

Cicero on M. Cornelius Cethegus and Ennian Historiography:
Brutus 57–60 and the Afterlife of the *Annales*

This paper examines Cicero's presentation at *Brut.* 57–60 of *Ann.* 304–8, Ennius' words on the orator M. Cornelius Cethegus, and the effects of that presentation on the afterlife of the *Annales* as a whole, both long- and short-term. *Ann.* 304–8 read:

additur orator Cornelius suaviloquenti
ore Cethegus Marcus Tuditano collega
Marci filius. is dictus popularibus ollis
qui tum vivebant homines atque aevom agitabant
flos delibatus populi Suadaique medulla.

At *Brut.* 57–60, Cicero presents these lines on the eloquence of Cethegus, the poet's contemporary, as hard evidence for Cethegus' standing as an orator in Ennius' own day. When it comes to those figures from the past before Cethegus who are reputed for rhetorical skill, Cicero denies that any certain historical knowledge of their real abilities exists. Thus Cethegus, in Cicero's account, stands at the threshold of historicity, specifically as a result of Ennius' testimony. Cicero moreover here more than anywhere else promotes the *Annales* as an historical source in terms strikingly reminiscent of the claims of the prose analytic tradition (*cum et ipse* [sc. Ennius] *eum* [sc. Cethegum] *audiverit et scribat de mortuo: ex quo nulla suspicio est amicitiae causa esse mentitum*; *Brut.* 57). The arrogation to Ennius of principles proper to an historiographical tradition to which the *Annales* did not formally belong suits Cicero's immediate purposes: in his bid to explain the course of rhetoric at Rome, he is indeed after the sort of historical detail and explanation that the analytic tradition would properly supply. With no such account available, he turns instead to the work that suggests the information that he would like and treats it as if it were of the type he requires. It is worth noticing all of this, because, to the extent that our sense of the *Annales* as a serious historiographical endeavour emerges from our sources at all, it is Cicero and more or less Cicero alone who is responsible; and what he has to say about the *Annales* as a record of the past, which varies widely, still resonates loudly in all its aspects in our accounts of the text today.

Cicero insists that Ennius' 'attestation' to Cethegus' rhetorical powers is unique in the historical record (*id ipsum* [i.e. Cethegus' tenure of the consulship with P. Tuditanus in the same year as Cato's quaestorship] *nisi unius Enni testimonio esset cognitum, hunc vetustas, ut alios fortasse multos, oblivione obruisset*; *Brut.* 60). If we are to believe Cicero on this account, Horace,

who speaks of Cethegus at *Ep.* 2.2.115–18 (*obscurata diu populo bonus eruet atque / proferet in lucem speciosa uocabula rerum, / quae priscis memorata Catonibus atque Cethegis / nunc situs informis premit et deserta uetustas*), can have known of Cethegus only directly from the *Annals* or (and/or) from Cicero's quotation of and comment on the text at *Brut.* 57–60. In fact, the joint mention with Cato at *Ep.* 2.2.117–18 suggests that Horace was thinking of Cethegus through *Brut.* 60ff., where Cato looms large as Cethegus' immediate successor and as the object of Cicero's praise in the rhetorical genealogy he constructs. This would make Cicero a determinative reader of Ennius for other readers as early as Horace, who themselves still had full access to the text.