

SILIUS ITALICUS AND NARRATOLOGY

SCHADEL (E.) *Ambiguities of War: a Narratological Commentary on Silius Italicus' Battle of Ticinus (Sil. 4.1–479)*. (*Mnemosyne Supplements* 463.) Pp. viii + 418. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022. Cased, €148. ISBN: 978-90-04-52266-4.

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I. de Jong, the standard-bearer of narratology among Classicists, explains that narratological commentaries differ from more traditional philological commentaries; they 'are not comprehensive, but concentrate on one aspect of the text: its narrative art' (I. de Jong, *Narratology and Classics* [2014], p. 10). In conspicuous ways, this commentary on the first half of Silius Italicus' *Punica* 4 by S. goes against what readers expect to find in a commentary on the historical epic. Those readers' expectations have become more ossified in recent years thanks to the explosion in interest for Silius' epic. Commentaries have appeared on Books 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12; passing over the admittedly valuable contributions of unpublished dissertations, C. van der Keur's commentary on Book 13 has just been published, and we eagerly await the work of R. Marks (Book 14), J. Jacobs (Book 15), and M. Fucecchi and A. Roumpou (Book 17), independently. While this new edition is idiosyncratic and will not be the last word on *Punica* 4, S. has nonetheless provided a valuable resource for assessing this critical book of the epic.

S. focuses the commentary on the opening half of *Punica* 4; the exigencies of dissertating, perhaps, have led to the truncation. In any case, this section of the *Punica* is tremendously important in its own right. The introduction and *aristeia* of Scipio Africanus, who saves his wounded father at the battle of the Ticinus, is the most momentous scene. The commentary falls into two uneven halves: a hefty introduction (90+ pages) followed by the commentary proper. S. does not provide the Latin text or an apparatus criticus, instead choosing to follow J. Delz's 1987 Teubner for the Latin text and apparatus. S. departs from Delz in two cases, reading ω 's consensus *canit* instead of Damsté's *capit* at Sil. 4.5 (p. 109) and suggesting P's *arma* for ω 's (not 'Delz's', as S. claims) *ora* at Sil. 4.166 (p. 194 n. 23: *miserisque suo lavit ora cruore*). S.'s discussion of 4.5 merits consideration. As for line 166, S.'s intertextual defence of *arma cruore* (otherwise preferred by Silius and Virgil in this *sedes*; for *ora cruore* cf. only Ov. *Met.* 15.98 and Petr. 120.96) seems, to this reviewer, wrong; *arma* makes *miseris* needlessly bathetic.

Throughout the commentary S. focuses on ambiguity, which she understands in a semiotic sense to deal with individual units anticipating multiple, and substantively discrete, interpretations (p. 31). Silius, as scholars such as R. Cowan have demonstrated, is interested in building a sense of suspense (a significant narratological concept) around the Second Punic War. S. searches hard for such ambiguous moments throughout Book 4, but the results are mixed. On the one hand, S.'s close reading of 4.57 (*signum furoris*) shows how Silius ambivalently applies the motivation of madness, usually reserved for the Carthaginians, to the 'self-destructive' Romans (p. 142). S. qualifies this ambiguity as a case of 'double focalization', and it is a remarkable strength that the book consistently fits literary theory to philological data. To make this theory less burdensome, S. includes a handy glossary of narratological terms.

On the other hand, S. not infrequently puts too much weight on minor elements of ambiguity. I was not prepared, for instance, to follow S. so far in reading Quirinius' death as emblematic of Rome's possible downfall; the contrafactual 'textual possible world', as S. would term it, does not seem adequately activated within the text (pp. 223–5 *ad*

4.213–15). Compare this, for instance, to S.'s convincing argument that the death of the Roman Catus at the hands of the mistaken Carthaginian prophet Bogus activates such connotations: her close attention to the contrafactual language of the scene demonstrates the power of S.'s approach (pp. 179–85 *ad* 4.134–42). In short, S. proposes significant and theoretically compelling ways to read the *Punica*, but her limited scope often cannot bear such interpretative weight. As narratological readings of the *Punica* become more common (see most recently P. van den Broek, *Narratives in Silius Italicus' Punica* [2023]), we should look forward to S.'s broader readings of the poem using the theories she advances here.

Every scholar of the *Punica*, for instance, will benefit from becoming familiar with S.'s discussion of the epic's engagement with 'possible worlds theory' (pp. 54–60). Silianists have discussed for some time the epic's complex relationship with the past and, through it, the present: our poet is spinning a (sometimes fictionalised) historical narrative of a world not his own. And yet, Silius clearly thinks that this world speaks to his own historical moment. S. differentiates between an 'actual world' that is true to historical events (i.e. our and Silius' world) and a 'textual actual world' that is the fictional creation of the poet-narrator and that can mimic or depart from the events of the 'actual world'. Most significantly, within this 'textual actual world' there is a 'textual possible world' created by internal narrators who imagine events playing out in a way that is contrary to the history of the 'actual world'. There is, therefore, suspense and dramatic power in the way in which the poet-narrator resolves the frictions between the 'textual actual world' and the 'textual possible world' vis-à-vis our own 'actual world'. This discussion has left me with a hermeneutically powerful shorthand for the way in which Silius encourages us to view events and history through, for example, Hannibal's eyes.

One, of course, does not usually come to a commentary looking for robust literary theories. Typically, commentaries on the *Punica* have an intertextual focus, especially searching for Livian and Virgilian/epic precedents. Outside of one episode (the battle of two sets of triplets reflecting Livy's Horatii and Curiatii) and some limited overviews (pp. 79–90, 139–46), S. eschews Livian *Quellenforschung*. Virgil and other epic sources (especially Lucan and Homer) are well represented. However, as this is not primarily an intertextual commentary, I noted some *desiderata* throughout, where S. could have bolstered her readings by noting Silius' Virgilian sources. For instance, the consul Scipio's words to the Gaul Crixus at Sil. 4.286 (*ferre haec umbris proavoque memento*; cf. pp. 268–9 *ad loc.*) almost certainly recall the Virgilian Neoptolemus' rebuke of Priam at *Aen.* 2.548–9 (*illi* [i.e. Achilles] *mea trisita facta | degeneremque Neoptolemum narrare memento*). Such a reading not only reemphasises the *urbs capta* motif (cf. *ad* 4.279: *captaeque . . . urbi*), but also calls into question the nature of Scipio's 'morally not unequivocal' (p. 266) and ultimately self-destructive, wrath. Furthermore, the phrase *ac vix tela furori | sufficiunt* (Sil. 4.351–2), describing the pitched fighting between Romans and Carthaginians, probably looks back to the *Aeneid's* first simile (1.150: *furor arma ministrat*), which describes the political turmoil of the late Republic. Activating this parallel reveals the loss of the *metus hostilis* that S. traces throughout the book and which is so clearly on display in this passage. Here, we see in stark relief the destructive transfer of *furor* from foreign enemy to Rome herself.

Silianists owe S. a debt of gratitude. The *Punica* lacks a resource quite like this one, and every scholar of Silius will benefit from consulting S.'s work. The writing is clear, and I noted almost no typographical errors. The bibliography is rich and masterfully deployed (no small feat, given the number of languages represented in the Silian literature). Most importantly, S.'s work demonstrates the possibilities of further narratological investigation into the epic. There is more work to be done on *Punica* 4, but this is an excellent start.

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