

## Sound in Ennius' *Annales*

Ennius' penchant for alliteration and other sound effects has been dismissed as either archaic, amateurish, or accidental. Lines such as *O Tite, tute, Tati, tibi tanta, tyranne, tulisti* (*Ann.* 104 Skutch) lurk in his poetry like poetic gargoyles, famous for their strangeness, not their beauty. Moreover, alliteration is not the only source of excessive noise in the *Annales*. Sound is one of the unexpected bounties of the poem. Even in its fragmentary state, it thunders, howls, grumbles and barks, roars, sings, shrieks, crashes, rings, resounds and yells out 'taratantara'. It is noisy writing, preferring auditory over visual effects, as a brief numerical analysis of the fragments will show. Out of the 623 surviving lines of the *Annales*, 90 deal with sound, while only 72 involve sight. Passages of the *Annales* that are adapted from Homer contain a far higher concentration of sound words and imagery than the originals. If one recognizes such facts and regards them as the result of the choices made by a mature poet, it is possible to see the ways in which Ennius used sound as a tool for expressing emphasis and engaging the attention of the audience (as briefly in Fisher). In this paper, I argue that sound is an important theme in the *Annales*, functioning as both a subject and a tool of poetry.

I begin by discussing fragments that feature sound as a subject. The aim of this section of the paper is to establish the significant presence of sound in the surviving pieces of the *Annales*, and to suggest some consistent characteristics of sound in the poem. I examine fragments 104, 175, 309, 387, 485, 545, and 555 (Skutch), which include onomatopoeic descriptions and instances in which several words denoting similar sounds are placed together, thus refining the listener's understanding through small differences of meaning. These examples illustrate how frequently Ennius uses his poetic devices to intensify and modulate descriptions of sound.

While the influence of Saturnian meter on Ennius' style can be detected in Ennius' use of alliteration to either unite or divide individual lines of hexameter (Goldberg), I consider Ennius use of sound against the background of contemporary poetics, especially the Euphonist theory propounded by Crates of Mallos and others in the second century BCE. Crates himself is too late to have influenced Ennius, but it is believed that earlier Euphonists had similar theories (Janko). Euphonist theories asserted that poems are judged as good principally on the basis of the arrangement of sound, rather than verbal composition or meaning. In particular, the principle that good verses imitate the sound being described aligns neatly with Ennius' onomatopoeic techniques.

Ennius' approach, unifying the sound described within the poem with the sound being conveyed to the audience, can be observed in many of the surviving fragments, and is therefore likely to have been prevalent throughout the *Annales*. Moreover, fragments containing sounds are transmitted by a range of ancient sources, who cite them for reasons unrelated to thematic content. This variety of sources reduces the chance that the prevalence of sound in the *Annales* is due to biased selection. By considering sound fragments on the basis of poetic technique rather than their context within the poem, it is possible to circumvent the uncertainties that surround attempts to reconstruct the *Annales* (Elliott). This paper demonstrates the primacy of sound in the *Annales*, and shows that rather than being symptoms of authorial excess, Ennius' alliteration and consonance are devices used to varied and subtle effect.

### Bibliography

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