

PLATO'S USE OF ΑΤΕΧΝΩΣ

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THE PERISPOMENON ADVERB ἀτεχνῶς, derived from ἀτεχνής, is an Atticism common in the Greek of Plato and Aristophanes.¹ While it is prominent in these two authors, it is absent from the works of the tragedians and orators, and thus appears to be colloquial in tone. Thesleff specifically includes it among those terms which function as "markers" of Plato's colloquial style.² Its most typical meaning is "really, utterly, simply, literally,"³ and a scholium on Aristophanes' *Plutus* 109 lists, "ἀληθῶς, παντελῶς καὶ καθάπαξ καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ," as synonyms. Obviously it is closely related to the paroxytone ἀτέχνως, derived from ἀτέχνος, and another scholium on the same line explains that the word with this accentuation means "ἄνευ τέχνης" and occurs "εἰ δέ τις παρὰ τὴν τέχνην λέγει τι ἡ-ποίηι."⁴

In this paper I am concerned with the use of ἀτεχνῶς in the Platonic dialogues, where it is found 75 times.⁴ I shall argue that Plato intended to exploit the etymological connection between ἀτεχνῶς and τέχνη, a word crucial to his thought and vocabulary.⁵ When "really, utterly, simply," and the like are used as translations, the English contains no more than a colorless adverb. This may have been the way this word was heard in actual conversation, and it is the way it is used in Aristophanes,⁵ but the philosophical significance and extreme frequency of τέχνη in the dialogues should give us pause: is ἀτεχνῶς meant by Plato to be a ῥῆμα? I shall argue that it is. This common and apparently quite neutral adverb resonates with the altogether pivotal word τέχνη, a fact Plato put to good use.

I shall argue that (frequently) Plato intended ἀτεχνῶς to have a dual meaning. In these passages not only is its meaning "really, utterly, simply," but also ἄνευ τέχνης. In other words, in these passages ἀτεχνῶς also means

¹This derivation is according to LSJ and is perhaps questionable. I am grateful to an anonymous reader of an earlier draft of this paper for bringing this to my attention. I would like to thank all three readers of this paper for their many valuable suggestions. Also, my colleague James Ruebel has been very helpful. Finally, I would like to thank the Earhart Foundation for a research grant that gave me the time to work on this project.

²H. Thesleff, "Studies in the Style of Plato," *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 20 (1967) 86.

³*Scholía in Aristophanem*, ed. W. J. W. Koster, (Groningen 1960) 34.

⁴This and all other computations have been verified by the Ibycus computer system at Princeton University. The late Art Hanson was typically generous when he introduced me to this new τέχνη.

My count includes all the dialogues, even those considered spurious. It does not include the letters.

⁵Ατεχνῶς is used in the following passages in Aristophanes: *Ach.* 37; *Nubes* 408, 425, 439, 453, 1174; *Vespae* 722, 810; *Pax* 199, 206; *Aves* 60, 820; *Ranae* 106; *Plu.* 109, 362.

ἀτέχνως. For Plato himself, who used no written accentuation at all, there obviously would have been no visible difference between these two words. It is therefore entirely possible that he intended ΑΤΕΧΝΩΣ to be ambiguous. In Burnet's edition, ἀτέχνως is found only three times. In these passages, there are companion terms in the sentence that establish the meaning, and therefore the accentuation of the word. For example, *Phaedo* 100d3-4 reads, "ἀπλῶς καὶ ἀτέχνως καὶ ἰσῶς εὐήθως." In the *Sophist* we find, "εἰκῆ δὲ καὶ ἀτέχνως" (225c1). Later (225c7) ἐντεχνον forms a direct contrast to ἀτέχνως and so makes the choice of accentuation self-evident. A passage from the *Gorgias* is slightly more problematic (as Dodds, but not Burnet, notes in his *apparatus*).⁶ The phrase is "κομιδῆ ἀτέχνως" (501a4, "quite unscientifically," according to Dodds). At 501a6 ἀλόγως seems to be a parallel term, and so again the choice of accent is straightforward.

The passages with which I am concerned are quite different from the above in that the choice of the perispomenon accentuation seems immediately plausible. In other words, ἀτεχνῶς in these passages does seem to be only a mild, intensifying adverb. I shall show, however, that it is precisely in situations such as these that Plato was punning.

To prove that an ancient author is punning is often quite difficult, since it requires attributing to him an intention not made explicit in the text. Some puns can, of course, be easily identified. For example, there is no mistaking Alcibiades' remark in the *Protagoras*, "Οὐ καλῶς λέγεις, ἔφη, ὦ Καλλία" (336b7).⁷ Nor is there any doubt that Plato is punning on the meaning of Polus' name, "colt," in *Gorgias* 463e2: "Πῶλος δὲ ὅδε νέος ἐστὶ καὶ ὄξυς." The use of τόκος in *Republic* 507a2-5 is a well-known case of a single word whose two meanings, interest and offspring, are both invoked in an elaborate dual metaphor.

The situation is more problematic when the word in question is colloquial. After all, it would seem that common words are most likely to be used unreflectively. I suggest, however, that such an assumption is dangerous when applied to the dialogues. Indeed, Plato seems to have followed well the advice of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. There he likened a good piece of writing to a properly functioning living body in which every part is necessary for the well being of the whole (264b-c). A piece is properly composed if it complies with the requirement of "logographic necessity" (264b7), i.e., if each of its parts performs a necessary function. In simpler but undoubtedly accurate terms, Plato was an enormously careful writer who wasted few if any words. Accordingly, the reader is compelled to examine virtually every word in the

⁶E. R. Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias* (Oxford 1960) 147.

⁷All my citations are from Burnet's edition (Oxford 1900-05). All English translations are taken from the Loeb Classical Library.

text, even the most colloquial, and seek to determine its function.⁸ In the case of ἀτεχνῶς, the several synonyms listed above were readily available to Plato. These he eschewed. In what follows I simply seek to discover why.

In a significant number of cases, it can be confidently asserted that Plato is punning with ἀτεχνῶς. In other instances, the evidence is not as immediately compelling. I cannot here treat each of the many passages where the word appears. Instead, this paper has two goals. The first is to establish a precedent: I show that Plato did in fact pun on ἀτεχνῶς in several important passages. The second goal is heuristic. I argue that the possibility of a pun should never be discounted and that as a result every passage in which the word appears should be tested. Τέχνη is too important a term and concept, and ἀτεχνῶς too closely related to it, for the reader not to consider the possibility that Plato intended ἀτεχνῶς to echo with the meaning ἀνετέχνης.

One function of ἀτεχνῶς that has long been noted is that of signalling an allusion to or quotation of a proverbial saying. Tarrant states, "A further clue to a few semi-proverbs may perhaps be found. Plato frequently uses certain phrases of emphasis to point to the applicability of some figure or turn of language. The chief of these are ἀτεχνῶς, ὡς ἀληθῶς, τῷ ὄντι."⁹ There are at least eleven such instances where the word is a "quotation marker" of some sort (see Appendix). For example, consider *Ion* 534d8. Socrates has been arguing that poets produce their works, not by τέχνη, but by inspiration. As evidence, he cites Tynnichus the Chalcidian. This man had never produced a single poem worth mention, until one day he somehow composed a paean considered to be among the most beautiful. What he had written was, "ἀτεχνῶς, ὅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει, 'εὐρημά τί Μοισάν'."

Tarrant is surely right that ἀτεχνῶς here indicates the citation of a semi-proverb. As such it does not appear to carry much weight in the sentence and a reasonable translation would be, "simply, as he himself says, an invention of the Muses." Examination of the context of this statement, however, reveals that the word has a dual meaning. The entire dialogue concerns the relationship between τέχνη and poetry (and the activity of the rhapsode).¹⁰ Forms of the noun τέχνη are used often in the near vicinity of 534d8: 533d1, e6, 534b8, c5, c6. Indeed, in the twelve Stephanus pages of the *Ion* there are 37 occurrences of the noun. The word thus appears at a rate of over three

⁸This is not to imply that Plato was a god who unerringly determined the appropriate slot for every word. It is, instead, to insist that he was a master writer and that any interpretation ought to begin with the assumption that Plato knew what he was doing.

⁹D. Tarrant, "Colloquialisms, Semi-Proverbs, and Word-Play in Plato," *CQ* 40 (1946) 109-117, at 114.

¹⁰For an interpretation of the *Ion* that makes it clear how crucial τέχνη is for Plato; see R. K. Sprague, *Plato's Philosopher King* (Columbia, S.C. 1976) 1-15.

times per page.¹¹ It is undeniable that Socrates believes that Tynnichus composed his poem *ἄνευ τέχνης*. Therefore, it is hard to imagine that Plato did not intend a pun here. If it were not a pun, we would have to accuse him of a rather gross literary insensitivity. It would be comparable to a treatise on parenthood, in which the phrase "a parent" is used three times per page, if the author said, "he is apparently a father," and was unaware of the pun he had made. Such artlessness would be utterly uncharacteristic of Plato.

The situation is similar, although not as transparent, at *Euthydemus* 291d1. Here Socrates describes *ἡ βασιλικὴ τέχνη*. To it, he suggests, the other τέχνηαι hand over their *ἔργα* in order to be rightly used. The kingly art is "ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ὀρθῶς πράττειν ἐν τῇ πόλει, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὸ ἰαμβεῖον μόνη ἐν τῇ πύμνῃ καθῆσθαι τῆς πόλεως." The second line from Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* is being paraphrased, and so Gifford is correct in saying that ἀτεχνῶς is used here in "quoting a proverbial saying."¹² The context, however, suggests the possibility of a pun.

As in the *Ion*, an important theme of the *Euthydemus* is Socrates' effort to show that the two sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, have no legitimate claim to a τέχνη. They think they are able to teach virtue (273d7) and to persuade others that virtue is teachable (274e7). It is this latter claim, namely that of being able to practise the art of protreptic, that Socrates is most determined to refute. The dialogue is composed of a series of speeches alternating between him and the sophists which compete for the attention and favor of young Kleinias. Throughout, Socrates is at his most ironic, especially when he lavishly praises the two brothers. Most telling is when he calls them "πάσσοφοι ἀτεχνῶς" (271c6; see also 303e1).

Τέχνη is not used with extreme frequency in this dialogue (0.7 times per page). In the immediate vicinity of 291d, however, it is found numerous times: 290a7, b1, b5, 291a8, b5, c5, c7, d7. In the first section of his protreptic speech (277d–282d), Socrates attempts to show that only philosophy leads to happiness. The objects which are typically called good (health, wealth, the traditional virtues) are actually neutral. Their value depends on how they are used. Only if used correctly will their possession bring benefit and thus happiness, and only if knowledge is employed as a guide will their use be correct. Thus, only σοφία is genuinely ἀγαθόν (281e4–5). The second instalment of the speech (288d–293d) contains Socrates' attempt to determine more specifically what kind of knowledge is actually required for this task. He divides τέχνη into two kinds: that which is productive, such as medicine and money-making, and that which is acquisitive, such as hunting

¹¹The most frequent occurrence of τέχνη is in the *Cleitophon* (3.5 times per Stephanus page). The *Ion* is second, followed by the *Lovers* (2.5), the *Statesman* (1.4), the *Sophist* (1.2), and the *Gorgias* (1.0).

¹²E. H. Gifford, *Plato's Euthydemus* (Oxford 1909) 43.

and geometry. What is needed is a third type of τέχνη, that which knows how to use these products and acquisitions. This proves difficult, if not impossible, to discover, for its proposed field of expertise, the correct use of all things, is so broad that it is out of the reach of the other, more typical, τέχνηαι. Finally, Socrates has to describe himself as in ἀπορία concerning the hypothetical kingly art (see 293a1).

I have elaborated the context in which ἀτεχνῶς is used to cite the line from Aeschylus because it is a good example of how our literary question, did Plato pun with ἀτεχνῶς, takes on philosophical significance. This passage is important, for in it the question of the "using τέχνη" whose province is the correct use of things is directly raised. Understanding the nature and possibility of such a τέχνη is central in discovering in what sense virtue is knowledge for Plato. In particular, the question becomes whether or to what extent virtue, understood as knowledge, is analogous to τέχνη. On this, scholars disagree.¹³ My own view is that Plato did *not* believe that a using τέχνη was epistemologically viable. In this short paper I cannot substantiate such a claim. Nevertheless, suppose it is correct. If so, then the use of ἀτεχνῶς at 291d1 is striking indeed and suggests a pun. Specifically it could be read as modifying καθῆσθαι in order to describe the impossibility of a technical governance of the city. Here my proposal is provisional and heuristic: the possibility of a pun should not be discounted at 291d1, and ἀτεχνῶς should not be dismissed as a mere colloquialism used only to mark a quotation.

At 292e3, after the search for the kingly art has failed, Socrates says, "ἀλλ' ἀτεχνῶς τὸ λεγόμενον ὁ Διὸς Κόρινθος γίνεται." Lamb translates, "and it is merely a case of the proverbial 'Corinthian Divine'." This saying refers to the time when Corinth had sent ambassadors to Megara to complain of their revolt. They had argued that the mythical founder of Megara, Corinthus son of Zeus, would be angered if the revolt continued. The proverb "came to be used of boastful repetitions of the same story,"¹⁴ and is here meant to give voice to the futility of the search. Again, ἀτεχνῶς has a dual function: it is used colloquially to indicate a quotation and, since the quotation is cited explicitly to note the absence of the βασιλικὴ τέχνη, a pun seems likely.

A second, typical use of ἀτεχνῶς is in conjunction with ὥσπερ, οἶον, and verbs such as εἰκάζω and δοκέω to indicate a comparison or simile. As Shorey puts it, "ἀτεχνῶς . . . marks the application (often ironical or emphatic) of

¹³T. Irwin, in *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford 1978), believes that the analogy between τέχνη and virtue is strict (ch. 3). G. Vlastos, in "The Virtuous and the Happy," *TLS* Feb. 24, 1978, 232, and George Klosko, "The Technical Conception of Virtue," *JHistPhil* 18 (1981) 95–102, disagree. Irwin's bibliography is a good guide to the enormous amount of literature on this issue.

¹⁴Gifford (above, n. 12) 44.

an image.¹⁵ We find a clear case of this usage, as well as a pun, at *Phaedo* 90c4, Socrates' famous warning against misology. A man becomes a misanthrope when he has unrealistic expectations of other men and so is terribly disappointed when they fail him. Misanthropy arises on account of trusting others "ἀνευ τέχνης" (89d5 and 89e5). So too with misology: it arises when someone "ἀνευ τῆς περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνης" (90b7) naively expects speeches to be readily true, and is then frustrated and embittered when examination finds them lacking. Such a man despairs of the efficacy of λόγος itself, and believes that, "πάντα τὰ ὄντα ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ἐν Εὐρύπῳ ἄνω καὶ κάτω στρέφεται καὶ χρόνον οὐδένα ἐν οὐδενὶ μένει" (90c4-6).

Shortly after this line Socrates states that the misologist does not blame his own "ἀτεχνία" (90d3), but the λόγοι themselves for his disappointment. Thus, the context again makes it highly probable that here Plato is punning with ἀτεχνῶς. To approach this from a different angle, *Phaedo* 90c4-6 contains an unmistakable reference to Heraclitus. The misologist adopts the position that τὰ ὄντα are unstable or in a state of flux. Since τέχνη, at least in the Platonic sense, requires that τὰ ὄντα be stable, Heraclitean ontology would make τέχνη itself impossible. Thus, the position as well as the man who adopts it may be said to be ἀνευ τέχνης. Ἀτεχνῶς at 90c4 not only performs the function Shorey ascribes to it, i.e., that of marking a simile, but also is a playful reference to τέχνη.¹⁶

Cratylus 440c8 also finds ἀτεχνῶς being used to form a description of the Heraclitean position. Here Socrates explains that if all things change and nothing abides, there can be no knowledge (see 440a). No man of sense will believe that "πάντα ὥσπερ κεράμια βέλ, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ οἱ κατάρρω νοσοῦντες ἄνθρωποι οὕτως οἴεσθαι καὶ τὰ πράγματα διακεῖσθαι."

Fowler renders ὥσπερ ἀτεχνῶς "just like." But men who hold such a belief, i.e., that all things flow, are men whose ontology makes τέχνη impossible, and so the word here is part of a pun (which is hardly surprising in this dialogue). *Cratylus* 402a5 and *Theaetetus* 179e6 each use ἀτεχνῶς to describe the Heraclitean position in a similar fashion. (Also, compare *Sophist* 246a8 and *Laws* 923a3.)

In *Laches* 188d6 ἀτεχνῶς is used to form a metaphor, and while this passage is not as clearly a pun as the *Phaedo* citation, it is worth noting. Laches is describing his ambivalence towards discussions. He is impressed by the man who "practises what he preaches," but when a speaker's deeds fail to live up to his words, Laches is appalled. He demands that the speaker and his speeches be in harmony. When they are, a man becomes truly musical for he has tuned himself, "ἀτεχνῶς δωριστί ἀλλ' οὐκ ἰαστί," simply

¹⁵P. Shorey, *Plato's Republic* (Cambridge 1926) 78. Aristotle uses ἀτεχνῶς only in order to express comparison. See *E.N.* 1102b18, *Gen. An.* 731a21, 743b22, *Prot.* 73.4, and *Soph. El.* 172a34.

¹⁶Perhaps ἀτεχνῶς modifies οἶονται at 90c2.

in the Dorian and not the Ionian mode. Here the word functions to intensify the metaphor. It should, however, be noted that later in the dialogue Laches argues against Nicias' claim that courage is wisdom (194c-196d). Τέχνη is the model of knowledge there used to illustrate the concept of wisdom (the examples in 195a-b are medicine and farming). In essence, therefore, Laches denies that courage is a τέχνη. His preferred man is not a τεχνίτης, but one who acts ἀτεχνῶς δωριστί. Between 185a and 188d τέχνη or forms of the adjective τεχνικός are used eleven times (see 185a1, b2, b11, d9, e4, e8, e11, 186c5, 187a1, b3). Thus the context makes a compelling case that Plato expected Laches' use of ἀτεχνῶς at 188d6 to be understood as also meaning ἀτέχνως.

A third function of ἀτεχνῶς is less specific than those of marking a quotation or emphasizing a comparison. This usage, which I term "attribution," is best illustrated by an example, again from the *Ion*.¹⁷ Ion describes his lack of interest in all poets other than Homer. He tells Socrates that whenever someone discusses any other poet, "ἀτεχνῶς νοστιάω" (532c2). Lamb translates this, "I simply fall into a doze." For Socrates, however, Ion's drowsiness is sure evidence that he has no τέχνη and is truly simple: a genuine τεχνίτης must be able to discuss and judge all the works, both good and bad, of all the practitioners in his field (see 532e-533c). Therefore, when Ion takes a little nap during a discourse on Hesiod or Archilochus, he does so because he is ἀνευ τέχνης. Reading the sentence in this manner we can "attribute" the adverb, or an adjective derived from it (ἀτεχνός), to the subject of the verb νοστιάω. Thus the sentence can be interpreted as meaning, "I, who am without τέχνη, fall into a doze."

In four lines of the *Apology* (17d3, 18d6, 30e2, 35d4) Socrates uses ἀτεχνῶς in a manner that invites the reader to attribute ἀτεχνός to himself. At 17d3 he says, "ἀτεχνῶς οὖν ξένως ἔχω τῆς λέξεως." Clearly, he is saying not only that he is "an utter foreigner" (Fowler) to the language of the lawcourt, but that he does not profess to have the rhetorical or sophistical art. Throughout the dialogue Socrates disclaims any positive or technical knowledge. He explicitly disassociates himself from Evenus of Paros who, at least in Callias' eyes, does seem to have the art of educating the youth in virtue (20c1). The *Apology* is the only work in which ἀτεχνῶς is used more frequently than τέχνη (six times to two). This makes good sense if we think of the word as a pun and a Socratic self-attribution. After all, this is the work that made forever famous the notion of Socratic ignorance.

Phaedrus 242a7 very likely contains the pun. Socrates is describing Phaedrus: "θεῖός γ' εἶ περὶ λόγους, ὦ Φαῖδρε, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς θαυμάσιος." Phaedrus

¹⁷I do not intend these three usages to be rigidly distinct. Obviously, my argument depends on both the quotation marker and the comparison involving an "attribution." "Attribution" is really only a category to cover those cases not subsumed under the first two usages.

is simply amazing when it comes to his passion for listening to speeches, but unfortunately he has no real understanding of them. He lacks "τὴν τῶν λόγων τέχνην" (260d4), which is the central concern of this stage of the dialogue (see 260d9, e3, e6, 261a7, b4, b6, c10, d7, e2.)

A final example comes from the *Republic*. After Thrasymachus has delivered his notorious remarks that "the unjust are good and wise" (348d3-5) and that he is willing to classify injustice with virtue and wisdom (349a1), Socrates says to him, "ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖς σύ, ὦ Θρασύμαχε, ἀτεχνῶς νῦν οὐ σκώπτειν" (349a6-7). Shorey renders this, "I absolutely believe that you are not 'mocking' us." With such a translation he takes into account the ambiguity of the clause (he both uses "absolutely" to modify "believe," and places "mocking" in quotation marks): does ἀτεχνῶς modify δοκεῖς or σκώπτειν? I suggest that in either case there is a strong possibility of a pun here. Much of Book 1 has proceeded on the assumption that justice is a τέχνη (see 332d2). Furthermore, τέχνη is used frequently in Book 1: 28 times in 28 Stephanus pages. Consequently, it is fair to say that Thrasymachus is a man ἀνευ τέχνης. Since Thrasymachus is the subject of both δοκεῖς and σκώπτειν it is likely that Plato intended the quality of ἀτεχνία to be attributed to him. This is a case where a pun cannot be proven. Nevertheless, reading ἀτεχνῶς as a pun does no violence to the tone or obvious intent of the passage, and so it should be strongly considered.

Many more examples could be cited. In lieu of this an appendix is provided below in which all occurrences of ἀτεχνῶς are listed, with a rough indication of how the word is used. Even without further argument the goals of this paper have been met. It has been established that Plato does in fact pun with ἀτεχνῶς and exploit its etymological connection with τέχνη. As a result, the reader should be alerted to the possibility of a pun in every line in which the word appears. Far from being simply a colorless adverb, used only to intensify similes or quote proverbial sayings, ἀτεχνῶς is a significant component of the Platonic lexicon and should be read as such.

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APPENDIX: ἀτεχνῶς IN ΠΛΑΤΩ

<i>Euthyphro</i>	<i>Symposium</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
3a7 C	173d5 C	486c1 A
5c7 A	179b1 Q	491a1 A
	192e7 A	494d1 A
<i>Apology</i>	198c2 Q	525c6 A
17d3 A	214b2 C	
18c7 A	217e7 C	<i>Meno</i>
18d6 C		80a3 C
26e8 A	<i>Phaedrus</i>	
30e2 C	230c7 C	<i>Ion</i>
35d4 A	242a7 A	532c2 A
		534d8 Q
<i>Phaedo</i>	<i>Alcibiades I</i>	541e7 C
59e4 A	116e3 C	
82e1 A	123a1 Q	<i>Menexenus</i>
90c4 C		249b7 A
103a8 A	<i>Alcibiades II</i>	
116a6 C	146e5 C	<i>Cleitophon</i>
		408c3 C
<i>Cratylus</i>	<i>Lovers</i>	
395e1 C	136a7 A	<i>Republic</i>
396a2 C		349a6 C
402a5 Q	<i>Charmides</i>	419a10 C
440c8 C	154b8 Q	432a2 A
		443d6 C
<i>Theatetus</i>	<i>Laches</i>	473c7 C
151c6 A	187b3 Q	548a9 C
161a7 A	188d6 C	563c5 Q
179e6 A		
	<i>Euthydemus</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>Sophist</i>	271c6 A	677d8 A
246a8 A	273e7 C	732e5 C
255d6 A	291d1 Q	790e1 C
	292e3 Q	793b6 C
<i>Statesman</i>	303e1 A	819b3 A
277b7 C		840d2 A
288a1 A	<i>Protagoras</i>	858a8 C
294c5 A	326d1 C	923a3 Q
303c8 C	352b8 C	952e7 C

"A"—attribution
"C"—comparison
"Q"—quotation