INDICATIONS OF SPEAKER IN GREEK DIALOGUE TEXTS

THE evidence of ancient books points to the surprising conclusion that in texts of drama or prose dialogue changes of speaker were not usually marked by the name of the new speaker. Instead the ancient reader had a colon, sometimes combined with a paragraphus or stroke in the margin, to guide him. The inconvenience of this practice and the muddle it caused need no emphasis. The facts have been assembled for the text of Plato and Lucian by J. Andrieu (*Le Dialogue antique*, 288 ff.), and for Aristophanes by J. C. B. Lowe (*Bull. Inst. Class. Stud.* ix (1962), 27–42). As far as prose dialogues are concerned confirmation can be found in an unexpected source: the prologue to the dialogue *Eranistes* by the fifth-century church father Theodoret (Migne, *Patrologia graeca*, lxxxiii. 29 b).

In the course of explaining the form of his book the author says:

τὰ δέ γε τῶν ἐρωτώντων καὶ ἀποκρινομένων ὀνόματα οὐ τῷ σώματι τοῦ λόγου συντάξω, καθάπερ οἱ πάλαι τῶν Ἑλλήνων σοφοί, ἀλλ᾽ ἔξωθεν παραγράψω ταῖς τῶν στίχων ἀρχαῖς. ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γὰρ τοῖς διὰ παντοδαπῆς ἠγμένοις παιδείας καὶ οἷς βίος ὁ λόγος προσέφερον τὰ συγγράμματα. ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ τοῖς λόγων ἀμυήτοις εὐσύνοπτον εἶναι βούλομαι τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν καὶ τῆς ὠφελείας τὴν εὕρεσιν. ἔσται δὲ τοῦτο δῆλων γενομένων τῶν διαλεγομένων προσώπων ἐκ τῶν παραγεγραμμένων ἔξωθεν ὀνομάτων.

Theodoret contrasts his own practice with that of the ancient writers of dialogue; first and foremost he will have had Plato in mind. Whereas they wrote for a highly cultivated public, he wishes to be readily intelligible to the ordinary man, and to help the reader who is not experienced in facing the difficulties presented by ancient books. This will be done by indicating the speaker's name in the margin at each point of change.

The passage is clear except at one point: what practice does he ascribe to the ancients by the words οὐ τῷ σώματι τοῦ λόγου συντάξω? Presumably that they tried to remedy the obscurity of texts without names by making each speaker address the other by name from time to time. That may have been some help to the reader threading his way through a complicated argument. The word σῶμα has to be translated more precisely than 'text'; here it means 'the spoken words'. This explanation also seems consistent with the practice of Plato's characters.

If this interpretation is right, it seems that a fifth-century Greek bishop deserves the credit for devising a literary convention that is now regarded as essential.[1]

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