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On Horace, *Ars Poetica*, II. 128–130

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etiam : *et*, *geminus* : *gemellus*, *genitor* : *genetrīx*, *impedio* : *pedis*, *legio* : *lego*, *lepidus* : *lepor*, *levis* : *levem*, *medicus* : *medeor*, *meminī* : *memor*, *penitus* : *penus*, *petīgo* : *peto*, *seliquastrum* : *sella*, *specio* : *spexī*, *venia* : *venus*, *venio* : *vēnī*, *benignus* : *bene*, *petilus* also *petulus*. Harder are *medius* and *melior*. It is possible that the change of *e* to *i* took place before the change of prevocalic *i* to *i*. Hence *medius* and *melior* (cp. Skt. *mādhyas* 'middle,' and comp. suffix *-jōs-* in *gāriyas* 'heavier') retain their *e*. If this be so, the *i* of *cilium* and *spicio* is due solely to the analogy of their compounded forms, while we may add to this class words like *venio*, *specio*, *etiam*, etc.

In three words *i* appears for *e* despite the presence of *r*.

stribiligo : the etymology of this word and its connection with *strebula* is too doubtful to be of service in the consideration of this question (S. Walde, *Et. lat. Wört.*)

fritillum : it is to be noted that the *e*-form *fretillo* does actually occur in an inscription (C.G.L. v. 590. 20). Perhaps *fritillum* is due to formal analogy with *fritillus* : *frutex*.

ricinus may have followed the analogy of *licinus* fr. **lecinos*, but this is very doubtful.

We may therefore enunciate the law that *e* in an open syllable not preceded or followed by *r* becomes *i* when the next syllable contains an *i*. This change is entirely independent of any action of the accent.

Here belong the numerous instances in which the preposition **en* (Osc. Umbr. *en*, Gk. *ἐν*, O. Pruss. *en*) stood before initial *i*, whether as a preposition proper or as a prefix in composition. Thus *initium* fr. **enitiom*, *in igne* fr. **en igne* **en egne*. Similarly **en-* 'un-' became *in-*.

I have thus endeavoured to show that of the sound-changes ascribed to the action of a penultimate stress in Latin some are clearly not the result of such a stress, while for others there are better reasons more fully in accord with the other facts of the language; and that there is therefore no phonetic evidence in the classical and preclassical periods for the existence of a penultimate stress in classical Latin.

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ON HORACE, *ARS POETICA*, ll. 128-130.

Difficile est proprie communia dicere ; tuque
rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.

PERHAPS I may be allowed to suggest a solution of the well-known difficulty in these lines, which, so far as I know, has not hitherto been proposed.

The accepted explanation used formerly to be that adopted from Acron by Lambinus: 'Communias hoc loco appellat Horatius argumenta fabularum a nullo adhuc tractata, et ita quae cuivis exposita sunt, et in medio quodammodo posita, quasi vacua et a nemine occupata. Talia igitur argumenta difficile est ita tractare ut proprie tua iure dici possint.' That is, 'communias' are things which are still 'communis iuris,' not yet appropriated.

The difficulties, however, of this interpretation are very serious. In the first place, it would not be easy to show that

'communis' was ever used, legally or otherwise, in the sense required. As opposed to 'propria,' 'communias' are things that everyone uses, not things that no one uses. Again, the 'Publica materies' of l. 131 may most naturally be taken as equivalent to 'communias' in l. 128; but the reference there is obviously to material which has been commonly used, and not to new and untouched matter. That Lambinus felt this difficulty is obvious from his long and elaborate note on l. 131.

I venture to say that no one would have adopted this explanation of 'communias,' unless he had been very hard pressed by the supposed necessities of the logical connexion; and for the most part modern editors have abandoned it. We can hardly, indeed, fail to see a connexion between the phrase used here by Horace and the expression, 'πῶς κοινὰ

διανοήματα ιδιώσομεν;’ quoted by Ribbeck from Hermogenes, *Περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος*. There it forms the heading of a short chapter on the means by which an orator may most effectively appropriate commonplaces to his own use, as for example by admitting them to be commonplaces, and at the same time arguing that they have a special appropriateness for his particular occasion. The expression of Hermogenes might quite fairly be translated almost in the words of Horace: ‘Quomodo communia proprie dicemus?’ Modern editors, therefore, as Orelli and Kiessling, take ‘communial’ to mean common types of character and feelings, and understand the expression to refer to the difficulty of individualising these by embodying them in personages of one’s own invention, instead of accepting the traditional persons of classical epic and drama. This explanation is much better than the other,¹ but still not quite satisfactory; and it seems to take away altogether the opening for originality in treatment which by the former interpretation was suggested in ‘proprie,’ and is further referred to in the lines which follow.

If the expression ‘Difficile est proprie communia dicere’ stood alone, we should all probably accept it, as I think it is commonly understood when quoted by itself, in the sense, ‘It is difficult to treat of themes which have been commonly handled, in such a manner as to put upon them the distinctive mark of your own individual genius.’ I maintain that this is in fact the meaning. Horace has been alluding to the ambitious endeavour to treat of new subjects, to produce something altogether

original, the idea being that it is too easy an enterprise to follow the beaten track and merely reproduce the stories and characters which have been established by tradition. Then in the lines which we are discussing he turns more particularly to his friend the elder Piso, who must have been engaged at the moment in dramatising the story of the *Iliad*:

tuque
rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.

(We note the individual form of address and the present indicative of ‘deducis.’)

Surely it would be a poor compliment to a friend and fellow-poet to say ‘It is hard to be in any way original, therefore you are right in not attempting it.’ The meaning, I take it, really is (if I may slightly expand the expression): ‘To stamp the mark of the individual genius upon themes which have already been often treated is a task hard enough to satisfy any poet’s ambition, and in choosing the story of the *Iliad* for your drama you are better advised than if you selected some altogether new and unknown subject.’ And then he proceeds to point out the conditions under which originality can be shown in the treatment of a theme which has been already dealt with by others.

I hold that this is a perfectly natural meaning to attach to the passage, and that it is supported both by the context and by the fact that we have here an address, not to writers generally, but to a particular man of eminence, who is the poet’s friend, and who might be open to the criticism that in the work which he had in hand he was attempting a task below the level of his genius.

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¹ This was Johnson’s interpretation: ‘He means that it is difficult to appropriate to particular persons qualities which are common to all mankind, as Homer has done’ (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, Ch. xxx.).