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N. Bernstein's Commentary on *Punica* 2 and J. Littlewood's Commentary on *Punica* 10 *A Comparative Discussion*

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Abstract

This article reviews two new commentaries on Silius Italicus' *Punica* published in 2017 by Oxford University Press: by Neil Bernstein on book 2 and by Joy Littlewood on book 10. Both volumes offer an introduction, translation and commentary as well as an analysis of important thematic points. This review considers each book's main strengths, discusses their limitations, and demonstrates their immense contribution to Flavian scholarship. Moreover, it examines the place of these two particular books in current Silian studies, considering how they inscribe themselves into current trends.

Keywords

Silius Italicus – *Punica* – commentary – epic poetry – Flavian literature – intertextuality

N.W. Bernstein. *Silius Italicus, Punica 2. Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. liv + 318. Pr. £80.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-874786-4.

R.J. Littlewood. *A Commentary on Silius Italicus' Punica 10*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. lxxix, 265. Pr. £75.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-871381-4.

Flavian literature (69–96 AD) is now gaining ground after years of scholarly neglect. The entire focus on the so-called ‘Golden Age of Latin Literature’ (70 BC to AD 18), in which ‘classical masterpieces’ were composed, inevitably marginalised the literature of the post-Augustan era. This has now changed, and for the last decades, significant steps have been made towards the appreciation and the promotion of first-century AD literature. The new ‘Oxford Commentaries on Flavian Poetry’ series provides a necessary tool for the study of this particular period of Latin literature. The commentaries under review promote this new shift in research by offering significant philological and interpretative studies of books 2 and 10 of Silius Italicus, one of the most neglected authors of the Flavian era. Pliny criticised the *Punica*, condemning Silius for having produced a literary work through effort rather than through talent (*scribebat carmina maiore cura quam ingenio*, *Ep.* 3.7.5). However, a line-by-line commentary can demonstrate the significance of Silius’ literary legacy, and can show that both *ingenium* and *cura* can produce fascinating poetry. The commentaries cover a wide range of themes—from literature, history, geography and politics to narratology and metapoetics. This review aims to show that although these two books might be perceived as strictly philological tools, they offer an invaluable source of information for the text of Silius, the first-century epic tradition and for our understanding of the politics of the early Empire for both undergraduate and postgraduate students and academics from various research backgrounds.

Only a few commentaries have been produced on Silius Italicus’ 17-book epic *Punica*, the largest extant Latin epic poem from antiquity. In 1986–1990 Spaltenstein published a relatively short French language commentary on the whole epic, which is nowadays considered rather outdated. The first modern commentary in English was published in 2011 by Littlewood on *Punica* 7. For the first time this book provided the academic community with an excellent compilation of Silius’ literary models as well as his intertextual discourse with preceding and contemporary literature; it also contained detailed bibliographical references for further research. Since then, there is a resurgence of interest in Silius’ epic with studies on several aspects of his work. The commentaries on *Punica* 2 by Bernstein and *Punica* 10 by Littlewood have now joined this growing number of studies on Flavian epic and on Silius specifically.¹ They explore and reveal Silius’ intellectual nature by dealing with his meticulous

1 Several commentaries on the *Punica* are forthcoming: on book 3 by Augoustakis and Littlewood, on book 9 by Bernstein, on book 13 by van der Keur, and on book 15 by Jacobs. Feeney has written a commentary on *Punica* 1 for his dissertation, and Ariemma has produced an Italian commentary on *Punica* 8.

composition of a 17-book epic on a war that lasted seventeen years, and his erudite but playful use of intertextuality that embellishes the narrative with different genres of preceding literature, including tragedy, mythology, geography, and history. An equally challenging task was the commentators' investigation of Silius' views regarding contemporary politics (mainly the description of the gloomy picture of the early Empire and the pursuit of excessive power in the first-century AD civil wars) through the treatment of a historical event of the distant past.

Bernstein's and Littlewood's commentaries inaugurate a new era of research for Silius and the poetry of the early Empire in general. They also offer a modern English prose translation of the Latin text, the first since the Loeb translation of the whole *Punica* in 1934, along with a literary and interpretative analysis. They provide modern audiences with a new perception of the literature of the Imperial era, revealing the complexities of its social and political context. Their extensive discussion of the Flavian author's subtle references to civil war after 69 situates these commentaries squarely within current Silian trends, including Ginsberg's and Krasne's recent edited volume.² Both commentaries offer a unique opportunity for discussion of the genre of historical epic. They can also be important for scholars with interests beyond Flavian epic, mainly Roman historians, people with research interests in reception studies (e.g. of Ennius, Virgil, Ovid and Lucan), or people working on Late Antiquity, such as Claudian, Prudentius, or Corippus. Finally, the commentaries can also be a useful tool for anyone interested in the geographical, topographical, and ethnographical details of Spain and Italy as provided in book 2 and 10 correspondingly.

The central episode of book 2 is the siege and fall of Saguntum, the event that initiated the Second Punic War, which is surrounded by episodes such as the embassy scene, the description of the shield of Hannibal, the role of the gods, and the Saguntine suicide. This book combines a vivid epic narrative of warfare, combats and divine intervention with scenes of embassy and debates in the Carthaginian Senate, highly rhetorical in style and tone, offering Silius the opportunity to reveal his rhetorical skills as a former senator. Bernstein's expertise in rhetoric, declamation and ways of persuasion render him the appropriate scholar to analyse this particular book. His books *Ethics, Identity, and Community in Later Roman Declamation* (2013) and *In the Image of the Ancestors. Narratives of Kinship in Flavian Epic* (2008), combined with his several articles on various aspects of rhetoric and epic, testify to this research expertise.

² Cf. Ginsberg and Krasne 2018.

Book 10 narrates the battle of Cannae, the most notorious Roman defeat, including Paulus' *aristeia* and the resurgence of Roman *uirtus*, and focuses on great military leaders, other than Scipio and Hannibal. Littlewood's decision to write a commentary on this book focusing on the characters of Aemilius Paulus and Fabius Maximus anticipates John Jacobs' commentary on *Punica* 15 (expected in 2022) where the importance of Marcellus in Silius' eulogy at the moment of the general's death (*Pun.* 15.334-398) is a central theme in the narrative of the whole book. This indicates a tendency in current scholarship on heroism in the *Punica* which expands attention beyond Scipio and Hannibal.

Both commentaries offer an extensive Introduction on each book's main elements: its structure, its literary sources, Silius' epic style and language, metrical issues. They follow the same pattern for the Oxford University Press series (Introduction, Latin text, English translation, Commentary, Bibliography, *Index locorum*, General index), but they are also distinct in their approach. Bernstein gives special emphasis to intertextuality and textual issues, whereas Littlewood focuses more on interpretation but engages less with the transmission of the text.

Both commentaries begin with a detailed section on Silius' biography and political career, followed by a section discussing each book's relationship with the historiographical sources on the siege of Saguntum (*Punica* 2) and the battle of Cannae (*Punica* 10). In the third section, Bernstein analyses the most important episodes and themes of the book, such as the embassy scene, the shield of Hannibal, the role of the gods and the Saguntine suicide, whereas Littlewood writes a characterisation of the protagonists of book 10, i.e., L. Aemilius Paulus, P. Cornelius Scipio, Q. Fabius Maximus, and Hannibal, following the same pattern she used for the Introduction on *Punica* 7. In the fourth section, Littlewood focuses on central themes of *Punica* 10, the most important of which is *luxuria* resulting from Imperialism as a cause of civil war; here she expands her previous discussion in her *Punica* 7 commentary and analyses the way the Flavian epics and the *Punica* in particular allude to the Roman civil wars. In her analysis of *Punica* 10, she connects wealth and luxury with imperialism after the Roman defeat at Cannae, but more importantly she draws connections with wealth and imperialism in the Flavian era. Littlewood is particularly interested in showing how Silius assimilates different genres within the epic narrative;³ so she reads the epilogue of *Punica* 10 as an epigram which allows Silius to express his own opinion regarding the Punic wars: Carthage should not have been destroyed, so that Rome could have been able to preserve her ancient morality. Prompted by Silius' statement *Carthago*

3 Cf. her contribution to Bessone and Fucecchi 2017.

seruanda est, Littlewood approaches the main theme of the book, *luxuria* and civil war, as an allusion to Silius' contemporary political situation.

Bernstein chooses another approach: in his fourth section, he analyses the intertextual method of Silius, focusing on the relationship of *Punica* 2 with poetic traditions that precede Silius (mainly Virgil and Ovid), as well as traditions contemporary to him (Valerius and Statius). Littlewood followed the same approach in *Punica* 7 by analysing individual cases of intertextuality within the book. In *Punica* 10, instead, she includes Silius' intertextuality in broader discussions of various thematic subjects; for example, in her analysis of the poetics of defeat in *Punica* 10, Littlewood compares Silius' Aemilius Paulus with Hector in *Ilias* 22 and Turnus in *Aeneis* 12. In his fourth section, Bernstein also offers an innovative discussion of the reception of the poem, mainly how the *Punica* was interpreted in eighteenth-century commentaries, and the reasons why the poem remained in obscurity for so long. In section 5, Littlewood examines Silius' epic style, the structure of *Punica* 10, aspects of language and style, and the use of the similes in the Cannae narrative. Bernstein does the same in his fifth section, also focusing on Silius' language and style. Both commentators notice that Silius uses his rhetorical skills to convey specific meanings. Littlewood discusses examples of Silius' use of rhetorical figures of speech, such as hyperbaton and polyptoton, to argue that through word order he accentuates what is important in the epic narrative. Bernstein argues that Silius uses a variety of linguistic registers to match the variety of narrative content he uses in one episode, a characteristic of both Roman epic and rhetoric. Finally, they both agree on Silius' preference for poetic over prosaic synonyms (such as *ensis* instead of *gladius*, or *ductor* instead of *dux*), and the absence of Graecisms (in contrast to Statius or Valerius).

In section 6, both commentators analyse metrical issues and Silius' prosody. Littlewood concludes the Introduction with a discussion on the transmission and reception of the text, whereas Bernstein describes the style and method of his translation of the Latin text. He "aims to provide a preliminary interpretation of the text and also to capture some of the varied linguistic registers featured in *Punica* 2" (lii). His choice therefore has a greater chance of conveying the concepts behind the text than a literal translation. Additionally, Bernstein lists four places where he departs from Delz' text (in lines 293, 366, 460, 487). This feature unfortunately is absent from Littlewood's, who adheres to the edition of Delz—it would have been useful for the reader to know the rationale behind her constitution of the text and the translation.

Some themes treated in the introductions deserve a more detailed analysis. Both commentaries discuss how the siege of Saguntum and the battle at Cannae have crossed over from historiography to the genre of epic poetry.

In the second chapter of the Introduction ("From History to Epic: Silius' adaptation of Livy in *Punica* 10"), Littlewood analyses how Silius differentiates himself from Livy's pessimistic approach, and how he adapts his narrative into an elevated style, appropriate for the epic genre. For example, where Livy employs the *recusatio* saying that he supposedly is unable to describe how the news about the defeat at Cannae and the death of both consuls reached Rome, Silius opts for a high epic style, making *Fama* disseminate the news, thus creating an intertextual dialogue with Virgil's *Fama*.⁴ A second example is Littlewood's analysis of Silius' decision to show Rome's moral resurgence and Varro's regeneration in contrast to Livy's more "pragmatic military narrative" (xxi), so that Silius shapes the historical narrative into a more heroic epic style. As part of Silius' elevated epic style, Littlewood discusses the cosmic elements in the battle between the Roman forces and divine power marshalled by Juno. She argues for a strongly Lucanian influence, through which Silius illustrates how internal divisions lead to self-destruction. In the same vein, Bernstein's analysis of Silius' relationship with historiography in Chapter 2 ("Epicizing History") comes to the same conclusion: that the epic poet adapts Livy's narrative on the siege of Saguntum in book 21 so that it suits the epic genre. Bernstein convincingly brings examples from the narrative of book 2 where poetic imagination gives Silius the opportunity to expand and exaggerate Livy's historical events. He focuses on the mass suicide episode, the final episode of *Punica* 2, which, according to Bernstein, is treated in an exaggerated way and thus contrasts with Livy's more moderate narrative. Bernstein then argues that Silius was influenced by the rhetorical tradition of his own times and shows that the story of the Saguntines' death was a popular topic in declamations, described as either a necessary and inevitable action or a heroic one. Bernstein's previous research on declamation, especially his studies of ps. Quintilian's *Major Declamations*,⁵ enables him to further explore the technique of fictional scenarios in Silius' treating the Saguntine suicide, which can reveal different ethical and social approaches: the Saguntine suicide can indeed be interpreted both as an example of ethical concepts, such as *fides* and *uirtus*, or as an image of civil war. At the end, Bernstein discusses the major theme of Roman *fides* and Carthaginian *perfidia* and describes how Silius follows Valerius Maximus in presenting a personified Fides to act in the Saguntine minds rather than simply showing the Saguntines' sense of loyalty, as was done by Livy (21.7.3).⁶

4 Littlewood, *Commentary*, xviii-xix.

5 Cf. Bernstein 2009, 2013, 2016.

6 This discussion seems to be a current topic in Flavian scholarship given the forthcoming book on *Fides* in Flavian Literature edited by Augoustakis, Buckley, and Stocks 2019.

A second aspect of both commentaries worth highlighting is their treatment of the Silian similes. Book 10 abounds in similes, and Littlewood rightly includes in the introduction an informative chapter particularly focused on this subject (Chapter V.4). More specifically, there are four big cat similes—two for Paulus' *aristeia* (at 10.1-5, 18-22) and two for his strength at death time, where at 10.241-246 Paulus is compared to a lion and at 10.293-296 appears as a tigress—as well as two shipwreck similes at 10.321-325 and 10.608-612. Littlewood has analysed Paulus' *aristeia* and his comparison to a ferocious lion already in chapter III.1 of the Introduction.⁷ In Chapter V she resumes this analysis and investigates the similes more extensively: whereas the lion simile is discussed briefly, she focuses on the very moment of Paulus' death that is compared to the defiance of a tigress. Moreover, as there are two shipwreck similes (one when after Paulus' death the plain of Cannae resembles the flotsam of shipwreck, 10.321-325, and the other when Varro's flight from the battle is compared to a helmsman who escaped alone at the moment of a shipwreck, 10.608-612), Littlewood concludes that the defiance of a lion and its dignity in death illustrates Paulus' heroism at the moment of his own death, which contrasts with the shipwreck simile that illustrates the destruction of the Roman army caused by Varro's irresponsible leadership. This comparison is analysed more in depth in the commentary on the corresponding lines (293-297), where Littlewood convincingly argues that the image of Paulus' weakness is intensified by the use of the female gender of the tigress as a comparison. Littlewood's discussion, however, does not include references to other Flavian literature, in which the weak and submissive tigress is a common image. For example, in Mart. *Sp.* 18.1-6 a tigress is shown licking the spear of her keeper, just as in *Punica* 10 a sign of submission. This parallel connects the two similes and adds a sense of theatricality, characteristic of Imperial poetry, implying that Paulus' death is being staged as if it were an arena spectacle. It also adds a sense of exoticism to the epic, as the tigress is a geographical marker for exotic lands outside the Roman Empire. However, the tigress in her uncontrolled rage when defending her cubs can also be used as an image of intensification, as is shown in Stat. *Theb.* 10.288-292 and V. Fl. 6.146-149.

Additionally, the connection of Paulus' weakness and femininity contributes to the general motif of enervation and the poetics of defeat occurring in the epic and particularly viewed in Hannibal's character. Throughout the epic, Hannibal is constantly associated with female characters (he is Dido's

7 Not at II.1 as it is indicated at page lxvii. The fear of Paulus' appearance to the Spanish mercenaries who are ready to capture Cato is compared to the fear of a growling lion to a hunter ready to bag his captured roe deer.

descendant and Juno's protégé, his allies are mainly female characters such as Asbyte in book 2) and thus represents the Eastern enemy who is condemned to be feminised and defeated.⁸ In this sense, we can argue that the extermination of Paulus (*hic finis Paulo*, 10.305), who has been a synecdochic hero for the Roman soldiers (*cape, quaeso, hunc, unica rerum | fessarum spes, cornipedem*, 10.273-274), anticipates Hannibal, the synecdochic hero for the Carthaginian soldiers (17.400), whose disappearance at the end of the epic (17.581-582) signifies the end of the war (*hic finis bello*, 17.618). Although in the commentary Littlewood compares Paulus to Fabius, another 'standing' hope for his soldiers as he appears in *Punica* 7, a discussion of the case of Hannibal would have completed the analysis.⁹

This leads us to a less strong feature of Littlewood's commentary: her (non-) treatment of *Punica* 17. Books 10 and 17 complement each other, as they narrate key moments of the whole epic: the most notorious Roman defeat, the battle of Cannae, and the most glorious Roman victory, the battle of Zama. Half of Littlewood's Introduction focuses on the characters of book 10, among which are Scipio and Hannibal. However, there is no mention of both leaders' appearance in *Punica* 17 and on their relationship as an antithetical and complementary pair of defeat and victory. Littlewood's illuminating section on the characterisation of Scipio, where she correctly views Scipio as Hannibal's nemesis,¹⁰ could have been enhanced by additional intratextual links from *Punica* 17, where Silius describes Scipio's cosmic revenge for Hannibal's past massacre whereby he purifies the natural world defiled by Hannibal's acts of transgression during the Second Punic War (17.479-521). This is the ultimate moment where Scipio appears as Hannibal's avenger and takes place in the final lines of the epic. A good conclusion to this chapter could have been a comparison of both protagonists, Scipio and Hannibal, showing that they can be two sides of the same coin.¹¹ The connection of *Punica* 10 and 17, the moment of defeat and the moment of victory for the Romans, could also have

8 The Roman idea of Orientalism according to which the East is defeated, distant, treacherous, and feminine, whereas the West is powerful, loyal, and masculine, has been extensively analysed by Keith 2010.

9 Bernstein in his commentary analyses how episodes of *Punica* 2, such as Asbyte's defeat, anticipate Hannibal's defeat at the end of the epic; cf. xxiii-iv.

10 See Littlewood, *Commentary*, p. xxxv.

11 Other possible connections between the two leaders could be viewed in their mutual respect of familial oaths. Scipio's virtues and his filial piety should be combined with his decision to engrave the image of his father and uncle on his shield, remaining faithful to his memory and his oath that he will be their avenger. In this way, he shares similarities with Hannibal, whose oath to revenge the memory of his father and his ancestress Dido imbues the whole epic narrative.

been revealed in Littlewood's analysis of the significance of the soldiers' names participating in the battle of Cannae and which evoke Rome's civil wars. Silius follows the same strategy in *Punica* 17 where names of soldiers such as Calenus, Herius, or Norbanus are taking part in the battle of Zama although they have no known connection with the Second Punic War.¹² In this case too, more attention to intratextual links with key moments and books of the epic would have been useful.

The role of the gods in *Punica* 10 as explored by Littlewood deserves further scrutiny. At lines 45-71 Juno is disguised as the coward Metellus to persuade Paulus to leave the battle; she then not only fails in her purpose but also causes a significant delay in the narrative. Littlewood convincingly discusses the morality of Juno's advice to Paulus, comparing Paulus' reluctance to flee the battlefield to Hector's reaction at *Il.* 22.61-65; both share an inability to endure the shame of flight. However, this analysis overlooks the role of Juno herself as well as her intentions and implications in the epic narrative. Some introductory comments regarding Juno's intratextual role in the *Punica*, as well as her narratological function, would have helped. Juno has a structural role in the epic, appearing at the beginning (1.29-38) to inspire first the Carthaginians with *furor* against the Romans, and then Hannibal with typical Carthaginian hatred at the first moment she inserts him into the epic narrative (1.42-55). She also intervenes when needed to save Hannibal's life, disrupting the narrative sequence: for example, in book 10 as well as in book 17 she disguises herself, as the Carthaginian Gelesta (10.83-91) and as a shepherd (17.567-580), and diverts Hannibal from the battlefield. In the final book of the epic, Juno's action to save Hannibal for the last time (17.567-580) signifies the end of her divine intervention in the whole epic. Among the gods, she opens and closes the epic narrative, while intervening in the middle of episodes to cause delay or confusion. In *Punica* 2, Juno's actions are catastrophic: she sends the Fury Tisiphone to inspire the Saguntines to commit suicide rather than endure capture by the Carthaginians (526-579). Bernstein's analysis of Juno's action in his Introduction is also brief as he focuses more on Hercules and Fides, two ambivalent figures in the *Punica*. In his commentary, though, he discusses in different lemmata (e.g. 526, 529, 531) Juno's emotions within the *Punica* and offers rich intertextual references on other appearances of Juno and on other gods in epic with similar reactions.

Moving on to Bernstein's Introduction, one important theme in *Punica* 2 is the Saguntine suicide (592-707). In Chapter 3.vi, Bernstein examines the

12 McGuire 2010 offers a thorough analysis on the anachronistic names of the soldiers at Cannae.

subject of suicide extensively and connects the Saguntine siege to Roman civil wars, recalling fratricidal episodes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's Massilian episode (3.340-355) and his Opitergian suicide (4.540-565). In his book *Ethics, Identity and Community in Later Roman Declamation*, Bernstein has already discussed how acts of suicide functioned as a strategy of aristocratic resistance to tyrannical rule from Republican times until the end of the 1st c. AD. Now he provides readers with a significant analysis of the political element of the Saguntine suicide in particular. Defining the action of mass suicide as a democratic one, he distinguishes it from aristocratic suicide practices in Silius' contemporaries, such as those of Lucan, Seneca and Petronius, emphasising that the Saguntines were compelled by the Fury to act (*inuitas ... dextras*, 617) rather than acting from free choice. According to Bernstein, the Saguntines' suicide is a negative *exemplum*, in contrast to the exemplary one at Capua as narrated in *Punica* 13. One chapter earlier (3.v), Bernstein draws parallels with the Capuan suicide when discussing the combined role of Fides and Fury in both books: at Saguntum, Fides and Fury work in opposition whereas at Capua, they work in concert. Bernstein had the opportunity to offer a more detailed analysis of civil war themes in the Saguntum Episode in his article in Ginsberg and Krasne 2018; yet here and in his commentary, he omits references to any philosophical thoughts. It would have been possible to view the Saguntine suicide within a Stoic philosophical frame, for example, or to read about Silius' debated philosophical inclinations. At the end of this analysis, Bernstein briefly connects the idea of Roman *fides* with Silius' own times. But a further connection between Silius and politics would have been helpful. For this particular chapter, Bernstein's and Littlewood's commentaries supplement each other, since Littlewood devotes about eight pages of her Introduction on the allusions of the epic narrative on Flavian politics (chapter IV).

Littlewood's English translation is a new feature, as in her previous commentary on *Punica* 7 there was no English translation of the Latin text. There is a mismatch between the Latin text and the translation on several pages which causes a slight confusion; Littlewood herself is not to be blamed for this typesetting problem. To assist the reader, Littlewood could have included line numbers in her English translation to enable the reader to keep track of the Latin text, as Bernstein does. Moreover, Littlewood's use of footnotes within the Latin text to indicate alternative readings shown in the apparatus might confuse some readers. Bernstein (at xliii-vi) offers a full explanation of how he treats those variants not only in terms of word choice but also in terms of style (e.g. the way he treats and translates rhetorical devices such as hypallages, hyperbaton etc.), preparing his reader for his effort to capture the varied linguistic registers, such as military notions, rhetorical effects or elegiac vocabulary. For

example, in the debate between Hanno and Gestar in the Carthaginian Senate (270-390), Bernstein retains the rhetorical tone of the phrase at line 289 *ut, qui stelligero speculator sidera caelo* with 'I am like the helmsman who watches the starry sky's constellations'. Although 'helmsman' is not in the Latin, Bernstein captures the rhetoric behind Hanno's implication of his crucial role for the state at this particular point of the narrative. Littlewood, on the other hand, acknowledges Silius' epic style at chapter V.2 and tries to remain faithful to the original text, but also to explain it wherever necessary. For example, she stresses Silius' emphasis on word order and significant juxtaposition, as seen at 552 *Hannibal Ausonio cremat haec de nomine uictor*, which she translates 'Hannibal, conqueror of the Ausonian land, cremates', keeping the emphasis on Hannibal's status as conqueror. In the corresponding line in the commentary section, she analyses the word order and remarks the antithetical phrases *Hannibal ... uictor*, which frames the line, and *Ausonio ... nomine*, which shows the defeated land.

Littlewood divides her commentary into large thematic units, providing each one with a title. She summarises each part before moving on to the lemmatic commentary. Sometimes, before the comments on the lines, and after the summary, she introduces the whole piece under analysis. Both the summary and the title helpfully indicate changes of subject, and/or facilitate the transition from preceding episodes. Bernstein divides the commentary into smaller thematic units, gives a brief summary of the events under discussion and then discusses the lemmata. He does not give titles to those thematic units, although that would be a welcome addition for readers, helping them to recognise the subject under discussion.¹³ Bernstein's commentary is abundant in intertextual references but not all of them substantially illuminate the significance of the passage in question. Citing parallels is important, since often they generate ideas, but citing too many parallels can confuse the reader rather than elucidate the interpretation. One such example can be seen in line 355, on Juno's action to stimulate the Roman minds with jealousy, where Bernstein discusses the idea of jealousy as a darkening force by quoting—not simply citing—numerous intratextual and intertextual references without any discussion of their relevance. More engagement with relevant passages from the

13 In general, Littlewood's layout is handier and easier to read, as she explicitly indicates the passage on which she is commenting and prepares the reader for what follows. Bernstein indicates only the number of lines on which he comments, with no introduction on the episode, which can make the reader lost, compelling him/her to go back and forth in the Introduction to understand the immediate context of each passage.

Punica would have been preferable, so that the reader can see how the same subject and concept have been important for Silius and in what ways he presents them in *Punica* 2. Another example is in lines 349–352, on the discussion of Hannibal's oath, where Bernstein quotes the whole passage from Liv. 21.1.4 and Val. Max. 9.3. ext.3 to show that Hannibal's oath is attested in historiographical and exemplary literature. A simple reference to these passages without quoting them would have been equally sufficient, and would have saved space for analysis and interpretation.

One of the most impressive features of Bernstein's commentary lies in his discussion of textual criticism as well as citations from early scholarship on Silius, such as the 18th century commentaries of Drakenborch (1717), Ernesti (1792) and Ruperti (1795). He also discusses textual issues from early editions, such as Heinsius (1600) and Schrader (1761), so that the reader has an overview of how interpretations of Silius have developed through the centuries. He critically replies to these different emendations with phrases such as "Duff's interpretation is incorrect" (on lines 85–86), or "Lemaire's explanation is incorrect" (on lines 83–84); at other times he adds his interpretation to existing ones with phrases such as "to Spaltenstein's example we can add" (on line 87). As already mentioned, he decided to change Delz' edition in seven cases, always supporting and explaining the reasons. The commentary is therefore also useful for its philological reassessment of the text of Silius. Littlewood, on the other hand, rarely engages with those older interpretations; she cites Spaltenstein whenever necessary but seldom discusses earlier scholars' views. It would have been helpful for the reader to see when and how she departs from any other previous scholarship, and what new interpretation she brings in her commentary. As for textual issues, Littlewood only occasionally discusses the manuscript tradition, but when she does, her answer is convincing (see comment on 175 or 367–368).

In sum, both commentaries are essential resources for the study of Silius, offering exceptionally helpful tools for the illumination of Silius' difficult and compressed Latin. Writing a commentary is an art of infinite possibilities and inevitably different commentators approach the text in different ways. Both books can be recommended to scholars interested in the *Punica*, the language and the political elements of the Flavian period, as well as to those studying Livy and the methods of epicising history, and those interested in the reception of the *Aeneid*. Undergraduate students are not entirely included within Bernstein's audience, but postgraduate students will certainly benefit from both commentaries. All in all, the two commentaries presented here seriously take into consideration the rich intertextuality of the *Punica* and give new insights into the study of Flavian culture and identity.

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