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A Various Villainy: Silius Italicus' Hannibal and Virgil's *Aeneid*

In this paper I propose to explore the subtle interrelationship between the *Punica* and the *Aeneid*, concentrating on how Silius' singular and complex Hannibal answers to Virgil's epic. If any individual dominates the *Punica*, it is surely Hannibal. For most readers of Silius' poem, however, Hannibal is too demonically opposed to Rome and Romanity to be in any straightforward sense a hero. I take Hannibal to be the villain of the piece, but propose to discuss some aspects of his villainy that echoes of the *Aeneid* serve to complicate.

A central theme of the *Punica* that connects it to Virgil's epic is Hannibal's desire to avenge Dido. Hannibal clearly calls to mind the Virgilian Dido's cry for vengeance in his speech at *Punica* 3. 69--96, where he instructs his wife, Imilce, to ensure that their son continues Carthaginian hostility to Rome. It is notable that the anti-Roman Hannibal echoes Virgil's proto-Roman Aeneas at *Aeneid* 12. 435--40; and there are, as in all such cases of intertextuality, at least two ways that we can make the interrelationship between the words of Aeneas and Hannibal work. First, to view Aeneas through the filter of a frenzied, obsessive Hannibal could fuel "pessimism" about the former's bellicosity. Secondly, and alternatively, tracking the traces in Hannibal of Aeneas as valiant, proto-Roman *vir* might destabilize the Carthaginian's "otherness".

We may always insist, of course, that any similarity between Aeneas and Hannibal is either outweighed by, or even emphasizes, their differences. If, however, the "light of history" shines harshly upon Silius' Hannibal, its severity is mitigated by the opportunities we have to see through his eyes. One such opportunity occurs at *Punica* 2. 395--456, when Hannibal is presented with a shield and the images on it become the subject of ecphrasis. Echoes of the *Aeneid* in this ecphrasis perhaps tend towards offering a real justification for Punic antipathy to Rome. For what Silius' Hannibal sees on the shield recalls precisely those aspects of the Virgilian Aeneas' association with Dido that are problematic for Aeneas' heroic status; specifically, it brings to mind the possibility that in Virgil's Dido-episode, infidelity is not, as stereotypically, a Punic vice, but a crime committed by Dido's proto-Roman lover.

Hannibal's perspective is also conspicuous in a parallel passage at *Punica* 6. 653--716, where he views images from Roman history at Liternum. Here, as Don Fowler has shown, Hannibal condemns a pro-Roman version of events in preference for a celebration and epicization of Carthaginian victory (Fowler, D. P. (1996) "Even Better than the Real Thing: A Tale of Two Cities" in J. Elsner (ed.) *Art and Text in Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 57--74 (= (2000) *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 86--107)). If these epic dreams are doomed to failure, still the *Punica* makes room for Hannibal's point of view. While predominantly a villain, he has a (meta-)poetic voice that challenges that of the *Punica*'s predominantly pro-Roman narrator.