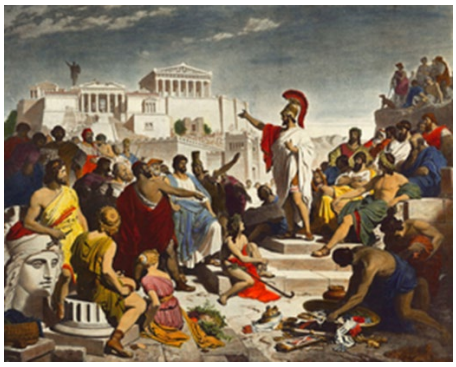
GRESHAM COLLEGE

7 March 2019

The Athenian Cemetery in the Age of Pericles: Gresham Lecture in Classics

Professor Edith Hall



Introduction

Remembering those who have died in war is a practice familiar to us. When British military personnel die on active service, they are entitled to have their bodies returned, a funeral at public expense and a service headstone maintained in perpetuity. Collective commemoration has become part of the national psyche ever since the end of World War I, when George V inaugurated the tradition; ceremonies have subsequently been held every year on 11th November to memorialise those who have died in combat. Ceremonies are held not only in Britain, but across the Commonwealth and in many other countries of the world. They often take place at a cenotaph, a Greek word meaning 'empty tomb', which may resemble Edwin Lutyens' monument at Whitehall, unveiled on November 11th, 1920.

In some Commonwealth countries, an oration is part of the traditional ceremonial activities on Remembrance Day. For the Australians, Anzac Day on April 25th, especially at the Canberra Cenotaph, is arguably more emotionally important. But it is on Remembrance Day that an annual speech is delivered by an esteemed Australian public figure. The most renowned of such speeches is probably the one delivered by former Labour Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1993. It is now quote frequently, studied intensively, and has shaped Australian national identity, psyche and democratic culture.

Yet, for many centuries, in medieval times until the mid-19th century, service people killed in action could expect that their corpses would be subjected to neglect and indignity, often simply being left to rot on battlefields. The turning point was the Treaty of Frankfurt which marked the end of the Franco-Prussian war, signed on 10th May 1871. According to Article 16, the French and German governments agreed to allow the military dead of either nation to be taken back to their national soil for burial.

The centuries of indignity preceding this treaty would have shocked and surprised most people in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. Roman legions tried to bury their dead with great care and honour. In AD 15, Germanicus interrupted a dangerous campaign to inter such remains as he could find of the numerous legionaries killed by Germanic tribes in the Battle of Teutoburg in AD 9. Going back more than three centuries, after the

momentous Battle of Chaeronea in 338 BCE, which effectively secured Philip of Macedon's supremacy in southern Greece, both sides buried their dead according to punctilious rules shaped by respect for religious tradition; the Thebans put up a famous monument, with a statue of a lion, to mark the mound in which their dead had been interred. More than 200 skeletons were found when the site was discovered in 1880. And the Athenians awarded a great honour to the one hundred and ninety-two of their compatriots who were killed defending Greece and Athens at the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. They erected a memorial and a large tumulus so that their bodies could rest where they had fallen and receive the honours due to heroes. But the most famous funeral ceremony of antiquity, and perhaps of all time, took place 59 years after that, in 431 BCE, when Pericles delivered a funeral oration in the classical Athenian cemetery known as the Kerameikos. This oration has exerted in incalculable influence over public oratory ever since Thucydides' Greek text was first printed in entirety in 1502, followed by numerus translations into modern languages. In this talk I describe the occasion, the venue and the text, before returning in conclusion to the influence of Pericles' seminal oration on Lincoln at Gettysburg.

The Occasion of the Classical Athenian Funeral Oration

All through the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians gathered annually at the city's burial ground to lay coffins in the earth for the dead of each civic tribe and listen to a speech in their praise. Although the custom may not have been inaugurated until the mid-460s, it was felt, like dramatic theatre, to represent an important component of the civic discourse of Athens, and to be inseparable from the city's democratic constitution. The important point was that it was administered by the state. All the men killed in action were buried together without distinction according to rank, and rich families were prevented from using the occasion of a family funeral to show off their wealth to the poorer bereaved. The ceremonies were organised by the state magistrate in charge of the military, the polemarch. The most famous of all Athenian funeral speeches was delivered by the Athenian statesman Pericles during the winter of the first year of the Peloponnesian War. The speech was invested with quite as much significance as the interment itself: Thucydides' Pericles opens his by remarking that the institution of the formal *epitaphios logos*, or funeral speech itself, has often been praised by those who deliver it.

I am going to read a description of the occasion by a 19th-century American politician called Edward Everett. It comes from the opening of his speech of 19th November 1863 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, during the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery there. The Battle of Gettysburg of July 1863 had been one of the deadliest bloodiest battles of the American Civil War (1861-1865): seven thousand men died and over ten thousand were captured or missing. Everett spoke immediately before Abraham Lincoln, who then delivered his far more famous Gettysburg Oration, to which we shall return at the end of the lecture. Everett was an elderly man, an expert classicist, who had been a Professor of Greek at Harvard before he entered politics. He had served as both Secretary of State and Senator before retiring and becoming one of Lincoln's most loyal supporters. This is how his speech opens, adapting the description of the Athenian state funerals he found in the text of Thucydides:

> "STANDING beneath this serene sky, overlooking these broad fields now reposing from the labours of the waning year, the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering before us, the graves of our brethren beneath our feet, it is with hesitation that I raise my poor voice to break the eloquent silence of God and Nature. But the duty to which you have called me must be performed; grant me, I pray you, your indulgence and your sympathy.
>
> "It was appointed by law in Athens, that the obsequies of the citizens who fell in battle should be performed at the public expense, and in the most honourable manner. Their bones were carefully gathered up from the funeral pyre where their bodies were consumed and brought home to the city. There, for three days before the interment, they lay in state, beneath tents of honour, to receive the votive offerings of friends and relatives: flowers, weapons, precious ornaments, painted vases (wonders of art, which after two thousand years adorn the museums of modern Europe), the last tributes of surviving affection. Ten coffins of funereal cypress received the honourable deposit, one for each of the tribes of the city, and an eleventh in memory of the unrecognized, but not therefore unhonoured, dead, and of those whose remains could not be recovered. On the fourth day the mournful procession was formed: mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters led the way, and to them it was permitted by the simplicity of ancient manners to utter aloud their

lamentations for the beloved and the lost; the male relatives and friends of the deceased followed; citizens and strangers closed the train. Thus marshalled, they moved to the place of interment in that famous Ceramicus, the most beautiful suburb of Athens, which had been adorned by Cimon, the son of Miltiades, with walks and fountains and columns, whose groves were filled with altars, shrines, and temples, whose gardens were kept forever green by the streams from the neighbouring hills, and shaded with the trees sacred to Minerva and coeval with the foundation of the city, whose circuit enclosed

> "the olive grove of Academe,
> Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird
> Trilled his thick-warbled note the summer long,"

whose pathways gleamed with the monuments of the illustrious dead, the work of the most consummate masters that ever gave life to marble. There, beneath the overarching plane-trees, upon a lofty stage erected for the purpose, it was ordained that a funeral oration should be pronounced by some citizen of Athens, in the presence of the assembled multitude."

That is how Everett set the scene for the commencement of Lincoln's own address.

The Location

The Kerameikos was an area of Athens to the north-west of the city centre not far from the site where Plato's Academy would be built at an ancient sanctuary. The word was originally used for an area just outside and inside the city walls, but by Pericles' time it usually signified the public graveyard, or *demosion sema*, that is, the cemetery. It took its name from the potters or *kerameis* who lived and worked there, owing to the excellent clay available by that part of the River Eridanos. It was said to be the loveliest suburb in all of Athens, and it had a lively nightlife. It was a place of religious significance for another reason, since it was there that the Sacred Way to Eleusis began, the road along which the procession moved for the Eleusinian Mysteries. The area first became used as a cemetery as early as 1200 BC. But it was just after the Persian Wars of 490 to 479 BCE that it took on something like the appearance of what we can still see small sections of today.

When the new city wall was built in 478 BCE, funeral sculptures were integrated into the city wall and the two large gates were built. One was the Sacred Gate and the other the Dipylon, or double-gated one, near which important citizens including Cleisthenes and Pericles were interred. Between the two gates just inside the walls stood a significant public building, the Pompeion. This is where the processions (*pompai*) for Athena during her festivals would begin, and great sacrificial feasts of roast beef prepared: many cattle bones have been excavated there. The Kerameikos, as a whole, was discovered in April 1863 - the same year as Gettysburg - when a Greek worker dug up a carved gravestone or *stele*. This may have attracted the attention of the Americans Edward Everett and Abraham Lincoln. Since then, both Greek and German archaeologists have worked intensively there. It is a spectacular place to visit, and the museum is packed with fascinating finds.

Thucydides, Pericles and his Oration

The speaker, Pericles, had been born in 495 BCE, and was now the most respected statesman in Athens, in his mid-sixties. He had a reputation as an incomparable orator; he spoke quite fast, but with great clarity and in a resonant, beautiful voice that contemporaries said left other speakers at the starting-line. His democratic credentials were impeccable. He was from the same family as Cleisthenes, who had founded the Athenian democracy, and he was the son of a Persian war hero. From 461 onwards he had dominated Athenian political and public life, and must have been re-elected as one of the ten generals repeatedly. He had always promoted policies by which the Athenians could benefit financially and strategically from their 'allies', who were increasingly seen as subject states to be taxed. He had initiated and often led successful campaigns in northern Greece, so the Athenians could set up colonies in Thrace. He put down rebellions against Athens in Samos and Byzantium and expanded Athenian activities in the Black Sea. But his most enduring achievement is his plan, initiated in 447 BCE, was to use some of the wealth the Athenians had acquired from their empire to finance the architectural

transformation of the Acropolis, where the city's gods as well as its treasury were housed. The Persians had razed the temples of the Acropolis to the ground during the 480 BCE invasion; until Pericles, these temples had not been rebuilt.

In 432 BCE, the year before the funeral oration, the magnificent new Parthenon, temple of Athena, with its Doric columns, friezes and pediment sculptures, had been finally completed. The frieze, which runs around the whole of the outside surface of the inner building of the temple, represents a series of scenes which are suggestive of a great procession in honour of the goddess housed inside - horses and riders, chariots, men bearing musical instruments, water jars and trays, sacrificial animals, a group of ten important men (perhaps heroes), seated gods and rituals. By the time the Parthenon was completed, visitors also had to pass through the Propylaea, the innovative complex of edifices surrounding the western entrance to the Acropolis, itself accessible only by a long series of wide stone stairs.

How did the Peloponnesian war begin? In 432 BCE the Spartans were persuaded to summon a meeting of the Peloponnesian League in order to hear other states' grievances against Athens. As a result, the Spartans voted in support of the motion that the Athenians had broken the terms of the fragile peace between them, thus in effect declaring war. In fact, substantial numbers of Athenian hoplites and rowers were already engaged in the longstanding siege of the Corinthian colony of Potidaea in northern Greece, where the philosopher Socrates, fighting for his city, saved the life of his young disciple Alcibiades. Yet life in Athens was about to change for the worse. The Thebans invaded the city of Plataea, only eight miles from Thebes but allied to Athens. The affair ended in a Plataean victory of sorts, but the Plataeans summarily put to death one hundred and eighty men (both Thebans and Plataeans suspected of treachery), thus setting the tone for the atrocities and savage reprisals which were to be such a pronounced feature of the whole Peloponnesian War.

Shortly afterwards, the Spartan king Archidamus II began invading Attica and occupying farmland. Although the Spartans only stayed for a few weeks at a time, the threat they posed was sufficient to persuade many of the rural Athenians to follow the policy advocated by Pericles, and move themselves, their families and even their wooden furniture from their ancestral farmsteads to within the long walls. These stretched from the city to the harbours at Piraeus. But being torn from their ancient roots caused severe emotional problems. Many had to make temporary homes in the turrets of the walls. These were some of the people Pericles was addressing in the funeral oration.

By mid-summer the Spartans were ravaging land at Acharnae, only a few miles from Athens itself. The young men became impatient at Pericles' policy of keeping the Athenians safe within the walls, only sending out small contingents of cavalry to keep the enemy off lands in the immediate vicinity. In the late summer, after the Spartans had returned home for the winter, Pericles finally led a whole force into Megarian territory. Athenian self-confidence had probably never been so high. Thucydides reports, 'This was without doubt the largest army of Athenians ever assembled, the state being still in the flower of her strength and yet unvisited by the plague. Full ten thousand heavy infantry were in the field, all Athenian citizens, besides the three thousand before Potidaea. Then the resident aliens who joined in the incursion were at least three thousand strong; besides which there was a multitude of light troops.'

Thucydides is also the reason why we know what Pericles said to the Athenians at the funeral of the first to die in the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides wrote the second great work of historiography in ancient Greek, his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. He was involved in the war as a general several years after the funeral oration. He must have written much of his book in the home he retired to, in Thrace, after he was exiled in 423 BCE. He may have died in the year 411 BCE, the year in which his narrative breaks off. Thucydides is highly analytical and looks for causes and consequences in history. He is not interested in divine intervention and explains everything from human nature and human decision-making. But his greatest legacy is the tragic tenor of his work. He is frank about the atrocities which humans on both sides in the war were capable of committing, and about *Realpolitik*: he candidly assumes that the Greek city-states were always motivated by expediency and their own self-interest. He knows that big, rich and powerful states always want to stay big, rich and powerful. He makes few attempts to glamorise even the communities with whom his partisan sympathies lie. This is why Nietzsche so admired him:

'From the despicable beautification and idealisation of the Greeks which the classically educated youth carries away into real life as reward for his high school training, there is no cure so fundamental as Thucydides… Thucydides is the great culmination and last manifestation of that strong, severe, hard realism which was instinctive in the more ancient Greeks.'

Does the speech as reported in Thucydides bear a close relationship to what Pericles said? Early in his history, Thucydides admits that his practice in recording speeches has been to say what he thought the occasion demanded. But in this particular case, I think he may have had access to an actual transcript. Thucydides stresses the significance of the occasion and the unusual size of the audience. The rostrum was made specially to make the speech audible by as many people as possible, and there were resident foreigners as well as citizen families present, not to mention women - indeed, this was a very rare opportunity for an Athenian politician to address citizen women directly. Thucydides is most likely to have been present on the occasion, as an ambitious young statesman and military man who was a dedicated admirer of Pericles. It was also winter, when no military campaigns were in process. Thucydides also introduces the speech saying that 'Pericles said *this*' rather than 'Pericles said *something like this*' or '*something to this effect*'.

The Text (Thucydides, II.35-46)

The speech itself fall into six parts, of which the third, the eulogy of Athens itself, is by far the longest and most important.

1. Pericles discusses the tradition of the annual speech itself.
2. In a programmatic section, he explains the plan of the speech, in which he will not dwell on the glories of past battles and Athenian victories, as most speakers at the public funerals have done, but focus on the principles of action, institutions and lifestyle which have made the city great.
3. In the kernel of the speech, Pericles offers a rousing account of the merits and beauties of the Athenian democratic constitution and culture. The point is to communicate why Athens is worth not only fighting for but dying for as well.
4. Pericles then discusses the principled views and courage of those who died.
5. He finally turns to address his listeners directly, first parents, then sons and brothers, and, briefly, widows: rather than comfort them, they should emulate the example of the dead.
6. A short summation and formal dismissal.

The speech has been analysed repeatedly, by scholars, historians, political scientists, rhetoricians and practising politicians. It would be a fine exercise to read it out in entirety, but unfortunately time here does not allow this indulgence. In this part of the lecture I'm going unashamedly to select passages which strike me as particularly interesting, either because they tell us something important about Pericles and Athens, or because they remain, in my ears at least, particularly inspirational.

Pericles opens with a rather peculiar *proem*, saying how difficult a challenge it is to find the right words on an occasion of such gravity. He discusses the likely emotional responses of the audience, and implicitly gives advice on the correct frame of mind in which to receive his words. He says that the loved ones of the departed will probably think he is not effusive enough, while others may feel envious of the praise he is bestowing on the dead or feel inadequate in comparison. This is an attempt to establish a bond of trust between him and his whole audience: he must find a middle path that alienates neither group and implicitly asks for their understanding as he does so. Since our ancestors, he says, 'have set the seal of their approval upon the practice' of the funeral oration, 'I must obey, and to the utmost of my power shall endeavour to satisfy the wishes and beliefs of all who hear me'.

In the second, programmatic section, he explains why he does *not* plan to praise earlier generations who fought and died for Athens. This was an unusual departure: we do have some funeral orations, and information about others, and it was indeed customary to rehearse the glories of fall of the Athenian tyrants in the late sixth century, and of the Persian Wars—the victories at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea. Other funeral orators also liked to talk about wars against rival Greek states or even mythical wars in far more remote history, such as the legendary

victory of the Athenians over the Amazonian warrior women who invaded Attica and attempted to set up a government on the Areopagus. But Pericles says he is more interested in the people of today, who are continuing this great work, and defines precisely what he will discuss instead of the past: 'I should like to point out by what principles of action we rose to power, and under what institutions and through what manner of life our empire became great. For I conceive that such thoughts are not unsuited to the occasion, and that this numerous assembly of citizens and strangers may profitably listen to them'.

The kernel of the speech is Section 3, which is also the longest. It is an account of the merits and beauties of the democratic constitution, which he says is an example to other city-states. It is called a democracy, he says, because 'the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few'. Justice is available to all in private litigation, and the criterion for advancement in public life is merit. Poverty is no bar to public service and public recognition. In private life, there is tolerance and an assumption that each man is free to do as he likes, and people are not judged for living their lives in different ways from their peers. But when it comes to public life, there is real reverence and unanimity. Respect for the state authorities and the laws constrains the behaviour of all, especially those who have been damaged or injured. And every Athenian is guided by respect for what the Greeks called the 'Unwritten Laws' - the fundamental taboos and imperatives that protected family members from abuse by each other, the recipients of oaths, suppliants, and the rights of the dead.

Pericles then celebrates the beautiful lifestyle of Athens. There are plentiful recreations, games and sacrifices, and Athenian homes are beautiful. The delightfulness of everyday life in their lovely city 'helps to banish sorrow'. Moreover, the city prides itself upon its openness. Foreigners are never expelled, and life is conducted in a transparent way without fear of foreigners gaining access to secrets. Here Pericles' pride is justifiable. Even the staunchest critics of Athens were impressed by its cosmopolitan atmosphere: one anti-democratic pamphleteer, by custom called 'the Old Oligarch', observed that it was the fact of Athenian *naval* power that made so many different types of luxury available in Athens, whether from Sicily, Cyprus, Egypt, Lydia or the Black Sea. The Athenian instinct to 'mingle with various peoples', he complains, has made even their speech a *potpourri* of different elements: 'hearing every kind of dialect, they have taken something from each; other Greeks rather tend to use their own dialect, way of life, and type of dress, but the Athenians use a mixture from all the Greeks and barbarians.'

Pericles continues by discussing the Athenian system of education and military training. They are efficient and yet the Athenians live a far more relaxed life than Greeks in military states such as Sparta. One of the great advantages of this training is that there is little emphasis on the pain of death, but an understanding of how to enjoy peaceful recreation. This section of the speech, I suspect, lies behind the question apocryphally attributed to Winston Churchill, when asked it was proposed to cut funding to the arts to support the war effort, '*Then what would we be fighting for?'*

Their beautiful education, which consists a much of the arts and intellectual development as military drill, makes Athenians, says Pericles, unusually brave. And here he relates the Athenians' advanced aesthetic sensibility and love of the arts and intellectual matters to their ability to defend their empire:

> "For we are lovers of the beautiful in our tastes and our strength lies, in our opinion, not in deliberation and discussion, but that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action. For we have a peculiar power of thinking before we act, and of acting, too, whereas other men are courageous from ignorance but hesitate upon reflection. And they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger."

Athenians are good at friendship and prefer to bestow gifts than to receive them. 'I say', avers Pericles, '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'. Here he is defining the Athenian cultural personality to which he wants everyone in his audience to aspire. And, he says, there are permanent witnesses of the truth of his claims. He must be thinking of his own building programme when he proudly announces, 'there are mighty monuments of our power which will make us the wonder of this and of

succeeding ages; we shall not need the praises of Homer or of any other panegyrist whose poetry may please for the moment, although his representation of the facts will not bear the light of day'. He concludes the praise of Athens with the rousing statement, 'Such is the city for whose sake these men nobly fought and died; they could not bear the thought that she might be taken from them; and every one of us who survive should gladly toil on her behalf'. This claim is widely thought to have inspired John F. Kennedy's admonition in his inaugural speech 'Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country'.

The fourth section turns to the sacrifice made by the dead themselves:

> 'I have dwelt upon the greatness of Athens because I want to show you that we are contending for a higher prize than those who enjoy none of these privileges, and to establish by manifest proof the merit of these men whom I am now commemorating. Their loftiest praise has been already spoken. For in magnifying the city I have magnified them, and men like them whose virtues made her glorious.'

Then he embarks on a slightly more conventional theme - that death can be advantageous if looked at from both the civic and the personal perspectives. A glorious death fighting for such a homeland puts the final seal, for all time, on the estimation of a man's worth. Even if they have erred before, by such courage in the face of death men wipe the slate clean:

> 'They have blotted out the evil with the good and have benefited the state more by their public services than they have injured her by their private actions'. Both rich and poor amongst the dead equally won honour because they 'deemed that the punishment of their enemies was sweeter than any of these things, and that they could fall in no nobler cause, they determined at the hazard of their lives to be honourably avenged, and to leave the rest. They resigned to hope their unknown chance of happiness; but in the face of death they resolved to rely upon themselves alone. And when the moment came they were minded to resist and suffer, rather than to fly and save their lives; they ran away from the word of dishonour, but on the battlefield their feet stood fast, and in an instant, at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory.'

With the idea of their dead leaving the scene of their glory with the final seal set on their reputations, Pericles at last turns to address those left behind. He says they will all derive their greatest comfort not from focussing on the bravery of their lost loved ones' final hours, but from this:

> '… fixing your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become filled with the love of her; and when you are impressed by the spectacle of her glory, reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it, who in the hour of conflict had the fear of dishonour always present to them, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but freely gave their lives to her as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast.'

This is a diplomatic way of acknowledging that some of the men had died in the process of losing, not winning, a battle. And at this point he rather suddenly shifts from the doggedly concrete, real-world environment in which his speech has so far operated. He has hardly mentioned the gods and eschewed any metaphysical flights of fancy about afterlives in Elysium or pleasing the local civic gods, even Athena. But now he embarks on a rousing metaphor to evoke the abstract idea of perennial fame. These men have received a form of immortality in 'praise which grows not old, and the noblest of all tombs, I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives, and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion both in word and deed. For the whole earth is the tomb of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men'. Rather than await the vicissitudes of fate in life off the battlefield, it is far better to be struck by death, 'unperceived at a time when a man is full of courage and animated by the general hope'.

After addressing all the bereaved, he divides them into three groups to deliver individual pieces of advice. He acknowledges the pain of the parents of the dead, especially when they see other parents whose sons are still alive.

But there is an answer, at least for those still young enough to have more children (this reads rather brutally to our 21st century ears and sensibilities): 'not only will the children who may hereafter be born make them forget their own lost ones, but the city will be doubly a gainer. She will not be left desolate, and she will be safer. But those who have passed their prime can also find comfort' says Pericles, sounding to our ears more brutal still: 'Congratulate yourselves that you have been happy during the greater part of your days; remember that your life of sorrow will not last long, and be comforted by the glory of those who are gone. For the love of honour alone is ever young, and not riches, as some say, but honour is the delight of men when they are old and useless'.

To the sons and brothers of the dead, he acknowledges that emulating the dead will be arduous, but the good thing about being dead, if the death was glorious, is freedom from the criticism and detraction of rivals. To the widows, he is notoriously blunt and unsympathetic: 'And, if I am to speak of womanly virtues to those of you who will henceforth be widows, let me sum them up in one short admonition: To a woman not to show more weakness than is natural to her sex is a great glory, and to be mentioned as little as possible among men, either in praise or blame.'

Just what is going on here? Why did Pericles feel the need to say this? How much did the bereaved women of Athens complain about their plight? Is he simply reminding the quiet and docile female population to remain quiet and docile? Or is he actually forced to mention the women because he is faced with a militant, distraught and noisy group of ritual mourners - grandmothers, wives, sisters, daughters - who are going to make life difficult for politicians advocating war? We just do not know. But it *is* clear that the state funeral had entailed the transfer of the leading role at obsequies from families, and particularly women, to the state and its male leading representatives. The relatives of the fallen were kept at a distance from the bodies, and were deprived of the physically intimate mourning rites beside the corpse which women had engaged in for centuries - washing and anointing the body privately, tearing and cutting off hair, ripping clothes, beating breasts, gouging cheeks with fingernails until the blood ran, hammering the ground with fists, and giving voice to the semi-sung ritual dirges with which we are familiar from the *Iliad* and tragedy.

In reality, legislation had been passed in the 6th century which curtailed excessive practices of self-mutilation and other displays of grief by women, probably to prevent aristocratic families competing with each other in expenditure on funerals. But in 431 BCE, even the display of the body no longer took place at the door of the private household; they were conducted in a public, civic space, probably the marketplace. The widows may have been reassured that Pericles' brief summation does at least affirm that any children whose fathers have died on active service will be raised henceforward at public expense. Yet, for all its resonant praise of democracy and patriotism, the addresses to the bereaved in Pericles' funeral oration forcibly remind us that classical Athens was a militaristic state and a brutal patriarchy.

Conclusion: Lincoln at Gettysburg

When Pericles mounted his specially constructed platform, he delivered the most influential speech ever delivered in western history: its praise of the democratic values for which that year's crop of war-dead had laid down their lives has informed countless significant orations since, including Abraham Lincoln's address at Gettysburg. 'Our administration', said Pericles to the bereaved of all classes 'favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences…advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition.' When Lincoln planned his Gettysburg oration, in preparation for which he certainly read his ally Everett's preceding speech, he followed Pericles' example. He praised not the dead in themselves but the principles that the new United States, in whose name they had died, should be founded. In a brilliant, prize-winning book, historian Garry Wills argues that Lincoln's speech constituted a 'revolution in thought', because Lincoln assumed the primacy of the Declaration of Independence over the Constitution as the supreme articulation of American government. He proposed that United States is fundamentally a single nation and a single people, rather than an association of separate states.

The moment at which both Everett and Lincoln spoke was one of similar historical significance, even if on a far larger scale in terms of human numbers, to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. The residents of the small Pennsylvania town had unexpectedly to cope with thousands of rotting corpses. And Lincoln follows Pericles, if not in precise verbal echoes or quotations, in grasping an historic opportunity to frame a vision of his whole community and its values and to inspire their audience to create a future together according to that vision. Lincoln also followed the classical structure of Pericles' oration in discussing first the dead and secondly the living - the survivors, the bereaved - and instructing them on their future. Lincoln's speech has in turn inspired most subsequent American presidents, including Barack Obama and, as we have suggested, John F. Kennedy in his inauguration speech.

Sadly, for the Athenians' sense of pride in themselves and their city and their empire, which according to Thucydides found its most eloquent articulation in Pericles' speech, the Athenians were about to face one of their greatest challenges in history. By the next spring, when the Spartans began to invade Attica again, the Athenians began to die from a fearsome plague which they caught from their water supplies. It was exacerbated by the close quarters in which they were confined behind the city walls. Neither doctors nor prayers to the gods could alleviate it. Pericles and his sons died from it. Fortunately for posterity, Thucydides, who preserves the funeral speech for us, despite himself contracting the plague and describing it in agonising detail, recovered. He survived to tell us about Pericles' last, great contributions to Athenian history. But many others who heard the speech did not. A mass grave of the right date for the plague was recovered in 1994-5 during excavations prior to the construction of Kerameikos subway station. The Archaeologist Efi Baziotopoulou-Valavani found 90 skeletons, ten belonging to children, hastily interred. Many of them will have been present at Pericles' funeral speech.