SOCRATES AS REVENANT: A READING OF THE *MENEXENUS*

BRUCE ROSENSTOCK

INTRODUCTION

THE *MENEXENUS* IS A SHORT WORK, most of which is given over to a Funeral Oration spoken by Socrates to a single listener, the young man after whom the dialogue is named. Socrates claims that the Funeral Oration is not of his own invention, but was recently delivered extemporaneously to him by Aspasia, someone who happens to be, Socrates avers, "a teacher of rhetoric not exactly unworthy of consideration" (235e4–5). During the course of his "show-piece" Funeral Oration, Socrates narrates a (rather touched-up) version of Athenian history which terminates with the King's Peace of 387/6. This is a rather glaring anachronism, considering that Socrates (and Aspasia, of course) had been dead for over a decade by the time of the King's Peace. Why does Plato have Socrates speak about historical developments which take place much after his death?

I will argue in the following pages that the anachronism of the *Menexenus* should be seen as intimating that the Socrates who is speaking in the dialogue is dead. Although this suggestion has been made by one or two previous scholars,[1] it is only Nicole Loraux in *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* who offers a (tantalizingly brief) suggestion of what such a construal of the anachronism implies. Loraux writes in a footnote:

> After I had finished this book, P. Vidal-Naquet suggested to me that the dramatic date of the *Menexenus* (386) makes the dialogue between Aspasia and Socrates, both of whom had long been dead, a dialogue between ghosts. A dialogue of ghosts on the speech to the dead, denounced as an illusion because it carries the Athenians to the Islands of the Blessed: the parodic intention becomes multiplied to infinity! This certainly throws some light on the celebrated "anachronism" that has so puzzled critics.[2]

My own reflections on the *Menexenus* and its anachronism similarly take their cue from the comment made by Socrates in the opening frame of the dialogue, namely, that listening to a Funeral Oration has always caused him

[1] See, for example, A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (New York 1927) 41 and H. S. Stern, "Plato's Funeral Oration," *The New Scholastic* 48 (1974) 503–508.

[2] Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, tr. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Mass. 1986) 466, n. 303.

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to imagine that he lived on the Islands of the Blessed, so wondrously did the orator portray Athens. I believe that Loraux, although perhaps hyperbolic in her description of "a parodic intention multiplied to infinity," is right about the depth of the irony of the *Menexenus*. This article will trace the ways that Plato's over-flattering portrait of Athenian history serves as an ironic indictment of Athens. It will show how the historically distorted representation of Socrates as rhetorician and as revenant makes him both Athens' ultimate accuser (against those who are taken in by his rhetoric) and the city's most solicitous father (for those who can see beyond his rhetoric).[3] I will conclude with some observations about the significance of the *Menexenus*'s representation of Socrates, especially in relation to the *Apology*.

SETTING THE SCENE

Except for a short framing introduction and coda, the *Menexenus* is the fanciful reproduction of a Funeral Oration which Pericles' foreign-born wife, Aspasia, composed extemporaneously for Socrates as a part of the instruction in rhetoric which he says he received from her. In the introductory frame, Socrates explains to his young friend Menexenus that Aspasia was not only his teacher in rhetoric, but also the teacher of "many fine rhetoricians, and of one who excels all the Greeks, Pericles, Xanthippus' son" (235e5–7). Menexenus leads Socrates to mention Aspasia and her extemporaneous performance by reporting to Socrates that he has just come from the Athenian Council where the members debated the question of whom they should select to deliver the annual Funeral Oration. (The dialogue seems to be set sometime during the latter years of the Peloponnesian War, Socrates describing himself as an old man [236c8].) Socrates tells Menexenus that the composition of a Funeral Oration is an easy task for any well-schooled rhetorician and, when challenged by Menexenus, boasts that even he might be able to manage one. Socrates explains that he had, in fact, just listened to and committed to memory an extemporaneously composed Funeral Oration delivered by Aspasia as part of her "course" in rhetoric. Socrates agrees to reproduce Aspasia's speech which, he says, combined off-the-cuff invention with "things she had previously researched when, as I am convinced, she put together the Funeral Oration which Pericles declaimed [Socrates is referring the Funeral Oration of Pericles whose tenor, if not

[3]This article had its inception in a small graduate seminar on Plato which I taught at Stanford University in 1985. Leslie Dean-Jones and Sara Myers each prepared presentations on the *Menexenus*. We spent some time attempting to understand the importance of the anachronism, and it was Leslie Dean-Jones who proposed that we seriously consider the possibility that Socrates is represented as speaking after his death to Menexenus. Sara Myers speculated about the thematic importance of the "Islands of the Blessed" reference in the dialogue.

exact words, is given to us by Thucydides]. She composed her speech to me from some of the unused parts of that earlier one" (236b4–6). Socrates goes on to deliver Aspasia's oration and the dialogue closes with a short exchange between Socrates and Menexenus in which Socrates promises that he will continue to report Aspasia's "many fair political speeches" (249e4).

TWO ORATIONS: SOCRATES VS. PERICLES

The oration which Socrates attributes to Aspasia and which he alleges is closely related to Pericles' great Funeral Oration, is certainly a far cry from its precursor.[4] Dionysius of Halicarnassus praises the introduction (εἰσβολή) of the Socratic oration, but faults the middle section of the dialogue for its exaggerated and overblown effects (*Demosthenes* 24–31). The final section of the oration, about which we will have more to say later on, Dionysius considers to be the best part of the speech, and he quotes it in its entirety. We cannot dismiss the piece as an obviously clumsy imitation of the Periclean original. It is, I would rather say, a more conventional example of the genre than that of Pericles. Plato himself forces the comparison between his own Funeral Oration and Pericles' in the opening frame of the dialogue, and it is therefore appropriate to examine the one in relation to the other. I will proceed under the assumption that Plato has the Thucydidean version in mind when he refers to Pericles' Funeral Oration; if not, then the version Plato refers to is very close to that of Thucydides, as the following analysis will suggest. Plato seems to be treading a fine line between overt parody (as, for example, in his imitation of Lysias in the *Phaedrus* and Agathon in the *Symposium*) and a successful display of his mastery of the rhetorical conventions of the genre of the Funeral Oration. Let us look a little more closely at the piece.

Socrates begins by making a rather standard deed/word contrast: those who have died have had their fitting tribute "in deed" (ἐν ἔργῳ) in the preceding ceremonies, and now what remains is the "word" (λόγος) which the law ordains as an "ornament" (κόσμος) for those men (236d4–e1). The Periclean Funeral Oration begins with a reference to the same deed/word contrast, but suggests the impropriety of having one speaker's words follow the communal ceremonies since, if the words are poorly delivered, the honor which the city as a whole has paid to the dead is diminished (2.35.1). Socrates, by praising the institution of the Funeral Oration, is doing nothing else than what Pericles says in his very first words has been the practice of "most of those who have spoken here before." But both Socrates and Pericles are following, in one way or another, the convention of the genre:

[4]For an overview of the scholarly opinion on the *Menexenus* and its merits as a Funeral Oration, see Robert Clavaud, *Le Ménéxène de Platon et la rhétorique de son temps* (Paris 1980) 37–77.

an opening contrast between the ceremony as "deed" and the oration as "word." Socrates merely obeys the rules of the genre; Pericles in a subtle way draws attention away from the ceremonies and adds dramatic tension to his speech.

Socrates continues by offering praise for the forebears of those who died, and he carries this praise all the way back to the first progenitor of the Athenian people, the exceptionally nurturing earth which sustains the life of the city. This reference to the autochthony of the Athenians is also a standard convention of the Funeral Oration.[5] The single ancestry of all the citizens is the underlying cause of the polity which, Socrates claims, has remained unchanged throughout Athens' history: "The cause of our polity is our equal birth" (238e1). The Athenian polity is one of *isonomia*, equality before the law, and those who rule do not treat other citizens as slaves, but respect them as "brothers" (239a1–4). Leaders are chosen for their apparent wisdom or moral excellence (ὁ δόξας σοφὸς ἢ ἀγαθὸς εἶναι κρατεῖ καὶ ἄρχει, 238d8).[6] Socrates is offering an unabashed encomium of a democratic city against which Plato elsewhere levels scathing attack, as, for example, when he says that Athens has never had a good statesman, except for Socrates himself (*Gorgias* 521d6–8), or that it is mob-ruled and rampant with the worst kind of "freedom," namely, lack of restraint (*Rep.* 562d6 ff.). But the terms of Socrates' praise of Athens are precisely what the genre conventions demand.

To be sure, the Periclean oration makes only passing reference to the Athenians' autochthonous origin (τὴν γὰρ χώραν οἱ αὐτοὶ αἰεὶ οἰκοῦντες, 2.36.1). But we may perhaps detect a further allusion to the topos in what Pericles says at the beginning of his description of the Athenian polity (2.37.1): "Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbours. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else" (Warner translation). At its heart, the claim to autochthony is a claim to uniqueness, or, in other words, non-derivativeness. Pericles quickly passes over the mythic basis

[5]Besides the mention of the theme in the Periclean oration which I will discuss in the following paragraph, cf. Demosthenes *Epit.* 4–6, Hyperides *Epit.* 7, Lysias *Epit.* 17. These, together with the *Menexenus*, make up the only complete Funeral Orations we possess. (Some have questioned the attributions in the cases of Demosthenes' and Lysias' orations, but, since we are interested only in defining the general conventions of the genre, we do not need to concern ourselves with issues of authenticity in this context.)

[6]E. R. Dodds, *Plato:* Gorgias (Oxford 1959) 24, suggests the presence of "*doxas*" is a sign of the irony of the Funeral Oration. If he is right, the irony is there only for those who are looking for it; by itself "*doxas*" does not necessarily convey irony, and may be taken to mean "one who is held to be ..." rather than "one who seems to be .... " I will discuss Dodds's further evidence of the ironic tone of the *Menexenus* below, 337–338. I believe each piece of evidence he adduces is ambiguous.

of the claim and goes directly to the implications of autochthony for the Athenian polity; Socrates once again obeys the rhetorical conventions to the letter.

After his description of the Athenian polity, Socrates proceeds to narrate Athenian history from mythic times until the King's Peace which, as I have mentioned, postdates Socrates' death by nearly a decade and a half. The red thread which runs through this narrative is the contrast between the "pure Hellenic nature" (cf. 245d1–6) of the Athenians and the antithetic nature of the "barbarian," the Persians most particularly. The purity of Athenian blood which results from the putative racial uniqueness of the citizens leads, as we have just seen, to the sense of equality which all citizens share. Just as Athenians do not brook the enslavement of one "brother" by another, so they could never stand by as other Hellenes, despite their "mixed blood" (Socrates calls most other Hellenes "half-barbarians," *meixobarbaroi*, at one point in the speech [245d5]), were threatened with enslavement. Socrates invokes the memory of those who fell at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea as paradigmatic of all those Athenians who have in more recent years died fighting for freedom. The Peloponnesian War broke out, Socrates avers, because of the jealousy and ingratitude of the other Greek cities (242a1) and ended in defeat only because their enemies called upon the Persians for aid and, more significantly, "we were overpowered by our enmity (*diaphora*) against ourselves" (243d4–5). Throughout the Peloponnesian War what motivated the Athenians was their dedication to liberty.

This is certainly a rosy portrait of Athenian history. Socrates makes no mention of the Empire which Athens fought to maintain and extend during the Peloponnesian War. On the other hand, the Periclean oration, although it does not so self-glorifyingly invoke Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea, similarly fails to mention except obliquely how Athens acquired its Empire (2.41.2). Where Socrates is primarily concerned with drawing the contrast between the "pure" Hellenic dedication to freedom and the barbaric indifference to it, Pericles concentrates on subtler temperamental differences between the Athenians and the Spartans, although, as in Socrates' oration, pride of place goes to the Athenian commitment to liberty (cf. 2.37.2). Behind both speeches we may find the single topos of Athens' contribution to Hellenic freedom. And we should not forget that Thucydides himself lends support to Socrates' judgment that "private enmities" (*idiai diaphorai*, 2.66.12) led to the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War. By the time the *Menexenus* was composed, this must have become just another consoling shibboleth (this is hardly its significance in Thucydides) which Athenians expected to hear in any speech memorializing those who fell during that war. Finally, the racial chauvinism of the speech, though

perhaps given an exaggerated expression here, is echoed in Plato's *Laws*. There, in a more sober narration of Athenian history, the Athenian Stranger says, in regard to the Persian Wars, that "had not the joint planning of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians warded off the encroaching enslavement, nearly all the Greek races would have been mixed together, and the barbarian races mixed with them and they with the barbarians, just as presently those over whom the Persians exercise their tyranny live all interspersed and intermingled, an evil cross-seeding (κακῶς ἐσπαρμένα)" (692e6–693a5). Socrates' harangue about the purity and superiority of Athenian blood must be close enough to the "mainstream" of Athenian belief that Plato himself can endorse a version of it.[7]

After the historical narrative, Socrates turns to offer remarks to the assembled city, and especially to the parents and children of the dead. In these final words he adopts the rhetorical trope of prosopopeia, speaking in the voice of the dead, first to their sons, then to their parents. This is the section of the oration which, as I mentioned above, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in agreement with other critics, identifies as the best part of the speech (*Dem.* 30). No other extant Funeral Oration employs prosopopeia this way. In the next section of the paper I will examine the significance of the trope, but for now we should note that it is perhaps a unique instance of rhetorical innovation in Socrates' Funeral Oration. To conclude with an address to the families of the dead is, however, a part of the necessary rhetorical structure of the Funeral Oration. Pericles ends his speech this way and it even seems that Plato quotes from the Periclean oration when he has Socrates (speaking for the dead) say one must comfort (παραμυθεῖσθαι) the fathers and the mothers of the dead but not mourn with them (συνοδύρεσθαι, 247c5–7). Pericles says that he will not lament over (ὀλοφύρομαι) the parents of the dead, but comfort them (παραμυθήσομαι). Pericles' comfort seems to be tailored to meet the special exigency of the historical moment, namely, the onset of war, whereas Socrates' words both quote from proverbial wisdom (247e5 and 248a6) and share in its gnomic ahistoricity and generality. But there is nothing in Socrates' words to suggest moral shallowness. If they sound conventional, they are at least uplifting.

All in all, Plato seems to have given us a standard specimen of the Funeral Oration, although it has none of the subtlety of the Periclean oration. What does Plato have in mind by demonstrating his skill at writing a Funeral Oration "by the book," so to speak? Why does this critic of Athens sing its praises this way?

[7]Isocrates (*Paneg.* 48–50) credits the Athenians with an innate intellectual superiority over all other humans; Lysias (*Epit.* 43) says that in the Persian Wars the Athenians "showed their authentic and autochthonous virtue to the barbarians from Asia."

The most plausible answer is one outlined by E. R. Dodds in the Introduction to his commentary on the *Gorgias*.[8] Dodds writes:

> Of all the early dialogues, the most closely related in subject to the *Gorgias* is the *Menexenus*. Both deal with rhetoric, and with the use of rhetoric by Athenian politicians; but while the *Gorgias* examines its theoretical basis, the *Menexenus* illustrates its practice by means of an imaginary funeral oration which parodies the stylistic tricks and the historical falsifications of patriotic oratory. The two are thus complementary, unequal though they are in length and importance; and both of them convey the same criticisms of Athenian democracy and Athenian foreign policy, through the expression is direct in the one case, ironical in the other.[9]

If Dodds is right to see the *Menexenus* as the practical demonstration of the theoretical treatment of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*,[10] then its Funeral Oration is deliberately designed as a specimen of "flattery" (*kolakeia*, *Grg.* 463b1 ff.) put together with a certain "knack" (*empeiria*) and routinized "smoothness" (*tribe*, *Grg.* 463b4), but lacking altogether the knowledge of how to lead citizens to virtue. That the speech flatters the Athenians is amply demonstrated by the brief description of its "history" I offered above. That it demonstrates a certain "knack" and "smoothness" that comes with constant practice is shown by the way it fashions new phrasings for "tried and true" topoi. But then where is the irony which Dodds finds in the oration? How does the knowledge of how to lead citizens to virtue, a knowledge which Plato ascribes to Socrates in the *Gorgias* (521d6–8) and denies to Athens' politicians, including Pericles (518e1–519d7), cast its ironic shadow over Socrates' rhetorically flawless performance? How is it that we are supposed to see, as Dodds claims, the anti-rhetorical and anti-demagogic Socrates of the *Gorgias* behind the smooth and flattering Socrates of the *Menexenus*?

Dodds points out that Socrates' remarks in the opening frame of the dialogue set the reader up to take the Funeral Oration as ironic.[11] Socrates says that those who die in battle are in a sense fortunate because even the unworthy among them are praised by men who have been preparing speeches for a very long time, and who know how to render their praise beautifully "when they say things that are true of their subject and that are also not true" (234c5–235a2). But although we may understand this

[8]Most critics follow Dodds; see especially E. F. Bloedow, "Aspasia and the Mystery of the *Menexenus*," *Wiener Studien* NS 9 (1975) 32–48 and Loraux (above, n. 2) 312–327.

[9]Dodds (above, n. 6) 23–24.

[10]I discuss the likelihood that the *Menexenus* was composed around the time of the *Gorgias* below, 344–346.

[11]Dodds (above, n. 6) 24, n. 2.

statement to undercut the sincerity of the Funeral Oration, it also comes very close to repeating the sentiment of Pericles' oration. Pericles similarly declares that death in battle raises even morally inferior men to a height of glory (cf. 2.42.3–4). Taken by themselves, Socrates' remarks are not unambiguous indicators of the ironic tone of the ensuing oration.

In attempting to show that the Funeral Oration is ironic, Dodds also points to Socrates' description of his speech as *paidia*: "But maybe you will laugh at me," Socrates says to Menexenus just before he delivers the oration, "if I shall seem to you to be engaging in play (*paizein*) when I am already an old man" (236c8–9). Again, we might find in this statement an ironic undercutting of the speech which follows, but it could just as easily be taken to refer to Socrates' assumption of the role of the eager student of rhetoric, a role which suits, for example, the youthful Phaedrus as he is portrayed in the dialogue named after him, but not Socrates in his advanced years.[12] Once again, the evidence is not unambiguous.

We still are in search of some device either within the speech or in its frame (or both) to expose the rhetoric as deceptive and to show that the tone throughout is ironic. I think that the "deliberate and fantastic anachronism"[13] which I mentioned in the opening of this article fulfills just this function. In fact, I would argue that the anachronism holds the key to understanding the significance of the Funeral Oration.

THE TEXT AS PALIMPSEST

With few exceptions, scholars have found the anachronism to consist in Socrates' and (Aspasia's) description of events well beyond their deaths. Plato, they believe, composed the *Menexenus* so as to represent the living Socrates in possession of knowledge about a time many years after his death. There is no doubt that this is the most natural conclusion to draw from the fact that the dialogue's frame portrays an obviously living Socrates talking with his young companion, Menexenus. But naturalistic assumptions about time are called into question, first of all, by the very nature of a Funeral Oration. The Funeral Oration focuses on the interlocking bonds which tie together past, present, and future generations into a single community, one which is represented most especially in the assembly of parents, children, wives and siblings gathered together to listen to an oration spoken over those who died so that the community might have a future. The Funeral Oration seeks to persuade the audience that the dead are somehow present among them, guiding them toward the future. Socrates' prosopopeia of the dead makes this point vividly. In this rhetorical context

[12]At *Apology* 17c4–5 Socrates says that it is not fitting at his age "to come before you like a boy fashioning speeches."

[13]These are Dodds's words ([above, n. 6] 24).

all "natural" perceptions of what is past or present or future are challenged. In one of the final lines of the speech, Socrates says that the city "stands in the allotted role (*moira*) of heirs to and sons of those who have died, of fathers in relation to their sons, of guardians in relation to their parents here, assuming total care of all of them throughout all time" (247b7–c3). The city in its corporate identity is the living embodiment of all the generations, past and future, and in it the dead and the living are brought together in the fullness of its present.[14] I would suggest that it is precisely to challenge even further the reader's natural assumptions about temporality, especially about the irrevocable disappearance of the dead into the past and the inhabitation of the present only by the living, that Plato has incorporated the glaring anachronism which he did within the *Menexenus*. More specifically, I suggest that the anachronism of the *Menexenus* can be seen to represent a dead Socrates speaking to a readership contemporaneous with Plato. And, what is more, the ghostly Socrates is revealed to be more alive than the living who, in truth, inhabit a realm of shades.[15]

One problem with putting Socrates "beyond the grave" is that he would, apparently, be unable to speak to his interlocutor, Menexenus, who was a young companion of the historical Socrates (cf. *Lysis* 211b). There is no doubt that in the opening of the dialogue Plato intends his reader to have this Menexenus, the companion of the historical Socrates, in mind, but, once the reader becomes aware of the anachronism of the funeral speech, he or she might remember (and a contemporary of Plato might actually be acquainted with) another Menexenus in Socrates' life, one who would be a young man at around the date of the King's Peace of 386. This other Menexenus is one of Socrates' sons (Diog. Laert. 2.26). The Socrates who is speaking from beyond the grave would be speaking to his son, too young to have been taught by Socrates during his lifetime but now, as he is coming of age, very much in need of his father's counsel.

As though the text were a palimpsest, we are able to read a second image behind that which first presents itself. We are able to see behind the figures

[14]Loraux ([above, n. 2] 21–131) discusses the three "times" of the Funeral Oration—"the time of the city, the time of the citizens, the time of the dead"—and traces the ways that these times converge and diverge in fifth- and fourth-century orations. See also 268 for a reference to how "orators hypnotize men's souls by celebrating the city and by confusing life and death, past and present."

[15]It is should be recalled that the idea that the dead may walk as ghosts above the ground is not at all foreign to Greek culture. In Athens, during a festival known as the *Genesia* on the fifth day of *Boedromion*, the spirits of the dead were thought to emerge from their graves. See Erwin Rhode, *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglauben der Griechen* (Freiburg 1894) 215–224. Although certainty cannot be had on this point, it is possible that the Funeral Oration was delivered on the *Genesia*. See F. Jacoby, "*Patrios Nomos*: State Burial in Athens and the Public Cemetery in the Kerameikos," *JHS* 64 (1944) 37–66.

of Socrates and Menexenus speaking sometime during the Peloponnesian War another Socrates and another Menexenus, a "shade" speaking to his son. This second image never comes into sharp focus, and never wholly replaces the first more "naturalistic" image, but it is visible nonetheless. Plato has not only hinted at the presence of this "ghostly" image through the device of the anachronism and the choice of Menexenus as interlocutor, but also in the central rhetorical conceit of the Funeral Oration: the exhortation spoken by the slain fathers to their living sons. This is the prosopopeia I briefly discussed in the previous section. Socrates introduces the exhortation of the dead to their sons in the following words:

O children of good men, I too have been exhorting you [Socrates has just said that in their lifetimes their fathers had done this] and in the future I will continue to exhort you, wherever I may encounter you, and I will remind you and drive you on to strive to be as virtuous as you can be. But at this moment it is right that I tell you what your fathers enjoined us to report to their survivors in the event that they suffer some harm, seeing that they were going to be risking their lives. I will tell you what I heard from their own mouths and also what they would now gladly tell you if they had the power, judging from what I heard them say then. *But you must think that you are listening to them directly when you hear what I report.* This is what they said .... (246b5–c8 [emphasis mine])

In the Funeral Oration, Socrates brings back to life the dead fathers who have fallen to save Athens. Similarly, Plato resuscitates Socrates, who also met his death in the service of Athens, in order to speak to his son, to make him remember why he, Socrates, gave his life for the city. The words which Socrates goes on to speak, allegedly those which he heard from the slain men before their death, could equally well have been spoken by Socrates himself with all sincerity:

O children, that you are born of good fathers, the present circumstance clearly declares. Though we might have lived ignobly, we chose to die with nobility, rather than bring shame upon you and all those who will come after you, and rather than stand shamefaced before our own fathers and the entirety of the race which preceded us. We believed that life is not livable for one who felt shame before those close to him, and that neither man nor god is the friend of such a one, whether while he walks upon the earth or when he goes in death below it. You must therefore remember our words, and if you practice anything at all, practice it with virtue, because you must know that without virtue all your wealth and all your deeds are base and worthless. (246d1–e2)

In the *Apology* Socrates tells the Athenians to "take your revenge upon my sons when they come of age and cause them pain in the same way that I caused you pain if they seem to you to care for wealth or anything else before virtue" (41e2–5). The Athenians do not heed these words, but Plato carries out what may very well have been the historical Socrates' final

charge to the city he was about to leave. Plato is bringing Socrates back to life to speak to his son, and, through his son, to the Athenians, those who had condemned him to death, and their children.

ATHENS AND HADES

It would not be going too far to say that Socrates spent his life in the effort to make Athens a place where the Funeral Oration he delivers would be the truth of Athens,[16] where fathers would wish for their children only that they excel them in virtue. That Socrates was put to death by those very fathers for "corrupting the youth" proves that this is not the truth of Athens. The falsehood of the oration could not be more poignantly demonstrated than by having the oration delivered by a Socrates who has returned from death, for just as in life he bore the message of Athens' failure to "care for virtue," so in death is he an even more powerful witness against Athens' corruption. The idealization of Athens, which on the surface seems mere flattery, now becomes, when it is read as the words of the executed Socrates to his son, both a condemnation of the city and an appeal to the reader to live in accordance with the ideals of virtue that guided Socrates' life. The speech condemns those who only hear themselves and their city praised. Those who hear Socrates' fatherly exhortation are, on the other hand, his heirs.

The irony of a Funeral Oration spoken by a dead Socrates runs much deeper than this, however. If the citizens of Athens could listen to this oration or one like it and be so charmed by its flattery as to believe, even for a moment, that it is sincere, then perhaps the dead Socrates is more truly alive than they are. Perhaps Athens is the realm of shades and Socrates is the single one among them who, like Teiresias, retains his full consciousness among the dead (cf. *Od.* 10.492–495). We should recall that this is how Plato describes the relation between the authentic teacher of virtue and the rest of the city: "That man would be such among the living as Homer says Teiresias is among the dead when he writes of him that 'he alone' among those in Hades 'possessed consciousness, while the others flitted like shadows'" (*Meno* 100a4–5). In a fascinating study of the corpus of writing ascribed to Theognis, Gregory Nagy argues persuasively that the poet is there represented as an avenging *daimon* who returns to Megara after his death.[17] In the *Menexenus* something very similar is at work: Socrates is returning to Athens to exact his due from a deluded, unjust city. His words

[16] C. H. Kahn, "Plato's Funeral Oration: The Motive of the *Menexenus*," *CP* 58 (1963) 220–234, goes so far as to argue that the speech is meant as a paradigmatic description of the ideal Athens.

[17] G. Nagy, "Theognis and Megara," in G. Nagy and T. J. Figueira (eds.), *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis* (Baltimore 1985) 22–81, and esp. 73–81.

would be, on this interpretation, like those of Theognis *redivivus*, a test against which the Athenians might be measured. Have they been taken in by the false praise, or can they see the shamefulness of their delusions?

Socrates is aware of the power of the Funeral Oration to cast a spell over its listeners, one which chains them even more strongly than before to the insubstantial and shadowy realm of the city. At the opening of the *Menexenus* he says that those who deliver Funeral Orations

> bewitch (γοητεύουσιν) our souls by eulogizing the city in every possible manner, praising first those who have just died in the war, then all our forebears and finally us who are yet alive. Menexenus, I for my part find myself after all that praise in a rather uplifted and noble frame of mind, so that on each occasion that I listen and am charmed [κηλούμενος][18], I am drawn beyond myself, believing that in a blink of an eye I have become taller, nobler, and more handsome .... In my case this pious awe (σεμνότης) lasts for more than three days; the words and the voice of the speaker enter so deeply into my ears that they ring with them and only on the fourth or fifth day do I recollect myself and perceive where it is on this earth that I am, since until then I had nearly thought I was dwelling on the Islands of the Blessed. (235a2–c4)

The Islands of the Blessed are those mythic, ever-verdant islands in the remotest west, situated in the encircling waters of Ocean, refreshed by the enlivening West Wind. It was precisely to attain to a post-mortem blessedness which an afterlife on those islands symbolized that thousands came every year to Athens in order to be initiated into the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis. After several days of preparation, they joined a day-long procession from Athens to Eleusis and on the second and third days of the festival they were initiated into the Mysteries of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, queen of the underworld. In the *Hymn to Demeter* these Mysteries are called *semna*, "awesome things" (line 478). Socrates is likening the Funeral Oration to the Eleusinian Mysteries, and it is significant in this regard that he has chosen to describe the length of his self-forgetfulness as three days, since this is the duration of the festival, procession, and initiation taken together. Since Diotima compares her teaching to the Mysteries (*Symp.* 210a1), and now Aspasia's speech is seen to be like the Mysteries, it is likely that Plato has chosen to attribute these speeches to women at least partly because of the probably central role of the priestess of Demeter at Eleusis.

[18]This is the same term used at *Cratylus* 403e1 to describe the effect of Plouton's words in Hades and, at *Protagoras* 315b1, to describe that of Protagoras upon the guests in Kallias' home, a placed which is likened to Hades when Socrates first enters and describes various personalities in terms borrowed from Odysseus' description of the underworld in *Od.* 11. For a further development of the ironic identification of Athens and Hades, see my "Fathers and Sons: Irony in the *Cratylus*," *Arethusa* 25 (1992) 385–417.

The Funeral Oration's effect on its audience is similar to that of the Eleusinian Mysteries on its initiates. In both, men and women sense themselves to be taken out of their mundane existence and brought into an ideally transfigured one which presages their life after death. But the Funeral Oration offers only a false idealization of the Athenian landscape. In contrast to the Funeral Oration, philosophy is the authentic preparation of the soul for its destiny beyond this life, a claim which we find in the *Meno* and the *Gorgias* and which finds its full expression in the *Phaedo*. In the *Meno*, for example, Plato has Socrates tell Meno that he could persuade him to abandon his infatuation with the overblown language of tragedy (and, by implication, oratory) "if it were not necessary for you to depart for the Mysteries, but you could stay here and be initiated" (76e8–9). The Socratic *logos* is the true Mystery, that is, the antidote to the deceptive and death-dealing discourse of the city, the discourse of rhetoric and the Funeral Oration, the discourse of a Hades on earth. In a passage closely approximating the theme of the *Menexenus*, Socrates in the *Gorgias* tells Callicles, who has just offered an encomium to the life of pleasure and power, an encomium which agrees with what "other men think but are unwilling to say aloud," that such a life is indeed "awesome" (*deinos*): "For I would not be amazed if Euripides had spoken truly in his lines, 'Who knows whether to be alive is to be already dead, and to be dead is to be alive?' Maybe we also are really dead" (492e7–493a1). In the concluding section of the *Gorgias* Socrates offers Callicles an imaginative portrayal of the judgment of souls in the afterlife. He describes how Rhadamanthus looks "into the soul of a man who has lived piously and with truth, whether that man is a private citizen or someone else, but especially, I am telling you Callicles, if that man was a philosopher who had in his lifetime kept to his own business and not meddled about in public affairs, then Rhadamanthus takes great joy in sending that soul to the Islands of the Blessed" (526c1–5).

Rhetoric offers a semblance of the authentic destiny of the soul in its incarnate condition by pandering to its immediate needs; philosophy as Socrates practiced it readies the soul for its authentic destiny by teaching it to recognize the illusions of the *polis* and by turning its gaze beyond the *polis* and beyond this life. Such at least is the position adumbrated in the *Meno* and the *Gorgias*. It is also, as I have been arguing, the view which lies behind the *Menexenus*.

Are we therefore to conclude that the *Menexenus* should be dated to that period in Plato's philosophical "development" in which he turns his back on the Socrates of the *Apology* who seems unencumbered with eschatological speculations? Since it is generally agreed that the Socrates of the *Apology* is probably not too far removed from the historical Socrates, does this mean that in addition to the falsified portrait of the historical Athens presented in the Funeral Oration, the dialogue also offers a falsified portrait

of the historical Socrates? And if the historically false portrait of Athens is Plato's deliberate demonstration of the deceptive nature of rhetoric, are we to understand that Plato would justify the historically false portrait of Socrates in the name of his new conception of "philosophy"? I believe there is a better way of posing the relationship between the *Apology*'s Socrates and the Socrates of the *Menexenus*, one which does not lead us to conclude that Plato may have been willing to sacrifice historical truth to the claims of philosophy.

THE *MENEXENUS* AND THE *APOLOGY*

In his portrait of Socrates in the *Apology*, Plato clearly represents Socratic philosophizing to be at odds with the city's accepted views. In the *Apology* Socrates unabashedly reveals his opinion about the value of the wisdom (σοφία) of the city's politicians. He delivers a speech which, for all its rhetorical force, eschews the conventional topoi expected in a defense speech (cf. 17b–c).[19] In the *Gorgias* Plato answers the question of what caused Socrates to lose his case. Plato has Callicles prophesy a time when Socrates will be dragged into the law court and, on a false charge, be put to death. Socrates will be unable to defend himself, Callicles asserts, because he has chosen to practice philosophy and failed to learn the rhetorical skills necessary for a successful life in the city (486a6–d1).

The Funeral Oration of the *Menexenus* seems not only to be, as Dodds had argued, a fitting companion to the *Gorgias*, but also a perfect counterpiece to the *Apology*. Quite unlike the *Apology*, which deliberately refuses to employ the standard topoi of the genre, the *Menexenus*' Funeral Oration, as we have seen, includes all the conventional topoi, and violates none of the rules of the genre. In the *Apology* Socrates is found guilty and condemned to death. But if the analysis of the *Menexenus*' anachronism offered in this paper is right, then its Funeral Oration contains a judgment of death (or better, death-in-life) passed upon many of the very Athenians who had some years earlier condemned Socrates to death.

To be sure, most Athenians will only have ears for the rhetorical surface of the Funeral Oration and will not attend to the irony by which they are condemned. What the *Menexenus* therefore stages is the return in disguise (fashioned by rhetoric) of one who died for refusing to follow the rules of the rhetorical game and who now judges those who judged him and condemns them because they cannot break free of the spell which rhetoric casts.

[19] In her paper written for the seminar, Sara Myers drew attention to Socrates' remark in the *Apology*'s opening that he "practically forgot himself" as he listened to his accusers. She suggested that the power of his accusers' rhetoric is therefore not unlike that which Socrates ascribes to the Funeral Oration.

I believe that Plato composed the *Menexenus* as a re-writing—a distortion, if you will—of history: Socrates was *not* silenced by the Athenians, who only condemned *themselves* to death by their failure to attend to Socrates' voice. This re-writing is Plato's declaration of the deep truth about Athens and Socrates, but it is ironically concealed by another re-writing of history, namely, the one which makes up the Funeral Oration's depiction of Athens and its history. The success of the concealment, the inability of most Athenians to hear who is really speaking in the Funeral Oration, is the validation of the justice of Socrates' judgment.

If this is right, then we are entitled to see a thematic link between the *Apology* and the *Menexenus*. The first offers us a representation of Socrates drawn within the parameters of historical verisimilitude, and the second offers us an "eschatological" Socrates from whose perspective history may be more truly judged. The first offers a Socratic *logos* in conflict with the city and its rhetorical practice, and the second a Socratic *logos* perfectly suited to what the city wishes to hear. As if imitating the power of binocular vision, both dialogues together offer us an aural perspective "in depth" of the "historic" Socrates.

The significance of the "eschatological Socrates" (both in the sense of his being a revenant and of his intimation that philosophy is the authentic Mystery) in the *Menexenus* and the thematic link which that dialogue bears to the *Apology* permit us to challenge a recent interpretation of the difference between the Socrates of the "early" and "middle" dialogues. Gregory Vlastos has argued that this difference can in fact be quite clearly delineated, and that it is evidence of a significant change in Plato's philosophy.[20] Vlastos refers to what I have called the "eschatological Socrates," the figure who intimates or speaks of the soul's immortal afterlife, as clearly standing apart from what he takes to be the earlier portrayal of Socrates.[21] According to Vlastos, the "early" Socratic dialogues represent the essential teaching, if not the *ipsissima verba*, of the historical Socrates, whereas the "middle" and "later" dialogues use Socrates as a spokesman for ideas which can only be ascribed to Plato.

Instead of attributing this shift in how Socrates and his teaching are represented to a change in Plato's thinking, we may choose to agree with Jacob Howland that Plato has designed a "nexus of interpretive interrelations" among the dialogues in such a way that, for example, the *Apology* and the *Phaedo* are mutually illuminating *facets* of an encompassing "literary [and, I would add, philosophical] cosmos."[22] Howland's claim that the dialogues

[20] Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca 1991).

[21] Vlastos (above, n. 20) 54–56.

[22] Jacob Howland, "Re-Reading Plato: The Problem of Platonic Chronology," *Phoenix* 45 (1991) 189–214, at 195.

form a "literary cosmos" and that developmental theories like that of Vlastos are not able to account for the complex interrelations among dialogues of apparently different "periods" is supported, I would contend, by the close thematic affiliation between the *Apology* and the *Menexenus* despite their very different representations of Socrates. In both these dialogues Plato addresses the significance of Socrates' condemnation and execution, the death-dealing power of rhetoric, and the nature of historical truth. Each dialogue presents a facet of the Platonic representation of Socrates and each calls upon the other in order for the full import of the "judgment of Socrates" to be understood.

And, what is more, it is only by reading the *Menexenus* together with the *Apology* in the way I am suggesting that an adequate answer can be given to a question which confronts any developmental reading of the dialogues: Why does Plato continue to use Socrates as a spokesman for ideas which are not really his? Vlastos' answer runs as follows:

> . . . the continuing harmony of the two minds [that of Socrates and that of Plato] though vital, is not rigid: the father image inspires, guides, and dominates but does not shackle Plato's philosophical quest. So when he finds compelling reason to strike out along new paths, he feels no need to sever the personal bond with Socrates. And when these lead him to new, unSocratic and antiSocratic conclusions, as they visibly do by the time he comes to write the *Meno*, the dramatist's attachment to his protagonist, replicating the man's love for the friend and teacher of his youth, survives the ideological separation. And so, as Plato changes, the philosophical persona of his Socrates is made to change, absorbing the writer's new convictions, arguing for them with the same zest with which the Socrates of the previous dialogues had argued for the views the writer had shared with the original of that figure earlier on.[23]

Our analysis of the *Menexenus* permits us to go beyond the description of how Plato's affection for his "father image" leads him to retain Socrates while changing his "philosophical persona." Because of its special linkage to the *Apology*, the *Menexenus* makes a statement about the relationship of the "eschatological Socrates" to Plato's presentation of the historical Socrates in the *Apology*. We have seen that in the *Menexenus* no less than in the *Apology* Plato affirms his allegiance to Socrates in his opposition to the "wisdom" of the city, but he renders the essential opposition between Socrates and the city as an opposition between the immortal soul and the seductive "shadows" which hold sway in the habitation of the incarnate soul. The Socrates of the *Apology* does not see his philosophic activity in those terms, and this does probably reflect the historical Socrates' self-understanding. But Plato wants us to believe that *if Socrates could speak from beyond the grave* he would endorse the deeper truth of Plato's rep-

[23] Vlastos (above, n. 20) 53.

resentation of Socratic philosophizing in dialogues like the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. The *Menexenus*, with its staging of Socrates' conflict with the city on the literal level of eschatology, with a post-mortem Socrates in the midst of an illusion-ridden Athens, is Plato's effort to show how his "break" with the historical Socrates is only apparent; in truth, Plato says, the voice of the historical Socrates must be made to resonate with the voice of Socrates "from beyond" if the truth of history is ever to be grasped.

CONCLUSION: WHO IS SOCRATES' HEIR?

I have argued that the *Menexenus* stages a revenant Socrates speaking to his son. This revenant Socrates displays a different but nonetheless complementary "take" from that of the *Apology* on the meaning of Socrates' rejection of the "wisdom" of the city and on the significance of Socrates' death. But this "new" Socrates embodies, according to Plato, the authentic truth about the historical Socrates, namely, that he was a uniquely gifted soul pursuing his immortal destiny, and that his project was to call Athenians away from the illusions of the city and towards the recognition of the demands of virtue which their own immortal destinies require of them. In the *Menexenus*, the one who can hear the voice of the revenant Socrates would fulfill this father's words to his son. When, therefore, Plato gives voice to the revenant Socrates, he represents himself in the role of Socrates' authentic son, attentive to and offering a report of the voice of his father. Plato can at one and the same time "abandon" the teaching of the historical Socrates, and yet claim to be the legitimate heir of that teaching. So profound is Plato's faithfulness to the "post-mortem" Socrates over the "historical" Socrates that he can dare to represent Socrates' death in prison and yet acknowledge that he was not present as an "eyewitness" (*Phd.* 59b2). In the *Phaedo* Plato makes Socrates sing his "swan song" (cf. *Phd.* 4e), prophesying not his own death, but his life beyond. Plato may be the "father" of this text, as he is of the *Menexenus*,[24] but he still wants to preserve the Socratic legacy, as a son preserves the patrimony (*ousia*) of his father.

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
DAVIS, CA 95616
U.S.A.

[24]For paternity as a metaphor of authorship, see *Symposium* 209d2 and *Phaedrus* 275d4.