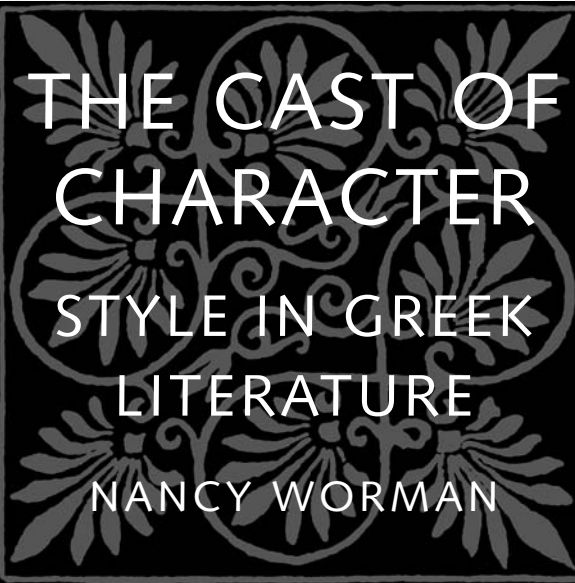


## THE CAST OF CHARACTER



THE CAST OF  
CHARACTER  
STYLE IN GREEK  
LITERATURE  
NANCY WORMAN



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS AUSTIN



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## VISIBLE TYPES AND VISUALIZING STYLES IN ARCHAIC POETRY

Archaic poets conjoin taste or touch with visual effect to characterize elements of verbal style, which strike the ear as they strike the eye—a conceptual synesthesia that gives physical weight to the spoken word and persuasive force to concrete detail. This sensual characterization of verbal impact has its more concrete extension in the visible features of a speaker's style. In literary depiction, the narrator may provide these details or they may be found in portraits deployed by adept and seductive performers themselves, who frequently offer visualizations of dress and deportment to flatter or entice their hearers. A speaker's use of such images also helps to delineate his own verbal and visible *hexis* and thus should display his character. But these physical details may cloak rather than reveal character, which brings into focus the central problem with stylistic elements in the first place: that they are mutable, which means that the agile oral performer can change them like a suit of clothes. Indeed, the dress and deportment of the body may also operate as a distraction, masking identity or intention.

This chapter explores the visible aspects of style and analyzes the sources of their perception as potentially deceitful, seductive, or overwhelming. Figures such as Pandora at one extreme and Thersites at the other highlight essential aspects of how the body signifies stylistically. But Helen and Odysseus illuminate subtler aspects of corporeal style, their elusive or changeable physical types matching their distracting or mutable verbal styles. The deportment and dress of these figures, as well as the significant objects and

compelling images with which they are associated, thus raise more complex and disturbing questions about how one's visible manner may profoundly affect one's message.

### THE BODY AS PUBLIC MEASURE

The body, especially in Homeric representation but also in Hesiod and the lyric poets, invokes ideas about order and proportion by means of concrete attributes. As an emblematic entity, it is thus essential to understanding the relationship between physical appearance and speaking style. Jean-Pierre Vernant has argued that archaic and classical representation measures the body in relation to the visible indications of one's social stature. "The Greek body of Antiquity," he explains, "appears in the manner of a coat of arms and presents through emblematic traits the multiple 'values'—concerning his life, beauty, and power—with which an individual is endowed, values which he bears and which proclaim his *timê*, his dignity and rank."<sup>1</sup> Vernant emphasizes that these bodies are situated within the visual field and measured along a continuum from light to dark. Just as the warrior's gleaming armor may foreshadow his victorious forays on the battlefield (e.g., *Il.* 19.365–383), so do the Furies' murky and blood-drenched forms mirror their grim role in death and retribution (e.g., *A. Eum.* 52). Physical grace, which itself may effect a visual persuasion, is also conceived of as a bright, tactile thing. The beauty enhancer *charis*, for instance, which can be poured over the body like a shining, liquid gown (e.g., *Hes. WD* 65), is associated in its Indo-European equivalents with light.<sup>2</sup>

There are also bodies in Greek literature that are categorized less by this public measure than by qualities that reveal their ambiguous places within the social schema. In their veiled or disguised forms, these sorts of bodies may invoke epistemological concerns similar to those that Froma Zeitlin has identified with bodies in tragedy: their visible presentations often call attention to the possibility of change, imposture, doubling, or otherwise eluding the eye.<sup>3</sup> Their depictions may involve touch (from soft to hard) and smell (from perfume to stench)—more intimate measures of body type.<sup>4</sup> When bright, a body's high-status gleam sometimes serves to mask rather than to reveal its identity. Shining garments may call attention to it, suggesting its specially luminous aspect and sometimes revealing its alluring skin.<sup>5</sup> Its possessor's eyes may meet the onlooker with a flashing glance, so that the viewer is himself viewed and disarmed.<sup>6</sup> Vernant does not differentiate in

of his vulnerability to her powers of perspicuity and perhaps even to her sexual appeal. His body has endured self-inflicted blows before entering Troy, and now he faces helpful but subtly threatening contact with a semi-divine female. He is at his most wary while in his hideous outfit (cf. *ὁ δὲ κερδοσύνη ἀλλέεινεν*, 4.251); after his bath and in new clothes, he tells all (*πάντα νόον*, 4.256). Helen's stripping of his disguise also effectively removes his typically crafty style. Now dressed in the clothes that blazon his identity, he has to fight his way out of Troy rather than cloak his passage in verbal imposture and physical disguise. Thus, at least as Helen tells it, Odysseus divests himself of his signature slyness in her presence and dons the brave visibility typical of Homeric heroes.

Like Helen's threat to Odysseus' body, Circe's is subtle. While obviously sensuous in nature, it interweaves tricks of feeding with those of undressing.<sup>42</sup> Odysseus appears at Circe's door battered by adventure but with his form protected by Hermes' special herb (*μῶλυ*, 10.305). Circe feeds the hero her own drugs, handing him a specially mixed drink (*κυκεῶν*) and tapping him dismissively with her wand (10.316–320). It is only when Odysseus whips out his sword and makes a dash at her that the goddess recognizes him and proposes bed (10.325–335). Odysseus, still suspicious and careful with his words, worries that while naked, Circe might render him "servile and emasculated" (*κακὸν καὶ ἀνήνορα*, 10.341). He insists that she swear an oath, as Hermes had instructed (10.343–344; cf. 10.299–301).<sup>43</sup> However, once he has climbed into her singularly beautiful bed (*περικαλλέος ἐνῆς*, 10.347, 480) and been elaborately bathed and dressed by her handmaidens (10.348–370), Odysseus sinks into a sensuous reverie and stays on Circe's island for a year. Hermes' *mōlu* may have helped the hero retain his human form and his manly prowess in the goddess' bed, but it did little to protect his sense of direction and thus to further his return.

Calypso presents a more concrete threat to Odysseus' body. Although she complies with Hermes' command to let the hero leave her island, her final bathing and dressing of Odysseus before he leaves nearly finishes him once he is at sea. Calypso is herself a fancy dresser, adorning her body for a trip to the woods in a large, shimmering, and delicately woven cloak, a golden belt, and a veil (5.230–232). When Odysseus has built his raft, she bathes and enwraps him in sweet-smelling clothes (*εἴματα τ' ἀμφίεσσα θυώδεα*, 5.264), and he sets off. On the eighth day at sea, in sight of Scheria, Odysseus encounters a storm raised by his enemy Poseidon. Wary and wise in his manner of address when slumped on the goddess' shore, once

splendidly dressed, he loses his verbal control. Despairing and alone on his raft, he wishes for death (*ὡς δὴ ἐγὼ γ' ὄφελον θανέειν*, 5.308). He goes overboard and almost drowns because of the weight of Calypso's elaborate clothes (*εἴματα γὰρ ὅ' ἐβάρυνε, τὰ οἱ πόρε δια Καλυψώ*, 5.321). He splutters out seawater (*στόματος δ' ἐξέπτυσεν ἄλμην / πικρὴν*, 5.323–324) rather than words; he cannot speak even if he wants to, well dressed for the part though he may be.

The nymph Ino sees him as he sinks and tells him to trade his fancy clothes for her divine scarf (*κορήδεμνον . . . ἄμβροτον*, 5.346–347). This he uses as a lifejacket, relinquishing it upon reaching Scheria as she had instructed. While the finely wrought clothes of one goddess reduce Odysseus to the language of despair and nearly silence him altogether, the ambrosial veil of another saves him, pulling him toward another island. There he will address the next available female with such well-wrought formality that she will overlook his savage appearance and agree to give him yet one more set of clothes. The Homeric poet thus depicts high-status female figures as manipulating the narrative by their use of clothing. Their various treatments of Odysseus' body immobilize or propel him, inhibiting and aiding his progress by turns.<sup>44</sup>

Divine cosmetics also impede or facilitate Odysseus' progress; only those that transform him into an aging beggar clearly help him on his way. In fact, the changes that make Odysseus uglier tend to precipitate scenes in which he is substantially cared for and nudged closer to his return. These are also the moments when the hero's versatile speaking abilities offset his appearance. In book 6, for instance, the poet carefully details the wild and startling aspect that Odysseus shows to the young girls when he first appears out of the bushes, naked except for a branch, encrusted with brine, and hungry as a lion (6.127–136). The simile that frames Odysseus' contact with the girls has a sexual subtext that heightens the sense of his danger for them: he is bestial and voracious, his eyes burn (6.131), and he is ready to chase his doelike prey anywhere, intending to "mingle" (*μίξεσθαι*) with them (6.132–133).<sup>45</sup> As he faces them, he debates with himself about whether he should approach the statuesque girl who holds her ground or stand off from her and bridge the gap between their visible statures with a winning speech. He decides that the more formal deportment will bring him more gain (*κέρδιον*, 6.145), a central (if mercenary) consideration in the plying of *peithō* that suggests the moral ambiguities of the activity.<sup>46</sup>

Thus when he is at his most physically repulsive, Odysseus addresses

This description more easily suits the reputation of Odysseus than that of Homer. From the ambiguous genitive (λόγον Ὀδυσσέος) to the full-blown description of the storytelling, Pindar's words yoke Homer to his character Odysseus, the man who most of all embodies the lying, contriving robber of judgment whose variegated narrative styles distract (*paragoisa*) his audiences.<sup>23</sup> Farnell tries to explain Pindar's harsh depiction of the poet's style by comparing the passage to *Olympian* 1.30–32. In it, the poet describes grace (*charis*) as fashioning all sweet things (ἅπαντα τεύχει τὰ μείλιχα) and as making the unpersuadable persuasive (ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστόν).<sup>24</sup> While it is true that in *Olympian* 1 the poet seems to take a positive tone when describing the power of the stylistic sweetener *charis*, even here this ability is treated somewhat ambivalently. In fact, the phrase ἄπιστον ἐμήσατο πιστόν anticipates charges that would be made later in the fifth century against the sophists.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the language of *Nemean* 7 is directly concerned with deceit, and while *Nemean* 8 does import some of the language of seduction, both passages provide a deeply ambivalent depiction of Homer's, and more importantly Odysseus', style.

In *Nemean* 7 Pindar underscores this negative depiction by declaring that most men have a blind heart (τυφλὸν ἦτορ), an ignorance of the truth that led to Ajax's suicide (7.24–26). That is, if the warriors who witnessed the contest between Ajax and Odysseus over Achilles' arms had been more attentive to the truth and less distracted by Odysseus' fine arguments, Homer's own audiences would not have been similarly led astray in their assessments of the two heroes.<sup>26</sup>

*Nemean* 8 takes up this same argument, enlarging on the conflict between Ajax, the silent and brave type (τιν' ἄγλωσσαν μὲν, ἦτορ δ' ἄλκιμον), and Odysseus, the embodiment of shifty falsehood (αἰόλω ψεύ- / δεῖ, 8.24–26). While oblivion overwhelms the one, the other wins the prize, as did Odysseus by secret vote (κρυφίαισι . . . ἐν ψάφοις, 27). The lyric poet Corinna depicts a similar scene in an ode about the poetry contest between the mountains Helicon and Cithaeron (fr. 654 *PMG*), which is itself in the tradition of the paradigmatic contest between Homer and Hesiod discussed by ancient commentators.<sup>27</sup> In Corinna's poem the Muse sets up a secret vote (ψᾶφον . . . κρυφίαν, 20–21) among the gods. When Helicon loses, the poet describes the decoration (ἀνεκόσμουν, 27) and delight of the victor Cithaeron as well as the bitter distress of the defeated Helicon.

The fragmentary quality of the remainder of the poem inhibits any understanding of what kind of judgment the poet herself passed on the contest,

but Pindar's use of the model of the contest and secret vote clearly demonstrates a link between poetic contests and community decision-making. Once again Pindar completes his version of the episode with a general statement that could apply to the narrative style of both Homer and his authorial figure Odysseus:

ἐχθρὰ δ' ἄρα πάρφασις ἦν καὶ πάλαι,  
αἰμύλων μύθων ὁμόφοι-  
τος, δολοφραδῆς, κακοποιὸν ὄνειδος.

Indeed, enemy beguilement existed also of old,  
a fellow-traveler of flattering stories,  
a guile-deviser, an evil-working disgrace. (*Nem.* 8.33–34)

Recall that in Homer ὀαριστὺς πάρφασις describes the sweet lover's talk that Aphrodite keeps in her charm-filled belt (*Il.* 14.216–217; see ch. 3). The word *parphasis* denotes the kind of persuasion used in the seduction scene, which might include also blandishments. Calypso, for example, mesmerizes Odysseus with such soft and flattering speeches (αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισι / θέλλγει, *Od.* 1.56–57). Lies and flattery also characterize the words that Pandora has in her heart (ψεῦδεά θ' αἰμυλίους τε λόγους, *WD* 78). For Pindar, this style of speaking is seduction gone bad, transformed into deceitful contrivance that misapplies blame and praise alike. The poet prays that he may never have such a character (ἦθος) and may keep rather to the simple path (κελεύθοις ἀπλόαις) of life (*Nem.* 8.35–36).<sup>28</sup> The criticism of Odysseus is thus concluded by a switch to the voice of the poet, so that the lying hero's blaming, deceitful style becomes an antitype for the epinician poet. As scholars have pointed out, for Pindar, Odysseus plays the role of the slanderer.<sup>29</sup> Since he is the blamer of Ajax, whose bulwark of a body makes him the prototypical athlete, Odysseus' style could not be more misrepresentational, more lying, in fact.

Because Homer champions this lying style and the character type who uses it, some writers in the fifth century were encouraged to associate the techniques of the poet with those of his favorite hero. But the questioning of Homer's veracity in the fifth century is not only a judgment on the poet or poetry in general; it is also an agonistic move, a querying of tradition that promotes another version of events. The stories of poetic contests indicate that this is an old game. It is also central to Pindar's program, insofar

those of Odysseus range from an ambiguous censure, where the techniques condemned are also those central to poetic composition, to a studied defense, where the techniques admired are also those central to oratorical performance.

Thus the dramatists often show awareness of the dangers of theatrical illusion, while prose writers trained in sophistic technique either promote or react against its spectacular effects. In fourth-century legal cases, speakers made frequent use of their opponent's visible types as a means of impugning their morals. This is itself a technique perfected by the sophists; fourth-century orators also often deride each other as sophists, in implicit recognition of this legacy. The sophists, like Helen and Odysseus, met with suspicion because of their versatile persuasive styles and their luxurious appearances. Like the figures they championed, their types did not conform sufficiently to the conflicted mandates of the consensus-driven democracy.<sup>2</sup> They looked like tyrants, with their elaborate robes and commanding attitudes; their speeches had a tyrannical effect on their audiences. They could alter their visible characters at will and draw their audiences into a nebulous swirl of imagery. Archaic and classical depictions of such speakers indicate a pervasive awareness of the power of their performances and a recognition that submission to their charms (as to those of a beautiful form) may lead to disaster. But these depictions also invigorate an appreciation of style as a lived experience, what Kenneth Burke once called the "dancing of an attitude."<sup>3</sup> This is the understanding of style that I have sought to uncover in Greek literature and that had a profound effect on later rhetorical theory.



## INTRODUCTION

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
2. By "visualizing" I mean a verbal style that fosters mental images by means of the depiction of visual details and the use of figurative language. Collins 1991: 1 calls this deployment of envisioning strategies "verbal visuality." This is a useful distinction, since most words that designate such description in common usage only denote the mental picture formed by the reader rather than the writer's written imagery. Cf. Demetrius, for example, who cites Theophrastus as saying that the "beauty" of a word (κάλλος ὀνόματος) is what gives pleasure to the ear or eye (ἔστι τὸ πρὸς τὴν ἀκοὴν ἢ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν ἡδύ) (*Eloc.* 173). This stylistic visuality takes different forms in Homer as opposed to Gorgias (for example), and within literary depiction may characterize quite different types. It is usually accompanied by a visually striking performance, either that portrayed in fictional settings (e.g., the gleaming garments and riveting face of Helen in the *Iliad*) or that known to be typical of actual performers (e.g., the ornate dress and lavish gestures of the rhapsodes, sophists, or tragic actors). This book focuses primarily on descriptions of the visualizing style of characters in literature, although it includes the scant details of styles in cultural arenas where these are available.
3. See *DH Comp.* 10, 12, 23; also *Dem.* 53, where he highlights the importance of delivery (i.e., the visible use of the body); and cf. *Arist. Rhet.* 1403b–1404a; *Demetr. Eloc.* 14, 27–28; *Cic. Orat.* 36, 54–60; *Quint. Inst. Orat.* 11.1.3; *Herm. Peri Ideiōn* 3.21.
4. Other scholars have noticed this, particularly in regard to the sophists, but not in relation to ideas about style: cf. Enos 1993; Gagarin 1994; Poulakos 1995; Schiappa 1999. Poulakos 1996 differentiates between Plato's and Aristotle's receptions of the sophists.
5. These are the two primary social categories that Bourdieu considers significant; see Bourdieu 1991: 81–89. See Gleason 1995 for the application of Bourdieu's concepts to figures of the Second Sophistic. Gleason emphasizes the training of masculine deportment and offers numerous examples of speakers' visible features. The material I analyze does not always provide as many concrete details as these later texts, in part because the notion of training in some concerted, institutionalized fashion is largely absent. I am, in any case, more concerned with literary representation than with reconstructions of social phenomena, and with how these earlier representational schemas delineate ideas about style without necessarily enumerating many details of the stylistic features themselves. See also Lateiner 1995, for the application of sociological theory to indications of deportment in Homer; and cf. Boegehold 1999 on ancient gesture, although he does not invoke Bourdieu or sociological concepts and is more interested in attempting to reconstruct actual performative deportment.

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