SANE IN VERGIL AND OVID: AN *UNPOETISCHES WORT* REVISITED

In his influential work *Unpoetische Wörter*, B. Axelson mentions *sane* as one of the words used freely in prose but generally avoided in verse.[1] He briefly discusses its occurrences in poetry. A closer look at these occurrences offers some insight into the manner in which Roman poets employed words usually associated with prose writing or everyday speech, while raising some interesting questions about the accepted text of a passage in the *Aeneid* and the style of Ovid's *Heroides* 16–21.

The fact that *sane* appears regularly in the verse of satire and epigram is consistent with its colloquial character. *Sane* appears eight times in Juvenal and nine times in Martial.[2] Though Horace never uses the word in his lyric poetry, it can be found eight times in his *Sermones* and *Epistles*.[3] The conversational speech of the characters of comedy naturally includes it. On the other hand, Propertius and Tibullus never use *sane*, and Ovid follows suit in his *Amores*. Except for one occurrence I shall dispute below, it is non-existent in epic poetry.[4] The didactic poets also shun this word, which is particularly telling in the case of Lucretius since he often employs *quidem* with a concessive sense, a sense which *sane* can take on as well. Seneca employs it regularly in his prose[5] but never in his tragic verse. In fact, besides the occurrences so far mentioned, there remain in all of Roman verse only a pair of instances in Catullus, one in the *Silvae* of Statius, and two more in Ovid's *Heroides*, more specifically, the double epistles (*Heroides* 16–21).[6]

The two cases in Catullus and the one instance in Statius are consistent with the general pattern of occurrence in verse in that they are tied to genre. The Catullan corpus and the *Silvae* are not homogeneous works but farragos of several genres. The two occurrences in Catullus are found in the section of short poems, which are characterized by, among other things, their colloquial style.[7] All three occurrences are found in hendecasyllabic poems, a verse-form usually reserved for light satire or comic invective. Indeed, the three poems in question are lightly satirical, and in two of the cases the mode of address is direct,[8] which is consistent with the conversational character of the word. Fordyce describes Catullus 10, an account of the poet's introduction to the new girlfriend of Varus, as 'full of colloquialism'.[9] Poem 43 is a piece of mild (by Catullus' standards) invective against a beauty who has had the misfortune of being favourably compared with Lesbia. In *Silvae* 4.9, Statius engages in invective of a more playful sort with his friend Grypus. As a matter of fact, the piece in the *Silvae*, written on the occasion of an exchange of Saturnalian gifts, is modelled on one of Catullus' own hendecasyllabic poems (14). Though *sane* does not appear in this particular poem of Catullus, Statius may have employed the word as part of a general imitation of the neoteric's hendecasyllabic style.

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[1] *Unpoetische Wörter* (Lund, 1945), pp. 94, 138.

[2] Juvenal 1.42; 4.16; 5.123; 9.46; 10.183; 12.124; 15.44; 15.61; Martial 3.1.5; 4.78.9; 5.15.6, 61.8, 84, 9; 6.32.5; 8.51.1; 9.47.4; 10.21.5.

[3] *Serm.* 2.3.138; *Ep.* 1.7.61; 15.5; 2.1.206; 2.2.64, 132. *A. P.* 206, 418.   [4] *Aen.* 10.48.

[5] A total of 13 times evenly distributed throughout the corpus.

[6] Catullus 10.4; 43.4; *Silvae* 4.9.1 (Axelson was unaware of this occurrence); *Heroides* 17.13, 21.213 (the line numbering used is the traditional one as found in the Showerman/Gould edition).

[7] Quinn describes the style of Catullus' short poems (which are mostly hendecasyllablic) as standing 'halfway between that of Plautus and that of the *Satires* of Horace . . . the Latin of conversation, improved upon'.

[8] Statius and Catullus 43.

[9] In the introduction to his commentary (Oxford, 1961) on this poem, p. 116.

If the rule among Roman poets was to restrict the use of *sane* to the more colloquial genres, then how to explain its appearance in epic verse, the highest of poetic genres? I suggest that the explanation is quite simple: it does not occur in epic. At *Aen.* 10.48 editors have chosen in *sane* the wrong variant. One of the three principal early manuscripts, R, and several other ninth-century MSS (e r u v) offer the reading *procul* instead of *sane* (*Aen.* 10.48–50):

Aeneas *procul* ignotis iactetur in undis
et quacumque viam dederit Fortuna sequatur:
hunc tegere et dirae valeam subducere pugnae.

I would be inclined to believe that the total avoidance of *sane* in the rest of Roman epic is sufficient to recommend *procul* over *sane*. Axelson turns this around and suggests that this argues for the spuriousness of the reading *procul*: it is the result of an early attempt to remove a word inappropriate to epic.[10]

There are, however, other arguments for *procul*. For one, the exact sense of *sane* in this context is problematic. This was recognized by Servius Auctus and apparently other early commentators, who felt the need to gloss it and provide a parallel usage from prose: Cicero, *pro Quinctio* 11, where *sane* has concessive force.[11] Editors such as Heyne, Brunck, and Wakefield believed *procul* to be the better reading while admitting that a concessive *sane* would not be impossible. They reached this conclusion without the benefit of Axelson's discovery that *sane* does not appear anywhere else in epic. Wagner and Forbiger concede that difficulties exist with *sane* but use the *lectio difficilior* argument employed later by Axelson to support its place in the text. More recently, S. J. Harrison observes that *sane* appears here for the first time in high verse, but follows Axelson's reasoning in choosing it over *procul*.[12] As far as the sense of the passage is concerned, I believe that a concessive *sane* is not out of the question, although this usage is usually accompanied by a corresponding adversative or limiting particle such as *dum*, *sed*, or *tamen* in the opposing clause.[13]

What no one has yet noticed is that the wording of this passage, with *procul*, occurs again in Latin verse.

integer hanc potui nuper bene reddere lucem;	
exul ut occiderem, nunc mihi vita data est.	
iam *procul ignotis* igitur moriemur *in oris*	
et fient ipso tristia fata loco;	Ov. *Trist.* 3.3.35–8
litore externo, *procul* a paternis	
occidens regnis tumuloque vili	
tectus *ignotas iacet inter umbras*.	Sen. *Med.* 619–21
matrem reliqui. profugus *ignotas procul*	
percurre *gentes*: te licet *terra ultimo*	
summota mundo dirimat Oceani plagis	Sen. *Phaed.* 929–31

That the phrase is a poetic one is clear from the fact that there are no parallels in prose. This, however, invites the suggestion that the collocation of *procul* and *ignotus* belonged to the poetic idiom for describing remote lands and herein lies

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[10] *Unpoetische Wörter*, p. 94.
[11] The gloss is *valde*, which, as Heyne observes, is incorrect.
[12] In his commentary on *Aeneid 10* (Oxford, 1991).
[13] Granted, the placing of *hunc* helps convey an opposition.

the explanation for the former word's finding its way into Vergil's text. Yet the parallel between the later passages and that in the *Aeneid* is not limited to these words. Notice that in the *Phaedra* passage Vergil's image of being tossed on a stormy sea (*iactetur in undis*) is picked up by *te . . . dirimat Oceani plagis*. It is not far-fetched to read *iacet* in the *Medea* passage as an instance of paronomasia with Vergil's *iactetur*.[14] In Ovid, the placing of the words is as close to Vergil's as the former's metrical sensibilities allowed. I have found only two hexameter lines in Ovidian elegy that approximate the unusual metrical configuration of Vergil's line (a pyrrhic in the second half of the second foot followed by a molossus), both coming in his early work:[15]

cumque tuis *sua iunxerunt* Nemesisque priorque   *Am.* 3.9.53

perque tuum *mihi iurasti* nisi fictus et ille est   *Her.* 2.37

If the reading of *procul* in Vergil is correct, that leaves the pair of occurrences in the double *Heroides* as the only two instances of *sane* in non-conversational verse. One of these might be the result of faulty transmission,[16] but that still leaves one almost certain case (17.13). *Heroides* 16–21 (the double letters) were apparently written at a much later date than the original fifteen[17] and possess many stylistic and structural features not found in the earlier set of *Heroides*. In fact, it is the nature of some of these differences that has convinced scholars to assign a late date of composition to these six poems, for many of their metrical peculiarities can be found only in Ovid's later elegies (*Tristia*, *Ex Ponto*, and to some extent *Fasti*).[18]

A connection may be drawn here between metre and diction. The metre of the double *Heroides* and the other late elegiac works exhibits a loosening of Ovid's characteristic rigour. In general, one finds in Ovid's verse a culmination of the trend in Roman poetry (which began with the first essays of Greek verse forms in the Latin tongue) to avoid certain practices while seeking out others. The smoothness (or excessive regularity, depending on one's point of view) of Ovid's versification is a manifestation of this. It is noteworthy, then, that metrical features belonging to the category of practices to be avoided appear, some for the first time, some more often

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[14] The editors have drawn my attention to a similar case: Prop. 2.34.64 and *Aen.* 1.2–3.

[15] Vergil's own metrical practice is of no help in this matter. A search through the *Aeneid* yields inconclusive evidence. The combination *molossus / pyrrhic / molossus* opens a line seven times, but so does *molossus / elided spondee / molossus*. Occurrences of the former are found at 1.581; 2.222; 5.127; 6.99, 831; 8.405; 9.255; of the latter at 2.616; 5.133, 714; 7.380; 8.234; 10.48; 11.605.

[16] The occurrence at 21.213 belongs to a section of the work (21.145–248) transmitted by a single source, π. Some believe this passage and another transmitted only by π (16.39–144) to be interpolations (cf. M. D. Reeve, *CQ* 23 (1973), 334–8; for a defence of their place in the text cf. E. J. Kenney, *CQ* 29 (1979), 394–431). Furthermore, a few editors have chosen to emend this *sane*. Heinsius conjectured *anne ut*, which Kenny adopts (cf. *Heroides XVI–XXI*, edited by E. J. Kenney (Cambridge, 1996), p. 242). In light of the occurrence at 17.13, emendation here seems unnecessary (Kenney would have been wiser to apply his argument against *sane*'s well attested variant at *Aen.* 10.48 to Heinsius' conjecture here. Cf. ibid. p. 248). But if the occurrence at *Her.* 21.213 is eliminated, it could be argued that the *hapaxlegomena* at *Her.* 17.13 and *Aen.* 10.48 support each other.

[17] Or fourteen. The *Epistula Sapphus* (*Her.* 15) has been often impugned as non-Ovidian, most recently by R. J. Tarrant, *HSCPh* 85 (1981), 133–53 and Knox, *Heroides: select epistles*, edited by P. E. Knox (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 13–14.

[18] Cf. S. B. Clark, *HSCPh* 19 (1908), 121–55. For some examples cf. below n.19.

than before, in his later elegies.[19] The presence of *sane* in the double epistles could represent in the area of diction what the polysyllabic pentameter endings denote in the field of metre: a loosening of the restraints of personal practice, not merely as a function of poetic maturity, but as a tool for expressing a new approach to a revisited genre.

There are several other points of diction which support this view. The phrase *ut nunc est* can be found in Cicero's letters and once in Horace's *Sermones*. Otherwise it is used only in the double epistles, where it occurs three times.[20] The word *qui?* = 'how?' (*Her.* 17.213) is a colloquialism found in comedy, Catullus, Lucretius, Horatian hexameters, and Phaedrus. *Prout* (*Her.* 21.227) is practically non-existent in verse.[21]

It is interesting, however, that Ovid does not use *sane* in the equally late, likewise epistolary *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*. Since this seems to be a word adapted to the verse epistle (cf. Horace), one might have expected an occurrence or two.[22] The possibility that the double letters were not written by Ovid is one that should not be excluded. The pseudo-Ovidian label pronounced by scholars of the last century has long been dropped, the obvious inconsistencies of style now being attributed to a late date of composition. Nonetheless, some contemporary scholars have been willing to question their Ovidian authorship.[23] If they are correct, the presence of *sane* should still be regarded as part of a deliberate colloquializing of the genre by the author, not, given the obvious quality of the work, as evidence of ineptitude.

It is difficult to try to formulate absolute rules concerning diction in classical texts. Though acutely aware of common practice and the traditional restrictions of genre, Roman authors did not allow these to stifle creativity. This having been said, one can discern a remarkable consistency in the manner with which the word *sane* appears in poetry. Any reading of *Aen.* 10.48 and *Heroides* 17.13, 21.213 must take this consistency into account.

Thesaurus Linguae Latinae   G. C. HANSEN

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[19] E.g. ending pentameters with polysyllabic words. This happens at *Fasti* 5.582; 6.660; *Her.* 16.290; 17.16; 19.202; and often in the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*. In the late elegies Ovid does not as rigorously avoid hexameter endings of the type *discordia taetra*, a noun ending in a short *a* followed by its epithet with the same ending. There are two cases in pre-exile elegy (not counting *Her.* 16–21) and one in the *Metamorphoses*. In the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto* there are seven such endings. There are four in the double epistles (cf. N. Holmes, *CQ* 45 (1995), 500–3. This count is based on the standard text, which could be challenged in two of the cases).

[20] 16.50, 17.169, 19.127.

[21] Horace, *Ser.* 2.6.67, and Ausonius, *Mosella* 372, are the only other cases. It should be added that some have suggested emending the occurrence in the *Heroides* (cf. E. Fisher, *HSCPh* 74 (1970), 193–205).

[22] Together these works contain more than four times as much text (6,724 lines) as the double letters (1,564).

[23] E. Courtney, *BICS* 12 (1965), 63–6 (a rather more extensively argued case based on the chronology of the polysyllabic pentameter endings); G. P. Goold, *Gnomon* 46 (1974), 484; R. J. Tarrant, *HSCPh* 85 (1981), 152 n. 39; N. Holmes, *CQ* 45 (1995), 502 (Courtney, Goold, and Tarrant also question the authorship of some of the single *Heroides*). Kenney (in the introduction to his edition, pp. 20–26) defends their Ovidian authorship with a vigour reminiscent of earlier discussions of the issue.