INTRODUCTION

Theophrastus was born at Eresos on Lesbos in 372/1 or 370/1 BC. His name, originally Τύρταµος, was changed by Aristotle to Θεόφραστος, in recognition (so later writers believed) of his divine eloquence. His association with Aristotle will have begun at Athens, if we accept that he studied with Plato. Otherwise it will have begun at Assos (on the coast of Asia Minor opposite Lesbos), where Hermias, ruler of Atarneus, former fellow-student of Aristotle in the Academy, gathered together a group of philosophers after the death of Plato in 348/7. The association continued in Macedonia, where Aristotle was invited by Philip II in 343/2, and in Athens, when Aristotle returned there in 335/4 and founded the Lyceum. The vicissitudes of the period which follows, and some of its leading figures, are reflected in the Characters. Lycurgus, during whose period of political influence Athens had retained a democratic constitution and a measure of independence from Macedonia, died c. 325/4. Alexander (xxiii.3) died in 323. During the uprising against Macedonia which followed, Aristotle left Athens for Euboea, where he died in 322/1, and Theophrastus became head of the Lyceum. Antipater (xxiii.4), regent of Macedonia, defeated the Athenians and their allies in 322, placed Athens under the control of Phocion, and imposed an oligarchic constitution and a Macedonian garrison. He designated Polyperchon (viii.6), general of Alexander, to succeed him in preference to his own son Cassander (viii.6, 9), with whom Theophrastus was on friendly terms.


For fuller discussion of historical allusions see the section on Date (pp. 16–19).

Diog. Laert. 5.36 = Theophr. fr. 1.5–7.

Diog. Laert. 5.37 = Theophr. fr. 1.13, Suda Θ 199 = Theophr. fr. 2.8–9.
died in 319. A struggle ensued between Polyperchon and Cassander. Polyperchon offered the Greek cities autonomy in return for their support. Athens rallied to him and executed Phocion. Cassander defeated Polyperchon and captured Athens in 317 and placed it under the control of Demetrius of Phaleron, pupil of Theophrastus. Through his influence Theophrastus, though a metic (like Aristotle), was allowed to own land, and so to establish the Lyceum in buildings of its own. Demetrius was expelled in 307. The restored democracy passed a law requiring heads of philosophical schools to obtain a licence from the state, and Theophrastus (along with other philosophers) briefly withdrew from Athens. On his return (the law was soon repealed) he remained head of the Lyceum until his death at the age of 85 in 288/7 or 287/6.

He is reputed to have had some 2,000 students. He bequeathed his writings to his pupil Neleus of Scepsis. The narrative of their subsequent history should be treated with reserve: it is said that, together with the writings of Aristotle, which Theophrastus had inherited, they were stored underground, suffered damage, and were sold to Apellicon of Teos, who issued unreliable copies; the library of Apellicon was carried off to Rome when Sulla captured Athens, and acquired by Tyrrannion the grammarian, who, with Andronicus of Rhodes, put further unsatisfactory copies into circulation.

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(a) Title

The manuscripts ABV entitle the work Χαρακτῆρες. Diogenes Laertius, in his catalogue of Theophrastus’ writings, lists it twice, first as Ἐθικοὶ χαρακτῆρες α’, second as Χαρακτῆρες ἡθικοί. The manuscripts ABV entitle the work Χαρακτῆρες. Diogenes Laertius, in his catalogue of Theophrastus’ writings, lists it twice, first as Ἐθικοὶ χαρακτῆρες α’, second as Χαρακτῆρες ἡθικοί.
The noun χαρακτήρ describes the ‘stamp’ or ‘imprint’ on a coin, a distinguishing mark of type or value. It is also used figuratively, to describe the ‘stamp’ of facial or bodily features, by which kinship or race are distinguished, and the ‘stamp’ of speech, as marked by local dialect or by a style of speech, or (in later literary criticism) by a style of writing. Into this pattern fits Men. fr. 72 ἄνδρὸς χαρακτήρ ἐκ λόγου γνωρίζεται, ‘the stamp of a man is recognised from his speech’: speech typifies him, makes him a distinct and recognisable individual.

A work entitled Χαρακτῆρες advertises nothing more specific than ‘types’, ‘marks’, ‘distinctive features’, or ‘styles’. This is not an adequate advertisement of Theophrastus’ work. Definition is needed, and is provided by ἰθικοῖ, which the manuscripts have lost, but Diogenes Laertius has preserved. The title Characters, hallowed by usage, is both misleading and incomplete. The true title means something like Behavioural Types or Distinctive Marks of Character.

(b) Antecedents and relations

The Characters, in conception and design, is a novel work: nothing like it, so far as we know, had been attempted before. But antecedents and relations can be recognised.

Descriptions of character types had appeared sporadically in other genres. Homer describes the δειλός and the ἄλκιµος in ambush, the former pale and fidgety, his heart thumping and his teeth chattering, the latter never blanching, eager for the fight to start (Il. 13.278–86). Semonides describes ten types of woman (fr. 7 West). Herodotus (through the mouth of a Persian) describes the µόναρχος (3.80.3–6), and Plato the Characters is mistaken. The catalogue is made up of four or five different lists, so that several titles appear twice (see Usener 1858: 1–24 = 1912: 50–70, Regenbogen 1940: 3854–5, Mejer 1998: 22–4).

20 Ar. Peace 220.
21 LSJ ii.5.
22 Eustathius saw in this a foreshadowing of Theophrastus: ‘The poet created archetypal characters, as Theophrastus was later to do, like the courageous man at the critical moment of an ambush, and the coward’ (Commentary on the Iliad 931.22–3 = III 469.3–5 van der Valk). See n. 57.
23 Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1975: 29 (‘he may be considered an ancestor of Theophrastus’), 32–3.
In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle distinguishes and analyses moral virtues and vices, ἠθικαί (as opposed to λογικαί) ἀρεταί and κακίαι. Virtue is a mean between two opposing vices, one of deficiency, the other of excess, in emotions and actions (2.1106b16–18). First he lists thirteen pairs of vices, with their mean (2.1107a32–1108b6).24 Theophrastus has nine (here asterisked) of the twenty-six vices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficiency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Excess</th>
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<tr>
<td>δειλία</td>
<td>ἀνδρεία</td>
<td>θράσος</td>
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<tr>
<td>ἀναισθησία</td>
<td>σωφροσύνη</td>
<td>ἀκολασία</td>
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<tr>
<td>ἀνελευθερία</td>
<td>ἐλευθεριότης</td>
<td>ἀσωτία</td>
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<tr>
<td>ἀναισχυντία</td>
<td>αἰδηµοσύνη</td>
<td>κατάπληξις</td>
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<td>ἀγροικία</td>
<td>εὐτραπελία</td>
<td>βωµολοχία</td>
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Aristotle develops the analysis of individual virtues and vices later (3.1115α4–1128β33).25 Although he personalises their bearers (exemplifying the δειλός and the ἀνδρεῖος, and so on, just as in the *Rhetoric* he exemplifies νέοι and πρεσβύτεροι), his persons exist, for the most part, out of time and space, moral paradigms, not flesh and blood. And so it is with the µόναρχος of Herodotus and the political characters drawn by Plato. But Aristotle provides the seed from which Theophrastus’ descriptions grow. He often indicates, in abstract and general terms, the circumstances or behaviour which are associated with each virtue and vice. For example, *Rhet.* 2.1379b17–19 (taking pleasure in the discomforts of others is the σηµεῖον, i.e. χαρακτήρ, of a hostile or scornful man), *Rhet.* 2.1383b19–20 (throwing away one’s shield or taking to flight is due to cowardice, withholding a deposit is due to injustice).

Instead of an abstract circumstance Theophrastus gives us a real occasion, and instead of an anonymous agent, a real individual. So, while Aristotle says that speaking at length and making grand claims about oneself is typical of ἀλαζονεία (*Rhet.* 2.1384a4–6), Theophrastus lets us hear...
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an Ἀλαζών doing that before visitors in the Piraeus (xxiii). The ἀνδρεῖος, according to Aristotle, will best display his fearlessness at sea or in war (Eth. Nic. 3.1113a34−a31). Theophrastus shows us the Δειλός on a ship and on the battlefield (xxv). Aristotle is even capable of anticipating Theophrastus’ technique. The βάνουσσας (Vulgar Man) makes a tasteless display of his wealth on unimportant occasions, for example, by entertaining his dining club on the scale of a wedding banquet or, when acting as choregus for a comedy, bringing on the chorus in purple (Eth. Nic. 4.1123a22–b3 σῶς ἐρανιστάς γαμικῶς ἔστι τῶν καὶ κομωδοὺς χορηγῶν ἐν τῇ παρόδῳ πορφύραν εἰσφέρον). With a slight change of wording (οἷος ἐρανιστάς γαμικῶς ἑστιῶν καὶ . . . εἰσφέρειν) this becomes indistinguishable from Theophrastus in content and style.

Like Homer in his description of the Δειλός and the ἄλκιμος Theophrastus locates his characters in a specific time and place. The time is the late fourth century. The place is Athens. And it is an Athens whose daily life he recreates for us in dozens of dramatic pictures and incidents. If we look elsewhere for such scenes and such people, we shall not find them (until we come to the Mimes of Herodas) except on the comic stage. Comedy furnishes much the same cast of players. Five characters of Theophrastus give their names to plays: the Ἀγροίκος (Antiphanes, Menander, Philemon and others), Ἀπιστός (Menander), Δεισιδαίµων (Menander), Κόλαξ (Menander and others), Μεµψίµοιρος (Antidotus). Another, the Ἀλαζών, appears regularly on stage. A late and dubious source claims Menander as a pupil of Theophrastus.

And so a new type of work came into existence, owing something to the ethical theorising of the Lyceum and something to the comic stage.

(c) Later Peripatetics

Later Peripatetics attempted character-drawing of this kind, but to what extent and for what purpose is unclear. Lycon, who succeeded Theophrastus’ successor Straton as head of the Lyceum c. 260 BC, wrote a description of a drunkard, preserved in the Latin translation of Rutilius Lupus (first century AD). The sketch is composed not of illustrations loosely linked but as a coherent narrative, which follows the drunkard

66 Cf. Ilera Fueyo 1998, and n. 68.
68 Lycon fr. 26 Wehrli ap. Rut. Lup. 2.7.
through the day, a technique used only once by Theophrastus (the exploits of the Δειλός in xcv). In its overblown rhetoric and unremitting cleverness, it is far from the style of Theophrastus.  

A papyrus of Philodemus preserves parts of a series of character-sketches, perhaps from a work Περὶ τοῦ κουφίζειν ὑπερηφανίας, ‘On relief from Arrogance’, by either Ariston of Keos, who was probably Lycon’s successor (c. 225 BC), or Ariston of Chios, a pupil of the Stoic Zeno.  

The characters depicted in the parts we have (they represent aspects of ὑπερηφανία) are the Αὐθάδης, Αὐθέκαστος (‘Self-willed Man’), Παντειήμων (‘Know-all’), and Εἴρων, of whom the first and fourth are also depicted by Theophrastus, and perhaps also the Σεµνοκόπος (‘Man Who Puts on a Show of Dignity’), Εὔτελιστής (‘Man Who Regards People as Insignificant’), and Οὐδενωτής (‘Man Who Regards People as Worthless’). Although the form of the original sketches has been obscured by introductory matter, commentary, and paraphrase from Philodemus, it is clear that Ariston follows Theophrastus closely in style, technique, and content. He uses the introductory formula τοιοῦτος . . . οἷος or something like it, builds his sentences around infinitives constructed with that formula, makes much use of participles, and normally links clauses with a simple καί. And he uses the same kind of illustrative vignettes from everyday life: a man asks for hot or cold water without consulting his fellow-bather and does not reciprocate a rub with oil, or fails to add an appropriate expression of greeting at the start of his letters and of good wishes at the end, or postures Socratically (‘The only thing I know is that I know nothing’). In style and wit there is nothing to distinguish these from Theophrastus.

A single sentence is preserved from a work, possibly but not certainly entitled Περὶ χαρακτήρων, by Satyrus, presumably the Peripatetic biographer (third/second centuries). It describes the behaviour of ἄσωτοι (‘profligates’), in a series of asyndetic participial clauses. The style, all

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31 See the commentary on i.2.  
32 fr. 14, i p. 36.17–19 Wehrli.  
33 fr. 14, ii p. 36.21–2 Wehrli.  
34 fr. 14, ii p. 36.25–6 Wehrli.  
36 There is a good appreciation of his style by Pasquali 1918: 144–7 = 1986: 59–62.  
37 Athen. 168C = Satyrus fr. 27 Schorn.
rhetorical balance and antithesis, is unlike Theophrastus, but is not unlike some of the spurious accretions (vi.7, viii.11, x.14).\(^\text{38}\)

(d) Roman developments

In the Roman period character-drawing becomes firmly associated with rhetoric. The author (first century BC) of \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} illustrates the technique of what he calls \textit{notatio} (i.e. \textit{χαρακτηρισµός}) with a richly textured sketch (4.63–4), for delivery in court, of \textit{The Man Who Shows off Pretended Wealth} (\textit{ostentatorem pecuni<ae glori>osum}), at first in the manner of Theophrastus, but soon developing into anecdotal narrative more in the manner of Lycon.\(^\text{39}\) Cicero uses the term \textit{descriptio} (\textit{Top.} 83 ‘description, which the Greeks call \textit{χαρακτήρ} . . . what sort of person a miser or a flatterer is, and other cases of the same kind, in which a person’s nature and manner of life are described’). Such character-drawing was practised in the schools of rhetoric (Quint. \textit{Inst.} 6.2.17 ‘school exercises in character-drawing . . . in which we often represent countrymen, superstitious men, misers and cowards’). And character-types are sketched by the satirists: the bore (Hor. \textit{Sat.} 1.9), the \textit{bellus homo} (Mart. 3.63), the miser (Juv. 14.109–34).

(e) The purpose of the Characters

The work has been tailored, by more than one hand, to serve a moralising purpose. The \textit{prooemium} introduces it as a work of moral guidance for the young. The epilogues advise or moralise. The definitions have links with ethical theorising.\(^\text{40}\) When we are rid of these accretions, nothing is analysed, no moral is drawn, no motive is sought.\(^\text{41}\) But purpose cannot be separated from form. And we do not know whether what remains, after the moralising accretions are removed, has the form which Theophrastus gave it.

It has been suggested that the \textit{Characters} are a collection of extracts from one or more works of Theophrastus.\(^\text{42}\) But the coherence and stylistic

\(^\text{39}\) See pp. 5–6. He is comparable to Theophrastus’ \textit{Ἀλαζών} (xxiii). There is another shared motif at xxii.4.
\(^\text{40}\) See p. 10.
\(^\text{41}\) For these as features which fundamentally distinguish the work from Aristotle’s ethical writings, see Furley 1953, Fortenbaugh 1975 (= 2003), 2005: 88–9.
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unity of the collection proves that its parts are not derived from unconnected works. And, if they are derived from a single work, it still remains to explain what the purpose of that other work might have been. It has also been suggested that the Characters were conceived with a rhetorical purpose: they are models for orators, a paintbox out of which an orator may draw the shades to suit him.\(^{13}\) Or that they have connections with the theoretical writings of Theophrastus and others on comedy, such as Theophrastus’ \(\text{Περὶ γελοίου} \) and \(\text{Περὶ κωµωιδίας}\),\(^{44}\) or the ‘Tractatus Coislinianus’, which has Peripatetic associations and has even been taken to derive from Aristotle’s lost work on comedy.\(^6\) They are ‘a mere appendix at the end of a work on the theory of drama’, ‘an aid for the playwrights of contemporary drama, a handbook of characterization for Menander . . . and his fellows’.\(^{46}\) Or that the work is a \(\text{ὑπόµνηµα} \) or \(\text{ποιητικός} \) \(\text{Κωµωιδίας}\), to which it bears the same relationship as the various Aristotelian \text{Constitutions} to the \text{Politics} and the \text{Homer: Problems} to the \text{Poetics} – like a painter’s sketchbook to his finished paintings.\(^{47}\)

Any attempt to interpret the work as a serious treatise comes up against an objection neatly formulated by Jebb. ‘The difficulty is, not that the descriptions are amusing, but that they are written as if their principal aim was to amuse.’\(^{48}\) Jebb’s answer is that Theophrastus wrote the Characters for his own amusement and that of his friends, who put them together after his death and issued them in collections of various sizes and shapes.\(^{49}\) In evidence of this he adduces their lack of symmetry, the capriciousness of their order, and the multiformity of the manuscript.

\(^{13}\) So especially Immisch 1898 (‘ein Farbenkasten’ 207); cf. Furley 1953. Fortenbaugh 1994 (= 2003). This argument owes too much to their later history. They survive because, in the Byzantine period, they were incorporated with the treatises of Hermogenes and Apthion, whose discussions of \text{ἠθος} and \text{ἠθοποιία} they were taken to illustrate (see p. 20). Pertinent criticism by Lane Fox 1996: 139.

\(^{44}\) Diog. Laert. 5.46, 47 = Theophr. fr. 1.184, 208 = fr. 666 nos. 23 and 22.


\(^{49}\) Jebb 1870: 18–21, 37–40 = 1909: 8–9, 16–17. Lane Fox 1996: 141 detects much the same purpose (see p. 19).
tradition. The manuscript tradition licenses no such inference. With regard to symmetry, some sketches are incomplete, and others may be. As for order, accidents of transmission may have disturbed a less capricious design; or what seems caprice may be designed to avoid the appearance of a textbook.

There is another possibility, which meets Jebb’s objection, and gives at least as plausible an account of the origins of the sketches. Pasquali suggested that they were conceived as illustrative showpieces for a course of lectures on ethics, a few moments’ light entertainment amid more serious matter, and for that reason composed in a simple style which suits oral delivery, and not designed for publication by Theophrastus himself.

According to a reputable source, Theophrastus was a lively lecturer. ‘Hermippus [third century bc] says that Theophrastus would arrive at the Peripatos punctually, smart and well dressed, then sit down and deliver his lecture, in the course of which he would use all kinds of movements and gestures. Once, when he was imitating a gourmet, he stuck out his tongue and licked his lips.’ One may readily picture him picking a speck of straw from another’s hair (ii.3), stuffing his cloak into his mouth to stifle a laugh (ii.4), officiously arranging cushions (ii.11), grabbing a dog’s snout (iv.9), staggering forward as if burdened by a jar, his hands plucking at documents which threaten to elude his grasp (vi.8), dousing himself with a ladleful of water (ix.8), rummaging through rubbish for a lost coin (x.8), sponging a wound and swatting flies (xxv.5), and twisting his buttocks for a wrestling throw (xxvii.14), while reciting his sketches in the lecture hall.

There was a famous professor in Oxford who would introduce into his seminars, as if on impulse, carefully designed sketches of past scholars, one for each occasion. I heard him once: he sketched Pasquali.

(f) Authenticity and integrity

Doubts have arisen from time to time that Theophrastus is the author of the Characters.

50 See the section on Transmission (pp. 19–21).
51 v and xix each consist of two parts, which come from separate sketches; in v both parts, in xix one or both, are incomplete.
53 Athen. 21B = Hermipp. fr. 51 Wehrli = Theophr. fr. 12.
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The prooemium used to be a stumbling-block: its author is 99 years old, and Theophrastus, according to Diogenes Laertius, died at 85. But the prooemium is spurious, a very late addition. Without the prooemium, what remains is not, as it stands, the work of Theophrastus. Several sketches (I, II, III, VI, VIII, X, XXVI, XXVII, XXIX) have epilogues, which betray themselves as later (perhaps much later) additions by their language, style, and moralising tone. And there are the introductory definitions. Some reflect the pseudo-Platonic Definitions, others the phraseology of Aristotle or pseudo-Aristotle; some describe a form of behaviour which has little or nothing to do with the behaviour described in the sketch itself; even those which are unobjectionable are no better than banal. They were added before the time of Philodemus (first century BC), who quotes def. II and possibly alludes to def. VI. They first came under suspicion early in the nineteenth century. That they are spurious and must be deleted en bloc was established beyond all doubt by Markus Stein in 1992.

When the work has been stripped of its prooemium, its epilogues, and its definitions, we still have not unwrapped the genuine article. Numerous further additions are embedded in the sketches, ranging in extent from single words to brief phrases (IV.4, VIII.7, XVIII.6, XIX.4, XX.9, XXI.11, XXII.7, XXX.10), whole sentences (II.9, VI.2, VII.5, VIII.5, XVI.3) and even a sentence of paragraph length (VI.7).

Here is a simple proof that interpolation is a real phenomenon, not a fiction designed to save Theophrastus’ credit. In V.10 a show-off hires out his little wrestling-school to τοῖς φιλοσόφοις τοῖς σοφισταῖς τοῖς ὁπλομάχοις τοῖς ἀρμονικοῖς, for them to perform in. This quartet of philosophers, sophists, drill-sergeants, and music lecturers, listed in asyndeton, ought to worry us. Theophrastus has several trios of nouns or verbs in asyndeton, but no quartets. Furthermore, philosophers and sophists are too much alike, when compared with the pair which follows, drill-sergeants and music-lecturers. If we are to reduce the list to three, by getting rid of either the sophists or the philosophers, we must get rid of the philosophers, because sophists are more likely than philosophers to wish to hire a place for public displays. And the Herculaneum papyrus omits the philosophers. There is an important lesson here. Anything that is anomalous should be regarded with suspicion. Nothing is genuine merely because it is in the manuscripts and cannot be proved to be spurious.

54 For which, see Ingenkamp 1967.
55 Bloch 1814 stigmatised ‘some’ (‘quaedam’ xii, xiii, 85) or ‘most’ (‘pleraeque’ 79), but explicitly condemned only XIII and XXVIII. Darvaris 1815 condemned them all.