THE PRINCIPLE OF CONCEALMENT (TO ΛΑΘΕΙΝ) IN GREEK LITERARY THEORY

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Introduction

In Greek literary criticism several systems were used, of which the χαρακτήρες τῆς λέξεως, ἀρμονία τῆς λέξεως and the ἀρεταὶ τῆς λέξεως-system were the most common. In this article only the ἀρεταὶ τῆς λέξεως-system will be considered.

The origin of this system can be traced back to Aristotle and had a long history in the Peripatetic tradition. The ἀρεταὶ τῆς λέξεως were regarded as 'the basic requirements of good style', a number of principles according to which evaluation of any piece of literature could be done. Consequently they recognized a distinction between good and bad style in terms of these qualities. For this reason this system was applied even when literature was evaluated in the framework of any other system. Exactly what these basic requirements were, differed according to the stage of history of this system. Aristotle regarded purity (ὁ ἐλληνισμός) (Rhetorica 3.5), clarity (ἡ σαφήνεια), appropriateness (τὸ πρέπον) and ornateness (ὁ δόγκος, τὸ κεκοσμημένον, ὁ κόσμος) (Rhetorica 3.2.1–7) as requirements for good style. The Stoics added yet another essential requirement, viz. brevity (ἡ συντομία). At this point in the history of this system a distinction was made between necessary qualities (ἀρεταὶ ἀναγκαία, virtutes necessariae) and accessory qualities (ἀρεταὶ ἐπιθέτου, virtutes adiectae). The former were regarded as sine qua non for all literature, whereas the need of the latter was determined by appropriateness. In chapter 23 of the De Thucydide of Dionysius of Halicarnassus the ἀρεταὶ ἐπιθέτου are divided in three groups:

1. sublimity (τὸ ύψος), beauty (ἡ καλλιέργημοσύνη), solemnity (ἡ σεμνολογία) and magnificence (ἡ μεγαλοπρέπεια);
2. intensity (ὁ τόνος), gravity (τὸ βάρος) and passion (τὸ πάθος);
3. persuasiveness (ἡ πειθώ), charm (ἡ χάρις) and pleasure (ἡ ηδονή).

One could easily get the impression that literary evaluation was done only in terms of systems like this ἀρεταὶ τῆς λέξεως-system. This was not the case. Some basic aesthetic principles, such as variation (ἡ μεταβολή) and
Moderation (τὸ μέτρον), were not integrated in any system of evaluation, but were used abundantly and at random along with whatever system was used. Concealment of art (τὸ λαθεῖν) was yet another such principle. Scholars have failed to recognize the important role this principle played in Greek literary criticism. It is the object of this article to elaborate on the role of τὸ λαθεῖν in Greek literary criticism, hoping to rectify the situation.

Concealment and naturalness

Embellishment was regarded as a prerequisite of good style; the writer/speaker thus had no choice but to make use of it. That, however, involved a lot of dangers so far as effective communication is concerned. He would run the risk of his integrity being questioned: The recipient would regard whatever emotion he is conveying as false (Περὶ ἔρμηγειας 5.250). Artifice not only impairs the vigour of impression; it also catches the attention of the recipient. In this way his attention is drawn away from what the text really intends to communicate (Περὶ ἔρμηγειας 5.247), with adverse effect: ‘… people think they are being got at and take offence, as they do at blended wines.’ (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.4).

The way to cope with these dangers, was not to abandon all forms of artifice, but to use them in such a way that the style appears natural, which is, according to Demetrius, essential for persuasion (Περὶ ἔρμηγειας 4.221).

Naturalness should not be confused with lack of stylistic refinement. One should neither think that the quality of naturalness could be attained by writing impromptu, writing without carefully planning and premeditating what the writer had in mind to communicate. On the contrary. The final product should appear natural.

This quality of naturalness is brought about not by avoiding all forms of artifice, but by concealing artifice: διὸ δεὶ λαθᾶναι ποιοῦντας, καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν λέγειν πεπλασμένος ἄλλα περικτῶς. (‘Therefore those who practice this, must conceal it and avoid the appearance of speaking artificially instead of naturally.’) (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.4).

To Lysias the object of his art was to imitate Nature: τὸ μιμήσασθαι τὴν φύσιν αὐτῆς (sc. ἡ τέχνη) μεγιστὸν ἔργον ἦν. (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Isaeo 16). Comparing the narrative of Lysias to that of Isaeus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus expressed the opinion that the difference between these two orators was the way in which artifice was used: In the case of Isaeus the reader is constantly aware of the fact that everything was artfully designed; Lysias, on the other hand, succeeded in concealing all artifice, leaving the reader with the impression that no art was used (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Isaeo 16). For this reason a client of Isaeus would not be heard without suspicion, even though he could be speaking the truth, whereas a client of Lysias could be believed even when telling lies (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Isaeo 16).
Concealment is thus the controlling principle by means of which embellishment can be made to appear natural, which is essential for persuasion.

Concealment and ἡ ἐκλογή τῶν ὄνομάτων

So far as the ἐκλογή is concerned, one could hardly make use of strange, compound and coined words: γλώτταις μὲν καὶ διλοίς ὄνομασι καὶ πε­ποιημένοις διλιγάκες καὶ διλιγαχοῦ χρηστένων (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.5). These would produce the desired effect, but they are too artificial and can hardly be concealed. The writer is bound to commit the fallacy known as βάθος or φύχρα (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.3). To have no embellishment in one’s style is bad, but to have misused stylistic resources is worse (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Thucydidē 23).

In the case of prose the writer does not have much of a choice: he is really restricted to the use of ordinary standard words (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.6). There is, however, one device which he can apply: the metaphor, being the only device used in colloquial language as well.

The reason why the metaphor is singled out, is its peculiar nature. According to Aristotle no other device can equal the metaphor in providing clarity (τὸ σαφές), pleasure (τὸ ἱδού) and the unusual (τὸ ξενικός) (Rhetorica 3.2.8). It has the peculiar ability to convey meaning in a clear way (which is of paramount importance), doing this in an aesthetic pleasing way. At the same time the very nature of a metaphor renders the style unusual, which would meet the demand of good style stated by Aristotle. But why would this technique be acceptable, as a matter highly recommendable, whereas all others on the lexical level should be avoided? The very reason for this is the fact that the metaphor was commonly used in everyday language by everybody, along with ‘standard proper words’ (κατά τὸ ἄνθρωπον) (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.6). This is very important as far as the principle of concealment is concerned: by making use of the metaphor the writer could indeed render his style clear but not mean, but doing it in an unobtrusive way: ὁπεὶ δὴ λόγον ὡς ἂν εὖ τοὺς τις, ἔσται τε ξενικόν καὶ λανθάνειν ἐνδέχεται καὶ σαρκεῖ (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.6). The reader/listener will not experience a metaphor deliberately introduced to enhance the style as an artificiality, being used to metaphors in everyday life.

Concealment and the σύνθεσις τῶν ὄνομάτων

As far as the σύνθεσις τῶν ὄνομάτων is concerned, this is the aspect of style where the writer can really show his greatness (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Demosthene 51). According to Aristotle (Rhetorica 3.2.5) Euripides was the first writer who succeeded in attaining greatness in the way in which he combined ordinary words to form sentences.

This aspect of style was not treated extensively by Aristotle. He distinguished between two types of style from the viewpoint of sentence-structure,
viz. the λέξεις ειρομένη (διαλεξυμένη) (paratactic style) and the λέξεις κατεστραμμένη (compacted style) (Rhetorica 3.9.1–3). In the case of the former, also described as the ‘disjointed’ type of style, the nuclear structures and cola are loosely strung together as in colloquial language, whereas in the case of the ‘compacted style’ sentences have been moulded in the form of periods.

Lysias was regarded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus as the master in using the ‘disjointed’ style (διαλεξυμένη λέξεις) (De Lysia 8). His composition (σύνθεσις τῶν ὄνομάτων) was absolutely simple and straightforward (ἄφελῶς πάνυ καὶ ἀπλῶς). According to Dionysius the distinctive nature of his composition was the very fact that it appeared not to have been ‘contrived or formed by any conscious art’ (δοκεῖ μὲν γὰρ ἀποιητὸς τις εἶναι καὶ ἀτεχνήτευτος), ‘not been devised deliberately and artistically’ (ἀνεξατησίως καὶ οὐ κατὰ τέχνην), ‘but is somehow spontaneous and fortuitous’ (αὐτομάτως δὲ πως καὶ ὡς ἑτοιχε σύγχειται). The important point is that Lysias succeeded in concealing his art to perfection.

The period is the backbone of the λέξεις κατεστραμμένη. A period has many possibilities, but is by nature artificial, which calls for careful application. Demetrius distinguished three kinds of periods: for narrative, dialogue and for oratory (Περὶ ἐρμηνείας 1.19). In connection with the narrative type he remarks that it should be neither too carefully moulded, nor too relaxed. Too carefully moulded would impair its oratorical ability (1.19). It draws its dignity and power of exposition from its simplicity. In the case of the period used in dialogue the writer should be even more cautious to conceal artificiality. It should scarcely betray its being a period (Περὶ ἐρμηνείας 1.21); the style of a dialogue should be midway between the λέξεις διεστραμμένη and λέξεις κατεστραμμένη. In the case of the oratorical period special care has to be taken to avoid antitheses and symmetry of words in the constituting members (1.27). This artificiality impairs the vigour of the expression, for the attention of the hearer/reader is drawn away from the content to the extravagant way of expression (Περὶ ἐρμηνείας 5.247). Where passion (πάθος) or even delineation of character (γραμματικός) is at stake, artifice should be avoided at all cost. Passion cannot be expressed in an artificial way. The wording should simulate passionate expression in everyday life. If that is not the case, the integrity of the speaker/writer will be destroyed.

Concealment and prose rhythm

In his discussion of verbal expression in the Rhetorica Aristotle devoted a separate section to a discussion of prose rhythm (3.8.1–5), a matter regarded as of extreme importance by the Peripatetics in the Hellenistic era. In this aspect of style the principle of concealment is of paramount importance as well, as can be seen in his discussion of the matter. Prose should
have rhythm, though not metre, which would make it a piece of poetry (3.8.3). Moreover, the rhythm should not be too precise, which can be achieved by restricting its use. Aristotle proceeds to discuss the various forms of rhythm in order to determine which one would suit prose best. He ends with the paean with a ratio of 3:2. This he regarded as the best, being the only type of rhythm with no fixed form. For this reason it would be the least obvious: ἄστε μάλιστα λανθάνειν (Rhetorica 3.8.5).\textsuperscript{14}

Concealment and figures of speech

Figures of speech were regarded as an integral part of style. Although they involved either ἐκλογή or σύνθεσις and should have been treated under those headings, traditionally they were discussed separately.

All figures of speech were regarded as embellishment, but the degree of artificiality differed quite substantially from highly artificial in the case of the Gorgianic figures, to virtually ‘natural’ in the case of figures such as the metaphor on the other side of the spectrum.

But was it really necessary to make use of figures of speech? Although a risky business, there are too many advantages in the use of figures that they can be ignored. They provide an easy way of making style ‘out of the ordinary’, which was regarded by Aristotle essential for excellence in style (Rhetorica 3.2.2). According to Ps.-Longinus some figures by their very nature enhance sublimity (Περὶ ὁψος 17); some are by nature forceful, making them indispensable when the writer/speaker takes refuge to forceful style (Demetrius, Περὶ ἐρμηνείας 5.240 ff.). In any case, figures are an essential part of the τέχνη of style, without which talent cannot produce a work of art (Ps.-Longinus 2.2-3 and 38.4).

Given the artificial nature of figures on the one hand, but the obvious benefits on the other hand, how should they be employed? According to Ps.-Longinus (Περὶ ὁψος 17.1 and 38.3) the perfect way to use a figure has to do with concealment: It should be used in such a way that its very nature as being a figure is not recognized: διότερ καὶ τότε ἄριστον δοκεῖ τὸ σχῆμα, οὕτως αὐτῷ τούτῳ διαλαμβάνει ὃτι σχῆμα ἐστιν (Ps.-Longinus Περὶ ὁψος 17.1). This is a sound principle, for figures of speech cannot be objectives in themselves; they perform a duty in the process of communication, foregrounding/highlighting the content of what they are communicating.\textsuperscript{15}

Having become aware of a figure which should have been concealed, what is the response of the reader/listener?

The reader/listener immediately becomes suspicious (Ps.-Longinus Περὶ ὁψος 17). To him the use of figures or artifice in general suggests premeditation, which, in the case of texts of persuasion, is associated with deception. The reader/listener would not mind being persuaded, as long
as he is convinced of the basic truthfulness. He would not like to be tricked in the process of persuasion.\textsuperscript{16}

To him this amounts to honesty on the part of the speaker/writer. A good example is provided in the \textit{Apologia} of Plato, where Socrates apologised beforehand for his way of presenting his case before the court: he has no experience of how things are done in the courts of law. This was a common way of getting the sympathy of the jury (Plato \textit{Apologia} 1). The jury were sympathetic with someone stating his case in a clumsy, unpolished way, for they regarded this as a proof of the integrity and sincerity of the speaker. On the other hand, a person putting his case in a polished, flawless way, would arouse suspicion: this speaker is not concerned with truth; he is trying to persuade the jury by making use of whatever means at his disposal. Obviously, the rhetoricians knew this and when writing a speech they did everything they could to \textit{conceal, not avoid}, all forms of artifice for fear of adverse response.

It is important to realize that not all embellishment would have the same adverse effect. This criticism is directed towards all devices which have the \textit{appearance of artificiality and disclose premeditation}, such as antitheses and exact symmetry of words. Certain figures of speech do not impair forcefulness or render the text artificial.

\textbf{How can this concealment be achieved?}

Firstly, the writer/speaker should make sure that whatever figure has been used, is totally overshadowed by the content or emotion being communicated (Ps.-Longinus \textit{Περί ους} 17.1–3 well as 15.11). Even a figure like the \textit{hyperbole}, which is commonplace in comedy, can be used to express intense emotion, as done successfully by Thucydides in Bk. 7.84 in speaking of those who had died in Sicily (Ps.-Longinus 38.3).

Secondly, figures that are by virtue of their very nature more easily concealed, should be used. No complete list in this regard could be found. Discussing forcible style in \textit{Περί ήμυς} 5, Demetrius does, however, single out a few figures which further forcefulness in a special way. These are the \textit{metaphora} (5.272–277), \textit{aposiopesis} (5.264), \textit{asundeton} (5.268) and \textit{paraleipsis} (5.263). These figures all have the feature of brevity in common, a prerequisite for forceful style (5.274). This being the case, these figures can be used where force is required without the danger of causing adverse response, which would happen where the reader/listener became aware of any form of artificiality. In other words, although these figures do indeed require careful premeditation, they \textit{appear natural} and concealment is no problem as would be the case in the use of other figures where force is required.

Two figures should receive special attention, viz. the \textit{huperbaton} and \textit{dialektikon}. With the \textit{dialektikon} the speaker/writer develops his argument by counterfeiting a dialogue between himself and someone else in the form
of a quick exchange of question and answer. Although this technique requires a lot of skill on the part of the writer/speaker, the audience/readers are easily misled into supposing that each carefully premeditated argument arouses in the mind and is put into words on the spur of the moment (Ps.-Longinus Περὶ ὁψος 18.2). In his discussion of the the special role of the huperbaton in literature (Περὶ ὁψος 22), Ps.-Longinus relates the distinctive feature of this figure, viz. the arrangement of words and thoughts out of their natural order, to the nature of communicating vehement emotion. In everyday life strong emotions are usually conveyed in a disordered fashion. Likewise, by using huperbata on appropriate occasions, the writer/speaker would be imitating Nature, thus concealing his device in a perfect way. Furthermore, by using huperbata the writer ensures that his text does not appear premeditated (ὡς μὴ δοξεῖν ἐσχεμένα λέγειν ἀλλ' ἡναγκασμένα — 22.2).

Finally, elaborate figures could be used with success, but their very nature makes concealment virtually impossible. According to Demetrius this would be acceptable as long as the figure employed is totally overshadowed by the content being communicated. The use of these figures, however, has to be very discreet (Demetrius Περὶ ἐρμηνείας 5.277).

**Concealment and the diversity of genres**

The basic need for concealment of art was considered imperative. The basic works consulted could, however, give rise to a legitimate question: Was the principle of concealment not appropriate to oratory alone? Would it be justified to assume that the Greeks regarded this principle of the same importance also in the case of all other literature?

As far as other forms of prose literature are concerned, one does not really have a problem: Although Greek scholars such as Demetrius, Ps.-Longinus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus could not escape the strong rhetorical tradition of especially the Peripatetic School, they should be regarded as literary critics rather than rhetoricians, although they were rhetoricians by profession. This is confirmed by the fact that not only orators were discussed in their works. Dionysius of Halicarnassus devoted an entire book to the style (πραγματικὸς τόπος as well as λεκτικὸς τόπος) of Thucydides; Herodotus, Plato and even Homer are discussed; that goes for Demetrius and Ps.-Longinus as well.

**Concealment and the basic requirements of good style**

Considering the important role τὸ λαθεῖν played as indicated in this article, it seems an obvious question to ask why τὸ λαθεῖν was never regarded as one of the basic requirements of good style along with purity, clarity, appropriateness and ornateness, in the case of Aristotle, including brevity
in the case of the Stoics, or as one of the ἀρεταί ἀναγχαῖαι by Dionysius of Halicarnassus?17

The very nature of these requirements is the answer to this question. All these requirements were regarded as independent but non-exclusive of one another: A good piece of literature should at all times comply to all of them simultaneously and could indeed be pure so far as grammar is concerned, clear in meaning, without making use of too many words to express the meaning (brevity), appropriate to the subject and other matters involved, and making use of refinement or embellishment to distinguish it from ordinary language. This independent feature characteristic of every principle or requirement cannot be ascribed to τὸ λαθεῖν. It cannot stand its ground as independent principle next to those mentioned above, for the very reason that it is always associated with artificiality in general, which involves two of the essential requirements mentioned above, viz. δό κόσμιος and τὸ πρέπον.

At the same time it was evident that it was likewise always associated with the impact of the text on the listener/reader. From this one can conclude that concealment can be regarded as the means or controlling principle by which artificiality (which was regarded as essential for good style and could thus not be ignored)18 could be used without doing harm in the communicative situation.

The relation between concealment and appropriateness is essentially the same as that between concealment and artificiality in general: Style had to be appropriate to the subject and the dignity of the subject determined the degree of artificiality.19 This means that although the principle of appropriateness necessitated artificiality, it still had to be concealed in order to make the utterance convincing. For this reason Aristotle could refer to the general principle of concealment having just discussed τὸ πρέπον: διὸ δὲ λανθάνειν ποιοῦντας, καὶ μὴ δοκεῖν λέγειν πεπλασμένως ἄλλα περιφροκτῶς· τούτο γὰρ πιθανόν, ἐξεῖνο δὲ τοῦναντίον. (Rhetorica 3.2.4).20

A few remarks on the relation between τὸ λαθεῖν and τὸ μέτριον would be appropriate, although τὸ μέτριον was never, just like τὸ λαθεῖν, regarded as one of the essential requirements of good style. This principle was regarded as one of the ways by means of which concealment could be brought about, but not the only way. This is evident from the references to the importance of imitating Nature,21 which is not brought about by applying the principle of τὸ μέτριον.

Conclusion

The literary theorists of Greek antiquity were aware of the need of refinement on the one hand, but likewise of the dangers accompanying the use of embellishment. In this article it was shown how the principle of τὸ λαθεῖν was utilized in securing the best possible result in all aspects of style.
NOTES


4. F. Solmsen, art. cit., 183.


6. According to F. Solmsen the organization of these elements to a “hard and fast system” was left to Theophrastus. (F. Solmsen, ‘Aristotelian tradition in ancient rhetoric’, AJPh, 62 [1941], 43).


8. Cp. Rhetorica 3.2.4: τόσον (i.e. λέγειν περιφοτίζως) γάρ πιθανόν, έκείνο (i.e. λέγεινεπελαμβάνοντας) δὲ τοῦτοντοιον. (Rhetorica 3.2.4). ('For naturalness is convincing, artificiality the reverse ...'). Cp. Ps.-Longinus Περί άμφος 16.4 as well.

9. Demosthenes had the response of the audience in mind in the first place when writing speeches for clients for private lawsuits: he did make use of extraordinary words (περιττή λέξεις) occasionally, but only in an unconspicuous way (οὐδὲ ταύτην [sc. λέξειν] ἐπ’ αὐτοφόρῳ, ἀλλ’ ἃςτε λαθείν) (Dionysius of Halicarnassus De Demosthene 56).

10. Even the closely related εἰκών should be used on a very selective basis. It is regarded as artificial and thus too obvious to be of any use in prose.

11. Obviously, the use of metaphors is subject to certain rules as well, eg. that a metaphor should not be far-fetched, but appropriate (Aristotle Rhetorica 3.2.9–15).

12. People will think they are being got at—Aristotle Rhetorica 2.2.4.


16. Cp. the reference to the comparison of the style of Lysias to that of Isaeus above.


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19. For this reason artificial style is appropriate to poetry at large, but only on a restricted scale in the case of prose. In prose the subject is less elevated (Rhetorica 3.2.3). In the case of poetry the subject is not on the same level of dignity from beginning till end. If in a drama a slave or a boy would speak in an elevated style, it would be inappropriate. Aristotle then concluded that style should constantly vary according to the need of the subject. Cp. Rhetorica 3.7 as well.


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