
THE INFLUENCE OF THE CULTURAL CONTEXT AND THE BROADENING OF THE SEMANTIC SPHERE OF THE TERMS TWO CONCRETE CASES

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Abstract

We can understand the richness of the vocabulary of a language as either the number of words or as the number of meanings that can be accessed by the users. A characteristic of the Latin language is the comprehensive semantic sphere of the terms. Throughout the long evolution of the language, semantics has been influenced directly by the cultural-historical context where the terms – I refer especially to the abstract ones – have been used. In the following lines, I proposed the analysis of two Latin terms – *absolutio*, *aestimatio* – starting precisely from the etymological analysis and from underscoring both the main meaning alterations suffered throughout the history and the semantic nuances conveyed for the terms they have generated, especially in the Romanian language.

Keywords: translation, difficulties, diachronic, analysis, absolutio

1. Introduction

As an expression of a culture, of a society or, more generally, of a civilization, vocabulary records with a high degree of accuracy all the mutations occurring within it. Furthermore, it can achieve this by adopting (using derivation, borrowing, loan translation, enrichment, degradation, etc.) the meanings of existing terms. The fact is all the more obvious as the idiom in question is older and more widely used. Except for Latin, it is very hard to find another language where such types of conditioning are used.

The general opinion is that translating a text from a source language into a target language involves, first of all, the mastering of a set of knowledge pertaining exclusively to the text approached, from grammar (morphology, syntax) and lexicon to the functional style of to the style to which it belongs, including here notions of prosody and stylistics. This is true, but it must always

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be accompanied by a deep insight into the setting of the text, namely into those sociocultural, political, religious, etc. realities susceptible of particularizing the meaning of a word, thus broadening, restraining or changing radically its semantic sphere. Hence, a wrong understanding of the meaning of a word or of a phrase may lead to interpretations and to wrong translation, implicitly, given that *gentilis, e* (adj.) has a certain meaning in Suetonius (*quod in illo gentile videbatur* – Tiberius, 68): ‘what seemed to him to be a family characteristic’), but a whole different meaning in *gentilis error* (‘pagan error; error of Pagans’), a phrase made known by the Christian literature

I chose this example of the emergence and assertion of the new religion intentionally, because the changes that it brought profoundly marked not only the structure of the society and the interhuman relationships – it suffices to give here as example the way Christianity proposed the understanding of family or the valences adopted by the noun *familia, ae* in the monastic setting – but also the conceptualizing manner. This manner is mostly visible in the values added to certain abstract terms – nouns such as *sanctity/sainteté/santità* mostly inherit the value imposed by Christianity to the word, *sanctitas, atis*, which initially referred mainly to the idea of inviolability (*sancio, sancire* = to establish solemnly, to ratify).

The difficulties of circumscribing the exact meaning of a term are not minor, not even when we refer only to the pre-Christian period: on one hand, they relate to the much broader semantic sphere of the Latin terms, which makes it possible for them to acquire values specific to distinct fields (e.g., Philosophy or Law). On the other hand, the same term may relate, in different periods, to a quality or to a flaw – in *Noctes Atticae* (XI, 2) Aulus Gellius stated that the ancients had not *elegantia* to designate ‘a more refined nature’ (*de amoeniore ingenio*), but ‘excessive fastidiousness in dress and mode of life’ (*de nitidiorē cultu atque victu*). Thus, until the time of Cato Major, Gellius states, the adjective *elegans* was not praise, but a flaw (*vitiū, non laudis fuit*).

I propose to illustrate the aforementioned aspects by an attempt to analyse the semantic values for two abstract terms. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I will try to take into account both the synchronic and the diachronic aspect of semantics in the inventorying of the multiple nuances used for the two terms. This will provide me with the chance of an overview that contains both the fundamental semantic core and the circumstantial nuances or those deriving only from certain associations.

2. *Æstimatio, -onis* (<*æs, æris*)

The controversial etymology of the term divided the opinions of researchers. Almost everybody agrees that the first syllable, *æs-*, is identical to the nominative of the noun *æs, æris*, ‘copper’, a connection that Sextus Pompeius Festus (second century AD) had already pointed out in *De verborum significatu* (a lost text which we can however access through *Excerpta ex libris Pompei Festi de significatione verborum*, a work by Paulus Diaconus, eighth

century AD: *Æstimata pœna ab antiquis ab ære dicta est, qui eam æstimaverunt ære...* – ‘the ancients designated the *estimated* punishment from *æs* [copper], because they assessed it in copper’). The interpretation was reprised or mentioned by all of those who have analysed the term. The second syllable, *-tim-*, is the one difficult to interpret. It is most often considered to refer to the radical present in the Greek verb *témnō*, ‘to cut’. The meaning of *æ.* (the verb *æstimo*, *-are* is a denominative) is in this case to establish a price, a value measured by cutting one or more pieces of copper.

Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) shares this opinion, but he does refer to the Greek *timē*, ‘esteem, honour, dignity, value, price, evaluation, assessment for tax purposes’. In this case, the interpretation is ‘evaluation/value/price in copper’ (...*dictum est æstimare, pro taxare, ab æs, æris, & timē Græce, quod est prætium Latine* – ‘instead of *taxare* they said *æstimare*, from *æs, æris* and from the Greek *timē*, which is the Latin for price’ [Laurentii Vallæ, *De Latinæ linguæ elegantia*, V, 20]). So does Luis Havet (who translates the verb *æstumare* > *æstimare* by *évaluer en espèces* [1]).

More recently, Franco Rendich – upon analysing in DI the Indo-European radical *tam* – believes that the verb *æstimare* (and, it may be assumed, the noun *æ.*) referred to “the material value of things” [2]. *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana, s.v. estimare*, considers that the verb is related to the Gothic *aist-an* (>Germ. *achten*: ‘to give attention, to appraise, to value’), both derived from the common root *ais*, ‘to seek, to wish’, which provides the ‘meaning of «acknowledging the price, the value of a thing»’ [Pianigiani Ottorino, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana*, Rome, 1907, <http://www.etimo.it/>]. Doubts regarding a correlation between *-tim-* and *témnō* are also expressed by Ernout & Meillet (*s.v. aestumo/aestimo*) [3], while *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (*s.v. æstimo, -are*) [4] posits that the verb (and the word family, implicitly) has an unknown etymology. Finally, Giacomo Devoto considers *æstumare* to be a verb derived from the adjective *æstumus* [5, *s.v. stimare*]. The last derives from *æs, æris* with a suffix of superlative, just like *optumus* (>*optimus*, ‘optimal, the best’) derives from *ops* (‘wealth’) using the same type of suffix (also featured in *legitimus* < *lex* [law], *maritimus* < *mare* [sea], etc.).

But whatever the etymology of the term, it definitely refers constantly to the idea of value (to be determined or respected, material or not), distributed according to the following meanings.

1. Generally: **a.** valuation, estimate, determination of the value (*æqua æstimatione* – ‘through equitable evaluation’ [Cæsar, *De bello civili*, I, 87]; *æstimationes possessionum et rerum* – the valuations of properties and of effects [Cæsar, *De bello civili*, III, 1]; *in æstimationem urbs agerque venit* – ‘Thus the city and territory came into the estimate’ [Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, V, 25]; **b.** appraisal (*æstimatio periculi* – ‘appraising the danger’ [Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, XXXVI, 59]).

2. Especially: established value, debt, properties whose value was established, real estate properties sold for debts – a meaning referring to certain socioeconomic realities after the civil war, featured in Cæsar, *De bello civili*, III,

1 (*prædia in æstimationem accepit* – ‘received certain properties at valuation’ [Cicero, *Ad familiares*, 13, 8]; *si æstimationes tuas vendere non potes* – ‘you are unable to find buyers for your valuation-lands’ [Cicero, *Ad familiares*, 9, 18]. In medieval Latin (fourteenth century), the term *æstimum*, *-i*, derived from *æ.*, designates the tax based on the valuation of a property [6]. Later, in von Pufendorf, for instance, *æ.* is also featured as an equivalent value of an asset: *recepta partis suæ æstimatione* – after receiving the equivalent value of his own part [*De iure naturæ et gentium*, IV, 7, 11].

3. Morally: appraisal, esteem, consideration, acknowledgment of the moral value (*æstimatione dignus/digna* – ‘worthy of esteem’ [Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, III, 20, 41-42, 51]; *æstimatio arbitriumque eius honoris* – ‘as an honour for merit’ [Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, III, 63]; *æstimatio vera magnitudinis* – ‘the true estimate of his greatness’ [Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, XXXVIII, 51].

4. Philosophically: **a.** evaluation, appraisal, as the Latin equivalent of the Greek *axía*, ‘value, price of a thing, esteem, reputation, merit, etc.’ (*dignum æstimatione, quale illi axían vocant* – ‘as possessing a certain amount of positive value – *axía*, as the Stoics call it’ [Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, III, 20]; an inherent value of a thing, qualitative evaluation, in opposition with the Greek *axía*, ‘quantitative evaluation’ (*Nam cum æstimatio, quæ axía dicitur, neque in bonis numerata sit nec rursus in malis, quantumcumque eo addideris, in suo genere manebit. Alia est propria æstimatio virtutis, quæ genere, non crescendo valet* – ‘Value, in Greek *axía*, is not counted as a Good nor yet as an Evil; so that however much you increase it in amount, it will still remain the same in kind. The value of Virtue is therefore peculiar and distinct; it depends on kind and not on degree’ [Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, III, 34]; **b.** In Scholastics, namely in Albert the Great, for instance, a faculty of the sensitive side of the soul, also called *virtus æstimativa* (‘estimative capacity’). According to his theory, featured in *De anima* (especially *De anima*, III, I, 2), the sensitive side of the soul has two categories of faculties, both with cognitive function: *vires apprehensivæ de foris* (‘external cognitive faculties’), namely the senses, and *vires apprehensivæ de intus* (‘internal cognitive faculties’), among which *æ.*, whose object is represented by those *intentiones* of the sensitive ones that are not perceived through external senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch). In Avicenna Latinus (twelfth century), *De anima*, V, 1, a text on which the Albertian thesis is based, this faculty (invariably called *æ.*) is exemplified by the reaction of the sheep, which feels the danger represented to her by the wolf even when she does not perceive this danger with the senses (vision, smell). Thomas Aquinas calls this faculty *vis æstimativa* (‘estimative faculty’: *Quæstiones de anima*, art. 8; *Sententia libri De anima*, Lectio XIII). The differences regarding *æ.* between the three afore-cited authors do not pertain to the modification of the semantic sphere of the term, but to the way the ‘estimative faculty’ per se is perceived.

5. *Legally*: **a.** translatable by ‘value, valuation, gravity, determination of a value’, **æ.** is used in the composition of phrases such as *æstimatio pœnæ* [Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 54, 232], ‘evaluation of the punishment’; *æstimatio litium* [Cicero, *In Verrem*, II, 2, 45], ‘the determination of the value of fines’; *delicti æstimatio* [Digesta, L, 17, 138, §1], ‘value/gravity of an offence’; *corporis æstimatio* (for instance, *Digesta*, IX, 3, 7: *liberum corpus nullam recipit æstimationem*, in a free translation: ‘the integrity of a free man is inestimable’), ‘economic/material value of the psycho-physical integrity of a person’; **b.** in the Anglo-Saxon law, *æstimatio capitis* (*Leges Alfredi*, 9: *Si quis mulierem gravidam interficit ... solvatur mulier illa integra capitis æstimatione* – ‘If anyone, while fighting, hurt a pregnant woman — let him pay a fine for the hurt as the evaluators determine!’), ‘value of a person’, a Latin equivalent for *wergeld* – textually, ‘a man’s price’ – a basic principle in Germanic law (established by the social status of an individual, *wergeld* as the foundation for *compositio*, a price that the wrongdoer had to pay to the injured party or to their family as compensation for a serious injury or for murder. During the reign of Charles the Great, this practice becomes mandatory, in an effort to contrast with *faida*, ‘private vengeance’. There are examples of the application of this principle in *Lex Salica*, XXIV, *Edictum Rhotari*, 9, *Leges Willelmi*, IX, etc. [7, 8] s.v. *Compositio*, 2. *Wera*); **c.** opinion, judge’s ruling, not necessarily pursuant to the legal norms into force or not necessarily just, but an inherent consequence of a deliberation. This curious and rare connotation is featured in Augustine (*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*, III, 64: *...sicut iudicis æstimatio maculabatur innocentibus addictis* – just like a judge’s ruling/ opinion was tarnished by the condemnation of innocents) or in the passage where Pierre Michaud-Quantin [9] cites *Glossa ordinaria* in *Digesta*: *Æstimatio, id est sententia vel opinio* (‘Æstimatio, namely ruling or opinion’). The meaning of certain phrases such as *absoluta/relativa æstimatio* (von Pufendorf, *De iure naturae et gentium*) is defined more likely by the value of the determined. Indeed, the semantic sphere of **æ.** was not actually modified.

6. *Rarely*, mostly in the Middle Ages (Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, XI, 17: *Hæc nimirum consilio Baronum ... æstimationem suam præferebat* – She valued her own opinion ... more than the advice of noblemen): view, opinion – most probably, although the passages are not very explicit, as a result of evaluating a context (it is worth stating that these semantic valences are more likely specific to a derived of **æ.**: *existimatio*). The first half of the twelfth century also comprised the dispute between Pierre Abélard and Bernard de Clairvaux regarding the definition of faith, which is based precisely on the different manner of conceptualizing the terms *existimatio* (<*ex-æstimatio*) and *æstimatio*. *Est quippe fides existimatio rerum non apparentium* (‘Indeed, faith is a judgment of things not seen’), Abélard says [*Introductio ad theologiam*, I, 1]; he believes that *existimatio* is a ‘firm opinion, conviction’, as the manner in which a human being relates to supernatural realities (different from how they relate to sensitive realities). Bernard [*Tractatus de erroribus Abaelardi*, IV, 9] replies: *Non enim est fides æstimatio, sed certitudo* (‘Faith is not opinion but

certainty'). Thus, he obviously interprets *æstimatio* and *existimatio* as perfectly synonymous and he ascribes to them the meaning 'uncertain, judgment, opinion'. These fluctuations in meaning were probably the target of Lorenzo Valla; he considered them inadequate and he invoked in his explanation the comparison of the verbal pairs of *cogitare-excogitare/æstimare-existimare* (*Ante enim est cogitare, deinde excogitare ... Æstimare est consyderabad, existimare vero iudicare* – First we have *cogitare* [to think], and then *excogitare* [to invent] ... *Æstimare* means taking into account [weighing, evaluating], while *existimare* means issuing a judgment [Laurentii Vallæ, *De Latinae linguæ elegantia*, V, 20]).

By oscillating between the primary meaning of determination of an amount of value and a very general meaning of opinion, between 'value of a person' (*wergeld*), in the Germanic law, and cognitive faculty, in Scholastics, *æ.* has preserved constantly in its evolution, according to Pierre Michaud-Quantin [9], the two meanings, active (process of determination of the value) and passive (value acknowledged, established, equivalent value). It is also worth noting both a certain dose of subjectivity involved by the term – especially when *æ.* means 'opinion' –, and the fact that it does not always necessarily involve an expertise from the agent, from this point of view *æ.* (in a passive sense) being either exact or approximate (the dose of non-determination was also conveyed in the derived terms of modern languages: in Romanian, '*estimare*' is partially synonymous with '*aproximare*').

Æ. and its family have generated in the Romance languages (but also in English: *to esteem, to estimate*, etc.) corresponding word families, whose translation does not raise special problems.

In Romanian, an entire family of words can be related to *æ.* (or to its family): *stimă, stimabil, a stima, estimate, a estima, estimabil, estimativ, inestimabil* – all of them entailing the idea of acknowledgment or determination of the value (intrinsic or not, qualitative or quantitative, precise or approximate) or of the price – in short, *a-precieare*.

3. Absolutio, onis (< solvo, solvere, solui, solutum)

The verb *solvo, solvere, solui, solutum* (loosen, release from, unbind, untie) is a compound of the verb *luo, luere, lui* (a term from the legal language, whose basic meaning is opposed to the one of *obligare* [3, p. 370]) with the particle *so-* (*sed-, se-*) that marks deprivation, separation, estrangement from something or someone. Perceived as a simple verb and reprising all the meanings of *luo, solvo*, it created numerous derived verbs (*re-solvo, dis-solvo, per-solvo, ex-solvo, ab-solvo...*) which have generated in their turn corresponding nouns, by the use of the suffix *-tio*. Taking into account the meaning of the particle *so-*, it is obvious that the preposition *ab* (*abs, a*) used as a prefix only consolidates the idea of separation that the verb *solvo* already comprised. Thus, while listing the meanings of *a.* (<*solvo*), one must take into account first of all the meanings and contexts for the usages of *luo* (rarely) and

solvo. I feature some of them as follows: *solvere navem*, ‘to raise the anchor’ (Cicero, *De officiis*, III, 50); *solvere crines*, ‘to undo the hair’ [Horatius, *Carmina*, II, 5, v. 24]; *solvere votum*, ‘to fulfil a promise’ [Catullus, *Carmina*, 36]; *rem solvere*, ‘to pay a debt’ [Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, VI, 14, 5]; *obsidium solvere*, ‘to raise the siege’ [Tacitus, *Annales*, IV, 73]; *poenam solvere*, ‘to execute a sentence’ [Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, V, v. 1224], etc.

Therefore, **1. Generally**, insofar as, for instance, the debts (pecuniary ones included), the obligations, the promises made to the others or the commitments to the divinity (*votum*) are seen as constraints, **a.**, as a release from the constraint, it may mean: **a)** ‘paying a debt’, ‘fulfilling an obligation’, ‘observing a promise’ or ‘doing an act of piety/religiosity’; **b)** in addition, in Late antiquity or the Middle Ages, it may simply mean ‘release, the granting of a freedom/allowance’, temporary or not, from a certain condition, status, etc. (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistulae*, CCCXIII: *Et credo, ni fallor, quod absolutio quae facta est, potest interim impediri* – ‘You, indeed, are quite able, I believe, to recall the permission you had given’); **c)** This leads to the meaning of ‘estrangement, separation’ (Ambrosius, *De bono mortis*, III, 8: *...mors absolutio est animae et corporis* – ‘...death is a removal of the soul from the body’).

2. From the meaning of ‘execution of...’, ‘fulfilment of...’, we pass to the one of ‘completeness’, ‘fullness’ [3, p. 634, s.v. *solvo*], especially in the rhetoric language (Cicero, *Brutus*, 137: *...optimi perfectio et absolutio* – ‘to rise to the summit of perfection’). *Absolutio orationis* thus means ‘completeness, exhaustiveness of the discourse’, full achievement, improvement of all its components, while the phrase *absoluta oratio*, ‘finished, completed discourse’ has nothing to do with *soluta oratio*, ‘free speech’, meaning ‘prose’ [Cicero, *Brutus*, 32], in the sense that a discourse in prose is free from metric constraints. It must also be noted that, unlike *perfectio*, referring to a work (with an objective meaning) and for which it is a partial synonym, *absolutio* concerns the agent, and thus it is highly subjective [10].

3. In grammar, the ‘completeness’ of a meaning, (rarely) being used to designate the positive degree of adjectives (Diomedes Grammaticus, *Ars grammatica*, I: *absolutio est elatio sine comparatione, ut fortis* – ‘the positive degree is the expression [of a quality] without [the use of] comparison, such as *strong*’). However, not that much **a.**, but other parts of speech within the same word family were successfully included in the grammatical language: *absolutus* (adj.; Consentius, *De nomine et verbo: Comparatio tres gradus habet, positivum sive absolutum...* – Comparison has three degrees, the positive, meaning the absolute; *quaedam vero absolutum habent intellectum* – but some of them have an absolute meaning; Priscianus, *Institutiones grammaticae*, II, 62: *...[nomen] absolutum est quod per se intellegitur et non eget alterius coniunctione nominis, ut deus, ratio* – ‘absolute [nouns] are understood on their own and do not need to be further specified by a second name, such as *God, reason*’; Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidos libros commentarii*, I, 716: *et est magis absolutum participium* – it is more of an absolute participle); *absolute* (adv.; Priscianus, *Institutiones*

grammaticae, VIII, 4: ...*quae absolute dicta non egent supradictis casibus* – uttered with an absolute meaning, they do not need the aforementioned cases).

4. *Philosophically*, **a.** may mean both ‘completeness’, an intrinsic quality of the realities through which they can be defined as ‘complete, fulfilled, full’ (Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, V, 38: *virtus... quae rationis absolutio definitur* – ‘virtue... may be defined in harmony with reason’), and ‘perfection’ (Cicero, *De oratore*, I, 130: *Hanc ego absolutionem perfectionemque in oratore desiderans...* – ‘while I desire this finish and perfection in an orator...’); furthermore, in medieval Latin, **a.**, with the meaning of ‘release from, of...’, is sometimes used as a synonym for *ablatio* (‘estrangement, abstraction’) to translate the Greek *afáresis*, ‘abstractive negation’ [11, s.v. *Abstraction*]. 5. Incrimination may also be regarded as a factor that limits drastically the freedom and rights of a person. Thus, *legally*, **a.** acquires the very general connotation of sentence that proclaims the innocence of a defendant (Cicero, *Ad familiares*, III, 11: *absolutio majestatis* – ‘acquittal on the charge of lèse-majesté’) or their acquittal (Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*, XXVII, 74: ...*sententiis XVI absolutio confici poterat* – ‘...an acquittal would be obtained by the votes of sixteen of them’). In addition, other terms within the word family of **a.** were destined to an exceptional career in the legal language: *absolutorius* and *absolubilis* (adj.: ‘absolatory’, ‘that can be acquitted’, respectively), *absolvere* (vb.: ‘to acquit’). It may also mean ‘release from the obligations of a contract’, in certain conditions, of course (*Digesta*, 46, 4, 1: *utriusque contingit ab eodem nexu absolutio* – ‘both parties are freed from compliance’).

As Christianity disseminated increasingly, **a.** acquired new semantic valences and it found (along with the verb *absolvere*) an application field, where it had a comparable or even a higher success than in the legal language. For an exhaustive presentation of the Latin concept, from a diachronic perspective, too, I advise the readers to look it up in DTC, s.v. *Absolution de péchés – Absolution quadragésimale* [12].

In the following lines, I will only mention the most frequent connotations of **a.** in the Christian literature.

6. *In the sacrament theology*: **a.** ‘forgiveness of the sins’, in competition with the noun *remissio*, a forgiveness that in the Christian religion only a priest may give, pursuant to the verse John 20, 23, within the sacrament of Penance/Confession (Jacob of Viterbo, *De regimine Christiano*, II, 4: *Huiusmodi autem actus est absolutio vel remissio peccatorum...* – ‘and such an act means the absolution or forgiveness of the sins’); **b.** indulgence (forgiveness, under certain circumstances, of the temporary punishment for the sins whose guilt had been erased). The canonical law regulates very strictly **a.**, both as forgiveness of the sins and as indulgence, by relating them to the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist [13].

7. *In liturgics*: **a.** prayer uttered at the bedside of a dead person in order to obtain absolution for his sins [7, p. 34, s.v. 5. *Absolutio*]; **b.** a title given to a prayer during the Morning Prayers (*Matutinum*), a major canonical hour (*Absolutio: A vinculis peccatorum nostrorum absolvat nos omnipotens et*

misericors Dominus – ‘Absolution: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins’ [7, p. 34, s.v. 6. *Absolutio capituli*; 14]).

8. In canonical law, **a.** may refer to the revocation of the interdictions imposed as an effect of excommunication. There is a definitive and unconditional revocation of excommunication, as there are temporary and conditioned revocations (with a special reference to the excommunication of a consecrated person: *absolutio ad effectum* and *absolutio ad cautelam* [7, p. 34, s.v. 7. *Absolutio ad cautelam*; 15]).

The Romance languages derived nouns from **a.** by preserving in their semantic spheres especially the legal meanings (acquittal, absolution), and the theological one (forgiveness of the sins). And not only the Romance languages: in English the noun *absolution* also has the two aforementioned connotations. This is, by the way, the title of a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald included in the volume *All the Sad Young Man* (1926) [16].

4. Conclusions

Hence, I have analysed two terms that have been influenced in a very different manner by Christian thought. The first – *aestimatio*, *-onis* – has not suffered radical mutations, given that the semantic core remained essentially the same. The legal or the philosophical meaning is encountered in both the pre-Christian and the Christian period. Certain particularizations are not the consequence of religious influences: I refer mainly to the special meaning (enforced by the socioeconomic realities specific to a certain historical context) mentioned in Cæsar, *De bello civili*, III, or within the phrase *aestimatio capitis* as an equivalent of *wergeld*, or to the value (faculty of the sensitive side of the soul) that Albert the Great ascribed to it. The new meanings attributed by the Christian authors (sentence, opinion, firm or less firm view) are the expression of a predictable semantic evolution: regardless of the context, the sentence, the opinion, the view are the result of an evaluation. It can be stated that *aestimatio*, *-onis*, despite its moral connotations, remains a non-religious term to which the religious usage is denied – maybe precisely because of this aspect (Bernard of Clairvaux).

Absolutio, *-onis*, on the other hand, had religious connotations in both periods. Nonetheless, its values specific to sacrament theology or to liturgics derives from the legal meaning of the term (acquittal). They do not replace the religious meaning used in pagan Antiquity (*absolutio voti*), but they are used along with it without reaching semantic hypertrophy, given that the idea of liberation (absolution) remains dominant here, as within the grammatical meanings of the term (of its word family).

In both cases, I have noted a broadening of the semantic sphere, which constitutes a serious source of difficulties for translators. The richness of the Latin lexicon must be understood first and foremost as a richness of the meanings ascribed to each term individually and it is worth asking to what extent

a person with a great insight into the Latin of ancients can also be a good translator of Latin Christian works.

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