Thucydides' Account of the Plague as Trauma Narrative

Jenna M. Colclough
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Steinbock, Bernd K.
The University of Western Ontario

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Abstract

Thucydides’ detailed description of the Athenian plague, which is estimated to have killed from a quarter to a third of Athens’ population\(^1\) and led to the breakdown of several social norms, has been approached from a variety of scholarly perspectives, yet its potential as a trauma narrative is still underexplored.

Drawing on comparative evidence from the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, such as Katherine Anne Porter’s fictionalized account *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, this thesis examines the emotive and commemorative functions of Thucydides’ plague episode through the lens of trauma theory. By combining elements of personal narrative, literature, and historiography, Thucydides rendered the story of the Athenian plague into an aesthetic representation and thus provides a collective memorialization of the forgotten victims. I suggest that his vivid description (ἐνάργεια) of the immense suffering enabled his readers to empathetically engage with the traumatic event and thus work through their own trauma.

Keywords: Thucydides, plague of Athens, trauma theory, trauma narrative, historiography, collective memory, memorialization, collective trauma, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Spanish Flu, Katherine Anne Porter, Dominick LaCapra.

\(^1\) Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 1.
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to David J. Raftus.

Puto me posse.
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Chapter 1: Methodology

“The present is ‘haunted’ by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present. – Jan Assmann

Introduction

In the 50 years following the defeat of Persia (480-430 BCE), Athens became a Mediterranean powerhouse. In the mid-5th century Athens was the most developed and well-organized proponent of naval warfare in the Mediterranean. From 450 BCE onward, Athens was engaged in a rapid process of democratization which progressed at the same rate as its increasing power over its allies. Under the direction of the Athenian statesman Pericles, Athens was also engaged in a series of building projects: improving fortifications by expanding its Long Walls, building the Parthenon, and beginning construction on the Propylaea in 437/36. The Thirty Years’ Peace proposed by Athens in 446/45 deteriorated in 431, and Athens and Sparta were once again in conflict. Pericles’ ambitious construction project ceased in 430, when Athens’ initiatives—in particular her dispatch of help to Corcyra, the ultimatum sent to Potidaea, and the passing of the decree about Megara—sparked war with the Peloponnesian League.

Having only been at war for a single year, the Athenians were struck with a terrible plague. The spread of the disease was likely aided by crowding within the city.

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6 Sealey (1975) 90.
7 Sealey (1975) 109.
which was due to a recent Athenian policy which relocated citizens from the
 countryside—as a result of the Peloponnesians’ invasion—to within the Long Walls that
 enclosed the Piraeus, Phaleron, and the fortress of Athens.\(^8\) The Athenian plague occurred
 in 430-29 followed by a second wave of the disease in 426, although the disease had
 never entirely ceased in the intervening time.\(^9\) Mitchell-Boyask estimates that the plague
 killed from a quarter to a third of Athens’ population.\(^10\) Having been a victim of the
 plague himself, Thucydides claims to have firsthand knowledge of the event and states
 that no less than 4,400 infantry and 300 cavalrymen had died of the disease besides a
 “vast number of the multitude that was never ascertained.”\(^11\) The reader first encounters
 the plague in 1.23 when Thucydides casts the plague episode as the climax to his list of
 Athenian wartime disasters with one of the longest spans between an article and its noun
 in extant Greek literature: ἡ οὐχ ἤκιστα βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθείρασα ἡ λοιμώδης
 νόσος, “the extremely harmful and pestilential disease which had destroyed not a small
 part.”\(^12\) The successive participles and adjectives used as well as his use of litotes (οὐχ
 ἤκιστα βλάψασα) and pleonasm (ἡ λοιμώδης νόσος)\(^13\) stresses the plague’s severity and
 its importance in the narrative. The severity of the disease is fully realized in Book 2
 where Thucydides recounts the Athenian plague in vivid detail.

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\(^8\) Welwei (2006) 528.
\(^9\) Thuc. 2.48.3.
\(^10\) Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 1. This is a somewhat conservative estimate, as Mikalson puts the
 death toll closer to one third. Mikalson (2009) 326.
\(^11\) Thuc. 2.48.3, 3.87.3: τοῦ δὲ ἄλλου ὅχλου ἀνεξεύρετος ἀριθμός.
\(^12\) Thuc. 1.23.3; Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 43. The translations used in this thesis are my own
 (unless otherwise indicated), but at times I draw upon standard published translations.
The vividness with which Thucydides recounts the plague is amplified by the condensed narrative he provides, which describes the horrors of the outbreak in 430 in a single episode of immense suffering.\textsuperscript{14} The result is a deeply emotive experience for the reader, in which the suffering elucidated in the account occurs suddenly and creates a narrative of destruction that constitutes a separate episode in the larger narrative of the Peloponnesian War. In spite of its brevity, Thucydides’ plague description cast a long shadow in Western literature and began a tradition of plague narratives concerned with themes of morality, nihilism, and religious hysteria.\textsuperscript{15} Thucydides’ influence is evident in ancient works by Lucretius, Virgil, and Procopius, as well as works of modern literature such as Albert Camus’ La Peste.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the fact that the suffering Thucydides elucidates may well have killed from a quarter to a third of Athens’ population,\textsuperscript{17} and thus must have constituted a major collective trauma, modern scholarship has largely neglected interpretations of the plague episode from the perspective of trauma. By employing the Spanish Flu pandemic as a comparative case, this thesis seeks to provide a reading of the plague episode through the lens of trauma theory.

\textsuperscript{14} Thucydides does not revisit the plague in any comparable detail despite the fact that, as Thucydides states in his account of 427/6, a second wave of the disease had come in the winter of 426, and the plague had not entirely disappeared in the interim. His confinement of plague description to a single episode presents the plague as a single event of great magnitude. See Thuc. 3.87. Cf. Woodman (1988) 35, n. 208.

\textsuperscript{15} Rusten (1990) 20.


\textsuperscript{17} Mitchell-Boyask (2009) 1; Mikalson (2009) 326.
Literature Review

Thucydides’ gripping account of the plague in Athens is a famous passage which has generated much academic interest. Scholarship on the plague episode is generally divided among three main lines of inquiry: the identification of the disease, the relationship between Thucydides’ account and those of the medical writers, and the rhetorical quality of Thucydides’ narrative. Frequent attempts have been made to classify the disease; yet, the results of such investigations based on literary evidence alone have been largely inconclusive. While past studies have yielded a long list of possible candidates for the disease, A.J. Holladay and J.F.C. Poole’s 1979 article “Thucydides and the Plague of Athens” demonstrated effectively that the disease Thucydides described has either since died out or has drastically mutated—hence the failure of modern-day physicians to identify Thucydides’ plague. For the name given to any particular disease functions only as a code-word for “a lengthy message whose detailed content is changing continuously,” and such a name therefore has little relevance outside the time and place to which it belongs.\textsuperscript{18} As time passes, the host species may become gradually more resistant to the infection, and so too can bacteria and viruses evolve by mutation and selection.\textsuperscript{19} Holladay and Poole credit the research of Luria, Delbrück, and Newcombe in the 1940s and the Lederbergs in 1952 with demonstrating that bacterial evolution by mutation and selection can and does occur. They suggest that scholars writing on the Athenian plague prior to the thorough circulation of their work were operating under the false impression that bacteria and their properties remain stagnant over long periods of

\textsuperscript{18} Holladay and Poole (1979) 283.
\textsuperscript{19} Holladay and Poole (1979) 284-285.
time.\textsuperscript{20} While Holladay and Poole propose candidates for a modern day mutation of the disease which include but are not limited to: smallpox, measles, typhus, and ergotism, their thesis ultimately suggests that attempts to posthumously classify the disease are doomed to remain inconclusive.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite their effective argument that the identification of Thucydides’ disease is a fruitless endeavor, attempts continue to be made. The medical researchers Langmuir and Ray have proposed as recently as 1987 toxic shock syndrome as a complication of influenza along with staphylococcal infection as a candidate for the Athenian plague, for which they have proposed the term \textit{Thucydides syndrome}. Building on the work of previous publications verifying the existence of toxic shock syndrome as a complication of influenza, Langmuir and Ray argue that these studies, at least in part, serve to “verify the hypothesis that epidemic influenza accompanied by superinfection with noninvasive, toxigenic strains of staphylococci was the explanation for the plague of Athens.”\textsuperscript{22} They suggest that the clinical variations in modern and ancient cases can be attributed to the known clinical manifestations produced by various staphylococcal exotoxins.

Langmuir and Ray’s proposal has been challenged, first by Holladay,\textsuperscript{23} and now by archaeological evidence. A burial pit in the Kerameikos was discovered in 1994 which

\textsuperscript{20} Holladay and Poole (1979) 284.
\textsuperscript{23} See Holladay (1986).
can be dated to the early years of the Peloponnesian War. The roughly 150 skeletons found were interred in an irregularly shaped pit with the bodies arranged in a rather random fashion, supporting Thucydides’ vivid description of hastened and haphazard burials in the city.\textsuperscript{24} No soil was placed between the layers of dead, and the greater sense of organization in the bottom layers suggest that the pit was used over time, with the later stages of interment being more chaotic and disorganized. The inappropriate amount and scale of grave goods combined with the rushed and seemingly unplanned mound has been widely accepted as material evidence of Thucydides’ plague.\textsuperscript{25} The burial pit became the subject of DNA testing in an attempt to put to rest the persistent question of diagnosis.

The 2006 publication by Papagrigorakis \textit{et al} presents the result of DNA amplifications conducted using samples of dental pulp from teeth recovered from the Kerameikos grave. A series of DNA amplifications of \textit{Yersinia pestis}, typhus, anthrax, tuberculosis, cowpox, and cat-scratch disease failed to yield any product in the reactions of sample DNA. The study did, however, identify DNA sequences of \textit{Salmonella enterica} serovar Typhi.\textsuperscript{26} The presence of the Typhi bacteria combined with the modern medical understanding that typhoid fever was likely endemic in the ancient world has led the authors of this study to conclude that typhoid fever was the probable cause of the Athenian plague.\textsuperscript{27} The researchers also note that their molecular diagnosis of typhoid

\textsuperscript{24} Thuc. 2.52.2-4. See Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{26} Papagrigorakis \textit{et al} (2006) 206.
fever is consistent with some of the key clinical features reported by Thucydides, including the fever, rash, and diarrhea, while other symptoms described by Thucydides (including the acuteness of its onset) are inconsistent with the typical present-day manifestation of typhoid fever. In an assessment similar to Holladay and Poole’s focus on disease mutation, Papagrigorakis et al attribute this inconsistency to the possible evolution of typhoid fever since its outbreak in Athens.\(^\text{28}\)

Taking the biological analysis of Papagrigorakis et al with the observation of Holladay and Poole that the disease may have drastically mutated, the bacteria *salmonella enterica* serovar Typhi is the most likely cause of the plague that struck Athens in 430-26. Thucydides’ inconsistency of symptoms and the inability of modern Classicists and medical experts to posthumously diagnose the illness based on literary evidence alone does not suggest that Thucydides’ account is untrustworthy or intentionally deceptive, but rather, that the disease has since mutated. The wide variety of symptoms described by Thucydides has led some scholars to suggest that Thucydides was documenting more than one illness, or else that his inventory of symptoms was subject to fabrication or exaggeration. Thomas E. Morgan has approached this topic as a component of his discussion of the style of the plague episode. He suggests that Thucydides, like a modern medical student approaching a vexing case study, may have recorded the vast array of symptoms with which he was presented in a head-to-toe sequence, which would account for the abundance of symptoms recorded. He also suggests that in a climate of confusion and chaos in Athens, in which Thucydides would have been able to observe plague victims in all stages of the disease and presenting

\(^{28}\) Papagrigorakis (2006) 213.
symptoms with varying severity, the impulse to document as much as possible for the future identification of the illness must be taken into account when approaching the variety of symptoms Thucydides presents. Papagrigrakis et al also present the possibility that a plurality of infectious diseases beset Athens during that time, which would have allowed for the variety of symptoms documented by Thucydides, as “it would have been extremely difficult for Thucydides or any other observer, to distinguish between two or more such diseases at that time.”

A second group of scholars have examined Thucydides’ connection to the medical authors. Recent scholarship on the plague episode tends to deny a close relationship or indebtedness to the Hippocratic authors. This is not to say that Thucydides was unfamiliar with the Hippocratic corpus—Holladay and Poole even go so far as to suggest that Thucydides was ahead of the medical science of his time due to his apparent grasp of the concepts of contagion and acquired immunity. D.L. Page argues that when Thucydides states in his description that the bile produced by plague victims was “of every kind for which the doctors have a name,” that we may presume that he was indeed familiar with those technical names. Page’s assessment of the terminology used by Thucydides suggests his awareness of the medical authors and contemporary

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29 For full discussion, see: Morgan (1994) 203-204.
32 Holladay and Poole (1979) 229-300.
33 Thuc. 2.49.3: καὶ ὅποτε ἐς τὴν καρδίαν στηρίξεις, ἄνεστρεφέ τε αὐτήν καὶ ἀποκαθάρσεις χολῆς πᾶσαι ὅσαι ὑπὸ ιατρῶν ὑνομασμέναι εἰσὶν ἐπῆσαν…
34 Page (1953) 99.
medical terminology.\textsuperscript{35} Parry has since countered Page and his high regard for Thucydides’ reliance on the Hippocratic corpus. He argues persuasively that Thucydides’ language was accessible to the general public, and not heavily burdened with medical jargon. Like Page, he turns to Thucydides’ statement about the many types of bile, but claims that Thucydides’ failure to list the various terms for bile suggests that Thucydides was unwilling to compromise the flow of his vivid narration for the sake of scientific exactness.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, Morgan stresses the literary nature of Thucydides’ description of the plague, specifically pertaining to the variety of verbs he uses to express the process of dying. In this way, Thucydides avoids the heavy reliance on \textit{θνήσκω} deployed by the medical authors in favor of linguistic variety which might better entertain his audience.\textsuperscript{37} Thus despite linguistic similarities with the Hippocratic authors, it appears that Thucydides did not heavily rely on the Hippocratic corpus to model his plague episode.

A third group of scholars examine the episode for Thucydides’ literary craft. Uninterested in a medical approach, Adam Parry stresses the contradiction of symptoms in Thucydides’ account as well as the plague’s sudden and incalculable nature to argue that the lack of technical terminology in the account betrays Thucydides’ divergent purpose; he is not interested in providing an accurate account, but seeks “to present the

\textsuperscript{35} Page (1953) 109: “Some of Thucydides’ terms are seldom, and a few never, found elsewhere except in medical and similar scientific treatises; others, though found elsewhere, are especially characteristic of medical writers.” For further discussion of Hippocratic terminology in Thucydides, see Weidauer (1953). These studies in Hippocratic terminology should be taken with Parry (1969), as he responds to Page and Weidauer and casts doubt upon the close association they posit between Thucydides and the medical authors.

\textsuperscript{36} Parry (1969) 113.

\textsuperscript{37} Morgan (1994) 201.
onslaught of the pest in as dramatic a form as possible.”\(^{38}\) An appreciation for

dramatization is also echoed by A.J. Woodman, who stresses the dramatic tone of the
account while considering any attempt made by Thucydides at including technical
terminology subservient to his rhetorical purpose.\(^ {39}\)

Woodman also suggests that the pursuit of a connection between Thucydides’
account and the actual historical evidence is completely misguided. Woodman suggests
that, like Homer, Thucydides’ plague narrative is an example of a consciously crafted
“disaster narrative” of “the most vivid and dramatic type.”\(^ {40}\) As evidence for this theory,
Woodman cites Thucydides’ list of disasters in 1.23, along with the historical analysis of
Fornara, who describes the magnification of subject matter as characteristic of authors
who seek to imbue their histories with external significances and literary brilliance.\(^ {41}\)
While Fornara does not apply this analysis to Thucydides— but rather to the later
historians, Clitarchus and Duris— Woodman applies it confidently to Thucydides’ list of
wartime disasters. Woodman further cites Dionysius’ claim that Thucydides “sometimes
makes the sufferings appear so cruel, so terrible, so piteous, as to leave no room for
historians or poets to surpass him.”\(^ {42}\) Woodman stresses the failure of modern scholars to

\(^{38}\) Parry (1969) 113. For a summary of Parry’s discussion of the incalculability of the plague, see
116.


\(^ {40}\) Woodman (1988) 30.


\(^ {42}\) Woodman’s translation; Woodman (1988) 30. Dion. Thuc. 15: λοιπὸν ἀκριβῶς φανερωθαὶ
ποιεῖ τὰ πάθη, ὅτε μηδεμίαν ὑπερβολὴν μήτε ἑπιτροπήρας μήτε
ποιητὰς καταλαμβάνῃ: Note that in this passage, Dionysius is referring vaguely to the destruction
which Thucydides vividly illuminates at various places in his work, and he cites the Plataean
episode and the affairs of Mytilene and Melos as examples. Dionysius offers these examples before
moving on to quote particular passages which Dionysius feels that Thucydides did not adequately
elaborate on. It is not unlikely that Dionysius considered the plague episode as an example of a
vivid portrayal of suffering in Thucydides, especially given his use of τὰ πάθη, which is perhaps a
satisfactorily identify the pathology of the disease and similarities between Thucydides’ account and works by the medical authors as proof of his immense exaggeration.\textsuperscript{43} He also highlights the convention in Greek literature to connect war, plague, and hubris, and later suggests that Thucydides’ reference to quadrupeds and dogs may have been an allusion to Homer, whose plague affected mules and dogs.\textsuperscript{44} The inability to posthumously diagnose Thucydides’ plague,\textsuperscript{45} the tragic tone imbued in the brief episode, and the possible Homeric allusions Woodman describes all converge to form Woodman’s theory that Thucydides’ account ought to be highly suspect, if not dismissed outright. His claim that there is no evidence to justify the existence of the plague outside Thucydides seems to call for the latter action.\textsuperscript{46}

Woodman’s attempt to dismiss the veracity of Thucydides’ account as a mere exercise in rhetorical composition is haphazard and extreme. To counter Woodman’s claim that no independent piece of evidence attests to the historicity of the plague, Hornblower considers the purification of Delos in winter of 426/425 BCE as a reaction to the pollution of the plague.\textsuperscript{47} While the purification of Delos is a major episode in Thucydides, he does not connect this purification to the plague per se. Further evidence is

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\textsuperscript{43} Woodman (1988) 38-39. Specifically, the relationship between “the critical period” (2.49.6) and \textit{Epidemics}, and Thucydides’ emphasis on prognosis in 2.48.3 and \textit{Prognosticon}. See Woodman (1988) n. 224, 66.


\textsuperscript{45} At least at the time when Woodman writes—the mass grave in the Kerameikos was not discovered until 1994.

\textsuperscript{46} Woodman (1988) 39.

\textsuperscript{47} Hornblower (1997) 318. Thucydides states that on the advice of an oracle, the Athenians purified the island by excavating burials and transferring the remains to Rhenea. They also decreed that in future no one was to be buried or to give birth on the island. Following the purification, the Athenians celebrated for the first time the quinquennial festival of the Delian games. See Thuc. 3.104.
provided by Diodorus Siculus, who explicitly states that an oracle had prompted the purification due to the severity of the Athenian plague, which the Athenians had attributed to the wrath of Apollo.\textsuperscript{48} Therefore literary evidence for the plague and the religious reaction of the Athenians is not limited to Thucydides alone. It is also worth noting that Woodman, writing in 1988, was unable to account for the 1994 discovery of a hasty burial pit in the Kerameikos as well as the subsequent dental analysis attesting to typhoid fever as the likely cause of death of those interred. The suggestion that Thucydides’ plague was a mere plot device simply cannot stand.\textsuperscript{49}

Support for Woodman’s assertion that Thucydides exaggerated the events of the plague as an act of “rhetorical magnification” may be found in the vividness of the plague episode. Thucydides confines all description of the plague into one brief section infused with vivid, evocative language which was undoubtedly gripping to his audience and intentionally dramatic.\textsuperscript{50} Thucydides’ inclusion of the plague in his list of wartime catastrophes (1.23) is emblematic of the disastrous episode. While Woodman’s attempt to overthrow the historicity of the Athenian plague is extreme, he is not alone in his

\textsuperscript{48} Diod. 12.58.6. Diodorus indicates that the purification of Delos was undertaken because the Athenians sought purification from the plague. The question of who proposed the purification of Delos is highly debated, although Cleonymus has become a strong candidate following the 1985 publication of an Athenian decree found on Delos dating to 426/5 which was likely proposed by him. See Lewis (1985) 108. Cf. Hornblower (1997) 518. See Hornblower (1997) 517 n.i for an overview to the problem.

\textsuperscript{49} It is also interesting to note the resistance in the scholion to Thucydides’ use of metaphor. Hornblower cites the scholion for Thuc. 2.51.4, ὃσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ὀθημηηζον. The scholiast, wanting to take this phrase in the literal sense, writes: ὅτι τὰ πρόβατα μεταληπτικά τῆς νόσου; “because the sheep caught and transmitted the disease.” As Hornblower states, the scholion is likely incorrect. However, the resistance against identifying Thucydides’ perhaps odd description as a metaphor might suggest that the plague episode was regarded as being largely documentarian and literal. Or perhaps, though it is unlikely, the scholiast was simply impervious to metaphor. For Hornblower’s discussion on the scholion for 2.51.4, see Hornblower (1997) 324-325.

\textsuperscript{50} The confinement of the plague to 2.47-54 gives the impression that Athens was dealt “a single shattering blow in the Summer of 430,” and avoids a potential anti-climax. Woodman (1988) 35.
skepticism towards Thucydides and his dramatic and sensational portrayal of the Athenian plague. Bellemore and Plant have proposed that Thucydides utilized the plague episode as a means to emphasize the gravity of his larger narrative, the Peloponnesian War. They further suggest that while the plague had little impact on the conduct of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides presented the event in such dramatic terms due at least in part to his own contraction of the disease and subsequent personal suffering.\textsuperscript{51} This is a far more measured approach than that of Woodman, as it allows for both the historicity of, and rhetorical influence on, Thucydides’ account. In their approach the existence of the plague is certain while the extent of human suffering depicted by Thucydides is subservient to his effort to emphasize the chaos of the period. Indeed, it cannot be said that the plague episode—or any aspect of Thucydides’ narrative—is free from embellishment or exaggeration.

After this survey of previous approaches, a brief outline of my own take on Thucydides’ plague episode is in order. With respect to a disaster of this magnitude, one wonders: how did the Athenians react to it, cope with it, and commemorate it? One expects that a disaster of this scope—as it emerges from Thucydides’ account—warranted public acknowledgement and memorialization, and yet the plague is absent from public memorials and extant funeral orations for the war dead, making Thucydides’ account all the more poignant. I propose to view the plague episode as a literary monument for the victims of the plague in line with the key role of memorialization in Greek historiography. Thucydides, for example, describes the events he relates in his history as being the “most worthy of relation” (ἀξιολογώτατον).\textsuperscript{52} His predecessor

\textsuperscript{51} Bellemore and Plant (1994) 401.
\textsuperscript{52} Thuc. 1.1.
Herodotus likewise vowed to document for posterity the affairs of men (τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων), in which one could include plague as a noteworthy event.\(^{53}\) Given the absence of other forms of official memorialization, Thucydides’ plague episode may be considered a step towards memorializing the plague which was noticeably absent from Athenian public discourse in its aftermath. Yet the question remains how exactly Thucydides’ account responded to this trauma, and how survivors of the plague may have received Thucydides’ account. I argue that it is not enough to consider the literary style and innovation with which Thucydides crafted this episode without also questioning how his technique may have been received by his Athenian readers given the traumatic nature of the events described.

Given the absence of other forms of memorialization and extant testimony from plague survivors, it is necessary to turn to comparative evidence in order to better understand the relationship between pestilential devastation and the effect of its transformation into trauma narratives. To achieve this, I consider the much more recent Spanish Flu pandemic and the silence in public discourse and historiography that followed it.\(^{54}\) Much like the Athenian plague, accounts (whether fictional or historical) which dealt with the Spanish Flu in any significant detail were few and far between, making publications like Katherine Anne Porter’s fictionalized account of her own

\(^{53}\) Hdt. 1.1.

\(^{54}\) The Spanish Flu is, in many ways, an ideal candidate for a comparison with the Athenian plague. Like the latter, the former struck during a war of unprecedented dimension. The abundance of archival records of the pandemic (relative to ancient pandemics) clearly demonstrates the severity of the outbreak and the lack of memorialization which followed. Furthermore, scholars of the Spanish Flu have noted the failure of early WWI historians to adequately address the pandemic in their accounts of WWI, thereby perpetuating the complicated relationship between the Spanish Flu pandemic and public discourse and historiography. In this case, the temporal distance between the two events is an asset.
pandemic experience all the more culturally significant. Like Thucydides, Porter vividly
details the effects of the Spanish Flu in her novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, while
contemporary sources on the pandemic avoided the gruesome details.\(^55\) Drawing on
David A. Davis’ interpretation of *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* as a trauma narrative, I propose
a reading of the plague episode as a narrative memorialization and aesthetic rendering of
this traumatic event in Athenian history.

It should be noted that this thesis is not built upon the contention that Thucydides’
account is wholly accurate; such a claim would be nearly impossible to corroborate and
does little to illuminate the skill with which Thucydides depicts Athenian suffering.
Rather, this thesis considers the value Thucydides’ vivid and emotionally evocative
account may have had in the aftermath of this traumatic event in Athenian history. To
what extent Thucydides may have exaggerated the effects of the plague is less important
than the effect which the account may have had on the reader, and how his account may
have contributed to Athenian cultural memory.

**The Traumatizing Effects of Pestilence**

Before we can proceed to analyze Thucydides’ account as a trauma narrative, we
have to establish that the past epidemic was in fact traumatic for Athenians.\(^56\) Modern

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\(^55\) While Katherine Anne Porter published *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* in 1939, general interest in the
influenza pandemic lulled until the late 1950s, after which publications were sporadic. Charles
Graves’ *Invasion by Virus*—the first global survey of the 1918-19 pandemic addressed to a
general readership— was not published until 1968. Cf. Beiner (2006) 497. For further discussion
of the historiographical treatment of Spanish Flu, see Chapter 3, “Spanish Flu and (Lack of)
Historiography.”

\(^56\) It is worth noting that some scholars are skeptical of the application of trauma theory to the
ancient world. Such skepticism will be addressed in this chapter under the section “Trauma in the
Ancient World?”
trauma theory deems not only war and genocide, but also pandemics and epidemics potential sources of trauma. Traumatic events or stressors refer to experiences that overwhelm the individual’s ability to cope with a threat and respond to it. To provide a general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event is often delayed. The traumatic event in question is so overwhelming that it “cannot be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.” When a traumatic event affects a large population simultaneously, it is referred to as a source of collective trauma. Social or collective trauma is a relatively new concept in the social sciences and “denotes a collectivity’s response to an event that is considered to be an overwhelming and unexpected threat to its cultural identity and social order.” The diagnosis of collective trauma became acutely significant in the aftermath of the Second World War, when concentration camp survivors, resistance fighters, veterans, sailors of the merchant marine, and their children began to suffer psychological repercussions from their wartime experiences. Sociologist Kai Erikson has argued that collective trauma can cause damage to the social fabric of a community as it ruptures social bonds, undermines communality, destroys support systems, and can even traumatize members of the affected group who were absent when the catastrophe or persecution took place. When collective trauma occurs it can amplify the individual’s experience of trauma because it affects the larger social structure from

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57 Caruth (2016) 11-12.
which individuals would ordinarily receive support. Psychotherapist Carolyn Yoder includes serious illnesses, pandemics, and epidemics on her list of common traumatic events or stressors. Even the sights, sounds, smells, and physical sensations caused by the plague itself can serve as a source of trauma for those afflicted.

Several aspects of Thucydides’ account of the plague appear in Yoder’s list of common traumatic events or stressors, including: the neglect of those who cannot care for themselves, serious illnesses, pandemics and epidemics, sudden loss of loved ones, witnessing death or injury, and a sudden change of rules, expectations, or social norms. Each of these traumatic stressors will be examined in due course alongside excerpts from Thucydides’ plague episode. It is also worth noting that even individuals who do not suffer infection themselves are still prime candidates for a condition known as secondary or vicarious trauma. Secondary trauma can affect individuals who respond to catastrophes and attend directly to victims. This phenomenon is common among caregivers, rescue workers, and even journalists who deal with victims’ testimonies. The effects of secondary trauma are similar to those experienced by victims themselves, even though victims of secondary trauma have never been in direct danger themselves. Thucydides’ account of the plague mentions doctors attempting to treat the illness (2.47.4), individuals tending to their friends (2.51.5), and even the weariness of kin who were overwhelmed by the disaster (2.51.5). Based on modern knowledge of vicarious trauma we can assert

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62 See Leys (2000); Wood (1999). Cf. Davis (2011) 56-57. Leys’ work also explains that theories surrounding the experience and study of trauma are often contested, as they tend to reflect competing social values as much as scientific advancements—for this reason, the interpretation of historical trauma requires vigilance. Cf. Davis (2011) 65.

63 Yoder (2005) 15.

64 Yoder (2005) 15-16. Note that these elements are not the complete list, but rather those which pertain to Thucydides’ account of the plague.

that these groups were likely candidates for the development of secondary trauma following the eradication of the disease.

The absence of post-traumatic symptoms such as reoccurring nightmares in Thucydides’ account of the plague must not be taken as an indication that the event was not traumatizing. Thucydides provides a historical account of the plague as it descends upon Athens, and, as previously discussed, trauma describes an overwhelming and catastrophic experience in which the response to the event is often delayed. Therefore the absence of post-traumatic symptoms from Thucydides’ account does not preclude the possibility of future trauma. What is present in Thucydides’ account is a variety of potential traumatic stressors. As the plague claimed the lives of between a quarter to a third of Athens’ population, the loss of kin must have been a fairly common occurrence. Survivors of the disease would have been confronted with their memories of not only the plague’s physiological effects on themselves, but also the suffering of those around them, and their own feelings of helplessness in the wake of the disaster. According to Thucydides the disease left some survivors blind or without the use of their limbs. It has even been argued that Thucydides’ extreme cast of the disease may have been due (at least in part) to his own harrowing experience. Given the scale and effects of the plague

67 Mitchell-Boyask (2009) 1; Mikalson (2009) 326.
68 Thuc. 2.49.7-8.
69 Bellemore and Plant (1994) 401. Bellemore and Plant view the plague episode as a means by which to emphasize the severity of the Peloponnesian War—a metaphor perhaps inspired by Thucydides’ personal suffering. “The Plague must have been a distressing time for him personally because of his own suffering. His own suffering in fact may have been the stimulus for him to use the Plague as a dramatic paradigm for the overall suffering of the war and to explain the decline in moral standards which he himself perceived and which is elsewhere illustrated, for example, in his passionate account of the stasis at Corcyra.” For Corcyra, see Thuc. 3.82-4. Cf. Bellemore and Plant (1994) 401.
Thucydides presents, it is very likely that survivors would have been traumatized by their experiences of it.

Because of the high death toll and the thorough permeation of the disease in Athens, the plague Thucydides describes must in all likelihood have constituted massive group trauma. When massive group trauma occurs, it can create a cumulative emotional and psychological wound which can span generations. Despite the event having taken place in the past, the traumatic event can be transmitted through generations consciously or unconsciously through the behavior of the traumatized individual in a phenomenon known as trans-generational trauma. The effects are cumulative and manifest in individual and group attitudes in future generations. As Yoder acknowledges, the trans-generational inheritance of trauma can occur even when a generation is not told the traumatic story explicitly, or else knows it only in broad terms. Even after the event has ceased the fears, anxieties, and behavioral changes stemming from the trauma can continue to affect individuals and consequently, their social relations. Thus, a climate of emotional strain often outlasts the period of initial trauma. Therefore, it is unlikely that the traumatic effects of the Athenian plague were limited only to those who experienced it.

Returning to the case of the Kerameikos burial pit, archeological evidence appears to support Thucydides’ assertion that the Athenians resorted to mass graves and a general disregard for burial rites as a way to quickly dispose of the dead. The roughly 150 skeletons found were interred in an irregularly shaped pit with the bodies having been laid out in a random fashion, supporting Thucydides’ vivid description of hastened and

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haphazard burials in the city.\textsuperscript{71} No soil was placed between the layers of dead, and the greater sense of organization in the bottom layers suggest that the pit was used over time, with the later stages of interment being more chaotic and disorganized. Due to the importance of burial and funerary rites in Greek culture, the hastened burial of plague victims would more than likely have contributed to the trauma of survivors for whom the relative neglect of their kin was surely tantamount to abandonment.

Given the variety of ways pestilence might traumatize plague victims, caregivers, and even future generations, it is appropriate to view the plague and indeed the plague episode through the lens of collective trauma. However, this approach does not suggest that all elements of Athenian society were traumatized by their experience of the plague. It is entirely possible to be subjected to traumatic events and not be traumatized by them.\textsuperscript{72} However, to dismiss a trauma-based approach to this episode on this caveat denies the severity of the events described as well as the possibility of the plague’s long-lasting effect on the Athenian populace. To examine Thucydides’ vivid portrayal of the plague without contemplating the traumatic nature of the event described and its reality for the Athenian reader is to deny the poignancy of his account. Furthermore, the 420/419 BCE importation of the cult of Aesklepios from Epidauros conveys that in the years following the eradication of the disease, Athenians maintained a preoccupation with disease and healing. In 420/419 the Athenians established two major sanctuaries of

\textsuperscript{71} Thuc. 2.52.2-4.
\textsuperscript{72} Yoder (2005) 11. Yoder notes that trauma is not derived from an event alone but depends on a variety of factors including age, previous history, degree of preparation, the meaning given to the event, its duration, the quality of social support available, knowledge about trauma and coping strategies, and even genetic makeup. What is considered traumatic for one individual may be simply a source of stress for another depending on a combination of these factors.
Aesklepios; one in the Piraeus and one on the southern slope of the Acropolis. Both sites would have simultaneously functioned as sacred sites and gathering places for the ill.\textsuperscript{73} The placement of the Asklepieion above the theatre of Dionysos exemplifies archaic associations between poetry and healing.\textsuperscript{74} As Meineck states, the importation of the cult of Asklepios and the significant placement of the Asklepieion suggest that Athenian society nevertheless sought healing for the traumatic events of invasion, plague, military disaster, and almost constant war.\textsuperscript{75}

When insight from modern trauma theory is applied to the event described by Thucydides, it is difficult to deny that the Athenian plague was a source of collective trauma in Athenian society. The chaos that Thucydides describes appears to reflect the chaos found in the Kerameikos burial pit and its haphazard burials. It is for this reason that I suggest an examination of Thucydides’ plague episode through the lens of the modern theory of collective trauma. The contention in this paper is not that Thucydides himself was in any capacity a victim of trauma, although his contraction of the plague, wartime experience, and exile far from preclude the possibility.\textsuperscript{76} I suggest instead a reading of the plague episode that encourages its audience to engage empathetically with a traumatic event in Athenian history and to consider how Athenian readers traumatized by their recent experiences may have engaged with the text. This approach resists the confinement of the plague episode to either the realm of critical historiography or emotive literature, focused on scouring the episode for either positivist ‘truths’ or literary

\textsuperscript{73} Mikalson (2009) 326.
\textsuperscript{74} Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 105-121.
\textsuperscript{75} Meineck (2012) 11.
\textsuperscript{76} Although the potential impact of trauma on Thucydides’ life and historiography is a fascinating subject, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The subject has been approached quite convincingly by Morley (2017).
innovation exclusively. Instead, this approach calls attention to Thucydides’ innovative production of a work of collective memory. Thucydides provides our main account of the plague which appears to be supported by archaeological evidence. If we are to take Thucydides at his word that his detailed description of the nature of the plague and its symptoms are based upon his own experience of the disease and his observations of others,77 then we ought to take this episode not only as a skillfully crafted piece of literature, but also as a trustworthy record of events. By applying modern trauma theory to Thucydides’ account, we stand to gain a better understanding of the traumatic nature of the Athenian plague and how his artful articulation of the events may have been received. In this thesis I demonstrate that through his historiographic account of the plague, Thucydides renders the story of the pandemic into aesthetic forms by combining elements of personal narrative, literature, and history, thus justifying an examination of the plague episode as a form of collective memorialization. This approach draws on David A. Davis’ reading of Pale Horse, Pale Rider as a monument to the Spanish Flu pandemic. My approach necessitates a reading of Thucydides that is aware both of its contemporary audience and its prominence in a society which perhaps sought to forget its recent horrors.

Davis’ Analysis of Pale Horse, Pale Rider

Pale Horse, Pale Rider is a novel written by Katherine Anne Porter and was first published in 1939. It follows the relationship of a young couple upon the heroine’s contraction of influenza during the pandemic of 1918. The Spanish Flu causes the

77 Thuc. 2.48.
protagonist, Miranda, to suffer a series of hallucinations and dreams which merge themes of death and survival with forgetfulness and the power of memory. Her “pale rider” alludes to the apocalyptic horseman described in Revelation 6:1-8, and her interplay between death and memory encourages an examination of her work as a form of traumatic memory.\(^78\) When she recovers from the illness, she discovers to her horror that her beau Adam had returned to his unit where he died of the illness which he likely contracted from tending to her.

Pale Horse, Pale Rider is a fictionalized account of Porter’s own experience. During Porter’s own hospitalization for Spanish Flu in 1918 her young suitor, Lieutenant Alexander Barclay, had contracted influenza and died. Porter was employed as a reporter with The Rocky Mountain News when she was taken ill, and likewise her protagonist Miranda was a reporter when she contracted the illness in Boston. Just as Miranda had come very near to death when she was revived by an injection, so too was Porter saved by an experimental injection of strychnine. Porter’s personal experiences captured in Pale Horse, Pale Rider thus testify to Porter’s own personal trauma narrative.\(^79\) Further evidence for the traumatizing effect of the influenza pandemic on Porter may be found in the eighteen years that elapsed between Porter’s contraction of the disease and her fictionalization of it. As Davis suggests, the gap between these two events testifies to the fact that Porter had attempted to suppress the event, but was ultimately unsuccessful—a prime characteristic of trauma.\(^80\) Furthermore, Porter’s candid comments throughout the years following the publication of Pale Horse, Pale Rider suggest that, despite the many

\(^78\) Davis (2011) 55. See Davis for full discussion.
\(^79\) Davis (2011) 57.
\(^80\) Davis (2011) 57.
illnesses Porter would contract throughout her life, her experience of the influenza pandemic was the most influential and significant experience to her personally. In a 1963 interview, Porter stressed the transformative nature of her illness and resulting brush with death:

> It simply divided my life, cut across it like that. So that everything before that was just getting ready, and after that I was in some strange way altered, really. It took me a long time to go out and live in the world again. I was really "alienated," in the pure sense. It was, I think, the fact that I really had participated in death, that I knew what death was, and had almost experienced it. I had what the Christians call the "beatific vision," and the Greeks called the "happy day," the happy vision just before death. Now if you have had that, and survived it, come back from it, you are no longer like other people, and there's no use deceiving yourself that you are. [Porter, “Interview” 85]

The “beatific vision” or “happy day” that Porter refers to here is depicted vividly in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*. When Miranda’s hallucinations had transported her to a vast landscape populated with the faces of deceased loved ones, Miranda was pulled out of her emotional reverie by her injection and by her realization that in her peace she had forgotten the dead. The relationship between the living and the dead and the responsibility of the living to honor the memory of the dead is a recurring theme in Porter’s work. While Miranda had reassured Adam that “Death always leaves one singer to mourn,” Miranda is later pulled from the brink of death by the notion of personal responsibility to the dead which can only be upheld by living memory. In this way, Miranda’s unhappiness with the war and its ever-growing death toll is subsumed by her

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82 Cf. Davis (2011) 57-58.
83 Porter (1939) 316.
dedication to commemoration. Her “beatific vision” is shattered by the following realization:

A thought struggled at the back of her mind, came clearly as a voice in her ear. Where are the dead? We have forgotten the dead, oh, the dead, where are they? [Porter, 325]

Since the importance of remembrance is stressed throughout Porter’s short novel, Davis argues, it is fitting that her work remains the most significant American literary work set during the pandemic. Given the absence of the Spanish Flu in public discourse and public commemoration following the pandemic, Porter’s work serves a dual purpose as both an evocative account of a traumatic event in history, and a monument to the experience.

The story of Porter’s heroine does not end simply with her recovery from Spanish Flu. As Miranda recovers in the hospital she is left to face many prospects: the end of the war, the death of her beau, and the determination of her friends and the medical staff to return her to her life and career before her illness. As a result, Miranda’s recovery involves a process of re-adjustment, in which Miranda views herself and her body as forever changed by her harrowing experience. Having faced the prospect of death and having lost her beau to the same disease, she now considers herself an outsider to the world she was once a part of before her traumatic experience:

…Miranda looked about her with the covertly hostile eyes of an alien who does not like the country in which he finds himself, does not understand the language nor wish to learn it, does not mean to live there and yet is helpless, unable to leave it at his will. [Porter, 326.]

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84 Davis (2001) 56.
The distance that Miranda now feels between herself and the world around her, as Davis notes in his work, is consistent with victims of trauma who, in its aftermath, must forge a new sense of identity that takes into account the traumatic event.\textsuperscript{85} Miranda’s initial helplessness and alienation from her caretakers in \textit{Pale Horse, Pale Rider} is consistent with Porter’s interviews regarding the life-altering nature of the illness. For Porter, her novel served as a fictionalized account of her own traumatic experience, and the publication of it enshrined the influenza experience in public discourse. Her work offers the reader an empathetic experience of the illness and simultaneously allows for the transmission of the event otherwise unremarked upon in public discourse.

Davis’ approach to \textit{Pale Horse, Pale Rider} takes into account the work of trauma psychologists and trauma historians to argue that Porter’s novel achieves “an aesthetic effect of vicarious experience.”\textsuperscript{86} Miranda’s avoidance of the war and its destruction is sustained by her thoughts of Adam, and she uses her memories of Adam as a shield against the war and the virus. This struggle between reality and remembrance, Davis argues, attests to Miranda’s inability to effectively repress the traumatic experience.\textsuperscript{87} According to Davis, the fictionalization of Porter’s experience:

\ldots created an enduring memory of the event, a memory that connects her personal experience to the experience of millions of other victims, that connects the survivors to the dead, and that connects the past to the present. [Davis, 59]

Because of the commemorative function of Porter’s novel, Davis is able to examine her work as an evocative literary account of a traumatic experience as well as a work of

\textsuperscript{85} Davis (2011) 58.
\textsuperscript{86} Davis (2011) 58.
\textsuperscript{87} Davis cites the observations of George Cheatham and Gary M. Ciuba, who discuss Miranda’s “obsessive” concern with death. Davis (2011) 59, n. 5.
collective memory. I argue that Thucydides’ account of the Athenian plague likewise serves as a vivid historical account of a traumatic event, and as a contribution to Athenian collective memory.

**Collective Memory Defined**

Before we consider Thucydides’ account of the plague as a contribution to Athenian collective memory it is necessary to articulate exactly what is meant here by this term. Maurice Halbwachs is credited with being the first to discuss the concept of collective memory systematically, having shifted the term collective memory from a biological framework to a social category.\(^{88}\) The importance Halbwachs attributes to collective memory for the formation of group identity remains a key starting point for research in the field.\(^{89}\) Collective or social memory maintains that while remembering is a task carried out by the individual, collective or social memory involves communities and is different from the sum total of individual thoughts about the past.\(^{90}\) Collective memory is rooted in conversations about memories deemed important enough to articulate and share with others, and it therefore depends on shared cultural forms and conventions of language.\(^{91}\) It reaches beyond the official histories of historians and refers to a set of actions that may draw on professional history but do not depend on it.\(^{92}\) The

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\(^{92}\) Winter and Sivan (1999) 8.
collective memory of a cultural group promulgates the specific character of that cultural group through the socialization and customs from which the individual derives identity.\textsuperscript{93} It can foster a sense of community through a shared experience, or, more realistically, through a shared remembrance of that experience. This is because while experience is unique to the individual, these experiences are shared through articulations in the group setting, thereby uniting individuals through a common narrative, however simplified that narrative may be to accommodate the group. The unity established through the collective remembrance of a shared experience can serve to bind its participants together; this effect is perhaps best encapsulated by Peter Loewenberg with the phrase: a common experience may be the trademark of a generation.\textsuperscript{94}

Some critics go so far as to deny the very existence of collective or social memory,\textsuperscript{95} with the central objection that remembrance should only be thought of as an individual mental process and cannot be conceptualized in group terms without assuming a monolithic group mentality. Scholars of social memory therefore must allow for the multipolarity of memory in their work by examining the collective aspects of memory without rendering the individual a passive cog in the machine of a collectivized will.\textsuperscript{96} Collective memory may be made up of remembering individuals, but it does not subsume their experience. A helpful example of the relationship between collective memory and remembering individuals may be found in the Attic funeral orations and casualty lists, as official tradition alone offered an anonymous collective history of Athens which did not

\textsuperscript{93} Assmann (1995) 125-126.
\textsuperscript{95} Funkenstein (1993) 6; Steinbock (2013) 8.
\textsuperscript{96} Steinbock (2013) 8-9.
reinforce the memories of individual participation. It was down to individuals or their families to maintain memories of participation and even narrative detail about particular campaigns or battles.\(^{97}\) The individual is necessarily engaged with and influenced by the collective memory of his or her own cultural group, but narratives of collective memory simply cannot capture the entirety of the memories or perspectives of those it represents.

While collective memory makes articulations based upon the events of the past, memory is nonetheless derived from the present and the contents of the present.\(^{98}\) Therefore events are remembered in accordance with the current self-image of the group and can promote distortions—often in the service of the remembering community.\(^{99}\) Events that are subsumed into collective memory do so via simplified narratives. For example, one might expect funeral orations and war memorials to praise the bravery of the dead and their ultimate contribution to their nation and its values. This somewhat romantic narrative fulfills the needs of the remembering community by providing a reason for the deaths of their companions that is easy to live with—their sacrifice was for the freedom of the living. Official commemorations seldom call for a critical consideration of the war and its consequences, opting instead to encourage social cohesion through a shared narrative. This is because the goal of the affective management of history is “to link remembering people together, to provide them with social space and symbolic tools that could help make such a link tangible.”\(^{100}\)

\(^{97}\) Thomas (1989) 215.
\(^{98}\) Funkenstein (1993) 9. In Funkenstein’s words: The past is the remembered present, just as the future is the anticipated present: memory is always derived from the present and from the contents of the present.
\(^{100}\) Oushakine (2013) 275.
But by what criteria do some events become part of collective memory while others do not? What happens when a cultural group forgets—or rather, chooses not to commemorate and recall—a particular shared event? If collective memory is indeed shaped by the community to suit the needs of the community, then it is logical to conclude that events that do not reaffirm group identity and values may result in intentional “forgetfulness.”

The Lack of Athenian Memorialization of the Plague

The inclination toward silence following a traumatic event is a common feature of individual trauma, as the individual often feels overwhelmed by the magnitude of the event. However, when translated to the realm of collective trauma this silence may take the form of a refusal to acknowledge and memorialize the event, which can in turn hinder the healing process. Articulation is a key step in the process towards acceptance. It is therefore notable that the Athenian plague received no form of public commemoration and is absent from extant funeral orations for the Athenian war dead. The absence of memorialization for victims of the plague was accompanied by the preoccupation with

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101 According to the work of Sigmund Freud, reactive silence following a collective trauma constitutes a period of latency. Giesen summarizes this period of latency as one in which “the community is unable to speak publicly about the trauma because the personal memories are still too vivid to be soothed by public rituals. The trauma is denied or silenced in public discourse or official social representations.” The period of latency and the period of speaking-out are distinct elements of trauma healing, although there is no fixed sequential order when dealing with memory and recovery. See Freud (1955). Cf. Giesen (2001) 14475.

102 Schick (2011) 1849-1850. Schick further cites Psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman, who describes the story-telling process as a “work of reconstruction” which transforms traumatic memory and allows it to be incorporated into the traumatized individual’s life story. Herman (1997) 175.
warfare and its victims in Classical Athens. By the late 5th century BCE, war was a prominent component of Athenian society which was reflected in daily life as well as Athenian public art and architecture. Between the Persian and the Peloponnesian Wars, Athens participated in some sort of war in two out of every three years and the latter lasted 27 years.103 War was dramatized onstage and represented in public monuments, statues, reliefs, and painted in sanctuaries and public spaces. Citizens were reminded each day of Athenian imperialism and military excellence.104 The wartime achievements of the Athenian ancestors were lauded in funeral orations for the recently killed soldiers, now conceived as having joined the honors of their Athenian ancestors. The presence of war in Athenian life and discourse normalized warfare as a communal experience. Those who died of the plague on the other hand received no public memorial and there was no equivalent of the *logoi epitaphioi* for plague victims despite the plague having killed a quarter to a third of the Athenian populace.105 The relative absence of the plague from Athenian discourse and even landscape signified, I suggest, a resistance to remembrance.

The remembrance of shared history is an excellent tool with which to encourage social cohesion following loss, and funeral orations presented an opportunity to unite Athenians under a shared narrative. The *epitaphioi* were a key component of Athenian identity; touching upon various narratives from Athenian history and its mythic past, they promulgated a sense of Athenian pride and facilitated remembrance. The reusing and reshaping of narratives provided some degree of consistency, and a “national” memory

103 Raaflaub (2014) 18.
104 Raaflaub (2014) 16.
was (re)constructed each year at the public burial for the war dead.\textsuperscript{106} The \textit{epitaphioi} recounted to audiences the deeds of the now-dead men on campaign; by narrating the deeds of the dead, the orator created memory for his listeners of the events described. For women, the elderly, the young, and even those orphaned due to the conflict, these narratives could provide a memory which they would not otherwise have.\textsuperscript{107} Thus the experience facilitates remembrance for the deceased while also educating the children in the deeds of their fathers through narrative.\textsuperscript{108} There is, however, no comparable institution for victims of pestilence. Without memorialization for victims of the plague, their experience did not receive narrativization by which it might have been subsumed into Athenian collective memory. Rather, the event was left to individuals to process and mourn without a unifying narrative. The failure or even refusal to acknowledge the plague would have further prevented the education of children and the transmission of the event as it was achieved in funeral orations.

This resistance to remembrance of the plague is further demonstrated in theatrical performances during the two decades following its conclusion in 426 BCE. In his study of the plague’s effect on elements of Athenian culture from its onset in 430 BCE to the production of \textit{Philoctetes} in 409 BCE, Mitchell-Boyask demonstrates that explicit reference to the Athenian plague was avoided in 5\textsuperscript{th} century Athenian drama despite illness and its cure being an ongoing concern and featured at varying levels of

\textsuperscript{106} Shear (2013) 527. See also: Steinbock (2013) 52; Thomas (1989) 213. For Athenian belief in the constructed (and reconstructed) memory of the funeral orations, see Strasburger (1958).

\textsuperscript{107} Shear (2013) 521-522.

\textsuperscript{108} Shear (2013) 519.
intensity. Mitchell-Boyask notes for example the infrequency of the term λομός (plague) relative to νόσος (disease). Λομός does not appear in the extant dramas of Euripides, is absent from comedy, and is found only once in Sophocles in line 28 of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, despite Sophocles’ interest in illness. Mitchell-Boyask proposes that λομός would have perhaps reminded Athenians too directly of their recent misfortunes, as Herodotus claims was the case with Phrynicus several decades earlier; the playwright was apparently fined 1,000 drachmas for reminding the Athenians of their role in the failure of the Ionian Revolt and the sack of Miletus in his tragedy, *The Sack of Miletus*. It appears that tragedy required greater distance from reality than history in order to have its desired effect, particularly when the subject was one of defeat. Mitchell-Boyask also suggests, perhaps not unreasonably, that Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* took second place at its debut at the Dionysia in 429 BCE due to its recurring theme of plague during a time when one was either currently attacking Athens, or recently had been. He suggests that the similarity between stage and reality had become transgressive, which would account for the play’s popularity a century later, when Athenian society enjoyed a greater temporal distance from their prior misfortune. The preference for the neutral term νόσος over the explicit term λομός demonstrated by Mitchell-Boyask suggests a hesitancy or even apprehension toward an articulation of the event onstage, and yet articulation is a key step in the process of trauma recovery.

111 Hdt. 6.21.
Trauma in the Ancient World?

Some scholars are skeptical of the application of trauma theory to the ancient world, and thus it is necessary to demonstrate that there is precedent for a reading of the plague episode through the lens of trauma theory. Classicists and Ancient Historians have demonstrated the presence of combat trauma in Ancient Greece, suggesting implicitly that the study of other forms of trauma in the ancient world, such as the trauma of pandemic disease, is not unwarranted. As David Konstan demonstrates in his introduction to Combat Trauma and the Ancient Greeks, the application of modern trauma theory to ancient evidence can provide fruitful readings of classical texts despite the fact that the ancient Greeks and Romans never appear to identify the pathology of combat trauma explicitly. Shell-shock only began to be examined and identified as a disorder after the First World War, and only recently has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder been classified as a medical condition. Konstan suggests that the failure of ancient sources to discuss the pathology of combat trauma in clinical terms is not due to its absence from Greek society but rather—paradoxically—to its familiarity. Perhaps instead we might consider a culture of trauma, in which battle and its after-effects were so commonplace that the medical diagnosis of combat trauma was unnecessary. This approach to trauma in the ancient world does not seek to retrospectively impose medical diagnoses, but rather recognizes patterns of behavior now known to be indicative of trauma.

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114 Konstan (2014) 2.
An apt example of behavior suggestive of combat trauma is the reaction of the Athenian warrior Epizelus at the Battle of Marathon. According to Herodotus the soldier was suddenly stricken blind as a great armed soldier bypassed him to cut down the man beside him, and the blindness lasted for the remainder of his life.\footnote{Hdt. 6.117.} Lawrence A. Trite suggests that the mythic framing of this event in Herodotus was the only way his contemporaries could fathom a case of sudden blindness.\footnote{Trite (2014) 88.} On the tragic stage, Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax} confronted the audience with the image of a troubled warrior as Odysseus witnesses Ajax attacking the livestock he believes to be his old comrades. In his study of combat trauma and the tragic stage, Peter Meineck connects this episode to the “berserk state” psychiatrist Jonathan Shay used to articulate the disconnected state of mind during moments of extreme battle frenzy.\footnote{Meineck (2009) 178-9.} Meineck also considers Achilles, Patroclus, and Diomedes berserkers at specific points in the \textit{Iliad} when their battle mania comes to the fore.\footnote{Meineck (2009) 179.} Battle mania appears to have also afflicted the Spartan warrior Aristodemus, whom Herodotus lauds for his bravery at Plataea. According to Herodotus, after having been shunned for being the only Spartan to have returned from Thermopylae alive, Aristodemus had wished to die (βουλόμενος ἀποθανεῖν) and fought with no regard for self-preservation— an attitude that Herodotus attributes to the “reproach hanging over him.”\footnote{Hdt. 9.72.} His reckless behavior is suggestive of survivor’s guilt, and is characteristic of a berserker, again exhibiting behavior now attributed to combat trauma.\footnote{Trite (2000) 74-77.}
Given the rather static nature of the physiology of modern humans, we may deduce that the neurological reactions constituting emotions are unchanging while the conceptualization and articulation of such emotions are not. While the account of Epizeleus frames his sudden blindness in the mythic terms of a giant warrior who passes over him and kills his comrade, modern clinicians might discuss his condition in terms of a functional somatic syndrome, or conversion disorder. Therefore the behavior indicative of combat trauma is fairly consistent, while its description may be thought of as subject to cultural and temporal change. Critics who would deny the presence of trauma in the ancient world on the basis of anachronism are choosing to ignore clear cases in which individuals like Epizeleus and Aristodemus behaved in ways now understood to be indicative of combat trauma. As Konstan and Meineck clearly demonstrate the presence of combat trauma in Greek society, the study of other forms of trauma in the ancient world—such as the trauma of pandemic disease—is not unwarranted. Modern trauma theory considers pandemics and epidemics capable of inducing massive group trauma, and the Athenian silence on the topic of plague with regards to memorialization and even dramatic performance is behavior characteristic of collective trauma.

Meineck further presents an intriguing case for understanding the prevalent role of combat trauma in Athenian theatre. In his work “Combat Trauma and the Tragic Stage: “Restoration” by Cultural Catharsis,” Meineck considers Athenian tragic performances and their audiences as composed to a considerable extent of survivors of

combat trauma. Inspired by the *Ancient Greeks/Modern Lives* public program which uses staged readings from epic and tragedy to foster public discourse on the issues surrounding the homecoming of veterans, Meineck suggests that Athenian tragedy offered a form of performance-based collective “catharsis” or “cultural therapy” by providing a place where the traumatic experiences of the spectators were to some extent reflected by the masked characters performing before them. Meineck’s approach to Athenian theatre is echoed by Paul Woodruff, who postulates that even today theatre can be healing for victims of combat trauma as theatre can serve as an effective tool for “releasing memory.” Because the engagement of the audience with a traumatic experience only lasts as long as the performance, this provides a limited engagement with trauma contained by the duration of the play and concluded with the play’s resolution of conflict. As Woodruff notes, the “sanctified space” of the theatre provides comfort to the audience as the conflict depicted is clearly removed from their own lives. This sensation conveys a sense of safety, as the actions of the characters onstage do not spill into the lives of audience members, and the audience (typically) does not engage in the action.

As Meineck and Woodruff consider theatre as a device to facilitate “cultural therapy” and “releasing memory” respectively, I suggest that historiographical literature can produce a similar effect. While Thucydides’ account articulates a source of collective

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124 Meineck (2012) 7. See article for full argument. Note that Meineck’s use of catharsis is influenced strongly by the work of Jonathan Shay (2002), and he does not refer explicitly to catharsis as a function of tragedy as defined by Aristotle in *Poetics* 49b27. Nor is Aristotle’s use of catharsis explored in this thesis as he applies this term specifically to tragic performance, not literature.

125 Woodruff (2014) 293.

126 Woodruff (2014) 293.
trauma, he simultaneously memorializes the event and offers readers the opportunity to engage with the event in a limited way. By articulating the event and encouraging his audience to empathetically engage with it, Thucydides’ plague episode is a prime example of a historiographical text facilitating the process of trauma healing. To better understand how a narrative may serve to combat the collective trauma of pestilence, a comparative approach is essential.

The Need for Comparative Study

As mentioned previously, the lack of extant accounts from survivors of the Athenian plague detailing their own experiences has led to an interest in Thucydides’ account for both its historical and literary value. It is due to this lack of sources that a comparative approach that examines more recent and better documented phenomena is both fruitful and necessary. The Spanish Flu outbreak in 1918 serves as a useful comparison; like the Athenian plague, the Spanish Flu struck during a major war, caused mass fatalities (although it was internationally felt, unlike the Athenian plague), and did not receive collective memorialization following the event. Given that the First World War and the pandemic occurred within the same timeframe, one might expect the pandemic to be viewed and commemorated in the same cultural context; yet this is not the case. While an abundance of literature was produced following WWI which details the experiences of war, the pandemic does not feature prominently in commemorative works despite more soldiers having died from influenza than combat injuries.127 This was largely due to the inability to politicize and assign meaning to pestilence. While

127 Davis (2011) 60-61.
memorials for fallen soldiers promote nationalism and heroism, pestilence strikes much more randomly and then resists heroic narrativization. Davis also notes that the patriotic or politicized commemoration of service members suggests that some deaths have more value than others, therefore justifying selective remembrance.\(^{128}\) For example, Historian Carol Byerly argues that medical officials in the US Army actively sought to diminish documentation of the pandemic’s impact as it represented a failure rather than a success.\(^{129}\) Without a collective memory to bind trauma survivors to one another, their trauma becomes isolated and individualized despite the shared experience.\(^{130}\)

Such isolation in the absence of memorialization was felt by Katherine Anne Porter in the aftermath of the Spanish Flu pandemic. Porter only began writing about her experience with Spanish Flu in 1932 upon her move to Switzerland. Davis argues that Porter’s delay in articulating her experience suggests that she tried either consciously or unconsciously to repress the memory.\(^{131}\) Obviously there are distinct differences between Porter and Thucydides’ accounts; not least of which the fact that Porter presents a fictionalization of her own experiences, while Thucydides is consciously engaged in providing an accurate historical account.\(^{132}\) Nevertheless, it is a worthwhile comparison as both accounts articulate traumatic experience(s). In his assessment, Davis draws on the work of Susan Brison who stipulates that an individual’s sense of self may be recovered

\(^{128}\) Davis (2011) 61.  
\(^{130}\) Byerly (2005) 60.  
\(^{131}\) Davis (2011) 57. For Porter’s writing in Switzerland, Davis cites Givner (1982) 280.  
\(^{132}\) For a programmatic statement on the accuracy of his work, see Thuc. 1.22. It is also worth noting that Thucydides’ account of the plague is not purely documentarian, as its rhetorical and literary qualities have been noted by scholars. Therefore, its comparison with the modern novel is not unfounded. See “Literature Review.”
through the articulation of the repressed traumatic experience. While an individual might take part in a cathartic unburdening to a sympathetic third party, this process is much more problematic when experienced on a mass scale.\textsuperscript{133} It is for this reason that for many Americans in 1918, discussing the pandemic was nearly impossible.\textsuperscript{134} Davis argues that the relative absence of the Spanish Flu from historiographical discourse contributes to the literary importance of \textit{Pale Horse, Pale Rider}, as it serves to bridge the gap between memory and history and documents a personal record of the event while acting as an “imaginative proxy” for the reader. “Imaginative proxy” refers to the ability of the work to simulate the experience of a historical event, but only in a limited manner. Davis suggests that this emotive approach may in fact be the most effective means by which to communicate such a historical event.\textsuperscript{135}

By assessing Thucydides’ narrative alongside an account from a survivor of the Spanish Flu pandemic, we may begin to understand the absence of the plague and its effects from Athenian literature. Modern scholarship on pestilence and its traumatic impact suggests that the Athenian silence on this issue was not uncommon, though nevertheless problematic for Athenian society in the aftermath of the plague. As Davis suggests that an emotive approach may be more effective for communicating such a historical event, I maintain that Thucydides’ detailed and— as I will show— emotive account served a similar benefit. Both accounts rebel against the absence of articulation to provide a vivid image of pestilence and its devastation. As both narratives provide readers with an expression of collective memory and cultural trauma, so too are the

\textsuperscript{135} Davis (2011) 66.
accounts limited, bound quite literally to their pages. Like the cathartic nature of
performance elucidated by Meineck and Woodruff, Thucydides gives his audience an
opportunity to engage in a limited way with collective trauma and to do so with the
comfort that the reader can step away from this experience at any time. The plague
episode simultaneously memorializes the event and allows the reader to have some
degree of control over their engagement with it. Like Porter’s *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, the
success of the plague episode as both an act of empathetic engagement and
memorialization lies in Thucydides’ use of vivid description; Thucydides does not shy
away from the horrors of the plague— he illuminates them.

136 Again, note that neither Meineck nor Woodruff address Aristotle’s use of catharsis, although
Aristotle receives a cursory mention in Woodruff (2014) 293.
Chapter 2: Creating Empathy

Introduction

This chapter examines the vivid description (ἐνάργεια) employed in Thucydides’ plague episode and the emotional response which Plutarch attributes to this technique. I consider a particular passage from Plutarch’s De Gloria in which he describes an emotional response to reading Thucydides which is also characteristic of trauma, suggesting that Thucydides sought to imbue his narrative with emotional realism. While Thucydides is often examined both in ancient sources and modern scholarship for his vividness of description, the connection between a vivid portrayal and its potential benefit to survivors of the event described is rarely made. I contend that even though Thucydides does not state that the impetus behind the plague episode is to help individuals work through their trauma, his vividness of description which he attributed to his desire to thoroughly document events for posterity can encourage the “working-through” process nonetheless. I also briefly examine the impact of intertextuality on this process before shifting focus to the importance of narrativization in trauma recovery.

I argue that the process of narrativization Thucydides is engaged with contextualizes social trauma as it “counteracts the isolation, silence, fear, shame, or ‘unspeakable horror’” of the event.\(^\text{137}\) I draw on the argument of trauma historian Dominick LaCapra to suggest that Thucydides’ plague episode validated Athenian experiences of the plague while promoting the working-through process through his engaging, nuanced account. I then consider the variety of perspectives illuminated in the plague episode as well as Thucydides’ striking use of language to emphasize Athenian

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\(^{137}\) Yoder (2005) 53.
suffering. I suggest that the ἀνομία related by Thucydides is also consistent with the breakdown of social order and expectations that can occur during events of mass trauma, further validating a trauma-based approach to this episode. Finally, I identify a series of dynamics in Thucydides’ account which are consistent with the traumatic events or “stressors” identified by Psychotherapist Carolyn Yoder, once again highlighting Thucydides’ attention to a varied representation of Athenian suffering. I argue that by being cognizant of modern developments in trauma theory we can approach Thucydides’ account of the plague with an awareness of the traumatizing nature of pestilence and appreciation for Thucydides’ ability to capture so many variations of the Athenian experience.

An Overview of the Plague Episode

Thucydides’ vivid account of the plague begins in 2.47 when the Peloponnesians invade Attica for the second time. They were present in Attica for only a few days when the plague broke out in Athens. Thucydides states that the Athenian plague was unique in its severity and its high mortality rate.138 He also stresses the ineffectiveness of doctors or supplications to provide relief. He concludes his introduction to the plague with the sentiment that, in the end, the Athenians were “vanquished by the disease.”139

Thucydides then provides the origins of the plague, stating that it first broke out in Africa and later spread to the Persian Empire and eventually to Athens (2.48.1-2). Having

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138 At least according to living memory. Thuc. 2.47.1-3: ...οὐ μέντοι τοσοῦτος γε λοιμός οὐδὲ φθορὰ ὧτος ἀνθρώπων οὐδαμὸν ἐμνημονεύετο γενέσθαι. //...but surely such a great pestilence or destruction of life has not been remembered to have happened in this way anywhere.
139 Thuc. 2.47.4: ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικῶμενοι. For more on this phrase, see Chapter 2, “Unsettling the Reader,” and Chapter 3, “Pestilence in Wartime.”
contracted the disease himself, Thucydides vows to give an accurate account of the plague so that it may be recognized in future, should it one day return (2.48.3).

Thucydides gives a detailed description of symptoms as well as the aftereffects of the disease. He paradoxically describes the plague as being beyond description, and offers as proof the disappearance of birds, and the reluctance of quadrupedal animals to consume the remains of plague victims. If they did touch the corpses, then they perished as well (2.50).

The caregivers of the ill then take centre stage as Thucydides details the deterioration of social ties in Athens. Thucydides states that the disease targeted all alike (2.51.3), and that those who were afflicted felt a deep despondency at the realization they had been taken ill. Entire households were depleted, and many were afraid to visit one another out of fear (2.51.4-5). Those who did visit often perished, and those who moved into Athens from the countryside faced crowded conditions and died in great numbers (2.52.1-2).

The increasingly dire situation in Athens culminated in the breakdown of civil and sacred law in Athens, as the temples were full of corpses and funeral rites were disrupted (2.52.4). In the face of certain death, Athenians no longer feared human or divine law, and sought only their immediate pleasure (2.53). Thucydides also considers the recollection of a verse (2.54.1-3) which proclaimed that a Dorian war would bring plague with it (λοιμὸς), although he indicates that there was some dispute about whether or not the term was meant to indicate plague (λοιμὸς), or famine (λιμός). Finally, the plague is attributed to the wrath of Apollo due to an oracular response received by the Spartans which proclaimed Apollo’s aid should Sparta go to war (2.54.4-5). Thucydides concludes
by stating that the ravages of the plague were felt most strongly at Athens (2.54.5). The horrors described in Thucydides’ account are all the more impactful for his use of vivid description.

Ενάργεια and Empathetic Unsettlement

Thucydides was well known in the ancient world for his use of ἐνάργεια—i.e., vivid descriptions of reported events.\textsuperscript{140} The plague episode is an apt example of this technique, as the brief narrative is highly descriptive and details the various actions and emotions of Athenian citizens. Thucydides invites his reader to view the plague as it develops, as his use of the imperfect tense throughout the episode conveys a sense of unfolding action and repeated actions in the past.\textsuperscript{141} The reader is invited to examine not only the physical strain of the illness on the individual, but also its strain on society and social relationships. Thucydides unequivocally states in the episode that the plague dragged on for some time, having broken out in 430/429 BCE with a resurgence of the disease in 426 BCE.\textsuperscript{142} Nevertheless, Thucydides condenses his description of the plague into one brief section imbued with vivid description for maximum effect, creating an intensely emotional experience for the reader.

Ancient literary critics were well aware of the effects of ἐνάργεια in historiography. Plutarch lauds Thucydides for his use of ἐνάργεια and the emotional response it elicits from his audience:

\begin{quote}
καὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν κράτιστος ὁ τὴν διήγησιν ὃσπερ γραφήν πάθεις καὶ προσώπος εἰδολοποιήσας. ὁ γαὖν θουκυδίδης ἁμα τὸ λόγῳ πρὸς ταύτην ἄμιλλάται τὴν ἐνάργειαν, οἷον θεατῆς ποιήσαι τὸν
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} de Jonge (2017) 642.
\textsuperscript{141} Bruzzone (2018) 594. The effects of this technique will be further explored throughout this chapter.
\textsuperscript{142} Thuc. 2.48.3.
The strongest of the historians is he who, by a detailed description of emotions and characters, renders his narration like a painting. Assuredly Thucydides always strives for this vividness in his writing, since it is his fervent desire to make the listener a spectator and to produce in those reading the same emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them… [Such a description] is characterized by pictorial vividness both in its arrangement and in its vivid description of what is happening … [Plut., De Gloria, 347a-c]

According to Plutarch, the strongest historian is he who offers to his audience the opportunity to become a spectator (θεατής) of the events described, enabled by the ἐνάργεια of the author to imagine the events unfolding before him. Plutarch is not the first ancient author to treat reading and visualization as analogous—the notion that readers or listeners could be transformed into eye-witnesses by means of vivid description is an ancient scholarly reaction dating back at least to Aristotle.¹⁴³ Plutarch states that Thucydides sought to instill in the listener the same emotions (πάθη) of amazement (ἐκπληκτικά) and consternation (ταρακτικά)¹⁴⁴ as those who beheld the events described; amazement and consternation are emotions often characteristic of a traumatic event, in which the individual is overwhelmed by the severity of their situation and their immediate ability to cope is impeded.¹⁴⁵ Because these emotions are

¹⁴⁴ LSJ also offers “astounding” as a possible translation for ἐκπληκτικά: LSJ, s.v. “ἐκπληκτικά.” LSJ also suggests “disturbing” as a possible translation for ταρακτικά, though I have opted to keep with Babbitt’s translation of “amazement” and “consternation” respectively (501). It is also worth noting that ἐκπληκτικά stems from the verb ἐκπλήσσω, “to drive out of one’s senses by a sudden shock.” The perfect participle offers the further meaning: to be panic-struck or amazed, especially by fear. LSJ, s.v. ἐκπλήσσω.
¹⁴⁵ Caruth (2016) 11-12.
characteristic of trauma, it appears that Thucydides sought to imbue his narrative with emotional realism.

There are two distinct ways in which the effect of ἐνάργεια illuminated by Plutarch might impact readers based on their proximity to the trauma Thucydides describes. For individuals who were directly affected by the events described, accounts of traumatic experiences can have a number of positive effects as they encourage dialogue not only among survivors but can also shape and preserve a collective memory of the trauma which in turn can counteract the isolation caused by the event.\footnote{Yoder (2005) 53.}

The second way in which ἐνάργεια might impact readers is by offering a limited and imaginative experience with the events described. By considering Plutarch’s praise of pictorial vividness in Thucydides through the lens of trauma theory, we may attribute his visual experience to a limited engagement with the events described, whereby, without having been party to the initial suffering, “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event.”\footnote{Felman and Laub (2013) 57. Cf. Davis (2011) 69.} The reader participates in the trauma through imagination.\footnote{Yaeger (2002) 46. Davis also comments on imaginative engagement with trauma narratives in \textit{Pale Horse, Pale Rider}. Davis views the novel as the synthesis of prosthetic historical memory and aesthetic fictional memory. The historical context grounds the novel in fact while the story affects the reader imaginatively. He argues that this narrative form can engage the reader more profoundly than historical memory alone. See Davis (2011) 69-70.} It is noteworthy that Plutarch ascribes the emotional effect of Thucydides’ ἐνάργεια to both the listener (τὸν ἀκροατήν) and “those reading” (τοῖς ἀναγιγνώσκοισιν). I suggest that public recitations of such vivid passages could have potentially been even more impactful for their experience in the group setting.\footnote{Although Thucydides states that his narrative was not intended as a “show-piece for immediate listening” (ὅ ἄγωνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα ἄκοιταν; Thuc. 1.22.4), Hornblower (2004,}
have facilitated discussion and reflection, making the limited engagement a shared experience. While Thucydides is often examined both in ancient sources and modern scholarship for his vividness of description, the connection between a vivid portrayal and its potential benefit to survivors of the event described is rarely made.

It must be noted that while Thucydides does not declare the intent behind the plague episode to be one of memorialization for the purpose of aiding survivors, this effect is still possible given Thucydides’ purpose outlined in his programmatic chapter:

καὶ ἐς μὲν ἄκροασιν ἵσως τὸ μή μυθόδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιοῦτον καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσσεθαι, ὑφέλλημα κρίνειν αὕτα ἄρκοντος ἔξει. κτῆμα τε ἐς αἷεi μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα ἀκούειν ἐξύγκειται.

And that which is not myth-like in this may not seem to have the same great enjoyment to the ear but it is sufficient for me if all those who shall want to examine the truth of what happened and of what is about to happen again in such a way or a similar way at some point, according to human nature, should consider this useful. It is composed as a possession for all time rather than as a prize piece for immediate listening. [Thuc. 1.22.4]

Thucydides expresses at once his dedication to pragmatic historiography, and the nature of his work as a possession (κτῆμά) for all time. So too does he claim to provide an  

26-28) argues persuasively that many episodes in Thucydides’ work seem composed as recitation units. He cites symposia and Panhellenic festivals such as the Olympic games as possible venues for such recitation; cf. Hornblower (1997) 31. The plague episode seems particularly well-suited to public recitation due to its brevity, vivid content, and its arrangement as a closed narrative. Although Hornblower does not list the plague episode in his discussion of passages in Thucydides that lend themselves to oral recitation, the findings of this thesis suggest that the episode’s literary qualities would also make the plague episode a likely candidate for recitation.

For some public programs designed to help victims work through their trauma, public testimony plays a key role. Michael Nutkiewicz has suggested in his work on Holocaust survivor testimonies that oral testimony is a “communal, didactic, and therapeutic” practice precisely because of its public nature. Nitkiewicz (2003) 17. Cf. Schick (2011) 1850.
accurate account of the plague for posterity, should the same symptoms appear in
future. While Thucydides does not claim to write for the purpose of aiding survivors to
move through their trauma, it cannot be denied that reading a vivid account of a traumatic
event can indeed yield some benefit to survivors. Although Thucydides attributes his
vividness of description to his desire to thoroughly document events for posterity, this
action has broader implications.

It must also be said that the emotional experience Thucydides crafts in the plague
episode is owed in part to intertextuality. Due to the interconnectedness of historiography
and oratory in the ancient world, history was subject to the same literary critique as
poetry and oratory. At this time in Classical Antiquity, a successful work was not a
bold divergence from tradition, but a product of that tradition which deployed its
conventions in interesting and innovative ways according to the style of its particular
author. The result was a work which may profess to focus on a particular historical

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151 Thuc. 2.48.3: ἔγὼ δὲ σιὼν τε ἔγραφε πλαύσις, καὶ ἄφ᾽ ὧν ἄν τις σκοπῶ, εἰ ποτὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπιστάμενος, μᾶλλον ἄν ἄνοικτος μη ἄγνοικτος, ταύτα διηλόγοις αὐτός τε νοοῦσας καὶ αὐτῶς ἰδὸν ἀλλοσ πάσχοντας. For my own part, I will deliver but the manner of it and lay open only
such things from the study of which a person should be best able to identify [the disease], having
knowledge of it beforehand, if it should come again, having been both sick of it myself and
having seen others sick of the same.

152 LaCapra (2014) 41-42. Schick (2011) 1850-1851. LaCapra suggests that an accurate,
empathetic historical account can not only pose a barrier to closure in discourse but can challenge
unifying or spiritually uplifting accounts of traumatic events which seek to provide reassurance or
benefit. He cites as his example the “unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to
endure any adversity with dignity and nobility.” (42) A nuanced historical account can offer to
the reader the opportunity for empathetic unsettlement, which may help to counteract feelings of
helplessness in the aftermath of a traumatic event and promote working-through.

153 See Cic. de leg., 1.5: Potes autem tu profecto satis facere in ea [historia], quippe cum sit opus,
ut tibi quidem uideri solet, unum hoc oratorium maxime. Nevertheless you are surely able to
render this [history] satisfactorily, since indeed this genre may be, as it is customary to be
perceived by you, the closest one to oratory.


155 Marincola (1999) 14. See text for a further discussion of the ancient historians and what was
widely considered effective intertextuality.
event but achieves this focus by employing literary tropes and conventions which engage
the reader by demonstrating a command of the larger literary tradition. It is for this reason
that when we examine the plague episode in Thucydides, we might recall the destructive

When Apollo spreads the plague among the Argive army, he does so by hurling
divine arrows among the host.\footnote{Iliad 1.40-55.} Nor does Apollo spread the disease senselessly, but he
does so out of anger towards Agamemnon, who had spurned Apollo’s priest, Chryses.\footnote{Iliad 1.9-60.}
Thucydides presents the plague in a clinical manner, removed from the divinity
associated with pestilence.\footnote{By which I mean that the plague episode is not introduced as being due to the wrath of Apollo. Thucydides does include at the end of the plague episode the report of an oracular response the Spartans had received which promised the aid of Apollo (his name implied from context) should they go to war and fight with “all of their might.” (Thuc. 2.54.4) However, Thucydides seems to dismiss this oracle by preceding it with the statement that “(for) people’s memories reflected their sufferings.” (Thuc. 2.54.3: οἱ γὰρ ἀνθρώποι πρὸς ἄ έπασχον τὴν μνήμην ἐποιοῦντο.) Regarding the question of whether or not Thucydides trusts oracles, Hornblower cites Marinatos (1981) 139, that Thucydides “is not questioning oracles here, but is merely stating that people make them fit their current circumstances.” The irony of which is not lost on Hornblower. Cf. Hornblower (1997) 327.} Nor does Thucydides explicitly attribute the plague to a
prior incursion of miasma, as is the case in *Iliad* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrrannus*.\footnote{The absence of miasma as a starting point for Thucydides’ account of the plague will be returned to later in this chapter under the heading “Unsettling the Reader.”}
Instead Thucydides portrays the plague as a force all on its own; describing the plague’s
initial outbreak in other places such as Lemnos, he presents a disease that spreads and
even “conquers”\footnote{This is a reference to νικώμενοι in 2.47.4. For full discussion see Chapter 2, “Unsettling the Reader,” and Chapter 3, “Pestilence in Wartime.”} of its own accord. This represents a sharp divergence from the
Homeric tradition that serves to highlight the senselessness of the plague’s destruction.
Without divine purpose behind the destruction incurred, the plague becomes a being of senseless violence, and its physical impact on plague victims takes center stage in the narrative. Ancient readers would almost certainly have approached the plague episode with Homer’s plague in mind, and the pains Thucydides takes to convey the independent movement and the impact of the pest without prior reference to the divine reminds the reader that the text they are engaged with is rooted in historiography. While his account may echo the horrors of plague in Homer’s *Iliad*, Thucydides’ plague episode contains the additional horror of recent experience. The reader is reminded of the brutal reality of the Athenian plague which is about to be illustrated by Thucydides through extensive scenes of ἐνάργεια.

Through the use of ἐνάργεια and an awareness of intertextuality Thucydides offers his reader an intense emotional experience. In the following section I argue that by detailing the chaos and the emotional strain of the plague at Athens, Thucydides validates Athenian suffering and encourages the working-through process.

**Trauma Narratives and “Working-Through”**

I propose that Thucydides’ use of ἐνάργεια (vividness) in this brief episode may have helped Athenian readers by enabling them to work through their trauma, whether this was personal, vicarious, or trans-generational trauma. The working-through process is the process by which victims of trauma move through their grief. Recalling the

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162 See for example Woodman, who argues that Thucydides encouraged the association of his plague narrative with Homer, due to the linguistic similarity between the prophecy that a Dorian war will be accompanied by plague and the warning Achilles provides to Agamemnon in Book 1 of the *Iliad*. Woodman (1988) 35.

163 For example, the reference in Thucydides to dogs and quadrupeds may serve as a rhetorical allusion to the mules and dogs affected by the plague in Homer. See Luschnat (1978) 1203–1204. Woodman (1988) 38, n. 221.
definition of trauma given by Caruth, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event is often delayed. The traumatic event in question is so overwhelming that it “cannot be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.” 164 The narrativization of events is a form of creative expression which is a key part of the process of working-through trauma. While unarticulated trauma can overwhelm the individual, the opportunity provided by a historical account to make distinctions and articulations can help limit the experience of trauma and its after-effects.165 Schick identifies the reconstruction of events and history in a narrative form as a key component of the working-through process.166 For a survivor of trauma, committing their experience(s) to narrative can “transform involuntary re-experiencing of traumatic events into memory of the events, thereby reestablishing authority over memory.”167 Once trauma is committed to narrative it can serve as a means of recovery for both author and reader; it allows the writer to recover their identity—i.e., to establish authority over their traumatic experience, while also allowing readers to

164 Caruth (2016) 11-12. Note that the feeling of being haunted or possessed by the past and the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes is characteristic of acting-out—a counterpart to the process of working-through trauma. LaCapra describes the state of acting-out as a “melancholic feedback loop” in which “tenses implode, it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene.” Because working-through involves making distinctions between past and present, the process of working-through may serve to counteract the force of acting-out and the repetition compulsion. That being said, it is important to remember that these two processes are not in a pure opposition with one another and that healing is a non-linear process. LaCapra (2014) 21-22; 148-149.
165 LaCapra (2014) 22-23.
166 Schick (2011) 1848. Schick also includes the expression of grief and critical judgement as components of working-through, and notes that the working-through process is non-linear and that tasks may overlap in practice. See also LaCapra (2014) 22.
participate in the trauma of others empathetically.\textsuperscript{168} Engagement with trauma narratives constitutes a two-way relationship, whereby the audience is engaged with the author while also being engaged on a deeper level with his/her own experiences as they inevitably seek to situate themselves in relation to the narrative.

The empathetic engagement of a work’s readership can take many forms. Due to the overwhelming nature of trauma, survivors often experience a reactive silence following the event, as the personal experience feels too harrowing to articulate effectively.\textsuperscript{169} The exposure of the trauma survivor to a narrative of their experience can help facilitate contemplation of the overall event without requiring the survivor to articulate their own traumatic experience. This contemplation can lead the individual to delimit their grief and to view the event through a larger context— they understand that their trauma stems from a shared event, and therefore that they are not isolated in their experience. Trauma narratives can also validate the traumatic experience by attesting to its severity. As Caruth acknowledges, trauma is often characterized by an overwhelming emotional reaction to an event which repeatedly imposes itself on the individual.\textsuperscript{170} A vivid historiographical examination of a traumatic event can not only foster a critical examination of the source of trauma, but the work itself can transform what the individual might consider to be too overwhelming to articulate into a form that can be transmitted and subsumed into collective memory.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{168} Davis (2011) 62.
\textsuperscript{169} LaCapra (2014) 42.
\textsuperscript{170} Caruth (2016) 11-12.
\textsuperscript{171} LaCapra (2014) 40-42. Note that LaCapra does not speak in terms of collective memory here, but rather he notes that the empathetic unsettlement created by a nuanced historiographical account can pose as a “barrier to closure in discourse.” (41)
Thucydides’ account may be thought of not only as a means to allow for empathetic engagement with the trauma, but also as a literary monument to the event. As Mitchell-Boyask stresses in his work, any critical discussion regarding the Athenian plague was absent from extant Athenian discourse— with the exception of Thucydides. As stated previously, the reactive silence of a community following a collective trauma is not uncommon but can result in the isolation of survivors and can prevent the source of the trauma from being adequately subsumed into collective memory. Thucydides’ account of the plague may therefore be thought of as a step towards bridging a clear gap in Athenian collective memory. The same is true of Katherine Anne Porter’s fictionalized account of her own experiences with the Spanish Flu as the text is at once commemorative and emotionally evocative.

I argue that the process of narrativization that Thucydides is engaged with contextualizes social trauma as it “counteracts the isolation, silence, fear, shame, or ‘unspeakable horror’” of the event.172 In Writing History, Writing Trauma, trauma historian Dominick LaCapra identifies historical writing as a tool for processing historical trauma. LaCapra states that historical writing serves as an effective tool for coming to terms with historical trauma, and that a nuanced account can actually promote the working-through process.173 By counteracting the ἀπορία commonly felt by trauma survivors, the narrative encourages a limited engagement with the source of trauma incurred and thus promotes working-through. The exposure of the reader to the harsh

reality of the event(s) described encourages a “practical ethical response.” For readers all-too aware of the horrors of the initial traumatic experience, historical analysis provides the opportunity for contemplation and assessment. Thucydides’ account of the plague provides historical analysis imbued with ἐνάργεια and emotional realism, allowing his audience to engage with his critical analysis and have an emotional experience simultaneously. By encouraging interaction with the source of individual trauma, the historical text can simultaneously commemorate the event and encourage its audience to, as LaCapra states, remain “open to the challenge of utopian aspiration.”

Approaching Thucydides’ account of the plague in light of LaCapra’s theory, we may take the case of brave individuals maintaining social relationships despite the fear of contagion as examples of the utopian aspirations LaCapra describes; hope is maintained in the face of destruction both because of valorous individuals and because the plague is considered an extreme event beyond the scope of normalcy. The absence of such a “great pestilence or destruction of life” from living memory allows readers to derive hope from the knowledge that the suffering Thucydides elucidates was an extremely rare occurrence and is therefore unlikely to strike again with such virulence. Thucydides emphasizes suffering by casting the plague as an extremely destructive and unique event in Athenian history. In so doing, Thucydides is able to validate the Athenian experience.

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174 Schick (2011) 1851. The term “practical ethical response” is a paraphrase of LaCapra (2014) 42: “Such a coming-to-terms...may empathetically expose the self to unsettlement, if not a secondary trauma, which should not be glorified or fixated upon but addressed in a manner that strives to be cognitively and ethically responsible as well as open to utopian aspiration.”

175 LaCapra (2014) 42.

176 Thuc. 2.47.1-3: ...οὐ μέντοι τοσοῦτος γε λοιμός οὐδὲ φθορὰ οὕτως ἀνθρώπων οὐδαμῶς ἐμνημονεύετο γενέσθαι. //...but surely such a great pestilence or destruction of life has not been remembered to have happened in this way anywhere.

177 Although Thucydides offers a detailed account to aid in the recognition of the disease “if it should ever break out again.” Thuc. 2.48.3: εἴ ποτε καὶ ἀδύτως ἐπιτέσοι...
and the sense of ἀπορία which modern trauma theory deems a common response in the wake of a traumatic event.

Unsettling the Reader

In this section I examine the language and metaphors used by Thucydides in the plague episode to communicate to the reader the extreme nature of the plague and the destruction it wreaked upon Athens. I begin by taking Thucydides’ claim that the plague’s destruction was far beyond any other in known history in conjunction with his programmatic chapters (Thuc. 1.1; 23). The implications of the plague’s arrival alongside the Peloponnesian army are examined in tandem with the stylistic observations made by Parry. I then consider the influence of the tragedians on Thucydides and examine select passages to suggest that Thucydides frames the plague episode in such a manner as to unsettle the reader and to impart upon him the overwhelming sense of chaos and destruction that characterized the pandemic itself. Finally, I examine the ἀνομία/λοιμός dichotomy presented by Paul Demont to suggest that Thucydides’ innovative inversion of this dichotomy effectively communicates the state of ἀπορία stemming from the collapse of social institutions and rituals— a state that modern psychology deems consistent with social or collective trauma.

From the outset of Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian War, he proclaims his interest in detailing events of tremendous impact:

Θουκυδίδης Αθηναίος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, ὡς ἐπολέμησαν πρὸς ἄλληλους, ἀρξάμενος εὐθὺς καθισταμένου καὶ ἔλπίσας μέγαν τε ἐσεσθαι καὶ ἄξιολογότατον τῶν προγεγενημένων, τεκμαιρόμενος ὅτι ἀκμάζοντες τε ἦσαν ἐς αὐτὸν ἀμφότεροι παρασκευή τῇ πάσῃ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο Ἐλληνικὸν ὅρθων ἥψιστάμενον πρὸς ἑκατέρους, τὸ μὲν εὐθὺς, τὸ δὲ καὶ διανοοῦμενον. κίνησις γὰρ αὕτη μεγίστη δὴ τοῖς
Thucydides, the Athenian, wrote about the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, how they fought against one another, having set out from its immediate outbreak, expecting that it would be both a great war and most worthy of relation of any having preceded it, taking as evidence that both sides went into it being at their prime with respect to any kind of preparation, and seeing the rest of Greece allying with either side, some immediately, and others still deliberating. For this was the greatest upheaval to have happened both to the Greeks, and to some part of the barbarians, so to speak, for the majority of mankind. For that which occurred before and in even more distant times is impossible to find with certainty on account of the abundance of time [passed], and from the evidence in which I happen to trust, having looked as far back as possible I believe that nothing great came about either in war or in other matters.[Thuc. 1.1]

The interest Thucydides conveys in great (μεγάλα) matters is a theme that Thucydides returns to at several points in his narrative. One cannot help but recall the above passage when Thucydides describes the plague in Book 1 as: ἡ οὖς ἦκιστα βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθείρασα ἡ λοιμώδης νόσος, “the extremely harmful and pestilential disease which had destroyed not a small part.” 178 The severity of the plague and the death toll it incurred is again mentioned in 2.47 to introduce the plague episode:

τοῦ δὲ θέρους εὐθὺς ἄρχομενου Πελοποννήσιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι τὰ δύο μέρη ὀσπερ καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἑσέβαλον ἐς τὴν Ἀττικήν ( ἤγειτο δὲ Ἀρχίδαμος ὁ Ζευξιδάμου Λακεδαιμονίων βασιλεὺς), καὶ καθὲξόμενοι ἐδήσαν τὴν γῆν. καὶ ἄντων αὐτῶν οὐ πολλὰς πω ἡμέρας ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ ἡ νόσος πρῶτον ἦρξατο γενέσθαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, λεγόμενον μὲν καὶ πρὸτερον πολλὰς ἐγκατασκήνωσαν καὶ περὶ Λήμνου καὶ ἐν ἄλλαις χωρίοις, οὐ μέντοι τοσοῦτος γε λοιμὸς οὐδὲ φθορὰ οὕτως ἄνθρώπων οὐδαμοῦ ἐμνημονεύετο γενέσθαι.

Right at the beginning of the summer the Peloponnesians and their allies invaded Attica with two-thirds of their forces as on the first occasion (Archidamus the son of Zeuxidamus, king of the Lacedaemonians, led them), and they encamped and were ravaging the land. With them being in Attica for only a few days the disease began to appear amongst the Athenians, and it is said to have struck many other places earlier, and in particular Lemnos and other districts, but surely such a great pestilence or destruction of life has not been remembered to have happened in this way anywhere. [Thuc. 2.47.1-3]

Thucydides highlights in the above passage that “such a great λοιμὸς and loss of life is not remembered to have happened anywhere.” From the outset of his account then, Thucydides stresses the remarkable and extreme nature of this event. The severity of the plague appears to be an entirely fitting subject for Thucydides’ narrative, given his expressed interest in events of notable suffering,¹⁷⁹ and the above quotation appears to harken back to Thucydides’ statement of intent. Indeed, the plague is also included in Thucydides’ summary of the sufferings which converged during the Peloponnesian War whether as products of the war itself or due to natural phenomena.¹⁸⁰ It is thus fitting that Thucydides introduces the plague narrative by taking the arrival of the pest together with the arrival of the Peloponnesians—as the plague which caused the greatest “destruction of life” in living memory¹⁸¹ seemed a fitting match for what Thucydides deemed would be a “both a great war and most worthy of relation.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Thuc. 1.23. This passage is fully discussed in Chapter 3, “Thucydides’ Account as Memorialization.”
¹⁸⁰ Thuc. 1.23.1-3. See Chapter 3, “Thucydides’ Account as Memorialization” for the full discussion of this passage, and the implications of Thucydides’ portrayal of the plague as the greatest pandemic as an integral part of his account of the Peloponnesian War, which he believed to have been the greatest conflict.
¹⁸¹ Thuc. 2.47.3.
¹⁸² Thuc. 1.1: τὸν πόλεμον… μέγαν τε ἔσσεθαι καὶ ἀξιολογώτατον…
The juxtaposition of the arrival of the plague with the arrival of the Peloponnesians in Attica has the additional effect of presenting the plague as an enemy to Athens—a connection which Thucydides exploits in the subsequent section:

οὔτε γὰρ ἰατροί ἠρκοῦν τὸ πρῶτον θεραπεύοντες ἁγνοία, ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ μᾶλιστα ἑθνοίκοι ὅσο καὶ μᾶλιστα προσήσαν, οὐτε ἀλλὰ ἀνθρωπεία τέχνη οὐδεμία· ὅσα τε πρὸς ἱεροῖς ἰκέτευσαν ἢ μαντεῖοι καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις ἐχρῆσαντο, πάντα ἁνωφελὴ ἤν, τελευτῶντες τε αὐτῶν ἀπέστησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικώμενοι.

For neither were the doctors at first sufficient in their aid on account of their ignorance (i.e., of the disease), but they themselves perished in very great numbers because they went there the most, nor was any other human device sufficient: as many supplications as the Athenians made at temples and consultations of oracles and such things they did, all were unprofitable, and in the end they abandoned them having been vanquished by the evil. [Thuc. 2.47.4]

Perhaps the strongest example of the connection Thucydides draws between war and pestilence is the conclusion of this passage with ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικώμενοι. For passive forms of the verb νικάω, LSJ cites “to be vanquished” as an appropriate translation. Furthermore, the use of ὑπὸ with a genitive of a noun personifies that very noun. The implication here is that Thucydides personifies the virus as an enemy attacking Athens at a time when a military invasion was already underway. As Parry notes, the connection between the arrival of the plague and foreign adversaries is furthered by the use of ἐπιπίπτειν, ἐσπίπτειν, νικᾶν, and ἔσωσέν throughout Thucydides’ account to suggest

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183 The subject change from the doctors to the Athenians more generally is not indicated in the Greek but this is the effect given Thucydides’ transition from the medical to the religious attempts made to ward off the disease. Note that ἰκέτευσαν is complexive, effectively summing up all the instances of supplication. Marchant (1937) 187.
184 LSJ, s.v. “νικάω.”
185 Smyth (1920) #1698 b N. 1.
that the plague attacked the Athenians like a military assault.\textsuperscript{186} The militaristic language Thucydides uses in the plague episode is also evident in the 1.23 list of sufferings, which concludes with ξυνεπέθετο (combined in attacking).\textsuperscript{187} Thucydides makes it abundantly clear that the sufferings incurred during the war, of which the plague was the most destructive, were “co-combatants” in the war, and combined to attack the Athenians.\textsuperscript{188} I suggest that Thucydides’ description of the plague in militaristic language has the effect of unsettling the reader. His comment that some Athenians initially believed they had been poisoned by Peloponnesians tampering with the cisterns reminds the audience of the climate of suspicion in Athens during the war.\textsuperscript{189} Through his use of military language and his early deployment of the Athenians’ initial suspicion that they had been poisoned, Thucydides seamlessly blends the anxieties of military attack with the onset of the disease to establish a climate in Athens that was pervaded by the fear of being vanquished whether by the Peloponnesians, or pestilence.

It is also worth noting the poetic term with which Thucydides expresses the plague’s outbreak. The verb ἐγκατασκήνωσε, translated here as “struck,” is not to be found in the extant works of his contemporary medical authors, and makes its first appearance in extant prose literature in this passage. As Parry notes, because the traditional usage of this verb implies the thunderbolt of Zeus, its inclusion here lends poetic resonance to Thucydides’ account, highlighting the intensity of the plague and the force with which it

\textsuperscript{186} Parry (1969) 116. For further discussion of Thucydides’ use of militaristic language in the plague episode and the relationship between pestilence and warfare, see Chapter 3, “Pestilence in Wartime.”
\textsuperscript{187} *LSJ*, s.v. “συνεπέθηκα,” n. II.
\textsuperscript{188} Kallet (2013) 373.
\textsuperscript{189} Thuc. 2.48.2.
struck. Parry further mentions that Thucydides was not the first to apply this verb to plague description. Forms of the verb are found in Aeschylus and later Sophocles to describe the occurrence of plague. By utilizing a term that is uncommonly used in prose and is traditionally associated with Attic tragedy, Thucydides evokes the tragic genre to signal to his reader that the harrowing events he is about to describe are worthy of a dramatic performance. His evocation of memory in the following clause with the verb ἐμνημονεύετο hurriedly follows his allusion to tragedy with the reminder that the narrative he relates is grounded in recent history.

Shifting focus from the language used by Thucydides in 2.47.4, it is important to also note the implications of the situation described. The severity of the disease is exemplified in this passage by the abortive attempts of doctors to ward off the plague and the high mortality rate among them, which together convey the limit of human ability (τέχνη) in the face of pestilential crisis. From there, Thucydides transitions to the Athenians’ appeals to divinity through supplications and the consultation of oracles. In this passage, Thucydides provides a brief overview of the plague which begins with the initial helplessness of doctors and concludes with the Athenians in the end (τελευτῶντές) being vanquished by the plague’s magnitude. By expressing the impossibility of a human solution, Thucydides highlights suffering while arousing pity for those whose suffering

190 Parry (1969) 114. *Trachiniae*, 1087 and *Persians* 514. Parry cites the following lines from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*: ἐν δ’ ὁ πυρφόρος θεὸς/σκήψας ἐλαύνει, λοιμῶς ἐξῆθεσθος, πόλιν. The fire-hurling god// went to the city, striking the city with the most hated disease. (*OT* 27-8) Hornblower also cites Parry’s reference to *Oedipus Tyrannus*, but further notes that while this term is not included in extant works from the Hippocratic corpus, it is deployed in later medical texts including Aetios and Pseudo-Galen. By that point, however, these authors may have had Thucydides in mind. Hornblower (1997) 318.

was inevitable. Plutarch’s praise of Thucydides for his ability to paint a picture of the events described may thus be observed in this passage as Thucydides illustrates through examples the failure of traditional institutions to offer relief from the outset of his episode. He makes it abundantly clear from the beginning that those suffering the ravages of the plague were abandoned to their misfortune due to the insufficiency of human aid and religious institutions. The reader can do little more than take pity on the plague victims for the suffering this passage forebodes.

Thucydides continues with a description of the plague’s origin and symptoms:

τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔτος, ὡς ὠμολογεῖτο, ἐκ πάντων μάλιστα δὴ ἐκεῖνο ἄνοσον ἐς τὰς ἄλλας ἀσθενείας ἐτύγχανεν ὁν. εἰ δὲ τις καὶ προθεματε ὁμιλήθη. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλοις ἀπ᾽ οὐδεμίας προφάσεως, ἀλλ᾽ ἐξαίφνης ύπομείζεται ὑπὲρ τῶν μὲν τῆς κεφαλῆς θέρμαι ἵσχυραι καὶ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἑρυθήματα καὶ φλόγωσις ἑλάμβανε…

For the year, as was commonly agreed, happened to be particularly free from all illness and other afflictions: but if someone was previously afflicted by something, all [illnesses] ended in this alone [i.e., the plague]. Others for no apparent reason, despite being in good health were suddenly seized with violent heats in the head and with redness and inflammation of the eyes…. [Thuc. 2.49.1-2.]

Thucydides thus introduces his lengthy description of symptoms with the above statement on the randomness of the affliction. This apparent randomness is a theme laced throughout Thucydides’ account and is indeed a topos of plague narratives in literature thereafter. Unlike the Peloponnesian War in which the Athenians were actively and willingly engaged, the plague struck individuals “for no apparent reason” (ἀπ᾽ οὐδεμίας προφάσεως).  

194 Thuc. 2.49.2.
The senseless destruction of the plague is all the more poignant given that Thucydides transitions into the plague episode from Pericles’ Funeral Oration for those recently fallen in battle.195 During his speech, Pericles presents an image of an idealized Athenian character that is marked by the Athenians’ respect for law and custom (2.37.3), their conduct of regular sacrifices (2.38.1), their self-sufficiency (2.41.1), and their shared belief in a sense of decency (2.43.1) and honor (2.44.4). He also mentions Athens as a center of imported goods from abroad (2.38.2).196 Using these key elements of Pericles’ speech, Woodman effectively shows the dramatic reversal (περιπέτεια) Thucydides creates using the plague episode.197 For one thing, the plague was imported from abroad (2.47.3), as were the goods Pericles boasts of in his speech. The reverence for law and custom is soon abandoned when the temples become filled with the dead and dying (2.52.3), and no individual was self-sufficient against the pest (2.51.3). Thucydides also states that during the plague men became indifferent to written law and the fear of the gods, abandoning all sense of decency (2.52-3.). Nor were the men any longer concerned with honour but valued whatever offered them immediate satisfaction (2.53.3). Due to the extreme reversal from the idealized Athenian character articulated by Pericles to the utter

195 The juxtaposition of these two episodes has long been a subject of scholarly interest. Gomme (1956) 161. Pericles’ speech has been labeled by Hornblower a praise of the Athenian “way of life.” Hornblower (1997) 298. Hornblower further cites Macleod’s observation the “glorious ideals” of Pericles’ speech are set “against the gloomier reality,” in part because the speech anticipates the plague description. Macleod, 149ff., cf. Hornblower (1997) 299. Bellemore and Plant also discuss the reversal of the piety lauded by Pericles and suggest that Thucydides had thematic concerns in mind with his formulation of the plague summary. Bellemore and Plant (1994) 390. For the comparison this juxtaposition brings between anomia and politeia, see Nielsen (1996) 401. For the self-sufficiency discussed by Pericles (2.41.1) and the failure of it to ward off the plague (2.51.3), see Macleod (1983) 149-153, cf. Bosworth (2000) 1.

196 These passages are offered by Woodman to highlight the collapse of this idealized Athenian character during the subsequent plague episode. Woodman (1988) 33-35.

moral erosion in the plague episode, Woodman argues that Thucydides was able to magnify both the blessings articulated by Pericles and the suffering of the Athenians incurred during the plague in a dramatic reversal reminiscent of tragedy. While Pericles’ speech emphasizes the idealized articulation of Athenian character, the plague permeated Athens and eventually led to the breakdown of social order in the city.

The social breakdown Thucydides depicts in the plague episode is accompanied by a growing sense of ἀπορία. In his vivid description of symptoms Thucydides captures the Athenian sense of ἀπορία through escalating consequences. He begins with the internal suffering of the individual, transitions to the external disfiguration of victims, and at last, addresses communal suffering. While he claims that victims endured intense fever, he claims in the same sentence that many wished to throw themselves into cold water. Many threw themselves into wells when left unattended, although Thucydides claims that the quantity of water consumed had no effect on their condition. For those who survived, he claims they were marked by the disease having reached their extremities, and many emerged having lost the use of limbs, eyesight, and even memory. His description begins internally with fever and travels outwards. The

199 Woodman’s observations of the deliberate juxtapositions between Pericles’ speech and the plague episode are convincing, yet they do not have to be pure rhetorical inventions, as Woodman suggests. Juxtaposition between the two episodes should not be taken as an indication that Thucydides simply fabricated details of the plague episode. See Gomme (1956) 161.
200 Thuc. 2.49.5. The simultaneous thirst for water and the inability of water to quench said thirst emphasizes the helplessness of plague victims and the apparent senselessness of the disease. Bellemore and Plant hypothesize that while we have no reason to doubt the fundamental symptoms of Thucydides’ plague, some were likely exaggerated or even (in some cases) fabricated for literary effect. For further analysis of the contrasts and contradictions in the plague episode, see Bellemore and Plant (1994).
202 Thuc. 2.49.7-8.
desperation of the victims for water led to desperate attempts to satisfy thirst, and endurance led only to more severe symptoms. By the end of this section the disease has moved from the head down to the extremities and has left the individual permanently disfigured in some capacity, leaving a visible manifestation of its destruction. The reference to unsupervised individuals resurfaces in 2.51, as the havoc wreaked on the individual attacks communal structure as well. Thucydides thus begins with the individual (2.49) and transitions to the communal (2.51).

The psychological toll which Thucydides elucidates in his account is not limited to those who had contracted the disease. Thucydides also takes pains to present the experiences of individuals and groups before shifting focus in order to detail the large-scale destruction of households and social ties. The escalating tension concludes with a state of ἀνομία, as Athenian customs are surrendered for the sake of necessity.203

The interconnectedness of ἀνομίᾳ and λοιμός Thucydides emphasizes is part of a longstanding tradition in Greek thought. Scholars have noted that the Greeks attributed various illnesses to daemonic or divine origins.204 As Demont acknowledges, the Iliad, Hesiod, Herodotus, and Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus all attribute pestilential devastation to human responsibility, and the diseases are “often understood in terms of divine retribution for offenses against either gods or men.”205 In other words, ἀνομίᾳ

203 Thuc. 2.52.3-4:…ὑπερβημαζομένου γάρ τοῦ κακοῦ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένονται, ἐς ὠλιγορίᾳν ἐτράποντο καὶ ἱερὸν καὶ ὁσίον όμοίως. νόμοι τε πάντες ξυνεταράχθησαν ὡς ἐχρώντο πρῶτερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς, ἐθαυτὸν δὲ ὡς ἀκαστός ἔδοξεντο. //…for because the people were brutalized by their suffering, with no way out, they considered in contempt the sacred and profane alike. All customs were thrown into confusion which they previously observed regarding burial, and they were buried as each could manage…

204 Parker (2001) 237.

205 Demont (2013) 74. See also Parker (2001), specifically “Purifying the City” and “Divine Vengeance and Disease.”
leads to λοιμός. In some cases this pollution arises from breaking the laws and standards of human behavior and this miasma is then passed from one individual to another through contagion. However, Thucydides resists attributing the disease to the traditional religious explanation of λοιμός. The plague does not arise due to ἀνομία but leads to it as necessity causes traditional burial customs to be neglected. Thucydides thus inverts the relationship between ἀνομία and λοιμός in Greek literary tradition. I suggest that this inversion further contributes to the overwhelming and unknowable sense of the disease that Thucydides has cultivated throughout the plague episode. Recalling the abortive attempts of doctors to prescribe aid due to their ignorance (ἀγνοία) of the disease, Thucydides’ innovation of inverting the traditional understanding of pestilence as divine retribution for ἀνομία contributes to his characterization of the plague as an act of random devastation. While Thucydides’ audience would almost certainly have been aware of the literary tradition of ἀνομία leading to λοιμός, his inversion plays on the expectation of his audience in order to present a devastating event in which traditional interpretation is insufficient. Keeping in mind Thucydides’ statement that “because the plague’s form was beyond description, not only in other respects did it visit individuals with a severity beyond human capacity,” it is tempting to conclude that so too did the event evade the human capacity to understand and interpret the event through traditional means.

206 Demont (2013) 74. Λοιμός is also the focus of a tradition of disaster narratives in Greek and Near Eastern literature. For a discussion of this tradition, see Chapter 3, “Thucydides’ Account as Memorialization.”
207 Demont (2013) 74-75.
208 Thuc. 2.47.3-4.
209 Thuc. 2.50.1: γενόμενον γὰρ κρείςσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου τά τε ἄλλα χαλεπώτερος ἢ κατά τήν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν προσέπιπτεν…
The ἀνομία related by Thucydides is also consistent with the breakdown of social order and expectations that can occur during events of mass trauma. The Athenians’ abandonment of burial rites and their disregard for the sacred in the wake of pestilential devastation constituted a rejection of social customs and institutions through which they would ordinarily have sought relief. Because the collapse of social order affects more than select members of a social community, it challenges the validity and stability of the social order itself. As the social fabric is disrupted, so too is the predictability of everyday life compromised, and feelings of hopelessness, apathy, fear, and disorientation pervade the community.\textsuperscript{210} In such situations trauma is considered an “adequate or natural” response to the collapse of social order and can occur immediately after the experience of the traumatic event.\textsuperscript{211} As previously discussed, themes of hopelessness and ἀπορία figure prominently in Thucydides’ account of the plague and are used to characterize the suffering of the Athenians. Thucydides presents an atmosphere of senseless devastation against which the traditional social institutions proved insufficient and were ultimately rejected. The ἀνομία described appears to have had a lasting effect, as Thucydides implies that the state of licentiousness continued after the plague had subsided.\textsuperscript{212} Thus Thucydides’ innovative inversion of the ἀνομία/λοιμός dichotomy effectively communicates the state of ἀπορία stemming from the collapse of social institutions and rituals— a state that modern psychology deems consistent with social or collective trauma.

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\item[\textsuperscript{210}] Giesen (2001) 14473.
\item[\textsuperscript{211}] Giesen (2001) 14473.
\item[\textsuperscript{212}] Thuc. 2.53.1: πρῶτον τε ἦρξε καὶ ἐς τῇ πόλει ἐπὶ πλέον ἀνομίας τὸ νόσημα. // And the great licentiousness, which also in other kinds was used in the city, began at first from this disease.
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Two Cases of Ἐνάργεια

In this section I consider how Thucydides evokes Ἐνάργεια in sections 2.51 and 2.52. These sections address the failure to effectively treat the disease, the despondency of its victims, and the gradual breakdown of Athenian social norms and institutions. I further divide these sections to deal with each theme in turn, and I examine Thucydides’ literary techniques through the lens of trauma theory to consider what the vivid portrayal of these sections might have meant for trauma survivors.

As the plague continues to pervade individual and communal experiences, Thucydides returns to the theme of indiscriminate fortune:

...καὶ ἄλλο παρελύπει κατ’ ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον οὐδὲν τὸν εἰωθότων· δὲ δὲ καὶ γένοιτο, ἐς τοῦτο ἐτελεύτα. ἐθνησκον δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀμελεία, οἱ δὲ καὶ πᾶνι θεραπευόμενοι. ἐν τε οὐδὲ ἐν κατέστη ίαμα ὡς εἰπεῖν ὃτι χρὴν προσφέροντας ὴφελεὶν· τὸ γάρ τῷ ξυνενεγκὸν ἄλλον τοῦτο ἐβλαπτεν. σῶμα τε αὐταρκες ὃν οὐδὲν διεφάνη πρὸς αὐτὸ ἰσχύος πέρι ἣ ἁσθενείας, ἄλλα πάντα ξυνήρει καὶ τὰ πάση διαίτηθεν Θεραπευόμενα.

...And at that time no man was troubled with any other of the typical ailments; and those which did occur ended in this [i.e., with the plague]. They died, some in neglect, and others despite being thoroughly cared for. No single remedy established itself, so to speak, by the application of which they could bring relief: for that which brought relief to one hindered another. No physical constitution was sufficient in itself to see it through; regardless of whether they were strong or weak, and despite all regimen of care, [the plague] seized all [alike]. [Thuc. 2.51.1-3]

Here, Thucydides emphasizes the complete and total permeation of the plague in Athenian society by reasserting its dominance over all other forms of illness. Using the particle τε, Thucydides creates a parallel sequence of thought, as the victims died 1) whether treated or not; 2) whether they took one drug or another; 3) whether physically...
strong or weak (ἐθνησκόν δὲ ... ἐν τε ... σῶμά τε). Through this parallel construction Thucydides is able to emphasize the variety of cases and approaches to the illness which existed simultaneously and which all resulted in the same grim fate. Thucydides uses a slew of verbs in the imperfect tense to illustrate the ongoing nature of the deaths of plague victims (ἐθνησκόν) and the varied effects of remedies (ξυνενεγκόν, ἐβλαπτεν).

The imperfect tense stresses the ongoing nature of these events and Thucydides allows his reader to view the plague at work in Athens.

Furthermore, the phrase “some died in neglect, and some [died] despite being thoroughly cared for,” presents an interesting disruption in a developing verb pattern in this episode. Here, the verb expressing death occurs at the beginning of a sentence and concludes with the participial verb expressing treatment. As Parry points out in his analysis of Thucydides’ language in the plague episode, verbs referring to the victims of the disease most often appear at the end of sentences. Like the disease, many of Thucydides’ clauses end with a verb denoting death, despair, or a general sense of being overwhelmed. In this particular instance, Thucydides’ deviation from an ongoing verb pattern addresses death (ἐθνησκόν) prior to the mention of treatment (πάνυ θεραπευόμενοι). This disruption coincides with Thucydides’ subsequent comment on the despair he attributes to victims when they realized that they had contracted the plague:

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213 Rusten (1990) 187. For the construction: Thuc. 2.51.2.
214 Thuc. 2.51.1: ἐθνησκόν δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀμέλεια, οἱ δὲ καὶ πάνυ θεραπευόμενοι.
215 Parry (1969) 115. Parry cites the following verbs which appear at the end of sentences as examples: νικώμενοι, πάσχοντας, ξυνεχόμενοι, διαφειόροντο, θεραπευόμενοι, ἐθνησκόν, νικώμενοι, διαφθαρήσεται. Note that νικώμενοι appears twice in Parry’s list as Thucydides deploys it in 2.47.4 and 2.51.5.
δεινότατον δὲ παντὸς ἦν τοῦ κακοῦ ὣς ἀθυμία ὅπως τις αἰσθανότο κάμνον (πρὸς γὰρ τὸ ἀνέλπιστον εὐθὺς τραπόμενοι τῇ γνώμῃ πολλῷ μᾶλλον προῖνετο σφάς αὐτοῦς καὶ οὐκ ἀντείχον), καὶ ὅτι ἐτερος ἄφ᾽ ἐτέρου θεραπείας ἀνασπιζόμενοι ὀσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ἐθνησκοῦν· καὶ τὸν πλείστον φθόρον τούτο ἑνεποίει.

But the worst aspect of the entire evil was the despondency whenever someone realized they were afflicted (for immediately turning their minds to hopelessness they surrendered themselves much sooner and did not resist), and since they became infected each from his caring for another they died like sheep: and this caused the greatest ruin. [Thuc. 2.51.4]

Using ὅπως...αἰσθανότο here, Thucydides invites his reader to observe the moment of realization that one has been taken ill, and he presents the subsequent hopelessness (ἀνέλπιστον) as the direct result of this realization. Once again, Thucydides also deploys a series of verbs in the imperfect tense to convey a sense of unfolding and frequent action.216 It is worth noting that this verbal technique is known from other literary sources which engage with the visual arts used to aid in the creation of a “visual” experience in literature.217 Thucydides uses this technique to freeze time at the moment of realization before transitioning to the resulting hopelessness.

This hopelessness seems to compound Thucydides’ earlier statement in 2.51 that no remedy “established itself” that could bring relief through its application.218 It may also harken back to his earlier claim that no human device (ἀνθρωπεία τέχνη οὐδεμία) could offer relief.219 Ἀπορία is once again the theme of description, as the plague makes no distinction between strong or weak constitutions. This Ἀπορία is articulated throughout

216 Προῖνετο, ἀντείχον, ἐθνησκοῦν, ἑνεποίει.
218 Thuc. 2.51.2: ἐν τε οὐδὲ ἐν κατέστη ιαμα...ὅτι χρῆν προσφέροντας ὀψελείν...
219 Thuc. 2.47.4.
the rest of section 2.51 using words like ἀθυμία (despondency) and ἀνέλπιστος (unexpected). Rusten in his commentary goes so far as to advocate “depression” as an appropriate translation for ἀθυμία, while the LSJ lists want of heart, faintheartedness, and despondency as possible translations. Meanwhile προίημι (to surrender) in the middle voice is used to indicate a surrender to the disease in similar language to military action. The overwhelming nature of the victims’ despondency is something Thucydides returns to several times throughout the episode, and he explicitly refers to ἀθυμία as the worst aspect of the whole disease. In his commentary, Gomme interprets this assertion as part of Thucydides’ larger description of symptoms, and identifies ἀθυμία as the most fatal symptom of the disease. If Gomme is correct in taking Thucydides’ emphasis on despondency as a symptom of the disease rather than a collateral result, then it becomes clear that Thucydides viewed psychological suffering as an inherent quality of the illness. This may have been due at least in part to Thucydides’ own experience of the illness. Whatever his motivation for this approach, Thucydides’ repeated emphasis on the psychological arena for suffering makes the emotional impact of the disease an integral part of its experience.

The balance struck in 2.51.4 between the individual realizing their fate and the reaction of the community to their plight allows the audience to examine this situation from the perspective of the individual and the community and to empathize with both. I

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220 Rusten (1990) 188. Rusten offers no explanation for his rendering of ἀθυμία as depression.
221 LSJ, s.v., “ἀθυμία, ἡ (ἀθυμος).” For the sake of distancing Thucydides’ account from modern associations of depression with clinical phenomena, I have kept the LSJ translation of “despondency.”
222 Thuc. 2.51.4.
223 Thuc. 2.51.4: δεινότατον δὲ παντὸς ἦν τοῦ κακοῦ ἢ τε ἀθυμία ὁπότε τις αἰσθητό κάμνων.
224 Gomme (1956) 157. Gomme takes 2.51.4 in conjunction with 2.51.2-3, which attributes death to plague victims regardless of their physical constitution.
assert that here Thucydides gives voice to a traumatic experience felt by the sick and their kin alike which in itself can encourage the working-through process. Traumatized individuals and those who empathize with them are likely to resist working-through due to a “fidelity to trauma.” The logic behind this resistance lies in the belief that an allegiance to suffering constitutes an allegiance to those who were subsumed by it— the dead. This response resists any form of conceptual or narrative closure, as the survival and subsequent return to daily activities is tantamount to betrayal.225 By engaging with the experiences of the ill and their caretakers in the plague episode, Thucydides allows both groups to engage with their traumatic experience(s) in a limited way, and to critically examine how individuals and groups coped with the pestilence within the larger context of the social and moral decay in Athens.

A critical examination of the event in question helps to provide a clear lens through which to view traumatic events not by presenting an unproblematic account or one that is devoid of emotion, but through the opportunity to make distinctions and develop articulations that can function as limits to the experience of trauma and its aftereffects.226 Articulation of the event can help to break the cyclical nature of the post-traumatic experience by demanding interaction with the source of the trauma; in his articulation of events, Thucydides illuminates not only the perspective of the sick, but also their relations, community, and social structures at large. Thucydides continues in 2.51 by addressing the impact of the plague on households:

225 LaCapra (2014) 22-23.
226 LaCapra (2014) 22.
Characteristically, Thucydides conveys a sense of unfolding action through his use of the imperfect tense. As Thucydides continues to transition in his account from individual experiences to the communal response to pestilence, he illuminates a variety of experiences of the plague which, as previously discussed, constitute traumatic events or stressors known from similar cases elsewhere. By capturing a variety of experiences Thucydides allows his audience to engage both with the text and with their own memory.

227 ἀπόλλυντο, διεφθείροντο, ἡφείδουν, ἡξέκαμφνον, ὡκτίζοντο, ἐπελάμβανεν, ἐμακαρίζοντο, εἶχον.
of the plague, whether experienced firsthand or through inherited narratives. He unites this variety of perspectives with the prevailing sense of chaos and ἀπορία.

By this point in the text Thucydides has given voice to the afflicted, the reaction of those around them, and the survivors. The suffering continues, then, even for those who recovered. Recalling Plutarch’s praise of Thucydides for emotional vividness,228 this passage does indeed invite the reader to consider the emotional state of various individuals present in Athens during the plague. In contrast to the despondency (ἀθυμία) felt by those who had contracted the disease,229 in this passage Thucydides presents the joy (περιχαρεῖ) felt by those who had recovered, as well as their unique capacity to empathize with the dying. Thucydides here conveys to his audience the lingering emotional effects of the plague in its aftermath. From the ἀθυμία addressed in 2.51, Thucydides has showcased the emotional stages of the disease. The overwhelming sense of ἀθυμία felt by the victims soon spread to their family members as they became “weary even of making lamentations of the dying,”230 and those who survived were able to look to the dying in pity and felt joy at their own survival. Nor does Thucydides simply present joy as the result of a healthy prognosis, as the survivors’ foolish optimism (ἐλπίδος...κούφης) is figured as hubristic. The variety of emotional content condensed into so brief a section recalls the skill praised by ancient critiques of Thucydides’ pathetic descriptions.231

228 Plut. De Gloria, 347a-c. See pg. 46-47.
229 Thuc. 2.51.4.
230 Thuc. 2.51.4: ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰς ὀλοφύρσεις τῶν ἀπογιγνομένων τελευτῶντες καὶ οἱ οἰκείοι ἐξέκαμνον ὑπὸ τοῦ πολλοῦ κικοῦ νικώμενοι.
231 See for example, Plut. Nic. 1.1: … ὅρα παρατείσθαι καὶ παρακαλεῖν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας τοῖς συγγράμμασι τούτοις, ὅπως ἐπὶ ταῖς διηγήσεσιν αἷς Θουκυδίδης, αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ
Thucydides also describes in this passage a lack of caretakers which left many isolated whether due to the fear of contagion or else the destruction of entire households (οἱ οἰκεῖοι ἐξέκαμψαν). An individual’s neglect of or inability to care for those who cannot care for themselves is deemed by Yoder to be a common traumatic event or stressor, and Thucydides’ account suggests that this was also a common occurrence during the initial outbreak. Indeed, throughout the plague episode Thucydides presents the pestilence through the perspective of caretakers. He describes the ἀπορία felt by family members who became “weary even of making lamentations of the dying” (2.51.4), the high death rate among caretakers (2.51.4), the neglect of others due to fear of contagion (2.51.5), and the desperation of individuals to unburden themselves of a corpse (2.52). Even the curious lack of fever associated with the disease is described by Thucydides through the eyes of an outsider with the observation that the skin of the victims was “not so very hot to the touch.” It may also be said that the scientific approach so widely recognized in Thucydides’ detailed list of symptoms can be largely attributed to its outside perspective—Thucydides describes the plague in such detail so that it may be easily recognized. I suggest that Thucydides’ focalization on the

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232 Thuc. 2.51.5.
234 Thuc. 2.49.4: καὶ τὸ μὲν ἐξωθὲν ἀπτομένω σῶμα ὡστ’ ἅγαν θερμᾶν ἤν…// And externally the skin was not so very hot to the touch.
235 Thuc. 2.48.3: ἐγὼ δὲ οἶδ᾽ ὅτι ἐγγίσκετο λέξω, καὶ ἄφ᾽ ἄν ἄν τις σκοπῶν, εἴ ποτε καὶ ἀπίθες ἐπιπέδοις, μάλιστ᾽ ἂν ἔχοι τι προειδώδες μὴ ἄγνοειν, ταῦτα δηλόσω αὐτὸς τε νοσήσας καὶ αὐτὸς ὁδόν ἄλλους πάσχοντας.
experiences of caretakers suggests that he sought to remind them of their recent experience(s). Thucydides achieves a similar effect in 7.75 when, rather than highlighting the emotional state of the wounded as they are left behind at the camp in Syracuse, he focuses instead on the departing troops who, hearing the cries of the injured imploring their aid, must leave them behind. The worst aspect for surviving caretakers must have been the feelings of ἀπορία, guilt, and shame for either losing their kin despite all care (2.51.1) or for neglecting the ill (2.51.5) or their burial rites (2.52.4). The emphasis Thucydides places on the perspective(s) of caregivers suggests that he composed the episode with the survivors in mind. For surviving caregivers, Thucydides’ account would have reminded them of their own role(s) in the disaster and allowed for a limited engagement with what must have been a source of trauma for many. Furthermore, his treatment of social dynamics within the larger narrative of the deterioration of Athenian society must have helped to contextualize individual suffering.

The fact that Thucydides describes those who continued to pay visits to their friends as having claim to virtue (οἱ ἄρετῆς τι μεταποιούμενοι) conveys a situation so dire that the perpetuation of friendship and social custom had become indicative of virtue. The eradication of entire households and deaths of some individuals “despite all care” (2.51.1) recalls additional sources of trauma on Yoder’s list— the sudden loss of loved ones, and the witnessing of death or injury.236 Regardless of one’s own physical constitution, as Thucydides takes pains to express the complete pervasion of the plague throughout the

For my own part, I will deliver but the manner of it and lay open only such things from the study of which a person should be best able to identify [the disease], having knowledge of it beforehand, if it should come again, having been both sick of it myself and seen others sick of the same.

city, the witnessing of death and suffering seems nearly inescapable. Although witnessing death was a much more common experience in the ancient world than in the modern-day West, the mass scale and severity of the disease presented by Thucydides is unusual and gruesome. Thucydides therefore illuminates in his account a variety of potential sources of first hand and vicarious trauma.

In what is perhaps the most memorable image imparted by the plague episode, Thucydides departs from the familial scenes discussed in the previous section as he quite literally takes the suffering to the streets, describing “destruction without any order” (ὁ φθόρος…οὐδενί κόσμῳ)—a situation which was aggravated by the evacuation of Attica and the resultant crowding in the city:

οίκιών γὰρ οὐχ ὑπαρχοῦσών, ἀλλ` ἐν καλύβαις πνιγηρᾶς ὀρα ἐποὺς διαπεραμένουν ὁ φθόρος ἐγίγνετο οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ, ἀλλ` καὶ νεκροί ἐπ` ἄλληλοις ἀποθνήσκοντες ἐκείνο καὶ ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἐκαλυτόντες καὶ περὶ τὰς κρήνας ἀπάσας ἡμιθνῆτες τοῦ ὀδατός ἐπιθυμία. τά τε ἱερά ἐν οἷς ἐσκηνητην νεκρῶν πλέα ἢν, αὐτοῦ ἐναποθνησκόντων. ὑπερβιαζομένου γὰρ τοῦ κακοῦ οἱ ἀνθρώποι, οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένωνται, ἐς ὀλίγωριαν ἐτράποντο καὶ ἱερῶν καὶ οἰς ὁμοίως. νόμοι ΤΕ πάντας ξυνεπαράχθησαν οἷς ἐχροῦντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς, ἐθαπτον δὲ ὡς ἐκαστὸς ἐδύνατο. καὶ πολλοὶ ἐς ἀνασχύνουσαν θήκας ἐτράποντο σπάνει τῶν ἐπιθυμοίνων διὰ τὸ συχνὸς ἢπ ἀποτελέσαντο σφίσιν· ἐπὶ πυρῶν γὰρ ἀλλοτρίας φθάνοντες τοὺς νησάντας οἱ μὲν ἐπιθέντες τῶν ἐνατῶν νεκρῶν ύψητον, οἱ δὲ καιμομένου ἄλλου ἐπὶβαλόντες ἀνοβεθεν ὄν φέροιεν ἀπῆσαν.

For having acquired no households of their own [said of the newcomers], but dwelling in huts which at that time of year were stifling, destruction occurred without any order, but the bodies lay on top of one another dying, and they rolled about in the streets and around all the springs, half-dead because they lusted for water. The temples in which they encamped were full of corpses, since their deathbeds were right there: for because the people were brutalized by their suffering, with no way out, they considered in contempt the sacred and profane alike. All customs were thrown into confusion which they previously observed regarding burial, and they were buried as each could manage. And many were driven to
shameful modes of burial on account of the lack of provisions and because there had already been numerous deaths among their own: for they made use of other people’s funeral pyres—some, anticipating those who had built the pyre, either by placing their own corpse atop the pyre and lighting it, or, by bringing a corpse to a pyre already burning, throwing it on top of the other corpse, and running away. [Thuc. 2.52.2-4]

Thucydides’ account continues to escalate with the disregard for burial rites. He begins with the influx of people from the countryside and the subsequent crowding within the city.237 Up until this point Thucydides’ description of the plague has avoided the topic of crowding within the city, but its inclusion here expands the narrative from the isolation of victims and the hesitancy to visit relatives to include the excess of citizens within the city walls. Thucydides has struck another point of contrast, as those who suffer in isolation do so in the midst of a crowded city. The reader is once more invited to glimpse a variety of misfortunes as civic order in Athens continues to unravel. Thucydides conveys the ongoing nature of Athenian suffering again through his preference for the imperfect tense.238 After he illustrates those still suffering the ravages of plague, Thucydides shifts his focus to the disposal of the dead. His description of people using other people’s funeral pyres draws distinct attention to the corruption of burial rites. The image of death Thucydides presents within the city also complements the earlier observation that the

237 It is also worth noting Woodman’s observation that Pericles stresses in 2.13.2 the policy which resettled citizens from the countryside in the city, leading to Thucydides’ observation in 2.52.1 that the influx of people had made conditions much worse during the plague. This juxtaposition aids further comparison between Periclean Athens and the chaos-ridden plague episode. Woodman (1988) 34.
238 ἐγίγνετο, ἐκείνο, ἐκαλίνδοῦντο, ἐσκήνητο, ἢν, ἐχρῶντο, ἔθαπτον, ἐδώνατο, ύφῆσαν, ἀπῆσαν.
Spartans were laying waste to the countryside, effectively juxtaposing the destruction of pestilence and war, and city and countryside respectively.²³⁹

Thucydides has transitioned from speaking about citizens in the domestic context to masses dying in public spaces. From the individuals previously discussed whom he deemed virtuous for continuing to care for their friends, he here describes the callous acts of individuals eager to unburden themselves of a corpse. The sentiment shared by family members who were too overwhelmed to even lament the dead (2.51.5) has here escalated from ἀπορία to an utter disregard for burial custom, and soon, all social norms. Yoder deems the sudden change of rules or social norms a potentially traumatic event,²⁴⁰ and the disregard for burial customs was indeed a serious breach of Hellenic custom.

Furthermore, death within a temple was considered sacrilege.²⁴¹ The men rolling about the streets (ἐν ταῖς ὀδοῖς ἐκκαλινθῶντο) suggest the interruption of all business in the city, and Thucydides presents an image of Athens at a standstill. The victims’ lust for water (τοῦ ὁδατοῦ ἐπιθυμία) also harkens back to the lust for water which drove many to hurl themselves down wells out of uncontrollable thirst (2.49). While Thucydides originally cast this thirst as a personal tragedy (for those who flung themselves into wells did so due to lack of supervision), here the result is a crowding in the streets—a communal problem. Thucydides presents a gradual process whereby the plague increasingly overwhelms Athens and its civic institutions.

²³⁹ Morgan (1994) 206.
²⁴¹ Hornblower (1997) 325. See also Parker (1983) 33, n. 5.
Conclusion

Thucydides was lauded in the ancient sources for his vividness of description and his ability, according to Plutarch, to render his narrative “like a painting.” Plutarch states that Thucydides sought to instill in the listener the same emotions (πάθη) of amazement (ἐκπληκτικὰ) and consternation (ταρακτικὰ) as those who beheld the events described. Because these emotions are often characteristic of a traumatic event, Plutarch’s emotional response to Thucydides suggests that Thucydides sought to imbue his narrative with emotional realism. However, the potential benefit of writing and reading a vivid portrayal of a traumatic event is rarely considered. Although Thucydides does not claim to provide such a vivid account for the sake of helping himself or his reader to work through their trauma, modern trauma theory has shown how an empathetic historiographical account can aid this process nonetheless.

Thucydides’ ability to craft an emotive account of the plague is due at least in part to his use of intertextuality. Thucydides’ sharp divergence from the Iliad while maintaining the connection between war and pestilence voiced by Achilles in Book 1 emphasizes that in Thucydides we encounter something new— a plague of epic proportions that functions independently of a vengeful god. Thucydides uses the personification of the pestilence along with militaristic language to present the plague as an enemy of the Athenians at a time when a military invasion was already underway. I suggest that the convergence of language and themes pertaining to pestilence and war likely served to instill a sense of anxiety in the reader. Furthermore, his use of the poetic

\[^{242}\text{Plut., } De \text{ Gloria, } 347a-c.\]
\[^{243}\text{Caruth (2016) 11-12. These emotions are often characteristic of a traumatic event in which the individual is overwhelmed by the severity of their situation and their immediate ability to cope is impeded.}\]
ἐγκατασκῆψαι [i.e., the plague struck the Athenians like Zeus’ lightning bolt] introduces a dramatic element to his portrayal of the pest, thus elevating his historical account to the level of tragedy.

Through the reversal of the idealized Athens articulated in Pericles’ preceding funeral speech, Thucydides presents the destruction of individuals and social groups by the plague until Athens is eventually overcome by ἀνομία— a state which represents the breakdown of social order and expectations that can occur during events of mass trauma, further validating a trauma-based approach to this episode. Thucydides’ inversion of the traditional relationship between pestilence and ἀνομία shown by Demont effectively communicates the state of ἀπορία stemming from the collapse of social institutions and rituals— a state that modern psychology deems consistent with social or collective trauma.

Thanks to modern developments in trauma theory we can approach Thucydides’ account of the plague with an awareness of the traumatizing nature of pestilence and an appreciation for Thucydides’ ability to capture so many variations of the Athenian experience. His extensive use of contrast and shifting narrative perspective emphasize the severity of the disease as well as its emotional toll. Thucydides’ historical account of the plague documents the effects of the disease in Athens while simultaneously crafting an empathetic narrative of vivid description capable of facilitating the reader’s emotional and imaginative engagement with their own experience of the plague.
Chapter 3: Memorialization

Introduction

This chapter considers the memorializing effect of Thucydides’ plague episode. I begin by examining Thucydides’ professed interest in recording events for posterity alongside Herodotus’ explicit aim to preserve the events about which he writes lest they “become extinguished by time…and lose their glory.”244 I contend that memorialization is an integral element of Greek historiography, and moreover, that the ancient historians were explicit about this goal. I suggest that through the vivid narrativization of the Athenian plague, Thucydides created what Assmann refers to as a “figure of memory,” 245 capable of being subsumed into Athenian collective memory.

The memorializing aspect of the plague episode is all the more pertinent given the silence on the topic of the plague in Athenian public discourse following the event. I argue that Thucydides’ account of the plague, which presents a historical record of events imbued with emotional realism, encourages a deeper engagement with trauma than even the Athenian logoi epitaphioi for the war dead. I suggest that the vividness of Thucydides’ account validated Athenian suffering and offered his readership a memorialization of the event which they were unlikely to have received through traditional institutions.

I then consider Thucydides’ catalogue of suffering (παθήματα) in 1.23 to argue that Thucydides introduces the plague in conjunction with a variety of other disasters in order to allude to a longstanding tradition of disaster narratives in the Greek and Near

244 Hdt. 1.1: τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται… ἀκλεῖα γένηται.…
245 i.e., a cultural formation which maintains the memory of a fixed point in the past. Assmann (1995) 129.
Eastern traditions. I provide a brief overview of the scholarship on the intertextuality of this tradition to suggest that Thucydides engaged with this story pattern to portray the Athenian suffering experienced during the plague as the single greatest calamity incurred by natural forces at a time when, judging by Thucydides’ statement (1.23) and literary tradition, calamities were the most frequent and most severe. This assessment further validates a reading of the plague episode through the lens of trauma theory as it views the suffering Thucydides illuminates as more than rhetorical effect, but rather, as an integral element of his history.

Finally, I return to Katherine Anne Porter and the influenza pandemic to consider the reasons behind the lack of historiography following the outbreak. I consider how Porter and Thucydides each managed to present pestilence as an integral part of the wartime experience while traditional narratives of memorialization tend to separate the two. Thucydides’ use of militaristic language helped to further weave together the two narratives of destruction, and to emphasize the lack of burial rites for plague victims compared to the Athenian war dead by juxtaposing the plague episode with Pericles’ speech. I suggest that through this comparison and the militaristic language used in describing the deaths of plague victims, Thucydides wove together the deaths of the plague victims with the deaths incurred by warfare to justify their remembrance as part of the larger narrative of the Peloponnesian War. I conclude with the observation that Thucydides ought to be commended for including a critical examination of pestilence in his wartime account which proves more comprehensive than that of early WWI historians.
Thucydides’ Account as Memorialization

As had been stressed repeatedly throughout this thesis, the Athenian plague received no form of public commemoration despite its immense death toll. Modern trauma theory considers pandemics and epidemics capable of inducing massive group trauma, and the Athenian silence on the topic of the plague with regards to memorialization and even dramatic performance is behavior indicative of collective trauma. Given the absence of public commemoration following the pandemic, Thucydides’ account of the plague may be taken in two ways: as a historiographical account of the disaster that enables the working-through process, and as a narrative memorialization of the event.

It must be said that while Thucydides does not claim to document the plague for the purposes of memorialization, memorialization is an integral element of his historiography. Indeed, Thucydides states that his motivation for recording the events of the Peloponnesian War is for the knowledge of future generations:

διότι δ’ ἔλυσαν, τὰς αἰτίας προώγραψα πρῶτον καὶ τὰς διαφοράς, τοῦ μὴ τινα ζητήσαι ποτε ἔξ ὧτον τοσοῦτος πόλεμος τοῖς Ἐλλησι κατέστη.

The reasons why they dissolved it [The Thirty Years’ Peace] and the causes of complaints I have written down first, in order that no one should ever seek out the cause which brought about such a war upon the Greeks. [Thuc. 1.23.5]

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246 An estimated quarter to a third of Athens’ population. Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 1; Mikalson (2009) 326. According to Thucydides no less than 4,400 infantry and 300 cavalrymen died in addition to a “vast number of the multitude that was never ascertained.” Thuc. 2.48.3, 3.87.3: τοῦ δὲ ἄλλου δῆλου ἄνεξεύρετος ἀριθμός.

247 See Chapter 2.
The documentation of events for posterity is closely connected to memorialization. While historiography may draw on a variety of sources, it is the transformation of these sources into a narrative form which ultimately defines the practice. In the plague episode—and indeed in his work overall—Thucydides goes beyond the death toll given in Book 3 to offer his reader a vivid narration of the events as they unfolded. He also introduces the plague episode with another comment on the posterity of his work:

legateō mēn oūn peri autōs ὡς ἐκαστος γιγνώσκει καὶ ἵατρός καὶ ἰδιώτης, ἀφ᾽ ὃτου εἰκὸς ἦν γενέσθαι αὐτό, καὶ τὰς αἰτίας ἀστίνας νομίζει τοσαύτης μεταβολῆς ἰκανᾶς εἶναι δύναμιν ἐς τὸ μεταστήσαι σχεῦν· ἐγὼ δὲ οἶνον τε ἐγίνετο λέξο, καὶ ἀφ᾽ ὃν ἂν τις σκοπῶν, εἰ ποτὲ καὶ αὐθές ἐπιπέσοι, μᾶλιςτ᾽ ἂν ἔχου τι προειδός μὴ ἀγνοεῖν, ταῦτα ἥπλωσο αὐτός τε νοσήσας καὶ αὐτός ἰδὼν ἄλλους πάσχωντας.

Now let every man, physician or other, concerning the ground of this sickness, whence it sprung, and what causes he thinks able to produce so great a disturbance, speak according to his own knowledge. For my own part, I will deliver but the manner of it and lay open only such things from the study of which a person should be best able to identify [the disease], having knowledge of it beforehand, if it should come again, having been both sick of it myself and seen others sick of the same. [Thuc. 2.48.3]

The information with which Thucydides claims future generations will be able to recognize the plague (should it return) implies the future remembrance of Thucydides’ account and consequently the horrifying nature by which he presents the plague’s destruction. This focus on posterity is also evident in Herodotus’ opening statement, which suggests that the ancient historians were acutely aware of the memorializing function of their work, which they inherited from Greek epic.248

248 See for example, Goldhill (1991) 166: “That the declaration and preservation of kleos is a crucial function of the poet’s voice in ancient Greek culture is a commonplace.”
ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται, τά τε ἄλλα καὶ δι’ ἥν αἰτήν ἐπολέμησαν ἄλληλοις.

This is the display of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that the things brought about by mankind may neither be extinguished by time, nor the great and marvelous deeds, some exhibited by the Hellenes and others the Barbarians, lose their glory, and many other things and also in particular the reason that they went to war with one another. [Hdt. 1.1.1]

While Thucydides does not claim explicitly to have created in the plague episode a monument to the event, memorialization is nevertheless an inevitable result of such a detailed historical account. Both Herodotus and Thucydides lay claim to a desire to record events which they deem remarkable, and, in the case of Thucydides, to leave behind a possession for all time. (κτήμα τε ἔς αἰεί). Through the vivid narrativization of a traumatic event in Athenian history, Thucydides created what Assmann refers to as a “figure of memory”—a cultural formation which maintains the memory of a fixed point in the past. Recalling the importance of narrativization for an event to be instilled in collective memory, it can be said that Thucydides’ account served as a means for remembrance, and that the emotional realism it contains allowed for emotional engagement with a traumatic event in Athenian history while also ensuring its place in Athenian collective memory. Given the large-scale suffering incurred by the plague it is therefore unsurprising that Thucydides should wish to make a memorial to this

249 Thuc. 1.22.4: κτήμα τε ἔς αἰεί μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραρχήμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται. See p. 48 for more on this passage.
250 Assmann (1995) 129. Note that Assmann separates figures of memory into two categories: cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance).
251 In order for an event to be subsumed into collective memory, it first requires narrativization. It is by simplified narratives that events are transmitted, and thus the “resultant memory is shaped by the characteristics of its narrative.” Steinbock (2013) 17. Refer to Chapter 1, “Collective Memory Defined,” for further discussion of narrativization and collective memory.
tumultuous event in Athenian history. His contribution to Athenian collective memory is all the more conspicuous given the absence of the plague from contemporary public discourse.

As previously discussed, the Athenian plague did not receive public commemoration, nor was there an equivalent to the *logoi epitaphioi* for plague victims. Public funeral orations can serve as an effective means by which to encourage social cohesion following disaster. They emphasize communal glory while they also condition citizens for further ordeals.252 While funeral orations may help individuals to cope in the short term, their purpose is ultimately to encourage citizens to accept the wartime actions of the state despite the loss of life incurred. Funeral orations offer what Schick refers to as a “truncated form of mourning” which prioritizes narrative over individualism and does not promote social re-engagement outside the orthodoxy. These are what Schick terms “meaning-making narratives,” as they are targeted towards citizens desperate to contextualize their recent experiences. Notably, Schick cites as an example the heroic-soldier narrative prevalent in the aftermath of WWI, whereby the horrors of war are shielded from the public, and the war dead are assumed to be “blissfully happy.”253 The overly-simplistic nature of funeral orations attempts to assign meaning to disaster but ultimately sacrifice a deeper engagement with the traumatic loss incurred.

I argue that Thucydides’ account of the plague, which presents a historical record of events imbued with emotional realism, encourages a deeper engagement with trauma than even the funeral orations for the war dead. In LaCapra’s discussion of working-

253 Schick (2011) 1843-1844. For the heroic-soldier narrative, Schick studies the works of Jay Winter and Siegfried Sassoon. For discussion of the war dead and their portrayal as “blissfully happy,” Schick cites Sassoon, 364.
through trauma, he maintains that the process of mourning and modes of critical thought offer the opportunity to make distinctions or articulations (however problematic) which function as limits to grief.\footnote{LaCapra (2014) 22.} The commemoration of the war dead by Pericles served a decidedly different purpose than the ἀπορία-filled plague episode. The victims of the plague were random, and their funeral rites neglected. Without memorializing the effects of plague, individuals are left to grieve their own experiences independently, as was the case following the Spanish Flu pandemic. As shared memories are crucial to the preservation of social identity, “the relative absence of pandemic memory suggests a double loss, both the loss of the victims and the loss of survivors’ group identity.”\footnote{Davis (2011) 60.} Memorializing can be healing as it can help to provide meaning for the losses sustained amidst the chaos and destruction of conflict. By testifying in his account to the Athenian suffering incurred by the plague, Thucydides created a literary monument to plague victims, who, judging by Thucydides’ account as well as the Kerameikos burial pit, received only haphazard burial rites.\footnote{Thuc. 2.52.4. For further discussion on the Kerameikos burial pit, see Chapter 1, “Literature Review.”}

While literary memorialization is seldom considered with respect to the plague episode, it has been applied effectively to the Sicilian Expedition by Rachel Bruzzone. She argues that Thucydides’ vivid description of the Great Harbour battle in Sicily mimics the imagery of a funerary monument and serves to create an ekphrastic image of the Athenians in battle. Taken along with the funerary elements in Nicias’ speech and Thucydides’ own epitaph for Nicias, Bruzzone contends that Thucydides crafts at the end
of his Sicilian Expedition a “substitute for the proper, relevant memorial the fallen were denied in real life.” Bruzzone examines the visual experience Thucydides creates in this episode and, as has been observed here in the plague episode, his preference for the imperfect tense. She argues that Thucydides created a monument to the valor of the Athenian troops in Sicily by “uncoupling the process of memorialization from the limit of the physical world.”

I argue that the plague episode serves a similar, memorializing function. Thucydides highlights the lack of memorialization afforded to plague victims by preceding the plague episode with Pericles’ Funeral Oration, effectively juxtaposing the commemoration of the war dead with those unfortunate plague victims who were frequently denied proper funeral rites due to fear of further spreading the disease. Unlike the haphazard disposal of plague victims, the remains of soldiers who had fallen in battle would be gathered from the funeral pyre and returned to the city for a public display organized by the tribes. The bones would be laid out for two days before a ceremonial procession to the Kerameikos accompanied by one empty bier symbolically representing the dead who had not been found and recovered. Not only does Thucydides effectively juxtapose Pericles’ Funeral Oration with the neglect of burial rites during the plague, but the neglect of customs is also recognized by trauma theory to be a traumatic stressor. I suggest that Thucydides’ plague episode may be taken as a

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258 See Chapter 2.
261 See Thuc. 2.52 for funerary details.
262 Thuc. 2.34.
literary memorial for those who died during the plague. Furthermore, I suggest that the vividness of the plague episode offered survivors a deeper engagement with trauma than was possible in the *logoi epitaphioi*. Rather than shy away from the horrors of the plague, Thucydides put them on display.

It is clear from the condensed nature of Thucydides’ narrative, his use of ἐνάργεια, and the variety of perspectives included that Thucydides sought to impart upon his readership the severe nature of the Athenian plague. Indeed, in the overview of his work Thucydides includes the plague alongside other wartime and even natural disasters, all of which he describes as sufferings (παθήματα):

τῶν δὲ πρῶτον ἔργων μέγιστον ἐπράξη τὸ Μήδικόν, καὶ τούτῳ ὀμοί δυόν ναυμαχίαιν καὶ πεζομαχίαιν ταχεῖαν τὴν κρίσιν ἔσχεν. τούτου δὲ τοῦ πολέμου μήκός τε μέγα προύβη, παθήματα τε ξυνηνέχθη γενέσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τῇ Ἑλλάδι οἷα οὕς ἔτερα ἐν ἱσοχρόνῳ. οὕτε γὰρ πόλεις τοσαίδε ληφθέσαι ἡρμώθησαν, οἳ μὲν ἤπο βαρβάρων, οἳ δ᾽ ὑπὸ σφόν αὐτῶν ἀντιπολεμοῦντων (εἰσὶ δ᾽ αἱ καὶ οἰκίτωρας μετέβαλον ἄλισκόμεναι), οὕτε φυγαί τοσαίδε ἀνθρώπων καὶ φόνος, οἳ μὲν κατ᾽ αὐτὸν τὸν πόλεμον, ὦ δὲ διὰ τὸ στασιάζειν. τὰ τε πρῶτον ἀκοῆς μὲν λεγόμενα, ἔργω δὲ σπανιότερον βεβαιούμενα ὅσκ ἁπάσα κατέστη, σεισμῶν τε πέρι, οἳ ἐπὶ πλείστον ἁμα μέρος γῆς καὶ ἰσχυρότατοι οἳ αὐτοὶ ἐπέσχοι, ἡλίου τε ἐκλείψεως, αἱ πυκνότερα παρὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ πρὶν χρόνου μνημονεύματα ξυνέβησαν, αὐχοί τε ἔστι παρ᾽ οἷς μεγάλοι καὶ ἂν αὐτῶν καὶ λιμοί καὶ ἡ οὕς ἡκιστὰ βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθείρασα ἡ λοιμώδῃς νόσος· ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα μετὰ τοῦτο τοῦ πολέμου ἁμα ξυνεπέθετο.

The greatest accomplishment in previous time was the Persian war, but nevertheless this matter was quickly determined in two battles by sea and two by land. But this war progressed at a great length, and in the course of it, sufferings occurred in Greece the like of which had never occurred in any equal period of time. For neither were so many cities made desolate after having been taken, some by the Barbarians, and others by [the Greeks] themselves, waging war against one another (and some, having been captured, were entered into by new inhabitants), nor was there ever such exile and killings of men, whether in the course of the war itself or as the result of civil strife. And so the stories of former times, which were
handed down by oral tradition, but very rarely confirmed by action, were no longer doubted: about earthquakes, for instance, for they prevailed over a very large part of the earth and were likewise most formidable; and eclipses of the sun, which occurred at more frequent intervals than those remembered from all previous times, and there were great droughts also in some places with resultant famines; and lastly, the extremely harmful and pestilential disease which had destroyed not a small part. For all these disasters combined in attacking them simultaneously with this war. [Thuc. 1.23.1-3.]

In contrast to the Persian War which Thucydides claims here ended swiftly with only a few key battles, the Peloponnesian War is all the more significant for its length and the sufferings (παθήματα) which occurred in rapid succession. The vague term παθήματα appears to encapsulate Thucydides’ lengthy summary of events which includes suffering that is characteristic of warfare (city-sacking, civil strife, exiles, and killings) as well as natural phenomena (earthquakes, solar eclipses, droughts, famines, and the plague). It is the convergence of these events that elevates the Peloponnesian War beyond the dismissive description Thucydides dedicates to the Greek conflict with Persia. While Thucydides uses ἀμα in 1.23.3 to stress the contemporaneous nature of the events described, μετὰ τοῦτο, “along with this,” stresses the relationship between the many sufferings (παθήματα) and the war itself. For Thucydides, the link between the suffering incurred from warfare and from natural phenomena appears indelible. He restates the convergence of a variety of natural disasters in Book 3.266

265 LSJ, s.v. “συνεπιθήμημ,” n. II.
266 Thuc. 3.87: τοῦ δ’ ἐπιγενέσθεν καιροῦ ὁ νόσος τὸ δεύτερον ἐπέπεσε τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, ἐκλειποῦσα μὲν οὐδένα χρόνον τὸ παντάπασιν, ἐγένετο δὲ τὶς δῆμως διοικητῇ, παρέμεινε δὲ τὸ μὲν ὕστερον οὕκ ἔλασσον ἐνιαυτοῦ, τὸ δὲ πρῶτον καὶ δύο ἐπτ., ὡστε Ἀθηναίους γε μὴ εἶναι ὅτι μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἐπίσει καὶ ἐκάκωσε τὴν δύναμιν· τετρακοσίων γὰρ ὀπλιτῶν καὶ τετρακισχίλιων οὐκ ἔλασσος ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν τάξεων καὶ τριακοσίων ἵππων, τοῦ δὲ ἄλλου ὀχλοῦ ἀνεξεύρετος ἀρίθμος, ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ σεσμοὶ τότε τῆς γῆς, ἐν τε Ἀθηναῖς καὶ ἐν Εὐβοίᾳ καὶ ἐν Βοιωτοῖς καὶ μᾶλθα ἐν Ὀρχομενῷ τῷ Βοιωτίῳ.
The παθήματα passage is a source of contention amongst scholars, who tend to either disregard the passage entirely or to downplay its role in relation to Thucydides’ historiographical method. The chief rationale behind this suspicion is that the connection Thucydides seems to suggest between natural disasters and human events appears inconsistent with Thucydides’ scientific approach to his material. However, this connection is consistent with archaic Greek thought which attributes natural disasters to divine punishment for human transgressions. Other scholars have made the case, rightly so, that it is not helpful to our understanding of Thucydides’ work to “sweep under the rug, make improbable excuses, or awkward explanations, for what does not conform to our preconceptions, as if the historian has ‘slipped’ a bit from the program.” Nor is this thesis concerned with what insight into Thucydides’ personal religiosity might be gleaned from this passage. It is more fruitful to examine instead the grouping of simultaneous (ũμα) disasters as a topos in Greek literature, and to consider how intertextuality might strengthen the argument that Thucydides presented the plague

And with the arrival of winter the disease fell upon the Athenians a second time, having at no time ceased altogether, but nevertheless there was some cessation [of it]. The second (wave) lasted no less than a year, the first [having lasted] two years, such that there was nothing that oppressed the Athenians and reduced their power more than this: for no less than four thousand and four hundred of the hoplites in the ranks died and three hundred cavalrymen, as well as a vast number of the multitude that was never ascertained. And at that time many earthquakes occurred, in Athens and Euboea and in Boeotia, and particularly in Orxomenus, in Boeotia.

267 Hornblower comments that Thucydides’ claim that natural disasters were more abundant during the Peloponnesian War has proven “an embarrassment to his commentators.” Hornblower (1991) 63. Gomme is at a loss as to whether or not Thucydides believed there was some connection between natural and human events. Gomme (1956) 151. Rhodes has remarked that “By the end of his catalogue Thucydides has departed from the rationalism which we tend to associate with him.” Rhodes (2014) 207. Cf. Bruzzone (2017) 882.


269 Kallet (2013) 360-361. For a defense of the παθήματα passage, see also Bruzzone (2017).

270 Thuc. 1.23.3.
episode as what Woodman describes as “a ‘disaster narrative’ of the most vivid and dramatic type.”

The disasters Thucydides lists in 1.23 appear at first to be misleading given the lack of attention Thucydides devotes to them throughout his historiographical account. The droughts (αὐχμοί) Thucydides mentions in 1.23 do not appear anywhere else in his narrative, while the eruption of Mt. Etna in 3.116 is left aside entirely. It can also be demonstrated that the scale and frequency of solar eclipses was less impressive than Thucydides suggests. As Hornblower states, Thucydides’ dramatic overview seems to allude to a narrative that is much more sensationalized and rhetorical than Thucydides’ account actually is, and with less attention paid to natural phenomena, human suffering, and portends than this overview would suggest. The only significant attention Thucydides devotes to a disaster narrative alluded to in 1.23 is the plague episode, which, as mentioned previously, dramatically concludes his list of natural phenomena with the longest separation of an article from its noun in extant Greek prose.

It is clear that the Athenian plague (λοιμώδης νόσος) is the focal point for 1.23 and functions as the climax to Thucydides’ list of παθήματα. Scholars have identified the juxtaposition of blessings with sufferings and war with plague exhibited in 1.23 as a

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273 Thucydides’ statement on the unusual frequency of eclipses in the Peloponnesian War years is “not accurate,” and “some allowance for exaggeration must be made” regarding his account of at least one of the two solar eclipses he describes: Stephenson and Fatoohi (2001) 248. Cf. Bruzzone (2017) 897, n. 39.
conventional and well-established topos by the time in which Thucydides writes.277 In Works and Days, after warning that hubristic behavior (ἦβρις) will always incur retribution (δίκη), Hesiod compares the just city with the unjust city. The just city will enjoy innumerable blessings, and the unjust will suffer “famine and plague together” (λιμὸν ὀμοῖ καὶ λοιμὸν) and their army will be destroyed.278 The Iliad also hints at the connection between war and pestilence in Book 1 with the Greek army being subdued by both war and pestilence (πόλεμός τε...καὶ λοιμός (1.61)), with this passage being the first attested use of λοιμός. Bruzzone suggests that λοιμός is a rare word that is the “preferred term” for plague in the πόλεμός/λοιμός tradition and serves as an indicator of this story pattern.279 The grouping together of blessings and misfortunes, war and natural disasters continues in later authors including Herodotus, who states that more evils occurred in Greece during the reigns of Darius and Artaxerxes than in other times, and that those misfortunes were accompanied by an extraordinary earthquake at Delos.280 Given the longstanding tradition of both the πόλεμός/λοιμός story pattern and the tradition of manifold disasters accompanying times of warfare, it appears that Thucydides was eager to evoke this story pattern even before the plague episode in 2.47, thus casting a grim shadow over the narrative to come.

As Bruzzone has shown, if Thucydides did indeed take natural and wartime disasters in 1.23 in concert in order to allude to a longstanding tradition of disaster narratives, then the plague’s pride of place at the end of Thucydides’ list of disasters and the plague episode in Book 2 serve to confirm the extraordinary, large-scale nature of the Peloponnesian War.\textsuperscript{281} Through his allusions to the literary tradition of warfare and natural disasters occurring together, Thucydides cast the Athenian plague as the single greatest example of suffering at a time when suffering was abundant. If ancient literary tradition saw fit for warfare and natural disaster to go hand in hand, then Thucydides created in the intense suffering of the plague episode a worthy match to what he believed would prove to be a great war most worthy of relation.\textsuperscript{282} Not only did Thucydides create a “figure of memory,” to use Assmann’s term,\textsuperscript{283} but he did so through the creation of an account which portrays the Athenian suffering experienced during the plague as the single greatest calamity incurred by natural forces at a time when, judging by Thucydides’ statement (1.23) and literary tradition, calamities were most frequent and most severe.

The relative absence of the plague from Athenian discourse is contrasted sharply by Thucydides’ emphasis on the severity of the plague and its effects. Emphasis on the level of devastation incurred is a trope of the historians which is a technique owed (at least in part) to the influence of rhetoric. Recent scholarship shows that ancient historians wrote rhetorically to “intrigue, astound, excite, distress, and persuade their audiences.”\textsuperscript{284}

\textsuperscript{281} Bruzzone (2017) 902.
\textsuperscript{282} Thuc. 1.1. τὸν πόλεμον… μέγαν τε ἔσεσθαι καὶ ἀξιώτατον…
\textsuperscript{283} Assmann (1995) 129.
\textsuperscript{284} Rutherford (2007) 510.
According to Rutherford, a part of the rhetorical process was the emphasis on the gravity of the subject at hand as well as the magnitude of suffering incurred, with Thucydides’ statement of interest combining both.\textsuperscript{285} With regard to Thucydides’ plague episode, his utilization of this trope serves to elevate the subject matter while it simultaneously validates the suffering that his Athenian audience was engaged in. When Thucydides calls the plague too difficult to describe (κρεῖσσον λόγῳ)\textsuperscript{286} and states that many other aspects must be passed over (πολλὰ καὶ ἄλλα παραλιπόντι), \textsuperscript{287} he deploys the “inexpressibility motif” to magnify the gravity of his subject matter.\textsuperscript{288} Through the emphasis Thucydides places on the severity of his subject matter, we may consider Thucydides as having offered Athenians affected by the plague a narrative suited to their remembering community\textsuperscript{289}—namely, that the immense scale of the disaster emphasizes its importance and justifies its remembrance. His account also features the positive example of valorous individuals who continued to care for their friends despite the fear of contagion,\textsuperscript{290} thereby memorializing the virtue of caretakers alongside the severity of the disease. Such a narrative could then serve to bind individuals together by fostering a shared sense of identity in the aftermath of a traumatic event.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{285} Rutherford (2007) 510; Thuc. 1.23.
\textsuperscript{286} Thuc. 2.50.1.
\textsuperscript{289} Remembering communities derive identity from the remembrance of a shared experience. Although each individual is unique in their experience of an event, collective remembrance through the perpetuation of simplified narratives fosters identity and community and can validate individual experience. It should also be noted that these simplified narratives are often in service to the remembering community. Steinbock (2013) 17. See Chapter 1, “Collective Memory Defined.”
\textsuperscript{290} Thuc. 2.51.5.
Thucydides’ account provides an enduring memory of the plague by bridging his own personal experience with the collective one and thus validating the Athenian experience. Like Porter’s fictionalized account of her own experience with the Spanish Flu pandemic, Thucydides’ vivid account is contrasted by the relative silence on the topic of the plague in Athenian theatre and other forms of memorialization. The result in both cases is a work of collective memory that renders elements of personal narrative, literature, and history into an aesthetic form. The vividness of Thucydides’ portrayal of the plague, which he describes as visiting individuals with “a violence beyond human endurance”292 strengthens his cast of the Peloponnesian War as the “greatest upheaval to have happened both to the Greeks, and to some part of the barbarians, so to speak, for the majority of mankind.”293 As the Peloponnesian War presented a great upheaval to Athenian life, so too was this upheaval felt through the natural occurrence of the plague, and Thucydides contributes to collective memorialization through his detailed account which does not shy away from the description of traumatic events.

**Spanish Flu and (Lack of) Historiography**

With respect to the detailed description Thucydides provides of the Athenian plague, it is once again worthwhile to return to the topic of Spanish Flu as a comparative case to consider what happens when contemporary historiography is unwilling to grapple with the effects of pestilence. The Spanish Flu caused more deaths than the Great War

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292 Thuc. 2.50.
293 Thuc. 1.1.2: κίνησις γὰρ αὕτη μεγίστη δή τοῖς Ἑλλησιν ἐγένετο καὶ μέρει τινὶ τῶν βαρβάρων, ὡς δὲ εἰπέτι καὶ ἐπὶ πλείστων ἀνθρώπων.
itself, and while the most recent study estimates a death toll of 50 million, the study also notes that “even this vast figure may be substantially lower than the real toll, perhaps as much as 100 percent understated.” Despite the massive death toll incurred, historiography of the Spanish Flu pandemic is characterized by sporadic surges in publication according to contemporary concerns, and virtually no references to Spanish Flu exist in literature and popular culture. Publications circulated in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic aimed at making medical sense out of the event, and lack historical perspective. Historians on the other hand maintained an almost complete silence regarding the pandemic despite a prominent interest in WWI. Any mention of the pandemic tended to be downplayed, limited to only a few brief sentences, or examined in conjunction with other ailments. As Howard Philips notes in his survey of post-Spanish Flu historiography, even the medical historian Sir Andrew Macphail combined his discussion of the Spanish Flu with “other infectious diseases” in his chapter titled “Diseases of War” in his official history of the Canadian medical services in WWI. The unwillingness of historians to grapple with the socio-cultural effects of the Spanish Flu is perhaps best exemplified by a comment made in the Casualties and War Statistics volume of Britain’s official History of the Great War published in 1931: “Apart from reproducing…the recorded figures for influenza in the British armies at home and abroad during the Great War little need be said about the disease.”

294 Guy Beiner et al (2009) 41. See also: (Davis 2011) 63.
296 Davis (2011) 55-56.
The pandemic had largely disappeared from cultural memory until it came to the forefront of public historical consciousness during the recent outbreak of H1N1 in 2009, and likewise has been the subject of “sporadic surges in publication.” It was not until 1961 that a rudimentary social history of the pandemic was first outlined in Adolph Hoehling’s *The Great Epidemic*. Academic publications were also impacted by shifting social anxieties. For example, the public uneasiness surrounding the 1957 Asian influenza epidemic postponed for a decade the publication of the first global survey of the pandemic addressed to a general readership.

During WWI, news reports on the pandemic were frequently suppressed so as not to “demoralise the war effort.” US efforts to downplay the pandemic’s impact indicate that the agency most capable of studying the outbreak of the disease deliberately diverted the public’s attention. When physicians were unable to find an effective treatment for Spanish Flu, widespread panic broke out. The disease became widely known as “the plague,” which continues to baffle oral historians. Frustrations gave way to a climate of suspicion as well; Katherine Anne Porter captured this suspicion in *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* with her reference to a popular WWI era conspiracy theory that the spread of influenza was a form of biological warfare, with the germ having been brought by a German ship to Boston. Thucydides captures a similar suspicion in his account, when

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303 Beiner (2009) 40. For further explanation of the insufficient documentation of the pandemic, see Davis (2011) 63-65.
he remarks upon the rumor that the Peloponnesians had caused the plague by tampering with Athens’ cisterns.\textsuperscript{307} The hostile relationship between the anxieties of war and pestilence in both cases contributed to a climate of suspicion and hopelessness.

Modern historians have largely attributed the subsequent lack of collective memorialization of the pandemic following the First World War to the politicization of cultural memory— while memorials for the war dead could focus on narratives of valor and sacrifice in order to promote nationalism, those who died from illness did so at random.\textsuperscript{308} A similar dynamic appears to have been at work in Ancient Greece, as the Athenian plague was exempt from memorialization while the war dead were commemorated by memorials and funeral orations. Unlike the plague victims, those who died in warfare did so gloriously, as the ability to fight as hoplites in close quarters was considered to be the “highest and most glorious expression of the masculine ideal.”\textsuperscript{309}

**Pestilence in Wartime**

Despite the tendency in public memorialization to separate themes of pestilence and warfare, Thucydides and Katherine Anne Porter nevertheless did treat pestilence as integral element of the wars they were each writing about. In *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, Miranda’s illness dominates the novel, while her frustration with the war seeps into her hallucinations and dreams. She even goes so far as to suppose that her illness could be

\textsuperscript{307} Thuc. 2.48.2.

\textsuperscript{308} Davis (2011) 60-61. See also Byerly (2005).

traced back to the beginning of the war.\textsuperscript{310} Porter indelibly links Miranda’s illness with the larger events of the First World War, thereby casting Miranda’s illness as “symbolic of the spiritual malaise of the twentieth century that nurtured catastrophic world wars.”\textsuperscript{311} Like the war, Miranda’s illness concludes with Armistice Day.\textsuperscript{312}

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Thucydides’ work is predominantly concerned with the events of the Peloponnesian War. For Thucydides, the plague is a part of a larger narrative; for Porter, the Spanish Flu is the narrative. In both works the relationship between pestilence and warfare serves to reinforce the severity of both, and both Thucydides and Porter are able to connect their respective plague to a larger narrative predominated by war in collective memory. By examining the militaristic language in Thucydides’ plague episode, I consider in this section how Thucydides may have shocked the reader by integrating militaristic language into his account of the Athenian plague.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, “Unsettling the Reader,” Thucydides deploys militaristic language throughout the plague episode to describe the arrival of the plague. Perhaps the strongest example of the connection Thucydides draws between war and pestilence is his use of the phrase ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ νικῶμενοι (2.47.3) and its variant ὑπὸ τοῦ πολλοῦ κακοῦ νικῶμενοι (2.51.5). As I established in Chapter 2, the passive form of νικάω combined with ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ in the genitive case personifies the plague itself as the vanquisher of the ill.\textsuperscript{313} Furthermore, the use of ἐπιπίπτειν, ἐσπίπτειν, νικᾶν, and

\textsuperscript{310} Porter (1939) 286: While she dressed she tried to trace the insidious career of her headache, and it seemed reasonable to suppose it had started with the war.

\textsuperscript{311} Unrue (1988) 111.


\textsuperscript{313} LSJ, s.v. “νικάω;” Smyth, s.v. “ὑπὸ;” n. 1, 387.
ξυναιρεῖν throughout Thucydides’ account suggest that the plague befell the Athenians like a military attack, and the list of sufferings in 1.23 concludes with ξυνεπέθετο (combined in attacking). While Thucydides’ militaristic language does indeed serve to reinforce the connection between pestilence and warfare while also disquieting the reader, there is an additional benefit to this technique. By describing the Athenians as having been vanquished (νικώμενοι) by the disease, he renders their deaths as at the hands of an enemy.

I suggest that Thucydides’ use of militaristic language in his description of the plague has the effect of disquieting the reader. His comment that some Athenians initially believed they had been poisoned by Peloponnesians tampering with the cisterns reminds the audience of the climate of suspicion in Athens during the war. Through his use of militaristic language and the Athenians’ initial suspicion that they had been poisoned deployed early on in his account, Thucydides seamlessly blends the anxieties of military attack with the onset of the disease to establish a climate in Athens that was pervaded by fear of being vanquished whether by the Peloponnesians, or pestilence. Bellemore and Plant have argued that Thucydides uses the plague episode as a means by which to emphasize the severity of the Peloponnesian War. While Bellemore and Plant attempt to limit the impact of the plague episode to an allegorical narrative, I argue that the interconnectedness of the plague episode and the larger conflict serves to unsettle and, at times, even shock the reader. As Parry has noted, the plague episode is a “paralogon

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314 Parry (1969) 116. For further discussion of Thucydides’ use of militaristic language in the plague episode and the relationship between pestilence and warfare, see “Pestilence in Wartime.”
315 LSJ, s.v. “συνεπεθήκα,” n. II.
316 Thuc. 2.48.2.
beyond all others, and essentially part of the war. It represents the most violent incursion of the superhuman and incalculable into the plans and constructions of men.”

The juxtaposition of the plague, whose destruction has already been alluded to in 2.23, with Pericles’ Funeral Oration makes for a grim comparison. Immediately after the Athenians who had died in battle received their funeral rites Thucydides transitions to the plague victims, for whom no equivalent to the *logoi epitaphioi* existed. The neglectful and haphazard disposal of the corpses in 2.52 must have come as a shock, particularly given the Athenian adherence to custom only recently articulated by Pericles. The honour of the military death which receives the public funeral is starkly contrasted by the disease which conquers individuals with no particular order. I suggest that Thucydides sought to highlight the neglect of the plague victims through his account, and, by speaking of their deaths in terms of a military defeat, to link their otherwise senseless deaths with the larger Peloponnesian War. Even though they did not receive public funeral rites alongside the Athenian war dead, in Thucydides’ narrative the plague victims are cast as the defeated in another theatre of war. Nor did they face a fainthearted enemy, but rather, the cause of the greatest suffering (παθήματα) during those years.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that memorialization is an integral element of historiography, and that the ancient historians were cognizant of this effect. By memorializing the plague episode, Thucydides was able to simultaneously document the event while also creating what

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319 Thuc. 2.37.3.
320 Thuc. 1.23.
Assman refers to as a “figure of memory”\(^{321}\)—a historiographical account whose narrative could be transmitted and subsumed into Athenian collective memory.

It is all the more necessary to examine Thucydides’ account of the plague for its memorializing aspect given the silence regarding the plague in Athenian public discourse following the eradication of the disease. While there was no equivalent to the logoi epitaphioi for plague victims, I argue that Thucydides’ account, imbued with emotional realism and vivid description, offered an even deeper engagement with the trauma than the logoi epitaphioi were equipped to deal with. The simplified narratives traditionally offered by funeral orations offer a “truncated form of mourning”\(^{322}\) which prioritizes narrative over individualism and does not promote social re-engagement outside the orthodoxy. These narratives, while they may provide comfort in the short-term, ultimately sacrifice a deeper engagement with the traumatic loss incurred. Thucydides’ narrative offers a much deeper engagement, and therefore an awareness of the role of trauma and trauma recovery in historiographical narratives allows for a deeper appreciation of Thucydides’ rendering of the pandemic into aesthetic forms as well as the significance of his account for trauma recovery.

Through his engagement with a longstanding tradition in Greek literature of converging disasters during times of warfare, Thucydides engages with this story pattern to portray the Athenian suffering incurred during the plague as the single greatest calamity during a time when calamities were the most frequent and severe. Thus, Thucydides’ emphasis on Athenian suffering is not only for rhetorical effect but is an integral feature of his account.

\(^{321}\) Assman (1995) 129.
\(^{322}\) Schick (2011) 1843-1844.
Like Katherine Anne Porter’s portrayal of the Spanish Flu pandemic, Thucydides portrays the Athenian plague as an integral part of the wartime experience despite the absence of the plague from Athenian war memorials and public commemoration. I suggest that Thucydides’ use of militaristic language with respect to the plague and the deaths it incurred functioned to weave together the destruction of plague and war. This technique combined with his juxtaposition of the plague with Pericles’ speech further emphasized the lack of funeral rites provided to the plague victims. I contend that by weaving together in the plague episode the language of warfare with the subject of pestilence Thucydides justifies the remembrance of plague victims as part of the larger Peloponnesian War.

Through his descriptive historiographical account of the plague Thucydides provided plague victims with a literary monument and he ensured a place for the Athenian plague in Athenian collective memory. This feat is all the more impressive given the fact that as recently as the early 20th century contemporary WWI historians would fail to adequately address the impact of pestilence in their accounts of WWI.
Conclusion

The initial outbreak of the Athenian plague occurred in 429/430 BCE and killed from a quarter to a third of the Athenian population. The devastation of the plague is captured by Thucydides, who confines his vivid account to one emblematic episode, offering his readers an intensely emotional experience. The plague episode is frequently considered for its relevance to medical knowledge, seeking either to retrospectively identify the disease, which has—until recently—proven to be an impossible task, or in an attempt to discern the nature of the relationship between Thucydides and the works of the medical authors. This episode has also been viewed as the product of rhetorical elaboration, notably by Parry and Woodman. I argue that trauma theory offers another promising approach to the plague episode. By accepting this episode as an example of memorialization, the narrative can be approached as an aesthetic rendering of a traumatic event and therefore as a source of reflection and cohesion for traumatized Athenians.

As has been demonstrated by the work of David Konstan and Peter Meineck, combat trauma was present in the ancient world, and the application of modern trauma theory can indeed provide fruitful readings of ancient texts. Given the obvious presence of combat trauma in Ancient Greek society, the study of other forms of trauma in the ancient world is not unwarranted. Since pandemics and epidemics are now considered by psychologists to be sources of collective trauma, it is justified to view Thucydides’ account of the plague through the lens of trauma theory. Modern scholars who denounce the presence of trauma in the ancient world as mere anachronism blatantly disregard ancient evidence for behavior now understood to be indicative of trauma.

323 Mitchell-Boyask (2008) 1. This is a somewhat conservative estimate, as Mikalson puts the death toll closer to one third. Mikalson (2009) 326.
I have argued that in his account of the Athenian plague, Thucydides renders the story of the pandemic into an aesthetic form by combining elements of personal narrative, literature, and history. The result was a form of collective memorialization which simultaneously captured vivid images of the plague’s destruction and allowed for the transmission of the event to younger generations.

By approaching the plague episode through the lens of collective trauma and trauma recovery, Thucydides’ use of ἐνάργεια may be understood not just as a literary tool of the ancient historian to entertain his audience, but also as a means by which to encourage a limited engagement with traumatic memory. The effectiveness of Thucydides’ narrative to engage the reader was likely amplified by the absence of the plague from extant funeral orations and memorialization. As Mitchell-Boyask’s study demonstrates, this silence regarding the recent plague is manifest in Athenian drama as an outright avoidance. As I have suggested, this avoidance can be counterproductive to the working-through process as articulation is a key step in the process of working-through trauma.

Comparative evidence from the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic suggests that the apprehension towards the articulation of the event is perhaps appropriate given its magnitude. While an individual might take part in a cathartic unburdening to a sympathetic third party, this process is much more problematic when the trauma is experienced on a mass scale. As David A. Davis has argued using the work of Spanish Flu survivor Katherine Anne Porter, the relative absence of the Spanish Flu from literary discourse contributes to her work’s literary importance, as it serves to bridge the gap between memory and history and documents a personal record of the event while
providing the reader with a limited, simulated engagement with the traumatic event. Davis further suggests that this emotive approach may in fact be the most effective means by which to communicate such a historical narrative. I have shown that Thucydides’ account serves a similar function, as his skills as a critical historian and an emotive literary artist converge in the plague episode to offer his audience a vivid, emotional description of the event. By alternating perspectives in the episode to convey a variety of experiences during the plague, Thucydides also captures several scenarios which have been identified as traumatic events or stressors for the survivors. These include: the neglect of those who cannot care for themselves, serious illnesses, pandemics and epidemics, sudden loss of loved ones, witnessing death or injury, and a sudden change or breakdown of rules, expectations, or social norms.324 His vivid description not only documents these occurrences but also allows his readers to engage with trauma in a limited way. This limited engagement facilitates healing and encourages dialogue among survivors, while shaping and preserving a collective memory of the trauma which can in turn counteract the isolation caused by the event.

By approaching Thucydides’ plague episode with an awareness of modern trauma theory and with Davis’ reading of Katherine Anne Porter’s experience of the Spanish Flu outbreak in mind, we may begin to understand the role of narrativization in the aftermath of pestilence and to account for the absence of plague in Athenian public discourse. Thucydides responded to that absence by committing a variety of Athenian experiences of the plague to a transmittable narrative form capable of being subsumed into Athenian collective memory. Furthermore, the empathetic unsettlement offered by such a nuanced

and emotionally evocative historical account is capable of counteracting the isolation characteristic of the aftermath of trauma and allows for the transmission of the event.\footnote{LaCapra (2014) 40-42.} By examining the plague episode through the lens of trauma theory we inevitably view Thucydides in two ways: as the critical reporter, and as the literary artist. His excellence in both roles is demonstrated by his analytic record of events and their simultaneous presentation in an emotive and imaginative way. Only by taking into account the traumatic effects of pestilence and the importance of narrativization in trauma recovery can we begin to fully grasp the gravity and significance of Thucydides’ plague episode.
Bibliography


Appendix A


Fig. 1, Papagrigorakis, Manolis J., Christos Yapijakis, Philippos N. Synodinos, and Effie Baziotopoulou-Valavani. "DNA Examination of Ancient Dental Pulp Incriminates Typhoid Fever as a Probable Cause of the Plague of Athens." International Journal of Infectious Diseases 10, no. 3 (May 2006): 206-214.
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jenna Colclough

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:

Acadia University
Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada

The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2017-2019 M.A. (Classics)

Awards and Honors:

Western Graduate Research Scholarship
2018-2019

SSHRC CGS Masters
2017-2018

Acadia University Scholar
2017

William G. Fletcher Memorial Award in Classics
2017

Acadia Golden A Recipient
2017

University Medal in Classics
2017

Henry P. Mackeen Scholarship
2017

Louise Morse Warne Scholarship
2016

Colville Award
2016

Webster Undergraduate Research Funding
2016

Dean’s List
2015-2017
Cecil H. and Elizabeth C. Kennedy Memorial Scholarship
2015-2016

Acadia Excellence Scholarship
2014-2016

Related Work

Experience:

Teaching Assistant (CS1000, CS2440B, CS3300F)
The University of Western Ontario
2017-2019

Teaching Assistant (CLAS 1113, CLAS 1123)
Acadia University
2016-2017

Research Assistant (Archives)
Acadia University
2015-2016