

ELOCVTIO NOVELLA

The purpose of this note is to banish for ever from our histories of Roman literature the term *elocutio nouella* as a description of the style preached and practised by Cornelius Fronto.¹

Commenting on a speech recently delivered by the Emperor Marcus, Fronto declares (*De eloquentia* 5. 1 = p. 146. 13 van den Hout):

Pleraque in oratione recenti tua, quod ad sententias attinet, animaduerto egregia esse; pauca admodum uno tenus uerbo corrigenda; non nihil interdum elocutione nouella parum signatum.

The standard interpretation of the last clause is that given by Haines (ii. 81): 'some parts here and there were not sufficiently marked with novelty of expression'. It is my contention that it means: 'some parts here and there were insufficiently clear through new-fangled diction'.

Nowhere else in Latin is *elocutio* qualified by *nouella*; the grammarians do use *noua elocutio* of an abnormal expression (see *TLL* v. 2. 403. 11–12), never for praise and once for blame: DServ. on Verg. *Aen.* 3. 572 (*prorumpit ad aethera nubem*) 'et est noua elocutio, nec enim possumus dicere "prorumpo illam rem"; potuit enim recte dici "nubes prorumpit".' But this might not be regarded as decisive; it is from Fronto himself that his judgement must be interpreted.

While Fronto can use 'new' as a term of praise ('ut de uolgaribus elegantia, de contaminateis noua redderes': *De eloquentia* 4. 7 = pp. 144. 24–145. 1 v.d.H.), he like other ancient writers usually regards novelty as a defect, not a virtue. In his *De orationibus* he makes his pupil ask: 'quid in orationibus meis nouicium, quid crispulum, quid luscum, quid purpurisso litum aut tumidum aut pollutum?' (§13 = p. 153. 1 v.d.H.). Clearly anything *nouicium* would be a fault. A few paragraphs later he warns the Emperor against inventing words: 'uerbum aliquod adquires non fictum a te (nam id quidem absurdum est), sed usurpatum concinnius aut congruentius aut accommodatius'.² Likewise his acolyte Gellius maintains (11. 7. 1–2):

Verbis uti aut nimis obsoletis³ exculcatisque aut insolentibus nouitatisque durae et inlepidae par esse delictum uidetur. sed molestius equidem culpatusque esse arbitror uerba noua incognita inaudita dicere quam inuulgata et sordentia. (§2) noua autem uideri dico etiam ea quae sunt inusitata et

¹ The application, of late-Victorian origin, seems largely but not wholly confined to English-speaking writers: e.g. W. Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, c. 5; J.W. Mackail, *Latin Literature*, 235; M.D. Brock, *Studies in Fronto and his Age*, 109; A.S. Owen in his and H.E. Butler's edition of Apuleius' *Apologia*, p. xlv; J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*, 651 (2nd edn., p. 522); J.F. Dalton, *Roman Literary Theory and Criticism*, 320; J.W.H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity*, ii. 343; J.W. Denniston in *OCD*, p. 313 (2nd edn., p. 381); R.G.C. Levens, *ibid.* p. 372 (2nd edn., p. 449); R. Marache, *La Critique littéraire de langue latine et le développe-*

ment du goût archaïsant au II^e siècle de notre ère, 135; F. Portalupi, *Marco Cornelio Frontone*, 38, 81, 112; G.M.A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics*, 320; H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Latin Literature*³, 519 (*eloquentia nouella*!).

² §18 = p. 154. 20 v.d.H. I should prefer to read {ac} *commodatius* in harmony with *concinnius* and *congruentius*; for *commodatus* cf. especially Quint. 10. 1. 17 'uox, actio decora, commodata ut quisque locus postulabit pronuntiandi . . . ratio'.

³ For *obsoletus* = *tritius* see Cic. 2 *Verr.* 5. 117, Sen. *Contr.* 4. *pr.* 9, Fronto *eloq.* 4. 12 = p. 146. 10 v.d.H., Gell. 16. 7. 4, 17. 2. 12.

desita, tametsi sunt uetusta.⁴

Gellius continues by recounting anecdotes of pleaders who disregarded this advice and were not understood; that Fronto too has ease of comprehension in mind is suggested by his letter *Ad M. Caesarem* 3. 1 = p. 36. 5 v.d.H.:

Denique idem tu, quom in senatu uel in contione populi dicendum fuit, nullo uerbo remotiore usus es, nulla figura obscura aut insolenti: ut qui scias eloquentiam Caesaris tubae similem esse debere, non tibi arum, in quibus minus est soni, plus difficultatis.

Marcus was not always so restrained. In the letter from which our phrase is taken Fronto's specific criticisms have perished in lacunae, save that he rebukes his sovereign lord for conjoining *κυρία λέξις* with *μεταφορά*.⁵ But in *De orationibus* we learn of several phrases coined by Marcus, not always with Fronto's approval: 'oculos conuenientes', 'enodata uoce', and in an edict 'inlibatam iuuentutem', 'uetustas curaue' (§§11, 17, 20 = pp. 152. 8, 12; 154. 7; 155. 8 v.d.H.). The last of these, with *uetustas* replacing the *antiquitas* of a Sallustian phrase more striking than successful, would certainly have caused the edict's readers to blink; we may well suppose that Marcus had been guilty of similar offences against taste and clarity.

Parum signatum I have rendered 'insufficiently clear'. The sense of *signatum* is known to the lexicographers: see Tertullian, *De resurr. mort.* 13. 3 'quid expressius atque signatius in hanc causam aut cui alii rei tale documentum?' (namely the phoenix as evidence of resurrection) and Ammianus 23. 6. 1 'quisquis enim adfectat nimiam breuitatem ubi narrantur incognita non quid signatius explicet sed quid debeat praeteriri scrutatur'. It is used with the slightly different nuance of "expressive" by Gellius 2. 5. *lemma* 'Quam lepide signateque dixerit Faustinus philosophus quid intersit inter Platonis et Lysiae orationem' and 2. 6. 6 'a ueteribus, qui proprie atque signate locuti sunt'.⁶

One last passage from Fronto will serve to elucidate. In the letter *Ad M. Caesarem* 4. 3, he first declares: 'Omnium artium, ut ego arbitror, imperitum et indoctum omnino esse praestat quam semiperitum ac semidoctum' (§1 = p. 56. 9 v.d.H.), then discusses various authors and notably Cicero, praises Marcus for searching out unexpected words, and warns: 'uerum, ut initio dixi, magnum in ea re periculum est, ne minus apte aut parum dilucide aut non satis decore ut a semidocto conlocetur, namque multo satius est uolgaribus et usitatis quam remotis et requisitis uti, si parum significet' (§4 = p. 58. 2 v.d.H., with Orelli's emendation). It is partly a question of taste,⁷ but also one of clarity: with *parum dilucide* and *si parum significant* compare *parum signatum*.

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⁴ Cf. Sidon. *Ep.* 4. 3. 3 'noua ibi uerba quia uetusta'—a compliment; Cic. *Or.* 12.

⁵ §3 = p. 146. 28 v.d.H.: 'alterum proprium "comes", alterum translatus "opifex".'

⁶ Gellius also uses *consignatus* (1. 15. 12, 1. 25. 8) and *significans* (1. 15. 17, 1. 25. 8, 17. 2. 11); the latter is employed by classical authors (e.g. Cic. *Fam.* 3. 12. 3 'acrius, apertius, significantius dignitatem tuam defendissem') and especially by Quintilian (e.g. 8. 2. 9 'proprie dictum, id est, quo nihil inueniri possit significantius').

⁷ Both in general thesis and in detail this

admonition resembles Gell. 11. 7: the Frontoian *semidoctus* is recalled by Gellius' warning against *ὀψιμαθία* (§3); his lack of taste is shared by the Gellian *apirocalus* (§7). The Atticists, too, who were trying to revive a bygone style as a whole rather than in *flosculi*, needed reminding—*τὸ γὰρ ἀπειρόκαλον ἐν τῷ ἀττικίζειν βάρβαρον* (Philostratus *V.S.* 503)—that their ideal was *λέξεώς τε ἀκριβῆς ἐνάργεια καὶ μετ' εὐγλωττίας ἀρχαῖσμός φεύγων ὁμοῦ ταπεινότητα καὶ ἀπειροκαλίαν* (the *προθεωρία* to Aristid. *Or.* 30 Keil, lines 11–13).