Flavian Fides Coins Reverses: (left) reverse Vespasian coin AD 73 fides publica as clasped right-hands with winged caduceus between poppy and cornucopia (British Museum, R.10390 from Stocks 2019 and OCRE), and (right) reverse Domitian coin AD 85 fidei publicae as personified goddess Fides holding corn-ears and a fruit plate (British Museum 1860,0326.25 from OCRE).

The Suicide Narratives of Silius Italicus

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the theme of suicide in Silius Italicus' *Punica* through the following case studies: Saguntum (*Punica* 2), Capua (*Punica* 11, 13), Hannibal (*Punica* 2, 13, 17), Scipio (*Punica* 4), and Solimus (*Punica* 9). I analyse recurrent literary features and motifs –civil war, human/object/divine agency, bodily disfigurement, elemental imagery in *loci horridi*, exile, haunting memory, *fides*, and *pietas*– and their connections to Silius' suicide ideology. I use frameworks provided by Narrative Exposure Therapy to connect these features with textual allusions to Silius' contemporary Rome and other Latin epics. I observe that Silius portrays suicide as a powerful weapon and instrument for moral action, a form of internal civil war, a form of escape and exile, and a transformative boundary threshold. I conclude that Silius presents an epic ideology of suicide that enabled readers to contemplate the emotional experiences of suicide, and the effects of suicide on one's physical/cultural identity and environment. These reveal a duality of Silian suicides as desperate acts amid uncontrollable and impossible situations, and as means of reclaiming personal power and control of one's fate.

Table of Contents:

Introduction

Suicide is central to Silius' historical epic. His *Punica* draws readers' attention to this through extended suicide narratives, allusions and displays of characters' suicidal thoughts. These are often accompanied by divine involvement, which both affirms and conflicts with the human agency and will of his epic characters. The individual expressions of suicide (at the climax of his epic (Solimus) and in both of his epic's protagonists (Hannibal and Scipio)) and the collective suicides (at Capua and Saguntum) emphasise the thematic prominence of suicide in Silius' epic. In this dissertation, I will examine Silius' use of this suicide theme, which I argue reveals a suicide ideology that emphasises the transformative relationships between subjects' emotional states, physical bodies, instruments of death, and natural/supernatural landscapes. I argue that through his suicide narratives Silius provides readers with *exempla* for exploring the traumatic impacts of self-destructive acts of violence on one's agency and individual/collective identity in ways like modern notions of Narrative Exposure Therapy. The prominence of suicide among the elite, the recent contexts of the AD 69 Civil Wars, and contemporary Flavian propaganda emphasising *fides* and recovery in the aftermath of civil war influenced and shaped Silius' ideological framing of suicide. He transposes these ideas onto his literary platform of the Second Punic War. In this manner, Silius uses *Punica* as an epic *exemplum* to explore the moral, physical, and emotional realities of suicide and its impact on contemporary Roman identity. I will demonstrate this through close-readings of Silius' suicide narratives, where he connects suicide to: civil war, relationships between human/object/divine agency, bodily disfigurement, elemental imagery in *loci horridi*, exile, haunting memory (ghosts and funerary landscapes), *fides*, and *pietas*. These features and messages are by no means exclusive to Silius' portrayals of suicide; however, their use in Silius is underexplored. Given the prominence of suicide in *Punica*, this dissertation aims to rectify this.

In Chapter 1, I will provide some historical context for Silius Italicus and *Punica* and a brief explanation of the literary features and frameworks employed in my interpretation. I will also explain where this dissertation fits in Silian scholarship.

I will then analyse suicide scenes in *Punica*. My first case study (Chapter 2) will be Silius' extended narrative of the Saguntine mass suicide (Books 1, 2), a deliberate narrative alteration. My second case study (Chapter 3) will be the suicidally-coded speeches of Decius (Book 11), and the actualised suicides of the Capuan senators and Taurea (Book 13) during Silius' Capua narrative. My final case studies (Chapter 4) will examine individual suicide through Hannibal, Scipio, and Solimus. For Hannibal, I will discuss Silius' allusions to his suicide after Saguntum (Book 2) and Scipio's *nekyia* (Book 13), and suicidal thoughts in Book 17. I will then explore Scipio's suicidal thoughts during the rescue of his father (Book 4), and Solimus' post-patricide suicide at the climax of Silius' Cannae narrative (Book 9).

Through analysing these passages, I will demonstrate how Silius variously characterises suicide: as a powerful weapon and instrument for moral action, a form of internal civil war, a form of escape and exile, and a transformative boundary. I will draw links between Silius' framing of suicide and his context, particularly his personal and the Roman collective trauma of civil war, major fires, and suicides. I will do this by exploring connections between Silius' suicide portrayals, contemporary Roman events, and other epic intertexts. I argue that with these parallels in his suicide scenes, Silius emphasises the individual and collective effects of self-destructive violence on subjects and their environments.

I will conclude that *Punica* presents an ideology of suicide that encourages readers to contemplate the emotional experiences of self-destructive acts, and the senses of power and powerlessness inherent in suicide. Under this interpretation, Silius can be read as presenting a dualistic view of suicide as both a desperate act in the face of impossible situations and a tool for reclaiming personal agency and control of one's fate.

Chapter 1: Silius Italicus and Approaching *Punica*'s Suicides

Epigraphic evidence reveals Silius Italicus' full name as Tiberius Catius Asconius Silius Italicus, though many details of his life are unknown and much debated.[1] The only exact date we have is his consulship in AD 68 during the final year of Nero's reign, suicide, and the resulting civil war and succession struggle.[2] Silius was probably born c. AD 25-29, and Martial and Pliny the Younger state Silius worked as an advocate, prosecutor, and *delator* ('informer') under Claudius and Nero before his consulship.[3] Silius' consulship during a major civil war must have had a profound impact on his life, and he probably played a crucial part in the wars. Tacitus claims Silius witnessed secret peace treaty negotiations between Vitellius and Vespasian's brother Flavius Sabinus, and Pliny states he was a friend of Vitellius.[4] This political position could have influenced Silius' choice of the Second Punic War for his epic subject, which repeatedly emphasises loyalty to, betrayal of, and divine defence of peace treaties. Silius appears to have been favourably viewed under Vespasian and his Flavian dynasty (despite his prior support of Vitellius), indicated by his governorship of Asia Minor in AD 77/78, one of the wealthiest provinces.[5] Pliny claims Silius withdrew from politics to devote himself to poetry.[6]

By AD 88 Silius had gained considerable literary reputation among elite contemporaries, and hosted gatherings where parts of *Punica* were recited.[7] I think this public recitation aspect during *Punica*'s composition, alongside some of his narratorial interjections, showcase Silius' consideration of and engagement with his collective

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[1] Dominik 2010, 428; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1; Grainger 2003, 11.
[2] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Dominik 2010, 428; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1.
[3] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1; Grainger 2003, 11.
[4] Tacitus, *Historiae* 3.65; Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1.
[5] Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1; Dominik 2010, 430-431.
[6] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7
[7] Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1-2.

audience and their reactions when crafting his narratives. Silius retired c. AD 95/96 to his *villa* in Campania (formerly belonging to Cicero), where he gained a reputation as a Vergil devotee, paying for the restoration of Vergil's tomb, which he "visited as if a temple".[8] Both his time in Campania and devotion to Vergil could have influenced the Vergilian intertexts and associations with civil wars and Mount Vesuvius in Silius' suicide narratives.

Punica is a 17-book epic on the Second Punic War.[9] For much of *Punica*, Hannibal acts as the antihero protagonist.[10] The later books focus on Scipio's rise to power as the Roman who can beat Hannibal and win the war (after a series of disastrous generals).[11] Over 40% is devoted to military matters, with most books structured around major conflicts, campaigns, battles, and sieges.[12] *Punica* has been described by scholars as "the most intertextual of poems", creating layers of meaning within single lines through connections to Livian history and Vergilian myth, as well as to Lucan, Statius, Valerius Flaccus, Ovid, Homer, Thucydides, Ennius etc.[13] Silius also reintroduces active gods into Roman historical epic, in contrast to Lucan.[14] While divine figures and intertextual allusions are common generic features of epic, I argue that the ways and frequency with which Silius employs these in his suicide narratives emphasise tensions relating to agency during suicidal thoughts or actions. I will explore these intertexts and divine roles in my close-readings.

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[8] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 2; Grainger 2003, 7-11.
[9] See Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 2-3 for a synopsis.
[10] Stocks 2018, 293-294, 299-300.
[11] Marks 2005, 535.
[12] Ibid., 529.
[13] Wilson 2004, 248, from Connor 2018, 20; Mills 2009, 50-51. Noted by scholars such as Marks 2005; Schrijvers 2006; Agri 2022; Bernstein 2008 and 2017; Roumpou 2020; Beltramini 2024; Stocks 2018; Vessey 1974; Watton 2018; Mills 2009; Manuwald 2014; Augoustakis 2020; Śnieżewski 2018; Van der Keur 2015; McClellan 2019; Leo 2014; Fucecchi 2019; Pomeroy 2010; McGuire 1997; Ganiban 2010, among others.
[14] As observed by Manuwald 2014, 215 and Asso 2010. The active gods which I examine in Silian suicide scenes are Juno, the Furies, Fides, Hercules, Mars, and Jupiter.

My translations of *Punica* in this dissertation are a synthesis of Duff's (1934) Loeb and Augoustakis & Bernstein's (2021) translations, combined with my own translation of Delz's Latin (included in Duff). I note where my translations significantly vary in my analysis. Due to space constraints and for broader accessibility, I have chosen to quote the passages I examine in English. Analysis of the Latin is clarified where relevant to emphasise further potential connections to Silius' socio-political context and the literary motifs he often employs to frame his suicides.

The exact date of *Punica*'s composition is uncertain and much debated. Scholarly dates range from AD 80-98: after Silius' political retirement following his proconsulship.[15] Many believe *Punica* was (mostly) completed shortly after Domitian's death in AD 96/97 due to its similarities with other Flavian poets (e.g., Statius and Valerius Flaccus).[16] For my dissertation, I will not attempt to determine an exact date for *Punica*, nor will I limit my analysis to any specific date. As the dating for *Punica* is currently uncertain and evidence for various positions still tenuous, I will consider the period from Silius' consulship during Nero's suicide to the end of Nerva's reign (as Silius died sometime under Trajan) as the ideological context for my interpretation. I think the events around Nero's suicide, AD 69 civil wars, fires in Rome, eruption of Vesuvius, and the succession uncertainty around Domitian's assassination could have shaped Silius' choice of suicide as a main epic theme and his suicide depictions.

Silius' attitude toward Domitian has been much debated by scholars, with the epic variously interpreted as panegyric or anti-Domitian.[17] Domitian made two of Silius' relatives consul: Silius' son Lucius Silius Decianus in AD 94 and Tiberius Catius Caesius

[15] See Marks 2005, 528; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 2.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Grainger 2003; McGuire 1997; Marks 2005; Agri 2022; Bernstein 2008.

Fronto (likely his adopted son and/or nephew) in AD 96.[18] Before his death, Domitian had no clear successor. Scholars have speculated that Fronto and Nerva were members of the conspiracy surrounding Domitian's assassination, occurring during Fronto's consulship.[19] I think the proximity of Silius and his family to imperial power during cases of suicide, assassination, civil war, negotiations, and conspiracies emphasised the prominence of suicide and representations of *fides* and civil war in *Punica*. Silius seemed to flourish under the Flavians until he committed suicide by starvation at the age of 75 under Trajan (c. AD 101-106) after protracted suffering from an incurable *clavus*, interpreted by scholars as a tumour/ulcer/cancer.[20] The lengthy suffering from this *clavus* could mean Silius contemplated suicide at least several years prior. In this light, I think Silius' status as a poet who used suicide as a core theme and who eventually voluntarily committed suicide himself (in contrast to other contemporary examples of forced suicide such as Seneca and Lucan[21]), make his suicide narratives worth further investigation.

Modern scholarly reception of Silius has until recent years differed significantly from his ancient reception.[22] Despite Silius' popularity among contemporaries and during the Renaissance, during the 19th and 20th centuries Silius was viewed by scholars as inferior to other Latin epicists like Vergil, Ovid, Lucan, or Statius.[23] This extensive negative scholarly reception of *Punica* is influenced by Pliny's comment that "Silius composed with more *cura* ('care/thought') than *ingenium* ('talent')", often interpreted as a critique of Silius' literary skill.[24] Only in the late-20th and 21st centuries did scholars reappreciate *Punica* as worth further study.[25]

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[18] Grainger 2003, 7-11; McDermott & Orentzel 1977, 24-27.
[19] Grainger 2003, 12.
[20] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Dominik 2010, 430-431; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 1; Marks 2005, 528.
[21] Tacitus, *Annals* 15.62-64; Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.100.
[22] See Dominik 2010 for an overview.
[23] Ibid., 425, 431-438.
[24] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7; Dominik 2010, 431.
[25] Dominik 2010, 425-426.

Some prominent scholars in shifting modern analysis of Silius are Tipping (2010), Marks (2005b), and Stocks (2014). Tipping argues *Punica* should be viewed as a key Roman epic by examining central characters (Hannibal, Fabius, and Scipio) as examples of epic virtues, vices, and values. Similarly, Stocks argues *Punica* "should be viewed as the definitive text for Rome's exploration of Hannibal as a cultural icon".[26] Marks stresses the need for Flavian readings of *Punica* and argues Silius' portrayal of Scipio acted as a message to Domitian on ideals of the *princeps*. The works of these prominent scholars emphasise that Silius' *Punica* is an epic imbued with intertextual, intratextual, and ideological messages for Flavian readers. Likewise, my close-readings will consider epic conventions and allusions and Silius' contemporary context when interpreting his thematic use of suicide.

Recent scholars have considered some of Silius' suicide passages within their examinations of other aspects of *Punica*. McGuire (1997) examines anti-imperial sentiment in Silius' suicide narratives as a form of political opposition and resistance to tyranny, connecting civil war and tyranny to poetic silence through suicide. McClellan (2019, 2015) examines corpse abuse and disfigurement in Latin epics. The commentaries of Bernstein (2017) on Book 2, Van der Keur (2024, 2015) on Book 13, and Roumpou (2019) on Book 17 have been useful to my examinations of Silius' suicide passages. All these have been valuable for my research. However, I could not find any comprehensive study with a clear focus on Silius' portrayal of suicide itself as the primary ideological and poetic theme. Additionally, while scholars have observed messages of Roman recovery in *Punica* (particularly in comparison to Lucan)[27] or have examined some of the passages I explore individually or with a focus on other themes,[28] I have not encountered any who have examined Silius' suicide theme and suicide ideology as their main analytical focus.

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[26] Stocks 2014, 53.
[27] For example, Beltramini 2024; Vessey 1974; McClellan 2015.
[28] For example: Vessey 1974 on Saguntum; Fucecchi 2019 on anti-hero *fides*; Stocks 2018 on *ira*; Bernstein 2008 on kinship; Beltramini 2024 on landscape at the Battle of the Trebia.

The closest to this type of exploration that I have come across in the scholarship is McGuire (1997). This dissertation aims to further recent modern re-examinations of Silius by providing a critical analysis of Silian depictions of suicide and treatment of suicide as a central poetic theme of his epic. I will explore how complex power tensions between subjects, objects, the supernatural, and landscapes shape Silius' suicide ideology.

Crucial to my analytical approach to suicide is Grisé's (1982), *Le Suicide Dans La Rome Antique*, which demonstrates there was no single Latin term for suicide.[29] The term *suicide* derives from a later Latin term *suicidium*/*suicida,* formed from *sui* ('of oneself') and *caedes* ('murder') in the 18thcentury by the theologian Caramuel's *Quaestio de Suicidio*.[30] Roman authors used different suicide expressions depending on context and preference.[31] Latin has many terms for designating different types of murder, and the absence of these compounds or value-judgements in Latin expressions of suicide indicate that the Romans did not consider self-killing to be murder.[32] Thus, the word *suicide* is a later linguistic addition which stigmatises the concept as an immoral and criminal act by linking murder with self-inflicted destruction. Therefore, the contexts around suicide expressions and authorial interjections are particularly crucial for interpreting authors' and audiences' probable value judgements of suicide *exempla* in Latin epics. As a result, effective examination of Silius' suicide theme requires close critical consideration of intratextual and intertextual allusions invoked, and his historical and personal background.

A unique feature of *Punica* is Silius' deliberate and overt use of suicide as a prominent poetic theme. Silius frequently reshapes and alters historical details to focus on

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[29] Grisé's catalogue of Roman suicides reported by ancient authors from 753BC-AD192.
[30] Ibid., 22-23.
[31] Ibid., 21.
[32] Ibid., 23, 26; Some Latin descriptor compounds for murder that Grisé mentions to contrast this classification for suicide include: parricide (*parricidium*), homicide (*homicidium*), matricide (*matricidium*), fratricide (*fratricidium*), infanticide (*infanticidium*), tyrannicide (*tyrannicidium*), and Plautus' *perenticida* ('murderer of one's wallet', Plautus *Epid.* 352).

extended narratives of collective suicides, individual suicides, and suicidal thoughts. He portrays the suicide act as a boundary threshold for characters to evaluate/exert their agency in response to inescapable situations. He emphasises the challenges to communal and self-identity that suicide can pose, as the ambiguities of suicidal agency highlight connections and tensions between humans, the natural environment, and the divine. Silius also links these to haunting memory and recovery, as his suicides both depict representations of cyclical self-destruction and highlight aspects of reparative closure and commemoration that serve as recovery reminders for survivors. I think Narrative Exposure Therapy is a useful interpretive framework for approaching Silius' suicide theme and the various expressions with which he characterises suicide.

Silius' expressions of suicide in *Punica* often use the following thematic frameworks/motifs: civil war, agency (in human-object and human-divine relationships), disfigurement, *loci horridi* connecting fire/water/landscapes to violent action, exile, haunting memory, *fides,* and *pietas*. These features are not exclusive to Silian epic; however, I believe their prominence in Silius' portrayals of suicide contribute to his complex suicide ideology and create a unique thematic emphasis on suicide itself.[33] I will now discuss these *topoi*, reviewing some scholarship surrounding them and pointing ahead to some of the main findings of my analysis (Chapters 2-4).

Civil War

Suicide in *Punica* is often linked to civil war through its portrayal as internal conflict with destructive action involving humans, the divine, and the landscape. Characters facing insurmountable circumstances often resort to suicide as form of escape and exile from the sufferings of civil war, slavery, grief, and external threats to their

[33] For example, both of his epic's protagonists (Hannibal and Scipio) experience suicidal thoughts within his narrative.

personal agency and community.[34] Silius' many echoes of Vergil and Lucan, depict his Punic War in terms evocative of Roman civil wars, and his ideology of suicide frequently frames the suicide act as a form of internal civil war. Silius' use of names connected with contemporary civil wars and Roman epithets for non-Roman peoples blur links between the past and present and reinforce themes of unified Italian identity.[35] The divisions, blurring, and unity of subjects' physical bodies during suicide create an internal 'civil war' for Silius' characters, linked to their external socio-political struggles.

The frequency of Roman suicide reached a highpoint during the disintegration of political society during/following the civil wars and establishment of the imperial regime, increasing during c.100BC-AD100.[36] Many recorded suicides are of elite men that were not voluntary but imposed/forced.[37] However, a striking feature of Silius' *Punica* is that all the cases of individual suicides and suicidal thoughts/attempts are voluntary (e.g., Hannibal, Scipio, Solimus, Decius, Taurea); while both collective suicides (the Saguntines and Capuan senators) teeter between voluntary and forced by divine influence. While divine influence does occur in some of Silius' individual suicide narratives (Juno: Hannibal, 17.542-580; Jupiter/Mars Gradivus: Scipio, 4.417-477), it is portrayed as divine interference that prevents suicidal actions voluntarily sought by the characters.[38] This divine interference is variously portrayed as an aid in personal recovery (Scipio) and an unwelcome hindering of one's power over their fate (Hannibal). These ambiguities could have been an attempt to incorporate contemporary discourses on suicide. They emphasise suicide's duality as a tool of destiny reclamation and retributive punishment/oppression

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[34] E.g., at Saguntum 2.564-567; Capua 13.270-298, 13.369-380; Solimus 9.168-177.

[35] *Rutulii, Daunii,* and *decus (Decii)* for the Saguntines and Capuans (see pp. 35-37, 58, 68): *Punica* 1.377, 1.437, 1.584, 1.658, 2.541, 2.567, 2.604; 1.440, 1.665, 2.244, 2.557; 11.157-158; McGuire 1997, 136-144, 209-210, 221, 226-227; Beltramini 2024, 7-9; Marks 2005, 143, 534-535; Bernstein 2008, 145-146; Van der Keur 2015, 503-504.

[36] Grisé 1982, 32-54.

[37] Lucan and Seneca's forced suicides resulting from the failed Pisonian Conspiracy against Nero: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.62-64; Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.100; Grisé 1982, 55-57; Agri 2022, 28-31.

[38] See pp. 81-92. Particularly striking is the framing of Juno's thwarting of Hannibal's suicide as involuntary life.

within the context of influxes in forced imperial suicides associated with civil war. Despite Silius' gods' interventions preventing or encouraging suicidal thoughts, the gods are not depicted as creating them. At most, suicide is portrayed as a type of internal collaboration with/against the divine, where human emotions already in existence are 'turned' or redirected.[39] The use of war and domestic gods (Jupiter, Mars, Juno, Hercules, Fides, and the Furies) in Silian suicide narratives links civil war and suicide through violence, familial dynamics, loyalty/duty, and retribution. Silius' suicide ideology often presents suicide subjects as personifications of an internal civil war, in which the gods interact, choose sides, and influence, much as they do with external civil wars in epic tradition[40].

Agency: Suicide Objects, Disfigured Bodies, and the Divine

Silian suicides involve complex interactions between human subjects, suicide objects, and the divine, as characters' suicides are variously depicted as *exempla* of power or powerlessness, reflecting their struggle for agency in a turbulent world.

Stoics connected suicide to virtues of reason and *libertas* ('freedom'), guided by divine calling, as a right or duty to preserve one's *dignitas* ('dignity').[41] Features of Seneca's *De Providentia* 6.7-8 are reminiscent of Silius' suicide ideology, which casts suicide as a weapon against death, uses domestic and civic motifs of doors and roads, and characterises suicide as a duality between escape and resistance.[42] Silius often uses suicide to explore aspects of agency and identity, as his suicides are variously portrayed as the result of divine influence or human freedom. The reciprocal role of suicide subjects, as both active forces in bringing about their deaths and recipients of violent action, is

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[39] E.g., Mars Gradivus with Scipio's anger (4.458-459).
[40] For example, the battle for influence between Fides/Hercules and Juno/Tisiphone throughout Saguntum pp. 29-56; the joint influence of the Furies and a vengeful Fides in the Capuan senator's suicide *Punica* 13.270-298 pp. 63-67.
[41] Cicero, *Fin.* 3.60-61, *Off.* 1.112; Seneca, *Epistulae* 104.3-5, 77.14, 70.20-21, 98.15-18; Grisé 1982, 180-184, 188; Argi 2022, 15-16; Englert 1990, 1-14.
[42] These can be seen in the description of the collective suicide pyre at Saguntum (2.592-613) pp. 43-52, the suicide speeches of Fury/real-Tiburna (2.560-579, 2.665-680) pp. 32-43, Decius' suicide-advocacy speeches (11.183-189, 11.194-201) pp. 57-62, and Virrius' suicide speech (13.262-298) pp. 63-67.

emphasised by Silius in the complex reciprocal relationships between subjects, objects, the divine, and the landscape during suicide scenes.

I will examine these reciprocal relationships between human/object agency and connections between subjects' physical bodies and the instruments of death. Pertinent to my interpretation are Begiato's (2018) ideas of 'emotional objects'. Emotional objects are objects loaded with emotional power that kindle and rekindle feelings through their presence, description, recollection, or absence.[43] Emotional objects can be consistent (physically tangible material remains) or inconsistent (temporary sensory or imaginative remains preserved in emotional memory). They create generational links prompting subjects to consider their past/future through reengagement.[44] Thus, emotional objects emphasise change and are powerful symbolic tools linking memory and experience to subjects' constructions of personal/collective identities.[45] I think Begiato's framework is a helpful tool to examine how Silius configures and interrogates relationships between emotional objects and subject identities in his post-civil war context through his suicide theme.

Several theoretical frameworks from archaeology emphasise reciprocal relationships between object agency and human actions or social purposes.[46] I will apply these to my analysis of the relationships between suicide subjects, suicide objects, and the physical body. I primarily follow Knappett (2005) in rooting object agency as a secondary affect to human signification/use, as this synthesises well with Begiato's emotional objects. These frameworks are useful for approaching human and object agency, as emotions are revealed through these object contexts.[47] I term these 'emotive objects of signification'. In my case studies, I will discuss Silius' use of emotive suicide objects of signification (such as pyres, poisons, and weapons) as narrative tools to connect suicide, nature, the divine,

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[43] Begiato 2018, 235-237.
[44] Ibid., 235-241.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Tilley 2001, 260; Hoskins 2006; Knappett 2005, 29.
[47] Begiato 2018, 241-242.

and agency. Silius frequently connects instruments of suicide (swords, pyres, and poisons) to subjects' physical bodies in ways that merge his characters with their objects of death during their suicide acts.[48] The reciprocal ambiguities in power and agency in suicide through the relationship between the subject (as an initiator of bodily self-destruction and a receiver of destructive bodily injury from objects) is particularly emphasised in disfigurement.

The motif of disfigurement often accompanies Silius' suicide theme, symbolising the deep bodily impact of violent self-destructive acts, and the effects of individual/collective trauma on one's physical identity and interaction with the world. Corpse mistreatment and bodily abuse were modes of psychological warfare and power-politics that simultaneously repelled and allured audiences.[49] Body horror and disfigurement have been used as literary themes in histories and epics (e.g., Livy and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) to represent boundary anxieties and biopolitics regarding identity and agency, as the imperial state exerted further control over citizens and their bodies.[50] I agree with McClellan that fictionalised poetic violence and corpse abuse in Latin epic reflect and react to actualised historical and contemporary violence in Rome.[51] This relationship is particularly evident in Silius' ideological connections between disfigurement and suicide, which portray complex entanglements between objects and bodies in self-destructive acts.[52] Through his graphic descriptions of suicide (which connect the agency of the physical body to external landscapes and circumstances), Silius confronts readers with questions about their own agency and the dual relationship suicide can provide in enacting, destroying, and preserving the memory of that influence. I argue Silius uses disfigurement to showcase these blurred ideas of agency and distorted/merged

[48] For instance, Tiburna's mouth attacking her suicide pyre's flames (2.680) pp. 41-43.
[49] McClellan 2019, 3-5.
[50] Hay 2018, 15.
[51] McClellan 2019, 6.
[52] For example, the famished and mutilated Saguntines 2.466-468, 2.681-698 pp. 46, 54 and Hannibal's poisoned corpse 2.707 pp. 74-75.

identities. Ideas of self-sought disfigurement and uncontrollable decay and afterlife fate position suicide as a boundary threshold between life/death and power/powerlessness over one's bodily fate.

Loci Horridi and Nature Motifs

Scholars such as Haselmann 2018 (from Augoustakis 2020) and Śnieżewski (2018) examine *topoi* of *loci amoeni* ('pleasant places') and *loci horridi* ('horrible places') that Silius uses to connect river battles to the Underworld riverscape. I wish to explore ways Silius creates landscapes of death as *loci horridi* that reinforce his suicide theme through language and motifs linking the physical body, nature, and the elements. Silius combines funerary imagery, violence, and nature to create landscapes of death,[53] and I think examining these other contexts will enable new interpretations of his suicides. *Loci horridi* create vivid landscapes of dread and violence, which serve as backdrops for Silius' suicide narratives, and link the urban landscape and the natural world to the psychological and emotional states of suicide subjects. They also relate to themes of haunting memory, highlighting the collective traumatic effects of self-destructive action on the future world that other characters and Silius' audience are faced with as they witness and recover from suicidal incidents.

Scholars such as Manolaraki (2010) and Schrijivers (2006) have recognised the importance of waterscapes in *Punica* which foreshadow Hannibal's fate and allude to contemporary ecological concerns. Silius' repetitive use of natural motifs emphasises the Punic War's disruptive effects on the landscape, projecting human conflict onto cosmic levels as threats to nature and the divine.[54] I aim to take these further in my suicide analysis. Silius often alludes to nature and the elements (particularly motifs of water, fire, and liquid-fire) as object manifestations of his characters' behaviours and emotional

[53] E.g., the Saguntines' *permixto funere* 2.681-698.
[54] Beltramini 2024, 1-2.

states.[55] These are connected through the agency of the characters' physical bodies. This creates active phenomenological suicide narratives grounded in the present.

Water, both a substance and god, was used by ancient authors as a literary motif that connected human experience to the landscape and the divine through associations with boundaries/transitions and ritual.[56] Water was used in funerary ritual both as purification to cleanse the body of blood or disease (washing the corpse, cleansing the mourners of contamination), and as a rite of passage and symbolic transition of state.[57] Given his penchant for intertexts and multiple hidden meanings, I think Silius' use of water and Underworld river motifs in his suicide scenes was reflective of the transitory step suicide occupies as a boundary threshold between life and death.

All Silius' collective suicides involve pyres. These give strong senses of collective cremation, wide-spread loss, and communal destruction. Likewise, his descriptions of suicide subjects' physical bodies often resemble aspects of the ancient cremation process.[58] The increases in suicides and deaths during the civil wars of Silius' historical context resulted in massive collective funeral pyres outside Rome, with one pyre reported to contain upwards of 1000 burning bodies at once.[59] These collective funeral pyres would have heightened the sensory and tangible impacts of the cremation process upon witnesses and the urban landscape, with things like the smells, sounds, and smoke made more visible from greater distances and for extended periods.[60]

I think Silius' connections between fire, collective cremation, and self-destruction could be linked to the many destructive fires he experienced. The fire at the Capitol during the conflict between Vitellius' and Vespasian's supporters of the AD 69 Civil War, and the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64 under Nero carried destructive impacts on Rome and the

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[55] E.g., *Punica* 1.56-60, 1.493-494, 2.584-589, 2.650-664, 2.680, 2.707, 13.571-575, 13.563-565, 13.870-873, 17.566.
[56] Jones 2005.
[57] *Aeneid* 6.218-231; Jones 2005, 19.
[58] E.g., Tiburna 2.668-670, 2.680 pp. 41-43.
[59] Martial 8.75.9-10; Habinek 2016, 9-10.
[60] Habinek 2016, 9-10.

Italian landscape.[61] These likely influenced Silius, who frequently emphasises the impact of fire on the landscape (burning roofs and pyres reflected in the sea, *Punica* 2.658-664) during his suicide narratives, and connects self-destructive acts to the landscape.

Silius uses *topoi* of liquid-fire to characterise the emotional states of *furor* ('frenzy') and *ira* ('anger') of suicide subjects, as well as to connect suicide bodies to the Underworld landscape and the Furies.[62] Liquid-fire was a common literary *topos* since Hesiod, often used to connect Mount Aetna to the monstrous divine (such as Titans and Cyclopes).[63] However, Silius' links between liquid-fire and violent self-destruction could have additional contemporary associations. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 and its massive destructive impacts on the Italian landscape, which obliterated several Roman towns (notably Pompei and Herculaneum), would have presented an example of natural disaster amid Rome's attempts to recover stability during the Flavian dynasty post-civil war. Silius' residence in Campania would likely have meant he witnessed much of the destructive aftermath of Vesuvius, if not the eruption itself. This may have influenced the reciprocal relationships of subjects and landscapes in his suicide narratives, which emphasise the widespread impact of self-destructive acts on one's community and cultural memory.

Exile

Silius frames suicide as a form of exile that provides a means of escaping slavery, powerlessness, or other violent threats during these impossible situations.[64] This emphasises subjects' isolation and hopelessness. The ideological connections between suicide and exile present suicide as an act that showcases this powerlessness, while also

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[61] Suetonius, *Vitellius* 15 and *Nero* 38; Tacitus, *Histories* 3.32-34, 3.71; *Annals* 15.38-41; Cassius Dio 64.15-17, 62.16-18; Byles 2013, 11, 37-38.
[62] See fn.55.
[63] *Theogony* 857-868; *Aeneid* 3.576; Buxton 2016, 30-31.
[64] E.g., 2.564-567.

providing a way for characters to reclaim dignity or control in the face of overwhelming loss and alienation. Links between exile and suicide can be seen in the connections Silius draws between his suicide narratives and Hannibal's own historical suicide in exile.

While Hannibal's actual suicide remains outside the scope of *Punica*, it is frequently alluded to, and Silius' frequent depictions of suicide as a form of exile could be interpreted as further indirect allusions to Hannibal's suicide.[65] Silius' links between exile and suicide could express a Vergilian influence. Aeneas' status as a refugee and links between civil war, exile, and the establishment of homeland in *Aeneid* established exile as a historical feature of Roman cultural identity in epic. By connecting this common generic *topos* of exile to the presentation of suicide in his epic, Silius highlights connections between subjects' suicides and their social identities. Emotional attachments to one's homeland ('place attachment') help construct social identity.[66] Home represents personal memories, security, privacy, order, and a cultural community of belonging; exile's separation from these references can lead to traumatic disruptions of one's personal and communal identities.[67] I argue Silius' framing of suicide as an exile emphasises tensions between the loss of one's identity and agency that come with suicide: as the body is transformed and future agency thwarted with death. However, this exilic framing of suicide can also be read as emphasising the ways that suicide can be used to preserve and reclaim one's identity: acting as a method of individual power through voluntary escape from impossible scenarios. Silius' links between exile and suicide could be seen as messages for readers to value the growth and unity of their community that actively shapes their lives, deaths, and legacies.

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[65] Allusions to Hannibal's suicide: 2.699-707, 13.868-895, 17.542-580, see pp.71-87; Some depictions of suicide as a form of exile: 2.560-579, 2.589-613, pp. 33-34, 44-46.
[66] Possingham 2022, 555.
[67] Ibid.

Haunting Memory

Haunting memory is a crucial literary device for Silius' suicide theme, reflecting tensions between personal agency and collective impact in overwhelming situations. Ghosts are frequently evoked as active agents, influencing characters' actions and motivations.[68] Likewise, funerary landscapes of *loci horridi* are created through references to Underworld rivers, Furies, and ghosts, which connect the suicide action to the landscape. The interplay between haunting memory, landscapes, and agency becomes a central element of Silius' suicide narratives, which present a nuanced portrayal of the lingering influence of past traumas on the present world. I argue that the presence of ghosts alongside the living in his suicide scenes highlights the transitional boundary state of suicide and the turbulent emotional state of his subjects: caught between their past motivations and present actions through the haunted landscape. This supernatural quality creates a space for ideological introspection on the complex emotional states of suicidal characters and their power/powerlessness when confronting impossible situations. Haunting memory and ghosts also appear to provide outlets for Silius to explore feelings of survivors' guilt and recovery from self-destructive acts of violence through characters and narratorial commentary.[69] Thus, Silius' use of haunting memory can be read as a tool that emphasises the impact of suicide on the physical world during the act and in its aftermath.

Fides and *Pietas*

In some instances, suicide is portrayed as an act of *fides* (loyalty) and *pietas* (duty/piety) done to maintain personal, familial, or cultural honour and values.[70] Suicide is often emphasised as a rational choice for subjects to die in a manner aligning with their

[68] E.g., Tiburna's haunting by Murrus (2.560-579) pp. 34-35, 39, and Hannibal's haunting from the phantom-Scipio (17.542-580) pp. 81-85.
[69] E.g., the survivor's guilt of Hannibal from his men's ghosts that spur his suicidal thoughts (17.542-580) pp. 83-87.
[70] E.g., Solimus' suicide in filial devotion to his father (9.168-177) pp. 92-96, and Scipio's attempts to commit suicide for similar reasons (4.454-477) pp. 87-92. Also, the framing of the goddess Fides as one of the divine influencers of the Saguntine and Capuan suicides.

personal and communal loyalties and duties, highlighting devotion and self-sacrifice amid overwhelming adversity as a means of adhering to one's moral values/identity. Silius' portrayal of suicide as both a tragic and glorious act raises questions about its societal implications, effectiveness, and consequences when viewed as an instrument of moral action.[71]

Flavian numismatic evidence supports the use of *fides* as a prominent symbol of civil war and its recovery in Silius' Rome. Many of Vespasian's coins from AD 73 depicted *fides exercitum* ('loyalty of the army') and *fides publica* ('loyalty of the public/people') as clasped right-hands, and Domitian's coins AD 84-89 depicted *fidei publicae* as the personified goddess Fides.[72] *Fides*-themed coinage during the AD 69 Civil War and afterward by the Flavians (in contrast to its absence from Julio-Claudian coinage) shifted *fides* from the private domestic to public sphere as a symbol of imperial power post-civil-war.[73] Echoes of this Flavian propaganda can be seen in many expressions of suicidal *fides* in Silius' narrative.[74]

Punica has been considered an epic of *fides*.[75] The prominence of *fides* in Silius' contemporary context and epic reveal its symbolic message for Roman recovery, stressing unified public loyalty in the aftermath of violent self-destructive acts like civil war. Civil war has been a longstanding part of Roman history and a theme of Roman epic since Vergil and Ennius, carrying a traumatic weight on Roman cultural self-identity. Silius' emphasis on *fides* could have reflected Flavian anxieties of returning to that violent past and desire for stability and recovery in its aftermath. Removal of Fides from Domitian's coins after AD 89,[76] as well as Fronto's potential involvement in Domitian's assassination in AD 96,

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[71] An overt instance of this is the aftermath of the Saguntine mass suicide 2.681-698
[72] Stocks 2019, OCRE, and the title images.
[73] For instance, the personified Fides with *fides publica* coins used by Galba (British Museum 1915.0310.5, OCRE), and the coins with *fides exercituum* with clasped right-hands used by Vitellius (British Museum R.10258, OCRE); Stocks 2019, 21-34; Fucecchi 2019, 188.
[74] E.g., Solimus' two *pollutae dextrae* (9.169) that he laments in his suicide speech pp. 94-95.
[75] Fucecchi 2019, 193.
[76] Stocks 2019, 32-36.

could have influenced the simultaneous positive and sinister aspects of Silius' personified Fides, often featured in his suicides. Silius frequently links Fides with the Furies, both epically entangled in their exertions of emotional influence and divine retribution throughout his suicide narratives (Saguntum and Capua particularly). Silius' frequent blurred participation of Fides and the Furies in his suicides and contemporary links between *fides* and civil wars, could have influenced the ambiguous portrayal of his Fides as a goddess associated with civil war and suicide.[77] This underscores *Punica*'s moral themes of Roman loyalty and recovery in the aftermath of destructive events.

Silius' links between *fides* and suicide could also have been influenced by Nero's suicide during Silius' consulship. Nero's last words in suicide (done by driving a dagger into his throat) were "too late…this is loyalty", and Suetonius reports that Nero's "first and most insistent request was that no one should be able to get possession of his head but that he should in some way be completely consumed by fire".[78] These could have influenced Silius' emphasis on *fides* and the motifs of throats, fire, and dismemberment in *Punica*'s suicides.

Tensions between self-destructive acts, civil war, duty, and recovery in suicide are also showcased through Silius' use of *pietas*. Like *fides*, *pietas* is variously depicted as affirmed through the act of suicide (Solimus: 9.168-177) or as a means of combatting suicidal thoughts to achieve personal and collective victory/recovery (Scipio: 4.417-477). These ambiguous illustrations of *pietas* are reminiscent of Vergil and the complex role of *pietas* for Aeneas, as both a tool for rescuing his family and founding Rome and a motive of personal revenge and civil war.

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[77] For the ambiguous divine influence of Fides and the Furies at Saguntum and Capua, see pp. 29-32, 40, 50-55, and 65-66.
[78] Suetonius, *Nero* 49.

Conclusions

In my case studies, I will examine how Silius uses these various *topoi* to shape narratives of collective and individual suicides in *Punica*. Silius' focus on suicide marks clear divergences from the war's historical events. Scholars such as Pomeroy (2010) have compared *Punica* to potential sources of Livy and Polybius. Livy's lengthy surviving account, and comparative analyses by Nesselrath (1986) and Pomeroy, indicate that nearly all Silius' narratorial variations were deliberate authorial choices, rather than a result of gaps in his source material.[79] A clear example of this deliberate narrative alteration is the structural pacing of *Punica*. Silius concentrates most of his 17-book epic on the war's early years, with the Battle at Cannae (as his climactic focalisation testing Roman character) occurring in Book 10, which contrasts to Livy where the battle occurs in Book 2 of his 10 books on the war (much more proportional to its historical temporality of 3 years into the 17-year war).[80] Silius also alters the narrative pacing of events, e.g. the expansion of his Saguntum narrative to 2 books. It is clear from these significant narrative variations that Silius uses the flexibility of the historical-epic genre to communicate political and philosophical messages on Roman character. *Punica* as a historical epic contains real historical characters and events intermixed with invented characters, active gods, and supernatural omens. I will examine some of these historical source comparisons; however, I will limit my analysis to the significance they can reveal on Silius' suicide ideology.

It is under this lens of viewing *Punica*'s framing as a clear authorial poetic choice, that I will examine the stylistic and ideological aspects of Silian suicide narratives. I argue that Silius' use of the aforementioned aspects of his poetic repertoire is similar to modern ideas of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). NET encourages individuals to establish self-identity and integrate traumatic event(s) into coherent stories by reflecting on key life

[79] Pomeroy 2010, 28-29.
[80] Ibid., 31.

events, and to contextualise traumatic experiences through controlled chronological narratives focusing on the positive and negative feelings/emotions aroused.[81] Ancient authors since Homer (*Odyssey* 21.293) and Diodorus Siculus (*Hist.* 17.112) used metaphors and terminology portraying 'trauma' and 'traumatisation' as an 'inner wounding'.[82] Scholars of Aristotle's *Poetics* have linked poetry's psychological *katharsis* ('purification') to traumatic engagement, through the *mimesis* ('imitation') of contemporary emotions/events.[83]

Likewise, epics can be interpreted as therapeutic emotional tools, providing ancient audiences with moral messages and distant yet recognisable *exempla* for reacting and processing psychosocial states. Epic genre has always been entangled with collective trauma. Collective trauma refers to traumatic events which affect psychosocial wellbeing on a communal scale, and the recovery from which occurs both at the group and individual level.[84] Traumatic experiences impact an individual or group's sense of identity (as 'trauma victim/survivor') and feelings of 'survivors' guilt' which impact recovery engagement.[85] A crucial aspect of trauma recovery is 'communalisation': telling one's story to socially connected others.[86] Oral and written retellings of traumatic experiences (like epic) can serve as therapeutic tools for trauma processing and recovery, analogous to modern NET approaches, as the sensory memories and turbulent emotions of traumatic episodes are able to be redefined, understood, and shared.[87] Ideas of Aristotelian poetic *katharsis* and NET approaches to ancient texts have received recent scholarly attention: Meineck (2012, 7) interprets Athenian tragedy as a collective culture therapy, and Christensen (2018) builds on Shay's (2012) argument for a therapeutic interpretation of the *Odyssey* as a recovery narrative.

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[81] Cooper *et al.* 2019.
[82] Becker 2014, 18.
[83] Schmitz 2007, 201.
[84] Isobel *et al.* 2019.
[85] Altmaier 2019.
[86] Minchin 2006, 4-5.
[87] APA 2017; Hartman 2003, 257, 259; Pennebaker 1997, 162-66; Schacter 2001, 171 in Minchin 2006, 4-5.

Ideas of NET can be seen in Scipio's *nekyia* (*Punica* 13.395-396, 13.868-895) which acts as a sort of Underworld talk-therapy, where Scipio's grief for his father's death and anxieties about Rome's collective future in the aftermath of Hannibalic trauma are assuaged. This can be interpreted as a further recovery from his earlier suicidal thoughts/attempts (4.454-477). Ideas of survivors' guilt are also shown to motivate Hannibal's suicidal thoughts and impede his recovery, as the ghosts of his men haunt him (17.563-565). Narratives of ghosts providing haunting guilt/fear or prophetic relief, illustrate Silian tensions between suicide as a representation of traumatic memories of powerlessness to escape one's destructive fate, and a representation of memorialising agency as self-destruction is used as a final glorious reclamation of one's destiny.

NET frameworks can also be read in *Punica*'s intertexts (particularly to Vergil and Lucan) and use of Roman names/epithets associated with contemporary civil wars (in Saguntum, Capua, Cannae narratives), which support interpretation of *Punica* as engaging with Roman collective trauma of civil war.

Additionally, Silius' epic could be interpreted as a type of narrative therapy for discussing suicidal thoughts in a realistic but less personally distressing way. During Scipio's *nekyia*, Silius offers a brief interjection on hardships verses death during an allusion to Hannibal's suicide and exile (*Punica* 13.883-885). His portrayal of enduring hardships (of slavery, the sea, exile, hunger, and heat) as an easier choice than committing suicide is striking. This ideology of suicide as a difficult decision is seemingly reflected in Silius' own later suicide by starvation,[88] which he probably had been contemplating for some years. Perhaps Silius' use of suicide as an epic theme could be a way of validating his identity/experiences of the difficult and complex emotional states and considerations in suicide, or an attempt to use narrative to ease the difficulties of engaging in suicidal contemplation.

[88] Pliny, *Epistulae* 3.7.

Examining Silius' narrative framing of suicide and the incorporation of all the literary features previously mentioned can reveal new insights into Silius' ideology of suicide and its possible significance to his audience. I will now examine how these interpretive devices and complex aspects of power entanglements characterise Silius' suicide expressions in my close-readings of collective and individual suicides in *Punica*.

Analysis: *Punica*'s Suicide Scenes

Chapter 2: Saguntum

Silius presents Hannibal's Saguntum siege as a primary cause of the Second Punic War, and the siege and mass suicide of the Saguntines occupy a significant portion of *Punica*'s opening (1.271-2.707). Silius deliberately diverges from Livy/Polybius with this dramatic distortion expanding the narrative to suit his epic genre.[89] Opening *Punica* with a deliberately extended narrative of the Saguntines' collective suicide makes suicide a clear thematic focus from the epic's outset.

After his *proem* (1.1-20) and brief excursions on Dido and Hannibal's motivations for war (1.21-270), Silius quickly sets the war's beginning with Hannibal's attack on Saguntum: "His war-trumpets sounded first before the gates of dismayed Saguntum, and he chose this war in eagerness for a greater war to come" (*Punica* 1.271-272). This choice could be influenced by contemporary rhetorical tradition, as the Saguntines' death was a popular declamation topic, representing ethical heroic *fides* and *virtus* or civil war.[90] While suicide plays an important role in Livy's account of Saguntum, Silius' account "dramatically alters the nature and scope" through divine mechanisms, as Hercules and Fides (Loyalty) compete with Juno and the Fury Tisiphone for control of the Saguntines' minds and fates.[91] Silius, like Valerius Maximus 6.6.5, presents a personified Fides influencing the Saguntine minds, in contrast to Livy (21.7.3) who presents the Saguntines' sense of loyalty without this divine influence.[92] Through use of a personified Fides as an active divine presence in *Punica*'s suicide narratives, Silius ambiguously links the actions, motivations, and effects of suicidal mentality with the divine, cosmic, and natural forces.

[89] Pomeroy 2010; Wallace 1968; Roumpou 2020, 169; Bernstein 2017.
[90] Bernstein 2017; Roumpou 2020, 169.
[91] McGuire 1977, 210-211.
[92] Bernstein 2017, 214; Roumpou 2020, 169.

Silius focalises this suicide narrative on suicide subjects. This is particularly striking with his treatment of the Saguntines' collective suicide, which breaks the focalisation from Hannibal before returning to him in a suicidal *prolepsis* at the end (*Punica* 2.699-707).[93] This focalisation shift with the collective suicide creates a vivid narrative centred on the experiences of suicide participants. Most of Silius' suicide narratives present the action with language focused on the physical and sensory elements, and in the present tense. This creates an active and sensory environment grounded in the present that connects the physical body, emotions, and agency of characters to their surroundings and the natural landscape. Through these suicide scenes, Silius emphasises the role of the body as an instrument for moral action, whose agency can be felt in reciprocal reactions with the landscape and the natural world. This creates a universalising tone of his suicide narratives for his audience, encouraging readers to put themselves in the present state of the suicide action and consider the multiple meanings the act can represent.

Silius immediately integrates the gods into his Saguntum, stressing the city's ties to Hercules and the slaying of Geryon by Hercules and Zacynthus (*Punica* 1.271-295). There are some parallels between this mythical digression and the historical suicide event. Several aspects of this myth reflect elements of Silius' Saguntine suicide motifs and possibly foreshadow the suicide events. The three-headed body of Geryon is possibly representative of Carthage and the 3 Punic Wars, and Hercules' failed intervention in Zacynthus' death from the serpent symbolic of Rome's failed aid to Saguntum against Hannibal.[94] The throat venom (*fauces…venenis*) poisoning Zacynthus from the snake he trod on could highlight the same dilemmas regarding agency present in the Saguntines' suicide, as it is the serpent Zacynthus actively throws himself on which brings about his death. This connects the instrument of death (poison) to the physical body (throat), both

[93] See pp. 71-76 for discussion.
[94] Vessey 1974, 30.

recurring motifs in Silius.[95] The method of poison also recalls Hannibal's and the Capuan senators' suicides (*veneno*: *Punica* 2.707; *placidis venenis*: *Punica* 13.892).[96] Hercules' appearance in the epic also reinforces the ethical themes of suicide and loyalty, as Hercules was a common ethical figure of triumphant *virtus* in Roman epic.[97] Additionally, associations of suicide with the throat and *fides* also recall Nero's suicide during Silius' consulship and Nero enjoyed performing as Hercules.[98] These may have motivated Silius' intratextual choices.

An enraged Juno instigates Silius' Saguntine suicide, ordering the Fury Tisiphone to "lay the proud people [of Sanguntum] low by their own right-hands" (*manu populumque ferocem dextris sterne suis*: 2.532-533) and punish Saguntum "down to Erebus" (*Punica* 2.541). Juno does this in response to the personified Fides' (Loyalty's) influence in Saguntum at the behest of Hercules, who pities the famished Saguntines' corpse-like bodies, deformed from hunger during Hannibal's siege (*Punica* 457-493). Fides transforms the Saguntines' hunger to a passion for loyalty and noble suicide, and her presence among those viewed as Aeneas' descendants outrages Juno (*Punica* 2.493-533). This creates a divine battle of Juno and Tisiphone against Fides and Hercules for influence over the Saguntines' minds that parallels the war with Carthage and creates a narrative undercurrent of civil war.[99] Silius' juxtaposition in characterising suicide as divinely influenced by Fides and the Furies portrays suicide as a tension between self-loyalty and self-punishment, as subjects' identities are both affirmed and destroyed. The punitive divine retribution through Juno and the Furies recalls *Aeneid* and Juno's anger after Dido's suicide. Just as Hannibal is cast by Silius as Dido's avenger by Juno (*Punica* 1.1-139;

[95] Throats: *Punica* 1.56-60 2.493-553, 2.608, 2.684-686; Poison: 1.271-295, 2.707, 13.274-275, 13.296-297, 13.892.
[96] Also noted by Vessey 1974, 35 and Van der Keur 2024, 503-504.
[97] Vessey 1974, 29-30.
[98] Suetonius, *Nero* 49, 53.
[99] McGuire 1997, 210-211; Fucecchi 2019, 193-194; Roumpou 2020, 172-173; Bernstein 2017.

Aeneid 4.641-671), here Juno herself seems to appear as an avenger through her role in the suicide action. However, much like her influence on Dido in *Aeneid* (in competition with Venus/Cupid), the tension between Juno and Fides makes their involvement in the suicide unclear. The ambiguous influence of these divine figures and their contrasting motivations (despite the unified 'goal' of their actions) appear to highlight a dual ideological characterisation of suicide as a punitive action inflicted upon subjects by external circumstances, and a choice sought by participants to reaffirm their values.

The divine pity of Fides and Hercules and the 'turning' of hunger into suicidal motivational might recall Silius' own later suicide by starvation. It is interesting that Silius chose for himself a manner of suicide resembling the Saguntine one with which he deliberately extends a significant portion of his epic's beginning. The Fury's use of rage, poison, death's throats, grief, and sadness to combat Fides' suicidal influence (*Punica* 2.493-553) are motifs that characterise many of Silius' other suicide narratives. These divine tools could be read as linking emotional motivations and reactions to the physical body and suicide method. The unification of mental and physical states seems to present suicide as a complex internal struggle that is both fuelled by the physical body (like hunger) and an external pressure than enacts itself upon the body (like poison).

I will examine the main elements of the Saguntum mass suicide in turn: the character of Tiburna, the suicide objects/omens of the snake and collective funeral pyre, and the suicide's aftermath.

Tiburna

Tisiphone takes the guise of the grieving widow Tiburna to inspire the Saguntines to madness, slaughter, and suicide. The Fury-Tiburna gives this speech:

> What end will there be? We have given enough to Loyalty and our ancestors. I myself saw my bloodied husband Murrus, I myself saw him. His mangled corpse terrified my sleep as it sounded forth dire prophecies: 'My wife, rescue yourself from this pitiful city's downfall. If the Carthaginian's victory has left no land for us, Tiburna, then flee to my shades. Our household gods have fallen, we iian Saguntines have died, and the Punic sword holds all'. My mind recoils, and his image still has not left my eyes.
>
> Will I see your roofs no more after this Saguntum? You were lucky, Murrus, lucky to die while your homeland still stood. But after a war's defeat and the vast sea's dangers, victorious Carthage will see us led as slaves to serve Sidonian mothers. When my final night comes at last, I shall lie a captive in Libya's bosom. But as for you, young men, whose self-conscious virtue has denied that you can ever be taken captive, you who have in death a mighty weapon against misfortune, rescue your mothers from slavery with your swords/hands. The steep road makes virtue known. Hasten to be first to invade this road to virtue, neither easy for people nor a known praise!
>
> *Punica* 2.560-579

Here, Silius frames suicide as a rescue and exilic flight to the shades in the face of Carthaginian victory. This connection is repeated with Tiburna's address to "lucky Murrus" who does not die an exile, but instead while his "homeland still stood". This link between exile and suicide recurs throughout *Punica*, and resembles Hannibal's later exilic suicide, chronologically omitted from *Punica*'s scope. Hannibal's historical suicide frames many of *Punica*'s suicides, alluded to after both collective suicides (2.699-707, 13.868-895). Silius' exilic framing of collective suicide could be a commentary on epic themes of Roman exilic cultural identity (e.g., Vergil's Aeneas' as a refugee), which anchored ideas of a unified Roman culture in a quest to recover from a violent othering and separation. Silius' choice to present collective suicide as a form of exile here, could indicate a similar epic theme of recovery amid catastrophic loss. With their suicides, the Saguntines (and later Capuans) exile themselves and the landscape is transformed until recovery can be achieved through Scipio's victory. Thus, the violent othering and separation of this exilic

framing of suicide may be read as highlighting the destructive action while also creating ideological space for reclamation and future victorious action.

Additionally, Fury-Tiburna's references to the personified Fides, ancestors, Saguntum's roofs (*tua tecta*) and the fallen household gods link domestic/civic imagery to suicide. The opening/closing of *Punica*'s Saguntum with the death and suicide of a husband and wife (Murrus' death at 1.475-521 and real-Tiburna's suicide at 2.665-680) further reveal Silius' frequent linking of suicide to domestic imagery.[100] Both have Vergilian intertexts. The suppliant Murrus' death is reminiscent of Turnus' at the end of *Aeneid* (12.919-952) as Hannibal "drove home his sword, pressed on by rage until the hilt stopped it".[101] Likewise, Tiburna's suicide recalls Dido's (*Aeneid* 4.641-671). Links between domestic imagery and suicide are reinforced in this speech through repeated references to Murrus' and Tiburna's relationship: 'my bloodied husband', *coniunx* ('wife'). These emphasise the relational/familial element of suicide and its haunting effects on families, as Murrus' shade offers simultaneous help and horror to Tiburna. The phrase *nec adhuc oculis absistit imago* ('his image still has not left my eyes') connects haunting memory and ghosts (Murrus' shade) to the living physical body and senses (Tiburna's eyes). These highlight the duality of the temporality of Murrus' spirit as a shade and the permanence of it as a haunting memory: the ghostly figure and haunting *imago*'s hold over Tiburna inspire the collective suicide. Both Silius' readers and the Saguntine audience appear encouraged to see themselves in Murrus/Tiburna's relationship, as Fury-Tiburna's speech can be read as appealing to their own family dynamics and fears. This haunting memory of domestic disorder in Silius' suicide theme could therefore emphasise ideas of collective social trauma needing recovery.

[100] Vessey 1974, 34-35.
[101] Stocks 2018, 301-302.

Silius links suicide to the divine through the speaker of the disguised Tisiphone (sent by Juno) quoting the prophesy of Murrus' *imago*. This could be an intratexual reference to Juno's later shepherd disguise *imago* adopted to prevent Hannibal's suicide (*Punica* 17.542-580). Silius' description of Murrus' *imago* emphasises visual senses and the physical body (*Punica* 2.561-568). Through the haunted Tiburna, Silius connects haunting memory to the mind, senses, and physical body to showcase the trauma of suicide. The ghosts that haunt *Punica* and their integration in Silius' suicide ideology create a Roman character of haunting, reinforced through civil war associations and linguistic epithets framing individual and collective suicides in terms evocative of Silius' contemporary socio-political context. The use of domestic ghosts and haunting memory to influence his suicide subjects could be interpreted as Silius' engagement with his personal trauma and the Roman collective trauma of civil wars, imperial suicides, and other states of extreme national threat which lingered like ghosts in Roman cultural memory. Contemporary uncertainties and haunting memories of the AD 68-69 civil wars likely reinvigorated during Domitian's reign (with no obvious successor) and following Domitian's assassination and Nerva's ascension.[102] The close relationships between Silius' family as consuls during contemporary historical incidents of imperial suicide, civil war, and assassination, (and looming threats and fears of death, exile, and civil war in Rome), could have influenced Silius' prominence of suicide as a poetic theme linking the civic/domestic sphere to civil war, exile, personal relationships.

Silius' encouragement of Roman identification with his suicide subjects can be seen in the speech's explicit vocalisation foreshadowing the Saguntine suicide: "we Rutulian Saguntines have died" (*occidimus Rutuli*: *Punica* 2.567). The use of direct speech and the first-person collective 'we' in Tiburna's self-characterisation of their suicide portray this as

[102] Agri 2022; Stocks 2019; McDermott & Orentzel 1977, 32-33; McGuire 1997, x-xi.

an address to both the Saguntine audience and Silius' readership. This use of first-person direct address to emphasise the suicide experience may have spurred Roman readers to reflect on their own deaths and their roles as witnesses and participants.

Audience-identification with suicide subjects is reinforced by the epithet *Rutuli*, also used before Murrus' death (who is of 'Rutulian blood' 1.376-379). The use of *Rutuli* recalls Turnus' gaze on the civil war's destruction before his inevitable death (*Aeneid* 12.911-916). This intertext links Silius' Saguntum to Rome and civil war. Recurring epithets like *Rutuli*[103] and *Daunii,*[104] symbolise and stress Italian unity, kinship with Rome, and epic links to Vergil's Trojan-Italian Civil War.[105] The epithets' connection to the Roman contemporary landscape "encourage readers to look for traces of *Romanitas* in Saguntum itself".[106] This is striking considering Saguntum's location in Spain at the outskirts of the Roman world. Both the Romanising epithets and the first-person language blur identities between Rome and Saguntum that could have encouraged Silius' audience to engage in self-reflection on suicide. Roman readers are identified with the suicide subjects, and thus encouraged to confront their own death in Silius' narrative.

Silius reinforces this Romanisation for his audience by including this epithet along with the first-person plural form of *occidere* ('to die/kill/cut down/slay with a sharp instrument/fall down') (*occidimus Rutuli*) in the suicide speech. This could awaken emotional associations for Roman readers to connect their own mortality/identity to mass suicide, as both victims and survivors of self-destructive environments. *Occidere* is an intransitive verb of violent action signifying 'operational phase' suicide narratives (suicide narratives that focus on the mode/method used), and rather than being neutral in tone, evokes the brutality inflicted on the body.[107] Silius' use of *occidimus* for his portrayal of

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[103] An epithet for Romans and Latium region: *Punica* 1.377, 1.437, 1.584, 1.658, 2.541, 2.567, 2.604.
[104] An epithet for the Apulia region: *Punica* 1.440, 1.665, 2.244, 2.557.
[105] McGuire 1997, 209-210; Bernstein 2017, 47-48; Cowan 2007. These links are supported in the translations: Duff 1934; Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 6.
[106] McGuire 1997, 209-210.
[107] I am using Grisé's classifications of suicide narrative types as 'operational' or 'decisional' (1982, 24-26). The application of these categories to Silius is my own.

the Saguntine suicide emphasises suicide's brutal effects on the physical body. With *Rutuli,* these create a vivid suicide narrative that highlights tensions and ambiguities between ideas of civil war, agency, identity, and the instrument of the physical body. Not to say these would encourage actualised suicide in his readership. Rather, Silius' narrative may be viewed as creating a safe space for readers to contemplate the acts and effects of suicide and explore how the emotions and experiences of graphic self-destruction affirm/challenge their images of themselves and their socio-political values. This use of epic narrative as a safe space for audience-engagement with suicidal ideation resembles the controlled reframing and emotional exploratory process of Narrative Exposure Therapy.[108] This could prompt reader reflection of what impossible situations necessitate suicide, how those suicide acts survive in living memory, and how recovery from suicide shapes contemporary history.

In Fury-Tiburna's suicide speech Carthage is described as a sword holding all (*tenet omnia Punicus ensis*) and appears to blur Romo-Saguntine identity, as Carthage metaphorically becomes the instrument of Roman/Saguntine death. The choice of a sword links Fury-Tiburna's speech to the suicide object of the sword used later by real-Tiburna (*Punica* 2.665-680). Thus, Silius uses the Punic sword as an emotive object signifying war, oppression, and death, but he also inverts this by having the sword function for Tiburna and the Saguntines as an instrument of agency and freedom from this oppression. In this way, the sword can be read as an emotive object signifying suicide produced by an intrapersonal civil war. The purpose, users, and emotional context of the suicide object shift between being tools of oppression and of agency, creating blurred identities between Rome, Carthage, and Saguntum that vividly showcase the ideological dilemmas of civil war. Thus, Silius complicates the Carthaginian victory over Saguntum/Rome by having

[108] Discussed pp. 24-26.

their presence be both an inevitable external threat and a freely sought self-destructive tool for later glory and *fides*.

In an explicit direct address with the vocative, the collective suicide is imagined as a product of 'self-conscious virtue' and 'weapon against misfortune/harsh death' (*sed vos, o iuvenes, vetuit quos conscia virtus posse capi, quis telum ingens contra aspera mors est*) that protects the Saguntines from captivity (*Punica* 2.575-579). Here Silius combines 'decisional phase' and 'operational phase' suicide narratives. The adjective *conscia* ('conscious/guilty/known') emphasises the 'decisional phase' of the suicide narrative, showcasing suicide subjects' rational will/consciousness.[109] As Vessey (1974, 32-33) observes Fury-Tiburna uses logical rhetoric grounded in rational philosophical ideas of suicide; I think this is evidenced in her characterisation of suicide as a weapon and the decisional language of their *conscia virtus*. *Conscia*'s associations with knowledge and guilt (this entanglement reflected in the English world self-conscious), characterise the suicide *virtus* of Silius' ideology.[110] *Conscia virtus* is another Vergilian intertext, recalling Entellus' godlike rage/strength during his boxing match with Dares (*Aeneid* 5.455: "then shame and self-conscious virtue kindle him/his strength"). It also connects the Saguntines to Turnus, whose mad refusal to avoid fighting Aeneas results from a Fury's intervention: "within that single heart seethes mighty shame, madness mingled with grief, love stung/driven by fury, and self-conscious virtue" (*Aeneid* 12.667-668).[111] These Vergilian intertexts link Silius' suicide theme to Italian disunity and civil war and emphasise Saguntum's suicidal strength as a deadly divinely fuelled product of Rome's abandonment. The expression and its linking of guilty shame, self-conscious valour, and strength of virtue

[109] See fn.107.
[110] Both Duff (1934) and Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) translate *conscia* as 'conscious'; however, I think 'self-conscious' better demonstrates the additional Latin connotations for English readers.
[111] Bernstein 2017, 242.

in the context of suicide here appear consistent with the complex ambiguity of Silius' suicide ideology observed previously.[112]

Conscia virtus is also linked to haunting memory as Murrus, whose ghost helps Fury-Tiburna inspire this suicide, was previously described in these terms: "then shame kindles his mind, and his self-conscious virtue does not fail him, though he was pressed in a tough spot" (*Punica* 1.493-494). Emotions of shame (*pudor*), *furor*, and grief are linked to Furies and portrayed with linguistic fire imagery in Vergilian and Silian expressions of *conscia virtus*.[113] Within this intertextual context, Silius' use of *conscia virtus* creates links between suicide objects (the collective pyre), the divine influence of the Furies, and human emotional states. Self-conscious virtue and its links to godlike strength, *furor*, fire, and *pudor* characterise Silian suicides as destructive forces that provide chaotic and unstable claims to individual power, which nevertheless have dramatic impacts on the surrounding world and historical memory.

Having examined the Fury-Tiburna's suicide speech, I will now turn to Silius' description of the real Tiburna's suicide:

> Look! Amidst the madness of slaughter, wretched Tiburna's right-hand was armed with her husband's bright sword, and in her left she shook a burning torch. Her dishevelled hair stood on end, and crying aloud, her naked breasts discoloured/bruised by her cruel blows, she hurried over corpses to Murrus' burial mound. Such seems Alecto, when Father of Hell's court thunders doom, and the monarch's wrath troubles and vexes the dead; Alecto, standing before the throne and terrible seat of the god, does service to the Jupiter of Tartarus and deals out

[112] My readings of the links between guilty shame and self-conscious valour and strength of virtue in *conscia virtus* and of the suicide sword as an emotive suicide object (in line with archaeological frameworks for interpreting interactions between object and subject agencies pp. 15-16), are consistent with McGuire's conclusions analysing tyrannical attributes of Flavian suicide subjects, which support representation of suicide as a reciprocal act of political defiance that terminates both tyranny and its opposition (1997, 185-186).

[113] *Accendit*: 'kindles/lights up' (*Punica* 1.493-494); *incendit*: 'burns/kindles', *aestuat*: 'heats up/seethes' (*Aeneid* 5.455, 12.667-668).

> punishments. With tears she placed her husband's armour on the burial mound, which had been recently rescued with much bloodshed. Praying to the dead to welcome her, she applied her burning torch to the pyre. Then, seizing death, she cried, 'Best of husbands, see, I myself carry this weapon to you in the shades'. And so she took up the sword and fell over the armour, attacking the flames with her gaping mouth
>
> *Punica* 2.665-680

Real-Tiburna's suicide reinforces Silius' blurred identity between Fides and the Furies. The familial *fides* between Tiburna and Murrus can be read in her use of his sword for her suicide and her loyalty to his command to flee to his shade in the face of Carthaginian domination (*Punica* 2.564-567). The burning torch in her left-hand recalls the Fury Tisiphone's Phlegethon-dipped torch used to conceal/embalm the gods (*Punica* 2.609-611). It appears deliberately unclear whether the suicide act is the result of the divine influence of Fides or Tisiphone. This creates a sense of divine blurred identity between the Fury and Fides within the suicide narrative that mirrors the blurred identities Silius creates between Rome, Saguntum, and Carthage. Through Tiburna, Silius seems to conjoin Fides and the Fury as goddesses representing civil war and suicide, unified in their influential self-destruction mirrored in the characters' internal disarray. This ambiguous influence merges the grim violent hopelessness and virtuous reclamation of power that suicide can dually occupy in the face of inescapable circumstances.

The burial mound of corpses Tiburna clamours over during her suicide (*ad tumulum Murri super ipsa cadavera fertur*: *Punica* 2.670) creates a *locus horridus* connecting suicide, death, and the physical body of the corpse to the natural landscape as a 'mountain of death'. Here Silius compares Tiburna's appearance to the Fury Alecto (reminiscent of Dido's suicide: *Aeneid* 4.641-671), rather than to Tisiphone, the Fury who assumed her appearance earlier.[114] This could be to create another intertextual allusion to Alecto's

[114] Vessey 1974, 34-35.

influence over Queen Amata and Turnus (*Aeneid* 7.341-543), where Alecto (at Juno's command) pierces them with a snake that poisons and inspires frenzy, self-destruction, and civil war. These Vergilian elements reflect similar motifs in Silius' suicide narratives of snakes, poison, and divinely linked madness, violence, and civil war. The *locus horridus* appears to demonstrate a deliberate thematic portrayal of the suicide process that highlights the complex turbulent motivations behind the act (through divine links), the violent act itself (through the methods), and the simultaneous peace and destruction of its aftermath (the burial mound and human pyre of corpses, the flight to the new home of the shades).

Real-Tiburna's physical description (her grief and self-harm visible in her dishevelled hair, naked bruised breasts, and the fire-attacking gaping mouth of her corpse: *Punica* 2.668-670, 2.680) recalls the visual and sensory experiences of the ancient cremation process, creating another *locus horridus*. Habinek quotes a passage from anthropologist Howard Williams' *Death Warmed Up: The Agency of Bodies and Bones in Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites*, which is useful for examining descriptions of the ancient cremation process for comparisons in Classical texts.[115] During the 7-10hour process, the corpse's insides became visible and fragmented, blood and bodily fluids evaporated and oozed, and the body-fat aided and accentuated the pyre's flames.[116] The corpse's limbs would twitch and appear to writhe as if alive, and the expansion of internal liquids/bodily gases made it bloat, change colour, and moan.[117] There was an acrid smell of burnt hair, and the cremated bones/ashes would distort, warp, and crack.[118] Communal pyres would have enhanced the sensory impact: burning hotter/faster, more visible, louder, and producing stronger odours.[119]

[115] Williams 2004, 271-281 from Habinek 2016, 9-13.
[116] Habinek 2016, 12-13.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 9-10.

Mass cremation frequently occurred in Silius' Rome due to population growth and civil wars, and Martial references a thousand corpses burnt simultaneously.[120] The major destructive fires and violence during the civil wars and imperial proscriptions perhaps influenced the prominence of suicide pyres as motifs in *Punica* and Silius' sensory descriptions linking bodies, suicide objects, and natural landscapes. Silius' Tiburna evokes different elements of the physical body in the suicide/cremation process: her hair recalls the smell of the suicide pyre, her bruised naked body recalls the mutilated discolouring of the corpse, and her gaping mouth attacking the flames after her death recalls the life-like writhing of the moaning corpse. Tiburna's climb over the corpses of Murrus' burial mound, her comparison to the Furies, and her invoking of the *manes* resemble *topoi* of witches and funeral pyres.[121]

Her gaping mouth attacking the flames (*flammas invadit hiatu*) (with themes of mouths/throats, attack/invasion, and suicide-by-pyre) alludes to her earlier suicide speech urging the Saguntines to virtuous suicide (*invadere*: 2.579) and to the lion/sheep metaphor at the end of Silius' Saguntum narrative (*faucibus invasit siccis leo, mandit hianti ore fremens… gutture ructatus large cruor*: *Punica* 2.684-686). All these motifs (throats, *fides*, and fire) often occur in Silius' suicide imagery. These could reflect Silius' personal/collective trauma over Nero's suicide, whom he was consul under. Nero committed suicide by driving a dagger into his throat, his last words were "too late…this is loyalty", and "the first and most insistent request Nero made of his companions was that…he should in some way be completely consumed by fire".[122] Here, Tiburna's gaping mouth, death by sword, cremation, and suicide connected to *fides,* recall Nero's suicide. Tiburna's suicide also resembles Dido's suicide by use of Aeneas' sword on a pyre, as she recalls her husband and curses the Trojans (*Aeneid* 4.641-671).[123] Like Dido, Tiburna's

[120] Martial 8.75.9–10; Habinek 2016, 9-10.
[121] Habinek (2016, 27-28) discusses the use of the *manes* in tropes of witches and funeral pyres in Horace's *Satire* 1.8 and Lucan 6.507-569. The comparison to Silius is my own.
[122] Suetonius, *Nero* 49.
[123] Fucecchi 2019, 193-194.

suicide is presented dually as an inevitable fate influenced by the divine, and a controlled attack of agency and resilient self-destruction.

This seems further reflected in *ad manes, en, ipsa fero* ('I myself carry this weapon to you in the shades': *Punica* 2.579) which characterises Tiburna as an agent of divine punishment. Silius repeatedly presents suicide as a weapon, and now Tiburna brings this weaponised suicide to the *manes* ('shades'). Habinek provides a useful catalogue of poetic use of the *manes* as agents, avengers, and reflections of fears of the living, with active impacts on their lives.[124] This characterises the *manes* as poetic tools of agency and haunting memory, as they both remind the living of violent pasts and influence present action. Tiburna's arming of the *manes* in her suicide can be interpreted as reflecting the cyclical nature of civil war and revealing suicide as a boundary between the living and the dead that (like Dido's suicide) creates space for post-mortem vengeance.

The Snake and Pyre:

After Fury-Tiburna's suicide speech, Silius describes the Fury's movement to a mountain tomb built by Hercules occupied by "a dark blue snake, its rough scales flecked with gold" (*Punica* 2.580-591). Silius uses nature motifs linked to death to describe this mountain tomb 'viewed from the sea' and 'graced with honoured ashes' to create a landscape of death evoking the natural elements (sea: water; ashes: fire; tomb/mountain: earth). This is a good example of Silius' use of *loci horridi* ('horrible places').[125] This elemental imagery is enhanced by the snake emerging with "bloody flame flashed from its fiery eyes, and its tongue flickered in its hissing mouth" (*Punica* 2.584-587). This fire

[124] Habinek 2016, 1-2.
[125] I have adopted the term *loci horridi* from Śnieżewski 2018 and Haselmann 2018 in Augoustakis 2020, who note it as a prominent device in Silian poetics. The examples I discuss here are my own.

imagery foreshadows the emotive object of the funeral pyre of the Saguntine suicide: with bloody flame signifying the burning corpses, and the flickering tongue evoking the sensory elements of the suicide pyre (the hiss of the burning and the flickering of the fire). The fire imagery of the snake also alludes to the real-Tiburna's suicide pyre and the description of her posthumous "attack [of] the flames with her gaping mouth" (*Punica* 2.680).

Like personified Fama (Rumour) in *Aeneid* (4.173-197: accompanying imagery of flaming rage and gossiping tongues), the snake weaves through the frightened city crowds (*Punica* 2.588-589). However, then the snake "slipped hurriedly from the high walls and, like an exile headed for the shore, plunged headlong into the sea's foamy waves" (*Punica* 2.589-591). This could be an intertextual reversal of the twin snakes from Tenedos, which emerge ashore from the sea and kill the Trojan Laocoon and his sons before hiding on the citadel (*Aeneid* 2.199-228). Continuation of landscape and nature motifs (city walls, shore, sea, foaming waves) reinforce Silius' use of a fiery mountain as an emotive object signifying death, war, and suicide. *Loci horridi* like this can be read as supporting the connections between individual's internal states and the wider community and environments surrounding them that Silius draws within his suicide theme.

Additionally, the 'suicide' of this snake upon the Fury's arrival recalls the snake in Zacynthus' story (*Punica* 1.271-295), creating an inversion between a snake seeking its own death and a snake bringing death to another. This reflection seems to further Silius' link between the personal and collective implications of self-destructive acts. The snake's flight from the city mirrors the Saguntines' escapist-suicide, highlighting their identity as both victims and agents of suicide. The city flees its destruction by reclaiming that destruction for itself through death. The exilic simile before the snake's suicide (*ac similis profugo vicina*) also alludes to Hannibal and his later suicide in exile, reinforced at the end of Silius' Saguntum narrative (*Punica* 2.699-707). This, like Tiburna's speech, frames suicide as a rescue and flight to the shades in the face of exile created in the wake of

Carthaginian victory. This reinforces thematic connections Silius draws between exile and suicide in *Punica*, which portray suicide as an exile from life.

After the exilic suicidal *locus horridus* of the fiery snake, Silius describes the collective Saguntine pyre and suicide act:

> Then indeed the Saguntines' minds were shaken/banished: just as the dead flee forth from betrayed roofs, and their shadows/ghosts refuse to lie on captive ground. Tired to hope for salvation, they reject food, and the hidden Fury acts. It is not more burdensome that the merciless gods make known the hard things of violent death, than bring forth delays; Thunderstruck, they seek to sever life more swiftly and are burdened by the light [of life].
>
> Eagerly built, its massive height rising to the stars, a funeral pyre stood in the middle of the city…They throw on the pile all that the conquered still possess…and with joy and pride consign the conqueror's booty to the all-devouring flames.
>
> When the wild Fury saw this pile, she shakes a torch dipped in Phlegethon's fiery waves, and conceals/embalms the gods above in Hellish fog. Then the Saguntines undertook a work noble to all the world, which unfortunate glory preserves eternally for the unconquered people
>
> *Punica* 2.592-613

Silius begins this passage with a simultaneous challenge and affirmation of Stoic ideas of rational suicide, as the Saguntines' minds are shaken/banished (*excussae mentes*). The verb *excutere* ('to shake out/banish') reinforces themes of exile and Fury/divine inspired mental confusion that also impacts the landscape as the Saguntines are compared to ghosts 'fleeing' from *prodita tecta* ('betrayed roofs') and 'captive ground' (*Punica* 2.592-594). These linguistic links create connections between suicide, exile, haunting memory, and relationships between the physical body and the natural world, as Silius' Saguntines seem portrayed as simultaneously living and dead during their suicide. The

exilic framing of their internal disarray and continued post-mortem exile as ghosts until the Carthaginian threat is vanquished, highlight the transitional boundary of the suicide act and the mental strain of subjects and their lingering communities facing overwhelming inescapable situations.

Here the Saguntines' exhausted hope mirrors their famished bodies in their suicidal state of mental/physical depletion. Suicide appears a potential recovery avenue from suffering during that impossible situation. If read as a predicative neuter nominative *sans est*, "hoping for salvation is totally futile" (2.594-595), the phrase provides a dramatic universalising of suicidal mentality. This universalising possibly encouraged readers to identify with suicide subjects, and vividly captures the grim rationality of the act as a legitimate response to reclaim agency and power amid helpless or impossible circumstances. Silius' mention of the Saguntines' 'rejecting of food' is possibly worth noting, as that is the method Silius later used for his own suicide after an incurable illness. Silius' description of the emaciated Saguntines focuses on the deformity and suffering of their physical bodies: "now covered only by sallow skin and poorly joined by quivering veins, the bones protrude, disgusting to see with the limbs eaten away" (*Punica* 2.466-468).[126] The Saguntines' *deformia membris* before their suicide present death as a weapon and a kindness for them when faced with that suffering (similar to Seneca *Consolation to Marcia* 20.2-3 and *De Providentia* 6.7-8), but also does not shy away from the horror and brutality of that fate. The presentation of the Saguntines' bodies in this deformed state makes their physical bodies parallel their suicide action as a transitory state between life and death.

[126] McClellan 2019, 100-107.

I translate *abrumpere vitam ocius attoniti quaerunt lucemque gravantur* as 'Thunderstruck, they seek to sever life more swiftly and are burdened by the light/life' (*Punica* 2.596-598). My translation of *attoniti* (from *attonare* 'to strike with lightning') as 'thunderstruck', and Silius' use of *lucem* ('light') to refer to the 'life' the Saguntines are burdened with and desire to sever show links between nature and the physical body in *Punica*'s suicides. These are translated by Duff (1934) as "in their frenzy" and "existence", and by Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) as "stunned" and "the light". My translation aims to both stick to the Latin and to showcase that Silius' use of these expressions in his suicide framing continues his narrative intertwining of physical bodies, mental states, and landscapes in his suicide depictions[127].

Suicide motifs of light/darkness continue with Silius' Fury: *quae postquam congesta videt feralis Erinnys, lampada flammiferis tinctam Phlegethontis in undis quassat et inferna superos caligine condit* (2.609-611). The verb *condit* has a double meaning: from *condere* ('to build/conceal') or *condire* ('to preserve/embalm/season'). While the primary meaning here is likely concealment,[128] I think Silius deliberately makes use of this double resonance. *Condere* reflects recurring ideas of the concealed-yet-present divine in Silius' suicide narratives. Here the divine occupy both an active role (through the Fury) and a passive role (through her obscuring of the remaining divine realm). This relates to the hidden Fury (*Punica* 2.595), who, while concealed, obscures. This duality represents Silius' recurring thematic emphasis on reciprocal transitory states in his suicide narratives. These play with ambiguities in agency and identity, as subjects express simultaneous victimhood and resistance in self-destructive actions. This is because the subject occupies the ambiguous position of receiving the actions they invoke, and Silius reflects these agency entanglements in their physical bodies, the instruments they use, and the landscape

[127] This creates an interesting connection of the Saguntines' mental states to Hannibal. Roumpou (2019, 33, 168) notes Hannibal's association with lightning elsewhere, his name Barca meaning 'lightning/thunderbolt'.

[128] Translated by both Duff (1934) and Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) as "hid".

surrounding them. The additional resonance with *condire* reflects funerary language, as the Fury's embalming of the gods with fog creates a *locus horridus* by connecting nature and the elements to both the process of death and preservation of the body in the exact moment of death. This possible hidden allusion to 'embalming' of the gods could highlight the hopelessness and loneliness of the Saguntines' situation, as even the gods themselves are cast as fellow corpses and their aid hidden and inaccessible.

This divine death alongside the human suicide gives a sense of wider physical and spiritual implications to self-destructive acts, which elicit a universalising mourning and recovery. Here *caligine* acts an emotive object signifying both mental and literal 'fog/smoke/darkness'. The concealing/embalming fog itself becomes a part of the suicide process by reinforcing links to death and burial. This gives the natural landscape an active role in the suicide process, as it undergoes its own funerary transformation, with the landscape acting as a mourner and funerary attendant of the Saguntine suicide. This showcases Silius' ideological characterisation of suicide as impacting individuals, societies, and the natural and spiritual world around them, that must choose to die, mourn, commemorate, and recover. Like the fog, Tisiphone's torch also connects to light/darkness motifs and the funerary process. Torches were traditionally emotive objects associated with weddings and funerals.[129] These link to ideas of domestic/civic imagery in suicide explored previously.

Silius portrays suicide as an *opus* ('work/deed') which is *nobile* ('noble/famous/celebrated') and preserved to all the world eternally (*Punica* 2.612-613). The Saguntines' act and mentality are rationalised and their senses of agency, power, and duty reinvigorated: drawing thematic links between memory, duty, and suicide. The universalising preservation of their suicide throughout the world creates a contrast between the destructive hopelessness of the act and the commemorative power of contemporary

[129] Augoustakis & Bernstein 2021, 29 trans. n.10.

memory. *Aggressi* (from *aggredere* 'to approach/attack/undertake') bears similarity to Silius' earlier use of *invadere* (*Punica* 2.579) in that both verbs signify a proactive entering/approaching/attack which frame his suicides. The use of *aggressi* in conjunction with the Saguntines' *opus nobile* create this tone of reciprocal agency, as the Saguntines use their suicide as a weapon against Carthage. Thus, Silius ideologically connects suicide to agency and haunting memory, highlighting both the power and powerlessness of his suicide subjects, and the grim hopelessness, mourning, and commemorative recovery attained by subjects and witnesses.

Silius next describes various scenes of familial violence in graphic detail, inspired by the Saguntines' madness and anger stirred up by the Fury (*Punica* 2.614-649). Then Silius begins his first narratorial interjection on the Saguntine mass suicide, focusing on the environment and gods:

> Who could command his tears when recounting the hardships of the city, praiseworthy monstrosities, Loyalty's punishments, and sorrowful fates of the pious? Even the Punic army, an enemy that knows no pity, could scarce have refrained from weeping. The city, long inhabited by Loyalty and that claimed the god as heavenly founder of her walls, rushes between the treacherous weapons of the Sidonian nation [Carthage] and the monstrous deeds of its own people, neglected by the unjust gods. Sword and fire rage, and wherever lacks the flame is a place of crimes. The pyre raised a cloud of black smoke high up to the stars. The citadel that former wars had spared…burns on the high top of the lofty mountain, the gods' roofs are burning. The sea is lit up by the flame's reflection, and the fire quivers on the restless water
>
> *Punica* 2.650-664

In this passage, Silius directly addresses his audience with a narratorial interjection asking "who could command his tears" when remembering the Saguntines' hardships, described with several oxymorons: *laudandaque monstra et Fidei poenas ac tristia fata*

piorum (*Punica* 2.650-651). Sword and fire re-emerge as emotive objects of suicide signification, this time connected with epic *furor* (*furit ensis et ignis*). These are also connected to landscapes of violence (*quique caret flamma, scelerum est locus*) through use of *scelerum* ('crimes/impious action'), which Silius links to divine injustice: the divine neglect of Saguntum paralleling the Roman neglect. The Roman neglect of Saguntum also seems to parallel the goddess Fides' abandonment of the inhabitants.[130] This perceived abandonment of Fides could reflect contemporary Rome. *Fides exercituum/publica* coins, which had been a prominent feature of coinage from the AD 69 Civil War and Flavian propaganda, were discontinued by Domitian in AD 89 to avoid suggestions of civil war after Saturninus' revolt in Germany.[131] Likewise, during the Saguntines' civil strife, the absence of Fides appears symbolic of Rome's repeat-cycle of civil war.[132] However, Silius' repeated blurring of the identities and influence of Fides and the Furies in his suicides create a more complex and ambiguous picture of Fides, as the goddess herself is cast as a personified civil war. This blurred identity is linguistically seen in Silius' oxymorons (2.650-652), particularly the *Fidei poenas* ('Loyalty's punishments'), which foreshadow the vengeful Fides later appearing in the Capuan senators' collective suicide (*Punica* 13.270-298). The *Fidei poenas* also add to Silius' ambiguous ideological portrait of suicide and Fides' role, as it has been variously translated as "the penalty paid by Loyalty" (Duff 1934) and "Loyalty's punishments" Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021). It is unclear whether suicide here is portrayed as the victory of the Furies over Fides, the victory of Fides, or (more likely I think) some combination.

The pyre is again described and reinforces Silius' links between landscapes and the divine in suicide. Now it is a *nigrantem fumo nubem* 'cloud of black smoke' reaching the

[130] Vessey 1974, 31-32.
[131] Stocks 2019.
[132] Ibid., 37.

stars. Motifs of fire and water recur throughout *Punica*, and the restless quivering sea reflecting fire and *furor* of the burning mountain citadel (2.658-664) could possibly allude to Hannibal's later 'boiling desire to die' (*ac leti fervebat amore*: 17.566). Silius' description of the burning citadel, roofs, and landscape, and his repeated emphasis on fire, water, pyres, mountains, city walls, and smoke/fog, could possibly be reflective of contemporary collective traumas around fire during *Punica*'s composition. For instance, the great fire of Rome under Nero in AD 64, various fires throughout the AD 69 Civil War between supporters of Vitellius and Vespasian, and the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius under Titus in AD 79.[133]

These fires/volcanic eruptions were major destructive events, which likely had a profound impact on Silius and his Roman audience. Fires leave longstanding traces on the landscape (soot, ash, debris, bodies), and fire victims/witnesses often report feelings of disorientation and confusion amongst the smoke and falling debris as they struggle to escape and save themselves and their loved ones.[134] The Tiber also was a natural fire break in the city.[135] These associations could make the notion of burning rivers in Silius' motif of flaming water (2.663-664) vivid for readers. It also recalls the earlier fiery coiling at the tall mountain tomb (*Punica* 2.584-589) which may evoke both funeral pyres and volcanic eruptions. Associations of fires and environmental disasters could be influenced by the proximities of these contemporary contexts and Silius' time in Campania.[136] Silius' connection between elemental disasters involving fire, smoke, death, and suicide create ties between self-destruction as a personal act, and as a collective action with wider destructive implications that create landscapes of violence, necessitating an internal and external recovery.

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[133] These fires are described in: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38-41, *Histories* 3.71, 3.32-34; Suetonius, *Nero* 38, *Vitellius* 15, *Titus* 9; Pliny, *Epistulae* 6.16, 6.20; Cassius Dio 62.16-18, 64.15-17, 66.21-24. Byles 2013, 11, 37-39 provides a helpful analysis of the impacts of these and other fires from 390BC–AD410 upon Rome. The application of these to Silius' work is my own.
[134] Byles 2013, 25, 37-38, 98-99.
[135] Ibid., 93.
[136] See pp.19

The ‘tears’ Silius imparts on readers appear to contrast the Saguntine pyre and fire of the city. This weeping pity (like the fire reflected on the burning sea), is powerless to prevent the city’s destruction, and reflects witnesses’ views of its aftermath. The collective impact of the suicide aftermath and recovery (through the universalised tears) parallels the collective act of the suicide itself, as the mourning and pity is extended to the Carthaginians as well as Silius’ audience. Silius’ extension of these tears to the Carthaginians links them with Roman readers as well as his Romanised Saguntines. This reinforces ideas of unity and blurred identity in his suicide theme, as self-destruction is ideologically portrayed as having a universal collective impact beyond its immediate participants.

Aftermath

After real-Tiburna’s suicide, Silius metaphorically describes the aftermath of the Saguntine collective suicide with a second narratorial interjection:

> A crowd of half-burned bodies, luckless in their death, lay jumbled indiscriminately, in a mixed funeral. Just as, when, driven by hunger, a conquering lion has at last invaded the sheepfold with a parched throat, and, roaring with a gaping mouth, he gnaws the unwarlike herd, and copious belched blood overflows from his gaping gullet. He broods on the dark heaps of the half-eaten massacre, or, gnashing his teeth with panting and growling, he walks between the mutilated piles. Far and wide the spread-out herd lie, with the Molossian dog that guarded them, the band of shepherds, and the master of the stable and flock, and all their huts thrown apart with their roofs destroyed. The Carthaginians burst into the citadel emptied out by Punishment’s many disasters. Then at last, her duty done, the Fury returned to the shades with Juno’s praise. The proud Fury rejoices in the great praise, snatching the multitude down with her to Tartarus.
>
> But you, you stars, whom no age shall ever equal, go, glory of the earth, you spirits, a dignified crowd, adorn Elysium and the pure homes of the dutiful/pious

Silius blurs identities of physical bodies in this *locus horridus* of the suicide aftermath, encapsulated in the motif of the *permixto funere* ('mixed funeral'). Silius emphasises the bodies' destructive physical states: described as 'half-burned', 'half-eaten', 'mutilated'. These emphasise traces of the suicide action on their bodies, still visible in its aftermath, that preserves some of their former selves but in an obscured and altered way. The description of the heap as *atris* ('dull black/gloomy/dark/obscure') links self-destruction and obscured identity through the elemental motif of darkness. These presentations of suicide entangle subjects' identities with their destructive actions, as they occupy a blurred state of succumbing to their motivations and escaping them.

The corpses are described as *iacere* ('to lie down/lie dead') which recalls the sideshadow of captives in Lybia in Fury-Tiburna's speech (*Punica* 2.574). The destroyed huts and roofs (*totaque vastatis disiecta mapalia tectis*) link to this sideshadowing through the Punic word *mapalia* ('huts'), which further blurs Carthaginian and Saguntine/Roman identity in the suicide. This presentation of the Saguntine suicide aftermath in terms evoking the Carthaginian landscape recalls the universal tears attributed to both the audience and Carthaginians earlier. These seem to depict the aftermath of collective suicide on a more globalised scale, as self-destructive acts are rendered to encompass wider landscape and cultural boundaries, necessitating mourning and recovery. The pastoral imagery of the sheep and shepherd recalls Juno's shepherd disguise to prevent Hannibal's suicide (*Punica* 17.567). Both appear to showcase this ideological blend of peace and destruction in Silian suicide framings. Links between the Saguntines' and Hannibal's suicides are furthered by Silius' immediate *prolepsis* on Hannibal's suicide which conclude this book.[137]

[137] See Chapter 4.

Silius' extended metaphor of the lion (linked to Carthage[138]) focuses on sensory language. However, I think this lion can also be linked to the Saguntines themselves as another display of ambiguous responsibility and identity in Silian suicide presentations[139]. The lion's hunger (2.683) alludes to the Saguntines' hunger (*Punica* 2.595, 2.466-468). Through the metaphor and description of the mutilated bodies, the lion seems to be given a shared responsibility for their self-destruction. This creates a further blurring of identity: the Saguntines' are identified with the lion (through their hunger and active role in the violent destruction during the suicide) and the mutilated/devoured sheep herd (through their passive role as corpses in the aftermath of the suicide). With these, Silius emphasises the Saguntines' role as suicide agents and victims, and further connects the physical bodies of suicide subjects to the instruments of their death.

Despite this emphasis on human agency, the divine are also incorporated in this agency in *Punica*. The personified Punishment and the Fury are also credited for the suicide, characterised as a divine duty (*munere* 2.693). This characterisation of suicide as a duty and divine calling links to Stoic philosophy.[140] The complex role of the divine is further illustrated with the opposition of Tartarus and Elysium in Silius' account of the Saguntines' posthumous fate. This duality of Tartarus and Elysium in the Saguntine *manes*' afterlife parallels the duality of the Fury and Fides divine influence of their suicide act in life. This is linked to themes of haunting memory as the Saguntines become *manes* that haunt Hannibal and inspire suicidal thoughts in him (*Punica* 2.699-707), giving them an agency beyond death. Perhaps the dual fate of the Saguntine *manes* also reflects the turning point of Fides' influence, which emerges in Book 13 with the narrative shift to Roman victory.[141] This is supported by Silius' use of *rapiens* in his description of the

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[138] For example, Bernstein 2017, 267.
[139] Linking of lions between Roman and Carthage, and the metaphor of a lion for rash fierceness with potential self-destruction and world-changing events for Romans can be seen in Lucan 1.200-227 with Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon.
[140] Cato's suicide in Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.30, *Off.* 1.112; Seneca, *Epistulae* 12.10, 70.14-16; Englert 1990, 91; Agri 2022, 15-16, 28-31; Grisé 1982, 180-184.
[141] See Van der Keur 2015 on how Book 13 makes a narrative shift to victory.

Fury's transport of the Saguntine *manes* to Tartarus, indicating that they were snatched and not meant to go there. This fits well with his description of the Saguntine *manes* in Elysium in his narratorial interjection.

In this interjection, Silius addresses the Saguntines in the vocative as "spirits", "stars", and "glory of the earth", whom he says: "adorn the homes of the pious" (*Punica* 2.696-698). This celestial imagery emphasises nature motifs, and links them to suicidal action by creating another haunting around their suicide: as their starry souls look down as witnesses upon their suicide object (the pyre reaching the stars: 2.599, 2.659) and the aftermath of their *permixto funere*. This showcases the connections Silius makes in his suicide narratives between subjects' physical bodies, objects, and the natural world around them.

Having explored suicide in Silius' Saguntum narrative, I will now turn to his Capua narrative.

Chapter 3: Capua

Silius' Capua narrative (Books 11 and 13) marks a turning point in *Punica*, as the Punic War post-Cannae shifts from Carthaginian to Roman victory, with the downfall of Capua foreshadowing Carthaginian defeat.[142] The final two actualised suicides in *Punica* occur in Silius' Capua narrative, and in response to Roman domination and punishment.[143] In this chapter, I will explore these suicide narratives: the suicide-advocacy speeches of Decius Magius (11.183-189, 11.194-201), the collective suicide of Virrus and the Capuan senators (13.270-298), and Taurea's suicide (*Punica* 13.369-380).

Decius

The first Capuan I will discuss is the senator Decius Magius. Decius' speeches in Book 11 suggest to readers his intent to commit suicide to avoid Hannibal's tyranny,[144] much akin to the Saguntines. However, unlike the Saguntines, Decius fails to carry out this suicide.

In Livy (23.7-10), Decius features as a voice of loud opposition to Hannibal, advocating for his fellow Capuans to honour their allegiance to Rome by not admitting, driving out, and murdering the Punic garrison. Livy's Decius is later arrested by Hannibal, which he protests as tyranny and slavery, but there is no reference to suicide in his speech (Livy 23.7-10). Livy's Decius holds considerable influence over his fellow Capuans, "moved by his bellow[s]" to the extent that Hannibal orders a hood placed over him during

[142] Van der Keur 2015.
[143] McGuire 1997, 222.
[144] McGuire 1997, 220-222.

his arrest and exiles Decius out of a fear for civil unrest, sedition, and rebellion should he return (Livy 23.10).

In contrast, Silius' Decius (*Punica* 11.157-258, 11.349-350, 11.377-384) occupies a more prominent place than Livy's, and gives two lengthy speeches (11.183-189, 11.194-200) directly referencing and advocating for collective suicide.[145] However, Silius' Decius ultimately fails to persuade his audience to undertake this collective suicide before his arrest, his protests "hurled in vain to hostile ears" (11.189) and "pointlessly said…unwelcome to all" (*Punica* 11.201). He is imprisoned and exiled by Hannibal before later being pitied and freed by Jupiter (*Punica* 11.349-350, 11.377-384).

This change in influence of Silius' Decius from Livy could be to juxtapose his Saguntum narrative, where the Fury, Tiburna, and Fides hold massive influence with their calls for collective suicide. The change makes Decius appear alone in his *fides* to Rome and opposition to Hannibal. Decius is repeated lauded by Silius as "the sole glory of Capua" (*Punica* 11.157-158) as the only Capuan honouring Roman *fides*, despite the threat of Hannibal and the hostility of his fellow Capuans. Silius connects Decius' *virtus* to his physical body and furthers this connection by portraying *fides* as a rational weapon Decius is armed with. He describes "the unconquerable fortitude in his chest" (11.158-159) which Decius refused to put aside, and his "bristling virtue" (*horrida virtus*), as "armed in his heart/chest with loyalty and desire for right, his unterrified mind was greater than Capua and his unconquerable bulk stood fast" (*Punica* 11.205-208). Decius' *horrida virtus* recalls the oxymorons of the Saguntum suicide (2.650-652) and encourages connections between *fides,* violence, and suicide. The use of *horrida* ('bristling/shocking/rough') seems to depict Decius' *virtus* as discomforting and of a rough and wild quality.[146] This bristling suicidal virtue evokes epic associations of mourning and wild frenzy of Tiburna's

[145] Ibid.
[146] Decius' *horrida virtus* is translated by Duff (1934) as "austere virtue" and Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) as "bristled with courage".

dishevelled hair standing on end and her comparison to the Furies (*Punica* 2.665-680). This portrays Decius' suicidal advocacy as both an *exemplum* of rational *fides* and wild *furor*, reinforcing Silius' conjoined influence of Fides and the Furies in his narrative portrayals of suicidal ideation. Decius' description as a "worthy victim" (*Punica* 11.249-250), extends Silius' praise of suicidal *virtus* to those who fail to actualise it.

Decius' name also links to *decus* ('glory/virtue') in the epithet Silius first attributes to him (*tum solum Decius Capuae decus*: *Punica* 11.157-158). Decius' epithet and suicide speech heavily referencing Roman battles, allude to the *Decii,* who sacrificed their lives on historical battlefields for their country.[147] These lead readers to anticipate Decius' suicide, characterised in Roman terms.[148] His failure and exile (*Punica* 11.157-158, 377-384) subvert this, and along with his lack of persuasive influence, emphasise isolation and public abandonment of socio-political *fides*.

As with Saguntum, Silius portrays Decius' advocacy for collective suicide as a socio-political call for action during impossible circumstances. Both present complex images of *nobilitas* and *decus*: pairing images of *pietas* with *dira scelera* ('terrible crimes').[149] Silius connects Decius' *fides* and *furor* with *rectique cupido* ('desire for right') and *horrida virtus*, depicting a complex ideology of suicide as both a rational act of reclaimed agency, duty, and *libertas* and a discomforting and graphic act of widely destructive violence. This could connect to Stoic links between suicide, courage, and firm moral purpose,[150] as the suicidal acts/advocacy of Decius and the Saguntines represent transitory thresholds between wild grim desperation and controlled reclamation of one's

[147] McGuire 1997, 221.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid., 215-216.
[150] Stoic links between suicide and firm moral purpose have been observed by Grisé (1982, 95-99, 188) and Englert (1990, 3-14) in Seneca (*Epistulae* 30.8-12, 70.20-25) and Epictetus (*Discourses* 1.24.20). The comparison of these to Silius here is my own.

fate. These seem to present suicide as transitory state between power and powerlessness when facing an inescapable fate.

Silius makes no comment on Decius' failure to actualise the suicide he advocates. However, his deliberate divergence from Livy in casting Decius as "the sole Roman loyalist at Capua" contrasts with the later Carthaginian loyalists of the Capuan senators who commit suicide to avoid Roman punishment (*Punica* 13.270-298).[151] I will return to this comparison after examining Decius' suicide-advocacy speeches.

With his Decius, who "promotes suicide in word [rather than] deed", Silius links poetic voice to suicide through speech and silence.[152] As previously stated, Silius' Decius occupies a much more prominent narrative role than Livy's, and Decius gives three impassioned speeches against Hannibal. Two of these speeches urge suicide (*Punica* 11.160-189, 11.194-200), and the third (11.247-256) alludes to Hannibal's later suicide. I will examine the first two here.

In his first speech (*Punica* 11.160-189), Decius urges his fellow Capuans to honour their alliance with the Romans and punish Hannibal for violating the peace treaty. He appeals to the shared kinship between Rome and Capua through their Trojan blood (*sanguis Dardanius*: 11.177-178), their sense of *fides* (11.162-168), and opposition to tyranny (11.183-186). He connects these moral displays of suicidal *fides* to the divine and ideas of divine and ancestral retribution: familial links to Jupiter (11.178-180), Hannibal's divine and ancestorial condemnation for violating the sacred treaty (11.160-162), and the Roman's god-like battle spirit (11.169-176). Silius' Decius urges the Capuans to suicide as

[151] McGuire 1997, 221.
[152] Ibid., 228.

both a punitive act of revenge for Hannibal's breach of the treaty, and a moral necessity for their display of *fides.* Decius' first suicide-coded speech concludes:

> Shall I put up with a leader, who's sword now usurps the place of justice and sworn agreements and whose only praises derived from bloodshed? Not so! Decius does not so confuse right and wrong as these things may wish. The greatest boon with which grudging Nature has armed us is this: that the door of death lies open to give us the power to depart from an unfair life.' Decius hurled these words in vain to hostile/turned ears
>
> *Punica* 11.183-189

With Decius' speech, Silius presents suicide as a reasonable opposition to tyranny, and links nature and freedom to suicide as a morally just departure. "The door of death lies open" recalls civic/domestic Stoic suicide metaphors.[153] *Nullo nos invida tanto armavit Natura bono* ('the greatest boon with which grudging Nature has armed us') recalls Pliny the Elder's (*Naturalis Historia* 2.63.156) link between suicide, death, a return to nature/earth. Silius' frames suicide as a weapon given to subjects by Nature to grant them 'the power to depart from an unfair life'. This recalls *libertas* (freedom/agency) inherit in Stoic views of justified rational suicide as a political act and moral right preferable to life if forced to live oppressed or against your values.[154] The personified arming Nature and open-door metaphor in Decius' first suicide speech create familiar object manifestations of suicidal thoughts that connect bodily action/agency to freedom, morality, and power. Silius does this by framing suicide in physical terms (door, weapon), which portray suicide as a tool of human agency easily controlled and supported (opened, armed by Nature). Thus, the physical body becomes an instrument of moral action and agency through the transitional and reciprocal power of suicide.

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[153] E.g., Seneca, *De Providentia* 6.7: 'life as a house whose door is open'.
[154] For suicide philosophies see: Seneca, *Epistulae* 70.11, *De Providentia* 6.7-8; Cicero, *Off.* 1.112; Grisé 1982, 226; Englert 1990, 91; Agri 2022, 28-31.

Silius reinforces this with Pacuvius' (another Capuan senator) advice to his son, Perolla, against assassinating Hannibal in Capua, which recalls Decius' earlier speech: "Or do Decius' sad chains not teach you to compose your mind?" (*Punica* 11.349-350). This remark reinforces the prerequisite of a composed mind for Stoic ideas of justified/rational suicide.[155] Decius' *tristia vincla* 'sad chains' potentially warn of the consequences of a failure to actualise the desire for suicide's freedom against literal/ethical subjugation. Perolla and Decius' portrayals as the lone failed resistance to Hannibal contrast with the Saguntine unity in their collective suicidal resistance.[156] The lone resistances of Decius and Perolla represent familial and civic division of Capua and themes of civil war.[157] Decius and Perolla both exemplify ideas of divided community (senator vs. public, son vs. father). This portrays the suicide-advocacy of Decius as a response to civil-war's disunity. It is Decius' failed persuasive unity for suicidal action which leads to his sad chains, and contrasts with Tiburna and the Saguntine suicide to escape Carthaginian slavery (*Punica* 2.564-579). However, despite his failure to inspire collective suicide, Decius still escapes his chains with the Jupiter's help (*Punica* 11.349-350, 11.377-384). Thus, Silius seems to present understanding the suicidal mindset as more important to individual liberty/virtue during times of civil war, than the actualised completion of the suicide act itself.

The idea of the body as an instrument for moral action is continued with Decius' second suicide speech:

> 'Be present, while an avenging right-hand works a deed worthy of Capua under my leadership. Let the barbarian youth fall! Each man should eagerly seize this glory for himself. If the enemy prepares to advance upon us, offer him gates blocked with

[155] For rational suicide see: Seneca, *Epistulae* 58.36; Pliny, *Epistulae* 1.22; Martial 2.53, 1.8; Grisé 1982; Englert 1990, 9-15.
[156] Bernstein 2008, 145-146.
[157] Ibid.

> corpses and use your swords to purge our crime. In the end, only blood will cleanse minds stained with crime'…Decius pointlessly said these things unwelcome to all
>
> *Punica* 11. 194-201

Silius continues the Stoic suicide open door/gate to death motif. However, this emotionally abstract suicide door/gate is now connected with the historical physical object reality of Capua's city gate through the cadaver, as Decius now calls upon his fellow Capuans to block Hannibal's entry and protect Capua (and by proxy Roman *fides*) with their corpses. I think the crime Silius references is the Capuans' breach of their treaty with Rome by allying with Hannibal, not the suicide action itself, cast as a gruesome cleanse to this crime. Silius links this suicidal cleanse/purification to the mind *solus eluerit sanguis maculatas crimine mentes* (*Punica* 11.199-200). Thus, suicide becomes a mental/physical purification and a redemption of Capuan moral character.

Silius' Decius portrays a rational and Stoic suicide advocation, which in actuality fails to occur and fails to persuade or hold much influence, contrasting with Livy's Decius (23.7-10), who Hannibal considers a serious threat and catalyst to civil war. Decius' final speech after his failure to commit suicide (before his imprisonment and exile by Hannibal) contains a short prophecy of Hannibal's defeat and death (*Punica* 11.252-256). This foreshadows Scipio's later Underworld *nekyia* at the end of Book 13, after the final Capua suicides. Silius' removal of Decius' persuasive influence could have been to build a more dramatic narrative impact in his subsequent Capuan suicides after Roman punitive threat for breaking *fides* of their alliance. Links to Decius' suicide speeches reframe the later Capuan suicides in defiance of Rome as harkening back Roman *fides* and values. I will explore these ideas further, as I now analyse Silius' portrayals of Virrius' and Taurea's suicide scenes.

Virrius

The collective suicide of Virrus and his fellow Capuan senators occurs at the climax of Book 13 (*Punica* 13.262-298), during the Roman siege of Capua, the night before the Romans entered the city.[158] After telling his fellow senators not to expect relief from Hannibal, Virrus gives this speech:

> 'It is enough to have lived so far. While it's still dark, let anyone seek my dinner and food, whoever has liberty as their heart's eternal companion down to Acheron's waters. Let the flow of wine through his limbs overtake his mind, and let everyone soothe death's sting. Then let him drink a medicine for defeat and disarm Fate with peaceful poison'. He said this and returned to his house with a group of followers.
>
> In the centre of his house a pyre was built and rose high with much oak wood, a common place of hospitality for lost souls. Nor did grief and fear stop driving the people mad. Now, too late, Decius came to mind, and his fine virtue that harsh exile had punished. From up high, sacred Loyalty looked down and troubled the men's treacherous hearts. An anonymous voice followed, spread everywhere in the air: 'Mortals, don't break the treaty with brutal iron, but preserve chaste Loyalty. She is more powerful than kings' dazzling purple. If someone rejoices in breaking agreed treaties when in danger and betrays an ally's fragile hopes, neither household nor his wife nor his life will abide except for grief and tears. Loyalty, whom he disrespected and violated, will always persecute him in distress over land and sea, day and night'.
>
> Hidden in a cloud, a shameless Fury attended all meetings, partook in every meal, and reclined on every couch to enjoy dinner. She herself handed each man drinks foaming with Stygian poison and administered freely punishment and death. Meanwhile, Virrius gave time for the poison to penetrate his body and clung to his companions' embrace, those who shared his fate. He climbed onto the pyre and ordered them to light the fire
>
> *Punica* 13.270-298

[158] Van der Keur 2015, xiii.

Here Silius focuses on poison and the pyre as suicide objects (in contrast to Decius' where the suicide mode was un-specified). Silius alludes to nature and the elements as object manifestations of emotional and virtuous action, connected through the agency of characters' physical bodies. This creates an active phenomenological poetic experience grounded in the present of the suicide action. This is evident in Silius' description of the flowing poisoned wine, linked to Acheron's waters and characterised as a peaceful medicine to "defeat and disarm Fate" (*Punica* 13.274-275). Wine, poison, and flow of water are linked to Virrius' physical body and blood as "the poison penetrate[s] his body" (*Punica* 13.296-297). This creates a phenomenological connection for readers between Virrus' poisoned suicide body and the Underworld riverscape. Thus, the body in the transitory suicide state is portrayed as an active flowing river through its cause of death (poison), linking the body, suicide instrument, and natural/supernatural landscape.

The pyre is another phenomenological suicide object. Its "oak wood" characterised as "a common place of hospitality for lost souls", recalls the Saguntine pyre, and creates a warm atmosphere linking family and civic duty to emotions of grief, fear, and madness. Likewise, the poisoned cup and imagery of a house consumed by violence allude to Pauvicus' earlier vision describing Capua's fall through motifs of violated hospitality and civil war (*Punica* 11.332-336).[159] Interestingly, both the collective suicides of the Saguntines and Capuan senators depict dual modes of suicide, as swords or poison are used alongside the pyres. The contrast between the Saguntines' joint use of the sword and the Capuans' joint use of poison could reflect their varied relationships to Hannibal and his later suicide. The Saguntine suicidal Roman *fides* and resistance to Hannibal, who longs for and is denied death in battle and suicide by sword (instead using poison 2.705-707, 2.532-533), contrasts with the Capuan suicidal Hannibalic *fides* in their suicide by poison.

[159] Bernstein 2008, 146-148.

Thus, there is a socio-political colouring to Silius' collective suicides, through links between *fides* and Hannibal in their motives and methods.

The senators' suicide, like Saguntum, emphasises questions of agency, as Silius' gods are made active participants. Silius gives his gods larger interactive narrative roles than Vergil or Lucan.[160] Silius' historical characters are emotional conduits for his gods in a heavy sense, and their connected emotions and motivations are especially highlighted and centred in suicide scenes. Objects, nature, and the elements are also used by Silius as emotional conduits for his characters actions in suicides, and connect characters' actions to reason, virtue, and divine influence. Like Saguntum, here the personified Fides is an integral part of the narrative action.[161] Fides' "anonymous voice, spread everywhere in the air", threatens to "persecute in distress over land and sea, day and night" those who violate her, continuing the nature motifs of *Punica*'s suicides. Fides' punitive presence in the Capuan senators' collective suicide makes more explicit Silius' blurring of her influence with the Furies and recalls Silius' *prolepsis* of Hannibal's suicide (2.699-707). Thus, suicide acts as an ideological tool of virtue and vengeance in the name of Roman allegiance that foreshadows Hannibal's fate. Here Fides and the Fury are unified and work together in their influence over the Capuans' fate.[162] This vengeful Fides paints a paradoxical picture of the Capuans, who in their suicide are both punished for breaking Roman *fides* while simultaneously honouring Hannibalic *fides*.[163] Their suicide is a helpless response to Fides' and the Furies' vengeful influence and Hannibal's neglect (similar to the divine influence and Roman neglect at Saguntum). Fides' vengeance through grief and tears recalls the audience's tears which Silius calls upon in the Saguntine

[160] Asso 2010, 179.
[161] Pomeroy 2010, 44-45.
[162] Roumpou 2020, 172-173; Bernstein 2017.
[163] McGuire 1997, 222-223.

suicide narrative (*Punica* 2.650). These reinforce Silius' portrayal of Fides and the Furies as goddesses with joint influence in suicidal agency.

Though the senators' attempt to reclaim agency through peaceful poison to escape and control their fates, this is complicated through the Fury's interactive role in assisting and accompanying the suicide banquet. The Fury-handed poison cups recall Aeson and Alicimede in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* 1.816-817, and the setting (banquet, pyre) recalls famous imperial suicides in Tacitus (*Annals* 11.3.2, 16.19.2-4).[164] The setting also evokes Epicurean metaphors of suicide as a banquet withdrawn from when satisfied.[165]

Interestingly, here there is little focus on the aftermath of the suicide act or its emotional impact. Instead, the focus remains on the suicide act. While this may feel incomplete to some readers, I think this active present sensory environmental emphasis of Silius' suicide scenes serves to link ideas of bodily action, agency, and freedom. It also heightens the contrast with the Saguntine suicide, which contains an extended active sensory narrative of the entire suicide process: the motivations, suicide act itself, and its aftermath in the physical and spiritual worlds of subjects and their *manes*. There is still an ambiguity of agency in the Capuan suicide, but it feels less overt and balanced than the Saguntine episode.

In Book 13, Silius appears to shift to presenting readers with suicide *exempla* reflecting "sympathetic views of victims of Roman imperialism", as the Capuan senators' and Taurea's suicides oppose Capua's Roman dependence.[166] Silius (like other contemporaries) frames his 3rdcentury BC Capua with descriptions reminiscent of

[164] Ibid., 223-224.
[165] Lucretius 3.938-939.
[166] McGuire 1997, 222.

contemporary Rome (1st centuries BC and AD): wealth and luxury, civil strife and conflict between the Senate and people, banquets, and gladiatorial combats (*Punica* 11.38-54).[167] This connection of Capua with contemporary Rome blurs ideas of past/present and confronts readers with ideas of Italian unity.[168] However, in this vein, I think that Silius' interjection praising Decius' virtue during the Capuan senators' suicide, along with the removal of Decius' persuasive influence, create a more dramatic poetic impact to the Capuan suicides. Silius' Capua is cast as a failed realisation of Decius' advocacy for them to *rapite hoc decus* (11.197) and a contrast to the Saguntines' *rapiens letum* (*Punica* 2.678). Yet his Capua is also presented in Roman terms and the suicide portrayed as a peaceful medicine to disarm Fate and escape in the name of liberty. Through the divine influence, allusions to Decius, and the philosophical and political overtones of his Capua narrative, Silius links Virrius' collective suicide in Hannibalic *fides* to Decius' Roman *fides*. I will explore this further in Taurea's suicide.

Taurea

Silius' final Capuan suicide is that of Taurea (Book 13), a Capuan citizen who commits suicide in front of the Roman consul Fulvius to protest the execution of the Capuan nobles who sided with Hannibal:

> Here, in his fierce/savage virtue, for I could not conceal a glorious deed performed even by an enemy, Taurea said with a loud shout: 'Will you go unpunished for taking the life of someone greater than you by the sword? And will my most brave head fall before your unworthy feet, severed by a lictor who received an order to do so? May god never grant this to us!' Then he looked at Fulvius with a threatening face and eagerly drove his battle sword through his chest with a frenzied grin. To him Fulvius replied: 'Take with you in death your falling country. Mars the war god

[167] Seneca *Epistulae* 51; McGuire 1997, 226-227; Bernstein 2008, 145-146; Van der Keur 2015, 503-504.
[168] Beltramini 2024, 7-9.

> will judge separately each man's courage and bravery. If you had thought it shameful to endure justice, you could have met death in battle'
>
> *Punica* 13.369-380

Silius' use of *decus* (13.370) to characterise Taurea's suicide in his narratorial interjection alludes to Decius' earlier defiant suicide speech (11.197) and the Capuan senators' collective suicide (*Punica* 13.271).[169] As with Decius, Silius links poetic voice to suicide speeches, with Taurea's suicide occurring during his suicide speech, which Fulvius' replies to as if an argument.[170] Taurea's determined remarks against Fulvius' use of the Lictors to execute him recalls Livy's (26.15, 26.16) dual accounts of Taurea's death as suicide and beheading execution. The use of *recidere* ('decapitate') and *ceruix* ('neck/severed head') recall Pompey's murder and headless corpse (Lucan 8.674, 9.214).[171] These intertexts in Taurea's speech, alongside Silius' narratorial interjection, emphasise themes of civil war and bodily disfigurement, and showcase the dual aspects of suicide as a means for asserting one's voice as well as a permanent silence in death.

Silius repeatedly emphasises Taurea's physical body: his loud voice, brave head falling at unworthy feet, threatening face, chest, and frenzied grin. Like *conscia virtus* examined previously (2.575-579), Taurea's *atrox virtus* (*Punica* 13.369) showcases the dynamic relationship between subjects' bodies and emotions, linked to Fides and the Furies through fusion of 'decisional' and 'operational' aspects of suicide.[172]

McGuire (1997, 225) observes the brutality of Taurea's suicide, and argues suicide can make participants possess tyrannical attributes during their self-destructive actions. Despite Silius' praise of Taurea, he is characterised with adjectives commonly applied to Carthaginians and Hannibal: *atrox* ('fierce/savage'), *feroci* ('wild/bold/cruel'), *minaci*

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[169] McGuire 1997, 225.
[170] Ibid., 228-229.
[171] Van der Keur 2024, 252-253.
[172] Taurea's *atrox virtus* is translated by Duff (1934) as "brave in defiance" and by Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) and Van der Keur (2024) as "unrelenting bravery". I translate it as "fierce/savage virtue" to reflect the complex and ambiguous connotations of the Latin on this depiction of suicidal *virtus*.

('threatening/menacing'), *torvum* ('pitiless/harsh'), and *furiale* ('furious/frenzied') throughout the suicide narrative.[173] The *-ax* and *-ox* suffix endings of these adjectives (*atrox*, *ferox*, *minax*), indicate their more negative connotations. However, their seemingly strange portrayal alongside attributes such as *virtus* and *decus* (13.369-370) reveal interesting ideological qualities of Silius' suicide subjects. The oxymoron *atrox virtus* recalls earlier oxymorons of *fides* and violent horror: the Saguntines' *laudandaque monstra et Fidei poenas* (2.650-652) and Decius' *horrida virtus* (*Punica* 11.205). This characterises Taurea's suicide in that same framework of suicide as a reciprocal weapon linking Fides' *virtus* and the Furies violent *furor* in a unified body. This presents Taurea as a personified state of civil war in his suicide.

The Capuan suicides are the final actualised suicides in *Punica*. They occur as a response to Roman oppression, that adopts Carthaginian brutality in their violent treatment of Capua.[174] There are similarities between Taurea's suicide speech and Hannibal's historical suicide, alluded to at the end of Silius Capua narrative during Scipio's *nekyia* (*Punica* 13.879-895). Both Hannibal and Taurea commit suicide to escape Roman punishment. However, Taurea's suicide is also portrayed in ways analogous to Roman values, blurring identities of Silius' Capuans as variously Romans and non-Romans. Taurea's suicide by iron/sword (*ferro*:13.371 *ensem*:13.376) would have been seen as a characteristically Roman suicide method.[175] Suicide by sword was seen as a noble and dignified way to gain a self-control in death, embodying the courage, firm spirit, and strong will of a fighter.[176] Taurea's suicide by sword strongly contrasts with Hannibal's inability to do so (despite his desires), that showcases the importance of agency in Silian suicide ideology.

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[173] Van der Keur 2024, 251.
[174] McGuire 1997, 206.
[175] Martial 1.78.
[176] Grisé 1982, 95-99.

Fulvius' remark to the dying Taurea that Mars will judge his bravery is reminiscent of Mars' role in Scipio's suicide attempts (*Punica* 4.454-477). Fulvius' remark also recalls Achilles' answer to the dying Hector (*Iliad* 22.365-366) and Mezentius' reply to Orodes (*Aeneid* 10.743-744).[177] These intertexts emphasise Silius' portrayal of his Capuan narrative as a miniature civil war which creates identity blurs between Romans, Carthaginians, and Capuans in his suicides. Tensions between Taurea's frenzied appearance and dignified suicide manner highlight Silius' complex portrayal of Roman and anti-Roman values, as subjects' identities blur during suicide. Silius could have used this universalising presentation of suicide to encourage readers to contemplate both their own self-destructive acts and acts of self-destruction they compel others to resort to through war, punishment, or other pressures.

[177] Van der Keur 2024, 253-254.

Chapter 4: Hannibal, Scipio, Solimus

I will now examine Silius' suicide narratives of Hannibal, Scipio, and Solimus. Silius alludes to Hannibal's suicide at the end of his Saguntum narrative (2.699-707) and Scipio's *nekyia* (13.868-895), and through an extended description of Hannibal's suicidal thoughts (*Punica* 17.542-580). Another primary character that experiences active suicidal thoughts is Scipio during the rescue of his father (*Punica* 4.454-477). The final individual suicide I will explore is Solimus' post-patricide suicide (*Punica* 9.168-177) which Silius describes at the climax of his Cannae narrative.

Hannibal

Silius omits Hannibal's eventual exilic suicide years after the war (c.183-181BC) from *Punica*. This likely was not due to lack of sources, as several extant accounts detail Hannibal's suicide.[178] Similarities between these accounts and details in *Punica* 2.699-707, 13.868-895 indicate this was a deliberate omission.[179] Despite this deliberate omission of the historical event of Hannibal's exilic suicide, Silius repeatedly alludes to and foreshadows it. I will examine the main overt instances of this.

Silius' first allusion to Hannibal's suicide occurs after the Saguntum suicide. Connections between the extended narrative of collective suicide and his epic protagonist at the outset of *Punica*, clearly set suicide as a central poetic theme.[180] Silius finishes his

[178] Livy 39.51; Cornelius Nepos, *Hannibal* 12-13.
[179] E.g., exile, hiding, Roman pressure, and poison.
[180] For viewing Hannibal as an anti-hero protagonist of Punica see Stocks 2018, 293-294, 299-300.

interjection praising the Saguntines' pious star-like spirits, with remarks on Hannibal's fate and a national warning against treaty violation:

> But as for Hannibal, whom unfair victory gave a famous name, hear, o nations, and do not break treaties of peace nor consider loyalty second to rule! Hannibal shall wander, a drifting exile, over the whole earth. Thrown from the shores of his homeland, terrified Carthage will see him turn his back in retreat. Often startled from sleep by the Saguntines' ghosts, Hannibal shall wish to have fallen by his own hand. Denied the iron/sword, the once unconquerable warrior will carry down to the Styx's waves limbs disfigured by livid poison
>
> *Punica* 2.699-707

Silius warns his audience on a socio-political level (signified by *o gentes* 'nations') to keep peace and loyalty above desire for rule. This message was likely resonant for Silius and his readers within their context following Nero's suicide and the civil wars of AD 69, characterised by violence and suicide. The focus on peace treaties is also interesting, since Silius played a crucial role in treaty negotiations between Vitellus and Vespasian during the AD 69 Civil War.[181] The emphasis on political *fides*, could also connect to *fides* coinage and Flavian propaganda of post-civil-war peace.[182] This interjection recalls the war's causes in the epic's *proem* (*Punica* 1.1-20), and the personified Fides' later warning during the Capuan senators' suicide (13.281-291). These reinforce links between suicide, *fides*, and civil war that support Silius' advocacy of Saguntum as a major cause of the war.

Silius continues to link suicide and exile in *Punica*. These thematic links connect Hannibal's historical fate to Silius' suicide ideology through poetic allusions to Hannibal's suicide, portraying suicide as a form of exile from life. This creates senses of 'otherness' in his characters' self/cultural identities. Hannibal is described as a *vagus exul* ('drifting

[181] Tacitus, *Histories* 3.65.
[182] Stocks 2019, 21-34.

exile') "thrown from the shores of his homeland" (*Punica* 2.701-702), and his body carried to Styx's waves. The exilic water imagery of borders and shores, and the description of his *tergaque vertentem* ('turning his back in retreat'), foreshadow Hannibal's departure from Italy (compared to an exile: 17.211-235) and flight at Zama (*Punica* 17.597-624, 17.643-650). Emphasis on exilic departure, waterscapes, and suicide recalls the snake in the Saguntum episode that commits suicide by throwing itself into the water (*Punica* 2.580-591). Hannibal's 'turned back' and status as *exul* tie his physical body/identity to the landscape. His status as an *invictus bellator* ('unconquerable warrior') is subverted by that of a *vagus exul* at Zama. These identities recall the "unconquerable" Saguntines' suicide (2.613) framed as a rescue from slavery and exilic flight to the shades in the face of Carthaginian victory (*Punica* 2.564-267). Silius' positioning of this *prolepsis* to Hannibal's exilic suicide (immediately following his Saguntine suicide narrative) highlights his poetic ideology of suicide as a form of exile. It can be read as a completion of their ambiguously portrayed weaponised exilic suicide (*Punica* 2.575-2.79, 2.665-680), and an extension of Fides' vengeful depiction in the Capuan suicide. This juxtaposition could provide for readers a justification for beginning *Punica* with Saguntum and the extended narrative treatment of their collective suicide. Connections between exile and suicide seem further apparent in their reversal with Decius, who both fails to commit suicide and is divinely rescued from his exile. Hannibal's drifting corpse in the Styx recalls his exilic wanderings, linking his physical body in life and fate in the afterlife to ideas of reduced agency and passivity. He is portrayed in both his exile and suicide as thrown about by both the natural and Underworld landscapes. This casts his suicide as resulting from his powerlessness in the face of inescapable and uncontrollable forces which hinder his capacity for action and separate him from his homeland.

The juxtaposition between Silius' interjection on the dual Underworld fates of the Saguntines' (to Tartarus and Elysium) and Silius' description of Hannibal's corpse as returning to the Underworld following his suicide, could further link the opening and

closing of *Punica*'s suicide theme. Hannibal's crossing of suicide's boundary threshold through Styx could portray the completion of Silius' recovery narrative. Styx was both a river and a goddess (associated with suicide, darkness, glory, victory, and violent force), often symbolising oath-keeping and transitional boundaries between life/afterlife in epic.[183] Perhaps as Hannibal's suicide returns him to the Styx and completes the narrative of retribution for his breach of the peace treaty and violation of *fides*, so too are the Saguntine ghosts returned to Elysium, and Roman recovery from the war's self-destructive conflicts able to be fully realised. Connections between the Styx, literally meaning 'shuddering',[184] and Hannibal's suicide could also reinforce the funerary landscape and the discomforting character of Silius suicide ideology, recalling the Fury and Tiburna's shaking torches (2.609-611, 2.665-680) and Decius' *horrida virtus* (*Punica* 11.205). These associations between ghosts, physical/mental sensations of shaking discomfort, and *fides* create a haunting quality to Silius' suicides that emphasises its effects on one's physical/mental states.

The *deformata ferret liventi membra veneno* ('limbs disfigured by livid poison' 2.707) emphasise Hannibal's physical body and the trauma suicide can inflict upon it. Silius' does not mention the specific poison Hannibal used, describing it only as *veneno* ('poison/potion/venom') (*Punica* 2.707). *Veneno* recalls the drug used to embalm Pompey's severed head (Lucan 8.686-691), linking poison to disfigurement and preservation. Likewise, the description of Hannibal's body carried by the waves echoes Pompey's deformed corpse knocked by Fortune and carried by the sea's waves (Lucan 8.698-700, 8.707-711).

[183] Homer, *Iliad* 2.896-898, 14.355-363, 15.46-54, *Odyssey* 5.180-191, 10.512-516; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.306-310, 4.469-485, 10.11-14; Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.322-330, 6.384-425, 6.434-440, 9.102-106; Jones 2005, 20.
[184] West 2003, 53 trans. of "Hymns: To Demeter" n.11.

Much like the haunting memory and collective trauma of his 'famous name' (*Punica* 2.699) for the Romans, there is a reciprocal trauma of defeat on Hannibal's *deformata membra* in death, which echoes the Saguntines' *deformia membris* (*Punica* 2.466-468). By positioning Hannibal's suicide *prolepsis* within the aftermath of the Saguntine suicide, Silius portrays Hannibal's fate of disfigured suicide limbs (like Pompey) as linked to civil war and its long-term effects of disunity on landscapes and communities afterward. Thus, Hannibal's physical suicide body becomes an emblem of his violation of *fides* and the destructive impact of his memorial legacy on Roman cultural unity.

Hannibal's suicide also focuses on the effects of fragmented identity on the physical body and one's mental state: both as a haunted exile and as a deformed corpse. Silius links the disfigurement of poison to removal from one's homeland, as both symbolise a removal/blurring of one's identity. Silius' Hannibal frequently views his war on Rome and the Italian landscape as a homeland, with his eventual withdraw from Italy portrayed as an emotional exile and abandonment of his *fides* to Roman conquest (*Punica* 13.736-751, 17.211-235, 17.605-617). Hannibal's exilic longing and *fides* for Roman conquest resemble Aeneas' departure from Troy (*Aeneid* 2.804, 3.1-12) and Pompey's departure from Italy and flight from Pharsalus (Lucan 3.4-7, 8.12–13).[185] These intertextual relationships between civil war and exile that Silius connects to Hannibal's suicide, showcase the important role Hannibal played on Roman cultural self-conceptions as they respond to both external and internal threats.

The ghosts within Hannibal's exilic suicidal fate further blur Romo-Carthaginian identities. Silius' Hannibal is repeatedly depicted as haunted by both the ghosts of enemies (the Saguntines: 2.704-705), and his own men (17.558-566). These ghosts have nightmarish influence over Hannibal's life: their shadows terrify his sleep (2.704-705) and

[185] Mills 2009, 53-55; McClellan 2019, 111, 262; Fucecchi 2020, 270-277; 2019, 188, 199-200.

their groans/cries echo in his head and fuel his suicidal guilt (17.558-566). The ghosts' influence over Hannibal's mental state during his exilic suicide, as well as the narratorial warning against treaty-breaking, recall the anonymous vengeful (almost ghostly) voice of Fides in Virrus' suicide, promising exilic persecution to those who break loyalty (*Punica* 13.281-291). Connections between *fides*, ghosts, and exile in Hannibal's suicide showcase relationships between the physical body, mental state, and environment upon one's identity and link suicide to haunting memory as subjects attempt escape from traumatic situations. Hannibal's loss of identity in his exilic suicide resembles Possingham's ideas of 'place attachment' and could be seen as a message for readers to value the growth and unity of their community as an important aspect of their individual power, memory, and identity.[186]

Hannibal's suicidal fate is again alluded to by Silius at the end of Book 13 and concludes his narrative of Scipio's Underworld *nekyia,* following his Capua narrative:

> The young Scipio replied weeping: 'I lament that the future holds such hardships for the Roman state. But if removed from light, there is no forgiveness once one dies, and in death itself he continues to suffer deserved punishments, what of Punishment's deeds will Hannibal suffer for his treachery? In what waves of Phlegethon will the Carthaginian leader burn? Or will some worthy bird's bite tear apart his limbs as they regrow eternally?'
>
> The prophetess exclaimed: 'Have no fear. The rest of his life won't follow without punishment. His bones will not find rest in his native country. For when all his strength is broken in a great battle, he will suffer and shamefully beg for his life….he will abandon his faithful wife and sweet baby son. He will leave Carthage's citadel and will roam about the seas on a ship in exile.
>
> …Oh! How much easier for mortals to endure the ills/hardships of slavery, cold, heat, exile, the perils of the sea, and hunger, than to be able to die! After the Italian wars, a slave to the Syrian king Antiochus and cheated of his desire to wage war against Rome, Hannibal will set sail uncertain as to where to go, and at last

[186] See pp.20.

> drift idly to Prusias' shores. There he will suffer a second slavery of old age and the unarmed life, and a hiding-place as a gift from the king. When the Romans put pressure persisting the return of their enemy; Hannibal will snatch a cup of quick poison and finally release the earth from a long fear.'
>
> *Punica* 13.868-895

Scipio asks the Sybil about Hannibal's afterlife fate, and his enquires about post-mortem punishments connect nature motifs to the physical body. Death itself is framed as a 'removal from light', echoing motifs of light/darkness in other suicide scenes.[187] Silius also uses Underworld rivers and bodies of water as *loci horridi*.[188] These create funerary landscapes linking the physical body to the natural world. The mention of the river Phlegethon's waves and punishment by Scipio (*Punica* 13.870-873), reflects Silius' earlier narrative, where Scipio witnesses the Underworld's riverscapes and various personified gods of punishment (13.523-594). Silius describes Phlegethon's waters as overflowing, scorching banks and twisting rocks with a panting (*anhelo*) whirlwind of fire (*Punica* 13.563-565). *Anhelo* appears in the metaphor of the lion's panting over the herd in the aftermath of the Saguntine fiery mass suicide (2.287) and the death of Hannibal's horse that spurs his "boiling desire to die" (17.556, 17.566); Hannibal's boiling desire and the sea reflecting the Saguntine suicide pyre (2.663-664) resemble Phlegethon's burning waves. This language gives a sensory quality to the flaming water that resembles motifs of throats and fire (e.g., Tiburna's mouth 2.680) as the river is given a hostile lifelike breath. These support Silius' penchant for blurring lines between subjects' emotions and landscapes in his suicide descriptions.

Silius' repeated framing of emotional states of suicide with motifs of burning water could have been motivated by the destruction of Vesuvius and its massive impact upon the

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[187] The Saguntines' flight from the light of life (2.597-598), the Fury's torch (2.609-611), and the *atris* heap of their suicide corpses (2.681-698).
[188] Haselmann 2018 from Augoustakis 2020, 121-122.

Roman people and landscape amidst their recovery from the civil wars. Ideas of lava as liquid-fire recur in ancient descriptions of Aetna, where the volcano is connected to the monstrous divine and portrayed as a living being breathing fire and smoke.[189] Through this *topos*, Silius connects Hannibal's enraged and self-destructive mental state to destructions of natural landscapes and monstrous supernatural *furor*. This provides another example of the ways Silian depictions of suicide emphasise its effects on both individuals and their surrounding environments.

Scipio's questions regarding the punitive post-mortem fate of Hannibal's physical body continue in this *prolepsis,* with Hannibal's eternally regrowing limbs torn apart by a bird (*Punica* 13.879-873). This alludes to Hannibal's *deformata membra* by poison (2.699-707) and recalls the Saguntine warrior Theron's *deforme cadaver* left exposed to birds (*Punica* 2.267-269).[190] These ideas of suicidal disfigurement emphasise the physical destruction of the body, broken-down and consumed by nature (poison, birds). The distortions of suicide subjects' personal identities as recognisable cadavers and their bodies transformative return to nature, seem to emphasise the paradoxical duality of unity and disunity in bodily disfigurement. Thus, suicidal disfigurement could showcase reciprocal relationships in bodily agency in Silius' suicide ideology. Hannibal's disfigurement by poison (*Punica* 13.890-893) affirms his agency as it was the suicide method he chose, while his disfigurement by the bird (13.870-873), as an inescapable form of posthumous punishment, challenges it. The language of Hannibal's suicide, with his snatching/seizing of a poison cup, links to the Furies.[191] This characterises suicide as a dynamic snatching between the human and divine for influence. This supports the historical reality of Hannibal's suicide as a freely chosen act of his agency and *libertas,* as well as *Punica*'s

[189] Hesiod *Theogony* 857-868; Vergil *Aeneid* 3.570-583; Buxton 2016, 30-31.
[190] McClellan 2019, 100-107.
[191] Through allusions to the Capuan senators (13.270-298), and earlier uses of *rapere* in Tiburna (2.678) and Saguntum (2.695).

repeated allusions emphasising Hannibal's powerlessness against posthumous punishment for violating *fides* (*Punica* 2.699-707, 13.868-895).

However, while Scipio asks the Sybil about Hannibal's afterlife fate, her response describes Hannibal's remaining life on earth as an exile until his suicide (*Punica* 13.874-893). Like the disfigurement and suicide in Scipio's speculations on Hannibal's afterlife, the Sybil's prophecy on Hannibal's life of exile and suicide emphasises reciprocal and ambiguous relationships in bodily agency in suicide. As observed previously, Silius repeatedly links exile and suicide. By the time of the Second Punic War, Hannibal had been absent from Carthage for 36 years.[192] Hannibal's exile from his homeland and abandonment of his wife and son (13.868-895) allude to the avenging Fides' warning of punishment for treaty-breaking: "neither his household, wife, nor life will abide except for grief and tears [as] Loyalty persecute[s] him in distress over land and sea, day and night" (*Punica* 13.289-290). Thus, Silius casts Hannibal's historical loss of family and cultural identity, exile, and suicide in epic terms as divine retribution for the war. Suicide is framed as an exile: severing one's familial relationships and cultural community. Hannibal's roaming of the seas in exile "drifting idly" to various shores "uncertain where to go…his bones find[ing no] rest in his native country" (13.868-895), recall earlier allusions to his wandering exile (*Punica* 2.699-707). The exilic fate of Hannibal's bones/corpse mirrors his fate in life, and the restless homeless bones create a haunting atmosphere. This exilic portrayal of Hannibal's suicide blurs the lines between the living and dead and stresses suicide as an example of this boundary threshold. This can be seen as creating ambiguous states of agency for subjects that challenge their senses of personal identity through the relationship of their physical body with the landscape and community surrounding them.

[192] Mills 2009, 55-56.

Silius' interjection on hardships verses death furthers connections between nature, the physical body, Roman hardships, and suicide. Silius' Sybil exclaims: "Oh! How much easier for mortals to endure the ills/hardships of slavery, cold, heat, exile, the perils of the sea, and hunger, than to be able to die!" (*Punica* 13.883-885). This interjection, along with Hannibal's shameful begging for his life, emphasise the shame of wandering suffering. This is an interesting contrast to Homer, where the disguised Odysseus remarks to the swineherd Eumaeus: "you have saved me from the agonies of wandering. The worst thing humans suffer is homelessness; we must endure this life because of desperate hunger; we endure, as migrants with no home" (*Odyssey* 15.341-347). Homer's ghost appears in Scipio's *nekyia* (*Punica* 13.778-797), and his influence was likely in Silius' mind with his epic genre. In the *Odyssey* (15.398-403), homelessness and exile are portrayed as sufferings worse than death, but there is also a paradoxical joy in their pain/grief by sharing one's identity and traumatic experiences through narrative.

However, here Silius frames suicide/voluntary death as a more difficult task than life's various hardships/sufferings, and the desire for life amid endless suffering as shameful. His portrayal of enduring suffering as an easier ordeal than facing death is striking. This seems to depart from Stoic ideas of suicide as a comfort from fears of suffering/death yet stresses suicide as an escape from slavery and preservation of *dignitas* and *virtus* when time and reason were right.[193] This ideology of suicide is seemingly reflected in Silius' own later suicide by starvation in the face of his incurable *clavus*. Given claims of Silius' lengthy suffering from this illness before his suicide (Pliny *Epistulae* 3.7), it is probable that Silius had been contemplating suicide some years prior. *Punica* stresses the difficulty of suicidal contemplation. The hardships Silius lists (slavery, the sea, exile, hunger, and heat) recur in his suicide narratives, which often present ambiguous dualities in agency/identity. Perhaps like Odysseus and Eumaeus, *Punica*'s

[193] Cicero, *Fin.* 3.60-61, *Off.* 1.112; Seneca, *Epistulae* 12.10, 70.14-16, 70.20-21, 77.14, 98.15-18, 104.3-5; Grisé 1982, 188; Englert 1990, 3-14. The application of these to Silius' portrayal of the difficulties of voluntary death here is my own.

discussion of suicide could be a way of validating Silius' identity/experiences and alleviating his sufferings of suicidal thoughts through narrative.[194] Under this lens, *Punica* could be interpreted as a form of Narrative Exposure Therapy for contemplating suicide in a realistic but less personally distressing way.

Hannibal's suicide is portrayed as a flight from Roman confrontation and punishment, akin to the Capuan suicides (*Punica* 13.270-298, 13.369-380) and in contrast to Saguntum (as a flight from Carthaginian slavery: 2.560-579). In this way, Silius reciprocally links suicide, tyranny, and civil war to political defiance, which simultaneously protests oppression while destroying the protestor.[195] Silius furthers connections to civil war through the epithet *Aeneadis* (13.891), which emphasises Hannibal's failure as Dido's avenger (whom he is cast at *Punica*'s beginning). *Punica*'s *proem* framing the war as between the *Aeneadum* and Carthage (*Punica* 1.1-3) connect its' *causas* to Hannibal's suicide, portrayed as the final closure to Dido's suicidal curse, which drove the epic plot (*Punica* 1.1-139; *Aeneid* 4.641-671).

The final allusion to Hannibal's suicide occurs at the end of the Battle at Zama. Scipio wants to face Hannibal in battle, believing Hannibal's death necessary for Carthaginian defeat and Roman victory (*Punica* 17.509-522). Silius positions Hannibal's suicidal thoughts after a metaphor of Carthage's dismemberment, creating a synecdochic relationship between the city/leader (*Punica* 17.149-151).[196] Fearing Hannibal's death if he faces Scipio, Juno constructs a phantom-Scipio to lead Hannibal away from the battlefield (*Punica* 17.522-547). After discovering the trick, Hannibal experiences strong

[194] See communalisation pp.26.
[195] McGuire 1997, 185-186.
[196] McClellan 2019, 108.

suicidal thoughts before Juno appears (disguised as a shepherd) to prevent his attempt by pretending to lead him toward the battlefield:

> 'Where do you flee, Scipio? You forget that you are retreating from my kingdom. For you there is no hiding-place on the soil of Libya!'
>
> Speaking thus he pursued the flying phantom with drawn sword, until it led him astray to a spot far removed from the strife of battle. Then the deceitful spectre vanished suddenly into the clouds. The general thundered: 'What god,' he said, 'has hidden their divinity and plotted against me? Or why does he hide beneath this apparition? Does my glory offend the gods so much? But, whichever of the gods it is that favours Rome, he shall never take me away nor save my enemy from me by these tricks!'
>
> He furiously turned his swift horse's reins and was riding back to the battlefield, when suddenly, by Juno's plan, the stalwart steed, smitten by a mysterious fever-fit, collapsed and soon breathed its life into the clouds from panting lungs. Then truly Hannibal could endure no more and said: 'This is another of your tricks, gods; but you don't deceive me. O would that I had been drowned at sea, that the rocks had been my tomb, and that the waves of ocean had devoured me! Was I preserved for a death like this? The men who followed my standards, whom I urged on to war are being slaughtered, and though absent, I hear their groans and their cries and the words of those calling 'Hannibal'. What river of Tartarus will ever purge away my guilt?' While he was pouring out these words, he was looking to his right-hand and boiling with desire to die.
>
> Then Juno, pitying the man, put on the likeness of a shepherd, she suddenly emerged from the shady woods, addressing Hannibal thus as he turned such an inglorious destiny in his head: '…If speed is your desire and you seek to get there quickly, I will guide you by a neighbouring path to the midst of the combat'.
>
> …Starting forward, Hannibal moved with great bounds over the surrounding plain; but Juno in disguise led him by a circuitous way, and, deceiving him about the region and roads, she preserved his life, even though Hannibal did not want it and was not grateful
>
> *Punica* 17.542-580

Hannibal's taunt of phantom-Scipio's flight is an ironic reversal of his own exilic fate outlined in Scipio's *neykia* (*Punica* 13.868-895). Juno's phantom-Scipio is described

variously as *effigies* (‘copy/imitation/portrait’), *umbrae* (‘shadow/shade’), *imago* (‘image’), *simulacrum* (‘image/imitation, spectre’), and *monstro* (‘evil omen’) (*Punica* 17.522-550).[197] The spectre’s appearance recalls Murrus’ haunting *imago* in Fury-Tiburna’s suicide speech (2.568), and the fleeing ancestorial *umbrae* before the Saguntines’ suicide pyre (2.593). Motifs of lingering and escaping ghosts/shadows, create suicide narratives imbued with haunting memory, as the physical body and its identity and presence in the landscape are put into question. It also foreshadows Hannibal’s exile, who at the end of the epic is taken from the battle by Juno like a fugitive (17.644: *visa Hannibalis campis fugientis imago*).[198] *Monstro* continues the unclear benevolent/sinister divine influence, emphasing blurred boundaries between the internal and external and one’s self-controlled actions versus circumstantial constraints within the suicide theme.[199] Through this, Silius portrays suicide and civil war as haunting traumatic memories that leave scars on the future when their true significance is forgotten, and effect survivors’ recovery.

These are strengthened with Hannibal’s suicidal lament on the haunting voices of his men’s ghosts, calling out his name (*Punica* 17.563-565). These allude to Fides’ anonymous voice during the Capuan collective suicide (*Punica* 13.270-298). The emotionally charged sensory/divine aspects of these voices, connect haunting memory and survivor’s guilt to Hannibal’s name. Thus, Silius emphasises unity between the individual and collective through this interaction between the dead/living and past/present, which emphasises war’s mental consequences for survivors, and the difficulties of traumatic memories in navigating recovery.

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[197] Duff (1934) translates these as “phantom”. Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021) also translate all as “phantom”, except *monstro* as “apparition”.
[198] Roumpou 2019, 165.
[199] Roumpou (2019, 169) on the negative/misfortune implications of *monstrum* indicating divinely induced evil omens (as at *Aeneid* 3.59, 10.637; *Thebaid* 6.495-6).

The *monstro* and the collapse of Hannibal's horse that spurs his suicidal thoughts are divinely influenced by Juno (*Punica* 17.554-558). At Saguntum, hidden divine influence spurs human agency into suicidal action, while here Hannibal calls attention to that divine influence and is prevented from actualising his suicidal thoughts. Hannibal taunts the gods for hiding their influence, boasting that it is his glory which offends them. Hannibal's contemplation of his *gloria* before his suicidal thoughts recalls Decius, Taurea, and Saguntum.[200] Silius' links between *gloria* and suicide seems to arise from the agency and bravery of the suicide subjects and their role in gaining partial control of their fates. Hannibal boasts that the gods will "never take me away" (*Punica* 17.522-580); this could foreshadow his suicide, as he does not experience a natural death and instead takes on the role of god in bringing about his own death in suicide, framed elsewhere as the fulfilment of divine retribution (*Punica* 2.699-707, 13.868-895). Thus, Silius' blurs the identities of Hannibal/human and divine influence and identity.

However, Hannibal's boastful claims to agency and *gloria* are made ambiguous through belief in Juno's phantom-Scipio. This pursuit and Hannibal's suicidal lament allude to Turnus and the phantom-Aeneas (*Aeneid* 10.633-688: though Hannibal survives), and casts Hannibal in a passive narrative position, like readers, observing the battle from a distance.[201] Silius could be using this passive position of Hannibal and *Aeneid*'s civil war contexts, to draw links between his Hannibal and Roman readers in the build-up to Hannibal's suicidal thoughts. His epithet for the Romans here, *Ausoniae* (*Punica* 17.572: an epithet for a region in Campania), like *Rutuli* and *Daunii*, connect civil war and Italian unity to Silius' suicide ideology.[202]

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[200] *Punica* 2.275-579, 2.612-613, 2.650-653 2.696-698, 11.194-201, 13.369-380.
[201] Agri 2022, 92-94.
[202] *Ausoniae* is translated here as "Romans" by both Duff (1934) and Augoustakis & Bernstein (2021); Roumpou (2019, 178) discusses that the genitive position of this epithet also reveals an ambiguous equalisation of Hannibal and Scipio.

Interestingly, Silius associates Hannibal's suicidal desires with ideas of survivors' guilt. Hannibal's suicidal desire recalls his earlier remark on the luck of his brother Hasdrubal's death (*Punica* 17.260-267) and Aeneas' envy of the glorious deaths at Troy (*Aeneid* 1.92-101).[203] Hannibal's haunting memory of his men's ghostly voices (17.563-565) is framed as survivor's guilt that recurs in conjunction with Silius' funerary *locus horridus* of Underworld waterscapes through the moral purification imagery of the Tartarus river purging Hannibal's guilt (*Punica* 17.565-566). Rivers were often divinely linked emotive objects, signifying moral purification, rituals, and boundary crossings.[204] Connections between waterscapes, the body, and ideologies of suicide as a boundary threshold between life and death, can be in seen the Lucan and Homerian intertexts of Hannibal's suicidal desires to drown. Hannibal's suicidal wish to die by shipwreck (*Punica* 17.559-560) recalls Pompey's corpse (Lucan 8.698-700, 8.707-711) and acts as an inverse to Odysseus' horror of dying at sea (*Odyssey* 5.299-313).[205] Hannibal's ingratitude for life and themes of survivors' guilt and haunting memory (through the dying groans of ghosts, the purification power of a suicide by drowning to block that guilt, and Juno's prevention of suicide attempts), can be seen through intertextual comparisons between Hannibal and Turnus after each chase their phantom-Scipio/Aeneas (*Aeneid* 10.663-688). The nature motifs of rocks/tombs in Hannibal's suicidal ideation connect waterscapes, suicide, and exile, recalling the flaming snake omen at Saguntum (*Punica* 2.580-591). These waterscapes of suicidal ideation further showcase Silius' frequent blending of the supernatural, the natural, and the internal worlds of characters and their environments in his expressions of suicides.

Silius' fiery-water motifs recur and link to Hannibal's emotional state during his suicidal thoughts: "while he was pouring out his words, he was looking to his right-hand

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[203] Mills 2009, 58-59.
[204] *Aeneid* 6.218-231; Jones 2005, 3-20.
[205] McClellan 2019, 261-262; Mills 2009, 58-59.

and boiling with desire to die" (*Punica* 17.565-566). These connect Hannibal's physical/mental state to the Underworld riverscape (*Punica* 2.707, 13.563-565, 13.571-575). I think this boiling desire recalls the flaming fluids of the ancient cremation process,[206] which like Hannibal's suicidal frustration represent the body's fuelling of one's death. This resembles Hannibal's burning thirst in his marrow (*Punica* 1.56-60), and other recurring Silian motifs of throats, fires, and water, that link the physical body to the intense emotions of suicide.

Hannibal's suicidal desire is characterised by Silius as a dishonourable fate (*ingloria fata*: *Punica* 17.569). This contrasts with Decius' suicide-advocation, and Taurea's and the Saguntines' lauded suicidal fates. Here Juno disguised as a shepherd prevents rather than encourages suicide (in contrast to Fides/Furies at Saguntum/Capua). Juno's prevention of Hannibal's suicide attempt at Zama represents a challenge to his agency.[207] The shepherd-Juno's diversion of Hannibal's suicide appears a dramatic reversal of the slaughtered shepherds in the Saguntine metaphor (2.681-698), indicating the reciprocal and constantly reversing dynamics of agency between human and divine characters in *Punica*'s suicides. These create a suicide ideology that simultaneously portray the duality of powerful resistance/action and the powerless inescapability of one's circumstances. The Saguntines are granted agency in their suicide, but their death prevents them from exercising future narrative agency as living beings (though they still possess some as ghosts through haunting memory). In contrast, Hannibal is provided by Juno with future agency by her saving his life but is here deprived of agency over his suicide (though this is later restored in his historical suicide by poison).

[206] For the archaeological account of ancient cremation see pp.41-43 and Williams 2004, 271-281 in Habinek 2016, 12-13. The comparison to Silius is my own.
[207] Agri 2022, 92-94.

Juno's diversion of Hannibal's suicide attempt mirrors Mars' diversion of Scipio's at Jupiter's command (*Punica* 4.417-477).[208] As with Jupiter/Mars/Scipio, Hannibal's divinely prevented suicide attempt is framed by Silius as an involuntary life. I think this interesting, as suicide was often framed in literature as a voluntary death.[209] Increased imperial imposition of voluntary death and suicide's frequency during Silius' contemporary context makes the theme of involuntary life in *Punica* juxtapose Silius' own culture.[210] Silius' consideration of thwarted suicide as involuntary life reveals his nuanced considerations of suicidal agency. Ideas of voluntary death and involuntary life could have been personally relevant for Silius as he considered his own suicide, and possibly recalled the suicides of his contemporaries during the turbulent political contexts of his lifetime.

Scipio

Silius explores suicidal thoughts through Scipio during the Battle at the River Ticinus (Book 4). Scipio's suicidal thoughts and Mars' divine presence do not occur in any other accounts of this scene (Livy 21.46; Polybius 10.3) and are unique to *Punica*. This shows Silius' clear desire to engage with suicide as a major poetic theme, as he presents it as affecting both of his two main characters: Hannibal and Scipio.

Here the old consul Scipio is wounded and saved by his young son, Scipio Africanus, who, fearing his father's death, contemplates suicide twice before dissuasion by Mars:

> Scipio's son saw the weapon lodged in his father's body. Tears wetted his cheeks, he trembled and suddenly turned pale, and his loud cry burst to the stars. Twice he had attempted to die before his father by turning his right-hand against himself.

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[208] Fucecchi 2020, 262-263.
[209] Grisé 1982, 24.
[210] For the frequency of imperially imposed 'voluntary' death see: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.62-64; Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.100; Grisé 1982, 32-54. The consideration of ideas of involuntary life in Silian suicide ideology is my own.

> Twice Mars had turned his anger against the Carthaginians. The fearless boy rushed through the enemies and weapons and matched Mars Gradivus pace for pace. The enemy formations yielded to him straightaway and a wide path suddenly appeared on the battlefield.
>
> Young Scipio mowed down the ranks, protected by Mars' divine shield. He cut down the man who had thrown the spear at his father atop the weapons and corpses. He sacrificed many souls, desired expiatory offerings, before his father's eyes. Then he quickly tore the spear out of his father's tough bones and dashed away, carrying his father on his neck and shoulders. The astonished forces held back their weapons at such a sight…Scipio's youth and remarkable piety caused astonished silence throughout the battlefield.
>
> Then Mars spoke from his high chariot: 'You will raze Carthage's roofs and you will force the Carthaginians to observe the peace treaty. Yet no day as great as this will dawn for you in your long life, dear boy. Hail your mighty sacred character, true son of Jupiter! Greater deeds/things still await you, but better deeds/things cannot be given'
>
> *Punica* 4.454-477

Scipio's suicide attempts are blocked by Mars Gradivus and channelled into saving his father. This is an interesting framing by Silius, as the gods are again used to combat suicidal thoughts (e.g., Juno and Hannibal: 17.542-580). The gods have been actively involved in nearly all *Punica*'s suicides. This divine involvement raises questions of agency, with divine influence either encouraging or diverting suicidal thoughts/actions. Previously, the only gods given this epic role were Juno, Fides, and the Furies. However, in the case of Scipio the role of suicide diversion is given to Mars (accompanied by the Furies and personified Irarum ('Wrath/Rage') and Bellona ('War')) by Jupiter, whose mind was moved by Scipio's dangers (*Punica* 4.417-444). Mars blocks Scipio's suicide attempts, and protects Scipio during the battle, who matches Mars "pace for pace" (4.454-477). Silius' shift within the narrative action from Mars Gradivus to Scipio is blurred and vague, reflecting their blending in the text within the context of divine influence.

The epithet *Mars Gradivus* 'Marching Mars' is an interesting choice, rather than other incarnations. Silius' use of *gradus* for Mars here, could parallel Scipio's warpath 'march' in avenging/saving his father, and Scipio's 'marching' out his depressive suicidal thoughts through Mars' 'turning'/re-channelling of those feelings. Interestingly it is the most powerful Roman deities (Jupiter, Juno, and Mars) who successfully divert the joint protagonists' suicidal thoughts. Silius frames the combatting of suicidal thoughts as a 'turning of anger' (*Punica* 4.458-459). This reading can possibly extend to Hannibal's case, as shepherd-Juno promises to lead him back to the war (variously framed as motivated by Hannibal's *ira*, 1.38-189, 239-273), which in a way returns him to that state. The phrase Silius uses, *bis transtulit iras in Poenos Mavors*, could be a pun between *Poenos* and *poenas* ('punishment') implying that Scipio is acting like a Fury, who commonly feature in Silian suicides. Thus, Mars' 'turning' of Scipio's anger seems to metaphorically transform Scipio into a Fury, as Scipio's self-destructive thoughts are externalised to instead fuel divine punishment against the Carthaginians. This transformation of Scipio's suicidal anger recalls Fides' transformation of the Saguntines' hunger to a passion for loyalty and noble suicide, ambiguously portrayed in tension with the Fury's punitive influence (*Punica* 2.493-553).

Much like the Furies and Fides at Saguntum and Capua, Scipio uses emotions of grief (*dolor*) and *ira*, which through suicide become weapons of destruction that connect the physical body, natural world, and the divine. These emotions also appear in Hannibal's suicidal thoughts, spurred by the grief of his horse's death, and dissuaded by the promise of return to his *ira*-fuelled war. Seneca and Cicero both claim *ira* and grief are impulsive mental instabilities incompatible with a *pius* or rational mind, that preventing careful examination of situations.[211] Scipio's body language of fear here (pale, trembling) could

[211] Seneca, *De Ira* 1.1-12; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.5.17-18; Stocks 2018, 296-297.

contribute to Silius' narrative of his failure to actualise his suicidal thoughts. Rational suicide was a dignified divine calling met with tranquillity, firm spirit, an unshakable will, and a solid strike.[212] Thus, Scipio's visible fear and failure to carry out his suicide, support Silius' view of rational suicide as a neutral act not always situationally appropriate, as he focuses on Scipio's emotional motivations of grief, *ira*, and familial *pietas*. Seneca (*De Ira* 1.1-12) presents *ira* as a frenzied madness sourced in *dolor*, and this pattern of *dolor-ira* is also seen with Aeneas, whose *pietas* and *ira* cause him to kill Turnus out of *dolor* for Pallas' death (*Aeneid* 1.9, 12.945-946).[213] Scipio's grief is linked to the *ira* of his suicidal thoughts. Rather than condemn Scipio's suicidal thoughts or his failure to actualise them, Silius instead explores suicide recovery as they are repurposed.

Despite Silius' gods' interventions stopping/exacerbating subjects' suicidal thoughts, they are not portrayed as creating them. At most, suicide is portrayed as an internal collaboration with or against the divine. The use of war and domestic gods (Jupiter, Mars, Juno, Fides, Furies) links suicide to civil war through violence, familial relationships, loyalty/duty, and retribution. With this, Silius presents his suicide subjects as personifications of an internal civil war, of which the gods interact, choose sides, and influence, much as they do with external civil wars in epic.

Scipio's *pietas*-driven grief and anger resurface after his father's and uncle's deaths (13.385-392), and readers could possibly have anticipated another suicide narrative; however, Scipio's *nekyia* soothes his *dolor* (*Punica* 13.395-396).[214] *Pietas*-driven *dolor-ira* motivates Scipio to consult the *manes* to assuage it and learn about Rome's future. Scipio's suicidal recovery (particularly his *nekyia*) can be seen as serving a therapeutic purpose as a sort of Underworld-talk-therapy akin to Narrative Exposure Therapy, where Scipio confronts past ghosts (of relatives and Rome), hears Hannibal's fate, trusts in divine

[212] Cicero, *Fin.* 3.60-61, *Off.* 1.112; Seneca, *Epistulae* 30.8-12, 70.20-21, 77.14, 98.15-18, 104.3-5; Grisé 1982, 95-99, 188; Englert 1990, 3-14.
[213] Stocks 2018, 295-296.
[214] Stocks 2018, 307-308; Van der Keur 2024, 9, 255.

punishment, and thinks to both his individual and Rome's collective future in aftermath of Hannibalic trauma. These link to NET as Scipio uses his *nekyia* to gain new senses of narrative control over Roman destiny and process his feelings of grief, through reengagement with his personal and cultural identity narratives. These further link suicide recovery to haunting memory, through the supernatural appearance of historical and familial ghosts, the divine, and the natural world. Silius' incorporation of ghosts and divine figures in his suicide and suicide recovery scenes creates a supernatural dimension to his suicide theme. This seems to emphasise suicide's power and significance as a mortality boundary that provides subjects with godlike power over their lives, emotions, and deeds, but also relinquishes those lives and humanity for their ghostly futures. Thus, suicide can be seen as enabling subjects to intensely reflect on their mortality, agency, and identity, as their fates impact their engagement with the natural world and its future in the aftermath of human action.

Mars' praise to Scipio "no day as great as this will dawn for you in your long life" (*Punica* 4.474-477) echoes Silius' praise of Saguntine glory (2.696-698). This inverses the Saguntine suicide, as here recovery from suicide (rather than the suicide act itself) is connected to duty, *pietas*, and glory as Scipio overcomes his suicidal thoughts and uses them to drive his godlike action on the battlefield saving his father. Scipio's *pietas* and rescue of his father alludes to Aeneas' *pietas* and carrying of his father, Anchises, from Troy (*Aeneid* 2.634-746). Both Scipio and Aeneas carry their fathers out of destructive circumstances because of familial duty, despite the personal risks to themselves. Likewise, Aeneas resolved to die with his father (*Aeneid* 2.634-670), before Anchises agreed to escape Troy's destruction with their family and household gods.

Mars Gradivus has an active divine role in Scipio's *pietas*-coded suicide narrative. Mars Gradivus was considered "the most turbulent/raging of gods" (*Gradive, furebas*),

able to grant protection from mortal weapons.[215] Silius' connections between Scipio's *ira* and *pietas* through the *furebas* figure of Mars Gradivus showcase complex emotional dynamics of violence and duty. These recall portrayals of Fides and the Furies and earlier ideas of suicide as a weapon, as Mars re-channels Scipio's *ira* and protects his *pietas* from a misused weapon of suicidal *fides* at Jupiter's command. Considering the roles Silius and his son/nephew Fronto possibly played as consuls during the various suicides/assassinations of their *principes* and subsequent succession tensions, the complex relationships between *pietas*, *fides*, and civil war in *Punica* could be commentary on the difficulties between familial loyalties and civic duties that civil war exacerbates. Scipio's suicide narrative could be seen to represent a break in the self-destructive cycle of familial vengeance, to instead prioritise recovery of the state and a healing.

Solimus

The final suicide *exemplum* I will explore is Solimus' during *Punica*'s climactic Cannae narrative. Silius begins the evening before Cannae with a patricide arising from mistaken identity, that evolves into a suicide of the son from grief. Satricus (characterised by Silius as a Trojan) returns to his Italian homeland after years of Carthaginian captivity, and after escaping the Carthaginian camp before the Battle at Cannae, he is murdered by his son Solimus (a Roman watchman) who did not recognise him (*Punica* 9.66-119). Satricus uses his dying words to reassure his son that his actions were not a crime due to the darkness and mistaken identity (*Punica* 9.120-151). He also gives Solimus the duty of warning the Roman consul Paulus to prolong the war with Hannibal and stop the other consul Varro's mad plan to do battle with Hannibal at Cannae (*Punica* 9.120-151).

[215] Statius, *Thebaid* 7.695-697, 9.4.

Satricus' and Solimus' story is a Silian invention, not found in Livy.[216] It emphasises connections between civil war and blurred identities between Romans/Carthaginians, as Solimus' father is mistaken for an enemy. The sense of familial/communal betrayal from unrecognisement spurs Solimus' suicide motivations. Through Solimus, Silius explores grief and various moral and visual significances of suicide (the bloody shield's warning), which set the stage for his Cannae narrative.

Upon recognising his dying father, Solimus is frozen with shame; his attempt to stop the blood is futile and weeping Solimus bemoans Fortune and the hostile gods before committing suicide:

> Then the young man, raising his grieving face to the stars, says: 'Polluted right-hands, and Moon, witness of my unspeakable crime, you who lighted the night to guide my weapons into my father's body! No further will these eyes and damned vision violate you.' While he remembers these events, at the same moment, with his sword, he digs into his heart. Sustaining the dark wound, he signs his father's orders on the shield with his dripping blood: 'Varro, avoid the combat!' Then he hangs the shield from his javelin's tip and collapses on his lamented parent's limbs
>
> *Punica* 9.168-177

Silius opens this suicide narrative with Solimus looking to the stars and calling on the Moon in grief. This showcases his use of celestial language to link the physical body, nature, and familial relationships to the suicide action. His use of 'stars' recalls the Saguntines' spirits and suicide pyre (*Punica* 2.599, 2.659, 2.696-698), and Scipio's cry to the stars prior to his suicidal thoughts (4.456). Silius casts nature as both a backdrop and an active participant in the suicide action, through Solimus' accusatory address of the Moon as both "witness" and "guide" to his 'unspeakable crime" (*Punica* 9.168-177). This creates a blurred sense of agency, as Silius furthers this participatory role of nature in suicide through motifs of light/darkness and sight. Thus, Solimus' suicide could be read as

[216] McGuire 1997, 134.

analogous to forced suicide, as Solimus blames the Moon's deceiving light for his patricide and frames his suicide as necessary penance. The word Silius uses here, *Titania*, was often an epithet of the goddess Diana, but was also used for any daughter of a Titan.[217] This allusion links the gods and nature to suicide as participants, observers, and affected parties.

The emphasis on Satricus and Solimus' Trojan identities and links to Aeneas (*Punica* 9.72-74), create a suicide scene emblematic of Roman agency and identity. As with Capua, Silius creates contemporary Roman associations in his Cannae narrative. During the battle and catalogue of Roman forces in *Punica* 8-10, he names participants after Romans involved in the 1st century BC and AD 69 civil wars.[218] Silius characterises his Cannae with themes of Roman divisiveness, as the consuls Varro and Paulus vie for command. Silius' positioning of this patricide and suicide (characterised by mistaken identity) at *Punica*'s climax, reaffirms themes of civil war through division, familial violence, and blurred identities. This presents readers with a suicidal and self-destructive Rome, that must be unified and reborn to repair the divisiveness of civil war, recover, and grow again.[219]

Silius connects suicide, civil war, and familial violence to the physical body as a powerful suicide instrument and victim. He describes Solimus' "polluted right-hands" (*pollutae dextrae*), "damned vision", and the dark wound of his sword from which he uses his blood to fulfil his duty to his father and warn the consuls. Silius' description "No further will these eyes and damned vision violate you" indicates a reciprocal relationship between human wounds/acts and damage to the landscape, supported when we read the *pollutae dextrae* in the context of the clasped right-hands of Flavian *fides* propaganda.[220]

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[217] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.165-205; For this epithet in Ovid see Staton 1963, 167.
[218] McGuire 1997, 136-144; Marks 2005, 534-535.
[219] Marks 2005, 534-535; Dominik 2006, 124-125.
[220] See Stocks 2019 and OCRE British Museum, R.10390 (title image) and British Museum R.10258, OCRE for clasped right-hands as a symbol of fides on Flavian/AD 69 Civil War coinage.

The use of right-hands in suicide is not exclusive to Silius and has been commonly used in Latin epic. However, the frequency of this motif in his suicide expressions when considered alongside the motifs' use in Flavian propaganda and Silius' political role during the AD 69 Civil War, appears to give the generic motif more weight.[221] Supporting this is the linguistic doubling here with Solimus' *two* right-hands, which make the link seem more deliberate than just a generic use of the expression. Solimus must commit suicide to not pollute nature with his act of familial violence. In a sense, Solimus' suicide is almost compelled by nature as a sort of moral balance. Silius' focus on the physical description of Solimus' body (linked to his morality and motivations) characterise the suicide subject as both a free agent and tainted/mutilated victim. Solimus' polluted body recalls descriptions of other suicide corpses as within transitory states of intact/deformed (Saguntines: 2.665-698; Hannibal: 2.699-707).

Suicide is linked to poetic voice, as here the suicide body and bloody shield become physical objects of warning connected by blood as a tool for written communication. Through the bloody suicide act, Solimus' literal voice is silent while his final message can be used as moral warning for Silius' audience. Connections between suicide and moral warning recall Silius' interjection alluding to Hannibal's suicide, which connects his death with a warning against treaty violation (*Punica* 2.699-707). In this way, Silian suicides showcase both haunting memory and bodily agency, by symbolically preserving a violent action through the bloody shield which actively leaves an ethical message (written with the dying suicide body) that marks the corpse and landscape.

As with Scipio's suicidal thoughts (*Punica* 4.454-477), Solimus' suicide is linked to an emotional moment of passionate grief. Many ancient philosophers viewed passionate and impulsive self-destructive emotions (e.g., anger, frenzy, and grief) as psychologically

[221] *Punica* 2.532-533, 2.577, 2.665-667, 4.457-459, 9.169, 11.194-196, 17.566

othering, with the power to make one unrecognisable to themselves and others.[222] This 'othering' links Solimus' suicide to the earlier mistaken identity of his father as a Carthaginian, that spurred the patricide and suicidal grief. Emotional and perceptual othering also connect to exile, which recur in the majority of *Punica*'s suicides. Silius often connects grief, tears, and *fides* in suicide, which characterise self-destruction as the divine retribution of Fides' and the Furies, and an exile from family and homeland.[223] This linking of exile and suicide presents suicide as an exile from life.

Solimus' suicide is also connected to Stoic duty, fitting well with Cicero and Seneca's ideas of suicide to maintain *dignitas* and commit to the moral character of one's *personae*.[224] By linking suicide to exile/otherness and morality/self-identity, Silius presents a complex portrayal of suicide as a transitory state between life and death (with suicide as exile), and between agency and victimhood (in the damages to self-identity through the process). This severs the physical body from its active influence on the landscape and surrounding world; however, its remains can still carry influence through haunting memory, which can be repeated or acknowledged and recovered from. Thus, Solimus' suicide becomes symbolic of civil war and Roman moral identity, setting the funerary landscape for Cannae. Silius openly claims to use this suicide as an omen for Cannae (*Punica* 9.178-179). Varro's dismissal of Solimus' suicide as the work of the Furies (9.265) seems to warn Silius' audience against failing to acknowledge this haunting memory of violent self-destruction necessary for recovery and prevention of cyclical civil war.

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[222] Seneca, *De Ira* 1.1, 2.36, *Epistulae* 85.9-13, 116.2-3; Aristotle, *De Anima* 2.2.413b20, 2.5.418a1-5; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.5.17-18; Agri 2022, 44-45; Stocks 2018, 295-297.
[223] *Punica* 4.454-477, 9.168-177, 13.289-290.
[224] Seneca, *Epistulae* 70.14, 66.13, 70.20-21; Cicero, *Off.* 1.112; Englert 1990, 91; Agri 2022, 28-31.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I examined Silius' ideological use of suicide as an epic theme emphasising the transformative and entangled relationships between subjects' emotional states, physical bodies, instruments of death, and landscapes. I argue that Silius uses narratives of individual/collective suicides and suicidal thoughts in *Punica* to provide his audience with *exempla* for exploring the moral, physical, and emotional realities of suicide and the impact of traumatic self-destructive acts on one's self/socio-political identity.

Through my analysis of *Punica*, the thematic features/motifs of Silius' suicides, and *Punica*'s potential links to other Latin epics and Silius contemporary Rome, I demonstrated how Silius variously characterises suicide as: a powerful weapon and instrument for moral action, a form of internal civil war, a form of escape and exile, and a transformative boundary threshold. This dissertation has contributed to the study of Silian epic by providing a critical analysis of Silius' suicide depictions and ideology, focusing on suicide as a central poetic theme of his *Punica*. I have done so by building on the works of McGuire (1997), Stocks (2019), and other Silian scholars by incorporating various archaeological frameworks and Grisé's (1982) approach to Roman suicide in my examination of suicide portrayals. I engaged with *Punica'*s suicide theme through frameworks of Narrative Exposure Therapy and literary *topoi* of civil war, agency, disfigurement, *loci horridi*, exile, haunting memory, *fides*, and *pietas*.

I conclude that Silius' presents an epic ideology of suicide, centred around a small repertoire of recurring motifs, which encourage his audience to contemplate the emotional experiences of suicide, its impact on one's physical/cultural identity and environment, and suicide's duality as a desperate act in the face of uncontrollable and inescapable circumstances and a tool for reclaiming self-control.

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