genius, to which full course must be given by the use of digressions, by bringing divine beings on to the stage, and by giving generally a mythologic tinge to the subject. The Latin laws of the historic epic were fixed by Ennius, and were still binding when Claudian wrote. They were never seriously infringed, except by Lucan, who substituted for the *dei ex machina* of his predecessors the vast, dim, and imposing Stoic conception of destiny. By protracted applica­tion, and being (to use the significant phrase of Petronius) “full of learning,” Silius had acquired excellent recipes for every ingredient that went to the making of the conventional historic epic. Though he is not named by Quintilian, he is probably hinted at in the mention of a class of poets who, as the writer says, “write to show their learning.” To seize the moments in the history, however unimportant, which were capable of pic­turesque treatment; to pass over all events, however important, which could not readily be rendered into heroics; to stuff out the somewhat modern heroes to something like Homeric proportions; to subject all their movements to the passions and caprices of the Olympians; to ransack the poetry of the past for incidents and similes on which a slightly new face might be put; to foist in by well-worn artifices episodes, however strange to the subject, taken from the mythologic or historic glories of Rome and Greece,—all this Silius knew how to do, as he knew his own fingers and nails. He did it all with the languid grace of the inveterate connoisseur, and with a simplicity foreign to his time, which sprang in part from cultivated taste and horror of the venturesome word, and in part from the subdued tone of a life which had come unscathed through the reigns of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. The more thread­bare the theme, and the more worn the machinery, the greater the need of genius. Two of the most rigid requirements of the ancient epic were abundant similes and abundant single combats. But all the obvious resemblances between the actions of heroic man and external nature had long been worked out, while for the renovation of the single combat little could be done till the hero of the Homeric type was replaced by the mediæval knight. Silius, however, had perfect poetic appreciation, with scarce a trace of poetic creativeness. No writer has ever been more correctly and more uniformly judged by contemporaries and by posterity alike. Only the shameless flatterer, Martial, ventured to call his friend a poet as great as Virgil. But the younger Pliny gently says that he wrote poems with greater diligence than talent, and that, when, according to the fashion of the time, he recited them to his friends, “he sometimes found out what men really thought of them.” It is indeed strange that the poem lived on. Silius is never mentioned by ancient writers after Pliny except Sidonius, who, under different conditions and at a much lower level, was such another as he. Since the discovery of Silius by Poggio, no modern enthusiast has arisen to sing his praises, and in the last sixty years he has found no editor, even for his text. Eighteenth-century editors, at a time when modern Silii were numerous in the field of literature and more fashionable than they have been since, found in the *Punica* passages not unworthy of comparison with the *Hcnriade,* and thought that Silius did not disgrace Virgil; but even such gentle commendation is not likely to be repeated again. Vet, by the purity of his taste and his Latin in an age when taste was fast becoming vicious and Latin corrupt, by his presentation to us of a type of a thousand vanished Latin epics, and by the historic aspects of his subject, Silius merits better treatment from scholars than he has received. The general reader he can hardly interest again. He is indeed of imitation all compact, and usually dilutes what he borrows; he may add a new beauty, but new strength he never gives. Hardly a dozen lines anywhere are without an echo of Virgil, and there are frequent admixtures of Lucretius, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, Homer, Hesiod, and many other poets still extant. If we could reconstitute the library of Silius we should probably find that scarcely an idea or a phrase in his entire work was wholly his own.

The raw material of the *Punica* was supplied in the main by the third decade of Livy, though Silius may have consulted other historians of the Hannibalic war. Such facts as are used are generally presented with their actual circumstances unchanged, and in their historic sequence. The spirit of the Punic times is but rarely misconceived,—as when to secret voting is attributed the election of men like Flaminius and Varro, and distinguished Romans are depicted as contending in a gladiatorial exhibition. Silius clearly intended the poem to consist of twenty-four books, like the Iliad and the Odyssey, but after the twelfth he hurries in visible weariness to the end and concludes with seventeen. The general plan of the epic follows that of the Iliad and the Æneid. Its theme is conceived as a duel between two mighty nations, with parallel dissensions among the gods. Scipio and Hannibal are the two great heroes who take the place of Achilles and Hector on the one hand and of Æneas and Turnus on the other, while the minor figures are all painted with Virgilian or Homeric pigments. In the delineation of character our poet is neither very powerful nor very consistent. His imagination was too weak to realize the actors with distinctness and individuality. His

Hannibal is evidently at the outset meant for an incarnation of cruelty and treachery, the embodiment of all that the vulgar Roman attached to the name “Punic.” But in the course of the poem the greatness of Hannibal is borne in upon the poet, and his feeling of it betrays itself in many touches. Thus he names Scipio “the great Hannibal of Ausonia”; he makes Juno assure the Carthaginian leader that if fortune had only permitted him to be born a Roman he would have been admitted to a place among the gods; and, when the ungenerous monster of the first book accords in the fifteenth a splendid burial to Marcellus, the poet cries, “You would fancy it was a Sidonian chief who had fallen.” Silius deserves little pity for the failure of his attempt to make Scipio an equipoise to Hannibal and the coun­terpart in personal prowess and prestige of Achilles. He becomes in the process almost as mythical a figure as the mediæval Alexander. The best drawn of the minor characters are Fabius Cunctator, an evident copy of Lucan’s Cato, and Paullus, the consul killed at Cannæ, who fights, hates, and dies like a genuine man.

Clearly it was a matter of religion with Silius to repeat and adapt all the striking episodes of Homer and Virgil. Hannibal must have a shield of marvellous workmanship like Achilles and Æneas; because Æneas descended into Hades and had a vision of the future history of Rome, so must Scipio have his revelation from heaven; Trebia, choked with bodies, must rise in ire like Xanthus, and be put to flight by Vulcan; for Virgil’s Camilla there must be an Asbyte, heroine of Saguntum; the beautiful speech of Euryalus when Nisus seeks to leave him is too good to be thrown away,—furbished up a little, it will serve as a parting address from Imilce to her husband Hannibal. The descriptions of the numerous battles are made up in the main, according to epic rule, of single combats—wearisome sometimes in Homer, wearisome offener in Virgil, painfully wearisome in Silius. The different component parts of the poem are on the whole fairly well knit together, and the transitions are not often needlessly abrupt; yet occasionally incidents and episodes are introduced with all the irrelevancy of the modern novel. A son of Regulus escapes from Thrasymene to a hut, merely to find there an old servant of his father, and to afford him the opportunity of telling over again the tale of the first war against the Carthaginians. To give scope for a eulogy of Cicero, an ancestor of his fights at Cannæ, and strong devices sometimes usher in such stories as the judgment of Paris and the choice of Hercules. The interposition of the gods is, however, usually managed with dignity and appro­priateness.

As to diction and detail, we miss, in general, power rather than taste. The metre runs on with correct smooth monotony, with something always of the Virgilian sweetness, though attenuated, but nothing of the Virgilian variety and strength. The dead level of literary execution is seldom broken by a rise into the region of genuine pathos and beauty, or by a descent into the ludicrous or the repellent. There are few absurdities, but the restraining force is trained perception and not a native sense of humour, which, ever present in Homer, not entirely absent in Virgil, and some­times finding grim expression in Lucan, fails Silius entirely. The address of Anna, Dido’s sister, to Juno compels a smile. Though deified on her sister’s death, and for a good many centuries already an inhabitant of heaven, Anna meets Juno for the first time on the outbreak of the *Second* Punic War, and deprecates the anger of the queen of heaven for having deserted the Carthaginians and attached herself to the Roman cause. Hannibal’s parting address to his child is also comical: he recognizes in the “heavy wailing” of the year-old babe “the seeds of rages like his own.” But Silius might have been forgiven for a thousand more weaknesses than he has if in but a few things he had shown strength. The grandest scenes in the history before him fail to lift him up; his treatment, for example, of Hannibal’s Alpine passage falls immensely below Lucan’s vigorous delineation of Cato’s far less stirring march across the African deserts.

But in the very weaknesses of Silius we may discern merit. He at least does not try to conceal defects of substance by contorted rhetorical conceits and feebly forcible exaggerations. In his ideal of what Latin expression should be he comes near to his con­temporary Quintilian, and resolutely holds aloof from the tenor of his age. Perhaps his want of success with the men of his time was not wholly due to his faults. His self-control rarely fails him; it stands the test of the horrors of war, and of Venus working her will on Hannibal at Capua. The reader of Statius and even Propertius will be thankful for the rarity of recondite epithets, such as “Rhœtean destiny,” “Garamantian standards,” “Lagean river,” “Smyrnæan strings.” Only a few passages here and there betray the true silver Latin extravagance, as when Hannibal is compared for speed to a tigress reft of her cubs, which darts forth *and in a few hours* traverses the Caucasus, and with a “winged ” leap flies across *the Ganges*; or when the Cartha­ginians after Capua launch their spears but are too enervated to *make them whiz*; or when the plague-stricken and famine-