PLATO’S *MENEXENUS* AND THE DISTORTION OF HISTORY

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The *Menexenus* raises problems on few of which there is any general agreement. First, what is the intention of the work? Is it a satire on Athenian political oratory or is it seriously meant to compete with other examples of the patriotic funeral oration? Secondly, even if it is a satire, and delivered tongue-in-cheek, is any part of it meant to be taken seriously? More specifically is there a change of mood in the later part of the funeral oration where Socrates delivers the message of the dead to their sons? Again it has been suggested that it may be directed at either the Funeral Speech of Pericles in Thucydides, or at the *epitaphios* which is found in the corpus of Lysias. And why is Athenian history so distorted in the speech? How much of this distortion is deliberate on Plato’s part, how much unconscious? In this paper I hope to be able to answer some of these questions, some more fully than others.¹

One thing is certain about the *Menexenus* and that is its date. Because of ‘a deliberate and fantastic anachronism’,² Socrates is made to sketch the history of Athens down to the Peace of Antalcidas (the King’s Peace of 386 BC) thirteen years after his death, so that the dialogue itself must have been composed after the Peace, and not long after since no later events are included. This makes the *Menexenus* approximately contemporary with the *Gorgias* in which Socrates bitterly condemns the use of rhetoric by Athenian politicians.³ It is therefore unlikely that the speech is to be taken seriously. But Plato’s contemporaries may not have had the advantage of reading the *Gorgias* before the *Menexenus*; so it seems best to approach the dialogue by itself and to look there first for the clues to its purpose.

The funeral speech itself is framed by two short dialogues between Socrates and Menexenus. Socrates meets Menexenus coming from the Council; and, after a sly attack on Menexenus’ impetuosity in rushing into politics, learns that the Council are about to select the orator to deliver the annual funeral

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was read to the Conference of the Classical Association of South Africa in Bloemfontein in January 1975. I wish to record my gratitude to Professor D. S. Raven and Mr N. T. Kennedy who read and criticized the first draft.

² E. R. Dodds (ed.), Plato *Gorgias*, Oxford, 1959, 24. Plato’s carelessness about the dramatic date of his dialogues (Dodds, *op. cit.* 17/18), probably militates against any deep significance in this anachronism. But taking Athenian history down to the King’s Peace does enable him to undermine Athenian pretensions. (See below.)

³ Dodds (*op. cit.* 23/24) guesses that the *Menexenus* was designed as an afterpiece to the *Gorgias*; the similarity of theme is emphasized by their opening words; both *Menexenus* and Callicles have recently moved from the study of philosophy to politics (καὶ μετὶς).
oration. Socrates promptly launches himself into a mocking eulogy of the genre. What he says here is clearly meant to be in our minds later. He starts by suggesting that death in battle is a good way for a poor man to obtain a magnificent funeral (234C). What follows is even more significant — that even if he is a worthless man he wins praise from accomplished orators who have their speeches ready-made in advance. Comparison with Thucydides II, 42,3 is suggestive; Thucydides makes Pericles say that valor in his final hour may blot out a man’s other deficiencies. Socrates has no such qualifying phrase — the man may be a rogue, he still gets a splendid encomium precisely because these funeral speeches are rhetorical exercises and anyone claiming to be an orator has one ready for the occasion. Socrates, in commenting ironically on the effect of these speeches, twice uses words which mean ‘bewitch’. It should be clear that when he comes to deliver it Socrates’ speech too will have to bewitch. Satire, if satire there is going to be, will have to be disguised, not least because the solemnity of a funeral oration demands a certain sublety. That Socrates’ speech does bewitch is clear from Menexenus’ enthusiastic response at the end (249DE) where Menexenus accepts the speech at its face value. But even the hints so far given make it clear that we are not expected to follow his example.

The characteristics of funeral orations, according to Socrates, are: (a) they have a cavalier attitude to the truth, ascribing to individuals καὶ τὰ προσόντα καὶ τὰ μη (234C); (b) they bewitch by their oratorical tricks; (c) they praise not only the dead, but the state (in every way), their ancestors and the living; (d) they are delivered to an audience predisposed in their favour; there is no difficulty in praising Athenians before an audience of Athenians; (e) improvisation of them is consequently easy, but, in fact, most orators have speeches ready made. So easy is a funeral oration to compose that Socrates is able to deliver one, not his own one but one learnt from his teacher in rhetoric, Aspasia. Why does Plato make Socrates ascribe the funeral speech to Aspasia, Pericles’ mistress, by 386 BC long dead? The Platonic Socrates has a habit of hiding behind others; he does so, for instance, in the Phaedrus. It is clear that he is doing that here; even Menexenus does not really doubt that Socrates is the author (236C and 249E). But why Aspasia? It was once supposed that this was an allusion to a lost work by Aeschines of Sphettus — a view which is now rightly out of favour. Friedlander pays particular attention to the analogy with the Phaedrus; Aspasia is named ‘in order to establish a connection — in a fantastic kind of playfulness — between the most famous funeral speech, that of Pericles, and Socrates’ fiction. Aspasia inspired both.’ Socrates in the Menexenus is playing with rhetoric — only rather better than the rhetoricians. Friedlander

4. A point repeated later (235D).
makes a good deal of Socrates' promise to report more political speeches of Aspasia to Menexenus; these will correspond, he believes, to the third, truly Socratic speech of the *Phaedrus*, whereas the actual funeral speech corresponds to the second erotic speech. A number of objections can be made to this interpretation. First, I am not alone in declining to believe that Socrates surpasses the orators in his speech in the *Menexenus*; secondly, the speech that corresponds to the truly Socratic speech of the *Phaedrus* is not actually included in the *Menexenus*. Why not, if the whole point of the dialogue is to educate, as Friedlander supposes? Moreover, these promised political speeches are to be composed (like the funeral oration) by Aspasia (249E) — surely if a difference was intended between these and the speech in the *Menexenus*, Plato would have avoided giving the distinct impression that they were going to be on much the same lines. Friedlander may be right in supposing that the ascription of the speech to Aspasia is to connect this speech with Pericles' funeral oration, but do we mean by that an actual speech delivered by Pericles or is this an allusion to the funeral speech in Book 2 of Thucydides? Since no actual speech of Pericles is extant, there is no point in discussing the former, but the latter view has found a good deal of support recently; Kahn and von Loewenclau have both insisted that it is the Thucydidean speech to which Plato is referring obliquely. They rely heavily on the passage (236A) where Socrates remarks that it would not be surprising if a man trained, as he had been, by Aspasia in rhetoric, and by Connus in music, could deliver a funeral speech; 'even someone less well taught than I, who had learnt music from Lamprus, and rhetoric from Antiphon the Rhamnusian, — even such a man would be able, none the less, to win renown by praising Athenians among Athenians.' It is supposed that a specific pupil of Antiphon is being alluded to here, namely Thucydides, and that he was a pupil of Antiphon because of his praise of him in Book VIII. Taking this together with the reference to Pericles' funeral speech (236B) which immediately follows, they assert that Plato's motive here is to establish a relationship between this speech and Thucydides' version of Pericles' speech, 'and to establish it in a mocking and derogatory fashion'. Kahn and others find this confirmed by textual parallels between the *Menexenus* and Thucydides — a problem I shall return to later. But it should be noticed now that Kahn does not believe that the *whole* of the *Menexenus* can be interpreted as an attack on Thucydides, since he acknowledges that there may be other 'models', for example, Lysias' *epitaphios*. But this interpretation seems wrong. It is odd that Plato should refer so obliquely to Thucydides, if he meant us to understand that

9. Thuc. VIII, 68. Not so much weight (if any) is attached by Kahn (art. cit. 221) to the statement in Marcellinus, *Vit. Thuc*. 22.
it was ‘the literary presentation’ of Pericles’ policy by Thucydides which was the object of his mockery. Elsewhere Plato shows no hesitation in naming the people he is to parody; e.g. Lysias in the *Phaedrus*. Secondly, it is difficult to understand why Plato did not cast the form (and content) of his speech closer to that of Thucydides. As I shall show later, there really is not very much that Thucydides and the *Menexenus* speech have in common – particularly if one disregards rhetorical commonplaces. Thirdly it is peculiar that Plato should allude obliquely to Thucydides alone, if his ‘model’ is equally (on Kahn’s view, at any rate) Lysias’ *epitaphios*. But the most damaging objection can, I believe, be made to the interpretation of Socrates’ remarks in 236A and B. Socrates is obviously joking here. The form of the joke is: Socrates has been taught by A and B; but *even* someone taught by C and D could win credit in these circumstances – i.e. before a well-disposed audience of Athenians. The joke depends entirely on A and B being figures of fun, (or at least mediocrities) and on C and D being the most famous teachers of their day – the opposite of the normal way of using this expression. Thus the natural way of explaining the introduction of the names of Antiphon and Lamprus is that they were famous teachers of rhetoric and music. Lamprus is known to have taught Sophocles (Athenaeus I, 20) and Nepos (Epaminondas 2) comments on his fame. Moreover there is no connection, known to me, between Lamprus and Thucydides. Antiphon was clearly just as famous in his field so the alleged allusion to Thucydides here is quite falsely based. Connus and Aspasia are quite as clearly figures of fun. Aspasia’s influence had long been the subject of jokes by the comic dramatists. And Connus is, as Méridier suggested, a mediocrity. 11

Moreover there is an implicit distinction in the text between the speeches allegedly composed by Aspasia (namely Pericles’ speech, and the *Menexenus* speech) on the one hand, and the hypothetical speech which a pupil of Antiphon might compose on the other. Thus it should be clear that the Pericles’ speech to which Socrates refers is not to be supposed to have a *direct* connection with any pupil of Antiphon – and, *a fortiori*, not with Thucydides. This may be too niggling a distinction, but it does at least show that there is not much strength in the arguments of those who would have us look for clues which are too subtle. Plato, it seems to me, is concerned to suggest playfully not just that Socrates’ teachers in rhetoric were mediocrities. but also that his funeral speech has, through Aspasia, a connection with Pericles. He is mentioned because he was regarded as one of the great imperialists. Plato openly condemns him and his policy of imperialism in the *Gorgias*. 12 We are thus led to expect that the

11. See Aristophanes *Acharn*, 526ff. Plutarch *Pericles* 24. Socrates seems to have been in the habit of claiming instruction by mediocrities. See also R. S. Bluck, *Plato's Meno*, Cambridge, 1964, 400–401, on his claim to be a pupil of Prodicus.

On Connus, see Méridier, *op. cit.* 79, (citing Wilamowitz).

speech which follows will have some bearing on imperialism, and, in one sense, we shall not be disappointed.

The intention of Socrates' speech is to mock; this is clear from the fear which Socrates expresses (236C) that Menexenus will laugh at him;¹³ Socrates agrees to recite the speech only because they are alone. But the object of mockery is not Thucydides alone. Despite the view that Plato shows no knowledge of Thucydides' history¹⁴ there do appear to be echoes of Thucydides in the Menexenus; this does not mean that we have to follow Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Dem. 23) who believed that it was written in imitation of Thucydides. Comparison of the two speeches shows a resemblance in their introductory antithesis of word and deed where, as Kahn¹⁵ has shown, though the figure is banal, only these two writers use it in exactly the same way; the contrasting ἐργα is used twice, first of the act of the burial, secondly for the deeds of the dead (Thuc. II, 35,1; Menex. 236D–E). They are alike too in emphasising that the oration, as well as the burial, is prescribed by nomos. As Steup¹⁶ saw, there is an almost polemical contrast in the use to which the figure is put: Pericles regrets the custom of including a speech; Plato affirms its wisdom. But of all the alleged resemblances none is close in wording, and what resemblance there is in content is more likely to be due to their both using themes which were considered obligatory in an epitaphios.¹⁷ One should bear in mind, in searching for parallels, that funeral orations were an annual event. Plato would have been familiar with a much wider range than we possess, so that we must disregard resemblances which are not immediately obvious.

What is much more obvious that the alleged parallels between the Menexenus and Thucydides, is the vast difference in their content.¹⁸ The greater part of the Menexenus is devoted to praise of the achievements of their ancestors, which takes the form of a resumé of fifth and fourth century Greek history, and of the mythical past of Athens, whereas this theme is dismissed in a few words by Thucydides (II, 36). Thucydides does not mention one historical event; this should prove conclusively that Plato's purpose is not to parody the Thucydidean version of Pericles' speech. A satire on Thucydides would surely too have attempted to convey something of the flavour of his style, whereas, in fact, the style of the Menexenus is quite different.

What other possible 'models' are there known to us? The epitaphios of Gorgias can, I think, be ruled out; its date is uncertain; usually dated to c. 420

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¹³. Emphasized, rightly, by Méridier, op. cit. 55.
¹⁵. art. cit. 222.
¹⁶. Reported by Gomme op. cit. Vol. II. 103. Other alleged resemblances include 'the πατήσεως τῆς Ἑλλάδος motif', (Thuc. II, 41, 1; Menex. 240D, 241C).
¹⁷. e.g. the boast of autochthony, Thuc. II, 36, 1; Menex. 237Bff. For obligatory themes, see Arist. Rhet. II, 22, 1396a.
¹⁸. Noted by Méridier, op. cit. 80.
BC, its transfer to after 392 BC in the second part of the Corinthian War, suggested by Mathieu, would make it a likely model, were it not for the fact that its content, as preserved by Philostratus appears to have been radically different. For Gorgias is said to have urged the Greeks on to a war against Persia—a theme which is absent from the Menexenus. The influence of Gorgias is detectable in the style of the Menexenus and it is possible that more parallels might come to light if we had anything more than a fragment to work on.19

Those who have believed that Plato was, above all, imitating the epitaphios of Lysias seem at first sight to be on more certain ground. This raises the difficult question of the authenticity of this work. Neither Blass nor Jebb thought it authentic; but more recently neither Gernet and Bizos nor Dover see any reason to doubt its authenticity.20 In view of the arguments of the latter it seems preferable to accept its authenticity. If this epitaphios was published in 392 BC the resemblances, and particularly the contrasts between it and the Menexenus speech become very significant.

Both orations emphasize the theme of Athens as the champion of liberty, and although this may strike one as being merely a commonplace of epitaphios since it occurs too in Thucydides, in Pseudo-Demosthenes, Hypereides, and in Isocrates' Panegyricus;21 closer study reveals that the insistence on this theme is a peculiarity of these two speeches alone.22 The use to which this theme is put is, as we shall see, radically different.

There are significant minor resemblances. Of all the fourth century orators these two are alone in making envy and jealousy the motives for Athens' enemies in the First Peloponnesian War. They both have the same size (50 myriads of men) for the expedition despatched by Darius against Greece.23 Again, there seems to me to be a greater than merely coincidental similarity in their both denying that Athens' misfortunes were due to κακία.24 Admittedly the application of this is slightly different; Lysias is referring to Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, Plato to the Civil War of 404/3 BC. But it should be noticed that the context in Lysias is exactly the same as in Plato—namely the Civil War. Moreover the language of both is very close—οὐ κακία—ὀδῷ—ἐν οὐσία κατατάσσεται / διεστρέφεται Αθηναίων. This, then, has all the characteristics of an intent-


22. ἐλευθερία, δουλεία and related verbs in (a) Menex. 239A, B; 239D (4 times); 240A (2); 240E; 242A/B; 242B (2); 242E; 244C (4); 244E; 245A (3). (b) Lysias, Epitaphios, 5, 14, 15, 18, 24, 26, 33, 34, 41, 44, 55, 60, 62, 64, 68 (2).

23. Lysias 48 κολάζου κατατάσσετος διὰ ζηλούον -- καὶ φθόνον. Menex. 242A πρῶτον μὲν ζηλοῦ, ἀπὸ ζηλοῦ δὲ φθόνος. For Darius' expedition, cf. Lys. 21; Menex. 240A.

24. Lys. 65; Menex. 244B.
ional resemblance. Only these two speeches have any measure of agreement in the topics with which they deal. They mention the mythical past of Athens in the same order, (Amazons, Adrastus, Herakleidae), albeit with a great difference in emphasis, and follow this with a resumé of fifth and fourth century history. The treatment of these subjects was, however, a necessary ingredient of an epitaphios.\(^{25}\) And there are striking differences which suggest that, although Plato clearly knew the speech, he did not intend to produce one which resembled it too closely. For instance the theme of 'justice' is emphasised in Lysias,\(^{26}\) but there are only two references to ‘justice’ in the whole of the Menexenus and significantly even these are (1) in the earlier part where Socrates is talking of Man in general as being alone in recognising justice and the gods, and (2) in the message of the dead where we find the truly Platonic lesson that ‘every form of knowledge, sundered from justice and the rest of virtue, is seen to be roguery rather than wisdom’.\(^{27}\) Clearly Plato has gone out of his way to deny Athens the claim to justice in her record in the fifth and fourth centuries, in stark contrast to Lysias; although we cannot, perhaps, be sure that this was directed at him alone.

Further differences may be noted; the boast of autochthony is linked in Lysias to the theme of justice (17), whereas it plays a very important part in the whole structure of the Menexenus. So, too, the proud democratic boast of equality of birth, which is intentionally made to depend on autochtony in Plato (238E–239A) is surprisingly absent from the democratic Lysias which suggests that Plato is perhaps ‘out-doing’ his predecessors. Even in the early part of the epitaphios in the Menexenus there are subjects which find no place in Lysias, e.g. Athens as the birthplace of grain and olive (238AB); the quarrel of the gods over Attica (238B) and Athens as beloved by the gods (237CD). This lack of correspondence to Lysias, taken with the differences in the sections devoted to the achievements of Athens with which I shall now deal, should show clearly that even if Lysias was one of Plato’s targets he was not the only one.

The historical sections of the speeches show the following significant differences:

1. There is no mention in Lysias of Cyrus or his son (c.f. 239D).
2. The capture of Eretria by the Persians which is given some prominence by Plato (240A–C), in contrast to his usual cursory treatment of events, is ruled out by Lysias (22) who expressly says that the Persians made straight for Athens. Nor is Plato obviously correcting Lysias’ version; there is no allusion in Plato to any other version, and the unexpected

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25. Lys. 4–16; Menex. 239B. But see, e.g. E. Buchner, Der Panegyricus des Isokrates, Wiesbaden, 1958, 65.
26. Lys. 10, 12, 14 (3), 17 (2), 19, 22.
27. 237D; 247A.
prominence of the Eretria incident can, I think, be satisfactorily explained in another way. 28

(3) The trenching of Athos and the bridging of the Hellespont by Xerxes, common enough rhetorical topoi, are not mentioned by Plato, but are by Lysias. 29

(4) Thermopylae, that famous Spartan act of heroism, significantly, as I shall show, is mentioned by Lysias (30–32) but not by Plato.

(5) Themistocles is celebrated by Lysias (42) in almost Thucydidean terms as ἱκανότατον εἰπεν καὶ γνώμαι καὶ πράξαι and as one of Athens' greatest contributions to the cause of freedom. Plato makes no mention of him or indeed of any individual Athenian.

(6) The fortification of the Isthmus, mentioned in Lysias (44), finds no parallel in Plato. In this case the omission seems due to nothing more than Plato's avoidance of detail.

(7) Lysias has no hesitation in mentioning Athens' hegemony (47), her command of the sea for 70 years (55), and even lauds the Athenian empire for saving the allies from faction. Plato makes no mention of the empire. Yet this particular difference may not be used to prove that Plato is not following Lysias closely because this omission is almost certainly deliberate, and therefore has no bearing on the question of Plato's ‘model’.

(8) Lysias finds no time to mention the battle of the Eurymedon, or the Cyprus expedition; Plato does (241E). Yet if Plato were satirising Lysias' epitaphios, one might have expected him either to confine himself to topics and events mentioned by his ‘model’, or at any rate to have some obvious reason for including new ones. No reason connected with Lysias alone is apparent.

(9) On the other hand Plato makes no mention of the naval battle against Aegina (Lys. 48–49) – a curious omission if he were following Lysias at all closely.

(10) Myronides' exploits at Megara (52–53) have no answering reference in Plato.

(11) Plato covers events from the battle of Tanagra (242A) down to the battle of Arginusae (243D). Lysias does not deal with this period at all, although he does allude to the defeat at Aegospotami (with a parenthetical aside which has been taken as an attack on Conon) – an important event significantly omitted by Plato.


29. Sections 28–29; see also Isoc. IV, 89; Hdt VII, 22–24; Aesch. Persae, 745ff; Aeschines III, 132.


31. Section 58. The phrase εἰπεν ἡγεμόνος κακίας εἰπε θεῶν δίανοια has been so taken by R. Seager, JHS 87, 1967, 108.
There is a curious passage in Lysias (57) where he contrasts the results of the hegemonies of Sparta and Athens to the benefit of the latter and concludes that 'for this reason, none but they should become the protectors of the Greeks and leaders of the cities'. Plato turns his back on such a hegemony. Again this must be accounted an intentional contrast.

The whole approach of these two writers to the celebration of the great events of Athenian history is quite different. Plato's treatment is cursory in the extreme; he does, on the other hand, cover the whole period from the Persian Wars down to the King's Peace. Lysias covers much less ground—omitting, for example, most of the First and the Great Peloponnesian War—but he usually gives more detail for each event covered, and occasionally indulges in a rhetorical display, as for example, on Salamis (32–44).

It has been thought that Plato delivers a 'telling blow' in the introductory dialogue of the Menexenus, at the opening of Lysias' speech, where Lysias welcomes the shortness of notice because no amount of preparation would do justice to the valour of the dead. Menexenus remarks on the need for the orator to extemporise since he is given so little notice (235C–D). Socrates derides their difficulty; they all have speeches prepared beforehand. But this is not directed at Lysias; it is directed at the orators generally. Isocrates, in the Panegyricus (13), observes 'that the other orators in their introductions...make excuses for the speeches they are about to deliver, some saying that their preparation has been on the spur of the moment, some that it is difficult to find words which match the greatness of their theme'. If we take Isocrates at his word such introductory excuses were commonplace, and not, therefore, a peculiarity of Lysias. So, although it seems fairly certain that Plato was aware of Lysias' speech, it seems just as obvious that he was not intending to satirise him alone.

The fact that there are echoes of Thucydides, an attack on the traditional content of the epitaphoi, as well as correspondences with Lysias' speech, suggests strongly that Plato's purpose was to write a pastiche of the funeral speech. Other facts support this. He appears deliberately to have outdone all the orators by omitting nothing; he has all the common themes, and an almost comprehensive historical survey which does not stop short this side of the Persian Wars. And, as I shall suggest, his attack on chauvinistic history includes Herodotus among its targets. Plato had made it clear in the introductory section that his target was to be chauvinist oratory (234C–235D). A closer look at Socrates' speech clearly reveals this. Not just pastiche, though, but satire too.

The satire is sometimes subtle, but it is there. Plato's technique is to push the clichés of the orators a bit too far so that, in part, at any rate, the funeral

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32. 'Curious' because it seems out of place in a funeral oration proper, but cf. Gorgias' epitaphios (Philostratus I, 9, 5) which had a similar ulterior motive.
33. e.g. Kahn. art. cit. 231.
speech of the *Menexenus* is a sort of rhetorical ‘reductio ad absurdum’. 34 For example, it is a trite enough remark, made by Lysias (2), that the valour of the dead has provided matter for speeches in abundance, and, though much has been said, much still remains to be said. Whereas Plato, in the preamble to the Persian Wars (239C) takes this too far when he remarks that the deeds of their ancestors have not been worthily dealt with by the poets, and ‘still lie buried in oblivion’, 35 totally and deliberately, disregarding Simonides, Pindar, Phrynichus and Aeschylus.

His style, it has been noticed, is one in which order and emphasis prevail; πρῶτον precedes δεύτερος or τρίτος with monotonous regularity; μετὰ δὲ τούτο, μετὰ δὲ ταύτα are done to death. 36 Points already made are summarised before we are allowed to proceed. For example the paragraph following those which laud Athenian autochthony and her instruction by the gods begins Γεννηθέντες δὲ καὶ παρακεχολύτης οὕτως (238B). Some scholars have thought this ordered composition worthy of praise but it seems to me to be deliberately overdone. 37

At the end of his fairly comprehensive section on Athenian history Socrates does not, as would be normal, offer his excuses for omitting some deeds of valour; what he actually says is ‘far more numerous and nobler (καλλίω) are the deeds that have been omitted’ (246A). The cliché has been transformed into an inanity. Why, after all omit the noblest deeds when the survey is far from short? It is not just that Socrates’ funeral oration smacks of the rhetorical schools, as Méridier suggests; what Plato is doing is destroying the clichés and tricks of rhetoric by overdoing them. So there is an undercurrent of satire even in the style.

The subject matter reveals the same technique of *reductio ad absurdum*. One of the main themes of the speech is that of Athens as the champion of liberty—a common enough theme in the funeral oration. Plato’s interest in this theme goes beyond the mere incorporation of a *topos*; he deliberately satirises it, and puts the sting at the tail end of the speech. At the beginning (239A) Plato praises the Athenians as ‘reared in complete freedom’—a remark which immediately strikes us as being delivered tongue in cheek; not, perhaps though, obviously so to Plato’s original readers. 38 Next the Persian Wars are preceded by a rather self-conscious preamble which mentions Cyrus, his son (Cambyses), and

34. See also above p. 26, comparing 234C with Thuc. II, 42, 3.
35. Reading ἐν ἀμνηστίᾳ; there is no need to amend. See Méridier, *op. cit.* 64 for the point made.
36. e.g. πρῶτος (237C) – δεύτερος (237D); πρῶτος Κύρος (239DE) – ὁ δὲ ὁδός – τρίτος δὲ Δαρεῖος, e.g. μετὰ δὲ τόσον (242A); μετὰ δὲ τάσσει (242C); again (243D).
37. On style see Méridier, *op. cit.* 66–8. For a different view, Blass *op. cit.* II, 469.
38. The ironic condemnation is obvious, as Friedlander (*op. cit.* 219) points out, in the light of *Republic VIII* and *Laws III* 698A ff. But as these are later works than the *Menex.* we cannot assume that Plato’s readers were able to discern the irony.
Darius – an unusually comprehensive list. Why does Plato have such an elaborate introduction? The emphasis upon freedom and its antithesis slavery, is, I suggest, the clue especially when it is juxtaposed with imperialism. Cyrus, in asserting the freedom of the Persians enslaves the Medes; while Darius ‘extended his empire by land as far as the Scythians, and his navy controlled the sea and the islands’. Freedom, then, for some, means slavery for others; and to whom does the phrase ναοσι δε της ταλάτης ἐκράται καὶ τῶν νησίων more aptly apply than the Athenians? The Athenians, we are going to be told more than once, fought for freedom; but the victims of their imperialism (the ‘allies’) are not mentioned any more than their imperialism is. The Persian example serves to remind us of what is missing in what follows. Of course, on a more obvious level, Plato is emphasising the threat of enslavement that hung over Greece. But this does not sufficiently account for the ἔλεος θεία aspect.

The Persian Wars are naturally regarded as a fight for freedom (239D–241E) but the rest of Athenian history is deliberately distorted to fit this nobler vision of Athens’ past. Accordingly the Athenians are said to have fought the Spartans at Tanagra (242A) ‘in defence of the liberty of the Boeotians’, whereas, in reality, Athens had fought in her own defence since the Spartans concerned had intended to march on Attica. Plato is forced to emphasise here that there has been a change in the Athenian fight for freedom; formerly against the barbarian, it is now directed against the other Greeks who are motivated by envy and jealousy of Athens (242A. Cf. 239B). Similarly the reason for undertaking the great Sicilian expedition is alleged to be an obligation to fight for the freedom of Leontini (243A). After the Peloponnesian War and the ‘ingratitude’ of the Greeks, Athens is said (243C) to have resolved not to help the other Greeks again if they were in danger of enslavement; it is conveniently forgotten that Athens was powerless to do anything contrary to Sparta at this stage. Now that Athens, ‘the champion of liberty’, is laid low Sparta was intent upon enslaving the Greeks. Athens is begged to join in the Corinthian War against Sparta. So Athens again rescued them from their slavery 'so that they remained free until they enslaved each other once more' (245A). But what is the result of this noble fight for freedom? The sting is in the tail (246A). The men over whom Socrates is apparently pronouncing this funeral speech are the men who ‘freed’ the Great King (of βασιλέα ἐλεοθερώσαντες). Allied with the Persians, they have swept the Spartans from the sea. Yet not so long before (in the distorted account of the reasons for the signing of the Peace of Nicias) we had been told (242D) that ‘against fellow Greeks, it was right to wage war only up to the point of victory ... but to the death against the barbarian’. The dead are thus patently guilty of having done the opposite. Nor is that the only implicit condemnation of Athens’ recent policy. There is a particularly violent attack earlier (243B) on

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39. No other orator mentions all three.
Athens' enemies who, during the latter part of the Peloponnesian War sought the aid of the Persian king. A pointed reference, as many have noted, for although Plato does not mention it, no contemporary could be unaware that Persia, and Persian gold, had played a part in fomenting the Corinthian War against Sparta. So, what Athens' history has come down to is a fight for the freedom of the Persian king against a fellow Greek state.

The boast of autochthony is undermined at the end in exactly the same way. Everything is made to depend on this. Equality of birth, itself the result of autochthony, is the cause of Athenian political equality. Their being raised in political equality is what induces the Athenians to fight for freedom. What particularly causes Athenian hatred of the barbarian is the fact that they are pure-blooded Greeks. This is the alleged reason for Athens' refusal to sign the peace terms of 393 BC, which involved the surrender to the Persian King of the Greeks of Asia Minor. Plato particularly insists on this point, taking a passing swipe at the other Greeks who, not being pure-bred could not be expected to behave any better – 'for there dwell with us none of your Pelops-race, or Cadmus, or Aegyptus, or Danaus'. But Plato does nothing to hide the fact that, in the end, Athens proved powerless to stick to her principles. The Greeks were surrendered; the boast of hatred of the barbarian, the proud result of their autochthony, proves just as empty as their claim to have been fighting for freedom.

The 'message of the dead', too, contains what appears to be a criticism of the excessive importance attached in epitaphioi to the deeds of ancestors. 'Most of all', it is said, 'we would be the vanquished (in virtue), you the victors, if you are careful not to misuse the glory of your ancestors, nor yet to squander it'. Plato is not attacking justified pride in the achievements of one's ancestors; his target is excessive pride based on nothing else. It is, then, surely not mere coincidence that Socrates' speech, which devotes so much more space, comparatively, to the past, finds, far from anything to praise, conduct by the dead which, for others, is branded as despicable, and moreover, embodies criticism of this tendency in funeral orations.

The Menexenus, as will be seen, exaggerates a tendency in the funeral oration to claim all the credit in the Persian Wars for Athens and so distorts history that few of her defeats are admitted. For us the glorification of Athens at the expense of the other Greeks starts, in prose authors, with Herodotus. It seems to me that Plato, in one section of the Menexenus, intentionally recalls

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41. On the Spartan treaty with Tissaphernes, 412 BC, see Thuc. VIII, 18 and Kahn art. cit. 233 n. 25.
43. I am indebted to Méridier's analysis of the autochthony theme (op. cit. 69).
44. The real reason for Athens' refusal to sign was her desire to retain her re-emergent empire. See R. Seager, art. cit. 105.
45. See Friedlander, op. cit. 221 and 227.
Herodotus possibly in order to remind his readers of the part which he had played in the development of Athenian chauvinist history. Socrates' self-conscious attempt to set the Persian Wars in the context of Persian history has already been noted. This procedure is distinctly unusual, and might serve to remind us of Herodotus whose approach to the wars against the Persians proceeds in much the same way.

The story of Darius ordering Datis to bring back the Eretrians and Athenians in captivity, if he wished to keep his head, serves, in its exaggeration, to emphasize the hubris of the Persian king - a typical theme in popular Athenian history. But this cannot be regarded as deliberate exaggeration; Plato repeats this threat of death in the Laws (III 698C) in a context in which satirical intent appears to be ruled out. This is, then, evidently one example of Plato unconsciously revealing his own low standards of historical accuracy. Notwithstanding this qualification, this detail adds a typically 'Herodotean' flavour to this section.

The fate of Eretria is dwelt on in some detail; the Menexenus has Eretria reduced in three days, thus more than halving the length of the attack as recorded by Herodotus (VI, 101,2). I will not press that exaggeration either; since the ancients were understandably careless in verifying details. Then (240 B–C) Plato recounts the anecdote about Datis combing the countryside to round up all the Eretrians by 'getting his men to join hands and sweep over the whole countryside'. It seems evident that one reason for this unusual detail is to emphasize the vastness of the Persian armament and the fate which might have befallen Athens, thus magnifying the achievement of the men of Marathon. This is, in fact, quite explicit in Laws (III, 698B). But there is also, I believe, another reason for the introduction of this anecdote. It is not, as Méridier has suggested, that Plato is using a tale whose validity he has doubted elsewhere. Granted that in the Laws (698D) Plato adds the qualification εἰτε ἄληθής εἴτε καὶ διδόθηκε, but there is nothing in the Menexenus to suggest that Plato has any doubt about its truth, or to indicate that we are to disbelieve it. It is, however, possible that this is inserted as being typical of Herodotus. Another detail points to Herodotus. The anecdote is introduced by a jarringly prosaic phrase - τοιοῦτοι τρόποι which seems out of place in the elevated language of the funeral oration. This particular phrase and others using τρόπος in this way are common in Herodotus, and the narrative of this incident in Herodotus VI, 31 actually begins σαγηνέως δὲ τόνδε ἰόν

47. See above p. 36.
49. See Dover, op. cit. 24.
50. Méridier, op. cit. 65.
τρώγων. This seems to show that Plato wanted his readers to be reminded that the story comes from Herodotus.

It is not without significance that Plato has again relied on an inaccurate memory. Reference to Herodotus shows that the incident took place on Chios, Lesbos and Tenedos, and has nothing to do with Eretria. It should then be obvious, pace Méridier, that Plato in the Laws is not claiming any deeper knowledge of the truth of this incident when he patently cannot even locate it accurately.\(^{52}\)

One must be careful, as Kahn\(^{53}\) has rightly warned, not to take as deliberate errors those minor mistakes in historical detail which are due either to reliance upon memory or to the need to simplify narrative for the sake of vividness. For example Plato (240C–240E) insists that not one of the Greeks aided the Athenians at Marathon except the Spartans who arrived too late, on the day after the battle, thus ignoring the part played by the Plataeans. This is almost certainly an omission which is due to Plato’s own ignorance, since, as Pohlenz pointed out,\(^{54}\), the role of the Plataeans is omitted again by Plato in the Laws (698D) where it cannot be claimed that there is the same need for simplification. However, one cannot dismiss all the historical inaccuracies in the Menexenus as being, like this, unintentional with the exception of the three major ones mentioned by Kahn, namely (a) the description of the Athenian constitution as an aristocracy;\(^{55}\) (b) the omission of all reference to the fifth century empire;

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52. The significance of the phrase in Laws 698D seems rather to show Plato’s lack of interest in verifying the truth of the incident.


55. Kahn, (art. cit. 225ff.) regards the description of the Athenian constitution as ‘tendentious protreptic’ which chooses for emphasis those features which can be twisted to suit Plato’s own political ideals. (Cf. Friedlander, op. cit. 222–3), whereas Dodds (op. cit. 24 n. 2) and others (e.g. Méridier, op. cit. 65) draw attention to the use of δοξαί in 238D which stresses the discrepancy between appearance and reality. Praise of the constitution was a topos in the epitaphios (e.g. Thuc. II, 37; Lys. Epit. 18; Isocr. Paneg. 39f.), but it seems too to have been an oratorical habit to claim that a democracy was really an aristocracy (meaning, of course, ‘government by the best’, see Gomme, op. cit. Vol. II, 109), as in Isocr. Panath 131, 153, or that it was (becoming) government by one man, as in Thuc. II, 65, 9, or even that an aristocracy was really ‘democratic’, as Isocrates does in Areop. 61 when he says ‘the Spartans are the best governed because they are the most democratic’. So that Plato is playing the orator here as much as the political philosopher. It should be noticed too that Plato claims that this constitution caused the goodness even of the dead (238C). Later in the speech it is made quite clear that the dead do not deserve this praise; hence the praise here of the constitution which moulded them is highly ironical; Plato is (pace Kahn) emphasizing its deficiencies not its virtues. Again Plato takes oratorical clichés too far. Comparison with Thuc. is instructive; it is reasonable to say poverty is no bar to political office, but Plato has ἀθετεῖν ἀθετεῖν ὁδεῖν ὁδεῖν ὁδεῖν ἀγνοεῖν ἀρετῶν ἀπελλάθαν ὀδεῖς—which is absurd; for ἀγνοεῖν ἀρετῶν might be an insult; to translate this by ‘obscurity of their fathers’ (as L & S and the Loeb edn. do) is to obscure the insulting ambiguity. Thuc. (II, 37, 1) has ἀδύναμος ἀθετεῖν which is quite unambiguous. Finally there is no parallel to ἀθετεῖν in Thuc. and this too is possibly ambiguous, referring not to weakness in power or wealth, but to sickness or idiocy.

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and (c) the insistence on Athens' hostility to Persia in the Corinthian War. Plato made it clear in the introductory dialogue (234C-235D) that funeral orations exaggerated their praise of Athens, and in the speech he gives a demonstration of this tendency. In his attempt to refute the view that the other (i.e. minor) historical inaccuracies of the Menexenus are proof of satirical intent, Kahn remarked that no-one has claimed that Isocrates' Panegyricus is a satire on rhetoric despite its even greater inaccuracy on Marathon. But it must be objected to this that the Panegyricus is clearly meant to be taken seriously; it seems just as clear that the Menexenus is not, and that, in my view, the Menexenus deliberately exaggerates the very inaccuracy of eulogies of Athenian history of which the Panegyricus is a later example. Some of the historical errors of the Menexenus may be unintentional, but the others are too numerous and too gross to be dismissed in this way.

Plato's own prejudice plays a far smaller part than one would have supposed. He awards τὰ ἄπορτα to the men of Marathon, admittedly, and only second prize to the victors of Salamis and Artemisium (240E) – an aristocratic view, expressed in Laws IV (707C–D) by Plato himself. Yet in the Menexenus there is no diminution of the value of Salamis; Marathon may have proved that the Persians could be beaten (241B), but Plato also shows that the importance of Salamis and Artemisium lay in their damaging the Persian reputation for being invincible at sea. This admission, which is much more in line with the general attitude of the orators is significant, because Plato, in stating his own views in the Laws is less inclined to praise Salamis and Artemisium. Here again then Plato is drawing on common oratorical opinion.

Plato reserves all the glory in the Persian Wars for Athens. It has been alleged by Kahn that this too is no proof of satirical intent. It is, indeed, not easy to disprove this allegation; but Plato distorts history to such an extent that I believe a demonstration of his errors compared with the other orators will help to show that the distortion cannot be anything other than deliberate.

First, the Menexenus does not mention Thermopylae; Plato, deliberately, it seems, restricts himself to praise of Athens. The fact that the bravery of the Spartans at Thermopylae is mentioned in every other funeral or quasi-funeral oration which deals with the achievements of their ancestors in detail, may show that Plato's omission is deliberately contrary to the normal procedure. Sometimes Plato merely follows the tradition. He implies, for instance, that the Athenian won Artemisium and Salamis single-handed (241A–C) whereas the

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56. Kahn, art. cit. 225.
57. Thermopylae is mentioned in Lys. Epit. 30–32; Isocr. Paneg. 90, 92; Hyper. Epit. 12; Lycurg. In Leocr. 108/9; also Isocr. V, 148; VI, 100; XII, 187. Thuc. has no section on ἐπιγαβαθήματα so absence of Thermopylae there is explicable. Pseudo-Demosth. LX has such a truncated section on ἐπιγαβαθήματα that it would be unreasonable to expect Thermopylae to be mentioned. It is important to note the frequency with which it is mentioned by Plato's contemporaries (and cf. Diodor. XI, 11, 5).
facts were far different according to our most reliable source. But the orators’ common version is the same as Plato’s. However his version of the battle of Plataea (241 BC) makes the distortion quite evident. He says that at last (η ἕν) the Spartans co-operated with the Athenians in a joint exploit – thus disregarding the Spartan role up to this point. In fact at Plataea Athens contributed only 8,000 hoplites out of a total of 35,700 (Hdt. IX, 28–29).

The other orators may be wrong on details – even hopelessly so – but Plato excels all. This is surely significant. No other orator covers anything like the same number of historical events as Plato; none 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, wilfully distorting history to prove his point. Whatever stands in the way of this rosy picture is ruthlessly discarded. It is not just a question of the funeral oration not being the place to celebrate disasters; it is, in itself, understandable enough that he should fail to mention a large number of Athenian reverses in the fifth century but Plato makes a deliberate attempt to mislead his audience.

In the same breath Plato talks of the battle of the Eurymedon, the Cyprus expedition, and the Egyptian expedition (241 BC), and clearly suggests that the latter was a success not a disaster. He omits all reference to the foundation, growth, and destruction of the fifth century empire – a serious and deliberate omission. The battle of Tanagra (242 BC) was not, as he asserts, indecisive – Thucydides (I, 108) makes it clear that it was a Spartan victory, although hardfought. There is no attempt to explain the origins of the Peloponnesian War (242 BC), presumably because this might have involved reference to the Athenian empire. He hastens over this with Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα πολλοῖς πολέμισαν γενομένου; naturally he mentions the ravaging of Attica and suggests that Athens was the innocent victim of Greek aggression, and moves swiftly to a thoroughly fictitious version of Athenian conduct over Sphacteria. ‘Although the Athenians,’ he says, ‘could have killed the Spartan leaders whom they had captured there, they spared their lives, and gave them back and made peace’. The facts were that Athens kept the Spartiates as a bargaining counter until after the signing of the Peace of Nicias (Thuc. V, 18), and had, moreover,

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58. Acc. to Hdt. VIII, 1–2 at Artemisium the Athenians contributed 127 out of 271 ships (147 if one includes the vessels manned by crew from Chalcis, but provided by Athens) and even these were partly manned by Platæans. At Salamis (Hdt. VIII 44–48) Athens provided 180 out of 378 ships.

59. Cf., e.g. Isocr. Paneg. 90–92; Lys. Epit. section 30 (Artemision); Isocr. VIII, 43; IV, 93–98; XII, 50–51; Lycurg. In Leocr. 68; Lys. Epit. section 32–44 (Salamis). The boast that the Athenians won Marathon single-handed goes back to Herodotus. See J. de Romilly, op. cit. 245 and n. 1.


61. Diodorus (XI 80) also asserts that the result was uncertain, so this may have been, if he was following Ephorus on this, the common fourth century version.

62. Is there any significance in Plato's calling it Sphagia when Thuc. (IV, 4 and 8) refers to it as Sphacteria? See too Strabo VIII, 4, 2. (Gomme, op. cit. Vol. IV, 482).
intended to put them to death if the Peloponnesians invaded Attica (Thuc. IV, 41). Athens was induced to make peace, according to Plato’s version (242D), because she thought it right to wage war only up to the point of victory, whereas we know that Athens had refused the Spartan offer of peace after her triumph at Pylos, and was induced to sue for peace in 421 BC only because of a series of defeats – which, of course, are forgotten, deliberately, by Plato.

The second part of the Peloponnesian War is referred to by Plato as a τρίτος πόλεμος, thus implicitly contradicting Thucydides who regarded the war as a whole. Plato calls this war ‘unexpected and terrible’ yet postpones explanation of this phrase until 243B where the blame is laid on Athens’ enemies who are said ‘to have reached such a pitch of jealousy that they even brought themselves to make overtures to their deadliest enemy’ – the Persian king. Why is this explanation postponed? The reason is obvious: where the phrase stands first it is placed uncomfortably close to the Sicilian expedition which could be regarded (and with some truth) as the reason for the renewal of hostilities. Much better, then, to postpone the explanation until he deals with the treachery of Athens’ enemies and thus, confusing results with causes, allege that they were responsible for the war.

On the Sicilian expedition there is similar distortion. According to Plato, the Athenians undertook it in order to fight for the freedom of Leontini (243A). It is possible that Plato is confusing two expeditions, as Méridier has suggested, namely (a) that undertaken in 426 BC ostensibly to help Leontini against the aggression of Syracuse, and (b) the great Sicilian expedition despatched in 415 BC whose pretext was the appeal made by the envoys of Egesta. Although the instructions to the commanders of the latter included the phrase ξυγκατακτίσας δὲ καὶ Λεωντίνως it might better be described as being ‘to succour Egesta’ – although they did little enough for that city. It is, however, possible that Plato himself was confused – the important point is that the highest of motives is ascribed to Athens; no hint here of Athens’ imperialistic designs. Surprisingly Aeschines (II, 76) ascribes exactly the same motive to the great Sicilian expedition. Aeschines’ knowledge of history was extremely limited, his sources being (when not ‘documents’) either imperfectly remembered facts or the work of orators. Now we know that

63. Méridier, op. cit. 61.
64. Thuc. V, 26. Was Plato aware of Thucydides’ views? J. de Romilly, op. cit. 365ff., denies that Plato anywhere shows any knowledge of his views; but this detail mentioned may be significant if, as seems to me more likely, Plato does show that he had read Thucydides – and not just the speeches. (See above p. 29 and n. 55.) Plato’s division of the war into two separate wars would then be a deliberate contradiction. But it is, of course, possible that Plato is merely following the popular version.
65. Méridier, ibid.
66. Thuc. III, 86–105; VI, 6; VI, 8,2. Thuc., it should be noted, deliberately discards the Leontini pretext. See J. de Romilly, op. cit. 200 n. 1.
elsewhere Aeschines transcribed a version of Athenian history from Andocides _De Pace_ and yet in that speech Andocides mentions an alliance with Egesta, not Leontini. Obviously Andocides was not his source for II, 76 and it seems a reasonable deduction that this mistake which is unique to Plato and Aeschines, shows that Aeschines has borrowed this 'fact' from the _Menexenus_—so that, whether consciously or not, Plato may have been responsible for the distortion of Greek history on this point. 67

In the _Menexenus_ the failure of the expedition is due to 'the inability of the Athenians to send reinforcements because of the distance' (243A) which totally ignores the reinforcements of 414/3 BC under Euryomedon and of the following year under Demosthenes. 68 It is difficult to believe that this insistence on error is quite unconscious. But the really significant point is that Plato has deliberately made the Sicilian expedition an example of δυστυχία. He minimizes the disaster, merely saying 'they gave in, and were unsuccessful'. Other orators were not so reticent, and I cannot conceive how Plato, who had visited Sicily, could have been unaware of the magnitude of the disaster. And his insistence that the Athenians were the victims of ill-luck must be deliberate. For he says exactly the same of the Civil War (244A/B); omitting any mention of the brutality of the Thirty, he even praises Athens for her conduct in the Civil War which is blamed not on κακία or ἡχόρα but on δυστυχία. At least one other orator had similarly praised Athens' wisdom in dealing with civil discord 69 but we know that Plato's own ideas about δυστυχία were far different; in the _Euthydemos_ 70 he had pointed out that there can be no 'good fortune' without wisdom. So Plato is making it quite evident that the Sicilian disaster was due to Athens' unwise imperialistic designs; the Athenians were saved in the Civil War by the 'love' which results from autochthony (244A). But in both cases the _Menexenus_ distorts history to make the disasters appear undeserved.

The treatment of the rest of the Peloponnesian War is equally misleading. While he refers to a seafight in the Hellespont (243A) where in one day the Athenians captured all the enemy's ships, 71 there is no mention of the defeat at Aegospotami which finally brought Athens to her knees. The other orators may not have named the battle, but they do admit the defeat; 72—not so Plato. He dwells on Athens' remarkable recovery from the Sicilian disaster, illus-

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67. Aeschin. II, 172–176 and Andoc. III, 3ff. (for alliance with Egesta section 30). See Jebb, _op. cit._ I, 130ff. Aeschines may have been influenced by Isocr. VIII, 84 which places the expedition at the time of the fortification of Decelea.

68. Thuc. VII, 16; 42; Isocr. (VIII, 84) also confuses the original expedition with the reinforcements sent out at the time of the fortification of Decelea.

69. Isocr. XVIII, 31.

70. _Euthydemos_ 278E. Friedlander _op. cit._ 225, but he does not notice the example in 243A. Cf. too 243C—the victims of Arginusae.

71. An allusion, perhaps, to Thuc. VIII, 9f. (capture of 10 ships) or to Cyzicus (Loeb edn.).

72. E.g. Isocr. IV, 119; V, 62; VIII, 86; VII, 64; Andoc. I, 73; 142; III, 21; Lys. _Epit._ 58; XII, 43; etc.
trating this by a section (243C–D) on the battle of Arginusae. The minor mistakes, the failure to mention that Athens had the advantage in numbers are not important, nor, perhaps, is the omission of the sequel to the failure of Athenians to rescue the crews of the wrecked ships. What is really astonishing about this passage is Plato’s assertion (243D) that the Athenians won not only Arginusae but also the rest of the war -- ὅ μόνων τῇ τότε ναυμαχίᾳ ἄλλῳ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πόλειςμον. This has puzzled at least one scholar but no interpretation of the Menexenus is likely to be successful unless it attempts to explain all the puzzles. There appears, at first sight, to be no point in this blatant lie since Plato, immediately afterwards (243D), admits that Athens lost the war. Why then does Plato make this statement? It seems that Plato is deliberately reconstructing history by pretending that, although Athens was victorious at sea – he conveniently omits her defeats, as we have seen – she was brought low only by internal dissension; Athens was responsible for her own defeat. It is more difficult to discover Plato’s exact reasons. It may be that Plato is intent on exposing (by taking it to an extreme) the kind of chauvinist fiction which would deny Athens’ enemies credit even for Athens’ defeat, and specifically, perhaps, Lysias’ version where it is expressly alleged that the Spartan victory was brought about by lack of unanimity among the Athenians.

After the Peloponnesian War the Menexenus (244 B–C) portrays an Athens aggrieved at the ingratitude of the Greeks who had repaid her services by joining the barbarian against them, and stripping her of the fleet ‘which had once saved them’. This is deliberately misleading; the fleet in question ought rather to be associated with the empire of which Plato makes no mention than with Athens’ services in the Persian wars.

In 244B there is rather a puzzling statement which has not drawn the attention it, perhaps, deserves. Athens is alleged to have forgiven the barbarians who, ‘having been ill treated by her, put up a vigorous defence against her’. There are, it seems to me, two really important points here. First, this statement continues the impression, which Plato is trying to give, that Athens gave as good as she got in the Ionian War, and implies (by Athens’ forgiveness) that hostility between barbarian and Greek is the natural order of things. This is particularly pointed in view of Persian aid to Athens in the Corinthian War. Secondly, its context clearly reveals its irony. We have just been informed, a propos of the internal peace of Athens that ‘we who are of the same stock as

73. Plato reduces to 60 ships the reinforcements sent from Athens, but cf. Xen. Hell. I, 6, 24 and 16.
74. Kahn, art. cit. 233 n. 20.
76. This is definitely a popular view. See de Romilly, op. cit. 270 n. 1 who points out that the memory of Athens’ services to Greece was so valid at the time that it was considered responsible for Athens being spared. (Xen. Hell. II, 2, 20.)
they grant forgiveness to one another’. Immediately Athens is caught νῶν βαρβάρως συγγιγνώσκουσα.

In the section dealing with more recent events (244C–246A) there is no difference in treatment; the same techniques are at work, satirising Athenian pretensions. The noblest of motives are ascribed to Athens; Sparta is now the danger to the freedom of the Greeks trying to enslave them – a pointed comment on what Athenian hegemony offered her allies. Athens is drawn into the Corinthian War, in spite of her resolve, when, we are told, the Argives, Boeotians, Corinthians, and even the Persian King sought Athenian aid against Sparta. There is no mention, naturally, of the rôle played by Persian gold in fostering this war, though Athens was, perhaps, less guilty than the others. But Athens was notoriously prone to help the weak, or so the orators liked to think. Plato duly trots out this commonplace (244E) to veil Athens real motives and in defiance of the fact that here she clearly was not aiding the weaker side. The irony of Athens’ position is clear; Plato points out that Athenian aid to the King was unofficial; she only allowed ‘exiles and volunteers’ to help Persia – so is Conon dismissed. This reluctance should be contrasted with the outright statement (246A) that the dead ‘freed the Persian king’. Athens’ renewed imperialistic pretensions are hinted at in 245B; she has restored her walls and rebuilt her navy.

There follows the acceptable version of the abortive peace negotiations of 393 BC; Athens is distinguished by her reluctance to surrender the Greek of Asia in return for Persian money. It is, of course, misleading to introduce the rôle of Persian money at this stage, but it makes a nice point against the other Greeks. Athens’ real motive in rejecting the peace terms – her fears for her renascent empire – is, naturally enough, omitted. But her rejection of these terms in 393 BC makes her acceptance of them in 386 BC all the more ignominious. Plato glosses over Athens’ failure to live up to her reputation; but, in order to do so, he has to emphasise how crippled Athens was by 386 BC – ‘as crippled as she had been in 404 BC’ he says. Deliberately – it can hardly be otherwise – Plato now admits that Athens formerly had been warred down – τῷ πρώτῳ καταστράφησθαι (245E), whereas earlier (243D) he had claimed ‘men formed the opinion (and it seemed true) that our city could never be warred down (καταστράφησθαι) not even by all mankind’. So yet another pretension has been exposed. And what consolation did Athens have in the terms of the King’s Peace? (Plato is careful to mention no others); she still is allowed to possess her walls and ships and colonies (245E) – the now hollow symbols of imperialism, the lust for which has once again brought Athens low.

78. Andoc. III, 28; Isocr. Paneg. 53; Lys. XXXIV, 11.
And what of the community (τὸ ἴσλανον) of Hellas, which one must not destroy (242D)? The Spartans, we are told, have been driven off the seas.

The tone of that section is bitter; the last section of the speech, the message of the dead (246D–248D) and Socrates' added exhortation seem to have a quite different tone. If we think this we are at any rate in accord with the opinion of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Dem. 25) who severely criticizes the first part, but greatly admires the later sections of the speech. Though it may in part be a pastiche of the traditional 'consolation' at the end of an epitaphios, it seems more truly to reflect genuine Socratic and Platonic ideas. Its focus is personal, not political; and its raison d'être is, in part, to emphasise the hollowness of the preceding sections of the oration. It would probably be difficult tastefully to make an outright satire of this traditional element of the epitaphios. The tone changes noticeably at 246B. In a remark which is repeated almost verbatim in 248E Socrates promises that 'whenever I meet one of you I will exhort and urge you to resolve to become as excellent as possible'. This reminds one strongly of Socrates' words in the Apology (30A). So that it does not come as a surprise that we are introduced to the unity of the virtues (246E). There is nothing very deep about the philosophy but it seems to be genuinely meant, just as the consolation seems genuine. And this is surely correct. However much Plato may have disapproved of the policies of Athens, the fact remains that Athenians had died to carry them out. Critic of Athens Plato may have been, he was still an Athenian. This may well explain the curious shift in tone of the work.

Kahn regards the Menexenus as being essentially 'an almost Demosthenic appeal to the Athenians of 386 BC to prove themselves worthy of the noblest traditions of their city'. This explanation of the speech as being protreptic will not do. For a start, as he admits, this explanation restricts the real meaning to two sections only – namely the survey of the Corinthian War, and the address of the dead warriors; whereas interpretation of the speech as an attack on patriotic oratory will cover all sections. Secondly Kahn's attempt at interpreting the distortions in Athenian history as being 'to praise Athens as she should be praised' is also unsatisfactory. The subjects dealt with by Plato, and their treatment, correspond too closely with Athenian popular sentiment (as revealed in Aristophanes as well as the orators) for there to be much trace of protreptic here. More important than this is the fact that Plato, as I have shown, departs in the Menexenus from views which we know him to have held elsewhere. Plato goes out of his way to give the impression that the Athenian

81. Friedlander, op. cit. 226.
82. Kahn, art. cit. 226.
83. See H. Crosby's article in Classical Studies presented to E. Cupps, Princeton, 1936, 72–85.
fleet was victorious towards the end of the Peloponnesian War. Now to an Athenian the fleet was synonymous with Empire. I cannot believe that Plato would have wished his nobler vision of Athens in the fifth century to embrace empire. The silence on the empire is a puzzle; on this it may be possible to allow an element of protreptic. But another explanation -- one consistent with the view that what Plato is attacking is the pretentiousness of Athenian political oratory -- is possible even here; loss of her empire was a sore point in 386 BC; to mention that empire, except in a roundabout way, would have been to admit the disaster of its loss. And, as Plato knew only too well, Athenian oratory tended to avoid mentioning uncomfortable truths.
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

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