

Edyta Gryksa

"Gladius" and "ensis" in the Roman civilisation

Scripta Classica 9, 81-90

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Edyta Gryksa

*University of Silesia, Katowice
Faculty of Philology*

Gladius and ensis in the Roman Civilization

Abstract: The aim of this article is to demonstrate the variety of adjectives, which are collocated with terms *gladius* and *ensis* in the Roman literature. The significant emphasis was put on the interpretation of collected fragments of ancient texts in order to point out numerous adjectives functions.

Key words: sword, soldier, Roman literature

Rome, which according to legends and ancient tales was founded at the turn of 754 and 753 BC, quickly became a hegemony in the world. It was possible thanks to three instruments of influence: the Latin language, equal in numerous respects with Greek, excellent legal system and military dominance.¹ The last was undoubtedly the most important. The history of the Roman army covers the period from the beginning of the state in the 8th century BC to its collapse, which dates back to the end of 5th century AD. Since the very beginning, the army itself was the significant factor on every stage of the state heyday. There is no doubt that fight with the enemy, which was aimed at defensive military actions, was one of its most important functions. The world of wars and manifold conflicts was well-known to soldiers, who were aware of their duties to obey the orders and fight in the name of the homeland and all its citizens. Their perseverance, courage, precisely devised military tactics, long-range leaders' diplomacy and sumptuous gear were fundamental for countless victories, thanks to which Rome was successively

¹ Z. Żygulski: *Broń starożytna*. Warszawa 1998, p. 78.

on its way up thereby gaining recognition and having an influence on other countries fates.

Antique sources provide numerous, more or less precise, information about the Roman army. Ancient authors, similarly to contemporary ones, had a tendency to fictionalize their texts, which could depreciate its historical value considerably. In numerous instances authors' partiality, their lack of objectivity could be relevant to contemporary restrictive politics or individual predispositions.² The authors such as Tacitus or Salustius were creating their works on the basis of official documents and testimonies from eyewitnesses, while others were not able to distinguish the truth from the fabrication. Nevertheless, it is worth referring to all texts on account of their merits – honest information or confirmation of authors' literary art and ingeniousness. Thanks to the latter – authors' inventiveness – there were numerous curious words, which came into existence over the years in order to enrich texts and to draw readers' attention. The authors could repeatedly describe the same subjects using different terms coexisting in the language structures. Such a phenomenon is highlighted in the terms *gladius*, *ensis* and *ferrum* cases, which describe just the same subject – a sword.³ It is worth stressing that equivalents usage was a common phenomenon dictated e.g. by metric issues (in poetry). When we are studying ancient texts we can notice a particular regularity: *gladius* is the term used especially in the prose, while *ensis* is rather a poetic term.⁴ The last of mentioned terms – *ferrum* – usually appears as *synecdoche* in relation *species pro genu* (a material is used to refer to an object composed of it). Opinions about this stylistic trope vary and the reason for it could be the attempt to identify it. Some theorists regard it as a separate trope, some see it as a special form of metonymy, while others subsume its functions entirely within metonymy.⁵

Since the very beginning of the existence of the Roman army a sword was one of the essential elements of soldier's weaponry. Furthermore, in the Marius' times every soldier had a helmet, a chain mail garment, a javelin, a shield, a dagger and essential soldier's kit.⁶ Over the years there were numerous changes in the army structures, connected with the necessity of its modernization and improvements. They concerned the rules of enlistment into the armed forces, the organization of particular military units, tactics as well as weaponry. The originators and executors were among others: Servius Tullius, Furius Camillus, Marius (mentioned above) and Gaius Iulius Caesar. From existing ancient texts we know that the Romans despised side arms. They preferred those, which could inflict a stab wound. Even

² P. Southern: *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History*. New York 2007, p. 1.

³ Quint. *Inst.* 10, 1, 11–14.

⁴ *Aspects of the Language of Latin Poetry*. Ed. J.N. Adams, R. Mayer. London 1989, p. 56.

⁵ D. Chandler: *Semiotics. The Basics*. London 2002, p. 257.

⁶ D. Gazda: "Armia rzymska I wiek p.n.e. – IV wiek n.e. Armia rzymska po reformach Mariusza Cezara – I wiek p.n.e." In: Idem: *Wojny domowe w imperium rzymskim*. Warszawa 2008, pp. 15–16.

a strong stroke could damage only muscles, which healed very quickly. A stab wound by contrast, even having only a few centimeters, could turn out to be a fatal one.⁷ The responsibility to use the sword in property owner classes was introduced by Servius Tullius. At first only short swords (up to 50 cm) modelled on Greek μάχαίρα were used. They had a blade made of bronze, lightly widened in a point direction, sharply cut at the end. A sword hilt, casted in bronze or iron, had a horizontal cross guard and cylindrical head, which sometimes could take on animistic shapes. In the times of the Punic Wars the short swords known also as Iberian, which turned into the classic *gladius* (the essential element of offensive infantryman's and legionnaire's weaponry), were used. This type of the sword was borrowed from Celtiberians, whom Romans brought together during the Second Punic War (218–201 BC) during the conquest of Hispania.⁸ It underwent numerous modifications over the years. There are two variants known from the Empire: heavier and lighter. Differed in weight, length of blade, width and build itself. The lighter variant of *gladius*, thanks to less complicated construction, could be mass-produced.⁹ It was perfect for a fight in a narrow battle array. The way of holding it was a characteristic feature – Romans held it high on the right side, while officers held it in a sheath hung on their left arm. It connected with the necessity to draw one's sword easily during the fierce battle. The officers' swords were richly ornamented, the hilts very often were inlaid with ivory, gold and silver. Moreover, it is worth marking that *gladius* was used by gladiators on the arena.

The adjectives which describe appearance of the Roman sword, are undoubtedly the largest group out of all, which are collocated with the terms: *gladius*, *ensis* and *ferrum*. They emphasize particular features of mentioned type of weapon such as length, weight, shape, ornaments or material it was made of.

The length of the sword in the studied ancient texts was conveyed with the adjectives such as: *longus*,¹⁰ *enormis*,¹¹ *ingens*¹² (enormous, big) as well as *brevis*¹³ and *minutus*¹⁴ (short). There is no doubt that the size of the sword always had a great influence on the fight course. The longer and bigger one undoubtedly gave the soldier much more possibilities during the fight in the distance or on the horseback – he could easier reach and strike the enemy. The shorter swords, thanks to their lightness and handiness, were definitely better to hand-to-hand combat – anyway, the most popular in Rome. Easy and fast strike at the enemy was essential on the battlefield. Even one thrust could turn the scales in favour. That is the reason

⁷ Vegetius: *De re militari*. 1, 12.

⁸ A. Goldsworthy: *The Complete Roman Army*. London 2003, p. 28.

⁹ E. Dąbrowa: "Uzbrojenie". *Filomata* 1990, nr 399, p. 401.

¹⁰ Liv. 37, 40; Ov. *Met.* 5, 200–204.

¹¹ Tac. *Ag.* 36, 1.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Tac. *Ger.* 43.

¹⁴ Nep. *Iph.* 1, 4–5.

why effective use of the sword belonged to the program of every recruit's exercises. During them recruits used wooden shields and special wooden pillars imitating the enemy. The legionnaires were trained in thrusts in enemy's stomach, legs and face. They were taught to avoid the attack on a trunk and strokes in head, because then they could expose themselves to the stroke as a result of baring the right side of the body¹⁵ (the left one was protected by the shield).

Besides the adjectives describing the length of the weapon, we can point out also these that describe its sharpness. *Acutus gladius*¹⁶ means the sharply cut, pointed sword. It was very effective similarly to *anceps gladius*¹⁷ – the double-edged sword. Even one accurate stroke was enough to bring the enemy down. We deal with completely different situation when we concentrate on the blunt sword – *hebes gladius*.¹⁸ Its usage was not only difficult, but just impossible.

The shape of sword blade was described by the ancient authors in many ways. According to their conceptions, it could be curved in shape of a scythe, a sickle – *falcatus*,¹⁹ or could put on the hooked shape – *hamacus*,²⁰ *uncus*.²¹ The sword with the curved hilt was very often one-edged.

If we put the emphasis on the sword appearance we cannot omit the adjectives which describe the material it was made of. Even in the ancient times copper with tin alloy was used to produce and develop the side arms. The bronze sword – *aer-eus ensis*²² – was extremely resistant to being worn away and very hard. However, with the pass of the time it was replaced by the iron one – *ferreus ensis*.²³ It was about 1300 BC by the Hittites when iron was used as a war material for the first time. The invention of iron as well as the development of its smelting, cold hammering and hardening, turned out to be the beginning of the military revolution in the classical age.²⁴ The centers of iron extraction were located in north-east Anatolia, middle Syria and in the Taurus Mountains. Its significance both in weapon and other tools production was invaluable. It was Plinius who undertook the topic of iron usage in his work. We can find the term *vivum ferrum*²⁵ in the book 34 of his *Natural History*. The term refers to the magnetic stone – also known as vivid iron. The wounds which were inflicted by it were, in Plinius's view, much more serious than these caused by the traditional iron weapon. It should be emphasized that

¹⁵ Z. Żygulski: *Broń starożytna...*, p. 100.

¹⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1, 35, 15.

¹⁷ *Ps.* 149, 6; *Hebr.* 4, 12.

¹⁸ *Ov. Ars.* 3, 588.

¹⁹ *Verg. A.* 7, 730–733.

²⁰ *Ov. Met.* 5, 79–84.

²¹ *V. Fl.* 6, 396–401.

²² *Verg. A.* 7, 741–743.

²³ *Lucr.* 5, 1286–1288.

²⁴ B.T. Carey: "Żelazo i Imperium. Rozkwit Asyrii". In: Idem: *Wojny starożytnego świata. Techniki walki*. Warszawa 2008, p. 42.

²⁵ *Plin. Nat.* 34, 147.

the material and similarly the ornaments did not have any direct influence on the sword usage and its effectiveness. Despite this fact they played an invaluable role.

The remaining texts suggest that, apart from the sword perfect shapes and blade sharpness, the producers cared for giving the hilt interesting, very often animistic shape. The hilt of Greek sword – μάχαριρα – was stylized as an eagle or a flamingo head, while the hilt of Iberian *falcata* assumed the shape of a swan or a goose head.²⁶ Since the 1st century AD they created a zigzag picture with the use of light acid, tannin, urine, sour beer or vinegar on the blade surface. I would also like to point out that the aforementioned image – alike the other ornaments – did not have any influence on the functional sword merits, but showed off its aesthetic qualities. In this context we should focus on adjectives such as: *fulgens*²⁷ (shiny), *aureus*²⁸ (gold), *nudus*²⁹ (naked, unadorned). It is worth devoting a little bit more attention to the last one on account of its untypical (in comparison to other adjectives) meaning. According to the dictionary definition *nudus* collocated with the Latin term *ensis* means the sword drawn from a sheath. The sword, the same as a dagger, was held on the special military belt known as *cingulum militare*. In the times of Augustus soldiers held two belts crossed on the hips – separate one for the sword and the dagger. Officers held the sword on the left and the dagger on the right side, the legionnaires held them the other way round.³⁰ The legionnaires held the sword on the right side – as it was pointed out above – as a matter of expediency. They held the shield in their left hand, therefore, if they had had the sheath with the weapon on the same side they would have had considerably limited ease of movement and it would have prevented them from drawing the sword quickly in danger.

Over the years, the leaders' and soldiers' experience influenced the changes in the sword build in order to make it much more handy and easier to use. In this context we can find such adjectives as: *levis*³¹ and *habilis*. The former means a light sword, which thanks to its weight gave the soldiers incomparably more freedom of movement and more chances for victory. The latter – *habilis* – can be found in Livius in the description of Titus Manlius's weaponry: *Pedestre scutum capit. Hispano cingitur gladio ad priopriorem habili pugnare*.³² In this fragment the adjective means the convenient, proper, suitable sword. The Hispanic sword – *gladius Hispanicus* – which was ideal for the hand-to-hand combat and to deal with the enemy from a short distance – turned out to be the best weapon during the armed clash. All the evidence suggests that it was not modified from the times of Hannibal

²⁶ Z. Żygulski: "Germania". In: Idem: *Broń starożytna*. Warszawa 1998.

²⁷ Apul. *Met.* 8, 13.

²⁸ 2 *Mach.* 15, 15.

²⁹ Verg. *A.* 9, 544–551.

³⁰ Z. Żygulski: "Germania". In: Idem: *Broń starożytna*. Warszawa 1998.

³¹ Tac. *Hist.* 1, 79, 19.

³² Liv. 7, 10: "He took an infantry shield. He was armed with the Spanish sword as it was better to fight at close distance" [own translation].

till the first half of the 1st century BC, which could have been the result of the Roman conservatism. Nowadays we know two models: Mainz – used especially as the stabbing weapon, and Pompeianus – ideal for stabbing and cutting.³³

Besides the adjectives describing the sword appearance we should also concentrate on metaphorical forms. The metaphor itself even in ancient times was understood as an element of speech, style or a specific way of perceiving reality.³⁴ According to Aristotle, it is the form of noticing similarities in words meaning and in described subjects, which arise aesthetic and cognitive emotions. Every author – as a creator of metaphors – acts intuitively, being completely aware of his intention, which is satisfying and focusing the readers' attention.³⁵ He achieves his aim by using the adjectives with positive or negative overtones, which embellish texts and make the descriptions much more attractive. Thanks to them, all the readers can find pleasure in keeping up with the characters' fates and enthusing about the author's outstanding talent. The style used by the author is always the result of his culture. It is articulated by his competent expression of ideas into words and adjusting them to the reading public and to the ensuing circumstances regardless of the work character and its message.³⁶

Thanks to the metaphorical adjectives, which can be regarded as perfect instances of the anthropomorphism (giving human features and motives for subjects, terms and phenomena), we are able to improve our knowledge about the soldiers' obligations and know more about the way how they were perceived over the years. In spite of the serious responsibility which rested on them, and the important function in the society, the Roman soldiers were very often presented in literature as dangerous characters on account of their irresistible desire and determination to win at all costs. Every soldier wished for the glory, which opened countless possibilities and, what is more, was a guarantee of success.³⁷ Victory always ensured wide recognition and adoration, therefore soldiers did their best – frequently paying the highest price – while all battles became brutal and unpredictable. Moreover, a Roman soldier was willingly described as a subhuman creature, whose faults and vices intensified because of the crowd psychology effect – which means that the numerical strength of the army itself stirred up anger and dread.³⁸

Among the epithets with the negative connotations, which were collocated in ancient literature with the Latin terms *gladius*, *ensis* and *ferrum*, we can list adjectives

³³ B. Szubelak: *Legionista Cezara. Studium uzbrojenia*. Częstochowa 1999, pp. 56–58.

³⁴ W. Wrzosek: *Historia – kultura – metafora. Powstanie nieklasycznej historiografii*. Wrocław 1995, p. 26.

³⁵ B. Otwinowska: “*Homo metaphoricus* w teorii twórczości XVII w.” In: *Studia o metaforze. Z dziejów form artystycznych w literaturze polskiej*. Ed. E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz. Wrocław 1980, pp. 31–40.

³⁶ Cz. Jaroszyński, P. Jaroszyński: *Podstawy retoryki klasycznej*. Warszawa 1998, p. 54.

³⁷ R. Cowan: *Wojny, bitwy i wojownicy rzymscy*. Warszawa 2010, pp. 11–12.

³⁸ J.M. Carrié: “*Zołnierz*”. In: A. Giardina: *Człowiek Rzymu*. Warszawa 1997, pp. 130–131.

tives such as: *poenalis*³⁹ (punitive, penal), *malus*⁴⁰ (unpleasant, harmful), *nefarius*⁴¹ (offending against moral law), *impius*⁴² (showing no regard for the divinely imposed moral duties), *ferus*⁴³ (wild, undomesticated), *violentus*⁴⁴ (violent, savage, aggressive), *minax*⁴⁵ (dangerous), *saevus*⁴⁶ (harsh, ferocious), *rigidus*⁴⁷ (primitive, rough in its manner). The adjectives: *letalis*⁴⁸ and *fatifer*⁴⁹ are extremely interesting. We can very often find them in literature as epithets not only for the sword, but for all types of weapon. It is possible to find the fragments where they function as epithets for the nouns: *arcus*⁵⁰ (a bow), *sagitta* (an arrow), *harundo* (a reed adapted for war special purposes) as well as *iaculum* (a javelin). Among their synonyms we should mention the adjectives such as *mortifer* and *fatifer*. In the case of *fatifer* we deal with the engaging interpretative situation. According to the dictionary definition *fatifer ensis* means the fatal, disastrous sword, so the negative connotations are noticeable right away. If we make an effort to find its etymological foundation, we find the verb *ferre* (to hold), and the noun *fatum*, which means a destiny that did not necessarily pertain to death – *mors*. The meaning of this adjective in military context could be involved with the aim of the person who held the sword, i.e. annihilating and taking the opponent's life.

Focusing a bit more on the epithets with negative overtones it is crucial to stress that not only adjectives can be found in the text in this function. There could also be adverbs, participles and nouns.⁵¹ We know about the examples when a noun is added directly to another one. Then we talk about apposition (*appositio*). The instances of such a construction are nouns *ultor*⁵² and *vindex*,⁵³ which collocated with the term *gladius* mean vindictive, inflicting punishment sword.

Ancient authors described Roman soldiers especially from the perspective of internal and foreign policy of the country. Moreover, they mention them rather fragmentarily and selectively. A top-down idea – according to which the soldiers were presented as a background of the action, while in the foreground there was al-

³⁹ Amm. 14, 5, 9.

⁴⁰ Sen. *Ep.* 92, 13.

⁴¹ Cic. *Pis.* 24, 4.

⁴² Ov. *Met.* 14, 799–802.

⁴³ Ov. *Ep.* 8, 60; Ov. *Met.* 6, 554–556.

⁴⁴ Ov. *Ep.* 11, 97–98.

⁴⁵ Amm. 14, 2, 16.

⁴⁶ Ov. *Tr.* 3, 7, 49–52.

⁴⁷ Ov. *Tr.* 3, 9, 25–26.

⁴⁸ Ov. *Met.* 13, 391–392.

⁴⁹ Ov. *Met.* 12, 492–494.

⁵⁰ *Fatifer* In: *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Vol. 6, 1, fasc. 2 (*familia* – *fenestro*). Leipzig 1987, col. 344.

⁵¹ H. Kurowska, S. Skorupka: *Stylistyka polska. Zarys*. Warszawa 1959, p. 203.

⁵² *Iob.* 19, 26.

⁵³ *Luc.* 5, 206.

ways a leader or *fatum*, which had a direct influence on people's and contemporary world fates – very often domineered over the way of the soldiers' representation.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, nowadays we have access to numerous works, epigraphic materials and epistolar sources saved from the ancient times, which are useful in revealing the positive aspects of Roman soldiers' nature. They presented all typical human characteristics. They were decisive and rebellious, loyal and honorable. They frequently turned out to be heroic, willing to make tremendous sacrifices in the name of fight for the good of their relatives and the homeland. They were always ready to die for their country and families. The positive characteristics, which Roman soldiers presented by their behaviour, in ancient texts are conveyed by adjectives such as: *felix*⁵⁵ (lucky, auspicious) *bonus*⁵⁶ (good, virtuous) *sanctus*⁵⁷ (saint). Another interesting adjective which is worth mentioning in this article is *coactus* – which means something unwilling, reluctant or forced. In connection with *gladius* it could be a little surprising. The fragment of the book 3 of Lucan's *Pharsalia* can be helpful in this case:

Adde quod innumerare concurrunt undique gentes,
nec sic horret iners scelerum contagia mundus
ut gladius eeant civilia bella coactis.⁵⁸

Defending the homeland was one of the soldiers' responsibilities regardless of circumstances. Every kind of insubordination, similarly to desertion, cowardice or ignorance for the official duties and orders, was strictly punished. Not only was a guilty soldier liable to punishment, but also whole *centuriae*, cohorts or legions. It is worth mentioning that one of the most drastic punishment was decimation – *decimatio*. Other well-known punishments in the Roman army were: *missio ignominiosa* – in other words it was an early disciplinary exemption from a military service, which involved the loss of all privileges and rights reserved for veterans, and *damnatio memoriae* – what meant wiping the name of the penalized army unit from all documents. Furthermore, also flogging, mocking of soldiers, holding publicly dishonoring attributes, relocation to a lower rank formation and others were universally used. All without exception were aimed at warning and discouraging the would-be followers of unacceptable behaviour and actions. In the name of the greatest good, values and obedience to the leader, each soldier was willing to die or turn arms against his relatives, friends or countrymen. He could be forced to

⁵⁴ I.A. Łuc: *Boni et mali milites Romani. Relacje między żołnierzami wojsk rzymskich w okresie wczesnego cesarstwa*. Kraków 2010, pp. 15–17.

⁵⁵ Sen. *Tro.* 281–285.

⁵⁶ Sen. *Ep.* 76, 13.

⁵⁷ *2 Mach.* 15, 16.

⁵⁸ Luc. 3, 321–323: “Add that countless nations are gathering from everywhere and the tardy world does not fear crime and dishonour so much that a coerced sword could be necessary for a civil war” [translation mine].

do it e.g. during the civil war – which is described above in the quoted fragment of Lucan's *Pharsalia*. Then *coactus gladius* turned out to be the instrument, the weapon forced to fight.

Apart from the already mentioned adjectives, it is worth taking into consideration one more group, namely the adjectives etymologically derived from terms connected with the military. Each language is characterized by a peculiar economy, which manifests itself in the possibility to create new words from the already existing ones. The limited number of elements, structures and linguistic rules gives us a chance to create endless amount of new constructions and combinations. The same economy is one of the Latin language qualities. Its characteristically large vocabulary was becoming the strong foundation for the new words. Nouns derived from verbs became the root words for other declensional forms (e.g. adjectives) with the pass of time. We deal with such a situation e.g. in case of: *bellator*⁵⁹ (warlike) *bellicus*⁶⁰ (military, warlike) *pugnax*⁶¹ (pugnacious, combative). If we think a while about the Latin terms which they can come from we find verbs like *bellare* and *pugnare* (to fight) one after another as well as the nouns *bellum* and *pugna* (a battle, a fight). The above mentioned adjectives collocated with the noun *ensis* describe the warlike, brave or battle sword. Once again we deal in this case with anthropomorphism. The author very often expressed the character's praise using these adjectives. The forms expressed directly the lyrical subject's attitude to the described situation. Another adjective, which by contrast derives from the verb *militare* (to serve as a soldier) and the noun *miles* (a soldier), is *militaris*. According to the dictionary definition *militaris gladius*⁶² refers to the warlike, ready to fight sword. I would also like to point out that according to Varro the noun *miles* is logically connected with the Latin term *mille* that means the number thousand. Besides words such as *vulgus* or *gregii*, which were frequently used by Tacitus in order to lay particular stress on the crowd psychology, this term rendered perfectly stylistic tendency to use the singular in collective meaning instead of the plural⁶³ (*synecdoche* in relation *a pluribus unum*). The adjective which derives from the term closely connected with the military service is also *dictatorius*. Etymologically, it comes from the verb *dictare* and the noun *dictator*. In ancient Rome the dictator was appointed by a consul for six months, when some dangerous situation in the country necessitated immediate entrusting one man with the whole power. Then he assumed the absolute power. From this information it is possible to conclude that *dictatorius gladius*⁶⁴ was the sword belonging to a dictator, who used his unlimited power trying to rescue the difficult situation in his country.

⁵⁹ Sil. 13, 374–376.

⁶⁰ Ov. *Met.* 3, 532–537.

⁶¹ Ov. *Tr.* 5, 7, 47–48.

⁶² Tac. *Hist.* 3, 77, 1.

⁶³ J.M. Carrié: "Żołnierz". In: A. Giardina: *Człowiek Rzymu*. Warszawa 1997, p. 131.

⁶⁴ Cic. *Chu.* 123.

The adjectives and the verbs, which function as the epithets in the text, are always aimed at specifying the described thing, putting an emphasis on its features and highlighting the lyrical subject's attitude to the situation. Thanks to them it is possible to round out, expand or even modify the meaning of words, which they collocated with. The metaphorical function of the epithets gives us an opportunity to transfer the features of material things onto psychical phenomena and *vice versa*. If we apply the semantic criterion, we can also mention logical epithets (which modify the meaning of a defined word) and tautological epithets – which put an emphasis on a particular characteristic that sticks with the term itself⁶⁵ (e.g. fast-footed Achilles).

Thanks to epithets we can enthuse about authors' originality and craftsmanship. All of them used a wide range of stylistic tropes and means of expression in order to fire our imagination as well as to convey – with elaborate, intentional care and accuracy – the beauty of described things and phenomena. Their primary aim was undoubtedly seeking for acclaim among readers. They achieved success through an innovative way of presenting the world and leaving the hints which are essential for the reconstruction of all described events. Thanks to epithets collocated with terms: *gladius*, *ensis* and *ferrum* we can broaden our knowledge not only about appearance of the Roman sword, but also about the Roman soldiers' characteristics, which can account for their behaviour many times.

⁶⁵ M.R. Mayerowa: *Poetyka teoretyczna. Zagadnienie języka*. Wrocław 1979, pp. 152–153.