

Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning

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What does the choice of the Gettysburg Address as a eulogy for the September 11 dead reveal about public mourning in the polity that made it? Tracing the genealogy of the Address back to Pericles' Funeral Oration, this essay argues that Thucydides provides two models of public mourning: one based on the Oration alone, the other on the rituals surrounding the Festival of Dionysia. Each generates a particular patriotic perspective: one unquestioning and partial, the other balanced and theoretical. Using Plato's *Menexenus* to distinguish the models, the essay employs them as a lens to view two moments of American public mourning linked by the Gettysburg Address. Suggesting that 1863 saw a Dionysian approach; and 2002, one based on the Oration alone, it traces the beneficial impact of the 1863 choice for American politics, and considers the possible consequences of the 2002 reading in light of American and Athenian historical experience.

In 2002, the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks was marked in New York City by a reading of the Gettysburg Address. It was, as many commentators noted, an unusual choice of eulogy, comparing the unwitting victims of a foreign terrorist attack to the willing participants in a civil war (Kakutani 2002; McWhorter 2003). The history of the funeral oration suggests, however, that the eliding of such distinctions is endemic to the tradition. Indeed, much of the contemporary criticism simply echoed Socrates' complaint that public eulogies are necessarily ill-fitting, anachronistic, and banal (Plato 1984). Underpinning the most recent criticism was, nevertheless, the suggestion that something was missing from the 2002 reading (Sontag): that Lincoln's original Address transcended the genre in a way that is now lost to us. Attempts to identify the source of this transcendence have largely relied on the genius of Abraham Lincoln for their explanatory leverage (Wills 1992; White 2005). It is an explanation without import for the contemporary polity. Suggesting that America has lost more than Lincoln, and taking seriously Peter Euben's observation that "political theory might explore public forms of grieving" (2002, 111), this essay identifies the difference between the 1863 and the 2002 readings by tracing the origins of the Address to two moments of Athenian public mourning: the funeral oration, and the rituals surrounding the Festival of Dionysia. Using Plato's *Menexenus* to elucidate their differences, and employing these details as an analytical lens, it argues that missing from the public commemoration of the September 11 attacks was a *Dionysian* perspective—one capable of simul-

taneous national celebration and critique—and that this absence has significant negative consequences for the contemporary polity and her response to this and future tragedies.

The reasons for turning to the Greeks here are twofold. First, the genealogy of the Gettysburg Address: anybody familiar with Thucydides' account of Pericles' Oration cannot help but be struck by the rhetorical, thematic, and stylistic similarities between the two speeches (1972). Following Garry Wills (1992) and Florence Jeanne Goodman (1965), it is argued that Lincoln was deeply influenced by Thucydides' presentation of Pericles' speech.¹ Second, the Greeks' role as the inventors of the public eulogy: Demosthenes says of the Athenians "they alone in the world deliver funeral orations for citizens who have died for their country" (Loraux 1986, 1). So integral was it to Greek identity that Nicole Loraux argues that the oration invented Athens as much as Athens invented the oration. Acknowledging the potential fallacy of assuming congruity between the origins of the oration and its current usage, the Greeks nevertheless reveal much about the role of the eulogy in public life. They provide a typology of public mourning, offering critical insight into two moments of American remembrance themselves

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¹ Anne Norton recounts: "When I was at Chicago, there were two speeches read by virtually all students in the Common Core: Pericles' Funeral Oration and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. One of our classmates famously confused the two and—more famously—appealed the rather bad grade he got in consequence on the grounds that, after all, they were very much the same" (2004, 134–35). Although many writers—such as Wills (1992)—have simply assumed that Lincoln read Thucydides, Goodman (1965) attempts to put the text in his hands. As he was only a reader—not a collector of books—this is somewhat difficult. Nevertheless, Goodman makes a strong case. Lincoln is, she notes, known to have read Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in Three Volumes* and Plutarch's *Lives* (taking the latter volume out of the Library of Congress twice during his Presidency) both of which discuss Pericles' rhetorical skills in some detail. In addition, Charles Rollin's *Ancient History*—which he also read—specifically footnotes Thucydides' account of Pericles' Oration (1972, 324). A notorious autodidact who went so far as read *Neilson's Exercises in Greek* in order that he might understand Greek oratory in the original is, perhaps, unlikely to have missed the opportunity to read what these texts cited as one of Athens' greatest speeches.

FIGURE 1. A Typology of Public Mourning

Mode of Mourning	Which Pericles?	Tragic Perspective	Type of Patriotism
Funeral Oration	<i>In the History</i>	Protagonist	Uncritical
Dionysian Oration	<i>Of the History</i>	Audience	Balanced

genealogically linked—both to the Greeks and to each other—by the reading of the Gettysburg Address. They offer two distinct modes of public mourning, each corresponding to a particular way of seeing and a particular type of patriotism. The first, associated with the funeral oration, demands little of the polity except laments for the lost and a recommitment to preexisting political methods and an established political identity. Thucydides (1972) connects this type of mourning to an uncritical patriotism and to a partiality of perspective common to the protagonists of Greek tragedy. In the face of mass death, it simply reaffirms the values of the polity. The second, associated with the rituals surrounding the Festival of Dionysia, uses the sacrifice of the honored dead to inspire the polity to confront difficult political choices, and thereby to embrace a potentially new political identity and a different set of political solutions. Thucydides connects this type of mourning to a more balanced patriotism and to a perspective akin to that of tragedy's audience. It seeks to reconsider the polity's values in order that it might more effectively confront the challenges of mass death. It is a measure of the sophistication of Thucydides' work that he is able to offer both models of mourning simultaneously in his presentation of Pericles' Funeral Oration. He offers in effect *two* Pericles—the Pericles *in the History* and the Pericles *of the History*—each one corresponding to a particular patriotic perspective, oration, and type of mourning. This typology of public mourning is summarized in Figure 1.

The essay proceeds by establishing its typology with a history of Greek mourning practices. Offering an account of the funeral oration, it details Socrates' critique of this tradition in the *Menexenus* and shows how the rituals of mourning surrounding the Festival of Dionysia transcend it. Demonstrating the ways in which Thucydides incorporates aspects of these rituals into his presentation of Pericles' Oration, it identifies the possibility of a funeral oration that is Dionysian in structure and effect. Building on the claim that Thucydides associates each of these approaches to mourning with a specific Pericles, the essay traces the genealogical connection between Pericles' Funeral Oration and Lincoln's Address before asking which Pericles was present—and thus, which kind of mourning was displayed—at Gettysburg and at Ground Zero. Arguing that the Pericles *of the History* provided the model for the 1863 Address, and the Pericles *in the History*

for 2002, the essay then considers the consequences of the 2002 choice in light of the American and Athenian experience.

THE ATHENIAN FUNERAL ORATION

For the Greeks, the annual wintertime funeral and oration for the war dead was an inextricably political affair. "[T]he orator's aims" wrote Nicole Loraux, "belong to the sphere of practical politics: at the end of the year of war, on the eve of new battles, the oration must attest to the cohesion of the community and to help strengthen it" (1986, 123). As such, it was necessarily public and traditional. Thucydides (1972, 143) recounts how, after two days set aside for people to make private offerings, the dead became public property. A funeral procession with ten wooden coffins—one for each of the Tribes of Athens—and an empty bier for the missing, led to the public burial place "in the most beautiful quarter outside the city walls." There, speaking from a high platform—much as in 1863 and 2002—the speaker addressed the crowd. Chosen "for his intellectual gifts and his general reputation," the speaker was expected to follow the community conventions that were already "ancient" when Thucydides described them (143–44); indeed, Pericles acknowledges "the institution of this speech at the close of our ceremony" (Thucydides, 144). Two such conventions were *epainesis* and *parainesis*: praise for the fallen and advice for the living. Pericles praises the dead for "their gallant conduct against the enemy in defense of their native land," noting that "they thought it more honorable to stand their ground and suffer death than to give in and save their lives" (Thucydides, 148, 149). Such *epainesis* is, of course, an indirect form of *parainesis*; indeed, it is clear that the real target of the funeral oration is the living not the dead. Of the fallen, Pericles tells the Athenians: "It is for you to try to be like them." The living must, he says, "resolve to keep up the same daring spirit against the foe" (Thucydides, 149). Tellingly there are no individuals here, only Athenians of noble conduct—Pericles refers only to "these men," "the dead," and "they"—making the city, not the dead, the subject of his speech. According to Loraux, the funeral oration was "an institution of speech in which the symbolic constantly encroached on the functional, since in each oration the codified praise of the dead spilled over into generalized praise of Athens" (2). Adopting the conventions of the genre to structure his speech, and setting his "praise for the dead . . . in the bright light of evidence," Pericles offers Athens an idealized vision of the city and her values (Thucydides, 148).

The great majority of Pericles' Funeral Oration is spent praising Athens and her customs: her openness to others; her democratic practices; her measured use of wealth; her generosity; her freedom; and her toleration. It is for all these reasons that Pericles declares Athens "an education to Greece" (Thucydides 1972, 147). He makes no attempt to hide his motives. "What I would prefer is that you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in

love with her" (Thucydides, 149). Indeed, he suggests that such patriotism finds its fullest expression in the fallen: men whose lives had value precisely because they were given in defense of Athenian ideals. It was, he asserts, a fate that ennobled those who suffered it. "Some of them no doubt had their faults; but what we ought to remember is their gallant conduct against the enemy in defense of their native land. They have blotted out evil with good, and done more service to the commonwealth than they ever did harm in their private lives" (Thucydides, 148). Like Greek politics itself, the focus of the oration was decidedly masculine. Standing in opposition to the private laments of women mourners, the oration was meant to gird the soldier-citizens for battle. Indeed, Pericles declares that "the consummation which has overtaken these men shows us the meaning of manliness" and famously relegates the role of women to childbirth and to being "least talked about by men" (Thucydides, 148, 150–51). The oration was, furthermore, something of an imperialistic paradox: claiming hegemony over others—"an education to Greece"—while being addressed primarily to Athens (Loraux 1986, 87–88). Pericles claims, nevertheless, that "Our city is open to the world" (Thucydides, 146), and contemporary sources, including the *Menexenus*, confirm that foreign observers would have been present (Plato 1984, 235b). The masculine and imperialistic aspects of the oration culminate in its final convention: the claim that only she, the imperial power can cause her own downfall. Losses, writes Loraux, were to be attributed only to mistakes of the city, to her own internal divides, not to the skill of the enemy (1986, 79, 138–39).

The Athenian funeral oration was then an occasion for the glorification of the city. It sought to reaffirm social ties, community values, and an established political identity. It was not, despite Pericles' assertion in the *History* that he "wanted to make it clear that for us there is more at stake than there is for others who lack our advantages" (Thucydides 1972, 148), an occasion for a discussion of the problems that had led to the war, nor the mistakes made in its execution; nor was it a time to wonder whether the casualties inflicted were worth the gains accrued, or indeed, the losses inflicted. It was this unquestioning and all-consuming patriotism that drew Plato's ire, and Socrates' scorn, in the *Menexenus*. Drawing out their critique allows us to see the contrast between this first form of public mourning and its more complex counterpart found in the rituals surrounding the Festival of Dionysia.

PRAISING ATHENIANS IN ATHENS

Although death is a perennial and persistent theme of the Platonic dialogues, the *Menexenus* is particularly interesting because it deals explicitly with the funeral oration tradition. It is one that Socrates holds in low regard. With habitual irony he declares:

...in many ways it's a fine thing to die in battle. A man gets a magnificent funeral even if he dies poor, and people praise him even if he was worthless. Wise men lavish praise

on him, not at random but in speeches prepared long in advance, and the praise is so beautiful that although they speak things both true and untrue of each man, the extreme beauty and diversity of their words bewitches our souls. (Plato 1984, 234c)

It is this "bewitchment of our souls" and the glossing over of important distinctions that are of particular concern for Socrates. It occurs because the speakers focus on the general—the city—rather than on the specifics of the dead:

For in every way, they eulogize the city and those who died in battle and all our forebears, and even us who are still alive, until finally, Menexenus, I feel myself ennobled by them. I every time stand and listen, charmed, believing I have become bigger, better-born, and better looking on the spot. (Plato 1984, 235a,b)

Far from reminding the citizenry of their roles and responsibilities, he suggests, the speech merely distracts its listeners. "I almost suppose I'm dwelling in the Isles of the Blessed," Socrates declares. "So skillful are our orators" (Plato 1984, 235c). Its effect is, he believes, solely to bind the citizens to the city in a way that dulls their critical faculties. That it does so regardless of the values of that city is, furthermore, a problem perpetuated and evidenced by the anachronism inherent in the orations.

Socrates notes more than once that the funeral orations are "prepared long in advance" (Plato 1984, 234c, 235d). Indeed, the eulogy that Socrates ascribes to Aspasia in the *Menexenus* is said to be "pieced together from leftovers from" Pericles' oration (Plato, 236b). As such, he suggests, the conventions of the funeral oration are mere commonplaces or platitudes: the simple repetition of old ideas. That the oration from the *Menexenus* was itself repeated in antiquity as a funeral oration seems to confirm his point. For Socrates, the problem with such platitudes is that they are purely comforting: they console in their generality and deliver the listener from critical reflection. The sort of dialectic prized by Socrates—that which forces its listeners into a rigorous scrutiny of everything they believe in and live by (Fish 1972, 1)—requires, by contrast, specificity: it is precise, delicate, and hard to pull off. A number of scholars have noted that the timing of the *Menexenus* seems decidedly out of joint: the speech tells the story of Athens down to the end of the Corinthian War and the King's Peace of 387 BC, but Socrates died in 399; Aspasia, who delivered the speech, almost certainly died before Socrates; and Pericles, who had died in 429 BC, is spoken of as if he is still alive (Plato, 235e). This vagueness, which has long puzzled scholars, may be an authorial comment on the platitudinous nature of the funeral oration. It does not matter when it is delivered, Plato seems to suggest, because it is not concerned with the specificity of truth.

Given his concern with specificity, Plato unsurprisingly appears to have a particular target in mind. The funeral oration in the *Menexenus* explicitly recalls Thucydides' claim that Athens was an "aristocracy with the approval of the multitude" (Plato 1984, 238c), and Socrates speaks disparagingly of someone who learned

his rhetoric from Antiphon of Rhamnusia, a teacher under whom Thucydides is said to have studied (Plato, 236a). Thus, declares R. E. Allen, the “*Menexenus* is primarily a criticism of Thucydides, not Pericles” (Allen, 1984, 325. See also Loraux 1986, 189). So, although Socrates appears to be addressing the Funeral Oration of Pericles, it might be the whole *History* that is the subject of his scorn, not least when he declares: “If one had to speak well of Athenians to Peloponnesians, or of Peloponnesians to Athenians, he would have to be a good orator indeed to be persuasive. But when one performs before the very people he is praising, it is perhaps no great thing to appear to speak well” (Plato, 235d). In praising the Athenians in Athens, Socrates suggests, Pericles, and by extension Thucydides, have taken on the easiest of tasks: the rhetorical speech that flatters to deceive, and serves only the basest interests of men and the city. It is a criticism not only of the funeral oration, but also of Thucydides’ *History* as a whole, a text which, in its structure and form, might be regarded as something of a funeral oration for the once-great city.² It may be, however, that Plato’s criticism of Pericles’ Funeral Oration, and by metonymic extension the *History*, is misplaced. For Thucydides also presents a more sophisticated account of these rituals of public mourning, one that moves beyond the simple flattery and unquestioning patriotism of the funeral oration and offers his readers the possibility of the kind of dialectic Socrates prizes. He does so by mimicking the structure of another set of rituals of Athenian public mourning: those surrounding the Festival of Dionysia. Setting out these conventions allows us to identify them in Thucydides’ work (1972), demonstrating the ways in which he was able to transcend Socrates’ criticism of the genre and offer a truly dialectical oration.

THE GREAT DIONYSIA

In his work on the Great Dionysia, the Athenian springtime festival of theatrical competition, Simon Goldhill identifies what he calls “the fundamentally questioning or agonistic nature of Greek tragedy” (1990, 98). He suggests that the hero of such tragedy “does not simply *reverse* the norms of what it means to fit into society but makes a *problem* of such integration (1990, 116). This much is wellknown: the theater offered the Greeks a way of casting critical light on their core values. Goldhill goes on to argue, however, that the Festival contributed to this questioning by providing a context for the presentation of socially transgressive theater that was itself a reminder of the civic values that were being problematized. Central to

this aspect of the Festival were the ceremonies that preceded the plays. “The space of theatrical performance was politicized by these rituals and this frame changed how the plays communicated with their audience” (Goldhill 2004, 224). Tellingly, these important civic ceremonies not only echoed those of the funeral oration, but also included their own rituals of public mourning.

As with the funeral ceremonies and oration for the fallen, the rituals of the Dionysia were concerned with death, militarism, masculinity, city, and empire. Just as the oration demanded a notable figure for its speaker, the Festival formally began with sacrifices and libations poured by the city’s most prominent citizens, the ten generals. The announcement of the city’s benefactors that followed was, as Demosthenes and Aeschines noted, a way for the city to encourage all her citizens to make similar civic sacrifices. “Such rhetoric,” writes Goldhill, “encapsulates a standard democratic ideal: that every man should act to benefit the collective of the state, and a citizen’s actions are evaluated according to how they contribute to the city” (2004, 225). The ceremonies were not, however, simply concerned with promoting the city to a domestic audience; indeed, the imperialist aspects of the oration find their parallel in the ceremonial display of tribute sent by the Empire. The most obvious parallel between the rituals of the Dionysia and those of the funeral and oration for the fallen was, however, the on-stage parade, in full military uniform, of the war orphans educated by the state who had grown to manhood. Each was announced by a herald who identified the orphan’s father, gave a speech praising the deceased’s exploits on behalf of the city, and declared that the son would do the same. It was only after the orphans had taken an oath to this effect that the plays could begin.

The prominent tribute to the war dead, and indeed, the significant role granted to the sons of the fallen, both suggest the ways in which the rituals of public mourning were an integral part of the Great Dionysia. If the Festival constituted, as some scholars have suggested, a city within a city, then it is not surprising that the oration which was so important to the founding of Athens should find its counterpart in the Dionysia. Indeed, John J. Winkler notes the appearance in Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* of a chorus of the sons of the fallen who mourn their fathers and look forward to the day when they too can take up arms for the city. It suggests, he argues, the centrality of these rituals of mourning, militarism, and manhood to the Festival, not least because of the restrictions on direct representation of Athenian life in tragic theater (Winkler 1985, 32–33; see also Loraux 1998). Given the importance of these rituals of public mourning to the Festival, and of the Festival to the city—so important that the city established a fund to support those citizens who would otherwise be too poor to attend—it is, perhaps, somewhat shocking for moderns to consider that these rituals extolling the city and the sacrifices of her war dead were immediately followed by theater which served to question the very values for which the soldiers had died. This tension between celebration and critique was, however, but one

² That the *History* contains both *epainesis* and *parainesis*, is militaristic in nature and, in its tragic structure, seems to suggest that Athens was responsible for her own downfall. I am not alone in suggesting this connection between the Oration and the work as whole, and although Loraux (1986) asserts that “once the funeral oration is over, the historian loses interest in the ceremony” (16), she does note that others have seen “the homological relationship that has . . . been observed between the *epitaphios* and the work as a whole” (289). If it is indeed an oration for Athens, the *History* is, fittingly, a Dionysian one.

of the binary oppositions through which the Greeks made sense of the world. Greek prose was noted for the prevalence of binary opposites, and such juxtapositions, it has been argued, were central to the dialectical experience: a way of permitting the Greeks to reflect upon the extremes of human existence in the hope that both might be avoided (Davidson 1997).

Inscribed at Delphi was a statement that has been translated as both “Remember your mortality” and “Nothing in excess” (Euben 2003, 17). The apparently close connection between these two concepts suggests the way in which, for the Greeks, excess was associated with death. The juxtaposition of opposites was meant to be a way to avoid such excess and to achieve balance: negotiating between them so as not only to live, in Aristotle’s phrase, but also to live well (1985). Excess was inextricably associated with a lack of vision: a one-sidedness that prevented the afflicted from seeing the partiality of his or her own perspective. Such lack of vision is evident in the protagonists of Athenian tragedy. Walter Kaufmann argues that *hubris*—the quality most often associated with tragic heroes—is best translated by contrasting it with “established usage, order, and right” and “moderation, temperance, [and] (self-) control” (1968, 64). In tragedy, such lack of self-control and disregard for the social order is inevitably associated with blindness: either literal, as in *Oedipus the King*; or figurative, as in *Antigone*. Such blindness is, furthermore, associated with a rigidity of mind. In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus’ commitment to the polarities of his culture—expressed in platitudes—rather than to negotiating between them, leads to his demise. That his death arises from a rejection of the god Dionysus is suggestive of the consequences of the failure to embrace the perspective of both the Festival and its plays. It is here, perhaps, that the pedagogical and civic functions of the Great Dionysia are most starkly presented.

Simon Goldhill’s (1990) suggestion that tragedy is “fundamentally questioning” captures its moral complexity. Characters are not simply good or bad, but figures whose downfall often emerges from a failure to control what is best in them: those caught in double-binds with conflicting needs and desires. They are not simple morality plays requiring mimetic fidelity on the part of the citizenry. Rather, they demand that the audience engage in interpretation and contemplation. *Theōreō*, from which we derive the modern word theory, meant both to be a member of an audience and to engage in judging or comparison.³ It is an activity that is essential to democracy, a political system whose very structure demands negotiation between conflicting viewpoints. For the audience, to fail to engage in the judgment demanded by the plays—to fail to embrace

the theoretical perspective—was to run the risk of emulating tragedy’s protagonists. Indeed, one of tragedy’s great ironies is that its protagonists are incapable of achieving the perspective that the plays seek to engender in their audiences. In contrast to comedy, the protagonists’ inability to see that they are characters in a play prevents them from adopting the theoretical perspective that might otherwise save them from their fates. Goldhill’s (2004, 231) work shows how the rituals surrounding the plays facilitated this tragic pedagogy. “The ceremonials before the play” he writes, “can bring the generals on the stage, and tragedy will then reveal the misplaced arrogance, disastrous overconfidence and failure of control of those in authority. The ceremonials before the plays may assert the military values of the state—yet drama after drama, set in a time of war, undermines all jingoism and certainty of purpose.”

The Great Dionysia offers then a second model of Athenian public mourning, one that Socrates—his own comments on the theater notwithstanding—would be hard-pressed to dismiss. The juxtaposition of celebration and critique offered the possibility of dialectic, and with it, the further possibility of a more balanced love of the city, one akin to that described in the *Phaedrus* where the good lover is said to criticize the object of his affections in the hope that he might become more perfect (Plato 1973). It is the possibility of an oration Dionysian in structure and transfiguring in effect that Thucydides demonstrates in his *History*.

THUCYDIDES’ DIONYSIAN ORATION

From the outset of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides (1972) is keen to distinguish his work from that of his predecessors. Most obviously he identifies the ways in which his work differs from the poets “who exaggerate the importance of their themes” and the “prose chroniclers” who “are less interested in telling the truth than catching the attention of the public” (47). Nevertheless, he also signals that his work demands interpretation and judgment on the part of the reader. His proposal “to give an account of the causes of complaint” that the two sides had against each other, followed by his assertion that “the real reason for the war is, in my opinion most likely to be disguised by such an argument” (49), suggests that his readers have to do more than simply pass their eyes over the text. It demands that they construct the significance of these events for themselves. Nor is his narrative that of a disinterested observer. Thucydides’ hope that his words will be “judged useful by those who wish to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future” (48), suggests a definite pedagogical end.⁴ That

³ There are, of course, limits on what can be claimed here, and Simon Goldhill sensibly notes that he is “not suggesting that every member of an audience left the theater deeply perplexed and reflecting on the nature of civic ideology—but the picture of an audience uniformly and solely interested in ‘pleasure,’ ‘entertainment,’ is equally banal. What I hope to describe here is a tension between the festival of drama as a civic institution and a reading of the texts of that institution” (Goldhill 1990, 115).

⁴ It is particularly telling that during the “Civil War in Corcyra,” when Thucydides (1972) famously declares that to “fit in with the change of events, words too had to change their usual meanings” (242), his narrative device breaks down and he is forced to break the fourth wall, telling his readers directly what they had hitherto been

end seems to be making his readers move beyond their own partial perspectives: that of which Athens herself seemed incapable. Athens' focus on her own interests at the expense of all other values had, as James Boyd White (1984) points out, self-defeating consequences: like a tragic protagonist, she failed to recognize the limitations of her own perspective. Indeed, the *History* echoes tragedy in at least two other ways. First, by identifying community values and displaying the dangers of failing to balance them appropriately; and second, by offering its readers a potential corrective: the opportunity to negotiate between the two visions of Athens set forth in the Funeral Oration and the Plague.

Although it is certainly true that the picture of Athens presented in Pericles' Funeral Oration is an exaggeratedly ideal one—where the city is just, the men are men, and the women are silent—it is not the only account of the city that Thucydides provides in Book Two of the *History*. He also gives an account—the “Plague of Athens” describing the actions of her citizens during a time of natural disaster—in which almost every virtue elaborated by Pericles is juxtaposed to, and undercut by its opposite. It is particularly telling that he does so *directly* after the Oration. For, although it could be argued that the juxtaposition is motivated by simple historical chronology, Thucydides' (1972) stated aims in writing the text suggest that he chose to highlight certain aspects of the historical events and to play down others. In condensing his account of the events that occurred between the Funeral Oration and the Plague, Thucydides alerts his readers to the suggestion that there is more going on here than mere historical chronology. Indeed, his juxtaposition of the two visions of Athens offers us a version of the tragic or Dionysian double-perspective identified by Goldhill. It is one in which the virtues of Athens are thrown into sharp relief and problematized by the context in which they are presented. From one perspective the audience hears Pericles' account of Athens' greatness; from the other, they can see how the very virtues of which he boasts are undercut by the actions of her citizens in a time of crisis. In so doing Thucydides employs an oratorical device—the juxtaposition of binary opposites—from the Oration itself.

In the Funeral Oration there are several such juxtapositions of opposites: the one and the many; Athenians and others; male and female; past and present; and life and death. There is another such an opposition in the juxtaposition of the accounts of the Plague and the Funeral Oration, and indeed, in the *details* of these accounts. Most obviously, there is the opposition between the elaborate funeral rites accorded to the

war dead, and the *ad hoc* approach adopted during the Plague; Pericles' boast about Athens' law-abiding nature, and the lawlessness brought about by epidemic; the opposition between honor, value, and tradition in the Oration, and “the pleasure of the moment, and everything that might conceivably contribute to that pleasure” of the plague period (Thucydides 1972, 155). Additionally there is the contrast between the care of the widows and orphans, and the neglect of the sick; between citizens coming together for the Oration, and staying in their houses during the illness; between the masculinity of the Oration, and the impotence caused by the Plague; and between the historical memory of Athens recounted and constituted by the Oration, and the loss of memory suffered by the sick, a loss that left them, unlike the Athens of the Oration, “unable to recognize their friends” (155). In setting up this juxtaposition of the two Athens, Thucydides offers his readers the opportunity for critical reflection: the chance to experience dialectic. They move between two worlds, recognizing that neither presents Athens in her entirety, but that each is a partial perspective from which they should seek to construct a more-balanced picture. Thucydides offers a Dionysian perspective, and with it, the opportunity to think critically about the events that he is presenting. He seeks not to sway his readers with simple patriotism in the way that Socrates suggests, but instead offers them the possibility of a more balanced, critical patriotism: one in which the celebration makes the criticism palatable, and the criticism tempers the celebration. Thucydides' sophistication is such that he presents both models of patriotism and public mourning simultaneously, offering in effect, two Pericles and two orations.

The first Pericles is the Pericles of the Oration alone: the Pericles *in the History*. This Pericles embodies the partial perspective of tragedy's protagonists. His Funeral Oration offers an idealized view of Athens and demands little of its audience. Lacking a critical perspective sufficient to balance its jingoistic militarism, the speech simply serves to perpetuate the basest instincts of the Athenian people, diminishing their capacity for critical reflection, and hastening them down the road to ruin. It is a further measure of the sophistication of Thucydides' work that the pathos of this Pericles is intensified by his apparent struggle to understand his status as a character in an historical drama. There are several occasions on which this Pericles, like Oedipus, comes close—but not close *enough*—to understanding his fate. Two such moments occur when he attempts to inject some restraint into the Oration, but is ultimately overwhelmed by the weight of its conventions. Pericles says of his oratorical predecessors: “It seemed to them a mark of honor to our soldiers who have fallen in the war that a speech should be made over them. I do not agree. These men have shown themselves valiant in action, and it would be enough, I think for their glories to be proclaimed in action, as you have done as this funeral organized by the state” (Thucydides 1972, 144). What might be intended as a note of caution becomes, in the context of the oration and its surrounding ceremonies, a kind of *occupatio*: a way of multiplying the efficacy of

left to deduce for themselves. His method of seldom to speaking in his own voice—much of the *History* is in the mimetic form criticized by Plato in the *Republic*, or in the form of reportage—demands that the readers construct the significance of the events for themselves. Traditionally “mimetic” has been taken to mean exactly the sort of speech in which the *Republic* itself is presented—reported dialogues. Kaufmann (1968, 37–38) argues, however, that “imitation” is but one of two senses of the word, the other being “pretending” or “make believe,” suggesting that even the mimetic speech of the *History* should be regarded as more literary than historical.

words by denying their value. Consequently, when this Pericles later claims that the Athenians “do not think there is an incompatibility between words and deeds” (147), even as he has undermined this claim at the outset of his speech, the interpretive demand that this claim makes on its audience is restricted to suggesting a purpose of the Oration greater than eulogizing the dead: the glorification of Athens. Any notes of caution struck by the speaker are distorted by the kind of patriotism engendered by the Oration absent an awareness of its Dionysian context. As with any tragic protagonist, the words of the Pericles *in the History* have unintended consequences: they do so because he lacks the perspective offered by the Pericles *of the History*.

The Pericles *of the History* is the Pericles of the Dionysian context established by Thucydides’ presentation of the Oration juxtaposed with the Plague. This Pericles embodies the theoretical perspective of tragedy’s audience. If the role of the Pericles *in the History* is to teach the audience of the dangers of the kind of patriotism engendered by the Funeral Oration absent any critical perspective, the role of the Pericles *of the History* is to show Thucydides’ audience how the perspective of the first Pericles might be avoided. The difference between the two Pericles then is the difference between the perspective of tragedy’s protagonists and tragedy’s audience: between a one-sided perspective and a theoretical one. In this sense then, Socrates is right about the funeral oration tradition, but wrong about Thucydides. Indeed, Thucydides seems not only to be aware of the problems inherent in the oration tradition, but also to have preempted Socrates’ critique. The dramatic irony arising from Thucydides’ presentation of the Pericles *of the History* seeks to affect his readers in the same way that Oedipus’ attempts to escape his fate sought to affect Sophocles’ audience: drawing them into an interpretive exercise conducive to developing a perspective more balanced than those depicted in the text.

The historical Athens, of course, adopted the perspective of the Pericles *in the History*. Despite this Pericles’ best efforts, the Athenians saw in the Oration only that which they wished to see. It was a disastrous mode of—nontheoretical—reading further evidenced by their response to the Dorian myth at the end of the Plague section:

At a time of distress people naturally recalled old oracles, and among them was a verse which the old men claimed had been delivered in the past and which said:

War with the Dorians comes, and a death will come at the same time.

There had been a controversy as to whether the word in this ancient verse was ‘dearth’ rather than ‘death’; but in the present state of affairs the view that the word was ‘death’ naturally prevailed; it was a case of people adapting their memories to suit their sufferings. (Thucydides 1972, 156)

In reading into the myth precisely that which they wished to see, the Athenians demonstrated the one-sidedness of thought and vision endemic to the protagonists of tragedy. When viewed through the perspective

established by the second Pericles, however, the suffering that resulted becomes a lesson for the readers of the text. In drawing attention to the way in which the Athenians adopted a single perspective on the ancient myth, Thucydides alerts his readers to the dangers of failing to engage in critical reflection themselves. The consequences of this lack of critical reflection are depicted in the tragic structure of the *History* as a whole, where Athens, the most powerful nation in the Greek world, is humiliated: her fleet and democracy destroyed by *hubris*. In this, the Pericles *in the History* becomes an “education to Greece” in a way that he simply could not know. With dramatic irony, the author appeals over the head of his character to his readers, teaching them a lesson that this Pericles could never learn.

Thucydides (1972) offers us then two models of public mourning, each corresponding to a particular Pericles and a particular perspective. He suggests that each model has definite consequences for the polity that chooses it. One corresponds to the Pericles *in the History* who gave an oration which is a manifestation of the kind of blindness and one-sidedness of thought endemic to the protagonists of tragedy. As such, it was what Socrates suggests that such orations must necessarily be: banal, anachronistic, and unquestioning in its patriotism. It is a model of public mourning which may simply perpetuate the need for funeral ceremonies. The other corresponds to the Pericles *of the History*, a figure from whom the reader derives the theoretical capacity for a more balanced perspective. The Dionysian context of his Funeral Oration—juxtaposed with the Thucydides’ account of the Plague—makes its patriotism anything but banal and unquestioning. It offers the opportunity for critical reflection on the values that are presented, and with it, the potential for a more balanced, less *hubristic* perspective. It is a model of public mourning that offers the possibility of avoiding further tragedy. Together these models constitute a lens through which to view the two moments of American mourning genealogically linked by the reading of the Gettysburg Address. Such an analysis suggests that while the 1863 reading offered its listeners the opportunity to consider its values and embrace a new political identity; the 2002 reading offered little more than the empty patriotism satirized by Socrates.

PERICLES AT GETTYSBURG

The Gettysburg Address was delivered publicly by Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the cemetery for the nearly ten thousand men who fell during the battle fought in the first three days of the July of that year. Lincoln was not, of course, the main speaker at the commemoration. That honor fell to the orator and classics scholar Edward Everett. His speech lasted over two hours, Lincoln’s not much over two minutes. Both, however, demonstrated the influence of a nineteenth century revival in Greek thought: what Rome had been to the Founding Fathers, Greece was to Lincoln’s generation (Wills 1992, 43). As might be expected of a noted classicist, Everett

identified the Greek pedigree for both the commemoration and his oration, invoking and quoting Pericles in his closing remarks. Lincoln made no such mention of the Greeks. Nevertheless, as befits one whose wife conducted séances in the White House, and members of whose cabinet engaged in the popular craze of “spirit-rapping” (Keneally 2003, 118–19), Lincoln simply seemed to channel Athens’ most prominent citizen.

The considerable similarities between Pericles’ Funeral Oration and the Gettysburg Address suggest the profound influence of Thucydides on Lincoln’s speech. Both texts are notable for their lack of detail. Just as Pericles failed to identify a single Athenian by name, Lincoln is equally circumspect: referring only to “a great battlefield,” “the brave men,” “these honored dead,” and “this nation” (Lincoln 1989, 536). Lincoln similarly identifies the community conventions that make the speech an appropriate one. “It is” he declared, “altogether fitting and proper that we should do this” (536). Pericles’ possibly inadvertent *occupatio* finds its parallel in Lincoln’s more deliberate use of the device in the Address. “But in a larger sense,” he asserted, “we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our power to add or detract” (536). Indeed, the irony of Lincoln’s claim that the “World will little note, nor long remember what we say here” (536), even as he was keeping at least one eye on posterity, suggests that he was seeking to emulate Pericles’ ultimately failed attempt at an interrogative oration: inviting the audience into an interpretive exercise, one that suggested a purpose of the speech greater than that of merely eulogizing the dead. Like Pericles’ speech, Lincoln’s Address also followed the conventions of the oration, invoking both *epainesis* and *parainesis*. Lincoln extols “those who here gave their lives that the nation might live,” and asserts that: “It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion” (536). Indeed, Lincoln’s speech is almost all *parainesis*, and it is clear that like that of Pericles, its focus is the living not the dead.

The similarities between the two speeches extend from their content to their contexts. Both were delivered in wartime by—at least nominally—military men: a general and a commander-in-chief. Both were concerned, in part, with the immediate concerns of the conflict in which they were engaged. As a wartime president, Lincoln faced a number of pressing political problems: forthcoming elections in several states including Maine, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Ohio threatened his own prospects for reelection; and paradoxically, perhaps, Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg had strengthened the belief that the Confederacy was on its last legs and increased the pressure on the President to make peace and restore the Union “as was” (Donald 1995, 455). As such, a number of prominent figures including Horace Greeley and John Murray Forbes had urged Lincoln to make a speech

identifying the causes of the war and the conditions for peace, and the funeral oration at Gettysburg provided him an opportunity to do just that. Less obviously, the imperialist aspects of Pericles’ Funeral Oration are, perhaps, paralleled in Lincoln’s desire to impose his vision of the war on both the North and the South. Lincoln, who refused to countenance the war as anything other than at most a *civil* war—despite the obvious Southern claims to the contrary—was nevertheless keen to make his conception of the conflict clear to the watching world, especially to those who might have been tempted to recognize the Confederacy, and further complicate the conflict or the potential peace. That Lincoln should use the word “nation” five times in his oration is, perhaps, evidence of an imperialistic perspective not dissimilar that of the Greeks.

If then, as the similarities between the speeches suggest, Pericles’ Funeral Oration was indeed the inspiration for the Gettysburg Address, in the context of the established typology, it raises the questions: which Pericles, and which oration? Having delivered two previous funeral orations—those of Zachary Taylor and Henry Clay—Lincoln was well aware of the potential for misrepresentation inherent in the eulogy. In 1858 at the funeral of a famously vain politician Lincoln observed that had the deceased “known how big a funeral he would have, he would have died years ago” (Peterson 1994, 102). His oft-told anecdote about the man who, when asked what he meant by his claim “I feel patriotic,” responded “I feel like either killing somebody or stealing something,” suggests a similar awareness of the problems of patriotism (Allen 1984, 324–25). It is then no surprise to find that Lincoln—with his well-known love of theater, and tragedy in particular (Goodwin 2005, 723)—offered a funeral oration that was both Dionysian in structure and transfiguring in effect: one that celebrated a nation with a government of, by, and for the people, but that also sought to shift her self-understanding by offering a critique both of her actions and of the Constitution on which she was based. It is an oration that suggests that his Pericles was the Pericles of the *History*.

The boldest claims about the nature and origin of the transfiguring qualities of the Gettysburg Address have been made by Garry Wills. The 1863 mourners, he declares “walked off, from those curving graves on the hillside; under a changed sky, into a different America. Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely” (Wills 1992, 38). The Address, he argues, had the significant effect of making the United States a singular noun, thereby shoring up the intellectual claims of the Union. The sources of this transfiguration were, he suggests, two movements between “the ideal and the real”: one physical, the other intellectual (Wills, 103). The first claim is, nevertheless, somewhat problematic. Noting the importance of the rural cemetery movement in nineteenth-century America, Wills suggests that the mourners’ *physical* movement between the burial space where the Address was delivered and the America outside the cemetery was a source of transfiguring contrast. Although it is

always possible that such a movement had a transfiguring effect for *some* citizens, the Greek experience suggests that this is not a particularly convincing explanation of any such change. For the Athenians there would have been a similar physical movement between the space outside the city walls where Pericles spoke, and the Athens that was itself riven with conflicts, and yet it is clear that this movement was insufficient to transfigure their outlook; indeed, it is precisely the absence of this transfiguration that Thucydides seems to be lamenting in his *History*. As such, Wills seems to be on much stronger ground when he discusses the way in which the Address brought the Declaration of Independence into dialog with the Constitution.

The math involved in the famous opening sentence of the Address, math which, perhaps, forces the listener into an interpretive exercise similar to that demanded by the Pericles of the *History*, connects the Address not to the Constitution, but to the Declaration of Independence. It asserts that a *nation*—not a confederation of states—was founded in 1776, one “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (Lincoln 1989, 536). In arguing that the Declaration was the real founding document of the nation, Lincoln called into question both the Constitution and the 1857 Dred Scott decision in which the Supreme Court had held that African Americans were excluded from the rights of citizenship enshrined in it. That the radicalism of Lincoln’s claim is now all but lost to a contemporary audience is a measure of his success at Gettysburg: so much is the current polity a part of the “new birth of freedom” that he created (Lincoln, 536). For, in 1863, the view that African Americans were guaranteed the freedoms granted by the Constitution as a direct result of the claims made in the Declaration was a view most commonly associated with radicals and abolitionists. That Lincoln himself had made the claim on at least one previous occasion suggests that part of what made Gettysburg so notable was the *context* of his claim.⁵ On an occasion when most were expecting the platitudes of the funeral oration, Lincoln offered a speech that, while celebrating the nation, her founding, and lamenting the war dead, was also highly critical of her current practices. It was an oration in which the celebration of the nation was offset by a critique whose impact was to shift both America’s understanding of herself and her key documents.

It is a paradox of Lincoln’s transcendence of the platitudes of the funeral oration that his achievement was to establish another such platitude: his controversial claim about the Declaration of Independence

becoming part of the bedrock understanding of the Constitution. Just as Thomas Paine had earlier helped to precipitate the Declaration by presenting his views in such a way that they became the “Common Sense” of his title (1986), Lincoln’s political poetry at Gettysburg helped to make his view “that all men are created equal” extended to African Americans all but unchallengeable and ultimately as “self-evident” as it was initially claimed (Derrida 1986; Honig 1991). Whether one agrees with McPherson’s claim that Lincoln won the war with metaphors (1991, 93–112), it is clear that Lincoln’s language helped win the peace. For although the Civil War Amendments that formally ended slavery, established equal protection under the law, and granted voting rights to African Americans, were all ratified after Lincoln’s death, his success in making the language of the Declaration part of our understanding of the Constitution was, as Eric Foner’s work illustrates, central both to these achievements and to African American political mobilization (1990, 50, 125; 2006, 122).⁶ The impact of the Address can also be measured in at least three other ways. First, in the number of times that the President was asked to provide autographed copies of the Address: there are at least five copies in Lincoln’s own handwriting, more than for any other document he ever wrote (Donald 1995, 465). Second, by the contrast between the reverence with which the actual physical document of the Declaration is treated today—carefully displayed and protected at the National Archives Rotunda—and the way in which it was all but neglected, in stark contrast to the Constitution itself, during the early Republic. Indeed, on November 19, 1863, the already-battered and faded document was hanging opposite a large window in the Government Patent Office in Washington, DC (Maier 1997, xi). Finally, in the strong responses that Lincoln’s words at Gettysburg drew from the press. Their reaction suggested that his funeral oration transcended the simple flattery that Socrates believed was inherent in the genre. Although the *Chicago Tribune* asserted that “The dedicatory remarks of President Lincoln will live among the annals of the war” (White 2005, 256), the *Chicago Times* railed that “It was to uphold this constitution, and the Union created by it that our officers and soldiers gave their lives at Gettysburg. How dare he, then, standing on their graves, misstate the cause for which they died, and libel the statesmen who founded the government? They were men possessing too much self-respect to declare that Negroes were their equals, or entitled to equal privileges” (Wills 1992, 38–39). By taking as his model the Pericles of the *History*, Lincoln offered an oration which was both Dionysian—in its juxtaposition of celebration of the nation’s founding

⁵ On July 4, 1863, celebrating the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Lincoln had foreshadowed the Address. “How long is it?” he asked “eighty-odd years—since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the history of the world a nation by its representatives assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that ‘all men are created equal’” (Lincoln 1989, 475). The view was, however, more traditionally associated with radicals. In 1800, a slave named Gabriel Prosser cited the Declaration as justification for his failed plan to attack Richmond; while another, Denmark Vessey did the same to justify his conspiring to attack Charleston, Virginia. It was also a view espoused by Frederick Douglass, Lysander Spooner, and William Goodell (Colaiacono 2006, 122, 66, 97).

⁶ The continuing importance of the Address to the American struggle for racial equality is evidenced by its role in another similarly Dionysian moment in American history: the 1963 March on Washington. Both John Lewis and Martin Luther King invoked the promise of the Declaration in their speeches at the Lincoln Memorial, with King in particular seeking to write a “sort of Gettysburg Address” that began with the phrase “Five score years ago” and which called on America to fulfill the promise of Jefferson’s document (Hansen 2003, 47, 65, 69).

and its critique of her current practices—and transfiguring. “His outwardly smooth sentences” wrote Carl Sandburg, “were inside of them gnarled and tough with the enigmas of the American experiment” (Sandburg 2005, 316).

Identifying Thucydides’ importance to the Gettysburg Address is not, of course, to diminish Lincoln’s genius; it is, rather, to add another layer to our understanding of it. It is, however, also to identify the possibility of a public mourning whose impact is to help to alleviate—rather than to exacerbate—the tensions that made such mourning necessary, one that might be revived in Lincoln’s absence. By adopting the theoretical perspective of the Pericles of the *History*, rather than the partial perspective of the Pericles in the *History*, Lincoln’s oration was able to help America achieve a more balanced perspective, adopt a new political identity, and to embrace new political solutions. The repetition of his Address in September 2002 seemed to have the opposite effect.

PERICLES AT GROUND ZERO

For many critics, the most puzzling aspect of the September 2002 commemoration for the World Trade Center dead was the decision by the event organizers to eschew any original oratory in favor not only of the Gettysburg Address, but also readings from the Declaration of Independence and Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms. One of the most commonly cited justifications for the decision was, however, “politics,” or more precisely, the desire to avoid anything that smacked of partisan political advantage. State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver noted that there was “a desire not to make it a political event” (Stashenko 2002), while New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg asserted: “One of the things I’ve tried very hard to do in the ceremonies for 9/11 is to keep politics out of it” (Archibold 2002). The tension in such claims is, however, suggested by Bloomberg’s further claim about the readings. “[E]verybody’s flying the American flag” he observed, “—what’s wrong with a little patriotism?” (Bloomberg 2002). In the context of the history of the funeral oration, the claim that such a public eulogy is “non-political,” is obviously somewhat problematic. The bigger problem appears to be, however, the partiality of perspective suggested by the claim that patriotism, and seeking to inculcate such patriotism, are not in themselves inherently political. The implicit assumption that American values are—in some sense—neutral seems to suggest the figurative blindness of tragedy’s protagonists: the inability to see the contingency of their own perspectives. It is a justification which suggests that the Pericles at Ground Zero was the Pericles in the *History*; a suggestion which seems to be borne out by the pertinence of Socrates’ critique to the 2002 commemoration.

Socrates’ complaint that such orations are “prepared long in advance” and mindlessly repeated in perpetuity obviously hits its target in the 2002 commemoration, not least because this was not the first occasion on

which the Address had been used as a eulogy or a rallying cry. As early as 1868, Edward Stanton, campaigning for Grant in Pennsylvania, delivered the Address and declared: “This is the voice of God speaking through the lips of Abraham Lincoln! . . . You hear the voice of Father Abraham tonight. Did he die in vain?” (Donald 2001, 6). Similarly, Allen Sandburg’s famous “Remember Dec. 7th!” poster issued by the Office of War Information in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor featured the words “. . . we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain . . .” over a tattered American flag flying at half-staff before a billowing cloud of smoke (Rosenberg 2002). As such, Socrates’ complaint that the oration was filled with commonplaces finds its target twice over. First, by making its equality claim a platitude, Lincoln’s Address became something of a self-consuming artifact (Fish 1972, 40), one whose initial effect on its audience destroyed the possibility of it ever being heard in the same way again: so powerful was its effect that by the time of its subsequent readings, the Address could only ever be a reminder of something already believed to be true. Second, the multiple subsequent uses of the Address made it the sort of commonplace against which Socrates railed. Indeed, the speech has become so much a part of the American national consciousness that its only capacity to shock or to transfigure lies in, perhaps, just how much of a commonplace it has become: outside the town of Gettysburg a billboard for a shopping mall declares it “*The Gettysburg Address for Shopping*.” As one commentator observed: “The Gettysburg Address is more than a eulogy. It’s a soybean, a versatile little problem solver that can be processed into seemingly infinite, ingenious products” (Vowel 2002, 5).

Socrates’ complaint about the anachronistic qualities of the funeral oration was similarly pertinent in 2002. Most obviously this was signaled when New York Governor George Pataki read the line: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation,” a claim that was off by some nearly seven-score years. More than this, however, the Address—in its anonymity—contrasted sharply with the modern tendency toward personalization of the dead. In the “Guiding Principles” of the *World Trade Center Memorial Competition Guidelines*, first among the design requirements was that a memorial: “Recognize each individual who was a victim of the attacks” (Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, 19). Indeed, the winning design, “Reflecting Absence” by Michael Arad and Peter Walker, incorporates a ribbon listing the names of the 2,982 victims of the 1993 and 2001 attacks, with the names of police officers, firefighters, and rescue workers designated with department shields (Collins and Dunlap 2004). The design for the proposed memorial commemorating the 184 people killed at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, is even richer in individual detail. Each victim is to be memorialized by an individual marker: 59 facing toward the Pentagon, commemorating those killed in the building; 125 facing outward, commemorating those killed on American Airlines Flight

77 (<http://memorial.pentagon.mil/description.htm>. Accessed February 22, 2004). This tendency towards greater individual commemoration extends then to drawing attention to the details of the victims' deaths, suggesting that it is only by breaking down such events into their constitutive parts that many in the contemporary polity can comprehend it.⁷ It also serves to obscure still-further the political aspects of such loss, drawing attention away from the social tensions that produced it. In 2002, to compensate for the unfashionable lack of specificity of the Gettysburg Address, a list of the names of the 2,801 people then believed to have been killed was read out by a parade of dignitaries and celebrities. The reading paused twice—at 9:04 a.m. to mark the moment when United Airlines Flight 175 hit the South Tower, and at 10:29 a.m. when the second tower collapsed—drawing attention, once again, to the details of the victims' deaths (Barry 2002).

The Socratic criticism that the funeral oration is necessarily ill-fitting also plays out in the suggestion of patriotic sacrifice implicit in the Address. For, although Donald Rumsfeld's invocation of the speech at the Pentagon ceremony on the same day *might* be considered appropriate for the victims of that attack (Tierney 2002)—for the Pentagon workers, if not the passengers and crew on Flight 77—it is unlikely that any of the World Trade Center victims saw their quotidian activities of work and travel as being in any sense patriotic. Indeed, even though these were clearly attacks on America, the number of non-Americans killed—including many undocumented foreign workers—should necessarily complicate any attempt to invoke a patriotic narrative (Wright 2006, 368). That it does not, suggests that Socrates was right about the all-consuming nature of the patriotism engendered by this kind of funeral oration. Much the same might be said about the nation's willingness to invoke this trope of patriotic sacrifice seemingly regardless of the circumstances. Speaking at the dedication of the memorial to those killed by domestic terrorists in the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City on Patriot's Day, 1995, President Clinton declared: "there are places in our national landscape so scarred by freedom's sacrifice that they shape forever the soul of America—Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Selma. This place is scared ground." As with the World Trade Center victims, however, it is hard to see how federal workers going about their business—and indeed, the 19 children killed in the day care center—could be

regarded as freedom fighters. "These people's lives" observed Linenthal, "were not given in an act of conscious sacrifice for their nation; they were taken in an act of mass murder. The landscape to which Oklahoma City is connected is not Valley Forge, Gettysburg, and Selma, but sites of political terrorism and mass murder: the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, the McDonalds in San Diego, and Columbine High School" (Linenthal 2001, 234). Ground Zero is another such location, but as Socrates noted, a feature of the kind of patriotism engendered by the non-Dionysian funeral oration is its capacity to elide important distinctions. Indeed, the kind of mourning embodied in the choice of the Gettysburg Address as a eulogy on September 11, 2002, not only serves to obscure specificity and truth but also seems to undermine the quest for it.

If the mode of mourning employed at Gettysburg provided a patriotic language that was useful for negotiating the tensions that had produced tragedy; the mode of mourning at Ground Zero seems to have produced a patriotic language useful only for exacerbating them. This is seen most obviously in the use of such language to evade critical inquiry into the causes of mass death. One example stands for many. Among those killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, were an estimated 200 firefighters believed to have been inside the North Tower when it collapsed, this despite a general evacuation order having been issued following the collapse of the first Tower. Due to a series of communication problems, including a lack of working interagency radios and territorial disputes between the services, many of those in the North Tower did not receive the order: of the 58 firefighters who escaped, only four said that they had known that the South Tower had fallen. Nevertheless in 2004, at the official inquiry into the emergency response, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani asserted that those in the North Tower received the evacuation order but elected to stay to help civilians. "Rather than giving us a story of men, uniformed men fleeing while civilians were left behind," he observed, unconsciously echoing the Pericles in the *History*, "which would have been devastating to the morale of this country . . . they gave us an example of very, very brave men and women in uniform who stand their ground to protect civilians . . . Instead of that we got a story of heroism and we got a story of pride and we got a story of support that helped get us through." When questions were raised by the 9/11 Commission about these deaths and their relationship to the Fire Department's shortcomings, New York City Officials—including both Giuliani and Bloomberg—responded with outrage, demanding to know how anyone could challenge the bravery, sacrifices, or heroism of the firefighters (Dwyer and Flynn 2005, 251–52). The ease, furthermore, with which this language of patriotic sacrifice and "the lessons of 9/11" were used to avoid necessary questions, and to elide important distinctions, in the transition from the military response to the Taliban's support for Al Qaeda to the invasion of Iraq suggests that the problems

⁷ The memorial to the Oklahoma City Bombing consists, in part, of 168 bronze chairs, one for every person who was killed there. Nineteen of those chairs are half-size: to memorialize the children who were killed in the Murrah Building's day-care center. Maya Lin's Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC which lists the names of the 58,158 Americans killed in that conflict is an earlier example. There is also *The New York Times* series "Portraits in Grief," later published in book form, which gave mini-biographies of those killed in the attacks (*New York Times*, 2002). Among the (thankfully) rejected designs for the World Trade Center Memorial was one with sculptures of two planes, with each passenger and crew member's name inscribed in their seat; and another that featured figures in business attire falling from the sky. (www.wtcsitememorial.org, accessed February 2, 2004).

generated by this kind of mourning are ongoing (Bush 2003, 2004).

A crisis, wrote Hannah Arendt, only becomes a disaster “when we respond to it with preformed judgments” (Arendt 1989, 174–75). That much of America has responded to the September 11 attacks with little more than preformed judgments is suggested by the familiarity of the responses to this supposedly “unique” event. The claims of “lost innocence” that accompanied the attacks were far from unique: industrialization, the Mexican-American War, Pearl Harbor, and Watergate were all moments when America had previously claimed to have lost her innocence (Linenthal 2001, 17). Even the alleged novelty of the “Bush Doctrine” of preemption is compromised by its reliance on the long-standing trope of American innocence in a world of sin: one in which a dehistoricized evil is regarded as the origin of the 9/11 Attacks (Bush 2001). This partiality of perspective and uncritical use of the past is manifested in, and perpetuated by, the adoption of a mode of mourning that simply echoes the Pericles in the *History*, one which celebrates—but fails to acknowledge the limits of—American virtue. Whereas Lincoln’s turn to the past was self-conscious and critical, producing an oration that exhibited similar qualities; the contemporary turn was, like the oration it produced, largely unreflective and uncritical. It is a difference that suggests that the contemporary American polity has lost a certain capacity for self-analysis: what is here being termed a Dionysian perspective. “To say something worthwhile” observed Hendrik Henderson of the 2002 commemoration, “you’d probably have to say something that everyone would agree with” (McWhorter 2003, xxii). In the choice of the Gettysburg Address—the voices of a few critics not withstanding—America achieved exactly that. That this bland consensus should be considered “worthwhile” is, perhaps, evidence of the absence of a self-critical perspective from the mourning rituals of the contemporary polity. It is an absence that produces a patriotism constituted by a depoliticized nationalism demanding little more than a recommitment to the *status quo*, rather than one in which a love of country means achieving a balanced perspective on the nation’s actions and values.

RECALLING OLD ORACLES

Death, as John Seery has argued in *Political Theory for Mortals*, can be a moment to engender great critical reflection (1996). Indeed, Peter Euben argues that “Plato invented philosophy as an act of mourning” (2003, 15). Personally, death is often experienced as a loss of direction and purpose. When those close to us die, our lives almost always change, and there exists a period of grieving and reflection. Politically, and especially so in the case of mass death, there exists a great opportunity for critical analysis. Indeed, political theory often emerges from a polity in crisis, one in which the old explanations no longer work. A polity’s capacity for such critical reflection might be both measured—and indeed, expanded—by its willingness to adopt a criti-

cal mode of mourning akin to that of the Festival of Dionysia: one that avoids the simple comforts of the traditional oration in favor of a more balanced perspective. Although it might be asked what is wrong with a rhetorical address at a time of crisis—denying the bereaved any modicum of comfort seems churlish to say the least—there is, nevertheless, an important distinction to be drawn between private grief and the rituals of public mourning. Public ceremonies and the stories told there shape policy. The idealized view of Athens presented by the Pericles in the *History* produced a policy of arrogance and insensitivity that culminated in the slaughter at Melos and ended in Athens’ eventual defeat and humiliation. The story told by Lincoln at Gettysburg paved the way for a more just and equitable America. In the first instance, the oration offered by Pericles in the *History* lacked any critical perspective, and Athens continued on her path to self-destruction. In the second, the self-analysis to which Lincoln’s Address subjected America produced quite a different nation. In both instance, the public stories told about the dead affected the policies of the living.⁸

It is, of course, hard to say what *should* have been said on September 11, 2002, but that is not the aim of this essay. It is rather to identify the absence from the contemporary polity of a perspective which might have produced a more critical mode of public mourning. A polity with a more well-developed Dionysian perspective—one able to read both the Declaration of Independence and Frederick Douglass’s “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” as part of her national celebrations—would certainly be one capable of a more nuanced response to the events of 2001. As Sandra M. Gilbert notes, the term “Ground Zero” referred originally to the point of impact of a nuclear strike. As such, it should perhaps evoke not only the violence that was done to America but also the violence America has done to others (Gilbert 2006). Although such a suggestion neither identifies a moral equivalence nor suggests any kind of justification for either act—simply offering a perspective from which to begin thinking about the response to the events of September 2001—it is, nevertheless, one that is unlikely to be welcomed in our current discourse on death, politics, and patriotism. The controversy generated by *Nightline* anchor Ted Koppel’s decision on April 30, 2004, (American Broadcast Company [ABC]) to read the names of the then 737 Americans killed in Iraq as part of the “War on Terror” response to September 11 suggests that the simple-minded public response to death and its failure to engender critical reflection is currently endemic to American society.⁹ Indeed, the

⁸ This public-private divide in mourning rituals works both ways. The call for a more critical mode of public mourning is not a call for the harassment of grieving families practiced by the Reverend Fred Phelps and his Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas (Alvarez 2006). Their celebration of American deaths at the *private* funerals of individual soldiers killed in the current conflict in Iraq—as a protest against what they believe to be the nation’s pro-gay rights agenda—lies outside the purview of any claim about *public* mourning.

⁹ The Sinclair Broadcast Group which owns a number of ABC franchises preempted the broadcast arguing that “‘Nightline’ is not

outcry over, and eventual shelving of, plans to locate a permanent exhibit at the Ground Zero site which places the events of September 11 within a broader narrative about struggles for freedom—including the treatment of American Indians and Jim Crow segregation—on the grounds that such a display “might include exhibits critical of America that would pain families” (Murphy 2005), suggests that there is little hope for emergence of a Dionysian account of the attacks. In the face of a changed world, and the absence of a Dionysian perspective in the public culture, much of America has stuck stubbornly and unconsciously to the explanations and values of the past. In a time of political distress she, like the Athenians, has “naturally recalled old oracles” such as the Gettysburg Address. Thucydides’ work suggests, however, that the specter of Athens looms large over the polity unless it can learn to place such oracles in a Dionysian context and, in the words of Thucydides, avoid “adapting our memories to suit our sufferings.”

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reporting news; it is doing nothing more than making a political statement.” It was a decision that drew a number of angry responses from, among others, Senator John McCain (Carter 2004). Koppel’s own editorial following the reading of the names suggests, however, that there may be sources of critical reflection still within the polity. “The reading of those 721 names was” said Koppel, “neither intended to provoke opposition to the war, nor was it meant as an endorsement. Some of you doubt that. You are convinced that I am opposed to the war. I’m not. But that’s beside the point. I am opposed to sustaining the illusion that war can be waged by the sacrifice of a few without burdening the rest of us in any way. I oppose the notion that to be at war is to forfeit the right to question, criticize, or debate our leaders’ policies or for that matter the policies of those who would become our leaders” (ABC 2004).

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