

## Some notes on the use of *stare*

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The complex series of semantic and syntactic functions borne by the Romance offshoots of Lat. *stare* has been at times related to early developments already attested in Latin<sup>1</sup>. The verbal form that we find in Latin, however, is consistently considered as a postural verb, i. e. *stare* ‘stand (in an erect position, on foot)’<sup>2</sup>. By looking at things from a Latin perspective, it is possible to draw a diachronic sequence of meanings and functions that, quite apart from the issues that are so important for the history of Romance languages, constitutes a story of its own i. e. a verb that, far from being semantically static, displays a functionally complex profile in *feri*.

Already in the archaic period, the 53 occurrences of *stare* in Plautus show a differentiated range of meanings. Its use as a postural verb is of course well attested. An example like (1) offers a clear opposition with *iacere*:

(1) Plaut., *Am.* 241 Quisque ut steterat iacet<sup>3</sup>

The meaning ‘to stand erect, on foot’, it must be firmly borne in mind, occurs in every stage of Latin, from Plautus to the *Itinerarium Egeriae*:

(2) Cic. *fam.* 10.23 Tu, mi Cicero, quod adhuc fecisti, idem praesta, ut vigilanter nervoseque nos, qui stamus in acie, subornes

(3) Petr. 39 Multis pedibus sto, et in mari et in terra multa possideo

(4) *Itin. Aeg.* 31.1 Nam omnis populus semper praesente episcopo iubetur sedere, tantum quod diacones soli stant semper

This sense naturally co-occurs also in clauses with adverbial locative complements, as in (5), where the sentence refers to the need to stand erect on chairs or stools to reach the top of piled food, and it shows up even in idiomatic expressions that answer to forms of address and refer generically to someone’s personal condition, such as the impersonal form in (6):

(5) Plaut., *Men.* 101-103 Cerialis cenas dat, ita mensas exstruit, / tantas struices concinnat patinarias: / standumst in lecto, si quid de summo petas

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. BOURCIEZ (1956); RIBEIRO (1958).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. POUNTAIN (1982); STENGAARD (1991).

<sup>3</sup> For Latin texts I mainly referred to Teubner or LOEB editions.

(6) Plaut., *Ps.* 457-458 *Sim.*: Salve. Quid agitur? *Ps.*: Statur hic ad hunc modum. / *Sim.*: Statum vide hominis, Callipho, quam basilicum

Independently from the meaning assumed, in Plautus (as in all other texts examined) a locative adverbial complement is, rather expectedly, quite common: it occurs in 18 cases out of 53 (34%; among the most common: *hic, ilico, ante, inter, propter*). The occurrence in idiomatic expressions, as in (6) (cf. the same idiom in Ter. *Eun.* 271 *quid agitur?* Pa.: *statur*) is a confirmation of the wide spread of the meaning ‘stand (in an erect position)’, which becomes a clear metaphor of being alive and, therefore, being well, not well etc.. The basically corresponding expression in Italian still employs the verb *stare*, although without any reference to erect position (as more generally is It. *stare*), so that the semantic scope of such an expression is mainly confined to adverbs of generic condition: i. e. *Come si sta? Si sta bene / male; Come stai? Sto bene / male* etc. (i. e. ‘How are you?’, ‘How is it going? Fine / Not well etc.’). Note, however, that in (6) the occurrence of the verbal noun *status* seems to refer not simply to a ‘royal posture’ but, in a more extended sense, to the overall physical aspect of a person<sup>4</sup> and, possibly, to the general state of an individual, an abstract sense that *status* clearly holds in many occurrences from other authors and temporal stages, from Cicero onwards (e. g. the *status* of the *res publica*, etc.), as is well represented in the Oxford Latin Dictionary.<sup>5</sup>

*Stare*, meaning ‘stand erect’, also occurs with adjectival complements, that may refer to physical position, as in (7, 8). This happens already in Plautus, but as we shall see, it is very frequent at all times:

(7) Plaut., *Tru.* 787-788 *Omnium primum diversae state – em sic, istuc volo; / neve inter vos significetis, ego ero paries. Loquere tu*

(8) Caes. *Gall.* 5.35 *Et ab eis qui cesserant et ab eis qui proximi steterant circumveniebantur*

It is important to note that in (7) the adj. *diversae* bears a rhematic status, as the utterance is not a request to be erect but it is the order to the girls of keeping a physical distance between themselves (so that they will not communicate by signs), and the verbal clause, as the whole sentence, would lose its sense if deprived of the adjective, which should be therefore considered as a predicative element.

The semantics of the adjectives involved, however, is not necessarily confined to a physical posture. This can be seen in (9), or in (10), where the adjective *stipida*, quite differently from *diversae* of (7), seems a purely attributive element:

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the translation given in the Loeb edition (ed. Nixon 1932): ‘*Sim.*: Ah, Pseudolus! And what are you doing? *Ps.*: Standing here in the attitude you note. *Sim.*: Look at that attitude, Callipho – The regality of it!’.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cic. *fam.* 11.1 *quo in statu simus, cognoscite*; cf., maybe, also Plaut. *Mi.* 1389 *in statu stat senes*. Cf. the considerations advanced, mainly from plautine examples, in ROSÉN (1981: 35-42, esp. footnotes 1, 21 and 37).

(9) Plaut., *Trin.* 1149-1150 Quid ego ineptus, dum sermonem vereor interrumpere, / solus sto nec quod conatus sum agere ago? Hominis conloquar<sup>6</sup>

(10) Plaut., *Ep.* 583 Quid stas stupida? Quid taces?

Far from having just one single meaning, *stare* can also refer to absence of movement, as in (11, 12, 13):

(11) Plaut., *Ps.* 863 Si iste ibit, ito, stabit, astato simul

(12) Plaut., *Am.* 291-293 Navem extemplo statuimus. / Quoniam vident nos stare, occeperunt ratem / turbare in portu

(13) Plaut., *Men.* 995 Quid statis? Quid dubitatis? Iam sublimen raptum oportuit

The clear opposition with *ire*, in (11), leaves little doubt that the meaning expressed is no longer connected with the ‘erect position’, nor would any such reference make sense in the context of (12) (where the sentence simply means ‘We stopped the boat. When they saw we were firm ...’). In Plautus the occurrences where *stare* refers to the erect position are almost exclusively characterized by a [+human] subject; but when *stare* simply means ‘to be firm’, [-animate] subjects often occur, as in (14):

(14) Plaut. *Am.* 276 Ita statim stant signa

It is true that with *stare* inanimate subjects are rare in Plautus: only 3 cases of 53 (6%). But this variable clearly depends on the topic of text: Cato, in *de agricultura*, presents the totality of the 8 occurrences of *stare* with inanimate subjects (8/8). A typical example could be (15):

(15) Cato, *agr.* 20 Columellam ferream, quae in miliario stat, eam rectam stare oportet in medio

The erect position of the column, a standing object, is naturally expressed by *stare*. Of course, several cases are rather difficult to classify, as reference to postural erectness can naturally co-occur with indication of absence of movement, because of conceptual / phenomenal contiguity at the referential level. Such a case could be represented, for instance, by a rather common kind of expressions like the following:

(16) Plaut., *Mer.* 872 Sta ilico!

At any rate, erect position does not mean necessarily no movement *stricto sensu* and, more importantly, [absence of movement] does not seem to be just an inferred feature expressed by a form whose semantic structure is centered only around the expression of the erect position, because in examples like *Am.* 291-293 (12) or *Am.* 276 (14), the feature [erect position] appears to be no longer relevant. Thus, it is not

<sup>6</sup> Cf. similar instances with compound forms of the verb, as Plaut. *Trin.* 718 Stas.: *Abiit [hercle] ille quidem. Ecquid audis, Lysiteles? Ego te volo. / Hic quoque hinc abiit. Stasime, restas solus. Quid ego nunc agam...;* *Trin.* 1110 Stas.: *Hic meo ero amicus solus firmus restiit.*

without significance that, already in Plautus, the numerical ratio of occurrences displaying quite unambiguously the meanings ‘to stand erect’ is roughly equal to those where reference to erect position is not relevant at all (and where, therefore, we could translate *stare* as ‘to stand / (or: be) firm’): roughly 15 vs. 21 (of a total of 53).

Most of the plautine occurrences are often compatible with a basic meaning ‘stand erect’ but they occur in contexts where the indication of the posture of the subject seems totally irrelevant and where the verb basically carries the function of expressing the plain physical presence of the subject in a certain place, i. e. what we might label as a locational verb<sup>7</sup>. Most of these occurrences, in fact, present a locative complement. Again, if we consider occurrences like (17, 18), the irrelevance of the postural indication is disputable and it depends on the (sometimes rather subjective) interpretation of the passage:

(17) Plaut., *Men.* 361-363 Animule mi, mihi mira videntur, / te hic stare foris, fores quoi pateant, / magis quam domus tua domus quom haec tua sit

(18) Plaut., *Mi.* 9 Sed ubi Artotrogus hic est? *Artotrogus*: Stat propter virum / fortem atque fortunatum et forma regia

But this does not hold for an instance like (19) *Capt.* 617, where the servant Tyndaros, seeing himself and his tricks discovered, desperately likens his circumstances to the destiny of a sacrificial victim, by using an idiomatic expression that refers to the condition of the victim stuck between the *sacrum* (‘the sacrifice’) and the *saxum*, the sharp stone used to cut the victim’s throat. Here *stare* simply points to the mere location of the victim:

(19) Plaut. *Capt.* 616-617 Nunc ego omnino occidi, / nunc ego inter sacrum saxumque sto, nec quid faciam scio

No reference to any posture can be claimed to be present in (20) *Me.* 344, where the subject of *stare* is inanimate and where the verb simply points to the mere physical presence of a ship in the port:

(20) Plaut., *Me.* 344 In istoc portu stat navis praedatoria

Examples of this kind are far from being rare, even in archaic authors. In Cato’s *de agricultura*, where, as we have seen, all occurrences are with an [-animate] subject, not all refer to an object in a standing position (like the *columella* in 15):

(21) Cato, *de agr.* 101 Si ramos ficulneos voles cum foliis, inter se alligato, fasciculos facito, eos in amurcam demittito, supra stet amurca facito

*Supra stet amurca facito* is of course a recommendation that the greasy marc (the liquid residue from the olives) must ‘stay’, i. e. must stick permanently on the surface

<sup>7</sup> Cf. STASSEN (2005); cf., of course, the use attested in It. *stare* and in other Romance varieties.

of the fig branches and, therefore, here *stare* seems to be employed as a (semantically) marked form of *esse* (which regularly occurs with *supra*; cf. *supra esse* in Cato's *de agr.* 119 *in orcuam condito, oleum supra siet*); more arguably, as a synonym of verbs like *manere*. In fact, not only does *stare* express the physical presence of the marc on the branches, but also its (however physical) permanency through time. This use of *stare*, far from being a peculiarity of Cato's text, occurs in all periods, and it can be seen much later, for example, in Martial:

(22) Mart. 8.33.17 *Crassior in facie uetulae stat creta Fabullae*<sup>8</sup>

We can further consider the following passage from the *Captivi*:

(23) Plaut. *Capt.* 739-741 *Cur ego te invito me esse salvom postulem? / Periculum vitae meae tuo stat periculo. / Post mortem in morte nihil est quod metuam mali*

Here the verb expresses the (ontological, so to speak) co-occurrence of someone's own danger (*periculum vitae meae*) and the another's (*tuo stat periculo*), somewhat analogously to verbs like It. *sussistere* or Eng. *to subsist*, and it appears to be used as a marked form of the semantically neutral *esse*<sup>9</sup>. This use can be compared to several examples that we find in other authors; for instance, Ter. *And.* 699-701:

(24) Ter. *And.* 699-701 *Si poterit fieri ut ne pater per me stetisse credat / quo minus haec fierent nuptiae, volo; sed si id non poterit, / id faciam, in proclivi quod est, per me stetisse ut credat*

Here the expression *per me stetisse* means 'it happens to be because of me'. In cases of this kind, *stare* seems to acquire the status of an existential verb, again, by virtue of the same metaphorical process seen before: 'to stand' means 'to be alive'; therefore, with inanimate and/or abstract subjects, simply 'to exist', 'to occur', 'to happen', 'to take place'. Semantically, it is a very common development. In the Plautine passage, however, we note that *stare* (having this "existential" meaning) is employed, syntactically, to connect its abstract subject to the following predicative element, i. e. the ablative phrase (*tuo periculo*), thus apparently reaching a sort of semi-copular function. But, given the semantic structure of the whole sentence (i.e. based on a full lexical, albeit abstract, meaning of *stare* as 'subsist'), this complement is better considered syntactically as external to the predicative nucleus of the verb. This represents a substantial difference from later Romance copular uses.

Classical authors, however, provide other uses that are worthy of attention. Livy, due to the warlike character of his historical records, employs *stare* very often, which in the classical language typically denotes the standing position of legionaries and armies in the battle-field. In Livy the 299 attestations of *stare* present 46 cases

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the translation in the Les Belles Lettres edition (ed. Izaac 1961): 'plus dense est la couche de craie que la vieille Fabulla porte sur son visage'.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Cic. *Att.* 3.13.2 *in periculo esse*; 4.7.2 *meo periculo esse*, 6.1.6 *rem illam suo periculo esse*.

(15%) where the verb co-occurs with an adjectival complement (more often preposed), the semantics of which is consistent with the postural value or with a meaning such as plain absence of movement: thus, we find adjectives such as *confertus*, *firmus*, *quietus*, *anceps*:

(25) Liv. 10.29 Galli testudine facta conferti stabant

(26) Liv. 22.39 Duobus ducibus unus resistas oportet. Resistes autem, aduersus famam rumoresque hominum si satis firmus steteris, si te neque collegae uana gloria neque tua falsa infamia mouerit

(27) Liv. 22.61 Indicio [est quod fides socio]rum, quae ad eam diem firma steterat, tum labare coepit

(28) Liv. 2.30 Romani contra, quia principio pugnae quieti steterant

(29) Liv. 8.38 Et hercule illo die ab hora diei tertia ad octauam ita anceps dicitur certamen stetisse

The hypothesis that these adjectives bear, in many cases, a predicative status can not be disregarded. The preceding position of the adjective, which is by far the most frequent, might speak in favor of such an interpretation. We must note, at any rate, that in none of these passages does *stare* reach the purely predicative function that will occur in Romance (e. g. It. *stare fermo* ‘to be firm’, *stare calmo* ‘to be quiet’; Sp. *estar distante* ‘to be distant’, *estar ausente* ‘to be absent’, *estar satisfecho* ‘to be satisfied’) as lexical meanings such as ‘stand erect’ or ‘stand firm’ are always clearly present. Again, and this is particularly evident with abstract subjects, *stare* expresses temporal continuity within a certain condition, which is of course lexically specified by the adjective, as we see in (29), Liv. 8.38, or (30), Liv. 29.2, where adverbial temporal phrases occur (*ab hora diei tertia ad octavam*; *aliquamdiu*):

(30) Liv. 29.2 Ibi aliquamdiu atrox pugna stetit<sup>10</sup>

Just as we have already seen in Plautus, in Livy the status of a postural verb occurs as often as the plainly locational function which, judging by the following passages, appears to be strengthened:

(31) Liv. 38.53 Adiecit decreto indignationem: ‘sub pedibus uestris stabit, tribuni, domitor ille Africae Scipio?’

(32) Liv. 8.38 Cum subito Samnitium equites, cum turma una longius propecta accepissent impedimenta Romanorum procul ab armatis sine praesidio, sine munimento stare, auiditate praedae impetum faciunt<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the translation given in the Loeb edition (ed. Moore 1949): ‘At that point a fierce battle continued for some time’.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the translation from the Loeb edition (ed. Forster 1926): ‘when the Samnite horsemen, learning from one of their squadrons that had pushed on ahead how the baggage of the Romans lay remote from their fighting men, without defenders or a rampart to protect it, were seized with the lust of pillaging, and made a sudden dash for it’.

Livy 38.53 (31) shows that, in some contexts, the meaning expressed by *stare* is explicitly incompatible with the reference to the erect position. In (32) not only does *stare* refer to the simple setting (i. e. in a lying, not standing, position) of an inanimate entity; if we take the construction to be *impedimenta Romanorum* = subject – *procul ab armatis (sine praesidio, sine munimento) stare* = predicate, we see that the locative adverbial phrase *procul stare* (which must be considered as a full rhematic unit, and it is syntactically analogous to occurrences such as Plaut. *Ps.* 457 *hic stare*; Cato *de agr.* 101 *supra stare*, etc.) is followed by a further adverbial phrase apparently external to the predicative nucleus (*sine praesidio, sine munimento*) that has no locative meaning but simply refers to a generic condition (i. e. ‘to be without defenders’). In (32) we can thus observe the co-occurrence of a plainly locational meaning with syntactic phenomena that seem to forerun a shift towards the function of a (stative) supportive, quasi-copular verb. Given the scarcity of occurrences of this kind in the classical language, such an example can not be safely regarded as an early case of future phenomena; but, at any rate, it is emblematic of the kind of interplay between semantic widening and syntactic possibilities that is taking place at this stage of the language.

Examples where *stare* shows abstract meanings are far from being isolated in texts of the late republican and early imperial period. In the following passage from Cicero’s letters, for example, *condicionibus stare* means ‘to abide by the agreement’, an expression that can basically overlap with the corresponding Italian construction *stare ai patti* ‘id.’ (which is of course completely devoided of any reference to a physical sense):

(33) Cic. *fam.* 16.12.3-4 Accepimus condiciones, sed ita ut removeat praesidia ex iis locis quae occupavit, ut sine metu de his ipsis condicionibus Romae senatus haberi possit. Id ille si fecerit, spes est pacis, non honestae – leges enim imponuntur –, sed quidvis est melius quam sic esse, ut sumus; sin autem ille suis condicionibus stare noluerit, bellum paratum est...<sup>12</sup>

This is just one of many passages that testify to the use of *stare* with an abstract meaning and how it spreads in the classical language<sup>13</sup>. Diachronically, this use can be considered as derived from the sense referring to ‘absence of movement’; but, again, this is an extremely common semantic process. In terms of structural features, the permanency designed by *stare* in occurrences of this kind can be referred, if any, to a temporal parameter. But it would probably be reductive and a mismatch (if not

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the translation from the Loeb edition (ed. Shackleton Bailey 2001): ‘We have accepted the terms, on condition that he withdraws his forces from the places he has occupied so that a meeting of the Senate may be called in Rome, free of duress, to discuss these same terms. If he complies, there is hope of peace, though not peace with honour, since the conditions are dictated; but anything is better than to be as we are. On the other hand, if he refuses to abide by his own terms, war is ready to hand’.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the passages quoted in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *stare*.

even generally misleading) to synthesize the semantic change *in acto* as a pertinence-shift from the feature [spatial] to the feature [temporal]. Bear in mind that one does not exclude the other, as is suggested by the following passage from Iuvenal:

(34) Iuv. 10.238-239... ad Phialen; tantum artificis ualet halitus oris / quod steterat multis in carcere fornicis annis

Here *stare* seems to refer to both physical (*in carcere*) and temporal (*multis annis*) permanency of many years in the brothel (i. e. the *fornix*, the subterranean vault typically hosting a brothel)<sup>14</sup>, as is natural, given that at the referential level the one phenomenon often implies the other. A better approach is, rather, less rigid and suggests that we consider the possibility that this verb has, by this temporal stage, begun to express, among other functions (postural verb; absence of movement; locational verb) the expression of permanency *within a semantically generic scope*. The relevance of a spatial dimension or, alternatively, a temporal dimension (or any other kind) is a matter of context or, that is, it depends on the scope of the surrounding elements, e. g. of the adjectives or the adverbs syntactically and semantically involved. It is within this frame that we can interpret passages often quoted as early examples of a copular use<sup>15</sup>. See, for example:

(35) Verg. *Aen.* 1.643-648 Aeneas (neque enim patrius consistere mentem / passus amor) rapidum ad navis praemittit Achaten, / Ascanio ferat haec, ipsumque ad moenia ducat; / omnis in Ascanio cari stat cura parentis. / Munera praeterea, Iliacis erepta ruinis, / ferre iubet

This passage, in fact, does not represent a massive step further with respect to similar uses attested in other, not chronologically distant authors. See again (29, 30) and their interpretations. In all these cases *stare* makes no reference to physical location and expresses the permanency of an abstract subject in a certain condition. The line from the *Aeneid* means that ‘the care of the loving father stands firm, all concentrated in Ascanius’. The (however it might be) rhematic status of the (figurative) locative complement *in Ascanio* does not imply that the verbal form is

<sup>14</sup> Either we take the subject of *steterat* to be *os* (preferably, like the translator of the Loeb edition has chosen) or, alternatively, to be the lewd Phiale herself (in this case *quod* being an explicative particle). Cf. the translation from the Loeb edition (ed. Morton Braund 2004): ‘... Phiale. That’s the power of the breath of her skilful mouth, which was for sale for many years in the brothel’s den’.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e. g., Val. Fl. *Arg.* 7.354 in BOURCIEZ (1956: 253); Verg. *Aen.* 1.646 in RIBEIRO (1958: 150). Cf. POUNTAIN (1982: 144); cf. also STENGAARD (1991: 36) who does not quote the passages directly but comments critically on the interpretations by earlier authors and stigmatizes the “enthusiasm” to trace a copular use at this early stage. Verg. *Aen.* 1.643-648 (35) is perhaps one of these cases. Nonetheless, the analysis of some of these passages suggests that they are more than just examples of a “poetical language” (cf. STENGAARD 1991: 36).



employed as a semantically void, purely predicative support. This use is of course a direct extension of the meaning ‘stand firm’, i. e. the expression of ‘absence of movement’, that we found attested since the time of Plautus (cf. 14, Plaut. *Am.* 276 *ita statim stant signa*). We note that in these passages the choice of *stare* (instead of, say, *esse*) corresponds to a particular configuration at the inferential level within the general semantic frame of the sentences: it is not said that a certain phenomenon simply takes place (e. g., with reference to (29), hypothetically: *\*anceps dicitur certamen fuisse*) but that it continues to occur in spite of expected or inferable conditions that would have led to the opposite conclusion: e. g., with reference to (29), given the fierce valour of the soldiers, the combat went on and on, maintaining an unpredictable result. In (35) Vergil’s goal is to say that, in spite of Enea’s affection towards other people and worries about other things, his care stays concentrated on his son. These occurrences of *stare*, instead of being instances of a copular use, display the status of a “marked” form of a copular verbal form, i. e. a semantically marked status that holds at the inferential and contextual level, and that corresponds to a verb expressing a strong (temporally oriented) permanency within a certain state or condition.

Quiet differently, a passage from the *Argonautica* represents a further step towards a purely supportive function:

(36) Val. Fl. *Arg.* 7.349-357 Haec ubi fata / rursus ad Haemonii iuvenis curamque metumque / vertitur, hunc solum propter seu vivere gaudens / sive mori, quodcumque velit. Maiora precatur / carmina, maiores Hecaten immittere vires / nunc sibi, nec notis stabat contenta venenis. / Cingitur inde sinus et, qua sibi fida magis vis / nulla, Prometheae florem de sanguine fibrae / Caucaseum promit nutritaque gramina ventis<sup>16</sup>

The comparison with other occurrences where *contentus* is the predicative element introduced by *esse*<sup>17</sup> shows the difference expressed by *stare* as a marked form, in the sense specified above. As we have seen, in the other passages (35, 29-30) *stare*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the translations given in the Loeb and Les Belles Lettres editions: ‘When she has spoken thus, she turns once more to anxiety and fear for the Haemonian youth; glad on his behalf alone to love or die, whatever he may wish, she prays Hecate to send her now more potent spells and mightier powers, nor abides contented with the drugs she knew. Then she girds up her robe and takes forth a Caucasian herb, of potency sure beyond all others, sprung of the gore that dropped from the liver of Prometheus, and grass wind-nurtured’ (ed. Mozley 1936); ‘Après ces mots, de nouveau ses pensées et ses craintes se tourment vers le jeune Hémonien; elle se réjouit de vivre ou de mourir pour lui uniquement, quelque parti qu’il préfère. Elle supplie Hécate de lui envoyer maintenant de plus puissants charmes, de plus puissants enchantements, et ne se trouve pas satisfaite de ses sortilèges ordinaires. Puis elle retrousse sa robe et prends le plus efficace de tous ses remèdes, la fleur née sur le Caucase de sang de foie de Prométhée, la plainte nourrie par son châtement...’ (ed. Liberman 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Plaut. *Cap.* 177 *Facete dictum. Sed si pauxillo potes contentus esse; Me.* 824 *nam uxor contenta est, quae bona est, uno viro; Me.* 1016; Cic. *fam.* 3.13.1 *a tali viro contentus eram.*

displays a meaning such as (not ‘to be’ but) ‘to continue to occur’ which, in general, can hold even if adjacent phrases with a rhematic status are not present (although in the specific cases of 35, 29 the omission of *in Ascanio* or *anceps* would be textually rather awkward). But in (36) this omission is implausible because the subject is not abstract and the expression of a “marked form” of *esse* (i. e. ‘continuing to occur’) referring to Medea would not make any sense. The only option would be to assume that here the verb means that Medea was ‘standing fast’ in a physical sense, an interpretation that does not fit in the context. Here *contenta stare* is a predicative unit that would lose its sense if one of the two rhematic elements were missing.

If we compare occurrences of this kind from classical texts and the use of *stare* as attested in archaic Latin, a diachronic perspective suggests that a process of semantic widening is in progress and is becoming more and more relevant for the syntactic functions of this verb. Further analyses extended to texts of the imperial and the late Latin stages can perhaps support the observations advanced so far with a more consistent frame. At any rate, with respect to a passage like (36), it is legitimate to assume that the co-occurrence of: *a*) the use of *stare* as a marked form (in the sense specified above) of a copular verbal predication; *b*) an adjacent adjective that constitutes a predicative unit with the verb; and *c*) a human subject, give way to a semantic-syntactic interplay that, at least theoretically, can overlap onto the features of constructions like Sp. *estar contento*, It. *stare tranquillo* etc; or, better, onto some of their semantic configurations. This passage from the *Argonautica* seems to display *incidentally* such co-occurrence of these three factors, that by this temporal stage is not frequent at all, and it therefore could not be safely considered as the first occurrence of the set of phenomena attested *systematically* in the Romance languages. Nonetheless, however sporadic the occurrence of phenomena of this kind may be, they can be assigned, although at an embryonic stage, to classical Latin.

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