

Book XII of Silius Italicus' *Punica* ends with Hannibal's retreat from outside Rome in the face of first Fulvius Flaccus' defence, next the impossibility of fighting a battle in the worst weather Jupiter can muster, and finally the realization that his opponents are gods. This calls up an interest in the relationship between man and nature, man and the gods and draws on various philosophies the ancients held in these areas. This essay will address these ideas and explore how they are presented and to what degree Silius separates or conflates the divine plane and that of the natural and human world.

From line 603 Jupiter catches sight of Hannibal *_in antem / Romuleo ... succedere vallo_* and immediately moves into action, summoning the relevant gods each to their hill and the elements to his will. This section through to line 625 has much in common with traditional storm scenes in epic in terms of diction and general depiction: there is a great emphasis on the winds, *_uentos_* (610), and their various aspects, *_hinc Notus, hinc Boreas, hinc ... Africus_* (617); on clouds, *_nubes_* (610), darkness, *_terras caeco nox condit amictu_* (613), blindness and being hidden, *_in stat tempestas oculis, hostique propinquo, Roma latet_* (614f); on rain and water, *_fluit agmen aquarum_* (619; cf. *_aquae mons_* (*Aen.* 1.105)); and especially on thunder and lightning, *_fulminaque et tonitrus_* (611), the noise and power of it, culminating in Jupiter's casting of the bolt at Hannibal from 622ff. This vocabulary is typical of storm scenes, and an obvious comparison is with the storm scene in the first book of the *Aeneid*; not only because of similarities in diction, and even specific metaphorical analogies such as *_agmen aquarum/aquae mons_* just noted; but also because of an acknowledgement of the Epicurean school of thought when it comes to acts of weather.

Hannibal's response to the storm is that the acts of the elements are blind, *_caecum e nubibus ignem_*, and empty, *_murmuraque a uentis misceri uana_*; evoking the creed of Lucretius. Vergil did the same with the storm scene in book I of the *Aeneid*: lines 58ff *_ni faciat..._* emphasize the course the winds would take if they were not harnessed by Aeolus. It has been noted that Vergil's description of the raw power of the winds both acknowledges and undercuts the methods espoused in Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*: Vergil allows that the winds are natural forces independent from the gods, and the argument is put forward in a very Lucretian way; if this explanation did not hold then this observation would not be made; but a god is necessary to keep these forces in check. In a similar way Silius has Hannibal dismiss the ominous implication of the storm and in Epicurean fashion attribute it to the whimsical but explainable ways of the weather; and while the adjectives *_uanus_* and *_caecus_* do well describe the mechanical and self-determined nature of Epicurean science, it is in this case

Hannibal who is *_caecus_*, blind to the gods who thwart him invisibly. The Epicurean argument is dismantled even further by the nearly comical extent to which Silius pushes the situation: Hannibal's statement is hard to take seriously as he utters it melted sword and blasted shield in hand; the consequent fine weather, violent storm, fine weather sequence adds to this effect.

After Hannibal's effort to meet in battle is checked for the first time, the sun comes out again, as suddenly as it had been shrouded by storm-clouds. In contrast to Hannibal's espousal of Lucretian ideas about the gods and the natural world, the *_Aeneadae_* (639) recognize the divine hand in their deliverance and immediately go about a ritual of thanks, praying to Iuppiter to slay Hannibal in the field.

This is an interesting characterization of the Romans. The Roman conquest depended on the strength of the Roman army, which meant the strength of the ordinary infantryman and that heroism was discouraged. Here Silius has the citizens of Rome appear supplicant in the face of battle and admit their foe's unique invincibility in mortal combat, *_haud alia potis est occumbere dextra_*. Their religiosity is to be admired as Roman as compared to Hannibal's denying the gods any hand in the situation, and it is perhaps something Roman that they recognize and despise heroism in their enemy, in that that concept would be shameful to find in the Roman army; but it is a little disconcerting that the might of Rome is no match for this single man, that they must cower behind a delay to battle and supplicate the gods with humble hands, *_submissas ... dextras_* (640), to deliver them. It brings to mind Aeneas' match Turnus and the fact that Aeneas, powerful as he was, had to have Turnus' energy sapped by the gods before he could conquer him. What follows is an example of how Silius can, as elsewhere throughout the poem, turn an embarrassment or defeat into something worthy of a place in epic; for a war may involve many defeats before triumph, and to maintain the optimism and conviction that epic demands was a difficult task for a poet choosing the Punic war as his topic.

The second day of Hannibal's attempts outside the walls of Rome is dealt with more swiftly, but the storm is clearly even more impressive than the last; this whole episode may be seen as a sort of tricolon crescendo in respect of the storm's power, for where the previous day the realm of man was wracked this day sees various gods disturbed. *_tremat et Rhodope Taurusque et Pindus et Atlas_* (658): these four are names for both mythological figures and great mountain ranges; Silius pushes the effect of the storm towards influencing the divine but keeps it rooted firmly in the physical world. So too the other mythological references to Erebus and Typhoeus are to a place and figure under ground and between the ground and a mountain respectively, so that Iuppiter's thunder may

be interpreted both as being so powerful to transcend the physical world and reach for the divine or mythological, and to physically shake the most massive features of the earth far and wide and deep.

The effect of this somewhat more powerful storm is apparent in Hannibal's initial passivity in being turned back a second time: he is *_cunctantem et uana minantem_* (662) and the winds *_circumagit_* and *_cogit_* (663); he cannot weather this one. Back in camp, however, he continues in his rational Epicurean defence. After a second discouragement Hannibal's troops need a stronger argument to be persuaded to fight. He puts forward two more of the "if the gods were concerned with human affairs then some certain actions would follow; these actions do not occur, so the gods are not concerned with human affairs" exempla: a) if the gods were against the Carthaginians then they would have defended the Romans at Cannae and Lake Trasimene, but the Carthaginians triumphed in both these battles; and b) if the gods were defending the city of Rome then they could easily cut off the head of the attack, Hannibal himself, and the defence would be complete, but at lines 622ff Iuppiter was content to strike only Hannibal's shield and allow the man to live to return to the field the next day. He again makes the point that it is only the weather preventing the meeting of arms, and closes his speech by clashing his armor.

The words which describe this final act, *_armis imitatur murmura caeli_*, are another case which can be interpreted on two planes: the divine and the natural. On the one hand the act may be interpreted as a challenge to Iuppiter, and so paralleled by the proud self-elevation or -deification of other mythical characters; Turnus again springs to mind. On the other hand it may be interpreted as a demonstration that all that is stopping his men is noise, and that men too can be terrifying in the same way. This latter interpretation is more likely to be Hannibal's own intent, since he has thus far denied Iuppiter any hand in the affair; but for the reader, since Silius inclines towards religion and Roman values, the former interpretation would be to the fore, and it is this theme, Hannibal's blind arrogance, which Silius capitalizes upon, expanding it to full force in his third movement.

Once again Hannibal's anti-theistic argument is contrasted immediately with the piety of the Romans. The Romans *_tantum confidere divis_* (686) that they send reinforcing soldiers **away** from the city. Hannibal is angered even further by this and is even more driven to make battle. Whereas in the previous day's attempt he got as near as *_quantum tramittere iactae / sufficerent hastae_* (652f), without any Roman defence, *_iamque propinquabat muro_*, so that the gods are pressed by his insistent to their ultimate defence of the city; to make it manifest to the attacker.

First, however, there is a scene which takes place on high between Iuppiter and Iuno. Much as in the twelfth book of the Aeneid where at line 793 Iuppiter asks *_quae iam finis erit, coniunx?_* and they come to an agreement, here too Iuppiter recognizes that though Iuno is behind the trouble, she is still to him *_coniunxque sororque / cara_* (693f; cf. *_es germana Iouis Saturnique altera proles_* (*_Aen._* 12.830)), and he is willing to make concessions, *_fuerit..._* 695; cf. *_do quod uis, et me uictusque uolensque remitto_* (*_Aen._* 12.833)) in order to bring about his universal will. However, where in the Aeneid Iuppiter makes his concession only to placate Iuno (*_irarum tantos uoluis sub pectore fluctus!_* (*_Aen._* 12.831)), never dropping his air of knowledge of the inevitable, here Silius presents a Iuppiter who complains to his wife, "it's not fair!" This is especially clear in the last sentence of his entreaty, where he expresses concern that Hannibal now tries to match his own thunder and lightning. This image of a supreme god feeling threatened by a mortal both emphasizes the superhuman character of Hannibal in the eyes of the Romans and plays a part in Silius' peculiar take on the epic genre.

For Silius' willingness to descend a little from high epic is refreshing. Much has been said about his debt to Vergil, but he as often imitates as takes and alters and inverts, differentiating himself in the wake of the master of Roman epic, sometimes at the master's expense. Rather than monotonously sustain the epic tone and follow directly in Vergil's footsteps, Silius ruthlessly adapts Vergil's words and scenes but is very ready to have some fun with the material, to give it a new life, or perhaps to present it as his take on the Aeneid. It may even be supposed that he uses so much Vergil just for this reason, the opportunity to show that this other aspect of epic can exist. Often the similarities with the Aeneid have Silius come off as a hack imitator, and traditionally the *Punica* has not enjoyed much serious consideration, but recently there has been more interest in the way Silius takes a subject which is not as uniformly optimistic as the idea behind the Aeneid, infuses it with scenes and thoughts taken from the Aeneid and creates a clever and entertaining work. He operates on the same ambiguities as the highly contentious ones in the Aeneid; the Dido and Turnus episodes and whether Aeneas conducts himself appropriately in the case of each; but on a smaller scale, which he applies in a more widespread manner to the effect of relevatory delight rather than intellectual perplexity.

The conclusion of the divine deliberation is that Iuno is to stop Hannibal herself. This section echoes two different sections in the Aeneid: Iuppiter's mandate to Mercury to get Aeneas out of Carthage and Venus' revealing to Aeneas the gods at the destruction of Troy. Both Iuno and Mercury assault their addressees with insulting epithets, *_o uecors_* (703), *_heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!_* (*_Aen._* 4.267), *_demens_* (*_Aen._* 4.562), and both respond

immediately to Iuppiter's command. More obvious is the link in the protagonist's revelation that the gods are physically present though invisible; this section closely parallels *_Aen._* 2.588--623, with the similar parenthetical declaration that the goddess is removing the fog which blinds the mortal character (707f, *_Aen._* 604--7) and the pointing out of various gods in different parts of the city. The differences, however, are as telling as the similarities. Silius' attribution of different parts of the city to different gods is more apt, since each deity is assigned to their own hill or sacred place. Secondly, here we see the divine defence of a powerful city rather than its sack. In the *Aeneid* Aeneas and the Roman reader are confronted with undeniable defeat, whereas Silius depicts the impregnability of the home of the gods, for so is Rome depicted; Iuppiter has his limits, and he will not suffer Hannibal to intrude upon his own house, similarly the other deities. Rome is more than another Troy; the whole episode turns on religion, and Hannibal denies the omens and is unable to breach Rome while the Romans are at every instance depicted as religious, and the gods, properly maintained in their respective locations, dutifully defend those locations. The twelfth book closes on this note, for even after Hannibal's withdrawal the Romans do not shirk their rituals, but rejoice in the ceremonies and pay due reverence.