

Elaine Fantham “

***Dic, si quid potes, de sexto annali...*” The literary legacy of Ennius’ Pyrrhic war**

This paper considers the form and content of Ennius’ sixth book, the nature and reasons for the relatively rich transmission of its surviving excerpts. The campaigns of Pyrrhus in Italy brought Greeks and Romans into conflict for the first time on Italian soil, pitying the self-styled descendant of Homer’s Achilles against Roman worthies like Fabricius, M’ Curius and the blind sage Appius Claudius. Ennius provides fully rounded examples of morality and eloquence who match Iliadic honor and courtesy in their dealings with a Greek warrior-prince. He may have used Hieronymus of Cardia, or Timaeus, but coming from Rudiae, near Pyrrhus’ ally Tarentum, he may have drawn largely on local tradition. His account, with the lost narrative of Cato’ *Origines*, must have shaped Roman perceptions up to Cicero’s generation, and offered the same appeal of victory through constancy in defeat and austere refusal of concessions familiar to us from Livy’s decade on the Hannibalic war.

It is not surprising that for example, the opening line of book 6, evoked by Cicero was echoed by Quintilian and adapted by Virgil (*Aen.* 9.526), to be quoted by both Macrobius and Servius. The approximately 20 excerpts accepted by Skutsch are a fair illustration of how and why Ennius survived; one third were adapted by Virgil and reported in *Macr. Sat.* 6.1 and 2; a quarter are used by Cicero in his treatises, a sixth cited by Festus for their language, and another quarter preserved by grammarians. Every one of the 40 odd lines contributes significantly to narrative interpretation, including Ennius’ own invented oracle (iv, 167 Sk), the Roman rush to arms (vi and vii) an episode from the battle of Heraclea (viii), a Homeric tree felling for a funeral pyre (ix), Pyrrhus’ admission of the cost of victory and refusal to take a ransom (x, xi) the *devotio* of the third Decius (xii), Appius’ denunciation of accepting the peace offered by Pyrrhus (xv), and Jupiter’s meditation before deciding the outcome (xviii).

While I hope for time to discuss Ennian fictions like the oracle and supposed *devotio*, my main concern returns to Vahlen’s introduction and the nature of Ennius’ reception by Cicero and Virgil. For Cicero his importance was poetic, rhetorical (cf. *Brutus* 55 and 61) and moral; the success of Appius’ *dissuasio* demonstrates the senate’s respect for the power of eloquence and principle, while Pyrrhus’ generosity is used (*Off.* 1.38) to illustrate the contrasting obligations of struggle for national survival and mere conflict *de imperio*.

Most important is Virgil’s systematic use of this book, as of all the Ennius we know: recalling Ennius as well as Homer for Misenus’ funeral (6. 179-82), using Ennian half-lines to mark parallel moments in his epic - the Latin calls to arms (9.7.625) the invocation to the Muses before Turnus’s aristeia (9.526) the grazing of Aeneas’ helmet that stirs him to battle-rage (12.492-3) The appositeness of these adaptations supports the possibility that xviii Sk. reflects a divine council like that of *Aen.* 10.2f. and the night of xix Sk. may have been prelude to a Roman defeat or reverse like *Aen.* 2.250.