

## A HITHERTO UNREMARKED PUN IN THE *PHAEDRUS*

Of Plato's purely Socratic dialogues,<sup>i</sup> the *Phaedrus* is the most originally mythical, as Frutiger<sup>ii</sup> has remarked. Indeed, *Phaedrus* himself suggests this:

O Socrates, you easily make speeches [which are] Egyptian and of whatever country, if you are willing.<sup>iii</sup>

Both the originality of the dialogue and the manifest connection between it and Plato's seventh epistle<sup>iv</sup> suggest that the explicit content of the *Phaedrus* is to a large extent (unusually so for a Platonic dialogue) the teaching of Plato himself.

The link with Plato himself is established by the setting. After Socrates unexpectedly encounters *Phaedrus*, they decide to pass their time listening to speech. But they need to find a suitable location for restful listening. The site which *Phaedrus* selects is underneath a broad-leaved plane tree, ἡ πλάτανος, a word which is derived, according to LSJ, "from πλατύς, because of its *broad crown*." Of the five occurrences of πλάτανος in the entire Platonic corpus, four are in the *Phaedrus*,<sup>v</sup> and they are not casual mentions, but rather are quite emphatic. I would suggest that we have here a pun on the author's nickname,<sup>vi</sup> i.e., that ἡ πλάτανος is meant to remind us of ὁ Πλάτων. Indeed, Diogenes Laertius refers to a triplet written by Timon the skeptic in which a similar pun is made. For Timon indirectly refers to Πλάτων as πλατίστακος, a nickname for ὁ μύλλος, a kind of fish.<sup>vii</sup> The pun, then, is possible, but is it likely? I believe so, for the following reasons. First, the *Phaedrus* is a dialogue full of playful punning.<sup>viii</sup> In addition, among the trees which are to be found in the grove called Academy (later the site of the Platonic school), there are plane trees, as the Just Λόγος in Aristophanes' *Clouds* asserts, when he mentions that the πλάτανος in the Academy whispers things which should not be spoken aloud.<sup>ix</sup> Finally, Timon's triplet compares Plato to something which sits on a tree of the Academy and sings, and since that something is a cicada, the tree could very well be a πλάτανος, on which in the *Phaedrus* (230c2, 258e7) cicadas do sit. Further, if Timon's triplet is the reference to the *Phaedrus* which it seems to me to be, Timon would be suggesting that not only ἡ πλάτανος but also οἱ τέττιγες signify ὁ Πλάτων. In other words, the suggestion is very strong that the entire discussion of the *Phaedrus* is carried on ὑπὸ τῆ τοῦ Πλάτωνος σκιᾶ.

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### Notes

<sup>i</sup> By a purely Socratic dialogue, I mean a dialogue in which Socrates is the primary speaker (Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito, Phaedo, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Philebus, *Phaedrus*, Alcibiades I/II, Hipparchus, Rival-lovers, Theages, Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthydemus, Protagoras, Gorgias, Meno, Hippias major/minor, Ion, Menexenus, Cleitophon, Republic, Minos). I divide the remaining dialogues into mixed dialogues, i.e., dialogues in which Socrates is present but not the primary speaker (Sophist, Statesman, Parmenides, Symposium, Timaeus, Critias), and purely non-Socratic dialogues, i.e., dialogues in which Socrates is totally absent (Laws, Epinomis). I do not mean to suggest by this, however, that this is the only legitimate division of Plato's dialogues, but merely that it is one legitimate division of them. For a discussion of others, see Leo Strauss, *City and man* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 55-58. Also cf. Diogenes Laertius III. 49-51, 56-62.

<sup>ii</sup> Perceval Frutiger, *Les mythes de Platon; etude philosophique et littéraire* (Paris, 1930), p. 233: "Il n'y a, semble-t-il, que deux mythes platoniciens qui soient entièrement originaux: la fable des cigales dans le *Phèdre*, et celle de Theuth dans le meme dialogue."

<sup>iii</sup> *Phaedrus* 275b3-4: ὦ Σώκρατες, ῥαδίως σὺ Αἰγυπτίους καὶ ὀποδαπούς ἂν ἐθέλης λόγους ποιεῖς.

<sup>iv</sup> Hackforth (Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, tr. with intro. and comm. by R. Hackforth (Indianapolis, 1952)) more than any other commentator has indicated them. He refers to the description of the superheavenly place (ὑπερουράνιος τόπος) as though it is an elaboration of the metaphor of the flare of learning in the soul employed in the seventh epistle (p. 15 top and note), he regards the final discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus* as "coincident [in its] testimony [with] *Epistle VII* (341-4)" (p. 163; cf. entire discussion on pp. 163-164), and he sees a connection between the discussion of συναγωγή and διαίρεσις (*Phaedrus* 265c8-266c1) and the discussion of exact knowledge in the seventh epistle 342a7 ff. (p. 135, n.3). And although I do not agree with his analysis of these texts in every detail, the stress on the intimate connection between the two works seems fundamentally correct. In addition, even though he fails to remark the pun on ἡ πλάτανος and ὁ Πλάτων, he does see that the adjective zeus-like (διόν: 252e1), which describes those whose souls are characterized by the philosophical craziness, souls for whom Zeus is the leader, "conceals an allusion to Plato's friend Dion of Syracuse" (p. 99, n.2; cf. G.J. de Vries, *Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam, 1969), note ad 252e1, p. 162; Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, volume 3, *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge, 1957), p. 18). Other commentators refer to other parallels, e.g., the assertion in both the *Phaedrus* (258e4-5) and the seventh epistle (335b3-5) that bodily pleasures are slavish (ἀνδραποδώδεις: cf. Vries, note ad 258e4-5, pp. 191-192), the praise of Darius' legislation in both (*Phaedrus* 258b10-c6 and seventh epistle 332a3-b6: cf. Plato, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1920-1964), tome IV, part 3, *Phèdre*, tr. L. Robin, note ad 258c, p. 58; also Vries, note ad 260e5-7 φησὶν ὁ λάκων, p. 201; R.S. Bluck, "The second Platonic epistle," *Phronesis*, vol. 5, 1960, p. 144, n.1; Plato, *Phaedrus and the Seventh and Eighth Letters*, tr. Walter Hamilton (Penguin Classics), pp. 136, n.1, and 138, n.1; Plato, *Plato's Epistles*, tr. with critical essays and notes by Glenn R. Morrow (Indianapolis, 1962), pp. 80-81), and the references to Tisias in both (*Phaedrus* 267a6, 273a6, 7, c8, d2, e8; *Epistles* 7.349c3: these are the only references to Tisias in the Platonic corpus). It should perhaps be added that the very inclusion of the seventh and eighth epistles in the Penguin Classics volume of the *Phaedrus* suggests a connection between these works.

<sup>v</sup> 229a8, 230b1-2, 6, 236e1. The fifth is at *Laws* 4.705c4, where it is listed as absent from the site of the colony which is being founded by the interlocutors there.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Diogenes Laertius III. 4, for the change in name from the originally given 'Aristocles' after his grandfather to the nickname "Plato," because of his εὐεχίαν or because of τὴν πλατύτητα of his manner of interpreting things or because the bridge of his nose was πλατύς. The pun is not remarked in the commentaries of Thompson, Hackforth, Hamilton, Sallis, Pieper, Robin, Vries, Verdenius, or Fowler. The works referred to here but not cited in note 4 above are: Plato, *The Phaedrus of Plato*, with English notes and dissertations by W.H. Thompson (New York, 1973); John Sallis, *Being and Logos: the way of Platonic dialogue* (Pittsburgh, 1975)—a penetrating analysis of the whole *Phaedrus* (in Chapter III), which consistently takes into account the arguments as dramatic elements of the dialogue; Josef Pieper, *Enthusiasm and divine madness*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, 1964); W.J. Verdenius, "Notes on Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Mnemosyne*, ser. 4, vol. 8, 1955, pp. 265-289; and Fowler, tr. Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>vii</sup> Diogenes Laertius III. 7. Timon clearly was fond of punning on Plato's name: ἀλλὰ καὶ Τίμων οὕτως ἰ παραγραμματίζων αὐτόν· ὡς ἀνέπλασσε Πλάτων <ὁ> πεπλασμένα θαύματα εἰδῶς. The pun is difficult to render into English, for it depends on reading Πλάτων (broad) also as ὁ πλάσσω (the one who fashions or fabricates). The best that I can do is the following: "But also Timon, punning on him in this here way, asserts how 'Plato-the-broad-fabricator, having-envisioned wondrous broad-fabrications, re-fabricated-them-broadly.'" (Diogenes Laertius III. 26).

<sup>viii</sup> Consider, for example, the opening of Socrates' palinode, 243e9-244a3, for a particularly dense cluster of puns on names. For an analysis of the puns and their relation to the *Phaedrus* as a whole, see my *Platonic myth and Platonic writing* (Lanham, MD, 1981), ch. V, "The Socratic Myth," pp. 72-73 and notes.

<sup>ix</sup> Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1008 (cf. 1005); also cf. LSJ, ψιθυρίζω, 2. One might add in this connection that the Platonic dialogue form is such as to allow Plato simultaneously to speak aloud what may be spoken and to whisper what may not be spoken aloud.