

The Diseased Body and Athenian Masculinity: A Kristevan Reading of Thucydides' Plague Narrative

<p>1. The symptoms of the plague (2.49)</p> <p>a)... και τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρυθήματα και φλόγωσις ἐλάμβανε, και τὰ ἐντός, ἢ τε φάρυγξ και ἡ γλῶσσα, εὐθὺς αἱματώδη ἦν και πνεῦμα ἄτοπον και δυσῶδες ἠφίει (2.49.2).</p> <p>b)... και ἀποκαθάρσεις χολῆς πᾶσαι ὅσαι ὑπὸ ἰατρῶν ὠνομασμέναι εἰσὶν ἐπήσαν... (2.49.3)</p> <p>c)... εἰ διαφύγοιεν, ἐπικατιόντος τοῦ νοσήματος ἐς τὴν κοιλίαν και ἐλκώσεώς τε αὐτῆ ἰσχυρᾶς ἐγγιγνομένης και διαρροίας ἅμα ἀκρατου ἐπιπιπτούσης οἱ πολλοὶ ὕστερον δι' αὐτὴν ἀσθενεῖα διεφθείροντο (2.49.6).</p> <p>d)... εἰ τις ἐκ τῶν μεγίστων περιγένοιτο, τῶν γε ἀκρωτηρίων ἀντίληψις αὐτοῦ ἐπεσήμαιεν. Κατέσκηπτε γὰρ ἐς αἰδοῖα και ἐς ἄκρας χεῖρας και πόδας, και πολλοὶ στερισκόμενοι τούτων διέφυγον, εἰσὶ δ' οἱ και τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν (2.49.7-8).</p>	<p>a)...but people in good health were all of a sudden attacked by violent heats in the head, and redness and inflammation in the eyes, the inward parts, such as the throat or tongue, becoming bloody and emitting an unnatural and fetid breath.</p> <p>b)...and discharges of bile of every kind named by physicians ensued...</p> <p>c) But if they passed this stage, and the disease descended further into the bowels, inducing a violent ulceration there accompanied by severe diarrhea, this brought on a weakness which was generally fatal.</p> <p>d)...even where it did not prove mortal, it still left its mark on the extremities; for it settled in the privy parts, the fingers and toes, and many escaped with the loss of these, some too with that of their eyes. (Translated by Richard Crawley)</p>
<p>2. The body and identity in Perikles' funeral oration</p> <p>a) κοινῇ γὰρ τὰ σώματα διδόντες ἰδία τὸν ἀγήρων ἔπαινον ἐλάμβανον και τὸν τάφον ἐπισημότατον, οὐκ ἐν ᾧ κεῖνται μᾶλλον, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ ἡ δόξα αὐτῶν παρὰ τῷ ἐντυχόντι αἰεὶ και λόγου και ἔργου καιρῷ αἰεὶ μνηστος καταλείπεται (2.43.2).</p> <p>b) ξυνηλὼν τε λέγω τὴν τε πᾶσαν τῆς Ἑλλάδος παιδευσιν εἶναι και καθ' ἕκαστον δοκεῖν ἂν μοι τὸν αὐτὸν ἄνδρα παρ' ἡμῶν ἐπὶ πλεῖστ' ἂν εἶδη και μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστ' ἂν εὐτραπέλωσ τὸ σῶμα αὐταρκες παρέχεσθαι (2.41.1).</p>	<p>a) For thus offering their lives, made in common by them all, they each of them individually received that renown which never grows old, and for a tomb, not so much that in which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered upon every occasion on which deed or story shall be commemorated.</p> <p>b) To sum up: I say that Athens is the school of Hellas, and that the individual Athenian in his own person seems to have the power of adapting himself to the most varied forms of action with the utmost versatility and grace.</p>
<p>3. Loss of identity in the plague narrative</p> <p>a) τοὺς δὲ και λήθη ἐλάμβανε παραθτικά ἀναστάντας τῶν πάντων ὁμοίως, και ἠγνόησαν σφᾶς τε αὐτοὺς και τοὺς ἐπιτηδεῖους (2.49.8).</p> <p>b) ὥστε ταχείας τὰς ἐπαυρέσεις και πρὸς τὸ τερπνὸν ἠξίουν ποιεῖσθαι, ἐφήμερα τὰ τε σώματα και τὰ χρήματα ὁμοίως ἠγούμενοι (2.53.2).</p> <p>c) σῶμά τε αὐταρκες ὃν οὐδὲν διεφάνη πρὸς αὐτὸ ἰσχύος πέρι ἢ ἀσθενείας, ἀλλὰ πάντα ξυνήρει και τὰ πάση διαίτη θεραπευόμενα (2.51.3).</p>	<p>a) Others again were seized with an entire loss of memory on their first recovery, and did not know either themselves or their friends.</p> <p>b) So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches alike things of a day.</p> <p>c) No constitution was of itself strong enough to resist or weak enough to escape the attacks; the disease carried off all alike and defied every mode of treatment.</p>
<p>4. Transgression of boundaries in the <i>polis</i></p> <p>τὰ τε ἱερὰ ἐν οἷς ἐσκήνετο νεκρῶν πλέα ἦν, αὐτοῦ ἐναποθησκόντων: ὑπερβιαζομένου γὰρ τοῦ κακοῦ οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένωνται, ἐς ὀλιγορίαν ἐτράποντο και ἱερῶν και ὁσίων ὁμοίως, νόμοι τε πάντες ξυνεταράχθησαν οἷς ἐχρῶντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς, ἔθαπον δὲ ὡς ἕκαστος ἐδύνατο (2.52.3-4).</p>	<p>The sacred places also in which they had quartered themselves were full of corpses of persons that had died there, just as they were; for as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became utterly careless of everything, whether sacred or profane. All the burial rites before in use were entirely upset, and they buried the bodies as best they could.</p>
<p>5. Erasure of difference between men and animals</p> <p>γενόμενον γὰρ κρεῖσσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου τὰ τε ἄλλα</p>	<p>But while the nature of the distemper was such as to baffle all description, and its attacks almost too grievous for human nature</p>

<p>χαλεπωτέρως ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν φύσιν προσέπιπτεν ἑκάστῳ καὶ ἐν τῷδε ἐδηλώσε μάλιστα ἄλλο τι ὄν ἢ τῶν ζυντρόφων τι: τὰ γὰρ ὄρνεα καὶ τετράποδα ὅσα ἀνθρώπων ἄπτεται, πολλῶν ἀτάφων γιγνομένων ἢ οὐ προσήει ἢ γευσάμενα διεφθείρετο (2.50.1).</p>	<p>to endure, it was still in the following circumstance that its difference from all ordinary disorders was most clearly shown. All the birds and beasts that prey upon human bodies either abstained from touching them (though there were many lying unburied), or died after tasting them.</p>
<p>6. Psychological effects of the plague</p> <p>δεινότατον δὲ παντὸς ἦν τοῦ κακοῦ ἢ τε ἀθυμία ὅποτε τις αἰσθοῖτο κάμνων (πρὸς γὰρ τὸ ἀνέλπιστον εὐθὺς τραπόμενοι τῇ γνώμῃ πολλῶ μᾶλλον προίεντο σφᾶς αὐτοὺς καὶ οὐκ ἀντεῖχον), καὶ ὅτι ἕτερος ἀφ' ἑτέρου θεραπείας ἀναπιπλάμενοι ὡσπερ τὰ πρόβατα ἔθνησκον: καὶ τὸν πλεῖστον φόρον τοῦτο ἐνεποιεῖ (2.51.4).</p>	<p>By far the most terrible feature in the malady was the dejection which ensued when anyone felt himself sickening, for the despair into which they instantly fell took away their power of resistance, and left them a much easier prey to the disorder; besides which, there was the awful spectacle of men dying like sheep, through having caught the infection in nursing each other.</p>

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