

The Revival of the Funeral Oration and the Plague in Thucydides Books 6–7

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AT THE END of his account of the first year of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides inserts Pericles' Funeral Oration, the most splendid surviving exposition of the spirit and achievement of fifth-century Athens. However, almost in the same breath Thucydides also demonstrates the fleetingness of this ideal: for upon the heels of the Funeral Oration follows the account of the outbreak, and devastating effect, of the plague at Athens. By the stark and monumental contrast, ideal height and nightmarish low of the city of Athens are directly juxtaposed.¹ What is more, Pericles, the figure that encapsulates like no other the Athenian ideal, dies from the plague. All this happens after only the first of the twenty-seven years of the war has passed. The vision projected in the Funeral Oration seems irretrievably lost, incapable of survival in a world shaken by the Peloponnesian War.

My goal in this paper is to show that in Thucydides' view the driving forces animating the highpoint marked by the Funeral Oration are not eradicated by the plague, but are back in place by the time of the Sicilian Expedition. Yet this revival has a tragic character: instead of engendering a renaissance of the Periclean ideal, it merely gives rise to yet another, albeit

¹ See K. Reinhardt, "Thukydides und Machiavelli," in *Vermächtnis der Antike* (Göttingen 1966) 214: "Sie [sc. the plague] gibt die Antwort auf die Leichenrede, ja sie folgt ihr so unmittelbar, wie nur ein Redner einem Redner folgen kann, und schafft zugleich den Umschwung, den Sturz in die Krise." On the same issue cf. A. W. Gomme, *The Greek Attitude to Poetry and History* (Berkeley 1954) 143–144.

figurative, outbreak of the plague. Thus, over the course of the Sicilian Expedition, the earlier succession from Funeral Oration to plague repeats itself: instead of representing the plague as a setback against which the Athenian ideal ultimately affirms itself, Thucydides shows the catastrophic triumph of a recurring pattern.

Before embarking on this exposition, however, I wish to indicate my position on a much-discussed question, which bears upon the issues to be considered: the status of the Funeral Oration within Thucydides' work as a whole. Building upon earlier work by Strasburger,² Hellmut Flashar argued that Pericles' picture of Athens in the Funeral Oration is at variance with Thucydides' own depiction of the Athenians' actual conduct, which, far from being inspired by striving after virtue, seems driven by hard-headed power politics combined with occasional outbursts of frantic passions.³ Flashar concluded that Thucydides' goal is an ironic exposure of the tension between the true situation at Athens and the sugar-coated Periclean picture.⁴ While Flashar is right to draw attention to this tension, his solution seems to presuppose an all-or-nothing opposition, which does not quite fit Thucydides' picture. A less exclusive contrast between the real and the ideal provides, I think, the basis of a more adequate interpretation of the height projected in the Funeral Oration. Such an alternative conception has been advanced by Nicole Loraux and Victoria Wohl.

Loraux has pointed out that "Athens has more than one face;

² H. Strasburger, "Thukydides und die politische Selbstdarstellung der Athener," in H. Herter (ed.), *Thukydides – Wege der Forschung* 98 (Darmstadt 1968 [1958]) 517–518.

³ H. Flashar, "Der Epitaphios des Perikles," in *Eidola: Ausgewählte kleine Schriften* (Amsterdam 1989 [1969]) 446–453.

⁴ Flashar, in *Eidola* 457: "[I]ndem er [sc. Thucydides] dem Perikles einen derart hinreißenden Hymnus auf die Macht Athens in den Mund legt ... erzeugt er eine fast ironische Spannung zur Wirklichkeit. Auch darin zeigt sich Thukydides als desillusionierender Entlarver menschlicher Denkweisen ..."

there are at least two cities, which, like the real and the paradigm, sometimes coexist and sometimes are mutually exclusive.”⁵ Wohl in turn considers the Athenian character described in the Funeral Oration as an “ideal-ego” of the Athenian citizen: “It is an image of himself as he will be, not as he is, and it is with jubilation that he takes on that image as his own. He incorporates this mirror image within himself as his ideal-ego (*Idealich*).”⁶ Both Loraux’s idea of the city’s two characters and Wohl’s notion of the Athenians’ ideal ego converge in the concept of a higher self, which is neither simply identical with reality nor flatly contradicted by it. Instead of being either factually given or unrealistically idealized, this higher Athenian self must be constantly achieved anew. In the Athenians’ brightest moments, the actual self of the city lifts itself up to the ideal self whereas on other occasions the two are separated by a vast divide. The character of Athens is not statically given, but constantly resituates itself along a spectrum, whose extreme points are marked by the Funeral Oration and the plague.

I. Funeral Oration and Sicilian Expedition

In both the Funeral Oration in Book 2 and the account of the run-up to the Sicilian Expedition in Book 6 one can detect a significant concentration of the same kinds of terms: ἀκμή and words related to it (2.31.2 ~ 6.17.1, 7.12.3, 7.14.1, 7.63.4), ἔρωξ and related vocabulary (2.43.1 ~ 6.13.1, 6.24.3), and ἐλπίζ and kindred words (2.42.4, 2.43.5, 2.43.6, 2.44.3 ~ 6.15.2, 6.24.3, 6.30.2, 6.31.6). The clustering of the same kinds of terms on both occasions calls for a closer investigation of the connection between the two passages.

ἀκμή

The Funeral Oration coincides with a distinctive highpoint, an ἀκμή, of the city of Athens. Thucydides points out that in the foregoing campaigning season the host led out by Pericles

⁵ N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* (New York 2006 [1981]) 365.

⁶ V. Wohl, *Love among the Ruins* (Princeton 2002) 33.

to invade the Megarid was the largest Athenian army ever assembled in one body, adding the explanation: “the city was still at its height and not yet suffering from disease” (ἀκμαζούσης ἔτι τῆς πόλεως καὶ οὐπω νενοσηκυίας, 2.31.2). This highpoint of Athenian flourishing coincides with Pericles’ delivery of the Funeral Oration. As the Funeral Oration makes clear, the Athenian ἀκμή does not merely consist in a maximum of manpower and resources, but also in a qualitative highpoint of human self-development. The collective ἀκμή reached by the city has its counterpart in the supreme achievement of individuals. The specific feat celebrated in the Funeral Oration, namely the self-sacrifice of the Athenian soldiers, indicates this ἀκμή achieved by particular Athenians: they “died, at the briefest decisive moment when fate intervened,⁷ at the height of fame rather than of fear” (δι’ ἐλαχίστου καιροῦ τύχης ἅμα ἀκμῆ τῆς δόξης μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ δέους ἀπηλλάγησαν, 2.42.4).

By definition, the kind of highpoint that finds expression in the Funeral Oration has a precarious character, and true to its fleetingness the Funeral Oration is placed at the cusp at which the ideal tips over into its dismantlement by the plague. Schol-

⁷ Two different interpretations have been advanced of the structures of dependence in the phrase δι’ ἐλαχίστου καιροῦ τύχης: does καιροῦ depend on διὰ and τύχης on καιροῦ, which is the option I have chosen (“at the briefest decisive moment when fate intervened”)? Or is the phrase ἐλαχίστου καιροῦ nested between διὰ and its genitive object τύχης, which would produce “through the fortune of the briefest instant” (J. S. Rusten, “Structure, Style, and Sense in Interpreting Thucydides: The Soldiers’ Choice,” *HSCP* 90 [1986] 75)? Given the extreme abstractness of the terms, I think it is more likely that the preposition is directly followed by its object. Rusten (69) provides parallel examples of “Thucydides’ oft-noted penchant for interposing between a preposition and its genitive object still another dependent genitive”; but in all these cases (for which see 70) the terms are much more concrete, so that the dependence structure is perspicuous and does not need the support of word order. In the present instance, however, the abstractness of the terms makes it much harder to understand, on the basis of semantics alone, the structure of dependence; therefore it seems likely that Thucydides observed the more common word order, thereby providing some guidance for his reader.

ars have observed that the plague mounts a frontal assault on the Periclean ideal. The plague has its own distinctive ἀκμή (ὄσον περ χρόνον καὶ ἡ νόσος ἀκμάζοι, 2.49.6). This flourishing of the plague coincides with the undoing of Athenian flourishing and signifies the direct negation of the latter.

Despite the terrible losses suffered by the Athenians because of the plague (cf. 3.87.2–3), the city has risen to another lofty highpoint by the time of the Sicilian Expedition. Alcibiades, who mirrors and magnifies the Athenians' general disposition on the eve of the expedition,⁸ claims that he is in his prime (ἀκμάζω, 6.17.1). Indeed, at the beginning of the expedition the Athenian soldiers are also in their prime (ἤκμαζε, 7.12.3, 7.63.4; ἀκμή, 7.14.1). This renewed ἀκμή consists in a recovery from the effects of the plague: in the Sicilian Debate, Nicias points out that the Athenians, after having suffered under the twin scourges of plague and war, have only recently revived their strength (νεωστὶ ἀπὸ νόσου μεγάλης καὶ πολέμου βραχὺ τι λελωφῆκαμεν, 6.12.1). The narrator confirms Nicias' assertion by stating that around the time of the departure “the city had just recovered from the plague and the continuous war” (ἄρτι δ' ἀνειλήφει ἡ πόλις ἑαυτὴν ἀπὸ τῆς νόσου καὶ τοῦ ξυνεχοῦς πολέμου, 6.26.2). Thucydides equates the undoing of the Athenian ἀκμή with the outbreak of the plague (2.31.2). The emphasis on the overcoming of the plague by the time of the Sicilian Expedition invites the conclusion that Athens has achieved a new highpoint comparable to that earlier climax at the time of Pericles.

Unity of polar opposites

Konrad Gaiser observed that the fundamental principle at work in Pericles' account of the Athenian character is the combination of opposite tendencies, of which a person manages to

⁸ As we will see below, Thucydides stresses that on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition a wave of collective desire and hope overruns the Athenians. In characterizing Alcibiades as “desiring and hoping” (ἐπιθυμῶν καὶ ἐλπίζων, 6.15.2), Thucydides suggests that he encapsulates those forces that have come to animate the Athenians at large.

exhibit, on common assumptions, at best either one or the other. For instance, the Athenians are committed to equality of political rights (ἰσονομία) and nonetheless give precedence to outstanding individuals (2.37.1); they endorse a liberal lifestyle and nonetheless respect authority (2.37.2–3); they value their private life and are simultaneously eagerly involved in politics (2.40.2); they are intellectual and yet resolute in action (2.40.2). Because of their direct juxtaposition, the opposing tendencies come to enhance each other so that each character trait stands out with crisper clarity than it would in isolation. Instead of destabilizing the respective opposite, these capacities are combined in a dynamic unity and enable an overabundant realization of a comprehensive range of potentials.⁹ In this way, the Athenians achieve a dialectic synthesis, which is dynamically charged and yet harmoniously ordered. As a result, the tension between two general human dispositions, idealism and realism, is offset. For Pericles tends to set an attitude marked by enterprising brio against one of circumspect prudence.

Polar opposites again meet at Athens on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition. Two such antithetical pairs recur in the speeches delivered by Nicias and Alcibiades: young vs. old, and active vs. quiet. Both pairs represent variations of the basic antithesis, which underlies the opposite inclinations in the Funeral Oration, between idealism and realism. Yet on the eve of the expedition, the polar inclinations, far from balancing out in a harmonious unity, clash in fierce rivalry. Whereas Pericles could act simultaneously as the spokesman of both tendencies, the contrary dispositions are aligned, as Colin Macleod observed, with different representatives by the time of the Sicilian Expedition: Alcibiades endorses the adventurous spirit of Athens, Nicias personifies, and speaks for, caution and restraint.¹⁰

⁹ K. Gaiser, *Das Staatsmodell des Thukydides. Zur Rede des Perikles auf die Gefallenen* (Heidelberg 1975) 31–32.

¹⁰ C. Macleod, “Rhetoric and History (Thucydides 6.16–18),” in *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983 [1975]) 86. Lowell Edmunds also points out a range of resemblances between Pericles and Alcibiades: *Chance and Intelligence in Thu-*

The identification of each polar member of a pair with one distinctive politician symbolizes the split that has begun to run through the Periclean ideal.

The antagonism between the two men, with the tendencies they embody, finds its expression in the attempt of each side to denigrate the opposing disposition. Nicias derides the immature youthfulness of Alcibiades and those who promote the expedition (νεώτερος ὢν ἔτι ἐς τὸ ἄρχειν, 6.12.2; τὸ πρᾶγμα ... εἶναι ... μὴ οἶον νεωτέρῳ¹¹ βουλευσασθαι, 6.12.2; οὐς [sc. νεωτέρους] ἐγὼ ... φοβούμαι, 6.13.1). Against the wave of excitement felt by people whom he considers to be irresponsible youngsters, he brings the elder men (τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις, 6.13.1) into position, urging them to resist the impulse to feel embarrassed about their lack of enthusiasm for the expedition.

Alcibiades counters Nicias' critique by insisting that his youth (ἡ ἐμὴ νεότης, 6.17.1) has brought great benefits to the Athenian state. He claims that Nicias breeds discord between young and old: "And let ... Nicias' setting the young at variance with the elders not dissuade you" (καὶ μὴ ὑμᾶς ἡ Νικίου ... διάστασις τοῖς νέοις ἐς τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους ἀποτρέψη, 6.18.6). In contradistinction, Alcibiades claims the harmonious cooperation of young and old to be a distinctive strength of Athens (ἅμα νέοι γεραιτέροις βουλευόντες and νεότητα ... καὶ γῆρας ἄνευ ἀλλήλων μηδὲν δύνασθαι, 6.18.6). Alcibiades' idea seems to be that the opposites of young and old will complement and reinforce each other, so that the vigor of youth and the experience of age are stimulated to develop their specific innate potential. The desired conjunction between young and old is reminiscent of the emphasis in the Funeral Oration on the totality achieved through the unity of mutually enhancing opposites. Alcibiades' description of this unity as κόσμος (τῷ ...

¹¹ *cydides* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1975) 124–128.

¹¹ This form is textually problematic, but it is transmitted by all the manuscripts and accepted in the OCT. Classen/Steup consider the transmitted text unsound and adopt Stein's emendation νεωτέρων: J. Classen and J. Steup, *Thukydides VI* (Berlin 1905) 33.

εἰωθότι κόσμῳ, 6.18.6), suggestive of a harmonious and pleasing order, is true to the spirit of the Funeral Oration:¹² there, too, the impression of a manifold yet well-ordered whole prevails, in which very different components are assigned their appropriate place.

Alcibiades' proposal that he and Nicias should receive the joint command of the expedition seems to evince his honest conviction about the benefits derived from the mutual supplementation of the opposite tendencies displayed by young and old (6.17.1). Yet, upon closer inspection, his idea of unity deviates significantly from the cooperation of polar forces promoted by Pericles. After advancing the position that youth and age are ineffectual without each other, Alcibiades sets out to undergird this claim by recourse to the following principle: "the inferior, the middle range, and the very rigorous together might, if blended with each other, have most strength" (ὁμοῦ δὲ τὸ τε φαῦλον καὶ τὸ μέσον καὶ τὸ πάνυ ἀκριβὲς ἂν ζυγκραθὲν μάλιστ' ἂν ἰσχύειν, 6.18.6).¹³ Given the immediate connection with the preceding statement about the need of young and old for mutual supplementation, it is clear that the two outer terms of Alcibiades' triad are supposed to line up, as scholars have pointed out, with the two aforementioned age groups: τὸ πάνυ ἀκριβὲς refers to the old and τὸ φαῦλον to the young.¹⁴ Jacqueline de Romilly has shown that Alcibiades' idea

¹² Cf. Gregory Vlastos on the variety of different meanings denoted by κόσμος: "What we get in all of these cases is not just any sort of arranging, but one that strikes the eye or the mind as pleasingly fitting: as setting, or keeping, or putting back, things in their proper order. There is a marked aesthetic component" (*Plato's Universe* [Seattle 1975] 3).

¹³ I understand τὸ φαῦλον ("the inferior") and τὸ πάνυ ἀκριβὲς ("the very rigorous") along the lines suggested by S. Hornblower (*A Commentary on Thucydides I–III* [Oxford 1995–2008] III 352), who in turn bases his translation on the interpretation of the passage by J. de Romilly, "Alcibiade et le mélange entre jeunes et vieux," in *L'invention de l'histoire politique chez Thucydide* (Paris 2005 [1976]) 152.

¹⁴ Romilly, in *L'invention de l'histoire politique* 152; Macleod, in *Collected Essays* 84.

about blending these different groups corresponds to Hippocratic theories of nourishment, according to which different dietary components, such as the raw and the cooked, must be mixed in order to coalesce, thus becoming the right kind of diet.¹⁵ In the Funeral Oration, the salient point is that the contrary capacities, while becoming parts of a greater unity, simultaneously fulfill their distinct innate potential more fully than they ever could on their own. This aspiration requires that each member of a given pair retains its distinctive character. By contrast, Alcibiades' theory of mixture presupposes that the opposite tendencies lose their unique character and are submerged in an undifferentiated blend.¹⁶

A closer inspection of Alcibiades' argumentation reveals what this commixture leads to: instead of achieving a dynamic whole in which different dispositions come to unfold their defining potential, the blend results in dominance of one part of the city over the rest. Just after the passage on the benefits of blending, Alcibiades points out that, if Athens were to pursue a quietist policy, "the skill of the city in all sorts of areas will grow old" (πάντων τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἐγγηράσασθαι, 6.18.6). Commenting on ἐγγηράσασθαι, Daniel Tompkins has observed that "[t]he metaphorical twist subtly disparages Nicias' view by hinting

¹⁵ Romilly, in *L'invention de l'histoire politique* 154–155.

¹⁶ Macleod has shown that Alcibiades' program of blending opposite tendencies seems bogus in important regards. The mixture of τὸ φαῦλον and τὸ πάνυ ἀκριβές is premised on the idea of mixing positive and negative qualities (in *Collected Essays* 84–85). Apropos of this notion, Macleod quotes a passage from Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (London 1946: 196), which provides an example of an absurd application of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean: "There was once a mayor who had adopted Aristotle's doctrine; at the end of his turn of office he made a speech saying that he had endeavoured to steer the narrow line between partiality and impartiality." The same criticism does not apply to the pairs of opposites in Pericles' speech, but it certainly does to Alcibiades' promotion of mixing τὸ φαῦλον and τὸ πάνυ ἀκριβές. It is very hard to see how the phrase τὸ φαῦλον can connote any commendable quality.

that decay and decline are typical of the elderly.”¹⁷ Therefore, despite the alleged importance of cooperation between old and young, old age is represented as being anathema to Athenian versatility. Alcibiades goes on to state that Athens “will always add to its experience if she engages in conflict” (ἀγωνιζομένην δὲ αἰεὶ προσλήψεσθαι ... τὴν ἐμπειρίαν, 6.18.6). The permanent striving after new challenges is indicative of a youthful disposition. However, one would have expected “experience” to be the elders’ distinctive contribution to the wellbeing of the city.¹⁸ It turns out that Alcibiades does not even attribute to the Athenian elders the ability to contribute a wealth of experience.

At the moment of the vote on the expedition, young and old both are in favor of the undertaking: “and a desire for sailing befell them in their entirety, all of them alike” (καὶ ἔρωσ ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι, 6.24.3). After making this totalizing observation, Thucydides then splits up the population into different groups. The elderly (τοῖς μὲν ... πρεσβυτέροις, 6.24.3) have, in keeping with their age, expectations that are less exuberant than the rest: while they think that they will probably subdue Sicily, they also envisage what they consider to be the unlikely event of failure, in which case they expect the exceeding military strength to be an insurance against disaster. By contrast, the more impetuous youngsters (τοῖς δ’ ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, 6.24.3) act “out of a longing

¹⁷ D. Tompkins, “Stylistic Characterization in Thucydides: Alcibiades and Nicias,” *JCS* 22 (1972) 212. Cf. Macleod, in *Collected Essays* 85.

¹⁸ Archidamus’ speech at the great debate in Sparta provides Thucydidean evidence for the attribution of experience to old age (1.80.1): καὶ αὐτὸς πολλῶν ἤδη πολέμων ἐμπειρὸς εἰμι, ὃ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, καὶ ὑμῶν τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡλικίᾳ ὀρώ, ὥστε μήτε ἀπειρία ἐπιθυμήσαι τινα τοῦ ἔργου (“And I myself have already had the experience of many wars, Lacedaemonians, and I see men among you who are of the same age, so that nobody is desirous of war out of lack of experience”). On Archidamus’ age and experience see Gomme, *HCT* I 246: “Archidamos in effect succeeded his grandfather Leotychides when the latter went into exile c. 476 B.C., and formally perhaps in 469 ... He may have fought in the Persian wars before that.”

for an absent sight and spectacle” (τῆς ... ἀπούσης πόθῳ ὄψεως καὶ θεωρίας, 6.24.3). The ἔρωσ that comes to infect everybody is really a youthful impulse of excitable desirousness. In reality, the allegedly perfect mixture amounts to the preponderance of the youngsters, by whose excited agitation the older men are carried along willy-nilly.

The Athenians’ inability to achieve the former balance and equipoise between contrary tendencies is also attested by the difficulties that the three generals Alcibiades, Nicias, and Lamachus have in cooperating with each other. After the Athenians’ arrival at Rhegium, the generals hold a counsel about the proper way to proceed, and each of them argues for a different procedure: Nicias wants to bring off reconciliation between the Selinuntians and the Egestaeans and then sail home, Alcibiades wants to solicit support from other Sicilians and then attack Selinus and Syracuse, and Lamachus proposes a fast and direct assault on Syracuse. The perplexing confusion that has befallen the Athenians manifests itself especially clearly through the position adopted by Alcibiades: he, who acted as the spokesman of the Athenians’ get-up-and-go mentality on the eve of the expedition, suddenly shrinks from a direct attack on Syracuse. His half-heartedness is symptomatic of the confusion that has affected the Athenians: opposites do not energize each other, but result in a muddled commixture. Eventually, Lamachus sides with Alcibiades’ middle position, but as a result delay ensues. When the Athenians finally move against Syracuse, Thucydides comments that the Syracusans, after first experiencing terror at the Athenians’ arrival, have a resurgence of courage when they become aware of the Athenians’ failure to attack (6.63.2). In retrospect, it turns out that Lamachus’ advocacy of a direct attack would have been the right strategy (7.42.3). Yet, given the potpourri of truculent dispositions that lack integration, the Athenians undermine each other and lose the punch that they usually display in their military endeavors. Even after Alcibiades’ departure, contrariness among the generals will remain a problem and hamper the Athenians’ operations in Sicily (7.47–49, 7.50.3–4). These complications indicate just how difficult the Athenians

have come to find the task of unifying contrary dispositions into a dynamic whole.

Despite the split running through the Periclean ideal by the time of the Sicilian Expedition, Athens has remained a city in which the development of very different kinds of dispositions is made possible and perhaps even encouraged. The Funeral Oration shows that this universalism is a rare distinction. Maintaining equilibrium between these opposing dispositions presupposes a balancing act. On the eve of the expedition, the equipoise between prudence and foolhardiness, which one can parse along the antithesis between young and old, is sacrificed in favor of a one-sided endorsement of youthful dash and daring. Paradoxically, once in Sicily, the Athenians turn out to fall short of their characteristic resoluteness. Deprived of the counter pole marked by prudence, Athenian energy cannot maintain itself on its previous height. Thus, while Athens is, at the time of the Sicilian Expedition, once again a city that fosters opposite tendencies, a harmonious balance between these dispositions is merely achieved in appearance.

ἔρως and ἐλπίς

Thucydides singles out two passions as the principal driving motivations behind the Sicilian Expedition: ἔρως (6.13.1, 6.24.3) and ἐλπίς (6.15.2, 6.24.3, 6.30.2, 6.31.6). The prominence of these two impulses is not fortuitous, but reflects their distinctively Athenian character, which is attested by the importance Pericles assigns to them in the Funeral Oration. In his account, ἔρως and ἐλπίς are driving forces that make possible the exceptional Athenian achievement and the willing self-sacrifice for the sake of the city.

ἔρως is the animating force that stimulates the Athenians to jeopardize their lives for the higher good of their city. Calling upon his audience to adopt the same spirit as the fallen, Pericles makes the following proclamation: “rather [than considering the matter merely in light of a speech] you must in fact daily gaze at the power of the city and become her [or “its”]

lovers,¹⁹ and whenever she [or “it”] seems great to you, you must reflect that men who were bold and knew their duty ... acquired these things” (μᾶλλον τὴν τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστάς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς, καὶ ὅταν ὑμῖν μεγάλη δόξη εἶναι, ἐνθυμουμένους ὅτι τολμῶντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα ... ἄνδρες αὐτὰ ἐκτήσαντο, 2.43.1). In urging the Athenians to become the ἐρασταί of either the city or its δύναμις, Pericles wishes to infuse them with a passionate desire, comparable to erotic longing, for their city.

This emphasis on erotic passion, however, is counterbalanced in various ways. For one thing, Monoson has stressed that, in connection with the role assigned to the ἐραστής, the Athenians did not think of ἔρως as a blinding emotional force that had the power to enslave individuals. Monoson observes that, instead, the ἐραστής was considered to be eminently self-controlled: “The term erastes clearly denotes the assertive, superior partner in sexual activity ... It effectively projects an

¹⁹ The phrasing, ἐραστάς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς, is ambiguous: does αὐτῆς refer to city or to power? Most commentators pass over the issue. Hornblower, apparently persuaded by Sir Kenneth Dover, is inclined to equate αὐτῆς with πόλεως (*Commentary* III 311). The statement that follows does in fact support the equation of αὐτῆς with πόλεως: καὶ ὅταν ὑμῖν μεγάλη δόξη εἶναι, ἐνθυμουμένους ὅτι τολμῶντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις αἰσχυρόμενοι ἄνδρες αὐτὰ ἐκτήσαντο, καὶ ὁπότε καὶ πείρα του σφαλεῖεν, οὐκ οὖν καὶ τὴν πόλιν γε τῆς σφετέρας ἀρετῆς ἀξιούντες στερίσκειν, κάλλιστον δὲ ἔρανον αὐτῇ προϊέμενοι (“and whenever it [i.e. the same entity to which αὐτῆς refers] seems great to you, reflect that men who were bold and knew their duty and who were, when it came to action, moved by shameful decency acquired these things, and who, whenever they failed in attempting something, were resolved that they should at least not deprive *the city* of their excellence, but gave freely the fairest service to her”). The soldiers are willing to bestow their life, their “fairest service,” on the city (τὴν πόλιν). But if it is the city, and not its power, to which they sacrifice their life, then it seems very likely that the city must also be the entity with which they have fallen in love. This is the case because the underlying idea seems to be that, just as the lover is willing to give up his life for the beloved, so the Athenians are ready to sacrifice theirs for the city.

image of active, energetic, controlling Athenian citizens.”²⁰ In keeping with this image of the self-controlled ἐραστής, Pericles implies that rational reflection is not at odds with the Athenians’ passionate love for their city. In the same breath as invoking the idea of the Athenians as ἐρασταί, Pericles enjoins his audience (χρή) to reflect (ἐνθυμουμένους) about the achievements that rendered the object of their longing possible. Daniel Tompkins has pointed out that Pericles’ choice of vocabulary, both in the Funeral Oration and in his other speeches, “is aggressively intellectual,”²¹ an effect that Pericles achieves, as Tompkins notes, in particular through the employment of cognitive vocabulary in an injunctive sense.²² The combination of a word expressing obligation (χρή) with a verb meaning “to ponder” is a case in point.

One of the pairs of polar opposites that the Athenians, according to the model put forward in the Funeral Oration, succeed in unifying is the antithesis between reason and passion. For instance, the Athenians are unique, Pericles observes, in their ability to combine daring (τολμᾶν and θράσος) and reflection (ἐκλογίζεσθαι and λογισμός, 2.40.3). In light of his emphasis on the equipoise between passionate fervor and intellectual reflection, it would be implausible to consider his injunction that the Athenians become lovers of their city an invitation to succumb to the blinding infatuation of a romantic lover. Instead, passion must be, in Pericles’ conception, in dialogue with reason in order to be able to discharge its beneficial potential. The embedding of the call for ἔρωσ in a speech that is rich in cognitive vocabulary²³ and that stresses the comple-

²⁰ S. S. Monoson, “Citizen as *Erastes*: Erotic Imagery and the Idea of Reciprocity in the Periclean Funeral Oration,” *Political Theory* 22 (1994) 257.

²¹ D. Tompkins, “The Language of Pericles and Modern International Politics,” in A. Tsakmakis and M. Tamiolaki (eds.), *Thucydides between History and Literature* (Berlin 2013) 449.

²² Tompkins notes the following instances: 1.140.4 νομίση, 1.141.1 διανοήθητε, 1.141.2 and 2.64.3 γνῶτε, 1.143.5 σκέψασθε, 2.44.4 ἠγεῖσθε.

²³ Note, in addition to the passages already pointed out, Pericles’ em-

mentariness of reason and passion suggests that Pericles is not thinking of a consuming passion which has broken loose from the intellect.

On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, Athenian ἔρωσ is in full bloom again and animates, just as it does in the Funeral Oration, a bold Athenian enterprise (δυσέρωτας εἶναι τῶν ἀπόντων, 6.13.1; καὶ ἔρωσ ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι, 6.24.3). Yet, contrary to the account offered by Pericles in the Funeral Oration, the passionate longing inspired by ἔρωσ is in no way counterbalanced by reason. Instead Thucydides constantly employs an ample repertoire of words that denote desire, longing, and passion.²⁴ This ubiquity endows ἔρωσ with an atmospheric quality, like an uncontainable mist that infiltrates every recess of the city. By contrast, words denoting reason and reflection are entirely missing from the account of the Athenian decision. The one-sided vocabulary suggests that on the eve of the expedition emotional rapture dominates the scene entirely without leaving room for its balancing counterpart.

Athenian hope, the other driving motivation behind the expedition, is likewise prominent in the Funeral Oration,²⁵ but its most iconic characterization can be found in the other great, albeit involuntary, glorification of the Athenian character: the speech of the Corinthians at the Spartan assembly in Book 1. The Corinthians' elucidation of salient aspects of Athenian

phasis on the rationality of the fallen soldiers and of the living who would follow them: the former “were bold and *knew* their duty” (τολμῶντες καὶ γινώσκοντες τὰ δέοντα), the latter “must *think it fit* to adopt a *mindset* that is in no way less bold” (χρὴ ... ἀτολμοτέραν ... μηδὲν ἄξιόν τὴν ... διάνοιαν ἔχειν, 2.43.1). In both passages, boldness is interlocked with thought.

²⁴ In addition to the two references to ἔρωσ: ὀρμάω and ὀρμάομαι, 6.6.1, 6.6.2, 6.9.3, 6.19.1, 6.24.2; ὀρέγομαι, 6.10.5, 6.16.6; ἐφίεμαι, 6.6.1, 6.8.4, 6.11.5; ἐπιθυμέω and related words, 6.10.1, 6.13.1, 6.15.3, 6.15.4, 6.24.2, 6.24.4; πόθος, 6.24.3; ἐπαγωγός, 6.8.2; προθυμέομαι, 6.31.3.

²⁵ Tompkins, in *Thucydides between History and Literature* 449–450, has pointed out that ἐλπίς, along with other terms such as τόλμα and κίνδυνος, belongs to a cluster of words which, while ambiguous in other sources, are prized by Pericles and represent cornerstones of the Athenian character.

ἐλπίς sheds light on the subsequent references to this theme in the Funeral Oration (1.70.7):

καὶ ἂ μὲν ἂν ἐπινοήσαντες μὴ ἐπεξέλθωσιν, οἰκείων στέρεσθαι ἡγοῦνται, ἂ δ' ἂν ἐπελθόντες κτήσωνται, ὀλίγα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα τυχεῖν πράξαντες. ἦν δ' ἄρα του καὶ πείρα σφαλῶσιν, ἀντελπίσαντες ἄλλα ἐπλήρωσαν τὴν χρεῖαν.

They consider themselves deprived of their own whenever they do not achieve something to which they have applied their mind; and whenever they go after a thing and do not take possession of it, they think that they have, at this point in time, done little in comparison to what lies in the future. But if it so happens that they fail in attempting something, then they fill the gap by forming new hopes as a substitute.

Two features of ἐλπίς stand out: first, ἐλπίς is an impulse that gives precedence to conception over actuality and incites the Athenians to rise above the impositions that material reality places on their projects; second, it lets the Athenians experience their envisioned goal with startling vividness, which becomes a substitute for the non-actuality of the desired situation. Transcendence of physical limitations and the stirring power of the imagination—these two aspects are fundamental to an approach to reality premised on ἐλπίς. The second aspect shows that ἐλπίς is not simply what modern parlance would call an emotion, but also covers the domain of the imagination.

Both distinctive capacities of ἐλπίς are likewise at play in the four passages that refer to this state of mind in the Funeral Oration (2.42.4, 2.43.5, 2.43.6, 2.44.3). In each passage, hope is the force that enables the Athenians to overcome grief about an oppressive, and eminently real, feature of human existence, namely exposure to physical extinction, either in the form of the soldiers' apprehension about their own very possible death or of the relatives' sorrow over the death of the fallen. By giving the unrealized the vivid presence distinctive of the imagination, hope overcomes people's usual entrenchment in the limitations and burdens that material reality imposes upon them.

One of the references to ἐλπίς stands at the highpoint of the Funeral Oration, where Pericles describes the soldiers' decision

to die for the city. By way of another unification of polar opposites, the Athenians combine two widely divergent viewpoints at this critical juncture: “to hope they entrusted the invisible chance of survival, but, in action, as to the issue immediately before their eyes, they resolved to put trust in themselves” (ἐλπίδι μὲν τὸ ἀφανὲς τοῦ κατορθώσκειν ἐπιτρέψαντες, ἔργῳ δὲ περὶ τοῦ ἤδη ὀρωμένου σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ἀξιοῦντες πεποιθέναι, 2.42.4). The willingness to derive energy from the invisible realm of the imaginary is counterbalanced by the soldiers’ hard-headed resolve to face up to the facts immediately before their eyes. Just as ἔρωξ is counterbalanced by ratiocination, so ἐλπίς is offset by a contrary tendency, namely an unsentimental sense of reality, and thus prevented from undue excess.

On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, hope is also oriented towards the invisible realm, again offering a vivid experience of things that are not yet real. The Athenians’ interest in Sicily comes primarily from their striking infatuation with Sicily’s alluring “absence” and “invisibility” (6.9.3, 6.13.1, 6.24.3). Contrary, however, to the ideal choice described by Pericles, this striving after exciting yet remote possibilities is not counterbalanced by a simultaneous orientation towards the requirements of the present situation. For on the eve of the expedition, the Athenians willfully discard things that are “present,” “available,” and “at hand” (τὰ ... ὑπάρχοντα and τοῖς ἐτοιμοῖς, 6.9.3; τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν οὐσίαν, 6.15.3; τὴν ἐν τῷ παρόντι ἡσυχίαν, 6.18.4; τὰ ὑπάρχοντα, 6.31.6). In this way, hope becomes the striving after an unrealistic phantasmagoria.

It is no coincidence that the Athenians, as they fall for the lure of the invisible, strive to imitate models of heroic epic. Scholars have observed that Alcibiades bears several attributes reminiscent of Odysseus,²⁶ and that the Athenian interest in

²⁶ C. J. Mackie, “Homer and Thucydides: Corcyra and Sicily,” *CQ* 46 (1996) 112. This Odyssean side in Alcibiades’ character, especially his great adaptability to hostile circumstances, became, as shown by D. Gribble (*Alcibiades and Athens* [Oxford 1999] 260–270), a central tenet of Plutarch’s portrait of Alcibiades. Though put less directly than in Plutarch, this char-

Sicily has Odyssean overtones.²⁷ Moreover, Mackie has pointed out that the Sicilian Expedition can be interpreted as an Odyssean voyage in reverse order.²⁸ In addition to the parallels between Alcibiades and Odysseus, several aspects of Alcibiades' behavior are reminiscent of the Trojan prince Paris.²⁹ There are also quite a few specific allusions to Homer: at the beginning of the narrative concerning Sicily, Thucydides makes reference to the Cyclopes and Laestrygonians (6.2.1),³⁰ and later, when recounting the doomed final phase of the expedition, he incorporates into his narrative a whole string of Homeric allusions, to which June Allison has called attention.³¹

In contradistinction to the Athenians' eager imitation of epic models on the eve of the expedition, Pericles in the Funeral Oration had rejected the need of a Homeric singer, preferring the truth of the Athenians' actual achievement to the momentary delight of an epic poem (2.41.4). This emphasis on the priority of the factual over the fancies of the imagination is one of Pericles' central concerns. At several points in the Funeral Oration, the Athenians, while free of the need to imitate others, are distinguished by the paramount exemplarity of their own city: instead of imitating the institutions of others (ζηλούση and μιμούμενοι), the Athenians serve as a model for the rest (παράδειγμα, 2.37.1); they leave signs from which others can read off their excellence (δηλοῦσθαι τὰς τιμάς, 2.35.1; σημείων and μνημεῖα, 2.41.4; σημείοις, 2.42.1; σημαίνει, 2.43.3); far from falling short of the fanciful accounts spun out in λόγοι, Athen-

acter trait is already a central facet of the picture given by Thucydides.

²⁷ S. A. Frangoulidis, "A Pattern from Homer's *Odyssey* in the Sicilian Narrative of Thucydides," *QUCC* N.S. 44 (1993) 97–98.

²⁸ Mackie, *CQ* 46 (1996) 110–112.

²⁹ See T. Joho, "Thucydides, Epic, and Tragedy," in R. Balot et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides* (Oxford 2017) 601–602.

³⁰ W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984) 162 n.9; Mackie, *CQ* 46 (1996) 106; Frangoulidis, *QUCC* N.S. 44 (1993) 95–96.

³¹ J. W. Allison, "Homeric Allusions at the Close of Thucydides' Sicilian Narrative," *AJP* 118 (1997) 502–515.

ian ἔργα are on a par with, or even surpass, what might be said about Athenian feats in speeches (2.35.1, 2.41.2, 2.41.3, 2.42.2, 2.43.1). Adam Parry observed that, in Pericles' representation, the fallen Athenians "are not ornaments, but the very stuff of what Pericles is saying."³² They have achieved an ideality that surpasses poetic models because it is saturated with the factuality of actual achievement. Thus, the exemplary paradigm is not to be found in the accounts of the poets, but in the actuality of Athens. The only model that Pericles considers worthy of the Athenians' imitation is the bravery of the fallen soldiers (ζηλώσαντες, 2.43.4), which is grounded in the unquestionable facticity of their death. The horizon of conception has been filled out by Athenian reality.

Contrary to Pericles' emphasis on the self-sufficient priority of actual achievement, the Athenians at the time of the Sicilian Expedition try to imitate the fancies of epic poetry. Acting out this mimetic infatuation, they try to merge myth with reality instead of striking a balance between imagination and realism. Alcibiades' model of mixture again superimposes itself over the Periclean idea of a unity of opposites. Yielding to an unrestrained striving after the imaginary visions of hope, the Athenians adopt a new paradigm of fantasy politics, of which Thucydides is deeply skeptical.

A renaissance of the Funeral Oration?

On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, fundamental pillars upon which the ideal of the Funeral Oration had come to rest have been brought back in place: the Athenians have again achieved an ἀκμή; the joint command of Nicias and Alcibiades provides evidence for the cooperation of contrary dispositions; and ἔρωξ and ἐλπίς infuse the Athenians with impassioned striving, imaginativeness, and the will to transcend material limitations. On closer examination, the resuscitation of these qualities enables merely a debased version of the higher Athenian self known from the Funeral Oration. Nonetheless, the

³² A. Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides* (New York 1981 [1957]) 169.

basic structural factors that underlay the earlier ideal are back in place. This is remarkable because under the onslaught of the plague the ideal of the Funeral Oration seemed irretrievably lost. Hellmut Flashar and Nicole Loraux have pointed out that, once the plague strikes at Athens, several central features of the Funeral Oration's ideal collapse.³³ To the reversals cited by Flashar and Loraux, one could add the collapse of all four structural components discussed above. First, as we have seen, the plague achieves its own distinctive ἀκμή, which in turn amounts to an erasure of the previous ἀκμή of Athens. Second, the plague is the antithesis of the Funeral Oration and, as such, stands for a destructive type of opposition: not the polarity of complementary qualities, but the annihilation of the ideal through suffering and chaos. Third, ἐλπίς gives way to utter hopelessness (2.51.4). Finally, all that remains of the Athenians' erotic disposition is a frantic striving for bodily pleasures: "They resolved to seek enjoyments that were quickly attainable and produced pleasure, considering their bodies and their possessions alike to be transitory" (ταχείας τὰς ἐπαυρέσεις καὶ πρὸς τὸ τερπνὸν ἠξίου πειεῖσθαι, ἐφήμερα τὰ τε σώματα καὶ τὰ χρήματα ὁμοίως ἠγούμενοι, 2.53.2). As this passage suggests, the character of Athenian ἔρωσ has been fundamentally transformed: the impulse to strive after a higher self, which is hard to attain, has shriveled into a craving for objects that promise immediate gratification. All four Athenian dispositions that made the ideal of the Funeral Oration possible and that were eroded by the plague are revived by the time of the Sicilian Expedition. They may have returned in wayward manifestations, but nonetheless the obliteration of these qualities by the plague appears to have been overcome. In principle, a resurrection of the ideal celebrated in the Funeral Oration seems to have been possible at this point.

The approach adopted in this paper naturally invites the question once raised by Dover in response to such identifica-

³³ Flashar, in *Eidola* 463–464; Loraux, *Invention of Athens* 513 n.88.

tions of literary patterning in Thucydides' work: "does he actually distort and misrepresent events to make them fit [sc. his view of constants and patterns]?"³⁴ In response, it should be emphasized that none of the thematic parallels, both those already dealt with and those still to be considered, provide evidence that Thucydides falsified the historical record. The echoes in question hinge on Thucydides' selection of specific details. In stressing, for example, the Athenians' collective succumbing to ἔρως and unreasonable hopefulness, Thucydides tries to capture, above anything else, the situation at Athens on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition. Starting out from what he perceived to be an en masse infatuation, Thucydides then recognizes a persistence of dispositions already emphasized by Pericles in the Funeral Oration and lets the reader experience this continuity through the thematic links between the Funeral Oration and the Sicilian Debate. In light of Thucydides' insistence, in the chapter on method, on his concern with a truthful rendering of facts and details (ὅσον δυνατόν ἀκριβείᾳ περὶ ἐκάστου ἐπεξελθών, 1.22.2), the reasonable assumption is that his procedure was something like the following: he started out from what he perceived to be the facts and put his literary techniques in the service of this concern.³⁵ Thucydides selected from presumably factually accurate details, whose similarity he considered to be non-coincidental. Through selection, he draws attention to similarities, but he does not, for all one can tell, fabricate the details on which the similarity hinges. Arnold Wycombe Gomme, one of the staunchest believers in Thu-

³⁴ K. J. Dover, "Thucydides 'as History' and 'as Literature'," in J. S. Rusten (ed.), *Thucydides: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (Oxford 2009 [1983]) 54.

³⁵ Charles Fornara has stressed that faithfulness to the facts was one of the central aspirations of ancient historiography from its beginnings and remained so throughout antiquity: "Of the various principles laid down by the ancients, none is more fundamental than the honest and impartial presentation of the facts, and it is entirely consistent with their clarity of vision and intellectual emancipation that the Greeks gave it to the world": *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley 1983) 99.

Thucydides' well-nigh scientific striving after the objective truth, recognized that Thucydides' selection of detail served, among other things, his compositional art.³⁶ While acknowledging Thucydides' artistry, Gomme did not think it at odds with the striving after a truthful account.

II. The Return of the Plague

Why did the Athenians, after achieving in the Archidamian War everything that Pericles had hoped for, decide to plunge themselves headlong into adventure at Sicily? This question apparently vexed Thucydides with such urgency that he decided to consider the situation on the eve of the expedition from a variety of angles. In addition to suggesting, as mentioned above, that the Athenian infatuation with Sicily was the result of a wholesale identification with mythological role models borrowed from Homeric epic, Thucydides also conceptualizes the desire for conquest through medical metaphors, thus likening it to a rampant disease. Victoria Wohl has emphasized the resonances between the idea of sickness and the Athenians' ἔρως for Sicily, and explored its resemblances with the notion of the death drive.³⁷ Lisa Kallet, in turn, has drawn attention to the striking use of medical language in Thucydides' excursus on the increasing financial trouble burdening the Athenians as the expedition drags on (7.27–28).³⁸ Although echoes of the

³⁶ “The ‘dramatic’ character of Thucydides’ *History* is thus, fundamentally, implicit in the events: they were dramatic, and a true history, that is, a scientific history, if well written, that is, if a work of art, will reveal them so”: *Greek Attitude to Poetry and History* 150. According to Gomme, one of the prime examples showing the compatibility between Thucydides’ dramatic manner and his faithfulness to the historical record is the direct juxtaposition of the Funeral Oration and the plague: “Nobody has yet suggested that the pestilence did not occur just then, and take the form and have the results which he describes; yet the ‘dramatic’ effect, coming as this narrative does immediately after the Funeral Speech, is overwhelming” (144).

³⁷ Wohl, *Love among the Ruins* 195–197.

³⁸ L. Kallet, *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides* (Berkeley 2001) 129–132.

plague are mentioned by both scholars,³⁹ their chief concern is with medical metaphors as such, irrespective of their resonance with the previous plague narrative. My goal is to demonstrate that Thucydides in fact considers the parallels between the plague and the Sicilian Expedition to be paramount: in the final stretches of the Sicilian narrative he describes the downfall of the Athenian army in terms that liken the disaster in Sicily to a new outbreak of the plague.

Erasure of ἐλπίς

After disaster has struck in Sicily, Thucydides twice remarks that the Athenians have ended up in a state of utter loss of hope: τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἀνέλπιστον ἦν τὸ κατὰ γῆν σωθήσεσθαι (“there was no hope for the Athenians to be saved on land,” 7.71.7), and ἀνέλπιστοι ἦσαν ... σωθήσεσθαι (“they were hopeless of being saved,” 8.1.2). Scholars have pointed out that both passages evoke the phrase εὐέλπιδες ὄντες σωθήσεσθαι (“being of good hopes to be saved,” 6.24.3), by which Thucydides had described the extravagant hopes of the younger Athenians on the eve of the expedition.⁴⁰

³⁹ In the earlier part of the Sicilian narrative, the most important parallel with the excursus on the plague is this remark about the Athenian ἔρωσ for Sicily: “And upon the entirety of them fell, on all in a similar way, a desire for sailing” (καὶ ἔρωσ ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι, 6.24.3). ἐμπίπτω frequently suggests the onset of “grievous physical or psychological states” (Connor, *Thucydides* 109 n.3). This verb and the synonymous ἐπιπίπτω and προσπίπτω are used seven times of the onset of the plague (ἐπιπίπτω, 2.48.3, 2.49.6, 3.86; ἐμπίπτω, 2.49.4, 2.53.4, 2.61.2; προσπίπτω, 2.50.1). On the medical resonance of the compounds of πίπτω see S. Swain, “Man and Medicine in Thucydides,” *Arethusa* 27 (1994) 306–307; Kallet, *Money and Corrosion* 44.

⁴⁰ On 6.24.3 and 7.71.7 see Kallet, *Money and Corrosion* 164; cf. B. Jordan, “The Sicilian Expedition Was a Potemkin Fleet,” *CQ* 50 (2000) 77–78. On 6.24.3 and 8.1.2: Kallet 164 n.53; Wohl, *Love among the Ruins* 204. H. C. Avery, “Themes in Thucydides’ Account of the Sicilian Expedition,” *Hermes* 101 (1973) 1–6, has shown that, in the course of the expedition, the Athenians move from a state of exuberant hope at the outset to total loss of hope by its end, and that the progressive dismantling of Athenian hope is mirrored by a symmetrical elevation of the Syracusans’ ἐλπίς.

By reducing the Athenians to utter hopelessness, the disaster in Sicily recalls the identical effect of the plague: πρὸς γὰρ τὸ ἀνέλπιστον εὐθὺς τραπόμενοι τῇ γνώμῃ πολλῶ μᾶλλον προίεντο σφᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ οὐκ ἀντεῖχον (“for they immediately turned to hopelessness in their thinking and much rather gave up and did not resist,” 2.51.4). Pericles says in his last speech that the outbreak of the plague represents “the only event, out of everything that has occurred, which happened stronger than ἐλπίς” (πρᾶγμα μόνον δὴ τῶν πάντων ἐλπίδος κρείσσον γεγενημένον, 2.64.1). Usually ἐλπίς here is translated as “expectation” or “anticipation” and ἐλπίδος κρείσσον is rendered as “beyond what we expected.”⁴¹ Yet the locution seems to have a second semantic layer hinging on a sense of ἐλπίς that we might render as “hope.” Taken in this way, the whole phrase comes to suggest that the plague was the only event that was “more powerful than hope,” i.e. the only event that crushed the hope of the Athenians. One of the Athenians’ extraordinary gifts, namely their ability, stressed by the Corinthians and celebrated in the Funeral Oration, to remain “hopeful amidst dangers” (ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς εὐέλπιδες, 1.70.3), is challenged by the two climactic Athenian disasters: the plague and the Sicilian defeat.

The conditions of the imprisonment in the quarries

Thucydides’ language in the final stretches of the Sicilian narrative is pregnant with allusions to the plague, which suggest that the catastrophe on Sicily is equivalent to a return of the disease. While W. R. Connor has found three striking parallels in Thucydides’ account of the carnage at the river Assinarus,⁴² Victoria Wohl and Hunter R. Rawlings have

⁴¹ J. Classen and J. Steup, *Thukydides* II (Berlin 1889) 168 *ad* 2.64.1.6: “Voraussicht, Erwartung.”

⁴² Connor, *Thucydides* 204 n.51, notes, in an aside, the following echoes: the Athenians’ desire to drink (τοῦ πιεῖν ἐπιθυμία, 7.84.2) evokes the desire for water of the sick (τοῦ ὕδατος ἐπιθυμία, 2.52.2); in both scenes there is a loss of order (7.84.3 οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ~ 2.52.2 οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ); and in both corpses are heaped on top of each other (7.85.1 νεκρῶν ... πολλῶν ἐπ’ ἄλ-

noted some further correspondences: the progressively aggravating sickness of the army and the failure to provide burial for the fallen.⁴³ Yet there is more to say.

References to the plague cluster densely in Thucydides' report of the predicament of the common soldiers imprisoned in the quarries at Syracuse. Twice he emphasizes the oppressive narrowness under which the Athenians, especially because of their large numbers, suffer (7.87.1, 7.87.2). In a similar way, the plague had a particularly dire effect because of spatial constriction: the city was overcrowded after the country population had had to move inside the city-walls (2.52.1). Oppressive heat also plays a role: the prisoners in the quarries suffer from "stifling heat" (πνίγος, 7.87.1) from the sun, just as the plague tormented the Athenians by making them feel unbearably hot (τῆς κεφαλῆς θέρμαι ἰσχυραί, 2.49.2; ἐκάετο, 2.49.5; ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντὸς καύματος, 2.49.6). In addition, because they did not live in solid houses, the country people suffered from the "stifling heat" in their shabby huts (ἐν καλύβαις πνιγηραῖς, 2.52.2). πνίγος recurs in the account of the prisoners' camp (7.87.1). Next, Hornblower observes that just as the plague causes patients' breath to smell bad (πνεῦμα ἄτοπον καὶ δυσῶδες, 2.49.2), so the rotting corpses cause an intolerable stench in the quarries (ὀσμαὶ ἦσαν οὐκ ἀνεκτοί, 7.87.2).⁴⁴ The captives at Syracuse are affected by both hunger and thirst (λιμῶ ἄμα καὶ δίψῃ ἐπιέζοντο, 7.87.2); the plague caused people to suffer from "unquenchable thirst" (τῇ δίψῃ ἀπαύστῳ ξυνεχόμενοι, 2.49.5). The word λιμός, "hunger," also appeared in the account of the plague. Thucydides reports that an oracle, predicting that "A Dorian war shall come and pestilence with it" (ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ), was believed by some to have, by way of paronomasia, the word λιμός, "hunger,"

λήλοις ἤδη κειμένων ~ 2.52.2 νεκροὶ ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις ... ἔκειντο).

⁴³ Wohl, *Love among the Ruins* 198; H. R. Rawlings, *The Structure of Thucydides' History* (Princeton 1981) 157.

⁴⁴ *Commentary* III 743.

instead of λοιμός, “plague” (2.54.2–3). This λοιμός reappears in the account of the captured Athenians at Syracuse. Finally, both at Athens and in the quarries people die in disorder and their corpses are heaped on top of each other. Once more, Thucydides evokes, as Hornblower points out, the phrase from the plague passage, to which he already alluded in the report of the carnage at the Assinarus: τῶν νεκρῶν ὁμοῦ ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοις ξυννενημένων (“the corpses being piled up on top of each other,” 7.87.2) recalls νεκροὶ ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοις ἀποθνήσκοντες ἔκειντο (“corpses of dying people lay on top of each other,” 2.52.2). The outcome of the expedition, which set out with extravagant hopes for enrichment and dominion, is tantamount to a renewed flaring up of the plague.

Athens the empty city

In his speech before the final Athenian retreat, Nicias tries to encourage his soldiers by the thought that, upon their return, they will restore the power of Athens, which has momentarily crumbled: “for a city is its men, and not walls and ships empty of men” (ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλις, καὶ οὐ τείχη οὐδὲ νῆες ἀνδρῶν κεναί, 7.77.7). Nicias’ view that a city empty of its men ceases to exist anticipates, in a harsh irony, the situation that will soon become reality at Athens. After the Athenian armament has been wiped out, Thucydides mentions that the Athenians “did not see ships in sufficient numbers in the docks or money in the treasury or crews for the ships” (ναῦς οὐχ ὀρῶντες ἐν τοῖς νεωσοίκοις ἱκανὰς οὐδὲ χρήματα ἐν τῷ κοινῷ οὐδ’ ὑπηρεσίας ταῖς ναυσίν, 8.1.2). In a similar way, the plague turns Athens into an empty city: “And many houses were left empty due to lack of people who were ready to treat the patients” (καὶ οἰκίαι πολλὰ ἐκενώθησαν ἀπορία τοῦ θεραπεύσοντος, 2.51.5). Both the plague and the defeat in Sicily turn Athens into a ghost town.

After the disaster in Sicily, the Athenians are confronted with a disconcerting lack of manpower: “Both each person individually and the city were without many hoplites and cavalrymen, and the flower of youth, another of which they did not see present for them” (στερόμενοι καὶ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστος καὶ ἡ πόλις

ὀπλιτῶν τε πολλῶν καὶ ἰππέων καὶ ἡλικίας οἴαν οὐχ ἑτέραν ἐώρων ὑπάρχουσαν, 8.1.2). As the following statement of Thucydides shows, the plague has the identical effect of draining the city of hoplites and cavalry: “For no fewer than four thousand four hundred of those who were enrolled as hoplites died and also three hundred cavalrymen” (τετρακοσίων γὰρ ὀπλιτῶν καὶ τετρακισχιλίων οὐκ ἐλάσσους ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν τάξεων καὶ τριακοσίων ἰππέων, 3.87.2–3).

Individual perspective coextensive with that of the city

The notion expressed at 8.1.2 that each individual is deprived of many hoplites, horsemen, and youths is an odd thought: while it makes sense to say that the state has suffered this loss, it seems paradoxical to claim that each single Athenian is deprived of these groups of people, which, as collective groups, exist only from the perspective of the city. The idea begins to make better sense when understood in the light of Pericles’ view, which he expresses repeatedly, that each Athenian citizen ought to surmount the limits of his individual selfhood and find instead true fulfillment through full identification with the higher reality represented by the city (1.143.5, 2.42.2, 2.43.1, 2.61.4). As Pericles himself acknowledges in his last speech, this ideal comes under pressure in the wake of the plague, which erodes the Athenians’ commitment to put themselves out for their state: “For I think that the city is more beneficial to its private citizens when it flourishes as a whole than when it does well as far as each individual citizen is concerned, but fails as a collective” (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι πόλιν πλείω ξύμπασαν ὀρθομένην ὠφελεῖν τοὺς ἰδιώτας ἢ καθ’ ἕκαστον τῶν πολιτῶν εὐπραγοῦσαν, ἀθρόαν δὲ σφαλλομένην, 2.60.2). The happiness of the individual is coextensive with the happiness of the state because, if the city founders, everyone goes down with it: “For when a man does well in his own private affairs and his fatherland is destroyed he will perish with it nonetheless; but if he does badly amidst a fatherland that does well he is much more likely to come through safe” (καλῶς μὲν γὰρ φερόμενος ἀνὴρ τὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν διαφθειρομένης τῆς πατρίδος οὐδὲν ἦσσον ξυναπόλλυται, κακοτυχῶν δὲ ἐν εὐτυχούσῃ

πολλῶ μᾶλλον διασώζεται, 2.60.3).

Pericles expresses this thought soon after the onset of the plague at a moment when the Athenians, under its impact, wish to abandon the war effort on behalf of their city. On this earlier occasion, the Athenians recoiled from the abyss that the plague opened up before them. After the defeat in Sicily and the metaphorical resurgence of the plague, when each individual Athenian comes to experience the losses that pertain, properly speaking, to the city at large, the Athenians have once again come face to face with the abyss.

Inner-Thucydidean echoes or topicality of disaster narratives?

Ancient accounts of disaster tend to feature a number of stock themes and situations, found across different authors and genres. The notions and phrases are *topoi*, recurrent motives through the lens of which authors came to portray momentous catastrophes.⁴⁵ It remains to be shown that the parallels between the account of the plague and the description of the Athenian imprisonment, rather than representing instances of this topicality of disaster, amount to specific correspondences between the two sections in question.

For the determination of such *topoi*, the parallels between Livy's account of the fall of Alba and Virgil's description of the sack of Troy provide a good point of reference. The details shared by the two accounts reflect, as Servius implies,⁴⁶ Ennius' report of the destruction of Alba. This in turn was influenced, as scholars consider likely, by the *Iliupersis* tradition, which ultimately goes back to treatments of the fall of Troy in poems of the epic cycle.⁴⁷ To judge from the passages influenced by the

⁴⁵ On the term *topos* and its importance for the literary tradition see E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Tübingen 1993 [1948]) 79–80.

⁴⁶ Serv. on *Aen.* 2.486: *de Albano excidio translatus est locus*.

⁴⁷ G. M. Paul, “‘Urbs Capta’: Sketch of an Ancient Literary Motif,” *Phoenix* 36 (1982) 147–148: “The popularity of that theme is attested by the various treatments of the *Iliupersis* in poems of the Epic Cycle and by Ste-sichorus.”

Iliupersis tradition, the following details can be considered recurrent motifs in ancient narratives of disaster: lamentation, fear and terror, and the shedding of tears.⁴⁸ Thucydides' narrative of the defeat in Sicily does include some of these specific details. They abound in the episode in which he describes the general mood of the Athenian army at the beginning of the ill-fated retreat: lamentation (ὄλοφρυμόν and οἰμωγῆς, 7.75.4), terror and fear (φόβου, 7.75.3; δεδιότας, 7.75.4, 7.75.7) and tears (δάκρυσι and δάκρυα, 7.75.4). In assessing the topicality of such details, it is well to remember Eduard Fraenkel's admonition about a resemblance of passages in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (327–328) and Vergil's account of the sack of Troy (*Aen.* 2.766–767): “Literary reminiscence is hardly in question: it is the common human experience in such a calamity.”⁴⁹ While it would be exaggerated to view the various motives of the *Iliupersis* tradition as exclusively literary, one can reasonably assume that the literary tradition helped authors to articulate features that tended to recur.⁵⁰

For our purposes, the decisive point is that, unlike the references to fear, tears, and lamentation, the specific parallels linking the plague narrative and the account of the defeat at Sicily do not belong, for the most part, to the adduced type of stock motives of disaster. This is especially true of the range of details marked by drastic physicality, which is, in the work of Thucydides, otherwise quite rare and represents a distinctive hallmark of the two episodes in question. As far as the other

⁴⁸ Lamentation: Polyb. 2.56.7 θρήνους, Verg. *Aen.* 2.487 *plangoribus*, Liv. 2.29.5 *vores miserabiles*, 5.42.4 (sack of Rome by Gauls) *ploratus*. Terror: Liv. 5.21.6 (fall of Veii) *timentes*, 5.21.11 *paventium*, 5.42.1 *terroris*, 5.42.4 *paventes*. Tears: Polyb. 2.56.7 δάκρυα.

⁴⁹ Aeschylus: *Agamemnon* II (Oxford 1950) 173.

⁵⁰ Paul, *Phoenix* 36 (1982) 148: “It is clear that the destruction of Troy and the resulting suffering and grief were firmly established as a literary and artistic theme ... Influenced by such descriptions [sc. of the capture of Troy] the general theme of the capture of cities was also early established in epic, tragedy, and historiography, and no doubt recurring patterns of events were to be observed in actual captures.”

parallels are concerned, Thucydides foregrounds peculiar details which make the parallel specific and, therefore, go beyond the merely topical. For instance, the appearance in Aeschylus' *Persians* of the motif of the city empty of men (119) may suggest that this image was topical.⁵¹ Yet, in Thucydides' report of the situation at Athens after the Sicilian defeat, the notion of the empty city is combined with the unusual thought articulated by Pericles in the wake of the plague that each individual experiences losses which, properly speaking, are ascribable only to collectives. The recurrence, in the plague narrative and in the report of the reaction at Athens, of this specific incongruity suggests that the parallel is more than an instance of topicality, but a specific link between the two Thucydidean passages. Similarly, with regard to the theme of hopelessness, which would be a common enough emotion in a momentous disaster, Thucydides brings to light a specific facet that both episodes have in common: the plague and the defeat at Sicily represent the two occasions on which the Athenians, the people who never lose hope, succumb, at least momentarily, to utter hopelessness.

III. Conclusion

On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, all relevant factors that should enable a renaissance of the ideal of the Funeral Oration are in place. Yet, instead of bringing back the realization of the higher Athenian self, these factors induce the Athenians to undertake an endeavor that culminates in a revival of the plague and, as such, directly negates the principles of the Funeral Oration. In the course of the expedition the earlier sequence from Funeral Oration to plague is reiterated.

Both in the chapter on method and in the excursus on stasis at Corcyra, Thucydides indicates that past events will come

⁵¹ Comparing the passage in the *Persians* with a Sumerian source, Bachvarova and Dutsch trace the motif of the emptied city back to Near-Eastern traditions: M. R. Bachvarova and D. Dutsch, "Mourning a City 'empty of men': Stereotypes of Anatolian Communal Lament in Aeschylus' *Persians*," in *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean* (Cambridge 2016) 91.

back in the future, albeit with some degree of modification due to changes in the individual circumstances (1.22.4, 3.82.2). Based on these passages, Pierre Vidal-Naquet described Thucydides' notion of time as a combination of cyclical and linear ideas: Thucydides' understanding of time was both "permanent" (this is the recurring pattern) and "changeable" (this is the linear aspect, which comes from the divergences caused by the interaction of the pattern with the situation at hand).⁵² Through the repetition of the sequence from Funeral Oration to plague, Thucydides' narrative provides an example of this crossover between temporal recurrence and progression.

If events go through a circular pattern, they follow a course that is, despite the variations that come with the specific manifestation, to some degree preordained. Yet the two sequences, the one from Funeral Oration to plague and the other from the Sicilian Debate to imprisonment in the quarries, differ in the influence exercised by human agency. If one is to believe Pericles, the outbreak of the plague constitutes a "daemonic visitation" that the Athenians "must bear as a necessity" (φέρειν δὲ χρὴ τὰ τε δαιμόνια ἀναγκάως, 2.64.2). On the eve of the Sicilian Expedition, the responsibility seems to reside solely in the human plane, namely in the Athenians' irresponsible indulgence in blinding passions.

Yet from Thucydides' account of the decision in favor of the expedition it is not at all clear whether the Athenians really enjoy as much free rein as one might be tempted to assume. Those factors that made the ideal of the Funeral Oration possible in the first place (ἄκμῃ, unity of opposites, ἔρωξ, ἐλπίζ) become driving forces of the Sicilian Expedition and are as such responsible for the renewed outbreak of the plague. Their revived ἄκμῃ tempts the Athenians to put excessive trust in their resources and to consider their armament, despite occasional fits of doubt, invincible (6.24.2–3, 6.30.2). The cooperation of contrary dispositions, far from achieving a synthesis,

⁵² P. Vidal-Naquet, "Divine Time and Human Time," *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore 1986 [1981]) 46.

leads to conflicting opinions among the different commanders, chiefly between Nicias on the one hand and Alcibiades and Demosthenes on the other, and subsequently leads to fatal strategic mistakes (6.48.1–50.1 with 7.42.3, 7.49.4, 7.50.4). ἔρως and ἐλπίς shake off the constraints imposed by reason and realism and overwhelm the Athenians with the force of deluding passions. The predominantly youthful impulses come to affect the majority of Athenians, and the elders, despite their more cautious disposition, allow themselves to be swept along. In tragedy, this kind of turnaround, in the course of which specific characteristics transform themselves from blessing to bane, is a sure sign of the influence of daemonic forces. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* provide clear evidence for the daemonic character of such an uncanny turnaround through which previously beneficial forces become agents of havoc.⁵³

Stahl has drawn attention to the parallel between the motivating force of ἔρως and ἐλπίς on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition and Diodotus' remarks on the destructive effect of these forces in the Mytilenean Debate (3.45.5).⁵⁴ Diodotus describes, according to Cornford, the seductive power of these drives in terms reminiscent of the attribution of a daemonic agency in Greek poetry.⁵⁵ This experience, both tragic and daemonic, also presents itself to the Athenians. Whereas myth-

⁵³ Both exceptional distinction and deadly culpability come in the wake of Agamemnon's victory at Troy (*Ag.* 468–474). In a similar manner, Oedipus is both the savior and the bane of Thebes and owes both titles to the same qualities (*OT* 441–442).

⁵⁴ H.-P. Stahl, *Thucydides: Man's Place in History* (Swansea 2003 [1966]) 120–121.

⁵⁵ F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London 1907) 227: "The inexplicable panic which will suddenly run through an army, the infectious spirit of a crowd, the ecstasy produced by intoxicants, the throes of sexual pleasure, the raving of the seer and of the poet—all these are states of mind in which the self appears to be drowned and swept away. By what? There can be but one answer: some spirit, or daemon, has entered the soul and possesses it. This is the very language used by Diodotus."

ological thought locates the origin of a tragic cycle in the divine, Thucydides anchors the cyclical element in “the human” (τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, 1.22.4) and the “nature of human beings” (φύσις ἀνθρώπων, 3.82.2). Diodotus remarks that there is not much that can be done by way of opposition “when human nature is eagerly bent on doing something” (τῆς ἀνθρωπείας φύσεως ὀρμωμένης προθύμως τι πράξει, 3.45.7). Although it is not a supernatural agent, human nature is portrayed as a mysterious, uncontrollable, and terrifying force. Diodotus captures the compulsion of human nature with the verb ὀρμάομαι. In other authors, this verb is used of a god who propels a human being to act in a specific way (ὀρμηθεὶς θεοῦ ἄρχετο, Hom. *Od.* 8.499; πρὸς θεῶν ὀρμημένος, Soph. *El.* 70; cf. ὑπὸ τούτου τοῦ ἔρωτος ὀρμημένου, Pl. *Symp.* 181D1). In Thucydides, human nature has taken the place that mythical thinkers attributed to the divine.⁵⁶

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