

playful exaggeration, extolling the powers of the public speakers; and then, in answer to Menexenus, allows that he does not think it a difficult matter to speak on such a subject. He himself could speak if he were chosen. Nay more, he has learned a speech from Aspasia which would be suitable on this very occasion. The speech itself follows, and is indeed the main part of the work. Its supposed date is after the 'Peace of Antalcidas', long after the real Socrates was dead.

Whether this speech was a serious effort on the part of Plato to surpass the rhetoricians of the day, or whether it was meant as a parody on their speeches, is a question which has given rise to some discussion. On the one hand it is too good for a parody. If regarded as such, it reminds us of the criticism passed by a matter-of-fact reader on the *Rejected Addresses*, 'that they seemed very good addresses, and for his part he did not see why they were rejected'. So too this oration, though falling far short of the magnificent speech of Pericles which Thucydides has preserved, seems to have been fully equal to the average of such discourses. 'They conformed', says Professor Jowett, 'to a regular type. They began with gods and ancestors, and the legendary history of Athens, to which succeeded an almost equally fictitious account of later times. The Persian war formed the centre of the narrative: in the age of Isocrates and Demosthenes the Athenians were still living on the glories of Marathon and Salamis. The *Menexenus* casts a veil over the weak places of Athenian history. The war of Athens and Boeotia is a war of liberation; the Athenians gave back the Spartans taken at Sphacteria out of kindness. Indeed...we democrats are the true aristocracy of virtue. These are the