

Zitierhinweis

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Jay Fisher: The Annals of Quintus Ennius and the Italic Tradition

For the history of Western literature, Ennius' epic *Annals*, written in the first half of the second century BCE, is an event of monumental importance: as a self-proclaimed Homer reincarnate (and calling upon the Greek Muses for inspiration), Ennius pioneered the composition of a large scale narrative in heroic hexameters - a Greek meter to boot - in Latin. He is thus a key player in the emergence of a Latin vernacular literature on the basis of Greek models, which Fisher (following Denis Feeney) rightly hails as 'one of the most important events in all of Western literature - it led to Vergil's *Aeneid* but also, eventually, to Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*' (5). That Ennius' *Annals*, like all translations or cross-cultural adaptations, constitutes a cultural hybrid has always been recognized. But with some honourable exceptions, classical philologists have tended to privilege Ennius' engagement with Greek literary predecessors (from Homer to the poet-scholars of Hellenistic Alexandria) when evaluating his literary achievement and the cultural outlook of his poetry. What so far has frequently flown under our critical radar is Ennius' allusive dialogue with what Fisher calls 'the Italic tradition'.

To help bring the interface of the *Annals* with native cultural traditions into sharper focus Fisher lays some conceptual and methodological groundwork in his opening chapter 'Ennius and the Italic Tradition'. His most important unit of analysis is not the literary allusion so cherished by classical philologists but what he terms 'traditional collocation' - units of words that, much like a literary allusion, invite the reader to recall their presence and function in other systems of signification. Here, however, these systems are not literary artefacts, but cultural discourses or practices. Fisher illustrates the value of his approach through the paradigmatic analysis of select fragments. With reference to *Annals* 232 Skutsch: *non semper vostra evortit nunc Iuppiter hac stat* (Fisher gives Warmington's translation: 'Not always does Jupiter upset your plans; now he stands on our side', but it is by no means certain that Jupiter is also the subject of *evortit*), he argues that the words *evortit*, *Iuppiter*, and *stat*, in the wider context of a military challenge (the line is perhaps uttered by Hannibal in an address to his troops), evoke a ritual discourse around the cults of Jupiter Stator and, more speculatively, the Oscan cult of Jupiter Versor. And in his analysis of *Annals* 240-241 Skutsch, which contain the names of twelve Olympian divinities (*Iuno Vesta Minerva Ceres Diana Venus Mars | Mercurius Iovis Neptunus Volcanus Apollo*), he draws on a wide range of epigraphical evidence not least from Southern Italy to demonstrate that the Ennian lines not only resonate with the Greek *duodekatheon*, but also nativized Latin practice - as well as Roman cult (arguably, the names refer to statues during the Roman ritual of the *lectisternium*) and contemporary politics (the name of Liber, the Roman equivalent to Dionysus, is absent, perhaps reflecting Roman interventions against his cult during the time Ennius wrote the *Annals*).

Against the traditional tendency to limit allusive gestures to dialogue between literary artefacts, Fisher thus joins other classicists in reclaiming the full force of Kristeva's conception of intertextuality, which in principle embraces all semiotic systems. In his view, part of Ennius' genius consists precisely in how he brings both literary and sub-literary idioms into mutually enriching play. Fisher's second, related emphasis of note concerns the way in which he models the dynamics of cross-cultural interactions. Much of his investigations are genealogical or etymological in orientation, insofar as he traces origins or parallels for formulations in Ennius across a wide range of Greek, Roman, and Italic (especially Oscan and Etruscan) settings and backgrounds. This is done deftly and with great learning and acumen, especially since he remains conscious of the fact that the origins of an

element do not determine the meaning it may have in any of the later settings in which it registers: in fact, in the business of cross-cultural adaptations, initially foreign phrases or ideas may well acquire a 'native' outlook (and be perceived as such).

Chapter 2: 'The Annals and the Greek Tradition' is perhaps the weakest part of the book.

Fisher here confronts the aspect of Ennius' authorial self-fashioning that is most problematic for his project: the polemic dismissal of native traditions of song and his explicit endorsement of Greek standards of poetic excellence. Fisher finds Ennius guilty of a performative contradiction, namely that in rejecting native Latin cultural practices he simultaneously evokes them. But it is indeed 'stating the obvious' when he claims that 'the use of the Latin language simply forbids a complete break with the native Latin tradition' (35). A more probing analysis of the apparent contradiction between Ennius' authorial voice and practice would have been welcome. In this chapter, a perennial crux in intertextual studies also registers persistently: to what extent are we to assume that Ennius (or, from the point of view of reception, his readers) activated associations with non-literary practices? And to what extent did such associations remain latent - built into the Latin language but accessible only to the classical philologist and his technical competence in historical linguistics?

Chapter 3: 'Ritual and Myth in the *Augurium Romuli* (*Annals* 72-91)' focuses on one of the longest surviving fragments from the *Annals*, the description of the competitive augury undertaken by Romulus and Remus before the foundation of Rome. Fisher can show that Ennius, with Alexandrian sophistication, puts his text in dialogue with Roman augural practice and enriches his text with phrases from Roman ritual. The chapter offers a close reading that pays attention to the cultural backgrounds (and the etymology) of specific words and phrases but also keeps the internal coherence of the fragment as such within view. This is all well done and yields compelling results.

Chapter 4: 'Ritual, Militia, and History in Book 6 of the Annals' explores the book of the *Annals* devoted to Rome's war against Pyrrhus. Fisher argues that both the Greek general and his Roman counterparts (in particular Decius Mus, famous for his ritual self-sacrifice to attain a Roman victory) operate with religious collocations in their speeches. Yet whereas the Romans manage to do so correctly, Ennius applies a policy of 'ironic near quotation' in the speeches of Pyrrhus: the Greek warlord speaks in Latin, but does so imprecisely and without seeming to understand the (efficacious) religious convictions built into Roman interactions with the gods. Apart from highlighting Ennius' own awareness of cross-cultural differences, the chapter also illustrates how his use of traditional collocations interlocks with more literary concerns, such as characterization.

The final Chapter 5: 'Ritual, Kinship and Myth in Book 1 of the Annals' centrally focuses on another long fragment, the Dream of Ilia (*Annals* 34-51 Skutsch). It is a heavily discussed piece of text that has received several excellent treatments in recent years. Fisher adds a systematic exploration of how the kinship terms used in the dream (and other fragments) interact with the system of familial relationships in republican Rome. A special concern of the chapter is the phenomenon that one and the same word (such as *pater*) may activate two different cultural systems (here kinship as well as ritual).

Ennius famously claimed to possess no fewer than three hearts: Latin, Greek, and Oscan. Fisher succeeds in showing how the epic idiom of the *Annals* reflects the imaginary anatomy of its author. Overall, his picture of Ennius as a representative and a practitioner of cultural diversity - indeed a poster-boy of multiculturalism - makes for an appealing contribution to the lively field of Ennian studies, not least since it complements and contrasts with other recent interventions. [1]

Note :

[1] See especially Jackie Elliott: *Ennius and the Architecture of the Annals*, Cambridge 2013, who subsumes the multi-cultural elements present in the *Annals* within a universalizing imperialist agenda that places Rome at the centre of the *oikumene*. For a third recent

important monograph on Ennius and the Ennian tradition see Nora Goldschmidt: *Shaggy Crowns: Ennius' Annales and Virgil's Aeneid* , Oxford 2013.