

SEVENTEEN DISTORTED MIRRORS IN PLATO

The word *κάτοπτρον* (in various cases) occurs seventeen times in Plato, apparently without variant.¹ In fourth-century Attic inscriptions, however, the word constantly appears in the metathesized form *κάτροπτον*.² This, therefore, was the normal Attic form, the one Plato would have been most familiar with, and the one we should expect him to have written. There is no ground for supposing that it was only colloquial and that he would have eschewed it in favour of the 'proper' form.

On this basis alone there would be a *prima facie* case for restoring *κάτοπτρον* in the text of Plato. The testimony of the manuscripts carries no weight in such a matter, as it was only to be expected that normalization would occur in the course of the tradition and that *κάτοπτρον* would prevail. Contemporary inscriptions may not be *conclusive* evidence for Plato's original orthography, but they are in general much the best evidence.

In the present case, however, we have something even better, for one of the passages in question virtually proves that Plato wrote *κάτοπτρον*. *Cratylus* 414c is transmitted as follows:

ὦ μακάριε, οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅτι τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τεθέντα κατακέχωσται ἤδη ὑπὸ τῶν βουλομένων τραγωιδεῖν αὐτά, περιτιθέντων γράμματα καὶ ἐξαιρούντων εὐστομίας ἔνεκα καὶ πανταχῆ στροφόντων, καὶ ὑπὸ καλλωπισμοῦ καὶ ὑπὸ χρόνου; ἐπεὶ ἐν τῷ κατόπτρῳ οὐ δοκεῖ σοι ἄτοπον εἶναι τὸ ἐμβεβλησθαι τὸ ῥῶ; ἀλλὰ τοιαῦτα οἶμαι ποιούσιν οἱ τῆς μὲν ἀληθείας οὐδὲν φροντίζοντες, τὸ δὲ στόμα πλάττοντες, κτλ.

According to the Budé editor, Méridier, 'la forme primitive devait être, suivant Socrate, *κάτοπτρον*. Le ρ est considéré par lui comme une addition superflue et une altération: il ne reconnaît pas ici le suffixe -τρο- qui sert, dans les noms neutres de ce genre, à marquer l'*instrument*.'³ This is unconvincing; -τρον is a perfectly normal and common suffix in nouns denoting instruments, and Plato cannot have thought that **κάτοπτρον* would have been better formed. It is therefore very hard to see why he should have chosen *κάτοπτρον* as an example of a word containing an intrusive ρ. He found an intrusive ρ because the form he was citing was *κάτροπτον*. This is obvious, and it has been remarked on in LSJ s.v. *κάτοπτρον*: 'spelt *κάτροπτον* in Att. Inscr., IG 2².1471.47, 1544.58 (iv B.C.), al., and this form shd. be restored in Pl. *Cra.* 414c'. The point is taken by Dalimier in her recent translation,⁴ and she advocates reading *κατρόπτῳ*.

But if Plato wrote *κατροππ-* in the *Cratylus*, we must assume that he wrote it

¹ *Crat.* 414c; *Theaet.* 193c, 206d; *Soph.* 239d,e (twice); *Phaedr.* 255d; *Alc.* I 132e, 133a,c; *Rep.* 402b, 596d; *Tim.* 46a,c, 71b, 72c; *Leg.* 905b. Mr D. B. Robinson tells me that he knows of no manuscript variants.

² L. Thraette, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions* i (Berlin and New York, 1980), 477, lists nineteen instances of this spelling from inventories, against only one of *κάτοπτρον*. The exception dates from after 318/317, and is immediately followed by three instances of *κάτροπτον* in the succeeding lines of the same inscription. Dover introduces *κάτροπτον* in *Ag. Nub.* 752, to which the only objection would be that the inscriptional evidence does not take us back before 385. It was on this ground that I refrained from making the alteration at *Aesch. Ag.* 839 (*Aeschyli tragoediae* [Stuttgart, 1990], xlviiii).

³ L. Méridier (ed.), *Platon* V.2 (Paris, 1950), 97, n. 2.

⁴ Catherine Dalimier, *Platon. Cratyle* (Paris, 1998), 253.

everywhere. It would be perverse to suppose that he sometimes used the one form and sometimes the other.

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WORDS AMISS AT PLATO, *PHAEDO* 118a1–4

καὶ ἐπαιῶν οὕτως ἡμῖν ἐπεδείκνυτο ὅτι ψύχειτό τε καὶ πῆγνυτο. καὶ αὐτὸς ἤπτετο καὶ εἶπεν ὅτι, ἐπειδὴν πρὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ γένηται αὐτῷ, τότε οἰχῆσεται.

The warden—ὁ ἄνθρωπος—who administered the poison has been checking the upward spread of its chilling and numbing effects on Socrates' body. He has ascertained that Socrates cannot feel him pressing or squeezing his foot or, next, his shins; and now, the narrator says, 'proceeding upward in this way he showed us that he was getting cold and numb . . .'. My concern in this note is with the sentence that follows, and especially the opening clause, καὶ αὐτὸς ἤπτετο.

Some have supposed that αὐτός refers to Socrates himself, who then must be imagined grasping or pinching his own chilly thigh (probably) and announcing, 'When it reaches my heart, I shall be gone.' Thus Archer Hind explains: 'Socrates himself did the same as the man. This seems to be mentioned simply as evidence of his perfect calmness.'¹ But at this point Socrates is lying on his back (117e5, κατεκλίνη ὑπτιος· οὕτω γὰρ ἐκέλευεν ὁ ἄνθρωπος) and, as we learn from the very next sentence, has covered his head (ἐνεκεκάλυπτο γάρ), uncovering it only to utter his famous last words about the rooster owed to Asclepius. While it is not inconceivable that, just before covering his head, he might sit up, lean forward, grasp his thigh, and pronounce on the poison's fatal progress, it must be said that such a scenario is bizarre and improbable. In determining and demonstrating the efficacy of the poison, the warden obviously must ask Socrates several times, 'Can you feel this?' (vel sim.) as he presses or squeezes, and each time must receive the answer 'No'. Socrates in fact participates in the demonstration, and for him then to sit up—disobeying the order to lie ὑπτιος—and repeat the warden's pressing or squeezing actions would be superfluous, to say the least. Besides, imperfective ἤπτετο, following ἐφαπτόμενος (117e6), properly should mean, not 'touched', but 'kept hold of' or 'had his hands on'.² And even if it were granted an inceptive meaning to accommodate αὐτός = Socrates, the verb would still seem to require a reflexive αὐτοῦ, 'took hold of himself'.³

¹ R. D. Archer Hind, *The Phaedo of Plato* (London, 1883), ad loc.

² On the meaning of ἐφάπτεσθαι here, 'lay hold of' rather than 'feel', see C. Rowe (ed.), *Plato. Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1993), ad loc. And for the tendency of simplex verbs to retain the semantic force of preceding compound verbs, see R. Renehan, *Greek Textual Criticism. A Reader* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 77–85, with reference to C. Watkins, 'An Indo-European construction in Greek and Latin', *HSCP* 71 (1966), pp. 115–19.

³ Cf. R. Hackforth, *Plato's Phaedo* (Cambridge, 1955), 190, n. 2 ('Nor could αὐτός mean Socrates, for then we should have had αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ . . .'). As a further objection to αὐτός = Socrates, P. Edwards has suggested to me (*per e-litt.*) that if Plato had intended Socrates to make a momentous statement about the precise time of his own death, it is unlikely that he would have employed *oratio obliqua* here (. . . τότε οἰχῆσεται); rather, we should have expected him to 'privilege' Socrates with *oratio recta* (. . . τότε οἰχῆσομαι), as he does elsewhere in *Phaedo* and especially in the final request for sacrifice to Asclepius.