

## HOW THE WEST WAS WON AND WHERE IT GOT US: COMPRESSING HISTORY IN SILIUS' *PUNICA*

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*Abstract.* In an intellectual climate where Silius is read with increasing interest, this paper explores the *Punica* as a historical text. In particular I examine how Silius includes incidents from outside the time of the Second Punic War within his historio-epic narrative of that period. Careful examination is made of one particular episode, the duel between Italian and Carthaginian brothers at the battle of Ticinus, to see how this reflects upon Rome's earliest history, especially the duel between the Horatii and Curiatii and Rome's conquest of Alba. Silius is revealed as an author who can compress history, giving his Punic war narrative a universal relevance, a feature appreciated by his contemporary Martial.

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### 1. Introduction

These are exciting times for readers of Silius Italicus. For the first time, arguably since his own lifetime, readers are starting to take Silius' *Punica* seriously as an object worthy of study and contemplation.<sup>1</sup> Those critics who have, in the past, attempted to use the *Punica* as a historical source have tended to be unkind in their evaluation of Silius as historian. Yet, as Gibson has recently pointed out, this is to ignore altogether the rhetorical side of ancient historiography: 'viewed from a perspective which sees ancient historical texts as something rather different from the work of modern academic historians, however, Silius and ancient historiography may not in fact be so far removed from each other after all.'<sup>2</sup> It is, perhaps, time to reconsider what it means to label a poem as 'historical epic'. In this paper I would like to consider how Silius appropriates historical narratives and recasts them in epic form in order to generate new meaning for his Roman audience; one episode in the *Punica* will illustrate how multiple historical narratives may be 'compressed' into a confined epic narrative space.<sup>3</sup>

The *Punica*'s reappraisal as a historical text mirrors the way in which Silius is being reconsidered as an epic poet, especially as regards his imitative strategies.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, despite assertions of Silius' technical ability, he is still largely regarded as an epicist of lesser competence, especially by com-

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<sup>1</sup> The recent glut of Silian bibliography includes Bernstein (2008) 132-59; Augoustakis (2010a); (2010b); Schaffnerrath (2010); Tipping (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Gibson (2010) 47.

<sup>3</sup> This borrows from the title of McGuire (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Scholars have built on Hinds (1998); although Hinds' work has been used as a foil by Silian scholars, see Wilson (2004) 225-6.

parison with Lucan or Statius.<sup>5</sup> Such opinions are heavily informed by the infamous (to readers of Silius, at any rate) comment of the younger Pliny that, as a poet, *scribebat maiore cura quam ingenio* ('he wrote with greater care than inspiration', *Ep.* 3.7.5). Negative readings of this phrase are not difficult to construct, and remain a popular starting point for discussion of the *Punica*.<sup>6</sup> Silius' *cura* has often been quantified by the scale of his debt to Virgil, whom, we are told (Mart. 7.63, 11.48, 11.50; Pliny *Ep.* 3.7.7-8), Silius venerated, as he did Cicero. His care in composition, in other words, rendered him little more than a mechanical and unthinking imitator of Rome's greatest poet. Silius' reputation as poet has suffered ever since.

Modern scholars, however, have started to question this view of Silius' poetry. We regularly acknowledge the wealth of texts to which Silius alludes, the *Punica* regularly employs systems of multiple intertextuality, and Silius' novels strategies for controlling such textual relationships.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, Wilson has noted how the *Punica* does not consistently signpost its intertexts through verbal 'quotation', but: 'prefers to signal the intertextual connection by alternative means, in particular, by coincidence of situation and detail rather than wording and, occasionally, by more explicit hints.'<sup>8</sup> Wilson's article deals solely with Silius' relationship with Ovid, but his acute observation applies more widely and especially to the poem's historical sources.

Silius was well known for owning a remarkable library (*multum ubique librorum*, 'many books everywhere', Plin. *Ep.* 3.7.8), and it is often suggested that the constant use of his collection allowed Silius to invoke other texts in unusual ways, and without systematic reference to verbal expression: 'The *Punica* is assiduously researched. Perhaps this is what Pliny had in mind when he characterised Silius as a poet notable for his exercise of "care".'<sup>9</sup> In this article I hope to explore some of these issues a little more deeply; understanding the technically adroit nature of Silius' *cura* is a key to discerning his *ingenium*. This article will centre on a reading of a single, relatively short passage of the *Punica* and will hope to suggest that Silius' allusive technique there is an example of broader trends in historio-epic composition, but is so in a distinctively Silian way. Furthermore, the *Punica* uses multiple intertextual allusion as a creative process, bringing meanings into his own epic nar-

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<sup>5</sup> For a positive reading of Silius' poetic techniques, see Pomeroy (1989). The negative appraisal of Feeney (1991) 250-312, has been highly influential. For a response, see Wilson (2004) 242 and n.36.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Henderson (2002) 108 and n.65. On Pliny's portrayal and its importance for Silius, see Spaltenstein (1986) xx.

<sup>7</sup> See Manuwald (2007).

<sup>8</sup> Wilson (2004) 226.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson (2004) 227.

rative of historical events which could not be generated in a more strictly historical prose account. Finally, it will be suggested that our passage read against its intertextual background has an important message for its (Flavian) audience and the comprehension of Roman history and Roman values.

## 2. Modes of Allusion and 'compressed history' in the *Punica*

It has been argued with increasing vigour that Flavian epic is possessed of an encyclopaedic quality in its use of intertextual allusion to earlier literature. Whilst Valerius Flaccus, Statius and Silius Italicus all undeniably regard Virgil's *Aeneid* as the most important intertext, they are also keen to include as complete an array of intertextual allusions to as wide a variety of texts within any given textual space. It is not only the most important exemplars of the epic genre that are included in this process, but also more *récherché* allusions to texts that might not initially strike a modern reader as having especial importance for epic writing.<sup>10</sup> This process of multiple allusion creates a complex overlaying of intertexts, woven into the fabric of discourse at the levels of diction, detail, situation or structure, and often a combination of all of these.

This desire to include *all* potential source material is also visible in Silius' *Punica*. There are some obvious differences when comparing the *Punica* to other Flavian epics, especially in the poem's tendency to privilege historical source material (as opposed to Callimachean or tragic material in Statius' mythological epics, for example) alongside epic intertexts.<sup>11</sup> Yet Silius' close affiliation to Livy as source has often been overplayed; we should note Pomeroy's observation that deviation from a historical source (generally Livy) is most profitably read as Silius displaying his poetic independence, while: 'close imitation should be seen as a deliberate act.'<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Silius is frequently eager to read other historical sources through the mediating in-

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<sup>10</sup> E.g., for an account of Hellenistic literature's influence, especially that of Callimachus, on Statius' *Thebaid*, see McNelis (2007).

<sup>11</sup> On Silius' use of historical sources, see Nicol (1936); Nesselrath (1986); Pomeroy (2010); Gibson (2010).

<sup>12</sup> Pomeroy (1989) 125. Such readings are inevitably reductive and assume that Silius *only* looked at those historical sources which survive to this day. There was a much richer variety of historical texts available to Silius and many of these are lost; thus active imitation of, say, Livy seems much more pointed in a context where an epic poet may choose between a number of authorities.

fluence of Livy and play with the rich and often conflicting range of historical source material available on the war with Hannibal.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the process of narration in Silius often does not revolve simply around deciding whether the poet has decided to follow Livy or not, but regularly requires us to read a narrative that transposes other historical intertexts, sometimes from parts of Livy's history other than his narrative of the Second Punic War, and for us to identify the various intertextual threads in order to understand the full impact of Silius' narrative. For Silius, the Punic War is a historical period that is 'good to think with', a means of constructing, idealising and deconstructing Roman identity.<sup>14</sup> For Silius, Hannibal's invasion is *the* place to explore Rome as a totality; *all* its history, *all* its mythology, *all* its literature. As well as becoming a means of establishing and exploring the core values of *Romanitas* (through a Flavian lens),<sup>15</sup> the narrative exhibits a historical pull, attracting all kinds of important 'Roman stories' into a single, over-arching narrative. Roman history is constructed as culminating with the Flavian dynasty under which Silius wrote. The battle of Cannae becomes an odd repository of Roman history as the names of its combatants evoke famous figures from other, later periods of Roman history.<sup>16</sup> Similar allusive strategies allow Silius to make literary connections as well as historical ones. The Cannae catalogue also affords him the opportunity to foreshadow the oratorical and poetic greatness that will come forth from Arpinum (*Pun.* 8.399-411) and Mantua (8.591-4), the home towns of Silius' greatest venerands, Cicero and Virgil. The sense that Silius is signalling an all-encompassing allusivity that borders on the encyclopaedic is further underlined by the appearance of Homer during the *nekyia* in book thirteen (13.778-97). Silius thus invokes an increasingly broad sense of literary tradition, one that begins to merge with historical tradition as literary figures cease to be sources of inspiration and start to become participants in the

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<sup>13</sup> See Pomeroy (2010), esp. 36-45.

<sup>14</sup> Much in the same way, the classical Greek tragedians regarded Thebes as 'good to think with', see Zeitlin (1990). Similar considerations motivate Statius' choice of Thebes for his *Thebaid*: see Henderson (1993) 170-3.

<sup>15</sup> For the use of exemplarity within the *Punica*, see Tipping (2010) *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> See McGuire (1995); Leigh (2000) 195. McGuire (1995) 111 implies that Silius' strategy is to turn Cannae into a pseudo-civil war narrative by using names associated with Roman civil wars of the past. As we shall see, the battle of Ticinus is also suggestive of civil conflict, but not exclusively so. Furthermore, I would suggest that the relative poverty of evidence for mid-Republican Rome may allow us to miss references that would have been more obvious to Silius' first-century AD audience. My contention is that the Cannae catalogue may have been, through its use of names, a repository of *all* Roman history.

narrative.<sup>17</sup> Yet more extraordinary is the inclusion of the historio-epic poet Ennius as a heroic centurion participating in a battle in Sardinia (12.387-419): 'by alluding to facts from Ennius' life and to well-known parts of his works, Silius Italicus demonstrates his knowledge of poetry, his awareness of its connotations and the possibilities of further development.'<sup>18</sup> If anything, such a reading underplays the importance of Ennius' inclusion in this manner; the *Punica* becomes a synthesis of Roman history and literary culture, blending the two seamlessly together.

### 3. Re-writing Livy's Horatii and Curiatii

Another episode in the *Punica* where such poetic strategies are presented in a less obvious manner appears during the narrative of the battle of Ticinus in the fourth book. The battle is perhaps most notable for the first appearance of the young Scipio, who rescues his wounded father during the battle (4.401-77).<sup>19</sup> Yet this particular story acts as the climax after a longer sequence of battle narratives. The earlier part of the battle is dominated by Hannibal, who enjoys a lengthy *aristeia* accompanied by 'Fear, Terror and Madness' (4.324-54). The actions of the Carthaginian and Roman leaders are separated by a brief narrative of a duel between two sets of triplets (4.355-400). One trio are half-Carthaginian, half-Spartan and sons of Xanthippus, the Spartan general who defeated Regulus in the First Punic War. They are named Eumachus, Critias and Xanthippus. The other trio are Italians from Egeria, named Virbius, Capys and Albanus. The sets of brothers are compared in a simile to African lions fighting. Almost immediately, two of the Italians are killed before the third, Virbius, feigns flight and kills Xanthippus and Eumachus in the process. The final pair of duellists kill each other (note the break with Livian tradition here). The episode is closed by an apostrophe from the poet, very much in imitation of Virgil's address to Nisus and Euryalus in the *Aeneid*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Such a historicising reading of the *Punica* sits nicely with Silius' veneration of Virgil, not simply as an author of a text in his collection, but as a more tangible, divine personality whose birthday, for example, he continues to celebrate long after his death: Plin. *Ep.* 3.7.8.

<sup>18</sup> Manuwald (2007) 83.

<sup>19</sup> Compare historical accounts of the battle by Polybius, 3.65-6, and Livy, 21.45-8. On the episode, see Marks (2005) 115-23. On the ways in which Silius draws on Livy in Book 4, see Taisne (1994).

<sup>20</sup> The whole episode, *Aen.* 9.176-449; the address, 9.446-9. For Silius' imitation, see Hardie (1993) 97; Ripoll (1998) 278-9.

It has long been recognised that this narrative is a reworking of the story of the duel between the Horatii and the Curiatii in Rome's semi-mythical, royal past, as told by Livy.<sup>21</sup> In that account, a battle between the Romans and Albans is averted (both sides fear the aggressive Etruscans) when the Romans agree with the Alban leader, Mettius Fufetius, that the conflict should be decided by a duel between two sets of triplets. At first, the battle goes badly for the Romans, with two of the Horatii being killed almost immediately. However, the final Horatius pretends to flee from the Curiatii, two of whom are injured. The Curiatii are separated and Horatius kills each one in turn, thus winning the war for Rome. Understanding the mechanics of Silius' story is difficult unless one is aware of the Livian narrative; the crucial act of Virbius separating his opponents by running away from them is highly compressed (*huic trepidos simulanti ducere gressus | Xanthippus gladio, rigida cadit Eumachus hasta*, 'as he led him away pretending fearful steps, he slew Xanthippus with his sword, Eumachus with his rigid spear', *Pun.* 4.391-2) to the point where the crucial details in the Livian narrative—the surviving Horatius realises that he can fight each opponent individually and that the Curiatii can only pursue him at different speeds because two are wounded—are omitted altogether.<sup>22</sup> Silius highlights his debt to Livy by making his story logically dependent on its inspiration.

The similarities between Silius and Livy's narratives are obvious, but it is the differences in detail and in emphasis that provoke further consideration of this episode. The background to Livy's narrative of the Horatii and Curiatii is rather different to that of the Second Punic War in Silius. Both Romans and Albans in Livy are concerned by the greater threat to their independence posed by the Etruscans, and the decision to resolve their conflict through representatives is designed to ensure a bloodless battle and victory;<sup>23</sup> both peoples will be required to fight against the Etruscans and this is a key element in Mettius' speech (*memor esto, iam cum signum pugnae dabis, has duas acies spectaculo fore ut fessos confectosque simul victorem ad victum adgrediantur*, 'be mindful, when you give the signal for battle, that these two armies will be a

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<sup>21</sup> Livy 1.24-5. Silius' version is much closer in length and in to detail to Livy's account than it is to the version given by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 3.13-20. For an extended discussion of the Livian episode and the narratives that surround it, see Feldeherr (1998) 123-44.

<sup>22</sup> Liv. 1.25.7-8: *Ergo ut segregaret pugnam eorum capessit fugam, ita ratus secuturos ut quemque volnere adfectum corpus sineret. Iam aliquantum spatii ex eo loco ubi pugnatum est aufugerat, cum respiciens videt magnis intervallis sequentes.* (He therefore took to flight to separate his opponents, thinking that each would follow him as the wounds on his body permitted. He had now fled some considerable distance from the space where they had first fought, when, looking back, he saw them following at great intervals.)

<sup>23</sup> Note the oddly bloodless 'sack' of Alba itself, Liv. 1.29.2-4.

spectacle and that they will attack us both, tired and beaten, conquerors and conquered', Liv. 1.23.8-9). By contrast, the duel in Silius is a brief (and relatively insignificant) moment within a large battle which is itself only really a prelude (in Silius' version) to the battle at Trebia (*Pun.* 4.525-704). This contrast is further emphasised by the extreme violence of the fight between the triplets, which focuses on details like Albanus' evisceration (*ast illi cuncta repente | implerunt clipeum miserando viscera lapsu*, 'all his insides at once filled his shield in a wretched fall', 4.383-4) and the severing of Capys' shield-arm (*Pun.* 4.385-9):

Eumachus inde Capyn; sed tota mole tenebat  
 ceu fixum membris tegimen; tamen improbus ensis  
 annexam parmae decidit vulnere laevam,  
 inque suo pressa est non reddens tegmina nisu  
 infelix manus atque haesit labentibus armis.

Then Eumachus attacked Capys; he held his shield with all his weight as though it were attached to his arm; the wicked sword, however, severed the left hand holding the shield, and the unlucky hand, not letting the shield go, held firm and clung to the falling armour.

Meanwhile the essential, excessive nature of the violence in this scene is thematised by the simile which takes us from the identification of the combatants to the description of the fighting itself (4.372-9).<sup>24</sup> The brothers are likened to African lions fighting one another, but the description of the violence within the simile is so extreme that the violence becomes almost paradoxical; severed limbs continue to fight even in an opponent's mouth (*illa dira fremunt, perfractaque in ore cruento | ossa sonant, pugnantque feris sub dentibus artus*, 'they roar terribly and broken bones crack in their bloody mouths and limbs fight on though held by wild teeth', 4.378-9). Thus bloody violence is encoded in the Silian narrative.

The simile of the lions also reveals a substantial transformation in the spectacular elements so central to Livy's presentation of events, where the armies watch their fate being decided by their representatives, collectively holding their breath and silenced by the drama unfolding before them (*itaque ergo erecti suspensique in minime gratum spectaculum animo intenduntur*, 'therefore, alert and on tenterhooks, they turned their attention to the unwanted spectacle', Liv. 1.25.2; *horror ingens spectantes perstringit et neutro inclinata spe torpebat vox spiritusque*, 'great horror struck the spectators and, with hope favouring nei-

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<sup>24</sup> Contrast the emphasis on the wholeness of the surviving Horatius in Livy: 1.25.7 *integer*; 1.25.11 *intactum*.

ther side, voice and breath stuck in their throats', 1.25.4). By contrast, there is no internal audience to appreciate the duel in Silius' battle of Ticinus. This dissimilarity is underlined in the lion simile, where the Moors hear the sound of fighting lions and turn away from the spectacle (*Pun.* 4.372-7):

ceu bella leones  
inter se furibunda movent et murmure anhelo  
squalentes campos ac longa mapalia complent –  
omnis in occultas rupes atque avia pernix  
Maurus saxa fugit, coniunxque Libyssa profuso  
vagitum cohibens, suspendit ab ubere natos ...

...like lions bringing raging war against one another and filling the rough plains and distant huts with a breathless groan—every nimble Moor flees to hidden rocks and remote cliffs, and the Libyan wife presses her children to her streaming breast to stop their crying...

So terrifying is the sound of lions roaring that the African men hide away from the sight of their fighting and mothers try to quiet their infants. Meanwhile the violence of the fight is underlined by the alliterative quality of the language that describes that cracking of bones and grinding of teeth (*illa dira fremunt, perfractaque in ore cruento | ossa sonant, pugnantque feris sub dentibus artus*, 4.378-9). Where Livy focused his narrative on the sight of the duel between Horatii and Curiatii, and the apparent silence of their armies watching them, Silius emphasises the lack of an audience for his duel, and the frightening noise of the combatants. Such a transformation of Silius' model means that his duel lacks the obvious motivation of Livy's—that it is designed to prevent bloodshed. The battle between Italians and Carthaginians seems utterly futile by comparison. Moreover, there is a further shift in meaning, whereby the interpretive emphasis shifts away from a putative internal audience onto the readers of the *Punica* themselves. Thus it falls to Silius' audience to decide what meaning and importance this narrative may have, and the changes that Silius makes to his famous source of inspiration act as directions towards a particular set of readings.

In a similar vein, the Albans have a relationship with Rome which seems radically different from that possessed by the Carthaginians in relation to their Roman opponents. Livy's narrative takes place in the distant, quasi-legendary past. The Livian narrative essentially tells of the Albans becoming Romans. Alba and Rome share similar institutions and ancestry (Liv. 1.23.1; 24.9), while they also acknowledge the same motives for entering into conflict in the first place (1.22.3-4). Alba itself was the home of Romulus and a number of the most important Roman families. Feldherr identifies the



closeness of the connection between opposing forces: 'Alba possesses a special relationship to Rome *unlike any other enemy* ... In becoming Romans, the Albans bind themselves to the *imperium* of the victorious city alone; Albans as a category cease to exist.'<sup>25</sup> The transposition of such a narrative by Silius into the Second Punic War, where Rome is struggling against its deadliest enemy, seems quite inappropriate.<sup>26</sup> Yet just as Feldherr suggests that Livy's narrative becomes a useful way of interrogating the notion of Roman identity,<sup>27</sup> so Silius' narrative may have more important implications for the poet's readership than the episode may initially suggest. Implicit in Livy's Horatii versus Curiatii story is the notion of Romans fighting Romans (much in the same way as, for example, Aeneas fighting Turnus in Virgil's *Aeneid* may be read as a proto-Roman civil conflict).<sup>28</sup> Overtones of civil war are also established in Silius' narrative, as we shall see below, but Silius has to work considerably harder to construct such a reading within a historical epic of Rome fighting her greatest external enemy of all time.

However, unlike the pattern in Livy, there is no greater power waiting in the wings in Silius' *Punica*. Moreover, Silius is often read as staging the war with Hannibal as a fight for Rome's survival, where the Romans suffer a series of disastrous defeats culminating in the battle at Cannae, the centre-piece of his poem. Thereafter, Rome is no longer in serious danger, despite Hannibal's reaching the walls of Rome itself in Book 12 (479-752) and routing two armies under Centenius and Fulvius.<sup>29</sup> It has often been remarked that Silius reshapes the history of the Second Punic War to suit his own purposes, making the defeat at Cannae the most important moment in Roman history and downplaying the enormity of defeats that happened thereafter.<sup>30</sup> The Second Punic War becomes the process whereby Roman identity is established as Rome's people overcome the Carthaginian invasion. Whilst this is the dominant reading of Silius' narrative, one where Rome is tested by defeat then develops after the battle of Cannae, the duel narrative in Book 4 suggests another means of reading conflict between Romans and Carthaginians, as one between relative equals where the victorious power will (eventu-

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<sup>25</sup> Feldherr (1998) 124; the italics are mine.

<sup>26</sup> Such a transposition is itself a Livian technique; compare Livy's awkward recasting of Periander silently cutting ears of wheat (Hdt. 5.92-3) as Tarquinius Superbus cutting heads of poppies, Livy 1.54.

<sup>27</sup> Feldherr (1998) 125.

<sup>28</sup> For narratives of division and unification in Book 1 of Livy, see Konstan (1986), esp. 205-10.

<sup>29</sup> Pomeroy (1989) 126-7.

<sup>30</sup> Roman victories are also downplayed: the battle of Zama is narrated with relative brevity compared to Cannae, *Pun.* 17.385-617.

ally) achieve domination of the entire Mediterranean. Silius ‘looks forward’ to the eventual conquest of Greece, implanting and compressing Roman conquest of the east within a narrative of Roman battle against Punic opponents. Such a reading of this conflict is implied by the identity of the Carthaginian brothers, who are also Spartans. That these three are atypical Carthaginians is perhaps suggested by the simulated flight of the last Italian, Virbius, expressed in terms that create a less than positive evaluation of this ruse (*trepidus simulanti ducere gressus*, ‘as he led him away pretending fearful steps’, *Pun.* 4.391 appears much more loaded than Livy’s rather neutral *capessit fugam*, ‘he took to flight’, *Liv.* 1.25.7); this is the behaviour one might expect of the stereotypically treacherous and wily Carthaginian. The Spartan origins of Eumachus, Critias and Xanthippus cue us to think of Romans fighting Greeks as much as Romans fighting Carthaginians; the un-Roman ruse of Virbius cues us to think of Romans as pseudo-Carthaginians in a further blurring of national identity.

It is a further break from the Livian model that the six combatants, although ostensibly identical in age and in courage (*totidem numero ... aetatis mentisque pares*, ‘equal in number ... equal in age and mindset’, *Pun.* 4.366, 368) are in fact carefully distinguished from one another. Silius spends eighteen lines describing the lineage of the warriors and only sixteen on the actual battle. Livy’s Horatii and Curiatii are very different: the historian narrates in such a way that it is impossible for the reader to distinguish one side from the other. What is more, Livy himself is uncertain whether it was the Horatii or the Curiatii who fought on the Roman side (*auctores utroque trahunt*, ‘authors give both versions’, *Liv.* 1.24.1).<sup>31</sup> It makes good sense for Livy’s narrative to blur the distinction between Roman and Alban given that they will soon become one people. Silius, by contrast, gives us a remarkable quantity of information (even by the standards of epic poetry)<sup>32</sup> concerning the names, origins and families of his combatants, details further complicated by the Spartan connection of the Carthaginian trio. One name of particular potency is that of Xanthippus, the Spartan father of the three Carthaginian brothers (the name is shared by one of his sons). Silius’ narrative instantly forces us to reflect upon the First Punic War and the defeat of Regulus by Xanthippus. It also anticipates a fuller reworking of that particular story in Book 6 of the *Punica*.<sup>33</sup> After the defeat at Trasimene, Serranus, the son of Regulus, meets his father’s former squire, Marus, who narrates the full story of his father’s deeds in the first war (6.101-551), including a detailed account

<sup>31</sup> See Konstan (1986) 210; Feldherr (1989) 130-1 on this blurring of identities.

<sup>32</sup> On the use of names in Virgilian battle narratives, see Harrison (1991) xxxi-xxxiii; on some uses of names in Statian battle narrative, see Hulls (2006).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Augoustakis (2010a) 156-195, esp. 159-64.

of his defeat by Xanthippus (6.310-33). Marus puts particular emphasis on the trickery that Xanthippus used to defeat Regulus (*Pun.* 6.326-8, 332-8):

at fraudem nectens, socios ubi concava saxa  
 claudebant, vertit subito certamina Graius  
 et dat terga ficta formidine ductor. (...)   
 abripuit traxitque virum fax mentis honestae  
 gloria et incerti fallax fiducia Martis.  
 non socios comitumve manus, non arma sequentum  
respicere, insano pugnae tendebat amore  
 iam solus, nubes subito cum densa Laconum  
 saxosis latebris intento ad proelia circum  
 funditur, et pone insurgit vis saeva virorum

But contriving a trick, hiding troops where the rocks were hollow, the Greek general suddenly turned from fighting and retreated swiftly in deceitful fear. ... Glory, that firebrand of the honourable heart, and deceitful faith in uncertain warfare seized and snatched Regulus away. He did not look back to allies or a band of companions or following troops and, now alone, he went forth with an insane love of battle, when suddenly a dense cloud of Spartans poured around from their rocky hiding-places and a savage force of men rose up behind the Roman intent on battle.

Regulus blindly follows his fleeing opponents, is surrounded and captured. Silius artfully plays on the notion of looking back and looking forward. His triplets duelling in Book 4 'look back' in a historical sense to the First Punic War and Xanthippus senior's capture of Regulus (a story doubtless well known to Silius' audience), but also looks forward to the flashback re-telling of this story in Book 6. Similarly, Regulus' refusal to look back (*non...respicere*) and mad desire to continue alone (*insano ... solus*) must carry a metapoetic weight—we as readers look back to Book 4 where the narrative logic of three-versus-three and three-versus-one is played out in contrast to Regulus' heroic naivety. Marus' rhetorical cry for punishment for the Spartans (*quae poena sequetur | digna satis tali pollutos Marte Laconas?*, 'What would be worthy punishments for the Spartans who so polluted the art of warfare?', *Pun.* 6.344-5) has already been fulfilled: Xanthippus' sons lie dead on the fields by the Ticinus and they have been killed by the same trickery that their father used against Regulus. They are literally denied the Spartan heritage they seek to ape (*Marte probare genus factisque Lacona parentem | ardebant*, 'they burned to prove their heritage in war and Laconian parentage by deeds', 4.361-2) and, much as they lack their father's tactical vision, so they are denied the opportunity to see their fatherland (*sed Spartam penetrare deus fratresque negarunt |*

*Ausonii*, ‘but god and Ausonian brothers forbade them to enter Sparta’, 4.365-6). The absence of spectacle that the lion-simile reinforced is also expressed as an absence of vision—the vision to see through Virbius’ trickery, and the sight of their paternal homeland that is denied to them.

This complex set of textual cues, ones that encourage us to flash back and glance forward at both intertextual and intratextual levels and along lines both literary and historical, might helpfully be viewed as a species of allusion which Barchiesi has termed ‘future reflexive’.<sup>34</sup> Barchiesi’s Alexandrian and Ovidian texts look back to literary models by looking forward in mythological time to the events those texts depict (for example, Theocritus’ Cyclops ironically anticipating Homer’s Cyclops)<sup>35</sup>. Silius’ mode of allusion is something of a reversal of this process: our battle narrative within the account of the battle of Ticinus foreshadows Marus’ reflections on the First Punic War but also prompts readers to reflect on that first conflict and on Rome’s legendary past simultaneously. An inset historical narrative becomes a *locus* of self-conscious allusivity and a prime moment for an exploration of the poet’s historio-epic technique in structuring his narrative. Many of the ironies of the triplets’ duel are established more concretely by this later narrative of earlier events.

On a broader level, Silius uses the names and the genealogy of his Carthaginian combatants to compress a series of historical narratives into a single, tight literary space. This one, relatively inconsequential fight echoes an important (arguably the most important, for Roman memory) act of the First Punic War, anticipating its re-telling later in the *Punica*, and re-focusing the belligerent logic of Regulus’ capture by reintegrating it into a narrative that flashes further back into legendary Roman history as told by Livy in his first book. The mutual slaughter of the triplets becomes a space in the ‘present’ time of the narrative where several ‘pasts’ are told simultaneously. Were we to continue Barchiesi’s metaphor we might think of this technique as ‘historic present’.

Similar traces of varied historical narratives are visible through the origins of the Italian trio who come from Egeria and Aricia (*quos miserat altis | Egeriae genitos immitis Aricia lucis*, ‘born in the tall groves of Egeria, whom pitiless Aricia had sent’, 4.366-7). The combination of geographical references creates an odd series of resonances with Livy’s first Book in particular. Aricia was a settlement south-east of Rome, at the foot of the Alban hills. These Italians (*Ausonii*, 4.366) are in fact Albans.<sup>36</sup> Just as the younger Xanthippus’

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<sup>34</sup> Barchiesi (2001).

<sup>35</sup> See Barchiesi (2001) 106.

<sup>36</sup> For Turnus Herdonius’ resistance to Tarquinius Superbus whilst based in Aricia, see Livy 1.50-1.

name leads us straight back to his famous father, so the name of Albanus underlines an element of the Italians' identity. Such a choice of origins lends Silius' narrative a sense of intertextual competitiveness; the products of Livy's Rome-versus-Alba story are now engaged in a higher task, fighting and attempting to defeat Hannibal's army. The foundational story told by Livy is absorbed by that of Silius and redirected in the more important narrative of Romans-defining-their-*Romanitas* in battle against the Carthaginians. Furthermore, other associations are suggested by the tall groves of Egeria (*altis Egeriae lucis*). Egeria was a water nymph worshipped at Aricia alongside Diana (Virg. *Aen.* 7.762-4, 775), but was also, perhaps more famously, worshipped with the Camenae outside the Porta Capena at Rome.<sup>37</sup> It is here that we find the location of the nymph's famous relationship with Rome's second king, Numa, but the Porta Capena is also the scene of the surviving Horatius' murder of his sister on his return from battle at Livy 1.26.2-4:

ita exercitus inde domos abducti. princeps Horatius ibat, trigemina spolia prae se gerens; cui soror uirgo, quae desponsa uni ex Curiatiis fuerat, obuia ante portam Capenam fuit, cognitoque super umeros fratris paludamento sponsi quod ipsa confecerat, soluit crines et flebiliter nomine sponsum mortuum appellat. mouet feroci iuueni animum comploratio sororis in uictoria sua tantoque gaudio publico. stricto itaque gladio simul uerbis increpans transfigit puellam. 'abi hinc cum immaturo amore ad sponsum,' inquit, 'oblita fratrum mortuorum uiuique, oblita patriae. sic eat quaecumque Romana lugebit hostem.'

Thus the two armies returned to their homes. The chieftain Horatius went carrying the triple spoils before him. His unmarried sister, who had been betrothed to one of the Curiatii, met him at the Capena gate and, recognising the cloak which she had made, let down her hair and called the name of her dead fiancé. His sister's weeping moved the mind of the young man to anger at the moment of his own victory and such public rejoicing. So with drawn sword he ran through the girl, accusing her with these words: 'Go to your fiancé with your immature love', he said, 'forgetting your brothers, dead and alive, and your fatherland. So may it be for every Roman woman who mourns an enemy.'

Horatia had been betrothed to one of the Curiatii and was killed by Horatius on his return from slaying that Curiatius for openly mourning her

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<sup>37</sup> See Ov. *Fast.* 3.261; Strabo 5.240; Ogilvie (1965) *ad* 1.21.1.

fiancé as soon as her brother saw her.<sup>38</sup> For a reader of Silius' narrative, however, the combination of detailed reminiscence of Livy's Horatii and Curiatii and the Italian, Romano-Alban combatants now being recast as natives of Egeria's groves forces a powerful reminiscence of the Porta Capena as the site of Horatia's death, and this opens up to us as readers all the complexities of family and national loyalty inherent in that episode. We could read the ethnic identity and geographical origins of Silius' combatants as closing off the questions of identity that permeate Livy's narrative: Albans and Romans, Horatii and Curiatii are, after all, united and condensed into one Italian body of manhood which is appropriately and positively re-directed towards Rome's ultimate foreign enemy, Carthage (with a bit of Greece thrown in for good measure).

However, the detailed account of national backgrounds of all six fighters instead contributes to a sense of fracture in each warrior's identity. Both sets of triplets are split between different national identities, African and Greek on the one hand, Roman and Alban on the other.<sup>39</sup> Further dark readings of the Horatii and Curiatii episode, already suggested by Horatius' killing of his sister, are available in the alternative version in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (which we so rapidly discarded earlier on in our analysis) where the opposing triplets are cousins: 'Dionysius makes much of the violation of kinship bonds entailed in their combat, which reproduces the kindred ties between Rome and Alba Longa as a whole.'<sup>40</sup> As the reader of Silius' reworking of this narrative begins to pick up on such disconcerting allusions, so the battle between triplets increasingly assumes the air of a fraternal, civil war narrative. Such reductions of Punic War into civil war are visible elsewhere in the *Punica*, perhaps most notably in the story of Solimus killing his father Satrius on the night before the battle of Cannae (*Pun.* 9.90-177).<sup>41</sup> In Book 4, there is rather more interpretive work to be done by Silius' audience, but the undertones of civil war in opposition to national defence are available to the alert reader sensitive to Silius' careful marking out of each combatant's identity.

Central to this shift towards more negative portrayals of war is the outcome of the duel itself, the greatest and most obvious difference between Sil-

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<sup>38</sup> On this part of Livy's narrative, see Feldherr (1989) 132-44.

<sup>39</sup> Although we should acknowledge that Livy's narrative is expressly predicated on the removal of 'Alban' as a separate and identifiable group, Silius' constructing of his own battle narrative takes us back to the last point in Roman history when Rome and Alba were separate entities.

<sup>40</sup> Konstan (1986) 209.

<sup>41</sup> The story is modelled on stories of civil war, esp. Liv. *perioch.* 79; Tac. *Hist.* 3.25. On this story, see Hardie (1992) 66-9; Wilson (2004) 243-7.

ius and his Livian model, where the final pair of combatants kill each other simultaneously. The conclusion of the battle in mutual slaughter shifts us away from the narrative logic of defence-of-the-realm or foreign-conquest and pushes us directly towards civil conflict. Such play with narrative patterns is central to the *Thebaid* of Silius' contemporary Statius. In that mythological epic, one brother defends his kingdom while another invades, but both are reduced to killing each other in a self-defeating duel. In Silius' historical epic account of the battle of Ticinus, meanwhile, the lack of a final victory, indeed the lack of a positive outcome of any kind, is underlined by the silence which follows. Livy's Horatius makes a speech over his defeated enemies which underlines the sacrificial and unifying logic of the episode ('*duos*' inquit '*fratrum manibus dedi; tertium causae belli huiusce, ut Romanus Albano imperet, dabo*', 'I have given two to the shades of my brothers', he said 'I give the third that Rome may rule Alba, the cause of this war', Liv. 1.25.12), while his killing of the final Curiatius, now injured and weighed down by his armour, is not a battle but a sacrificial slaughter (*nec illud proelium fuit*, 'this was not a battle', Liv. 1.25.11).<sup>42</sup> By contrast, in Silius' narrative, the noise that was so prominent in the fighting (*Pun.* 4.378-9) is replaced by the lack of such an affirming speech. The conclusion of the battle in mutual slaughter and the sudden and now radical difference of Silius' narrative to its most important model text is underlined by the faintest of linguistic allusions to it, highlighting this transformation as Livy's language just about seeps through the hermeneutical gap between these texts (*Pun.* 4.394-5):

inde alterna viris transegit pectora mucro,  
inque vicem erepta posuerunt proelia vita.

Then each ran his sword through the other's breast, and in turn they put an end to battles with life snatched away.

Where Livy's account shaded battle into sacrificial ritual, Silius' reworking resolutely maintains its combative status even to the point of self-negation. Italians and Carthaginians battle to the last, to an absence of outcome and to apparent pointlessness, unlike their Roman–Alban counterparts. Therefore it is left to the voice of the narrator to provide some kind of closural utterance. Yet here the Silian narrative oddly parallels the tensions between division and unity that are so crucial in Livy. As we saw earlier, the battle itself emphasises that most powerful expression of division of the self, dis-

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Konstan (1986) 210: 'the union of the two populations is here figured as the collapse of distinction between individuals: the lone surviving Horatius is an image of the new unity between Rome and Alba.'

memberment. Yet the conclusion of the battle creates unity of a different kind when the last two warriors kill each other. The action suggests that the final pair fall almost threaded together and Silius' verb (*transegit*) adds to the sense of finality, but can also imply an idea of compromise—Silius may be making one last gesture towards the legal compromise between Rome and Alba by employing a verb that suggests conciliation.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Death, Sacrifice and the Value of History

Such a close examination of this passage brings to light Silius' strategy for generating meaning; the situational similarity to the Livian passage begs a closer comparison, which in turn highlights the dissonances between the two passages. Moreover, meaning is generated by the multiple historical narratives suggested and thus incorporated into the story of the duel. Thus the brief episode becomes a way of 're-telling' through allusions of various kinds a multiplicity of histories. What stands out in this analysis is how infrequent are the allusions at a linguistic level to any of Silius' historical comparands; the language remains resolutely Virgilian despite the obvious resemblances to Livy in particular.<sup>44</sup> Silius' most obvious intertextual allusion in the battle narrative we have been examining is his authorial address to the fallen warriors (*Pun.* 4.396-400):

felices leti, pietas quos addidit umbras!  
 optabunt similes venientia saecula fratres,  
 aeternumque decus memori celebrabitur aevo,  
 si modo ferre diem serosque videre nepotes  
 carmina nostra valent, nec famam invidit Apollo.

Happy in death those whom loyalty has added to the dead! Coming ages will pray for similar brothers and eternal glory will be remembered throughout eternity if only my poetry is strong enough to endure and to see its distant descendants, nor Apollo deny fame.

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<sup>43</sup> *OLD* s.v. *transigo*, 1 'to pierce through', 2 'to carry through to the end', 4 'to settle by mutual concession, compromise'. On the comparable unity-in-death of a minor pair of warriors in the *Thebaid*, see Hulls (2006) 137-8.

<sup>44</sup> No systematic analysis of linguistic allusion will be offered here, although two major points of contact with Virgil are explored below. Those wishing to follow up such linguistic allusion should consult Spaltenstein (1986) *ad loc.* For systematic reversals of Virgilian themes by Silius, see Pomeroy (2000).



Silius celebrates the death of his combatants, yet the sacrificial value of the deaths of six young men is difficult to discern. This provides yet another crucial contextual contrast with Livy's Horatii and Curiatii, whose deaths act as sacrificial parallels to the complex sacrifice and fetial rituals described in advance of the duel (Liv. 1.24),<sup>45</sup> and who mimic sacrificial victims by entering willingly into the contest as surrogates for Rome and Alba (*nihil recusatur*, 'nothing is refused', Liv. 1.24.2). By contrast, the apparent futility of the deaths in Silius make the Carthaginians and Italians a repetition of Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus after whose deaths Virgil makes his own apostrophic utterance on which the above passage is modelled. The basic impetus of Silius' entire episode is as a negative foil for the heroism of the young Scipio rescuing his father in this battle (the scene which follows directly after the duel of the triplets), whose exploits will combine the valour of Virgil's Ascanius (whose first victory in *Aeneid* 9 follows the deaths of Nisus and Euryalus) and Aeneas (who also rescued his father from the fall of Troy) as well as Lausus (who rescued his father Mezentius in *Aeneid* 10).<sup>46</sup> The triplets' duel is 'a mirror combat whose limiting case is the fratricide of civil war, and which forecloses the future through extirpation of the present generation.'<sup>47</sup> It thus becomes all too easy to read the battle between the triplets as the worst kind of zero-sum game, where the futility of war is expressed in the annihilation of yet another hopeful generation of young men, yet another epic reminder to a Flavian audience of the horrors of (especially civil) conflicts.

Such a reading of our passage's impact is rather reductive. The triplets' duel is also a foil for the *aristeia* of Hannibal that precedes it (*Pun.* 4.324-54). The self-sacrifice of the Italian brothers represents a shift in the momentum of the battle away from Hannibal's wholesale slaughter of Italian youth towards a more even battle (*Pun.* 4.351-4):

exoritur rabies caedum, ac vix tela furori  
 sufficiunt; teritur iunctis umbonibus umbo,  
 pesque pedem premit, et nutantes casside cristae  
 hostilem tremulo pulsant conamine frontem.

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<sup>45</sup> See Wiedemann (1986); Feldherr (1998) 138-9. In a further Livian echo, the spear-throwing scene with which the battle of Ticinus opens, *Pun.* 4.134-42, is a deliberate distortion of the spear-throwing ritual in declarations of war, see Liv. 1.32.5-14.

<sup>46</sup> On this last comparison, see Marks (2005) 116-17 and n.8; for details of the first two comparisons and further allusion to Achilles, see Marks (2005) 120-2.

<sup>47</sup> Hardie (1993) 97.

Bloody slaughter began, and weapons scarcely sufficed for this madness; shield joined and clashed with shield, foot pressed on foot, and nodding helmet-crests shaking with effort struck enemy heads.

This passage forms the ‘bridge’ between Hannibal’s *aristeia* and the triplets narrative. Silius creates a sense that this moment is the culmination of a long series of epic battles; the use of polyptoton here evokes and fulfils Dido’s curse in *Aeneid* 4, while such expressions for the clash of weaponry form a long tradition in Roman and classical epic.<sup>48</sup> The Roman forces have stemmed the flow at least in so far as men are now being killed on both sides; the duel between the triplets symbolises an ‘evenness’ in the killing. Furthermore, the futile yet worthy sacrifice of the triplets also provides an alternative to a mode of death suggested by Scipio himself shortly after the passage we have been examining. Scipio’s initial reaction to his father’s being surrounded and wounded is twice to attempt suicide (*Pun.* 4.454-79) before Mars, sent by Jupiter, turns the young Scipio’s anger away from himself and re-directs it towards his enemies, thus metamorphosing Scipio from coward into hero (note the implicit contrast between the young Scipio’s attempted suicide and his father’s threats of it, 4.415-6). Scipio, by attempting suicide, is clearly a less than straightforward combination of Virgilian heroic models. That he requires divine assistance to transform him into a successful fighter undermines, to an extent, his claims to exemplarity.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, from our perspective as readers of the episode that precedes Scipio’s failed suicide and subsequent heroism, the future conqueror of Hannibal is a less explicitly good model for behaviour than the heroic but doomed Italian (and, indeed, Carthaginian) brothers despite the fact that in the end his achievements are far greater. Such a novel and complex emotional reaction on the part of Scipio to the sight of his father’s wounding illustrates in microcosm the range of responses that the Hannibalic invasion presents.<sup>50</sup> It is not, after all, the eventual beating of Hannibal’s forces that, in Silius’ vision, is the most important element of *Romanitas* in the Second Punic War, but rather his presentation of Roman steadfastness in the face of the series of crushing defeats that culminate at Cannae. Silius gives us, in other words,

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<sup>48</sup> See *Aen.* 4.628-9. For the figure, see Wills (1996) 200-1 with esp. *Pun.* 4.352-4, 9.322-5; Macrob. 6.3.5.

<sup>49</sup> Although see Marks (2005) 115-22; Tipping (2010) 146-50.

<sup>50</sup> On the novelty of Scipio’s contemplation of suicide, see Marks (2005) 116. The possibilities of suicide are explored at a much broader level by Silius in his account of the glorious mass suicide of the Saguntines, *Pun.* 2.456-707 and the escape from punishment that the Capuans achieve through their mass suicide, *Pun.* 13.256-98. On the Saguntum episode in particular see Dominik (2003); (2006).

within his narrative of the battle of Ticinus a series of possible responses to the overwhelming Carthaginian onslaught: abject defeat, self-sacrifice in defeat, suicide or astonishing heroism. We see in the body of Scipio himself the two most extreme possible responses. For the more 'ordinary' Roman warrior, therefore, death is not an option but an inevitability, and central to Silius' construction of the battle sequence is the choice that Romans had in the manner of their death.

Moreover, to read the narrative of the duel between the sets of triplets only as a negative portrayal of the futility of war is to ignore the way in which Silius' narrative appropriates multiple historical contexts. The passage's desire to 'compress history', that is to re-run a series of overlaid historical narratives simultaneously in a single, tightly-controlled, textual space lends it a universalising quality. The battle thus becomes the appropriate discourse with which to explore the *Punica's* central themes of heroism and patriotism. In this way, Silius' reworking of Virgil's apostrophe to Nisus and Euryalus acquires its own importance (*Pun.* 4.396-400):

felices leti, pietas quos addidit umbris!  
 optabunt similes venientia saecula fratres,  
 aeternumque decus memori celebrabitur aevo,  
 si modo ferre diem serosque videre nepotes  
 carmina nostra valent, nec famam invidit Apollo.

Happy in death those whom loyalty has added to the dead! Coming ages will pray for similar brothers and eternal glory will be remembered throughout eternity if only my poetry is strong enough to endure and to see its distant descendants, nor Apollo deny fame.

In the logic of Silius' Punic War, death is not really the issue. Instead, Silius celebrates the patriotism (however futile it may seem) of all six of his combatants. Despite Silius' careful attempts to distinguish between his combatants, they end their combat as they began it, indistinguishable from one another, united in a combined expression of *pietas*. Yet the crucial element is provided by the historical compression contained within the episode. Without such a system underpinning this narrative, Silius' warriors would soon be forgotten as greater Roman heroes surface (as Scipio is about to do) and start to defeat Rome's greatest enemy. Instead, 'compressing history' allows us to universalise the importance of Silian fighters, making them a useful, relevant and worthy example for his own contemporary audience.

## 5. Conclusion

Rome, Carthage and Sparta have, by Silius' time, become one empire, and one that was frequently equated with the entire world. Silius' incorporation of sustained reference to Livy's Horatii and Curiatii in his portrayal of the battle of Ticinus creates a sense that this is the pre-history of Rome and Alba in macrocosm; the triplets are fighting to create a single, unified *imperium*. Central to our understanding of this passage is the question of the value of such deaths as the Italian and Carthaginian brothers suffer. One suspects that Silius' answer is that, before the battle of Cannae, such deaths are indeed worthwhile and worthy of celebration. After Cannae, and after the series of defeats by Hannibal that tested Roman manhood to breaking point, such losses have less value.<sup>51</sup> There is an imbalance to the central narrative thrust of the *Punica* that most readers find difficult to reconcile. The episode of greatest importance is Rome's greatest defeat, the centrepiece of the poem, and the poet rattles through all the victories that ultimately follow. Rome's victory and gradual assumption of complete control of the world is an anti-climax.<sup>52</sup> The implication is, of course, that after the Second Punic War, there is a shift in the way such things must be perceived, an ethical shift that persisted into Silius' own time. With Rome the dominant power in the Mediterranean, such life-or-death wars as were fought between Rome and Carthage were a thing of the past; foreign conquest happened on the fringes of empire, while for many of Silius' audience, the memory of war would have been dominated by the civil conflict which began in AD 68, the year identified by Silius' name as consul for that year. The focus on civil war is reflected in the tastes of post-Augustan epic, where authors such as Lucan and Statius seize on the suggestions of civil conflict in Virgil's *Aeneid* and make these the central themes of their own poetry. Thus the deaths of the triplets would be less morally worthwhile in a more modern context. Such an implication is foregrounded in Silius' apostrophe and its contrast between Republican heroism and future generations (*optabunt similes venientia saecula fratres*, 'coming ages will pray for similar brothers', 4.397).

However, this is not to say that Silius' historical epic consigns such heroic self-sacrifice to a morally superior yet ultimately intangible Roman past. Instead, the compression of numerous historical narratives within the fabric of one episode at Ticinus, the structural device that informs Silius' battle

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<sup>51</sup> Such a reading is only underlined by Silius' address to the dead Sicilian youth, Prodaetus: *sat prorsus, sat erat decoris discrimine tuto, | sat laudis, cur facta, puer, maiora petebas?*, 'there was enough, more than enough of glory and praise to be won in safe contests; why did you seek greater deeds, boy?', *Pun.* 14.510-11. My thanks to my anonymous reader for this suggestion.

<sup>52</sup> See Pomeroy (1989) 126-7.

narrative, allows such an episode to remain valuable for its exemplarity into Rome's imperial present. Such an approach, combining limited intertextual repetition at the linguistic level with alternate modes of historical reference based on coincidence of situation and context, is part of the novelty of Silius' approach, his distinctive take on Flavian epic. Yet this approach gives his historical epic a totalising characteristic that makes it the best form of discourse with which to reflect upon Roman values. It is central to Silius' presentation of *pietas* as he portrays it here that it is exemplified in the willingness of young men to struggle and die both for family and for their fatherland.

If we find such a formulation to be an interpretation too far, we should end by considering Martial's responses to his contemporary's poetry. Martial is entirely less restrained in his praise of Silius than is the younger Pliny, with whom we began our assessment.<sup>53</sup> Martial is very consistent in his praise for Silius (see esp. Mart. 4.14, also 8.66, 9.86, 11.48, 11.50, 12.67), but especially intriguing is his use of the epithet *perpetuus* to describe Silius as a poet (6.64.10, 7.63.1), combined with a description in one epigram of Silius' poetry as 'undying' (*perpetui numquam moritura volumina Sili | qui legis et Latia carmina digna toga*, 'you who read the undying volumes of immortal Silius, songs worthy of the Latin toga', 7.63.1-2).<sup>54</sup> The epithet surely evokes Ovid's characterisation of his *Metamorphoses* as a *perpetuum carmen* ('eternal song', Ov. *Met.* 1.4). That epic poem, of course, narrated (ostensibly) everything from the creation of the world to the apotheosis of Julius Caesar, universalising poetry of a slightly different order. Martial may thus be making a deeper literary critical point than has previously been suspected. The *Punica* are not simply 'undying volumes' in that they partake of the poetic immortality to which Silius aspires (*Pun.* 4.399-400), but also because they are possessed of a universality in their historical approach and a perpetual relevance comparable to the all-encompassing nature of Ovid's epic. We may view Martial's reading of Silius' epic as an expression of literary encyclopaedism in action: Martial praises a work that transcends its limitations as a historical narrative of a discrete episode in the Roman past. Compressing history thus achieves a further goal for Silius, one which is appreciated and subtly alluded to by Martial. It makes the *Punica*, even in its briefest episodes and narratives, a work that is more than historical epic and of great significance for its Roman audience.

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<sup>53</sup> For the suggestion that Pliny took exception to Silius' career under Nero and his praise of Domitian in the *Punica*, see Nauta (2002) 149.

<sup>54</sup> For Martial's and Pliny's appraisals of Silius see Nauta (2002) 148-50.

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