

INTERPRETING MAHĀBHĀRATA EPISODES AS SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

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A student of the history of ideas in early India can scarcely afford to disregard the materials offered by the didactic portions of the Mahābhārata.¹ The very bulk of these materials, the encyclopaedic range of topics they encompass, and the free-ranging treatment they adopt all make the Mahābhārata an especially rich source for the history of religious, social, and political ideas. While there may often be a broad affinity between Mahābhārata materials and the later law-books, the didactic episodes are particularly interesting in that they tend to present ideals and practices *in a living situation*, not – as in the law-book – drily compartmentalized in grey enumerations of duties.² From this point of view, the Mahābhārata is a potentially richer source for understanding the implications of ideals and practices, and the social contexts in which they were manifested. But at the same time, the idiosyncrasy of Mahābhārata episodes places greater difficulties and uncertainties in the way of interpreting them. The problem of the relative chronology of Mahābhārata materials is, for instance, made more intractable by the rarity of closely cognate parallel texts such as the dharmaśāstra corpus provides; definition of the standpoint from which a doctrine or practice is perceived is much more open for Mahābhārata material than for a law-treatise. Yet such difficulties of interpretation are symptoms of the same characteristics which make the Mahābhārata most valuable as source material: if we are to mine the rich lodes of information the text contains, the difficulties of analysis must be turned to advantage and the uncertainties made less.

Higher criticism of the Mahābhārata corpus:

Alsdorf's study, "Beiträge zur Geschichte von Vegetarismus und Rinderverehrung in Indien"³, focussing principally on dharmaśāstra material,

¹ Including not only the 'pseudo epic' of books xii, xiii, but other didactic and homiletic interludes, especially in book iii.

² A point stressed by E. W. Hopkins, *The Religions of India* (Boston, 1895), pp. 349-350, 365.

³ *Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, Jahrgang 1961.

has pointed up the great analytical value of identifying disparate materials juxtaposed in a single text sequence. In such a situation it is possible not only to compare and contrast the component materials themselves, but more importantly to examine the relationships in which they stand one to another. If the combination of disparate materials is a virtue, then the Mahābhārata is the embodiment of all that is good. In the controversies which have raged back and forth across the terrain of the Mahābhārata authorship question, it has never been responsibly denied that the Mahābhārata — especially in its didactic sections — is a compilation which has brought into intimate juxtaposition materials of differing origins often expressing seemingly quite distinct points of view.⁴ Consequently, the Mahābhārata offers glimpses of the dynamics of intellectual life lacking in texts which more single-mindedly expound a unitary point of view. In this respect, the chaos which makes the Mahābhārata a “literary monstrosity”⁵ is also its particular strength.

It is, therefore, doing the less than full justice to the Mahābhārata material to treat it in the manner characteristic of survey works, that is either by generalizing a timeless synthetic Mahābhārata view, or by admitting a diversity of views and arranging them according to necessarily *a priori* or independently-deduced assumptions about historical changes in values and outlook. The product of the former tendency reduces the rich variety of Mahābhārata evidences to a generality which may be more misleading than it is informative. The latter approach, while more sensitive to the Mahābhārata material, suffers by subjugating the Mahābhārata evidence to the convictions of the analyst or to the pattern of development deducible from the evidence of other less internally diverse works widely separated in time. A symptom of the anaemia of this approach is the passive use of Mahābhārata passages as illustrative material only. The handling of Mahābhārata material¹ in this manner is not only unconstructive, it is also open to uncontrollable vagaries of interpretation. To appreciate this point it is only necessary to put side by side the following extracts discussing non-injury. The first is from W. N. Brown :

The Mahābhārata, taken as a whole, shows Brahmanic rule and popular practice to be at variance. In one passage the text states that he who kills a cow lives as many years in hell

⁴ J. Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata* (Berlin, 1899), pp. 119–130, argues only that there was a single process of compilation; V. S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay, 1957), pp. 22–23, pausing in his polemic, retreats even from this position.

⁵ Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, p. 6. Cf. H. Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata, Seine Entstehung, sein Inhalt, seine Form* (Göttingen, 1922), pp. 1 and 76.

as there are hairs on the cow's body...and various other passages command Ahimsā. Yet elsewhere meat-eating is mentioned in a casual manner and the existence of a butcher shop is nothing out of the ordinary.⁶

the second from Holtzmann :

Nahuṣa was charged with heresy for declaring that the killing and sacrificing of animals was unlawful. By contrast the later, didactic portions of the Epic come out in favour of ahimsā :⁷

What Holtzmann's predilection would have as a differentiation of antiquity, Brown sees as a differentiation of popular practice and brahmanic ideal. It is only an added complication that Brown should cite the Dharmavyādha episode⁸ for his instance of the butcher's shop, when the hero of the episode, the pious hunter, is at great pains to dissociate himself from killing or eating meat.⁹ Plucking references out of the massive corpus of Mahābhārata material proves nothing more than that the devil can quote scriptures to his own purpose. The wealth of material is so great and the relationship of various passages one to another is so indeterminate that the Mahābhārata is capable of contributing neither confirmation nor refutation of any hypothesis argued on extrinsic grounds.

The amenability of higher criticism to be turned into self-fulfilling prophecy through unconsciously circular argumentation not stabilized by objective underpinnings is well illustrated in the case of the Bhagavadgītā, that part of the Mahābhārata which, with the exception of the early chapters of the Ādiparvan, has received most attention from critical analysts.¹⁰ Reputable scholars have argued that the extant Bhagavadgītā represents a Vaiṣṇava revision of an older pantheistic poem;¹¹ the converse : that it is a theistic work with accretions of vedāntic materials;¹² and the radical alternative : that it is

⁶ W. N. Brown, "The Sanctity of the Cow in Hinduism", *Journal of the Madras University*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Jan. 1957), p. 35.

⁷ A. Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile* (Kiel, 1892-1895), Bk. I, p. 36; "Dem Nahuṣa....für die ahimsā;" (my translation).

⁸ Mbh. iii. 198-206; the specific reference is Mbh. iii. 198.10.

⁹ Mbh. iii. 198. 31-32.

¹⁰ L. van Schroeder, *Bhagavad-Gītā. Des Erhabenen Sang* (Jena, 1920), pp. vii-xv; and G. S. Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā* (Bombay, 1969), pp. 7-12, survey the major text-critical interpretations.

¹¹ Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, Bk. II, pp. 163-165; similarly Hopkins, *Religions of India*, pp. 389-400.

¹² R. Garbe, "Bhagavad-Gītā", *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh, 1908-1926), vol. II, p. 536a-b; and his *Die Bhagavadgītā...mit einer Einleitung über ihre ursprüngliche Gestalt, ihr Lehren und ihr Alter* (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 7-8, 12-15.

wrong to "apply Procrustean methods, and by excisions ... to force into a unified mould the sayings of a writer who never dreamed of the necessity or desirability of such unity."¹³ The diversity of interpretations is not attributable to careless or superficial study, but to the inevitable subjectivity of argumentation which feeds on the stuff of its own conclusion.

The two requirements for a fruitful exploitation of the Mahābhārata's wealth of information are a sound delineation of the component passages which may be regarded as the units making up a given Mahābhārata tract, and a reasoned account of their association in the context where they are found. In his treatment of dharmasāstra materials, Alsdorf was greatly assisted in mounting his argument on these points by the availability of several analogous, even cognate, works in the genre and of others in a continuing scholastic tradition, which enabled him to draw telling inferences establishing a chronology on the basis of comparative study.¹⁴ Such facilities are rarely afforded to the Mahābhārata analyst.¹⁵ Consequently one is left to fall back on the internal evidence of the Mahābhārata tradition itself for one's deduction both of the segmentation of the text and of the interrelations of the segments.

Appreciations of the construction of the extant Mahābhārata text have ranged across a spectrum from the holistic to the atomistic.¹⁶ The foremost

¹³ F. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gītā* (New York, 1964), p. 108. Also R. C. Zaehner *The Bhagavad-Gītā with a commentary based on the original sources* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 1-2, 4-5. Garbe, *Die Bhagavadgītā*, pp. 8-11, argues to refute such views. P. Deussen, *Vier philosophische Texte des Mahābhārata*... (Leipzig, 1906), pp. v-vi, adopts a position similar to Edgerton's but sees the work not as a synthesis but as an organic expression of a transitional philosophy.

¹⁴ Alsdorf, "Vegetarismus und Rinderverehrung". pp. 572-585, 599-603.

¹⁵ Some cases which spring to mind are Morton Smith's use of three Ambā stories in the Mahābhārata ("The Story of Ambā in the Mahābhārata", *Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. 19 (1955), pp. 85-132), which was not profitable; Hopkins' comparison of the Rāmopākhyāna and Rāmāyana (*The Great Epic of India. Its Character and Origin* [Calcutta, 1969; first publ. 1901], pp. 58-84), which is not helpful for details of textual reconstruction; the comparison of Mahābhārata materials with purāṇic parallels (for which see Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, Bk. IV, pp. 29-58), but as in the case of H. Lüders' comparison of R̥ṣyaśṛṅga stories ("Die Sage von R̥ṣyaśṛṅga", *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Jahrgang 1897, pp. 87-135) and my own of Dharmavyādha stories in the Mahābhārata and Padmapurāṇa, the correspondences are generally so inexplicit and so partial as to be of little use.

¹⁶ The latter term is Sukthankar's characterization of the so-called "analytical" theory. See his survey of treatments, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, pp. 1-31; or G. J. Held, *The Mahābhārata: An Ethnological Study* (Amsterdam, 1935), pp. 1-27; or R. N. Dandekar, "The Mahābhārata, Origin and Growth", *University of Ceylon Review*, vol. 12 (1954), pp. 68-75.

exponent of the syncretic or holistic view has been Joseph Dahlmann. In his *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, he accepts that the Mahābhārata contains masses of discrete materials, which, in some cases, had existed independently prior to their incorporation in the Mahābhārata, but argues that the process of compiling these diverse materials was undertaken at one time, on a single plan which reflects a coherent view on topics of dharmaśāstra.¹⁷ This conception of the composition process allows Dahlmann to attribute what others would see as symptoms of a process of accretion to the composite nature of the Mahābhārata corpus.¹⁸ In opposition to this syncretic position, the Occidental scholarly orthodoxy, led by Holtzmann,¹⁹ Hopkins,²⁰ Winternitz,²¹ and Oldenberg,²² has seen the Mahābhārata as the product of a process of revisions and accretions widely separated in time and attributable to several or numerous hands. Two principal arguments are advanced in support of this position : first, that the disorderliness and inherent improbability of parts of the text and the incompatibility of values expressed in the text are such that it is more happily attributed to several composers than to the incompetence of one; secondly, that the internal evidence relating to content and style points to times of composition so far separated that development of the text over a long period of time seems to be suggested. It will be noticed that the assertions of both camps are in fact alternative interpretations of the same evidence. However, on specific points in which Mahābhārata passages can be dated on external evidence,²³ and in the light of the persuasive evidence

¹⁷ Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, pp. 119-130. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, pp. 28-31, and S. Levi "[Compte rendu:] *The Mahābhārata* for the first time critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar...." *Journal asiatique*, vol. 215 (1929), pp. 345-348, adopt qualified holistic portions less keenly argued than Dahlmann's uncompromising stance.

¹⁸ For instance, he argues that the repetitions of *gāthā* material in widely separated parts of the text are not evidence of interpolation but only evidence that as the rhapsodic framework which structures the Epic dialogue progresses the composer has drawn material from the same formerly independent *itihāsa*s to deal with situations or questions which recur as the frame story traverses similar ground. Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, pp. 123-126, 129-130.

¹⁹ Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, Bk. I.

²⁰ Hopkins, *Great Epic*, ch. 5, 6.

²¹ M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, pt. II (2nd edn., Calcutta, 1963), pp. 273-288, and 330-417 passim.

²² Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, pp. 2-57.

²³ See, e. g. Ludwig's reply to Dahlmann's first book in his "Das Mahābhārata als Epos und als Rechtsbuch, ein Problem aus Altindiens Cultur- und Litteraturgeschichte von Joseph Dahlmann S. J.", *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Classe für Philosophie, Geschichte und Philologie*, 1896, V, pp. 1-5. Dahlmann, unrepentant, replies with polemic in his *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, p. 6.

provided by the compilation of the Poona Critical Edition²⁴ which irrefutably demonstrates that a great many accretions both extensive and minute have been added to branches of the Mahābhārata tradition subsequent to the time of the archetypal text, it is unreasonable not to accept that there has been accretion anterior to the archetypal text. Against the ever-rolling stream of the Critical Edition's publication, latter-day syncretists have been able only to inveigh and inveigle with obscurantist protests²⁵ or chauvinist complaint.²⁶

While it may be that as an account of the present form of the whole Mahābhārata corpus, Dahlmann's syncretic approach must be discarded, that is not to say that all contribution by Dahlmann to the debate on how Mahābhārata material is to be handled for the purpose of ideological analysis is invalidated. It is a matter of disagreement among members of the atomist party as to how frequently the Mahābhārata has been subjected to revision and interpolation,²⁷ and in their general surveys they have tended to postulate the interpolation of whole episodes or clusters of episodes. Thus, when we come to analyse a single episode, the atomistic theories offer no rule of thumb disposing us to find either internal complexity or internal unity in any episode. In principle, then, when dealing with an episode or didactic tract, it is respectable to take up a position anywhere in the spectrum from Dahlmann's synthetic holism to an enthusiastic attribution of every irregularity to the effects of interpolation. Analysts tending to Dahlmann's position, who are wary of too liberally positing interpolation, are obliged either to demand less rigorous logic and consistency from their single composer²⁸ or to expend

²⁴ V. S. Sukthankar, S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya (eds.), *The Mahābhārata for the first time Critically Edited* (Poona, 1933-1972).

²⁵ S. Levi, "[Compte rendu :] *The Mahābhārata* for the first time critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar.....", *Journal asiatique*, vol. 215 (1929), pp. 345-348, and vol. 225 (1935), pp. 281-283. M. Biarreau, "Some More Considerations about Textual Criticism", *Purāṇa*, vol. 10 (1968), pp. 115-123, tries to develop S. Levi's objections to Western textual criticism. V. M. Bedekar, "Principles of Mahābhārata Textual Criticism: the need for a restatement", *Purāṇa*, vol. 11 (1969), pp. 212-224, cogently defends Sukthankar on most points.

²⁶ Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, pp. 29-31, 85-87, 124. The irony of Sukthankar's position and his reliance on the Vulgate text is rightly noted by his editor, p. ix.

²⁷ C. V. Vaidya, *The Mahābhārata : A Criticism* (Delhi, 1966), pp. 2, 147, proposes three stages corresponding with the three recitals mentioned in the Ādiparvan; Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata und seine Theile*, Bk. I, pp. 67-69, also proposes three stages, but they are quite unorthodox. Hopkins, *Great Epic*, pp. 397-398, sees a multiplicity of accretions, but would rank them in five main stages; Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, pt. II, pp. 409-410, assumes countless interpolations without proposing identifiable stages of development affecting the whole epic.

²⁸ As e. g., Edgerton, *Bhagavad Gītā*, pp. 106, 108.

considerable effort in trying to comprehend an underlying or subtly defined consistency which is not evident *prima facie*.²⁹ The more willing the analyst to invoke interpolation, the more stringent the demands he may make of each of his several postulated contributors and the more easily he is able to impose his own conceptions of what conjunctions of ideas are appropriate and what are not.³⁰ The residual value of Dahlmann's work is his warning against the dangers of excessive indulgence in suppositions of multiple authorship. He tellingly observes that while it is possible to track down apparent inconsistencies in the Mahābhārata, there is no theoretical barrier to continuing the process *ad infinitum*, reducing such analysis to absurdity. Dahlmann points out that such a method of analysis permits the critic to attribute every contradiction apparent to him to the long cultural history of the Mahābhārata tradition and the diverse influences which have affected it. By doing so, he excuses himself from the task of giving a "scientific" explanation of the contradictions or of considering them in relation to the whole.³¹ While the last part of Dahlmann's objection must be rejected insofar as it is possible to account for an interpolator's intention just as much as to impute a composer's, his general point that a discipline is removed from the analysis by the possibility of invoking interpolation as a *deus ex machina*³² is well taken. Elsewhere, Dahlmann stresses the importance of sensitivity in relating material to its context — to the speakers involved, to the precise aspect of the topic being considered, to the angle from which a question is approached.³³ By undertaking such study in preference to crying "interpolation" at every turn, the analyst may be led to a deeper understanding of the meaning of his material. And yet, to make this ideal of restraint an absolute dogma, in the manner of Dahlmann, is to indulge in mystification.

It will be seen that general considerations of analytical approach have little of practical value to tell us about the makeup of any given episode. They consist in subjective judgements of balance which offer no criterion for determining the optimum segmentation of a text. Thus, when Otto

²⁹ As e. g., Deussen, *Vier philosophische Texte*, pp. v-vi, elaborated in his *Die nachvedische Philosophie der Inder*.. (4th edn., Leipzig, 1922), pp. 15-18. Dahlmann's jesuitical acuity has also excited comment: van Schroeder, *Das Erhabenen Sang*, p. vii.

³⁰ A set of consciously ideological prerequisites is, for example, spelt out in Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā*, pp. 115-120, xv, and *passim*.

³¹ Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, p. 6

³² Hopkins, *Great Epic*, pp. 369-370, unashamedly espouses this antinomian attitude with respect to the 'pseudo-epic'. Also Oldenberg, *Das Mahābhārata*, pp. 76-78; Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. I, pt. II, p. 386.

³³ Dahlmann, *Genesis des Mahābhārata*, p. 130.

dissects the Bhagavadgītā into an original stock and eight independent tracts,³⁴ there is no reason to suppose that he is wrong. But it is essentially a matter of taste whether we prefer his segmentation to Garbe's twofold stratification,³⁵ or Khair's threefold one.³⁶ And Edgerton, who had no hesitation in excising many contaminations from his edition of the Sabhāparvan,³⁷ nor in acknowledging that the Bhagavadgītā itself is probably an interpolation, and that "such interpolations are numerous in the Mahābhārata; so numerous that we may fairly regard them as a regular habit",³⁸ is nevertheless still prepared to assert that the Bhagavadgītā should be seen as a unity which deliberately proposes alternative and logically incompatible ways of salvation. Thus the very diversity and seeming incompatibilities which inspired others to dissect and stratify the text provide Edgerton with the key to comprehending the meaning of this "frankly mystical and emotional" composition.³⁹

To put analysis on a less subjective footing, it is highly desirable that the segmentation and stratigraphy of a passage should be deduced as far as possible on grounds other than those relating to the imputed intentions of the one or several composers — that is, it should not be based primarily on inferences concerning the intended significance of the passage or parts of the passage. Attempts have been made to meet this desideratum both by bringing to bear the evidence of cognate material in sources independent of the Mahābhārata or appearing elsewhere in the Mahābhārata, and by using internal evidence of a formal kind, examining the text for flaws of construction, syntactic non sequiturs, and contrasts of style. The classic study combining external comparative evidence with the internal evidence of construction is Lüders' analysis of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode.⁴⁰ Studies relying more heavily on stylistic analysis and based upon Hopkins' study of epic versification,

³⁴ R. Otto, *Die Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā* (Tübingen, 1934) and *Die Lehr-Traktate der Bhagavad-Gītā* (Tübingen, 1935)

³⁵ Garbe, *Bhagavadgītā*, pp. 6-18, 58, etc.

³⁶ Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā*, pp. 37-46, 121-153.

³⁷ Note especially Edgerton, *Sabhāparvan* (Poona, 1944), pp. xxxiv-xxxv. Edgerton's stance is more ruthless than Sukthankar's.

³⁸ Edgerton, *Bhagavad Gītā*, p. 105, n. 1.

³⁹ Edgerton, *Bhagavad Gītā*, p. 193.

⁴⁰ "Die Sage von R̥ṣyaśṛṅga." *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Jahrgang 1897, pp. 90-103. W. D. O' Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* (London, 1973), discusses the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga story from a totally different point of view, synthesizing all reflexes of the tale indiscriminately and applying extrinsic categories in order to elicit the supposed essential meaning (not form) of the story.

have been applied to particular episodes by Morton Smith⁴¹ and on a broader canvas by Mary Carroll Smith.⁴² Let us consider what we have to learn from such studies.

Lüders' treatment of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode :

Lüders' study of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode in the Tīrthayātrā of the Āraṇyakaparvan⁴³ is of interest both because it provides a paradigm for critical studies of Mahābhārata episodes and also because it indirectly illustrates the immense contribution the Poona Critical Edition has made to questions of text history.

Lüders does not set down a manifesto of analytical principles, but a consistent procedure of argumentation is deducible from his parallel treatments of two aspects of the story. In each case the foundation of Lüders' argument is that there are illogicalities in the progression of the narrative which are best explained as the products of a reworking of an older story.⁴⁴ He demonstrates this by showing that the excision of certain verses and "slight changes" to others will greatly improve the cogency of the narrative.⁴⁵ Having in this way identified and confirmed certain non-original materials, Lüders imputes from them the intentions of the reviser — namely, the advancement of brahmanic prestige and the preservation of the princes' virginity. With those imputed intentions in mind, Lüders surveys the text, identifying passages which contribute to realizing these aims, and if they can be excised without harm to the remainder of the material, proposes that they too be regarded as accretions, or if it is not possible to excise them painlessly, proposes that they be regarded as revisions of earlier material.⁴⁶

By following this line of argument, Lüders moves from formal or logical grounds upon which key revisions can be deduced to imputing the reviser's intention, and only then argues from the imputed intention or ideological interest of the reviser in order to detect further accreted material. This procedure is impeccable : neither the fact of accretion nor the intention

⁴¹ R. Morton Smith, "Story of Ambā"; "The Story of Nala in the Mahābhārata", *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, vol. 9 (1960), pp. 357-386; "The Story of Sakuntalā in the Mahābhārata", *Journal of the Bihar Research Society*, vol. 46 (1960), pp. 163-176.

⁴² M. C. Smith, *The Core of India's Great Epic* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard, 1972).

⁴³ Mbh. iii. 110-113.

⁴⁴ Lüders, "R̥ṣyaśṛṅga", pp. 90, 93; also pp. 104-106 on the Rāmāyaṇa version.

⁴⁵ Lüders, "R̥ṣyaśṛṅga", pp. 90-93, proposing that the text has been "leicht verändert" (p. 91).

⁴⁶ Lüders, "R̥ṣyaśṛṅga", pp. 93, 102-103.

of the accretor are assumed *a priori*. The subsequent reversal of the direction of the reasoning — using deduction of intention to infer accretion — is a valid extension of the analysis, for it is improbable that every piece of accreted material should happen to be detectable on formal or structural grounds. Consequently, without this further step, the analysis would most probably remain incomplete. However — and this Lüders does not acknowledge — accretions delineated on the criterion of content are established with less certainty than those complementarily attested on formal grounds. This qualification applies especially to instances where the revision of pre-existent material is proposed, since in these cases the analyst's inference of revision and the deduction by which it is derived have to defend themselves before the highest court of appeal — the overt testimony of the extant text.⁴⁷

Having deduced and inferred a delineation of original and revised materials, Lüders argues cogently that the revision of the story was subsequent to its incorporation in the Mahābhārata corpus.⁴⁸ And finally he turns outside the Mahābhārata version of the story in order to draw inferences concerning the relative antiquity of the accretion-cum-revision he had proposed. He does this by focussing attention on two short passages which have parallels in the Padmapurāṇa version of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga story sufficiently close to suggest genetic relationship.⁴⁹ By arguing that these passages have features which suggest lack of originality in the Mahābhārata text while they are both at home in the Padmapurāṇa contexts, Lüders reasonably contends that the passages are accretions in the Mahābhārata corpus introduced by a transmitter who was acquainted with the Padmapurāṇa account of the story. From the relationship of the passages to the Padmapurāṇa version Lüders concludes that the general revision of the Mahābhārata story must have post-dated the composition of the Padmapurāṇa story.

As Lüders was working from the single testimony of the Vulgate text he did not have access to the readings of other branches of the Mahābhārata tradition. It is interesting, therefore, to note that Lüders' analysis is at once magnificently confirmed and utterly destroyed by the new light cast on the text by the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata. The Critical Edition reveals that the two passages Lüders had singled out as almost verbatim quotations from the Padmapurāṇa are in fact contaminations which appear in only

⁴⁷ Thus in considering Lüders' emendation *śāntā/veśyā* it is necessary to balance the requirement of multiple alteration against the strength of the inference based on the mention of Śāntā in the introductory question (" R̥ṣyaśṛṅga ", p. 93).

⁴⁸ Lüders, " R̥ṣyaśṛṅga ", pp. 92, 93.

⁴⁹ Mbh. (Vulg.) iii. 110. 37ab. = (C. E.) iii. 110. 543*;

Mbh. (Vulg.) iii. 111. 12 = (C. E.) iii. 111. 548*; at Lüders, " R̥ṣyaśṛṅga ", p. 99

about half the collated manuscripts.⁵⁰ In this respect Lüders' judicious eye was able to achieve through higher criticism of the Vulgate text what the compilation of a critical edition would powerfully confirm. But at the same time the Critical Edition shows that these passages are contaminations while the material comprising the other parts of Lüders' hypothesized general revision were already present in the archetypal text. Thus the testimony of the Critical Edition refutes Lüders' contention that there was a single general revision of the Mahābhārata material inspired by the Padmapurāṇa version.⁵¹ With hindsight we can recognize that Lüders' self-criticism on this point was deficient. Although the two passages of close verbal correspondence established that a reviser of the Mahābhārata version knew the Padmapurāṇa text, Lüders failed to demonstrate any relationship between these passages and the other materials he hypothesized as accreted. They share no common theme; nor was it explained why the verbal correspondence should be manifest only in these incidental passages and not in those parts of the accretion more expressive of the reviser's intentions.⁵² Apparently Lüders found the hypothesis of a single reworking attractive for its heuristic simplicity.⁵³ Nevertheless, the lesson of the Critical Edition is that sheer methodological elegance was not realistic in this case. Furthermore, once the Critical Edition has separated in time the passages which establish unequivocally a debt to the Padmapurāṇa from Lüders' other hypothesized revisions there is no longer any reason to attribute the reworking which Lüders deduced on internal evidence to the hand of a single reviser. Since its component elements have no obvious connexion, it is not even heuristically advantageous to do so. The power of the analytical tool with which the Critical Edition has provided us may thus be gauged from the fact that in place of Lüders' twofold strati-

⁵⁰ Mbh. iil. 110. 543* ; 14 MSS, plus 2 MSS marg. sec. manu out of 28 collated MSS; Mbh. iii. 110. 548* ; in the same N MSS as the foregoing, but in no S MS.

⁵¹ Lüders, "Ṛṣyaśṛṅga", p. 102. Of course, while, Lüders' reasoning is shown thus to be ill-founded, that is not proof that there was not a Padmapurāṇa-inspired revision, but without the benefit of almost verbatim textual parallels this is probably unprovable.

⁵² Indeed on the contrary, Lüders, "Ṛṣyaśṛṅga", p. 102, points out the reviser's freedom in developing his own elaborations. Nor does Lüders reflect sufficiently on the implications of his observation of verbal correspondences between the Padmapurāṇa text and parts of the Mahābhārata text which, in his reconstruction, belong on the older level (p. 103).

⁵³ This may be inferred from Lüders' admirably discriminating qualification of the Padmapurāṇa connexion: while he calls the relationship of the paired passages in the Mahābhārata and Padmapurāṇa texts "undeniable" (unabweichlich, "Ṛṣyaśṛṅga", p. 100), he says only that "we might also accept" (dürfen wir aber auch annehmen, "Ṛṣyaśṛṅga", p. 102) that the major revision was inspired by the Padmapurāṇa version.

fication of original and revised materials, on the basis of the evidence he himself adduces, we are now obliged to think in terms of accretion on four levels between the original incorporation of the story and the Vulgate text (viz. incorporation of original material; the two revisions thematically distinguished by Lüders; the contaminations).⁵⁴ Thus the Critical Edition teaches us directly and by example that the history of the Mahābhārata has probably been more complex than there were hitherto grounds to suppose.

For analysis of other episodes in the Mahābhārata, Lüders' treatment of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode stands as both a model and a caution. Lüders' analysis is exemplary in its method of argumentation, moving to ideological inference only from formal criteria. It is also exemplary in distinguishing absolutely between the question of the relative antiquity of elements making up a story judged against an inferred prototype and the question of the relative antiquity of the incorporation of materials into the Mahābhārata corpus. (This is the fundamental issue upon which Dahlmann and the atomistic school part company). On the other hand, Lüders' treatment of the episode has a cautionary sequel which points up the dangers inherent in a too-enthusiastic embracing of presuppositions inspired purely by methodological concerns.

It should also be observed that the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode is narrative in presentation rather than didactic. Because of this, Lüders' task in building arguments on inconsequentialities in plot development which are devoid of direct ideological significance will have been easier than the task of the analyst of a tract in which a large part of the material has the form of a statically conducted colloquy and in which accretions or revisions may be expected to deal purely and directly with ideological interests. To cope with such didactic material, perhaps Otto's analysis of the Bhagavadgītā provides a more relevant exemplar. In his deduction of an old continuum now fragmented through interpolation, Otto offers useful insights into how Lüders' use of evidence from a prefatory question can be developed to include details of the setting of the dialogue and the concluding statement as well.⁵⁵ The inferences derived from these elements of structural significance can then take the place of plot-derived inferences in analysis of a narrative episode.

Statistical analyses of style :

Metrical and stylistic criteria did not figure largely in Lüders' analysis. Yet because metrical patterns and other symptoms of style are objectively

⁵⁴ In fact, since there are other contaminations in descent lines collateral to that of the Vulgate text, this understates the complexity of the history of the tradition.

⁵⁵ Otto, *Urgestalt der Bhagavad-Gītā*, pp. 7-14. The overall validity of Otto's analysis is not at issue here.

quantifiable there should be a great deal to gain from developing the use of such criteria as a means of minimizing the otherwise considerable reliance on the analyst's discretion. Moreover, with the aid of the modern digital computer both the burdensome tasks of making the quantifications themselves and of eliciting their significant patterns are very much lightened. Since criteria of style will apply regardless of whether an episode is narrative or didactic in content, it may indeed prove particularly worthwhile for our purposes to consider how stylistic analysis might be validly conducted and whether its application to the analysis of Mahābhārata episodes will produce useful results.

An extended attempt to apply stylistic criteria to the analysis of Mahābhārata episodes has been made by Morton Smith.⁵⁶ His aim is to use statistics of style as an ancillary aid to literary criticism, asserting that the key decisions in dismembering a passage must continue to be made on "literary" (sc. higher criticism) grounds.⁵⁷ While it is not necessary to linger over Morton Smith's cavalier dogmatism on certain principles of higher criticism, we may notice that Morton Smith fails to treat his quantifications of style in a statistically valid manner. In the first place, he does not make allowance for the fundamental statistical reality that it is highly improbable that two samples taken from the same corpus of material should match each other exactly in any number of given variables. The statistician's task is, therefore, not to demonstrate that there are differences between two samples, but to determine whether or not the degree of difference is so great that it is significant. Only if there is a significant difference (at a prescribed level of certainty) has one the right to conclude that the samples examined are not likely to have been drawn from the same corpus. Secondly, Morton Smith does not allow for the fact that in order to calculate the degrees of significance of difference, it is necessary to have a statistically viable quantity of material.⁵⁸ Consequently his use of stylistic indicators reduces the subjectivity of his analysis not one whit. A statistical determination of stylistic differences has remained just as elusive for Morton Smith as it would have been for a self-confessedly subjective literary critic. While this result is undoubtedly attributable in part to Morton Smith's unrigorous use of quantified stylistic data, it may also be the case that the material involved is simply not amenable to

⁵⁶ Morton Smith, "Story of Ambā", "Story of Nala", "Story of Śakuntalā".

⁵⁷ Morton Smith, "Story of Nala", p. 360.

⁵⁸ H. Jacobi, *The Rāmāyana* (tr. S. N. Ghosal, Baroda, 1960; first publ. 1893), p. 24, notes this limitation on the usefulness of the technique. Word frequency counts in a corpus as large as the entire Sabhāparvan may be valid (B. A. A. J. van Nooten, *Mahābhārata Text Analysis with the Aid of the Digital Computer* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Univ. of California, 1963)).

a properly statistical analysis of style. The extent to which the latter possibility may be the case can best be gauged through considering the demands of a disciplined statistical analysis. For this purpose, the example of Trautmann's study of Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra⁵⁹ provides instructive insights.

Trautmann's interesting study of the Arthaśāstra authorship problem draws upon analytical techniques developed for deciding questions of disputed authorship in western classical and modern writings.⁶⁰ Trautmann's task is to apply the fundamental principles of these statistical analyses to the particular circumstances of the Arthaśāstra in order to determine whether there had been multiple authorship of the extant text, and — if it should emerge that there had been — to identify the contributions made by each contributing author.

From Trautmann's treatment it is clear that a reliable and objectively interpretable quantification of style will be produced only by an analysis which is built around certain indispensable requirements. First, since the analysis is based upon the statistically described frequencies of elements of style, it is absolutely necessary to have samples sufficiently large to produce discriminating results.⁶¹ The more frequent the occurrence of the element of style, the less bulky the sample of the text will have to be; the converse applies for more thinly distributed elements. For a range of discriminators not different in kind from most of these proposed by Morton Smith,⁶² Trautmann considers a sample of 2,000 words in length the minimum sample upon which reliable results can be generated.⁶³ For rarer markers of style, such as the less common particles or combinations of particles,⁶⁴ or lexical usages, correspondingly larger samples would be necessary. Secondly, the statistics derived from these samples must be subjected to mathematically respectable

⁵⁹ T. R. Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra, A Statistical Investigation of the Authorship and Evolution of the Text* (Leiden, 1971).

⁶⁰ Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 78–81. He appears to have followed A. Q. Morton, " The Authorship of Greek Prose ", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Series A, vol. 129 (1965), pp. 169–233, both in some details and in the strategy of approach.

⁶¹ Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 81, 85, 115.

⁶² Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, employs particle frequency and frequency distribution (pp. 82–88) and compound length distribution (pp. 130–131) as his principal criteria.

⁶³ Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, p. 82 ; equivalent to 300 sentences of prose; pp. 97–98 : or 300 Ślokas.

⁶⁴ B. A. A. J. van Nooten, " Redundancy in Mahābhārata Verse Composition ", *Journal of the American Society*, vol. 89 (1969), pp. 50–58.

tests of significance : ⁶⁵ only if the difference between the statistical description of two samples of material is calculated to be of such a degree that there is only a small chance that it would arise in random sampling from the same corpus of material can it be presumed that the work of different authors is involved. Thirdly, the stylistic criteria which are subjected to statistical analysis must be effective discriminators of authorship.⁶⁶ (Although even with effective discriminators it remains true that while the comparison of sets of statistics indicates the probability of different authorship if there are significant differences in the stylistic data, the lack of significant difference cannot conversely lead to a presumption of common authorship.⁶⁷)

It is perhaps the requirement of a statistically viable sample which represents the most serious obstacle to the application of a statistical analysis of style to the Mahābhārata. The evidence of the Critical Edition with respect to contaminations (the euphemistically termed " star passages ") and the implications of the higher criticism conducted by Lüders and others suggest that the contributions of various hands to the extant Mahābhārata text have often been so short that no statistically valid conclusions could be derived from them.⁶⁸ In every circumstance where interpolations of less than three hundred stanzas are either posited or suspected, the technique of statistical analysis is utterly debilitated.

Beside this practical limitation on Mahābhārata studies, we must also take account of the theoretical problem that in order to produce valid results it is necessary to work from quantifications of criteria which are effective discriminators of style. The determination of which criteria are effective discriminators presents no difficulty when the statistical analysis is intended to deal with a passage of disputed or unknown authorship, seeking to attribute it or refute its attribution to a given author of whom there are other writings of undisputed authorship available for comparative analysis. In such a case it is possible, by submitting to comparative analysis samples from his writings together with the writings of others which are ostensibly similar,

⁶⁵ Trautmann uses the X^2 test and—for sentence length distribution—the F test of variance ratio : *Kautilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 85–86, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthaśāstra*, p. 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* ; cf. Morton Smith, " Story of Śakuntalā," p. 175, directly contradicting this position.

⁶⁸ The whole story of R̥ṣyaśrṅga falls well below Trautmann's statistical threshold, as does the story of Tulādhara shorn of its contaminations but including its ancillary chapters. All the interpolations identified by Garbe in his *Bhagavad-gītā* even if attributed to a single author, also fall below the threshold; likewise each of the revisions hypothesized by Khair, *Quest for the Original Gītā* and a fortiori the same applies to Otto's *Urgestalt der Bhagavadgītā*.

to extract constant and contrastive elements of the known author's style which will therefore be capable of acting as significant discriminators of his style when the passage at issue is tested. In the case of the *Arthaśāstra*, no other works attributable to " Kauṭilya " or any of the hands which may have been involved in the compilation are available for collateral testing. To circumvent this difficulty, Trautmann hit upon the tactic of making comparative analyses of other quite unrelated and dissimilar works of known authorship in order to deduce a generalized statement about criteria likely to be effective discriminators universal to the Sanskrit language.⁶⁹ At best this compromise with necessity must reduce the discriminating power of the chosen criteria by limiting the range of indicators which can be regarded as generally safe;⁷⁰ at worst, we can never be sure that the generally discriminating criteria will be reliable indicators for a particular author. In order to minimize the danger of using sporadically unreliable indicators, Trautmann emphasizes the helpfulness of " utterly mundane " elements of style⁷¹ which are unlikely to be affected by an author's conscious striving for effect. However, even if a pattern of usage is unconscious, this does not mean that it is impervious to being affected by the content or conscious (rhetorical) style of a passage.⁷²

Stylistic analysis of the *Mahābhārata*, too, has to be undertaken without the availability of control writings which can be attributed to known hands. Consequently the power of such analysis must be reduced, just as it was with the *Arthaśāstra*. At the same time it is probably true that Trautmann's ingenuity has provided a workable substitute procedure by proposing general discriminators. Indeed, analysis of *Mahābhārata* material should be benefited somewhat by the applicability of additional criteria relating to metrical elements of style.⁷³

A further dimension is lent to the theoretical problems of statistical

⁶⁹ Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 91-114, 123-130.

⁷⁰ Cf. Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, p. 92, on the possibility of assigning weights to the relative discriminating power of certain words.

⁷¹ Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 79-81. Examples are common particles (*atha*, *api*, *eva*) and metrical forms (*pathyā* / *vipulā* ratio, types of *vipulā*, etc.)

⁷² In fact Trautmann incidentally notes one case where such an effect is suggested: *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, p. 116, on the heavy use of *vā* in Book 7.

⁷³ The statistics of *pathyā*/*vipulā* śloka scansion in proportion to one another, pioneered by Hopkins, *Great Epic*, pp. 219-252, and employed by Morton Smith, are most promising. See also Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 109-112. The sporadic distribution and small proportion of *triṣṭubh* stanzas are limitations on their general statistical usefulness, although special studies may be tailored around their patterns of occurrence, e. g. Mary Carrol Smith, *Core of the Great Epic*.

analysis by the fact that in Arthaśāstra and Mahābhārata studies we are investigating not unitary works of either known or disputed authorship but composite works whose authors are not only unknown from other writings, but whose contributions to the composite works are not necessarily defined with accuracy or certainty.⁷⁴ How, then, is the analyst to proceed with the identification of samples of material which can confidently be attributed to a single author? Failure to eliminate interpolations will vitiate the analysis by diluting or skewing the statistics. If the delineation of component segments of the composite work is done on non-statistical grounds, then the statistical analysis is only as valid as the assumptions of authorship upon which it is based: it does not offer any confirmation or refutation of the hypothesized segmentation; it only offers results which are based on that segmentation.⁷⁵

Nor is it feasible to generate the segmentation of a passage through any statistical analysis of style. It may seem, *prima facie*, possible to test exhaustively all possible segmentation patterns on the assumption that the segmentation which gives either the largest number of significant differences or a significant difference at the highest degree of certainty is most likely to delineate the contributions of accretors. Given an indeterminate but arbitrarily limited number of authors⁷⁶ making contributions of indeterminate size and indeterminate and not necessarily continuous placement, and given a certain number of stylistic discriminators, the number of hypothetically possible segmentations and of the calculations for testing them would be extremely high, although doubtless not beyond the capacity of a digital computer to handle. The infeasibility of the proposal arises rather from several theoretical obstacles: first, that even when a large bulk of material is being subjected to statistical segmentation, and when the number of contributing authors is arbitrarily limited, a large proportion of hypothetical combinations would be statistically vitiated by containing one or more segments of a sample size too small to allow calculation of significance of differences;⁷⁷ secondly, that there are no realistic criteria for preferring

⁷⁴ Cf. Morton Smith, "Story of Nala", p. 366, on adhyāya divisions. Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra*, pp. 70-76, unconvincingly supposes that each book of the Arthaśāstra (excluding the verse colophons associated with chapter divisions) is the composition of a single author.

⁷⁵ This is a corollary of the point made earlier that lack of significant difference between samples is not positive evidence of common authorship.

⁷⁶ Without this limitation, the analysis would tend to resolve itself into the most diverse result, viz. a number of segments equal to the number of basic units of analysis.

⁷⁷ In practice of course the observation of page 53f. above applies, and it is likely that not only some samples but even the whole corpus will be disqualified.

several significant differences at a certain degree of certainty to a single significant difference at a higher degree of certainty; and, thirdly, underlying the second objection, that it is improper to turn the analytical procedure on its head, to use statements concerning the statistical probability that a relationship of a certain kind exists between given knowns to posit a single most probable relationship between unknowns.

In sum, it seems that statistical studies of style will not make any contribution to analysis of the Mahābhārata text beyond corroborating (but not establishing or refuting) segmentations which happen to comprise components large enough to provide a statistical base. In the fundamental problem of deriving the segmentation, we have no alternative but to try to push further along the jungle path which Lüders began to clear.

Proposing a workable methodology :

The desideratum for an analysis of the authorship of a Mahābhārata passage is that, given the material extant, it should produce the conclusion which most nearly corresponds with the historical reality of the composition and transmission of the text. We have no means of knowing the historical reality except through analysis of the text. Because the results cannot be corroborated or refuted from any independent source, their only recommendation can be that the process of analysis which produced them was subject to internal corroborations and exposed to potential refutations at every turn of its development. While this in itself is no guarantee that the results will have any verisimilitude, at least there is no procedure which can produce more authoritative results.

Although at first sight the approach may seem somewhat Luddite, the most reliable and productive principle of analysis is simply to let the text speak for itself as far as possible. Imputed relationships of the material under consideration with other presumed like or cognate passages in related or independent traditions may have suggestive or corroborative value, but in the last analysis, the precise nature of their relationship with the text at issue, and therefore their significance for unravelling it, can only be determined in terms of that text itself. Even Lüders, whose overall approach was comparative, declined to use comparative material for more than corroboration of accretions he had deduced from his study of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga episode itself. Furthermore, by focussing his analysis in the first place solely on the materials of the passage for analysis, the analyst imposes upon himself the healthy discipline of giving the text – read in its plain sense and construed in the context it provides itself – the presumptive power of interpretation.

With all the good will and sensitivity in the world, however, the analyst will stumble over passages which, read plainly, do not make good sense or do not make sense at all. Since it is the fundamental assumption of rational analysis that an author does not write nonsense, it is in situations where the extant text appears to lack straightforward sense that interpolation, textual derangement, or omission should be hypothesized. In some cases the incoherence or self-contradictions of the text will be beyond doubt; in others, however, the analyst will be called upon to exercise discretion in deciding the question of degree which separates permissible latitude from impermissible laxity. It is both inappropriate and unwise to place demands of absolute consistency and flawless expression on an author.⁷⁸ In the first place, it is unreasonable to expect superhuman perfection from a human composer, especially one who is often not composing *ex nihilo* or *in vacuo*, but adapting his memory's half-formed metric phrases or rhetorical sequences with an eye to the context for which his composition is intended; and in the second place, in demanding more than a reasonable freedom from inconsequentialities there is a danger that the analyst may prescribe as stringent requirements his own predispositions.⁷⁹ It is reasonable to expect of a composer only competent coherence, not more.

The fact that judgement of degrees of delirament may be discretionary will generally not weaken the analysis, however, for it is merely the basis for hypothesizing interpolation. Confirmation of the hypothesis depends on the application of a test : simply, whether or not the text is improved formally and structurally with the excision of the hypothesized interpolation.⁸⁰ If the excision leaves a hiatus or makes the text less consequent, then there is a presumption against the proposed interpolation. The practical application of this test may involve a balancing of the infelicities created by excising the material against those perpetuated by leaving it in place. But the necessity for such a decision is ultimately inescapable; it lies at the heart of the analytical method, for the ultimate justification of the analysis is that by segmenting a passage into discrete components attributable to various hands the good sense of the sum of the parts may be made greater than the sense of the whole.

⁷⁸ Cf. A. Esteller's statement of Lüders' "rationality principle" ("The Mahābhārata Text Criticism (Apropos of a recent publication) ", *Journal of the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, n. s., vol. 27 (1951), p. 248). Lüders would not, I think, concur with Esteller's outrageous damping of the licence, gullibility, nonsensicality and devilry with which the tribe of scribe-transmitters has degraded an original authentic and faultless text.

⁷⁹ Morton Smith is, I fear, guilty of many offences of this nature.

⁸⁰ Such structural and formal (syntactical) tests of continuity are to be distinguished absolutely from subjective assertions like that of Garbe, *Die Bhagavad-Gītā*, p. 16.

The validity of this test for hiatus hinges upon an assumption that, in the absence of indications to the contrary, everything which was ever present in the tradition is now present, i.e. that nothing has been lost or revised. A practical corollary of this assumption is that textual asperities are always to be attributed to the disruption attendant upon incorporation of an interpolation rather than to omission. Whether or not this assumption accurately reflects the reality of a stable text tradition is immaterial; it is a methodological imperative. Since it is possible to support or refute an argument only on the basis of extant evidence, to change or revise the extant material without positive textual support is tantamount to tampering with the evidence. An interpreter's guess about omission or revision remains impermissible because there is no way in which it can be shown to be incorrect, and hence no way to confirm it logically. Moreover, a too-ready resort to emendation by the analyst may palliate vexations which might better be diagnosed as symptoms of interpolation.⁸¹

Because we have only the extant material available to us, we cannot directly gauge how likely it is that our analysis will be vitiated by its ignorance of alterations made to the older parts of a text in the course of accommodating new material. With the evidence now provided by the Critical Edition collation, however, we are able to judge the frequency of such alterations in the tradition since the time of the archetypal text. While evidence arising under later conditions cannot be applied unthinkingly to the development of the tradition prior to the archetypal text, it is nevertheless the best evidence we have. Thus Edgerton is relevant when he observes that so far as the Sabhāparvan text is concerned,

probably not one of the some fifty MSS I have studied for Book 2, nor any of the genealogical ancestors, ever *deliberately or intentionally* omitted a single line of the text;... and it appears that no scribe, no redactor, ever knowingly sacrificed a single line which he found in his original. Not even if he found something which seemed to him incomprehensible, inconsistent with the context, irreligious or immoral.⁸²

⁸¹ An extreme case of such a practice is Deussen's emendation of *ahimsā* to *anahimsā* in Mbh. xii. 256. 6a (*Vier philosophische Texte*, p. 434, as 265. 6).

⁸² Edgerton, *Sabhāparvan*, "Introduction", p. xxxiv (Edgerton's emphasis). Note especially Sukthankar, *Ādiparvan* (Poona, 1933), " Prolegomena ", pp. lii-liii; also his " Epic Studies, II. Dr. Ruben on the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata ", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol. 11 (1930), pp. 272-275, concurs. Note, however, an instance in which Belvalkar thinks material has been deliberately omitted from S1 alone (*Śāntiparvan* [Poona, 1966], " Introduction ", pp. xxiii); the case may, however, be one of incomplete distribution of a contamination.

There are, of course, many instances of accidental loss, as for instance through haplogy, but because such omissions are random and because there is also evidence of a compensating factor in restitution by contamination from collateral versions, they are probably not a serious threat to the analysis. With revisions, the situation is somewhat different. The collation of the Critical Edition does, indeed, provide evidence of revisions where the context of the material has been so changed by interpolation that it has come to be felt necessary to harmonize the sense of the older material with the new.⁸³ From the theoretical point of view the implications of this are unfortunate, for however probable a revision may seem, invocation of textual alteration without textual support must remain impermissible;⁸⁴ and even in cases where there is indirect textual support for an emendation, argumentation which does not involve revision should generally be preferred to the alternative.

Elegance is added to the analysis by taking consideration of the hypothesized interpolation one step further and attempting to give a credible account of the motivation for its composition. This involves determining the point or aspect of the older text which inspired the interpolator to compose or insert his contribution, and accounting for the placement of the interpolation in relation to the postulated point of attraction. Being argued *ex hypothesi* the treatment has no predicative value. The virtue of the exercise is that it carries the spirit of the analysis across into the realm of interpolation. The discipline of the principle that the text is to be understood read in its plain sense and construed in the context it provides itself is not dissipated by the necessary redefinition of context; even when interpolation is proposed, the context remains partly that supplied by the prior text. Dealing with the products of two minds, the analyst has more flexibility in accounting for inconsistencies of outlook or infelicities of plot development, but he is never released from the obligation of justifying his inferences on the basis of the interpolator's composition and the prior text as it may have appeared to him. While it is credible that an interpolator's comprehension of the totality of the prior text may have been deficient or that he may have overlooked subtleties implicit in the outlook of an earlier composer, it is neither necessary nor warranted to believe that the interpolator's work is the product of an inferior mind. By withholding such derogation, the particular riches of the Mahābhārata corpus are unlocked. In an intensively

⁸³ E. . . the emendations *sparāhā* to *śraddhā* of Mbh. xii. 256. 6c and 16a, or *sambhavati* to *sambharati* of Mbh. xii. 255. 37f.

⁸⁴ Lüders' emendations *śāntā* to *veśyā* are backed by evidence of the story's introduction. See note 47 above.

interpolated tradition, there is ample opportunity to observe and describe the meeting of minds which occurs between every interpolator and his predecessors.

The results of analysis conducted on the lines indicated are the more reliable the more strictly the initial segmentation of the text and hypothesizing of interpolation is derived from formal or structural grounds. Delineation of an interpolation through complementary faults of syntax in the extant text is a far sounder base for the hypothesis than, for instance, an apparent shift of ideological position. The more formal the criteria, the less scope there is for the intrusion of the analyst's preconceptions.⁸⁵ Not only is the analysis more securely founded in more objectively discernible features of the text, but it need hardly be added that when the analysis of Mahābhārata material is being undertaken with an interest in moral history in view, there is an additional impulse for the analyst to indulge in self-fulfilling prophecy and therefore even more reason to be wary of ideologically-mounted segmentations.

It should also be noted that segmentation on other than formal or structural grounds does not offer the opportunity for distinguishing between materials compiled by a single composer and materials properly attributed to separate contributors to the Mahābhārata corpus. While this is an essential distinction for reconstructing the history of the text tradition, it might be thought that the distinction is rather academic as far as a history of ideas is concerned : what does it matter if distinguishable materials were combined for incorporation or incorporated separately ? But unless this distinction is observed we lose a part of the special contribution which the Mahābhārata can make to a history of ideas by giving an insight into how related ideas were dynamically related in the minds of earlier writers. Only if we can presume that certain materials were, in the mind of an unknown composer, relevantly combined in the exposition of his ideological outlook can we use them to attempt to discern the coherent thread, the angle of vision, which binds *his* composition into a whole. If every ideological conception were segmented and considered as discrete from the remaining text, our insight would be very much shallower.

Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that interpolation may have taken place without leaving formal or structural traces. In such cases, it would

⁸⁵ The problematical nature of argument based on "jedes inhaltliche Kriterium" is well illustrated by W. Ruben's discussion, "Schwierigkeiten der Textkritik des Mahābhārata", *Acta Orientalia* [Lund], vol. 8 (1929), pp. 253-254. Sukthankar, "Epic Studies, III", pp. 263-264, seems to have misunderstood Ruben's point.

produce greater verisimilitude in the analysis to accept a segmentation based on ideological grounds. The obstacle to doing so, however, is the impossibility of determining when, short of outright contradiction in the text, such ideologically generated segmentation would be justified. Since there is no way of separating judgements on this question from the analyst's own perceptions (or preconceptions), it is methodically preferable to adopt a conservative formalist position. The results will be more, not less, interesting.

The supreme potential of the Mahābhārata corpus for the history of ideas is, thus, a product of precisely those qualities which have in the past made scholars shy of drawing upon it.⁸⁶ It encompasses a vast amount of material on diverse topics, and has been subjected to intensive interpolation over many centuries. While on the one hand this makes the corpus as a whole dauntingly unwieldy, on the other hand detailed and disciplined analyses of Mahābhārata episodes promise insights into the intellectual life of early India with an intimacy not available from any other source.

⁸⁶ On the unattractiveness of Mahābhārata didactic material, it is only necessary to cite Oldenberg's condemnation of the Śāntiparvan as a jumble of countless episodes whose treatment is matched in its bulk only by its superficiality and sloganizing, full of crass contradiction (*Das Mahābhārata*, pp. 76,77). He is, perhaps, outdone only by Venkatachellam Iyer, *Notes of a Study of the Preliminary Chapters of the Mahābhārata. Being an attempt to separate genuine from spurious matter* (Madras, 1922), who calls the Śāntiparvan and Anuśāsanaparvan " Stupendous forgeries unsurpassed for the daring involved in the enterprise " (p. 271), adding that " we should thank ourselves that the chapters [of sermons] are no greater than they are in number " (p. 279). See also Esteller, " The Mahābhārata Text-Criticism ", p. 242.