

BELLARIA LXIII



UNFAMILIAR LATIN POETS I

The beginnings of Latin literature

ENNIUS (239-169 BC)

Introduction

Everyone knows the following line by Ennius, referring to Fabius Maximus Cunctator who refused to engage Hannibal in battle on the field but simply harassed him:

‘One man by his delaying restored our state.’

363 *unus homo nobis cunctando restituit rem.*

But who knows how it continues?

noenum * *rumores ponebat ante salutem;*

ergo postque magisque uiri nunc gloria claret.

‘He did not put hearsay before our safety;

And so afterwards, and all the more, the man’s glory now shines out.’

* *noenum* = *non*. Cicero, who quotes the lines, almost certainly wrote *non enim*. The text throughout this *Bellaria* comes from Skutsch’s mighty 1985 Oxford edition.

Ennius, who came from south Italy, developed the nationalistic epic genre with his 18-book *Annales* (note the technical title, used of priestly records). Unconsciously preparing the way for Virgil’s *Aeneid*, he consciously adopted the metre—the hexameter—and much of the style of Homer (who at the beginning of the epic, he claims, appeared to him in a dream) to tell in epic verse the story of Rome from its foundation to its assault on Greece in the early 2nd C BC, seen as taking revenge for the Greek victory in the Trojan war.

To do this in Latin at this time was no mean feat. Ennius' Books 1-3 deal with the mythical start (Romulus and early kings of Rome); 4-6 with the conquest of Italy and the defeat of the Greek chieftain Pyrrhus who had come to help the largely Greek-colonised southern Italian states; 7-9 with the Punic wars (at the end of which the hostile pro-Carthage Juno yields to Jupiter, cf. the *Aeneid*); 10-12 with affairs in Greece, and Roman victories in Spain; and 13-18 with further Roman adventures in Greece and the east, down to about 170 BC.



Ennius (possibly)

These were the years of Rome's seemingly unstoppable rise to dominance in the Mediterranean, and Ennius had the vision to see it and expound it as destiny, ordained at the gods' command (the fragments contain six scenes on Olympus where the destiny of Rome is discussed). He bestows heroic status on the historical participants, treating Roman soldiers as Homeric figures. But the true hero at the heart of it all is the Roman people—*moribus antiquis res stat Romana uirisque*, as he put it ('the Roman state stood firm on its ancient traditions and its men'), a national epic indeed.

Among the many legacies he left, Ennius made a major contribution to epic style by consistently adopting the *present* tense for the narrative, giving it a new immediacy, an almost visual impact. The following (and very eloquent) passage provides an example, with only the final verb in the past:

'They advance through deep forests, hew with axes,
fell mighty oaks, the holm is sliced down,
the ash is split apart, and tall fir laid low,
they overturn loft pines: the whole forest
was ringing with the crash of leafy trees.'

incedunt arbusta per alta, securibu(s) caedunt,
percellunt magnas quercus, exciditur ilex,
fraxinu(s) frangitur atque abies consternitur alta,
pinus proceras peruortunt: omne sonabat
arbustum fremitu siluāi frondisāi.*

Skutsch 175-79

*Note the regular metrical discounting of final –s.

Note too the end-stopping of the lines, in strong contrast with Virgil; the love of alliteration; the weightiness of the metre. The metre is not always quite secure.

Here, then, was a 'Homeric' Roman epic, a national celebration of Rome's greatest historical achievements, and (even better) in a Latin adapted to Homeric metre. It was a bit rough-hewn, but had real dignity and grandeur and was deeply influential. The professor of rhetoric Quintilian put it like this: 'Let us revere Ennius as we revere the sacred groves, hallowed by antiquity, whose massive and venerable oak trees are not so remarkable for beauty as for the religious awe which they inspire.'

Book 1: The Rape of Ilia foretold *Annales* 32-48



Mars and Rhea Silvia (Rubens, c. 1620)

Note: Ilia (better known as Rhea Silvia), daughter of Aeneas, and 'the daughter of Eurydica' (married to Aeneas), are step-sisters. This reads like a real dream—it has none of the formality of Homeric dreaming; note again the alliteration.

A nurse awakes Ilia, who tells her step-sister of a strange dream, signifying her forthcoming rape by Mars, and of Aeneas appearing and hinting at the story of Romulus and Remus.

34 When the old nurse had with limbs a-tremble quickly brought a light,
35 [Ilia], frightened out of sleep, spoke thus in tears:
'O daughter of Eurydica, you whom our father loved,
now strength and life too leave all my body.

For a handsome [=divine] man seemed among pleasant willow-thickets
and banks and places strange to drag me away; and thus, alone,
40 afterwards, my own sister, did I seem to wander,
and slow-footed to track and search for you, but to be unable
to catch you to my heart [= 'reach you']: no path made sure my stepping.'

34 *et cita cum tremulis anus attulit artubus lumen,*
 35 *talia commemorat lacrimans, exterrita somno:*
'Eurudica prognata pater quam noster amauit,
uires uitaque corpus meum nunc deserit omne.
nam me uisus homo pulcher per amoena salicta
et ripas raptare locosque nouos: ita sola
 40 *postilla, germana soror, errare uidebar*
tardaue uestigare et quaerere te, neque posse
corde capessere: semita nulla pedem stabilibat.'

'Then it was father who seemed to lift up his voice and speak to me
 in these words:- "O daughter, first must be negotiated by you
 45 hardships, but after that, your fortunes will rise again from a river."
 With these words, my own sister, did father suddenly withdraw,
 and no longer gave himself to my gaze though my heart longed for him,
 even though many a time my hands towards the blue precincts of the sky
 did I stretch out in tears, and called him with caressing voice.
 50 All but now did sleep leave me, sick at heart.'

exin compellare pater me uoce uidetur
his uerbis: 'o gnata, tibi sunt ante gerendae
 45 *aerumnae, post ex fluuio fortuna resistet.'*
haec ecfatus pater, germana, repente recessit
nec sese dedit in conspectum corde cupitus,
quamquam multa manus ad caeli caerula templa
tendebam lacrumans et blanda uoce uocabam.
 50 *uix aegro cum corde meo me somnus reliquit.'*

Romulus and Remus consult the auspices *Annales 72-91*



Romulus and Remus on the watch

In this famous scene, Romulus wins the royal crown. Note the highly original Roman simile.

72 Then, careful with a great care, each in eagerness
for royal rule, they are intent on the watching and soothsaying of birds.
On the mountain Remus sits for the auspices and alone
75 watches for a favourable bird. But handsome [=divine?] Romulus on high
Aventine makes enquiry and looks out for the soaring breed.
They were competing to call the city Rome or Remora.
Anxiety filled all the men as to which of the two should be ruler.
So they wait, just as when the consul means to give
80 the signal, all men look eagerly at the barrier's bounds
to see how soon he will send the chariots forth from the painted mouths:
so the people were waiting and held their tongues
at the outcome, to which of the two the victory of the throne should be given.

*72 curantes magna cum cura cumcupientes
regni dant operam simul auspicio augurioque.
in monte Remus auspicio sedet atque secundam
75 solus auem seruat. at Romulus pulcher in alto
quaerit Auentino, seruat genus altiuolantum.
certabant urbem Romam Remoramne uocarent.
omnibus cura uiris, uter esset induperator.
expectant ueluti, consul cum mittere signum
80 uolt, omnes auidi spectant ad carceris oras,
quam mox emittat pictis e faucibus currus:
sic expectabat populus atque ora tenebat
rebus, utri magni uictoria sit data regni.*

Meanwhile the white sun withdrew into depths of night.
85 Then clear shot forth, struck out from the rays, a light,
just when, from the height, the luckiest far of flying prophets,
flew a bird to the left. Just then all golden there rises up the sun.
Down from the sky fly thrice four sacred forms
of birds, and betake themselves to places lucky and of happy omen.
90 From this Romulus sees that to him were especially granted,
confirmed by the auspices, the chair and throne of royalty.

*interea sol albus recessit in infera noctis.
85 exin candida se radiis dedit icta foras lux,
et simul ex alto longe pulcherruma praepes
laeua uolauit auis: simul aureus exoritur sol.
cedunt de caelo ter quattor corpora sancta
aiuum, praepetibus sese pulchrisque locis dant.
90 conspicit inde sibi data Romulus esse propritim
auspicio regni stabilita scamna locumque.*

The death of Romulus
*Annales*105-109



Romulus immortalised (Antonio Tempesta 1555-1630)

105 Longing filled their hearts and at the same time
they talked thus among themselves - 'O Romulus, Romulus, descended from
[the gods,
what a guardian of your country did the gods beget you!
O father and begetter, O blood sprung from the god,
You it was who brought us forth into the world of light.'

105 *pectora ... tenet desiderium, simul inter
sese sic memorant, 'o Romule, Romule die,
qualem te patriae custodem di genuerunt!
o pater, o genitor, o sanguen dis oriundum,
tu produxisti nos intra luminis oras.'*

Book 6: Pyrrhus' speech
*Annales*183-190



Rome v. elephants

The battle for Tarentum

As Rome expanded its power into the Greek-dominated south of Italy, the Greek city of Tarentum asked Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, to come to their aid. From 280-275 BC, with a huge army + 20 war elephants, he had great early success, but his victory at Asculum (279 BC) drew the famous 'Pyrrhic victory' comment 'One more victory like that against the Romans and we shall be completely stuffed'. Here Pyrrhus gives his magnificent, ringing reply to Fabricius who has come to ransom prisoners after the battle of Heraclea (280 BC):

183 'Gold for myself I ask not; nor for you to pay me the price.

Not bartering war but waging war,

185 with iron not with gold, let us of both sides make trial for our lives.

Whether mistress Fortune wishes you or me to rule, whatever it brings,

let us test it by bravery. At the same time, hear this word of mine:

those whose bravery war's fortune has spared,

their freedom I have determined to spare.

190 I grant it you—take them—and I grant it with the wishes of the great gods.'

183 *nec mi aurum posco nec mi pretium dederitis:*

non cauponantes bellum sed belligerantes

185 *ferro, non auro, uitam cernamus utrique.*

uosne uelit an me regnare era quidue ferat Fors

uirtute experiamur, et hoc simul accipe dictum:

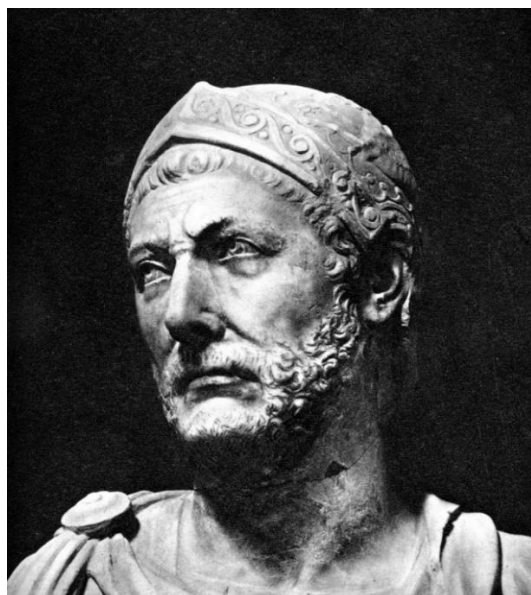
quorum uirtuti belli fortuna pepercit,

eorundem me libertati parcere certumust.

190 *dono—ducite—doque uolentibus cum magnis Dis.*

Book 8: The war with Hannibal

Annales 248-253



Hannibal

Politics at play?

The context of this fragment is not at all obvious, but it looks like a description of internal conflict in Rome; possibly it is part of a speech.

248 Away from view is Wisdom thrust, with violence is action done,
scorned is the speaker of good counsel, dear is the harsh warrior.
250 Not with learned speeches do men strive, nor with evil speaking—
[as they] fall foul one of another—brewing enmities.
They rush to make joint seizure not legally, rather by the sword—
they press a claim and aim at mastery—and attack with determined force.

248 *pellitur e medio sapientia, ui geritur res,
spernitur orator bonus, horridus miles amatur.*
250 *haut doctis dictis certantes nec maledictis
miscent inter sese, inimicitias agitantes.
non ex iure manu consertum sed magis ferro—
rem repetunt, regnumque petunt—uadunt solida ui.*

Praise of C. Servilius Geminus (cos. 217 BC)
Annales 268-285



Battle of Cannae 216 BC

The fragment probably refers to the battle of Cannae, a defeat in which Servilius and Aemilius Paullus played heroic roles. Gellius, the source of the fragment, commented that apparently the passage about Servilius here is a picture of Ennius' own manners and temper.

268 So saying he called to one with whom, well, often and cheerfully,
his table, his talks, and his affairs'
270 plans he shared when he had been tired out through the great part
of the day in managing the greatest affairs,
by counsel given in the broad forum and sacred senate-house:
one to whom boldly on matters great and small and jokes
he spoke out, and [] words good and bad to say
275 he blurted out, if he wished to somehow, and stored them in loyal keeping;
one with whom many pleasures ...
... and many joys both openly and secretly:

268 *haece locutus, uocat quocum, bene saepe libenter,*
mensam sermonesque suos rerumque suarum
270 *consilium impartit, magnam cum lassus diei*
partem fuisset de summis rebus regundis
consilio indu foro lato sanctoque senatu:*
cui res audacter magnas paruasque iocumque
*eloqueretur, *et cuncta* malaque et bona dictu*
275 *euomeret, si qui uellet, tutoque locaret.*
Quocum multa uolup ac

gaudia clamque palamque;

*A very archaic form of *in!* *et cuncta*: clearly corrupt

278 no thought of whose opinion led him a bad deed to do, [whether] a fickle or bad [opinion]; a learned, trusty, 280 agreeable man and a fine talker, content with his own, happy and shrewd; one who spoke the right thing at the right time, obliging; of few words; keeping many old-time ways which a long buried bygone age made and manners old and new; keeping also to the laws of many elders and of gods and men; 285 one who could prudently mention rumours or remain silent.

278 *ingenium cui nulla malum sententia suadet*
ut faceret facinus, leuis aut mala, doctus, fidelis,
280 *suauius homo, facundus, suo contentus, beatus,*
scitus, secunda loquens in tempore, commodus uerbum
paucum, multa tenens antiqua sepulta, uestutas
quem facit et mores ueteresque novosque, tenens et
multorum ueterum leges diuumque hominumque;
285 *prudenter qui dicta loquiue tacereue possit.*

Endword

Cicero in *de senectute* tells us that Ennius described himself in old age as:

522 like a brave horse, who has often, in the final lap, won games at Olympia, and now in old age exhausted takes his rest.
522 *sicuti fortis equus spatio qui saepe supremo*
uicit Olympia, nunc senior, confectus quiescit.

And elsewhere Ennius said of himself:

'Let no one honour me with tears nor make a funeral
With weeping. Why? I fly, living, through the mouths of men'.
nemo me lacrumis decoret nec funera fletu
faxit. cur? uolito uiuus per ora uirum.

Next week: Livius Andronicus' translation of the *Odyssey*, Publilius Syrus' one-liners and Grattius on hunting-dogs.