

**UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA
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**THEOPHRASTUS IN GREEK-LATIN AND ROMANIAN
LITERATURE
– TRADITION OF *CHARACTERS* –**

ABSTRACT

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Argumentum

Our thesis orientates towards a subject, not frequently met in literary studies, namely the interest in the tradition of *Characters*, inaugurated by the Greek writer-philosopher Theophrastus, and, deriving from it, the interest in the study of moralists' works. The purpose of our approach is to surprise how the *Characters*' tradition evolved along the time and its tentacular extensions to Greek-Latin, French (Jean de La Bruyère) or Romanian literature, in the eighteenth century and, respectively, first half of the nineteenth century. The comparison of Theophrastus's *Characters* with later writings is a legitimate approach (in the study of literary tradition); as such, it is not always necessary to establish connections or paradigms, but to observe the particularities and the evaluation of human types, e.g. the characters. This work arose from an impulse, not only sentimentally motivated, as one might think, but correlated with curiosity for Theophrastus' work, a tempore situated, and waiting for new challenging reconsiderations.

Another interest in Theophrastus' work is represented by the quality of *contemporaneity* applicable to his work. Although he lived and wrote in the IV-III century *B.C.*, in Ancient Greece, Theophrastus remains a contemporary writer, as we have concluded from the literary studies dedicated to him along the centuries. Nevertheless, Romanian literature represents a particularity as it is characterized by a lack of critical studies approaching Theophrastus' work (there are only two translations of his work, first in 1943, of C. Fedeleş, and second, in 1968, of A. Tita). The unfavorable situation has motivated us to undertake this exegesis, in an attempt to counterbalance the absence of literary Romanian analysis, concerning the topic above, and to promote Theophrastus' work within our cultural area.

Our attempt relies on current trends of resizing and reinterpretation the great classics and also on the growing interest, expressed in current literature, in studying the characters and the human nature. Although universal literary researches on Theophrastus have been performed in a considerable number, bibliographic material, existing in Romanian, is of a smaller amount.

Without ignoring the different types of reading and interpretation, our study is based on various editions of Theophrastus's *Characters*, as well as on various studies, articles and commentaries. Our research is not exhaustive, we have chosen only the most significant literary contributions; of James Diggle, William W. Fortenbaugh, Markus Stein, Otto Immisch, Giorgio Pasquali, Rudolf Stark, etc. In the Romanian literature, several critics had attempted literary portraits, naming Tudor Vianu, Marian Popa, Silviu Angelescu, Mihaela Mancaş, which oriented us in terms of theoretical, historical and cultural coordinates. Our appreciation is illustrated in the bibliographical section of this thesis.

In the chapter **Problems of terminology**, we have conducted a review of the terminology

issues commonly encountered when dealing with such a topic, e.g.+ definitions, interpretations belonging to theoreticians, critics, and literary historians, and referring to the concepts of character, ethos, portrait, type, etopee, prosopography etc. These terms often overlap. In order to delineate our research, we have clarified the concepts, our analysis being oriented to describe the characters, vices, virtues or morals. The novelty of our research is the interpretation of Theophrastus's work, starting with the characters' description and comparing them with subsequent writings in Greek Latin, French and Romanian literature. The comparative approach envisages the study of this tradition of *Characters*, in literature, along the centuries, highlighting the similarities and differences. We examine the modern concept of "character", comparing it with the classical term and trying to conclude if there are any resemblances or not.

Our study adds to previous studies a more specific approach, focusing on the continuity of Peripatetic tradition, intertextuality and literary influence in French literature (in Jean de La Bruyère) and Romanian (at B.P. Poni, and in the literary physiology works of C. Negruzzi, M. Kogalniceanu and N. Filimon). The characters are refined and individualized based on period, historical conditions, dominant aesthetic trends, genre and literary species, author's work and personality. I focused on the echo Theophrastus's *Characters* produced in the epoch, underlying his originality, as well as his influence, imitation proving to be a creative factor.

Theophrastus' *Characters* are placed under the influence of a Peripatetic tradition in the writing of *Characters*; being a central point of intersection between the study of social paradigms, reflections on social acceptable or amendable behavior, and shared values or deviations.

Our thesis is intended as a contribution to relevant discussions about the Theophrastus's *Characters*, enlarging area of exegetical debate about purpose and function, about the relations between the Theophrastus's *Characters* and the post-Character writings, in terms of contact and convergence between the *Characters* and later works.

In the chapter **Theophrastus in the context of Greek and Latin literature**, we are concerned, first, with the philosophers belonging to the Peripatetic School, and those who, according to writings, sayings or testimonies, in one way or another, have produced works on *Characters*, in general. We presume that there was no linear practice of a characters' education in this school, but there are reasons to take in consideration a tradition of characters and their connections with ethics, comedy and rhetoric. We analyze the context of Greek literature, briefly presenting the works on Characters' theme before Theophrastus and the writers who produced them, as well as the connections established beyond the Peripatetic School (Homer, Simonide, Herodotus and Plato). Description of Characters in Aristotle's case is reviewed in the subsection *About character in Aristotle and his successors*, paying attention to ethics, rhetoric, poetics and physiognomics. Thus, we not limit the topic to the study of characters, but we take into account, for

example, different ethic orientations that can be seen at Aristotle and other writers, as well as examples of character denigration known in legal discourse. The focus on the tradition, with authors' analysis, is important when establishing the authenticity of whole texts or just fragments.

The Peripatetic's list includes, above all, the writings of Aristotle and *corpus Aristotelicum*, original or not, because, in some cases, they form a part of the peripatetic tradition. The disciple of Aristotle, **Theophrastus**, and his **work, the *Characters***, had produced a change and evolution in the tradition of character-based writing, which reached its peak in ancient Greek literature.

Moreover, in the section **The structure and the originality of *Characters***, we have approached issues regarding the structure and authenticity of the work, we have questioned the integrity of the work, raised the problem of definitions, reviewing opinion of critics and recent publishers, according to whom, the definitions added or attached to characters are spurious; we underlined their importance in the history of the work reception. They do not represent a late addition to text, such as the moral conclusions added at the end of each character sketches. Similar definitions have emerged in fragments of papyrus from the first century BC., which proves the fact that the definitions were not part of original work, but added lately. The tradition of the definitions is a subject worth investigating, because they certainly contain, *inter alia*, Peripatetic phraseology and form part of the Peripatetic tradition. We consider also that the definitions are not only "trivial" and "inept" (James Diggle), they are a useful record of the reception of the text, and a traditional part of the *corpus*. They are also an important source for studying the differences between philosophical and popular language.

Next, we suggested that Theophrastus has deliberately chosen types well known to his audience, which seemed relevant, most remarkable or even ostentatious, in contemporary society. If we approve (as J. Diggle did) that definitions and abstract titles are later additions, we have one character trait as neologism, introduced by Theophrastus (character XXI - μικροφιλότιμος - *infumuratul*). But actually we are dealing with a selection. There are other types of characters that were important but abandoned for some reason. There was no attempt to find a solution to this problem, which may depend, to a certain level, on the way it was perpetuated.

In the subchapter **The purpose of *Characters*. The nature and their function**, we have tried to clarify the confusion regarding the purpose and general idea of Theophrastus' work. For centuries, critics have debated around the purpose of Theophrastus' work, connected either to ethics, poetry, comedy and rhetoric or intended as a sort of entertainment or a collection of illustrative excerpts for a course or a lecture. What we have tried to demonstrate the debate or controversy about the purpose of the work seems to have been, mostly constrained and has sought to rebuild something resembling Theophrastus, in the history of genres from Antiquity. It seems to be more important the consideration of the work's function than the exact purpose. In fact, it may be a new

kind or a mixture of genres that can not be all categorized as a sub-genre. Most modern critics' views reflect the particularities, the work's features and the peripatetic tradition around which the work has been build. None of these possibilities cannot be excluded today, but, at the same time, none of them should not be treated as the only possibility. Therefore, it seems wrong to pretend that the work has no ethical dimension. *Characters* have certainly an ethical dimension, though Theophrastus's intention in carrying out the work was not theorizing ethics and ethical dimension is not the same as in Aristotle's works. The same is applicable in the case of rhetorical or poetic connections. No one would doubt, for example, that the presentation of critical defects and the creation of stereotypes helps create comic effect. But the link between the *Characters* of Theophrastus and Menander's plays may be common around the same human nature, no dependence of one another.

Next, we approached **the problems of classification** of human types or characters. There have been attempts to regroup the characters according to some similar or opposite characteristics, just for the reader's pleasure, which may prove of no importance, and modern publishers have abandoned such attempts. There can be formal or structural groups, to better understand the differences between some characters. This lack of systematic presentation seems not to be a problem for the author, and perhaps it was not his intention.

To understand the differences and similarities between the characters, we studied Theophrastus' *Characters* in terms of **levels of social communication**. All types described in the *Characters* are deviations from commendable or acceptable social behavior. We have focused our attention on these deviations and the specific ways Theophrastus depicts these details, eg. what makes these types to be socially unacceptable. He presents images of people with basic social roles, images of active participants in life's *polis*. The images are, however, distorted, most forms present a distorted way of virtue, even positive characteristics are seen as excessive and inappropriate. Many of the actions described are not negative *per se*, and some would be completely positive if it were run in a more appropriate at a time, in a more appropriate or to the right person. In short, the types show a general lack of social intelligence. The characters are presented in a limited range of situations and places that are important parts of the social network of the city (particularly Athens). The reactions of different types differ in different situations or places, which is an important aspect in the analysis of each type. Specific places include the home market (with various divisions, such as women market), baths, theater, gymnasia, military assembly, court, portic, street etc. Sometimes it is difficult to determine a precise location. We noticed that the main reason this type of behavior becomes socially unacceptable is the fact it abandons some common basic values, important to the right functioning of the society.

Next, we have selected, for analysis, several **types of Theophrastean characters**: that of *the*

Insincere, the Arrogant and the Shamelessly Greedy Man, our focus on the use of character types at some orators, which present them as terms of disparagement, abuse or invective. We followed K. Dover's suggestion: in the situation of a division in moral philosophy with popular morality in Ancient Greece, the main genre which may provide us credible information about the practice of rhetoric is Attic oratory. Furthermore, we have examined the occurrence of the types outside the Peripatetic School, not always being necessary to link characters with ethics, but moreover with comedy. Finally, we draw some developments, drawings or lost portraits and merged traces of writing characters in other works of Theophrastus, and some problems recurred at the text level.

At the end of this chapter, we deal with the **literary influence of Characters**, pleading, where applicable, for a "Theophrastean influence" on some works, some of the followers of Theophrastus (Ariston, Lycon and Satyros). As a result, we hope that we have proved that studies on character have a particularly important role within the Peripatetic tradition. Although other philosophical schools (Stoics) have not entirely dismissed the subject, the Peripatetics seem to have given it special attention, no matter the form they have chosen for exemplification. The reason should be found in Aristotle's ideas in bringing along philosophical discussions with social practices. The Peripatetic orientates more towards humans than actions, reaching the observation and evaluation of social types. In this regard, Theophrastus seems to have gone further, from the theoretical basis provided by Aristotle, into something completely original by focusing on the practical application of these ideas.

Within the literary influence, we have analyzed Character-centered works that follow the Peripatetic tradition; we have tried to underline specific developments, important in addressing issues of popular morality and moral philosophy. We have traced a general character; and what is unacceptable, from a social perspective, in the behavior of the type of "negative" character.

Then, in new Attic comedy, in Menander's case, we show some similarities and differences with Theophrastus's characters and the representation of negative social types, trying to argue, to consider the comedy of Menander as an ethic comedy.

Menander has transformed the essence of comedy, he did not abandon laughter to achieve cultural stability- it all passed on second level – he is interested in correcting the vices and in the pursuit of happiness. Menander's personages are prototypes of characters: small bourgeois, parasites, chefs, retailers, farmers, courtesans, slave plot, boasting soldier, whose tone remains simple and natural; style is similar to an every day language, but its liveliness and apparent disorder prove to be its real values. Although there were only few fragments of new comedy left, the titles of Menander's plays have a Theophrastean core. If we want to define the comedy of Menander, we must say that, obviously, it is an ethic comedy, in the original sense, because its center are the characters, useful not only to produce laughter, but also to portray the transformation of a vicious

human into a virtuous one. It also tends to find a middle way or a good way to succeed. Menander, knowing the human qualities and defects, presents characters with soft hues. Being a student of Theophrastus, we can say that he puts into stage Theophrastean human types.

In each play, Menander intends to demonstrate a moral reality; not theory, but the *pragmata* (examples, rules of life). Therefore, the structure, the moral theme of a comedy of Menander is of logical and ethical content. Prolog has three basic functions: inform about the background action (premises or remote events), it introduces the protagonists with refers to data anagraphics or psychological traits; it anticipates conclusions, having as purpose to orientate our attention on the treatment of characters. Menander's characters are not static but evolving, they are real people. The Menandreic drama is characterized by the fusion of the human condition unit of the characters with the infinite variety of forms the Characters take, between the serious and the ridicule; by the optimistic interpretation of life. The idea of humanity, an expression of the sense of human solidarity, expressed by the famous Terence *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum et puto* (I am human and think that anything that's human is not unknown to me) of *Heautontimorumenos* (*Who punishes himself*, I, 1, 25) also comes from Menander: *Since you are a man, must ponder what that man or thing of grace is the man, but if a man!*

The study of the Characters writings can not be done without the analysis of the latest authors, which owe the pattern and the subject more or less to Theophrastus. We refer here to the Characters of the Roman times, within the Latin literature. After a brief overview of Mims, then Atellane fable, with its stereotypical characters, we analyze the characters of the Roman period, in rhetoric, satire, epistole (Horace, Juvenal) and comedy (Cnaeus Naevius, Plautus, Terence), so that, at the end of this chapter, we can draw, shape the tradition, character reception in the eighteenth century English literature.

In chapter II, **Characters of Theophrastus in the context of French classical literature**, we follow characters in French classicism, the XVII century French even developing a genre of deepening human inside. The rich literature of moralists provides us a huge material for the knowledge of this human orientation, specific of that time. After a short presentation of the intellectual context (including the term "moralist", the moment moralist in France and some moralists's works) we analyze the *Characters* of La Bruyère as work of transition, and this choice is justified by the points of convergence between texts (ancients and moderns), which should not hide their differences, and the possibility to report them to other works.

These points of convergence can provide us a first definition of "moralists" of the eighteenth century. They are turning to the "world", the word is very rich in meanings: land and human world, social world; "fashionable" honor. They deploy their morality within contemporary space, describing the habits revealing before their eyes, and directly addressing the audience of his time.

Moreover, their works are not only evidence of a critical report of morals, but of moral discourse forms, so they transpose and reinvent traditional genres of morality. If moralists talk about human, we shouldn't believe that they know his nature. The impulse to write comes, to the contrary, from the uncertainty of its frame; their writings express this uncertainty, it shows also, by writing in a moral and fragmented way; they deliver, refusing to the reader the systematically treaty which might be expected, not leaving the comfort of a doctrine, subjecting it to a fragmented, elliptical, and often contradictory proposal.

In this chapter, focused on the La Bruyère's *Characters*, we have tried, first, to demonstrate the specificity of the activity of the XVII century moralists, which lies at the confluence of social history, literary history and the history of thought. We addressed issues of structure and originality of the Labruyèrian work, from genesis to the style of the work, highlighting the variety of reflections, records, narrative procedures or speeches. After a short presentation of the work, we focus on the aims of the work, to finish with the analysis of the individual characters, collectives or socials, and the passions described by La Bruyère, then with the elements of intertextuality (strong influence), with the Ancient works, with *Characters* of Theophrastus, with Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld.

In the last chapter, **III. Characters in Romanian literature**, after an introduction to the classical elements of Romanian culture and literature, we analyze the moralists, the predecessors of B.P.Mumuleanu. From G. Călinescu's opinions, referring to classicism and romanticism, that the observation of a classic's interest is bound to human types, to eternal types, from the characterological vision of the classic, we try to shape a tradition of characters, of the moral portrait, of the etopee and prosopography in old Romanian literature, in the works of chronicles, they are influenced by the reading of the ancients. The portrait's construction knows an evolution in parallel with the three Moldavian chronicles, from the most common forms of description of manners and psychological traits (Gr. Ureche, M. Costin) to the narrative portraits of I. Neculce's chronic. Then, we examined several representatives of satire itself, in the traditional form, from N. Olahus, Matei Milu, Ioan Cantacuzino, V. Pogor, and Gh. Asachi and C. Stamati. Then, we deal with the Barbu Paris Mumuleanu's *Characters*, between model and originality, pursuing matters of structure and originality, examining some portraits and models. The general character of human character types, portrayed by the Romanian poet, approaches his predecessors, not only by the technical feature, but also by title and by subject.

We analyze Barbu Paris Mumuleanu's poems, that *voice with pain* of Romanian poetry, as it was called Eminescu, whose work was claimed by the history of literature and entered as such in the concerns of literary historians, and deserves, we think, a reconsideration from the perspective of the classical elements. Even if, often characterized by a sense of credulousness and clumsiness in

terms of artistic achievements, the work interests us because of the classic essence used in *Characters*, volume with a preface including some ideas of the Enlightenment.

The trend and the generalized term, belonging to the classical typology of models, allies the author's polemical argument, where violence of language, invectives (sometimes down satire), but, also, the singular details, which give authenticity, local color to the pictures and even to the characters, sometimes, verve print motion, turning the character into a minor sketch. The lengths, the discursive of the speech are inherent. The preface to the volume *Characters*, comprehensive critique of society of the epoch, and the ideas in the spirit of Enlightenment philosophy, show a patriot, a moralist who finds virulent words to attack ostentatious luxury and lust, close to the tone of Antim Ivireanul's *Sermons*, or constructs grotesque images.

Finally, we follow the classical models in the physiology of the successors, analyzing the moralists in Romanian literature until the mid-nineteenth century (Negruzzi, Kogălniceanu and N. Filimon – proving qualities of moral observers). Of course, you will have noticed that the present study focuses in particular on the traditional character of the etopee at some moralists. The reason to "neglect" others moralists (particularly Romanian moralists of the second half of the nineteenth century, and even the twentieth century), is none other than the limited space of a PhD thesis, which not allows the analysis of all literature, but we hope that we will continue in a future study.

We do not pretend to be exhaustive, being aware of the essential quality of a work of art: to be modeled after a comprehensive range of receptors. The main motivation of our approach lies in a purely aesthetic point of view, and its specificity asserts to find its origin in the numerous readings concerning the object of investigation.

We plea for literary modesty unlike other literary critics, which state that justified and relevant is their research method, denying the contributions of literary history, of old and new literary criticism, already perceived as tradition. In our opinion, the novelty of the study is in its ability to open, both towards previous researches as well as towards a constructive reading, achieved through a continuous dialogue with literature and the receiver.

Historical tradition of literary criticism "betray" the possibility of a multitude of interpretations of Theophrastus's *Character*. We always had in mind this truth and just want it to strengthen it with our modest contribution.