

The Reader in the Text

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Abstract. I here call attention to a device found in many literary traditions, a variant of prolepsis (anticipation of an opponent's argument) in which the opponent is a reader envisioned by the author or a character actually present inside the text, who complains of something new and is silenced, or prefers something else and is satisfied. Such passages may signal the presence of late material in a text, and thus (as in the following examples) may help to reveal the compositional strata of that text.

Iliad 2:73-75

High on the list of Iliadic military idiocies¹ is Agamemnon's response to a dream of victory over Troy, a dream sent by Zeus to mislead him, but ostensibly favorable. He calls the Greeks together in 2:50, but presently he proposes to the chiefs:

73 First, I with words will make trial of them, as is fitting,

74 Ordering them to flee in their many-benched ships together –

75 Do ye take care, from this side and that, to restrain them with words

Given the rush for the ships which follows, nothing less suitable could be imagined.² I suggest that the phrase ἢ θέμις ἐστί “as is fitting” is meant to excuse this nonsense: to lull the sensible reader (or hearer) over the absurdity of the suggestion.

Themis θέμις in the Iliad usually means social entitlement. Some instances (with Smith's translations) are: 9:33 “as is my *privilege*,” 9:276 “in the *manner* of men and women,” 23:44 “it is noway *right*,” 24:652 “as they *have a right* to.” The privilege of Diomedes to speak in assembly, in 9:33, is based on his status as a chief and thus as a counselor; he is one who is socially entitled to be heard. Iliad 2:73, which lacks this social or customary dimension, seems to be anomalous in this group.

Evidence of Interpolation. The *natural* thing for Agamemnon to do, if he believes the dream, would be to gather the Greeks and march on Troy. Was this the original plot? Or to put the question in a form in which philology can deal with it: Is there a point in Iliad 2 from which the story actually takes that course? There is: at 2:445f. The preceding lines, 2:442-444, are nearly identical with the 2:50-52 assembly call. After the episode of the flight to the ships, the tale goes back to its starting point, and at 2:442 it calls the assembly all over again. When the material between 2:52 and 2:445 is removed, the two assembly calls can be merged as one. For the standard reason that the text is more coherent without it, 2:53-2:444 looks like an interpolation.

¹For a defense, with citation of previous literature, see Cook **Test**.

²For the perplexities of the commentators, see eg Jevons (1886) 307; Knox (1989).

Without that passage, Iliad 2:50-452 would read this way:

50~442 Straightway to the heralds clear-voiced, he gave his instruction
 51=443 to summon unto the battle the flowing-haired men of Achaia.
 52=444 These did indeed issue summons, and those did assemble right quickly.
 445 And those who surrounded Atrides, the nurtured of Zeus, the princes,
 446 hastened to marshal the host; among them, blue-eyed Athena,
 447 wearing the aegis so precious, free from all age and immortal,
 448 wherefrom a hundred of tassels, all of them gold, were suspended,
 449 cunningly woven, a hundred of oxen the value of each,
 450 and with this, dazzling the eye, she sped through the host of Achaians,
 451 urging them onward; great strength did she inspire in each one,
 452 a heart to make war without ceasing, and still to do battle.

Implications for the Text. If 2:442-445f has a satisfactory narrative flow, and no one has ever said it does not, then so does 2:50-52 *plus* 445f. The largely comical material between the two assembly calls (featuring garrulous Nestor, rude Thersites, and repentant Agamemnon) might have taken about forty minutes in performance.³

Time is treated luxuriously in the Iliad, with the story line sometimes pausing for comic relief (the Wounding of Aphrodite, Iliad 5:311-430) or civic affirmation (the Shield of Achilles, Iliad 18:483-608). Perhaps our Iliad was once more compact, and was later distended by bards playing to audiences more leisured, and more civilian, than those for whom the original tales had been crafted?

Mahâ-Parinibbâna Sutta 5:41-44

The Buddha has been traveling from village to village with his disciples; at 5:1, he has reached Kusinârâ. He has been taken ill, and his followers know he will soon die. Contemplating that approaching death, the disciple Ânanda mourns (5:32-35), as is quite natural. But he also finds time to object, not to the death of the Buddha as such, but to the fact that it is taking place in a mere jerkwater town of no repute. Then:

5:41. When he had thus spoken, the venerable Ânanda said to the Blessed One, "Let not the Blessed One die in this little wattle-and-daub town in the midst of the jungle, in this branch township. For, Lord, there are other great cities, such as Campâ, Râjagaha, Sâvatthi, Sâketa, Kosambi, and Benâres. Let the Blessed One die in one of them. There, there are many wealthy nobles and Brahmans and heads of houses, believers in the Tathâgata, who will pay due honor to the remains of the Tathâgata." [42] "Say not so, Ânanda! Say not so, Ânanda, that this is but a small wattle-and-daub town in the midst of the jungle, a branch township. Long ago, Ânanda, there was a king, by name Mahâ-Sudassana, a King of Kings, a righteous man who ruled in righteousness, Lord of the Four Quarters of the Earth, conqueror, the protector of his people, possessor of the seven Royal Treasures. This Kusinârâ, Ânanda, was the royal city of King Mahâ-Sudassana, under the name of Kusâvatî, and on the east and on the west it was twelve leagues in length, and on the north and on the south it was seven leagues in breadth."

³A 1912 performance (see Drerup **Fünfte** 49f) suggests a tempo of 6 seconds per line.

[43]“That royal city Kusâvatî, Ânanda, was mighty, and prosperous, and full of people, crowded with men, and provided with all things for food. Just, Ânanda, as the royal city of the gods, Âlakamandâ by name, is mighty, prosperous, and full of people, crowded with the gods and provided with all kinds of food, so, Ânanda, was the royal city Kusâvatî mighty and prosperous, full of people, crowded with men, and provided with all kinds of food. [44] Both by day and by night, Ânanda, the royal city Kusâvatî resounded with the ten cries, that is to say: the noise of elephants, and the noise of horses and the noise of chariots; the sounds of the drum, of the tabor, and of the lute; the sound of singing and the sounds of the cymbal and of the gong; and lastly, with the cry, Eat, drink, and be merry!”

With that reassurance, the text resumes its previous business, and Ânanda is sent to notify the Mallas of Kusinârâ of the Buddha’s impending demise. The Kusâvatî passage lifts the tale out of its humble setting, making it grander and so more agreeable to a devout but disappointed posterity, whose interests Ânanda briefly represents.

Evidence of Interpolation. The interruptive quality of the passage is obvious, as is the change in the role of Ânanda in that passage. Its independence as a narrative unit is shown by the fact that it recurs as the beginning of the Mahâ-Sudassana Sutta, which describes the royal city Kusâvatî and the world conquests of its King Sudassana, ending with the death of the King (modeled on the death of the Buddha from MPn). Finally (MSd 2:37), the Buddha reveals that he himself was that King, that he had previously died and been buried there six times, that the King’s death was the seventh, and that his coming death would be the eighth and last. This whole Sutta may be seen as a further development of the already legendary and elaborative MPn 5:41-44.⁴

Implications for the Text. May not the intermittently humble Mahâ-Parinibbâna Sutta have been at first a relatively realistic narrative of the last days of the Buddha, subsequently modified to be more suitable to the sensibilities of a later, more devout, more pilgrimage oriented, and above all, a richer and more urban, posterity?

⁴That passage has interest in other directions too: it seems to have influenced the rewriting of the first death scene of Confucius (LY 7:35, c0450) as LY 9:12 (c0405). In the latter, Confucius is dying in humble status, and his followers, led by Dž-lù, thinking this inappropriate for so great a man, masquerade as the retinue of a nobleman to create what for them was a more suitable setting. If so, then the interpolated MPn 5:41-44 must somewhat predate c0405; the core MPn narrative must be earlier than the interpolation; and the death of Buddha, which it is the central task of the MPn to describe, must be earlier still. The effect of all this is to put the Buddha’s death in the early 05c, which is where at least one older tradition also located it.

Rhys Davids ends his Introduction to the MPn by suggesting that the Buddha’s death must be redated from that traditional c0485 to c0420/0400, since the transmission series of Theras from Asoka (mid 03c) back to Upâli will account for “only about 150 years.” This assumes that Upâli and monastic Buddhism itself date from the time of the Buddha, but that assumption is against all economic probability. The likely stages are: (1) In MPn, Buddha and his followers are itinerant. (2) The Prâtimokṣa (Pâli, Pâtimokkha), a confessional for monks living separately and assembling twice a month, defines a period of *semi*-monastic Buddhism, which must intervene. (3) Full monastic Buddhism *does* begin with Upâli, but it requires wealthy patrons, and thus can arise only at a later and more prosperous stage of Ganga urbanization.

Analects 13:3

Confucius died in 0479. The Analects supposedly reflects Confucius, and contains much gnomic advice which the reader comes to regard as typifying Confucius. In that context of expectation, the *jǜng-míng* 正名 “rectification of names” theory which is urged in LY 13:3 is startling, since the idea itself, and the chain argument form in which it is expounded, suggest to the educated reader, not Confucius, but rather the 03rd century philosopher Sywǎndź, who has a whole chapter (SZ 22) on that subject. We are surprised. In Analects 13:3, “Confucius’s” disciple Dź-lù is surprised too. “Confucius” proceeds to berate him for that surprise, in these terms:

“Dź-lù said, If the Ruler of Wèi were waiting for the Master to be in charge of his government, what would the Master do first? The Master said, It would certainly be to rectify names, would it not? Dź-lù said, The Master is off the track. What is all this about rectifying? The Master said, Boorish indeed is Yóu! The gentleman, with respect to what he does not understand, should maintain an abashed silence. If names are not rectified, speech will not be representative. If speech is not representative, things will not get done . . .”

No mere emollient Iliad 2:73 adverb here: this is heavy stuff. But in its different way, it too recognizes (in the person of a disciple) and silences (by haranguing that disciple) the doubts of readers who might otherwise be inclined to find its novelty anomalous.

Evidence of Interpolation. LY 13:3 interrupts a pattern of paired sayings in that chapter (13:1/2 and 13:4/5). There is no place for the LY 13:3 saying in that pattern. It is then structurally intrusive, and for that reason also, probably of later date.

Implications for the Text. Other Sywǎndzian moments in the Analects occur in the next layer of the text (LY 16-20); they reduce the anomaly of LY 13:3.⁵ May not they and LY 13:3 together imply contact with a rival 03c Confucianism which could not be named without anachronism, but was too important to be altogether ignored by the authors of the Analects, the leaders of the 03rd century Confucian School of Lǚ?

Mark 4:10-13

In much of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is represented as a healer, and a caller to repentance. The Lord is coming, we are told. Crowds gather and listen. We listen too, expecting the Lord to appear at any moment. Suddenly, we overhear this astonishing remark of Jesus (incorporating the “cursing oracle” of Isaiah 6:9-10):

4:10. And when he was alone, those who were about him with the Twelve asked him concerning the parables, [11] and he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables, [12] so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again, and be forgiven. [13] And he said to them, Do you not understand this parable? How then do you expect to understand all the parables?”

⁵See the comments in Brooks *Analects* to LY 17:2a/b, 17:3, 17:8a, and 17:9 (where the Analects either opposes Sywǎndź or sides with his enemies, the Mencians), and all of LY 19.

An explanation then follows, in 4:14-20. A bit further on (4:34), we are told that “he did not speak to them save in parables, but privately, to his own disciples, he explained everything.” Jesus’s previously successful preaching seems to have become, not just ineffectual, but *intentionally* ineffectual. What has happened?

Evidence of Interpolation. In 4:21-32, with no narrative retransition, Jesus again addresses the multitude. Mk 4:1-9 plus 21-32 would make a plausible public sermon, which is interrupted by the change of setting in 4:10-20, from the crowd to a private conversation and back to the crowd again. Quite apart from the difference of content, this unmotivated double change of scene independently suggests that the dark 4:10-20 (and the related and equally dark 4:34) are interpolated.

Implications for the Text. The seeming interpolation insists that Jesus’s meaning will be revealed *only later*, and then only to a few; and that Jesus’s original hearers, even his disciples, systematically fail to understand him. Wrede called the message of such passages the Messianic Secret.⁶ They seem to rebuke expectations about Jesus or the future which are implied or stated in other passages in Mark. May they not be an attempt to impose a new meaning, a post-Crucifixion meaning, on teachings which some readers remembered as having been the teachings of Jesus during his lifetime? To deny the validity of those memories, and to silence those who still held them?

Conclusion

The presence of readers within texts, whether as mindfulness on a hero’s part or as actual characters in the story, has many forms and intensities, but there seems to be a common quality. I suggest that these may be places where a text argues, on behalf of its *late* elements, against expectations which are grounded in its readers’ familiarity (or dissatisfaction) with its *early* elements. Such devices can suit the strategy of an evolving text as a way of maintaining contact: satisfying disturbed readers or pleasing discontented ones. In the rhetorically stronger instances, such as the last two above, the point at issue may merely be that much more consequential: the art of ruling men; the salvation of humankind.

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⁶As cannot be further explored here, I find that there are not one but two “secrets” in Mark; that is, ways in which later passages in Mark seek to disavow what earlier passages expound.