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A SYMPTOMATIC TEXT CORRUPTION: Plato, *Gorgias* 448a5

HOLGER THESLEFF

Papyrologists know that the change of speaker was rarely and inconsistently noted in manuscripts of ancient dialogue texts. A line in the margin may occur, occasionally some other mark, but names or so-called character sigla ('singulae litterae'), such as we are used to, (ΑΓ, ΚΑ, ΚΑΑ, ΣΩ) were not normally employed. Perhaps codicologists know when the sigla began to be regularly adopted. This must have been at a time when dialogue texts were professionally copied for new readers who were expected to cope with the written dialogues on their own. In the Hellenistic age, the practice was still unknown, as far as I can see. I have argued elsewhere that the lack of character sigla has some bearing on the question of in what way, and for what audiences, the Platonic dialogues were originally meant to be presented.¹

A well-established public institution such as the Greek theatre had no difficulties in using manuscripts lacking character sigla. Those who studied the written texts, stage directors and actors, were from the start acquainted with the distribution of the roles, and little training was needed to identify them. Nor was the change of speaker a big problem with pieces of simple dramatic prose dialogue where only two characters appear, such as some of Plato's texts. If a third person occasionally turns up (as in, say, the opening of *Hippias Minor* and again at 373a-c), a vocative address helps with the identification. And when a dialogue is carried by a narrative, there is normally no problem at all in determining who said what. This literary practice was well known since Homer, and the Socratics adopted it at an

¹ "Plato and His Public", in: B.Amden al. (eds.), *Noctes Atticae*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press 2002, esp. 292–294. The absence in ancient manuscripts of names or sigla for dialogue speakers was argued in detail by J.Andrieu, *Le dialogue antique* (Coll. d'Études Latines 29), Paris 1954, 209–229, 283, 307 f.; cf. E.Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, Oxford 1971, 15. I do not know of any counter-evidence.

early date.² Such texts could be read by anybody outside the public institutions.

Most of Plato's literarily wrought dialogues are of the narrative ('reported') kind. They were probably meant for (relatively) large audiences, and the text could be put in circulation beyond the immediate control of the author. The narrator, and through him the reader, can easily manage the flow of the dialogue even when several characters are involved in a lively discussion (as in *Protagoras*, *Symposium*, *Euthydemus* or *Phaedo*).³

However, a few of Plato's directly "dramatic" dialogues present obvious difficulties to a reader who has no character sigla for orientation. The *Gorgias* is a glaring example. I shall focus here on a single passage where the problem of character identification has led to a corruption of the text. I see this detail, which I have previously noted only in passing, as a very strong support for my hypothesis that the *Gorgias* was originally a narrated dialogue, later revised and expanded and rewritten in dramatic form.⁴

The introductory discussion (447a-448b) has a two-stage setting. The text (Burnet's OCT edition) runs as follows:

ΚΑΛ. Πολέμου καὶ μάχης φασὶ χρῆναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, 447
οὕτω μεταλαγχάνειν.

ΣΩ. Ἄλλ' ἢ, τὸ λεγόμενον, κατόπιω ἐορτῆς ἤκομεν καὶ
ὑστεροῦμεν;

ΚΑΛ. Καὶ μάλα γε ἀστείας ἐορτῆς· πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ καλὰ 5
Γοργίας ἡμῖν ὀλίγον πρότερον ἐπεδείξατο.

ΣΩ. Τούτων μέντοι, ὦ Καλλίκλεις, αἴτιος Χαιρεφῶν ὄδε,
ἐν ἀγορᾷ ἀναγκάσας ἡμᾶς διατρίψαι.

² Details in H.Thesleff, *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Comm.Hum.Litt. 70), Helsinki 1982, 53–67; P.A.Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement*, Ithaca 1994.

³ But contrary to other Socratics, Plato seems always to have preferred closed audiences; see Thesleff 2002 (above, n. 1).

⁴ First argued in 1982 (above, n. 2) 86–87; also *Phronesis* 34 (1989) 7 n. 28 with further references.

ΧΑΙ. Οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἐγὼ γὰρ καὶ ἰάσομαι. **b**
 φίλος γάρ μοι Γοργίας, ὥστ' ἐπιδειξεται ἡμῖν, εἰ μὲν δοκεῖ,
 νῦν, ἐὰν δὲ βούλη, εἰς αὖθις.

ΚΑΛ. Τί δέ, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν; ἐπιθυμῆ Σωκράτης ἀκοῦσαι
 Γοργίου; **5**

ΧΑΙ. Ἐπ' αὐτό γέ τοι τοῦτο πάρεσμεν.

ΚΑΛ. Οὐκοῦν ὅταν βούλησθε παρ' ἐμὲ ἦκειν οἴκαδε· παρ'
 ἔμοι γὰρ Γοργίας καταλύει καὶ ἐπιδειξεται ὑμῖν.

ΣΩ. Εὖ λέγεις, ὦ Καλλίκλεις. ἀλλ' ἄρα ἐθελήσειεν ἂν
 ἡμῖν διαλεχθῆναι; βούλομαι γὰρ πυθέσθαι παρ' αὐτοῦ τίς ἢ **c**
 δύναμις τῆς τέχνης τοῦ ἀνδρός, καὶ τί ἐστὶν δ' ἐπαγγέλλεται
 τε καὶ διδάσκει· τὴν δὲ ἄλλην ἐπίδειξιν εἰς αὖθις, ὥσπερ σὺ
 λέγεις, ποιησάσθω.

ΚΑΛ. Οὐδὲν οἶον τὸ αὐτὸν ἐρωτᾶν, ὦ Σώκρατες. καὶ γὰρ **5**
 αὐτῷ ἐν τοῦτ' ἦν τῆς ἐπιδείξεως· ἐκέλευε γοῦν νυνδὴ ἐρωτᾶν
 ὅτι τις βούλοιο τῶν ἔνδον ὄντων, καὶ πρὸς ἅπαντα ἔφη
 ἀποκρινεῖσθαι.

ΣΩ. Ἥ καλῶς λέγεις. ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, ἐροῦ αὐτόν.

ΧΑΙ. Τί ἔρωμαι; **10**

ΣΩ. Ὅστις ἐστίν. **d**

ΧΑΙ. Πῶς λέγεις;

ΣΩ. Ὡσπερ ἂν εἰ ἐτύγχανεν ὦν ὑποδημάτων δημιουργός,
 ἀπεκρίνατο ἂν δήπου σοι ὅτι σκυτοτόμος· ἢ οὐ μανθάνεις ὡς
 λέγω; **5**

ΧΑΙ. Μανθάνω καὶ ἐρήσομαι. Εἰπέ μοι, ὦ Γοργία,
 ἀληθῆ λέγει Καλλικλῆς ὅδε ὅτι ἐπαγγέλλη ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὅτι
 ἂν τίς σε ἐρωτᾷ;

ΓΟΡ. Ἀληθῆ, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν· καὶ γὰρ νυνδὴ αὐτὰ ταῦτα **448**
 ἐπηγγελλόμεν, καὶ λέγω ὅτι οὐδεὶς μέ πω ἠρώτηκε καινὸν
 οὐδὲν πολλῶν ἐτῶν.

ΧΑΙ. Ἥ που ἄρα ῥαδίως ἀποκρινῆ, ὦ Γοργία.

ΓΟΡ. Πάρεστι τούτου πείραν, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, λαμβάνειν. **5**

ΠΩΛ. Νῆ Δία· ἂν δέ γε βούλη, ὦ Χαιρεφῶν, ἐμοῦ.
 Γοργίας μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἀπειρηκέμαι μοι δοκεῖ· πολλὰ γὰρ ἄρτι
 διελήλυθεν.

ΧΑΙ. Τί δέ, ὦ Πῶλε; οἶει σὺ κάλλιον ἂν Γοργίου
 ἀποκρίνασθαι; **10**

ΠΩΛ. Τί δὲ τοῦτο, ἐὰν σοί γε ἰκανῶς; **b**

ΧΑΙ. Οὐδέν· ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ σὺ βούλει, ἀποκρίνου.

ΠΩΛ. Ἐρώτα.

Thus, at the opening, Socrates and Chaerephon arrive too late to an epideictic performance by Gorgias, perhaps at a gymnasium. Then Callicles (447b7-8) invites them to his home where Gorgias is staying during his visit to Athens, and the ensuing debate seems to be carried on there.⁵ The situation recalls the settings of some narrative dialogues (notably *Protagoras*, *Symposium* and *Republic*), but nothing is explicitly said in the text of *Gorgias* about a change of place. This is of no factual importance here, though we may feel that something is missing.

Another, more interesting feature is the lack of clear indications of who the speaker is – assuming that there are no character sigla. Callicles opens the dialogue, but the unprepared reader will not know this before there comes the vocative address in Socrates' second rejoinder (447a7). This same reader will also find it hard to identify the speaker at 447b1 as Chaerephon, until he has read on a bit, and perhaps reflected on what has been said. Similar difficulties occur now and again in the following pages. At 448a5 there comes a stumbling block which no editors and commentators seem to have noticed.

The immediate context is this. Socrates has suggested to Chaerephon (who knows Gorgias personally, 447b2) that he might try to interrogate Gorgias about 'who (or what) he is' (ὅστις ἐστίν, 447d1), as if he were asking a maker of shoes who he is (answer: a cobbler). Chaerephon begins (447d6) by asking if it is true, as Callicles has just said (447c5-8), that Gorgias is prepared to answer all questions. Gorgias self-consciously declares (448a1-3) that nobody has asked him any new questions in many years. "So you will find it easy to answer?", Chaerephon suggests (448a4).

Gorgias replies to this, according to all our manuscripts and editions (448a5): Πάρεστι τούτου πείραν, ᾧ Χαιρεμῶν, λαμβάνειν. This must mean something like "Here is an opportunity to make a test of this, Chaerephon". Now, πάρεστι meaning 'here is a chance' is good colloquial Attic, a bit peculiar in the mouth of the pompous Gorgias, but possible. The noun πείρα, including the phrase πείραν λαμβάνειν, is normally constructed with persons or with qualities or attitudes that can be tested in persons.⁶ The following speaker in fact understands τούτου personally, as if

⁵ For the earlier discussion of the possible change of place, see W.K.C.Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy IV*, Cambridge 1975, 285; see further A. Fussi in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33 (2000) 45–49.

⁶ Most of the 20 occurrences in the Platonic corpus refer to persons only. For *Laches*

referring to Gorgias. This speaker is Polus, an associate of Gorgias, again a new character (whose identification, by the way, is not immediately obvious from the context). He interferes (448a6-8): "Yes, certainly, but please (try) me! For Gorgias seems to decline: he has been speaking so much a while ago." And Chaerephon now starts to interrogate Polus. Gorgias only reappears at 448d, as Socrates' interlocutor.

We note that Polus not only understands τούτου personally and substitutes it with ἐμοῦ, but also he does not find Gorgias as prepared to be 'tried', 'tested', as the Πάρεστι reply, put in his mouth, would imply. Polus understands Gorgias to have declined (ἀπειρηκέναι 448a7), apparently judging from his attitude. Indeed, Gorgias is certainly not interested in a πείρα. It is very peculiar that he would instantly offer himself to a testing by this minor Socratic, Chaerephon. After all, Gorgias has only claimed that he knows answers to all questions, and that people always keep asking him the same things (448a2-3). He is bored. Later it takes Socrates some time (448d-449c) to persuade Gorgias to undergo his elenchus.

These specific complications disappear if the Πάρεστι comment is given to Socrates instead of Gorgias. Then Socrates would be following up what he said to Chaerephon before (447cd): "Go on, Chaerephon! Here is a chance to test this (namely, whether Gorgias finds it easy to answer) and him (namely, Gorgias himself)." Socrates does not say αὐτοῦ. But the genitive τούτου may have a double implication:⁷ it refers to Chaerephon's tentative ῥαδίως ἀποκρινῆ (448a4), but at the same time to Gorgias. Socrates is ironical: this is not going to be easy, but surely Gorgias is worth examining. To test persons (rather than things) is typical of Socrates. Polus overhears this remark, does not see the irony, and interferes by stressing the personal aspect of τούτου: "rather test me!"

The emendation of the post-Platonic ΓΟΡ into ΣΩ is easily done. What makes this very minor correction of the text tradition interesting, is that it corroborates the aforementioned hypothesis of a secondary change in the dialogue technique of the *Gorgias*.⁸ According to Plato's narrative practice, the narrator of the dialogue, here presumably Socrates himself, is likely to have commented on the setting, notably in this introductory section. He gave sufficient hints of who says what, and how – note for instance that

189b, see below, n. 7.

⁷ Cf. *Laches* 189b where πείρα is constructed with two genitives, σαυτοῦ and ἀρετῆς.

⁸ Above, n. 4.

Gorgias evidently does not listen to the discussion between Callicles, Chaerophon and Socrates until Chaerophon (447d6) turns to him. With the establishment of the text, and the later adoption of the sigla, the Πάρεστι comment was *automatically* attributed to Gorgias who had made the statement at 448a1-3 and whom Chaerophon addresses at 448a4. But in fact the only utterance by Gorgias at the beginning of the dialogue seems to be the pompous statement at 448a1-3, with its special effect and its implication of boredom.

We can only speculate about what made Plato and the early Platonists drop the 'inserenda', the μεταξὺ τῶν λόγων, and make the dialogue directly dramatic. This is likely to have happened in Plato's lifetime. In *Theaetetus*, where the process is explicitly referred to (142c-143c), the ultimate motivation was probably the successively more Academic contents of the dialogue which made the literary apparatus superfluous. Here the fiction of Euclides of Megara being the 'writer' who had several times been verifying, and making additions to, Socrates' narrative (*ibid.*), is a piece of Platonic play that does not entirely open itself to us. But the speakers of this dialogue, in its directly dramatic form, were easily identified by a reader, in this case a slave (143c), who has rehearsed the reading beforehand. We must presume that slaves were trained for reading in the Academy. At any rate the author, or somebody who knew the text well, was present at the performance and prepared to give the necessary instructions to the reader and his listeners. Remember: oral communication still dominated in the Early Academy.

However, the *Gorgias* is not a strictly Academic writing even in its present form. It has quite a protreptic tone, and Socrates in a way turns into an orator (as in *Protagoras* he has, in the end, changed position with the sophist). There may be some symbolic truth in the story about the Corinthian farmer who had listened to the *Gorgias* (presumably some part of it) and become so impressed that he marched straight on to Athens to hear more.⁹ Yet there are ingredients alluding to Academic practice, such as the dihaereses at 462c-466a; and Socrates' discussion with Polus and Callicles especially (beginning at 481b) includes important philosophical points. Most pertinently, the section 506c-509c looks almost like a manifesto of Platonic philosophy. Some scholars have pointed out features in *Gorgias* which were

⁹ Themistius, *Or.* 23, 296cd.

hardly intended for the general public.¹⁰ I imagine that the *Gorgias* was gradually expanded and elaborated as Plato's personal defence of philosophy until it became a useful textbook for Academic training.

Thus, while the dialogue still preserved much of Plato's specific non-Academic concerns from the 390s (Athenian politics, the influence of rhetors, the attack of Polycrates, apology of Socrates, and a general appeal to educated Athenians), the inserenda, which were useful for non-Academics only, could be left out from this new version.¹¹

A somewhat similar case is the *Laches* (cf. the narrative *Charmides*) which cannot be dealt with here.¹² If the *Gorgias* had perhaps originally been addressed to a somewhat larger audience, the dialogue was now habitually presented by a trained reader to chosen audiences of intellectuals – where Corinthian farmers, alas, had no place. In Plato's lifetime, the dialogues were not on the whole intended for the general market, i.e., copied for publication, though some of the narrative pieces had a larger appeal. Plato's manuscripts, and especially the dramatic pieces, were not meant to be studied in a literate society by new readers unacquainted with the text. Thus the mistake with the attribution of *Gorgias* 448a5 is symptomatic of three trends on which I have commented recently:¹³ the slide in Plato's dialogue technique from narrative to dramatic form; the preference for oral presentation in Plato's environment; and Plato's deliberate withdrawal from publicity. All lead to additional complications for our understanding of his allusions and moods.

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¹⁰ E.g., Th.A.Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie*, Berlin 1985, 191–207. The dialectic of the 'tyrannical' and 'dishonest' Socrates of this dialogue (see D.Babut, "OYTOΣI ANHP OY ΠAYΣETAI ΦAYAPΩN", *REG* 105 (1992) 59–110; J.Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates*, Cambridge 2000, 291–376) can, after all, only contribute to a fairly refined sort of protreptic (contrary to, say, *Euthydemus* which also ends with a protreptic note).

¹¹ As tended to happen in *Republic* II–X and *Parmenides*. I have not basically changed my view of this process, as argued in 1982 (above, n. 2)

¹² Possibly some dialogues were performed dramatically by students in Plato's Academy; cf. Thesleff 1982 (above, n. 2) 59, 62–63, with references; doubted by G.J.de Vries in *Mnemosyne* 37 (1984) 143–145. Public performances in Plato's Athens, as suggested by Gilbert Ryle, are rather out of the question.

¹³ In 2002 (above, n. 1).