



PROJECT MUSE®

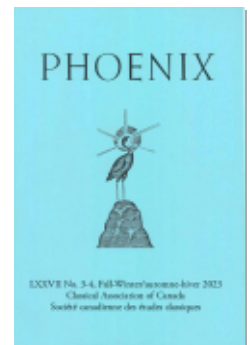
Short-Circuiting Heroism: Suicidal Achilles(es) in Quintus
Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*

Fotini Hadjittofi

Phoenix, Volume 77, Number 3-4, Fall-automne/Winter-hiver 2023, pp.
335-349 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/phx.2023.a942862>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/942862>

SHORT-CIRCUITING HEROISM: SUICIDAL ACHILLES(ES)
IN QUINTUS SMYRNAEUS' *POSTHOMERICA*

FOTINI HADJITTOFI

I. POSTHOMERIC HEROISM AND SUICIDE

QUINTUS' *Posthomerica* is the sole large-scale mythological epic to have survived from the many centuries that separate Apollonius of Rhodes and Nonnus of Panopolis. Written most probably in the third century c.e., this poem creates a bridge between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by recounting what happened at Troy between the moment after Hector's funeral, which is where the *Iliad* left off, and the sacking of the city and dispersal of the Achaean fleet, which is where the *Odyssey* picks up the story.¹ To create this bridge, Quintus adopts the persona and style of Homer, going so far as to provide himself with an autobiographical investiture (12.306–313) at Smyrna, one of Homer's mythical birthplaces.² While he undoubtedly shows awareness of Hellenistic and specifically Callimachean developments, Quintus clearly subordinates these to his own poetics, recasting and updating Homer in a number of aspects, including the literary, the ethical, and the religious.

Scholars have often noted Quintus' strong moralizing tendencies: his gods are for the most part dignified and distant,³ and his poem abounds in *gnomae*, many of which expound an ethos of endurance, decorum, and acceptance of fate, which scholars have generally taken to be a mark of Stoicism.⁴ The main heroes of Quintus' poem also behave in a manner which seems to respond to broader criticism of Homer's heroes: that is, just like Quintus' gods, his heroes are also largely well-behaved. An example often mentioned by scholars is Neoptolemus, who in many other accounts is a brutal killer but in Quintus inherits the best traits of his father Achilles (being an astounding warrior) without any of his moral flaws (being neither impulsive nor overly passionate).⁵

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of FCT (Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia), Portugal, through the project PTDC/LLT-LES/30930/2017 (national funds).

¹On the date of the poem, see Carvounis 2019: xx–xxvi and Greensmith 2020: 24–34. The text of Quintus is cited from Vian 1963–1969. Translations are adapted from James 2007.

²For Quintus' "poetics of impersonation," see now Greensmith 2020: esp. 158–188 on the pseudo-autobiographical in-proem.

³On Quintus' gods, see Bär 2016; Barbaresco 2021 and 2022.

⁴For Quintus' Stoicism, see Vian 1963: xiv–xviii; García Romero 1985, 1986, 1989, and 1990; Calero Secall 1998a: 104–105, 1998b: 91, and 2000: 198; Maciver 2007, 2012: 39–86 and 87–124, and 2016; Langella 2016; Greensmith 2020: 136–138 and 318–322. For some dissenting opinions, see, for example, Gärtner (2014), emphasizing continuity with Homeric practices, and Tsomis (2018a: 102–105), who argues for influence from popular beliefs and literary *topoi* without entirely dismissing Stoicism.

⁵See esp. Boyten 2007. Cf. Calero Secall 1998a: 105 for Neoptolemus as a quasi-Stoic sage. A more detailed study of Neoptolemus' characterization can be found in Scheijnen 2018: 156–225.

Quintus' moral whitewashing of Neoptolemus takes many forms, but perhaps the most striking is the notorious slaying of Priam by the altar of Zeus during the sack of Troy. This scene had become emblematic of Neoptolemus' barbaric and impious bloodlust in both literature and art.⁶ Quintus does include it in his poem: in the last book of the *Posthomerica*, Neoptolemus encounters Priam by the altar of Zeus the Guardian and kills him. Before that happens, however, Quintus stages a dialogue between the two, the effect of which is to exonerate Neoptolemus by making the murder seem almost like a merciful act. Priam actually implores Neoptolemus: "Kill me without mercy in my misfortune. I certainly / after all that I've suffered, have no desire to see / the light of the all-seeing sun. My one wish now / is to perish with my children and so to forget my grievous / pain and the ugly din of war."⁷ Neoptolemus is presented as almost showing kindness in ending the acute distress under which Priam has been living. What is elsewhere a brutal killing becomes in the *Posthomerica* a mediated suicide.

This article will investigate a series of suicides in the *Posthomerica*—deaths that are, in different ways, self-provoked and that result from the heroes' adoption of an Achillean brand of heroism. It will be argued that in Quintus' epic this type of heroism (an overabundance of fierce courage, pride, and passion) is, on the one hand, incompatible with the new moral ideology espoused in the poem but, on the other, also recognized as essential, even indispensable, for any epic in the traditional Homeric mold. Similar to what Philip Hardie (1993: 60–76) has termed the "energy of Hell" (the ceaseless motion and emotive turmoil that provide the impetus for new movement in post-Virgilian Latin epic), the successive explosions of excessive, Achillean heroism both lead to the "short circuit" of suicide and ultimately endow the epic with a kind of dynamism that sustains its generic identity and keeps its plot on the right track.

Achilles himself provokes his own death in the third book of the *Posthomerica*. At this point in the narrative, Achilles is at his warlike best. He is routing the Trojans, making the rivers choke with corpses, and finding himself on the cusp of breaking through Troy's gates and seizing the city—a possibility that would entirely derail the mythical plot. Apollo appears on the battlefield and gives Achilles a stern warning to back off. Showing no respect for the god, the hero orders him instead to: "Retreat now, far away, and join the rest of the gods / at home, or I will strike you, immortal though you are."⁸ Such an attack against a god would not be exactly unheard of in the *Iliad*, where a hero can, and

⁶ In literature, most famous is Virgil's version in the *Aeneid* (2.499–553); in Greek, see Triphiodorus' *Sack of Troy* 634–641. Calero Secall (1998a: 106) lists further sources.

⁷ Quint. Smyrn. 13.227–231: κτεῖνον μὴδ' ἐλέαιρε δυσάμμορον· οὐ γὰρ ἔγωγε / τοῖα παθὼν καὶ τόσσα λιλαίομαι εἰσοράσθαι / ἡελίοιο φάος πανδερκέος, ἀλλὰ που ἤδη / φθεῖσθαι ὁμῶς τεκέεσσι καὶ ἐκλελαθέσθαι ἀνίης / λευγαλέης ὁμάδου τε δυσσηχέος.

⁸ Quint. Smyrn. 3.51–52: ἀλλ' ἀναχάζεο τῆλε καὶ ἐς μακάρων ἔδος ἄλλων / ἔρχεο, μὴ σε βάλοιμι καὶ ἀθάνατόν περ ἐόντα.

does, strike and injure a divinity,⁹ but it is not the *modus operandi* that Quintus espouses for his morally upright heroes.¹⁰ Achilles has transgressed a boundary: his excessive bellicosity and impiety immediately bring about his own death, as Apollo shoots a shaft that strikes Achilles' vulnerable spot, his ankle.

Maria Wenglisnky (1992: 82) rightly argues that by threatening Apollo with physical violence, Achilles is essentially "asking to be killed." Like Priam's mediated suicide, this almost self-inflicted death exculpates the one who delivers it: Apollo, having been openly offended, can be relieved of any (philosophical or moralizing) charge of divine callousness or deviousness. Furthermore, as Tine Scheijnen (2018: 102) points out, by having Apollo himself kill Achilles, without using Paris as an intermediary, the *Posthomerica* stresses Achilles' larger-than-life character.¹¹ Achilles is dispatched by a god, not a mortal, and only at the point when Achilles himself has taken the deluded step of threatening a divinity—indeed the very god who has been shown to be Achilles' divine double, as the hero's famous wrath is a magnification of the wrath of Apollo against the Achaeans in *Iliad* Book 1.¹² Achilles may not explicitly ask to be killed, as Priam does, but his death is provoked by himself and administered by the god who is the divine equivalent of himself: a god whose wrath tends to be both easily incited and immediately catastrophic.¹³ The self-provoked death of Achilles is the first instance in which a Posthomeric hero embodying an inflexible model of epic heroism brings about his own demise, perhaps indicating, as early as Book 3, that this type of heroism has outlived its era—that this is a new epic world, which does not condone such excessive behavior.

Very soon, however, a new Achillean hero takes the stage: Ajax, who in Book 5 commits suicide after recovering from his famous episode of madness.¹⁴ Poets who composed previous versions of Ajax's suicide had already cast him as a second Achilles.¹⁵ That Quintus also saw Ajax in these Achillean terms is obvious from a number of Achillean allusions out of which he crafts this

⁹Diomedes wounds Aphrodite and Ares in *Il.* 5.329–340 and 846–861, respectively; Achilles fights the river god Xanthus in Book 21.

¹⁰As Carvounis (2024: 193–194) notes, Achilles' aggression here escalates his last Iliadic encounter with the same god, where the hero had declared: "Truly I would punish you, if I had the power" (ἦ σ' ἂν τιταίμην, εἴ μοι δύναις γε παρείη, *Il.* 22.20).

¹¹Scholars have also noted that, by opting for the version in which Apollo kills Achilles alone (and not in concert with Paris), the epic is consistent in its tendency to limit any interaction between gods and mortals to the absolute minimum; see Bär 2016: 223 and Barbaresco 2022: 133–134.

¹²See Rabel 1990; cf. Robbins 1993: 19–20 and Mackie 1997: 8–9.

¹³Achilles himself seems to know this in the *Iliad* (24.602–617), when he tells the story of Niobe.

¹⁴For Quintus' specifically Achillean Ajax, see Scheijnen 2018: 110–155, with earlier bibliography.

¹⁵Most notable among these are, of course, Sophocles (*Ajax*) and Ovid (*Met.* 13). Quintus may or may not have read Latin poetry: the most extensive study on Quintus' allusive engagement with Virgil, by Gärtner (2005), has been inconclusive. Scholars have, nevertheless, tended to assume some knowledge of the Latin tradition; see Hadjittofi 2007 and Bär 2022.

hero. From calling Ajax Αἰακίδην (5.244), thus highlighting his kinship with Achilles through their common ancestor Aeacus, to presenting him as the martial double of Achilles in battle, to having Thetis sigh at his resemblance to her son during the funeral games for Achilles in Book 4 (4.498–499), Quintus' Ajax remains throughout a Posthomeric second Achilles.¹⁶ Not all of these allusions can be analyzed here, but two examples from near the end of Ajax's life will demonstrate, first, the excesses of his Achillean wrath and, second, the way this Achillean type of heroism irrevocably leads to self-destruction and points to Achilles himself as a "suicidal" character.

First, let us consider Ajax's wrath. When addressing what he thinks is the slain Odysseus, but is in fact a slaughtered sheep, Quintus' Ajax angrily says (5.444–448), "Lie there, you dog! You won't be mourned with the embrace / of wife and offspring in their uncontrollable grief / nor by parents, who will not see you in their need / . . . the birds and dogs will devour you where you have fallen."¹⁷ This echoes what the Homeric Achilles says to Lycaon in the *Iliad* ("lie there now with the fishes"; ἐνταυθοῖ νῦν κείσο μετ' ἰχθύσιν, 21.122; he goes on to add that his mother will not mourn at his funeral) and almost parallels his taunting of Hector, to whom he also declares that his mother will not mourn at his funeral, but that dogs and birds will devour his body (ἀλλὰ κύνες τε καὶ οἰωνοὶ κατὰ πάντα δάσσονται, *Il.* 22.354). Very similar speeches are addressed by Quintus' Achilles to Penthesileia and Thersites, both of whom are slain by him in Book 1.¹⁸ The denial of burial and defilement of the enemy's corpse designate a type of excessive heroism that is, to a great extent, particular to Achilles.¹⁹

Second, let us examine Ajax's suicide: Ajax's speech after he has realized what he has done in his madness and before he plunges his sword into his own throat is also full of Achillean reminiscences:

ἀλλὰ τί μοι στυγεροῖσι μετέμμεναι ἐσθλὸν ἐόντα:
ἐρρέτω Ἀργείων ὁλοὸς στρατός· ἐρρέτω αἰὼν
ἄσχετος· οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἐσθλὸς ἔχει γέρας, ἀλλὰ χερσίων

¹⁶ See also the allusion to the incipit of the *Iliad* in Quint. Smyrn. 5.149–150: μέγα δ' ἔσσεται ἄλγος Ἀχαιοῖς, / κείνων ἢν τινα δεινὸς ἔλη χόλος ("Great will be the Achaeans' grief / if either of them [Ajax or Odysseus] is seized by dreadful wrath").

¹⁷ κείσο, κύον· σὲ γὰρ οὐ τι γοήσεται ἀμφιπεσοῦσα / κουριδίη μετὰ παιδὸς ἀάσχετον ἀσχαλόωσα / οὐ τοκέες, τοῖς οὐ τι μετέσσει ἐλδομένοισι / γήραος ἐσθλὸν ὄνειαρ, ἐπεὶ νῦν σε τῆλ' ἀπὸ πάτρης / οἰωνοὶ τε κύνες τε δεδουπότα δαρδάψουσιν.

¹⁸ See 1.644 (Achilles to Penthesileia): κείσο νῦν ἐν κονίῃσι κυνῶν βόσις ἢ δ' οἰωνῶν; 1.757 (Achilles to Thersites): κείσο νῦν ἐν κονίῃσι λελασμένους ἀφροσυνάων. For Libanius' Thersites, see Stenger in this issue (above, 206–223).

¹⁹ Other such taunting speeches in the *Posthomeric* are more restrained and dignified. James and Lee (2000: 126) list Eurypylos over Nireus (6.385–389); Eurypylos over Machaon (6.414–424 and 431–434); Neoptolemus over Eurypylos (8.211–216); Menelaus over Deiphobus (13.359–373; this last one insists on justice being served to the latest husband of Helen).

τιμήεις τε πέλει καὶ φίλτερος·

(Quint. Smyrn. 5.476–479)

But why, if I'm truly brave, should I stay with those I hate?
Begone the cursed Argive army! Begone the life
I cannot endure! The brave are no longer rewarded; base men
are honored now and preferred.

The last sentence here about the brave not receiving a fair reward (γέρας) has a clear Achillean ring, recalling not only Achilles' wrath over his Iliadic γέρας, Briseis, but also what the hero declared to the ambassadors in *Iliad* 9 about the brave and the base being unfairly held in equal honor (ἐν δὲ ἱῇ τιμῇ ἡμὲν κακὸς ἦδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός, *Il.* 9.319). Moreover, what Ajax says regarding no longer wanting to live among those he hates (στυγεροῖσι μετέμμεναι) echoes another specific statement by Achilles, the one he made to Thetis in *Iliad* 18 about not wanting to live or be among men (ἄνδρεσσι μετέμμεναι, *Il.* 18.91) while Hector is still alive. At first sight there is an important difference: Quintus' Ajax wishes for his own death in absolute terms; Homer's Achilles only really wishes for death conditionally—if Hector is still alive. In the Iliadic conversation with Thetis, however, it is clear that what Achilles desires, Hector's death, will soon be followed by the death of Achilles himself. Thetis immediately replies to her son that, according to what he has just said, he will be “swift to die” (ὠκύμορος, 18.95).

The suicidal monologue of Quintus' Ajax shows the impasse to which Achillean heroism leads. Both the Posthomeric Ajax and the Homeric Achilles provoke their own deaths: Ajax directly, because he was unable to exact revenge; Achilles indirectly, because he insisted on exacting revenge. Both have stressed the undesirability of life if their enemies can thrive while they, the self-proclaimed “good” and “brave,” are unable to assert their superiority. Close parallels between the funerals and laments for Achilles in *Posthomeric* Book 3 and Ajax in Book 5 confirm the intimate relationship between the two heroes.²⁰ This is even explicitly stated by the narrator in one of the last verses of Book 5, which affirms that the Achaeans were “stricken with grief; for they had honored him no less than Achilles” (θυμὸν ἀκηχέμενοι· τὸν γὰρ τίον ἴσον Ἀχιλλεῖ, 5.658).²¹

²⁰There are three speeches of lament for Ajax, by Teucer (509–520), Tecmessa (532–558), and Odysseus (574–597). These are reminiscent of the laments for Achilles in Book 3 by Ajax, Phoenix, Agamemnon, Briseis, and Thetis; as James and Lee (2000: 17) state, these are “an effective means of underlining the similar status of the two heroes”; cf. Scheijnen 2018: 152.

²¹Calero Secall (1998b: 91) sees the funeral as a means to rehabilitate Ajax, whose only fault was that he did not know how to accept and deal with his destiny—i.e., he was not a good Stoic—but even this can be excused within the framework of Stoic determinism. She also argues that Quintus' Stoic “contacts” (e.g., Marcus Aurelius 3.1 and 10.8.3) must have fomented the notion that suicide is a legitimate human right, when the preservation of life is not viable. It should be noted, however, that the Stoic position on suicide had, by Quintus' time, been partly absorbed by Neoplatonism: a

With both Achilles and Ajax dead, in the words of Tine Scheijnen (2018: 153), “part of the *Iliad* dies.” The two Iliadic heavyweights and the kind of heroism that they represented have fallen, leaving the field open for a new kind of heroics, one that combines physical strength, wit, and self-control and is embodied by heroes such as Odysseus and Neoptolemus.²² For the following four books, the epic plods along without any explosions of epic wrath or intense passion. An instance where such an explosion would have been expected is instead transformed into a morally edifying story. In Book 9, Odysseus and Diomedes go to fetch Philoctetes and his famous arrows from the island of Lemnos. The desolate Philoctetes has every reason to be angry with his former comrades, who had abandoned him, alone and wounded, to fend for himself on the inhospitable island. But as he first sets eyes on them, Athena makes his anger melt away (χόλον διέχευεν Ἀθήνη, 9.404). Athena’s intervention here appears to be Quintus’ own innovation, relying on the goddess’s similar role at *Iliad* 1.193–222, where she prevented Achilles from attacking Agamemnon.²³ But whereas the Homeric Athena only averted Agamemnon’s likely murder, leaving Achilles’ wrath to simmer undiminished, the Posthomeric Athena is able to intervene directly within the psyche and dissolve anger altogether. Later, when Odysseus and Diomedes address Philoctetes and blame Fate for making them abandon him, their old comrade “found it easy to put a stop immediately to his bitter anger, / though before it had been extreme because of all he had suffered.”²⁴ As Simon Goldhill (2022: 36) argues, in these lines the “‘before’ indicates not just Philoctetes’ previous feelings, but also the previous representations of those feelings within the poetic tradition that Quintus is transforming so starkly: what once was so bitterly painful and excessive is now melted away.” In a later dialogue with Agamemnon, which replays the Homeric embassy to Achilles (though in a much friendlier tone),²⁵ Philoctetes redefines what it means to be a “good” or “brave” man (ἔσθλός) when he says, “the mind of a good man should be pliable. / It is not right to be angry and surly forever.”²⁶ This ethical re-writing of the Homeric embassy represents the Posthomeric agenda of resistance to wrath and other extreme emotions—what the philosophers would

third-century Neoplatonist such as Plotinus is not strictly prohibitive regarding suicide; see Dillon 1994. For later Neoplatonic discourses on suicide, see Papazian 2005.

²² Note, for example, that, while Apollo wishes to strike down Neoptolemus like he had done Achilles, and at the exact same spot (ῥομαινε βαλεῖν θρασὺν υἱ Ἀχιλλῆος / αὐτοῦ, ὅπου καὶ πρόσθεν Ἀχιλλεῖα, 9.305–306), this is not because Neoptolemus challenged the god, but simply because he had encouraged the Achaeans to keep fighting until they seize Troy (9.275–283). This may well draw all the more sharply the contrast between hubristic father and simply valiant son.

²³ Ozbek (2022: 155) notes similarities to Athena’s role in dispelling Ajax’s madness at 5.451–452.

²⁴ Quint. Smyrn. 9.423–425: αὐτίκα θυμὸν / ῥηιδίως κατέπαυσεν ἀνιηροῦ χόλοιο, / ἔκπαγλον τὸ πάροιθε χολούμενος, ὅσσ’ ἐπεπόνθει.

²⁵ For the parallels, see Vian 1966: 200, n. 6; Schmitz 2007: 77; Ozbek 2022: n. *ad loc.*

²⁶ Quint. Smyrn. 9.520–521: οἷδα γὰρ ὡς <σ>τρεπτὸς νόος ἀνδράσι γίνεται ἐσθλοῖς, / οὐδ’ αἰεὶ χαλεπὸν θέμις ἔμμεναι οὐδ’ ἀσύφηλον.

call *apatheia*.²⁷ Philoctetes patently succeeds where both Achilles and Ajax had failed.

II. THE INEVITABLE SUICIDE OF A FEMALE ACHILLES

But can an epic poem, and indeed an epic as Homeric as the *Posthomerica*, sustain itself without explosions of wrath and intense emotion? If the Posthomeric heroes were uniformly as well behaved and forgiving as Philoctetes, could Quintus' epic still work as an epic? Arguably, some measure of wrath and uncontrollable passion is still a "compulsory" ingredient of the genre, even in a poem that promotes a philosophizing discourse of endurance and *apatheia*. In Book 10—the book immediately following the arrival of Philoctetes—we find another hero who, like Philoctetes, has received a wound which no ordinary doctor can heal: Paris. His story, however, is one full of anger and extreme emotion, manifested in a character whose female gender has perhaps obscured, in scholars' eyes, her Achillean, self-destructive heroism. The character is Oenone, Paris' forlorn wife, whom he abandoned to wed Helen and who alone has the power to heal his mortal wound, which had been inflicted by Philoctetes' arrow.

After receiving the wound, Paris travels all the way to Mt Ida where Oenone lives, apparently cut off from the rest of society. He beseeches her to heal his wound, at first using an argument that sounds very similar to what various Achaeans had said to Philoctetes in the previous book: "I did not mean it [to abandon you]. It was the inescapable Fates that led me / to Helen."²⁸ As if sensing that this kind of Stoicizing argument will not have much traction with his former wife, Paris resorts to further rhetorical appeals, many of which are directly borrowed, again, from the Homeric embassy to Achilles:

291 ἦπιον ἔνθεο θυμόν, ἄχος δ' ἀλεγεινὸν ἄλαλκε
 . . .
 300 λιτῆς δ' ἀποθύμια ῥέξεις
 αἶψά καὶ αὐταὶ Ζηνὸς ἐριγδούποιο θύγατρες
 εἰσὶ καὶ ἀνθρώποισιν ὑπερφιάλοις κοτέουσai
 ἐξόπιθε στονόεσσαν ἐπιθύνουσιν Ἑριννὸν
 καὶ χόλον. ἀλλὰ σύ, πότνα, κακὰς ἀπὸ Κῆρας ἔρυκε
 ἐσσυμένως, εἰ καὶ τι παρήλιτον ἀφραδίησιν.
 (Quint. Smyrn. 10.291 and 300–305)

291 Have a merciful heart and stop my terrible pain.
 . . .
 300 [Abandoning me] would offend the Prayers,
 who are actually daughters of Zeus the god of thunder,

²⁷ See Maciver 2012: 120–121; Greensmith 2020: 318–322: esp. 322 on Philoctetes and Sinon signaling ideals of acceptance and collaboration as a response to the position of a Greek citizen under Roman rule; Goldhill (2022: 33–34) comments on the epic's "repeated warnings against extreme behaviour and emotions" (34).

²⁸ Quint. Smyrn. 10.286–287: οὐκ ἐθέλων περ· ἄγον δέ με Κῆρες ἄφυκτοι / εἰς Ἑλένην.

and when they are provoked by the pride of human beings,
they pursue them with a hateful spirit of vengeance
and anger. Hurry, my lady, and stop the evil Fates,
even though I did you wrong in my folly.

The half-line “Have a merciful heart” (ἤπιον ἔνθεο θυμόν, 10.291) is an almost verbatim echo of what Ajax says to Achilles in the Iliadic embassy (ἴλαον ἔνθεο θυμόν, 9.639). The subsequent mention of the λιταί (the personified Prayers or Entreaties, who are daughters of Zeus and who punish those who ignore them) takes its cue from Phoenix’s almost identical description of the same λιταί to Achilles (9.502–513).²⁹ Finally, Paris’ confession that he did wrong in his folly (παρήλιτον ἀφραδίῃσιν, 10.305) evokes Agamemnon’s confession of error and folly, which set in motion the embassy in *Iliad* 9.³⁰ The same confession is made, in fact, by Quintus’ Agamemnon to Philoctetes in the previous book. When the king greets the hero upon his return, he attributes Philoctetes’ abandonment by his comrades to a collective act of blind folly (ἐπεὶ ἀασάμεσθα καὶ ἡλίτομεν τόδε ἔργον, 9.509).

As seen above, Philoctetes models the exemplary Posthomeric hero by accepting the apology and moving past his anger. Not so Oenone, who will insist on an Iliadic explosion of rage. Just like Achilles, who rejects Agamemnon’s apology and turns away the embassy, Oenone refuses any reconciliation. Both Achilles and Oenone find themselves holding the power of life and death over former friends; Oenone’s marginalized position on Mt Ida, at the fringes of Trojan society, perhaps even recalls the isolated Achilles of the wrath narrative. Both Achilles and Oenone feel slighted on account of having suffered an injustice that was erotically tinged. Namely, they were both deprived of a sexual partner (Achilles of Briseis, Oenone of Paris), yet now that their partners are offered back to them, they are no longer interested.

Oenone’s first reaction to Paris’ speech is to send him back to Helen: “go and enjoy yourself sleeping with her!”³¹ (ἦ παριαύων / τέρπεο, 310–311). This is a verbatim allusion to Achilles’ dismissive words to Odysseus regarding Agamemnon in *Iliad* 9: “let him enjoy himself sleeping with her [Briseis]” (τῇ παριαύων / τερπέσθω, 9.336–337). The image of Helen’s bed returns at the end of Oenone’s speech, when she tells Paris that that is where he should be moaning and whining in his pain (τρύζειν πὰρ λεχέεσσι πεπαρμένον ἄλγεϊ λυγρῷ, 10.326). Oenone uses here the relatively rare verb τρύζειν, which Achilles also uses to describe the Iliadic embassy speeches as unwelcome whining (ὥς μή μοι τρύζητε, 9.311).

²⁹For further discussion, see Tsomis (2018b: 177–178), who also notes the religious element in this argument.

³⁰*Il.* 9.119: ἀασάμην φρεσὶ λευγαλέῃσι πιθήσας (“I went blind, and yielded to my wretched passion”).

³¹This is the translation by Hopkinson (2018). The translation by James (2007) takes the verb, τέρπεο, to be an imperfect, but the Iliadic allusion strongly suggests that it is an imperative.

Most impressive of all is Oenone's wish:

αἶ γάρ μοι μέγα θηρὸς ὑπὸ κραδίῃ μένος εἶη
 δαρδάνηαι σέο σάρκα, ἔπειτα δέ θ' αἶμα λαφύξαι,
 οἷά με πῆματ' ἔοργας ἀτασθαλίῃσι πιθήσας.
 (Quint. Smyrn. 10.315–317)

I wish I had the heart and strength of a savage beast,
 first to devour your flesh and then to lap your blood
 for the way you made me suffer with your willful folly.

Although there is a female precedent for such a cannibalistic statement in Hecuba's outburst of grief in *Iliad* 24, when she says that she would like to eat Achilles' liver,³² both verbally and conceptually Oenone's explosion of rage is much closer to Achilles' own reply to Hector in their duel in *Iliad* 22, when Hector beseeches Achilles to respect his corpse, but Achilles rejects the supplication, saying "I wish my strength and heart could drive me / to carve up your flesh and eat it raw, in return for what you've done" (αἶ γάρ πως αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμὸς ἀνή / ὧμ' ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἷα ἔοργας, *Il.* 22.346–347).³³ Like the Iliadic Achilles and the Posthomeric Ajax, Oenone knows no bounds to her wrath: even the death of one's enemy is not enough. Refusing a burial and defiling a corpse mark the point at which a heroic soul rent by uncontrollable passion has reached the stage of self-destruction.

In Oenone's case, the death of her former husband paradoxically causes her anger against him to subside and her previous love for him to resurge. Abandoning the role of the wrathful Achilles who rejects ambassadors and suppliants, Oenone now becomes the inconsolable Achilles who mourns continuously for Patroclus. Her act of lying down in the *Posthomeric*, intensely bemoaning Paris (κεῖτο βαρὺ στενάχουσα, 10.414) is exactly the same as Achilles lying down in the *Iliad* intensely bemoaning Patroclus (κεῖτο βαρὺ στενάχων, 23.60). In both cases, the wrath has led, whether directly or indirectly, to uncontrollable grief: Achilles and Oenone have caused the deaths of Patroclus and Paris, respectively, and they now heavily lament them.

As passionate and uncontrollable as her former rage, Oenone's grief prompts her to seek Paris' funeral pyre in the mountains of Ida and—astonishing the shepherds and nymphs in attendance—to throw herself upon the pyre so that she burns together with Paris:

ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη Νύμφη τις ἀνὰ φρένας· οἱ δ' ἐνὶ μέσση
 πυρκαϊῇ καίοντο λελασμένοι ἡριγενείης.
 ἀμφὶ δὲ βουκόλοι ἄνδρες ἐθάμβεον, εὖτε πάροιθεν

³² *Il.* 24.212–213: τοῦ ἐγὼ μέσον ἦπαρ ἔχοιμι / ἐσθέμεναι προσφῦσα ("in whose liver I wish I could fix my teeth and feed upon it").

³³ Cf. Tsomis 2018b: 183 on surmising the strength of Oenone's emotions for Paris from the Achillean allusion.

- 480 Ἄργεῖοι θάμβησαν ἀολλέες ἀθρήσαντες
 Εὐάδην Καπανῆος ἐπεκχυμένην μελέεσσιν
 ἀμφὶ πόσιν δμηθέντα Διὸς στονόμεντι κεραυνῷ.
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δ' ἀμφοτέρους ὀλοή πυρὸς ἦνυσε ῥιπὴ
 Οἰνώνην τε Πάριν τε, μὴ δ' ὑποκάββαλε τέφρῃ,
 485 δὴ τότε πυρκαϊὴν οἶνῳ σβέσαν, ὅστέα δ' αὐτῶν
 χρυσέῳ ἐν κρητῆρι θέσαν. περὶ δέ σφισι σῆμα
 ἐσσυμένως τεύξαντο, θέσαν δ' ἄρα δοιὼ ὑπερθε
 στήλας αἷ περ ἕασι τετραμμέναι ἄλλυδις ἄλλῃ,
 ζῆλον ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισιν ἔτι στονόμεντα φέρουσαι.
 (Quint. Smyrn. 10.477–489)

- Such were the inward words of the nymphs, while in the midst
 of the pyre that pair lay burning, daylight all forgotten.
 Round them the herdsmen stood in wonder, as once before
 480 the gathered Argives wondered when they saw
 Evadne stretched out on the body of Capaneus,
 her husband killed by the grievous thunderbolt of Zeus.
 When the fire's destructive force had consumed them both,
 Oenone and Paris, concealed in a single heap of ashes,
 485 wine was used to quench the pyre and then their bones
 were placed in a golden vessel. Over them a mound
 was quickly constructed, on top of which was set a pair
 of gravestones turned in opposite directions,
 preserving still the bitter enmity between them.

Oenone's suicide immediately after the death of Paris was part of the literary tradition before the *Posthomerica*. It is only in Quintus, however, that Oenone commits suicide through self-immolation.³⁴ There are at least two reasons why Quintus may have opted for (or even invented) this particular method of suicide. The first of these is that Oenone and Paris receive a common burial as a consequence of their burning together on the pyre. This is reminiscent of what happens with the bodies of Achilles and Patroclus: as narrated in *Odyssey* 24, after Achilles' corpse was burned, his bones were mixed together with those of his beloved Patroclus and placed inside a golden amphora (χρύσεον ἀμφιφορῆα, *Od.* 24.74).³⁵ In the *Posthomerica*, the bones of the Achillean Oenone and her beloved Paris are placed together inside a golden vessel (ὅστέα δ' αὐτῶν / χρυσέῳ ἐν κρητῆρι θέσαν, 10.485–486). Joint funeral mounds are raised

³⁴In Pseudo-Apollodorus, Oenone hangs herself (ἐαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν, *Bibl.* 3.155); in Lycophron, she hurls herself from the topmost towers (πύργων ἀπ' ἄκρων πρὸς νεόδομητον νέκυν, *Alex.* 65); in Parthenius, she kills herself next to Paris' corpse (διεχρήσατο ἐαυτήν, 4.7).

³⁵Note also that at 10.478 the phrase λελασμένοι ἡριγενεῖς ("daylight all forgotten"; of the dead Oenone and Paris) echoes λελασμένος ἐγγειάων at Quint. Smyrn. 3.390 ("forgotten now the work of spears"; said of the dead Achilles), which in turn echoes *Od.* 24.40: λελασμένος ἵπποσυνάων ("forgotten of the work of horsemen"; also of the dead Achilles).

for each couple. In the Posthomeric mound, enmity and bitterness, like the quintessentially epic wrath, cannot be entirely suppressed: the grave stelae of Oenone and Paris are turned towards opposite directions, enshrining in the landscape the memory of their acrimony.³⁶

A second reason why Quintus may have chosen this specific method of suicide for Oenone is indicated by the text itself, in the simile which compares her self-immolation to that of Evadne upon the pyre of her husband, Capaneus (10.479–482). The explicit evocation of Evadne and the thematic echoes from Euripides' *Suppliants*,³⁷ where her death on Capaneus' pyre is recounted, provide an illustrious literary pedigree for Oenone's act of desperation. But the comparison with Evadne and Capaneus is also somewhat jarring. Oenone is not just a faithful wife like Evadne—she was at least partly, if not wholly, responsible for the death of her husband.³⁸ As for Paris, he has absolutely nothing in common with the gigantic, blasphemous Capaneus, whom Zeus had to kill by thunderbolt to prevent him from scaling the walls of Thebes.³⁹ The direct reference here to Capaneus and to Zeus' thunderbolt (κεραυνῶ, 10.482) probably has less to do with Paris than with Oenone and the type of inflexible Achillean heroism that she has modeled in the text. By furiously rejecting the plea of her former husband, Oenone brought about her own destruction. Her explosion of rage, like the overstepping of Capaneus, is the expression of a short-circuiting heroism which the *Posthomeric* seems to condemn, but without which an epic poem in the Homeric mold cannot fully function.

III. CONCLUSION

Gigantomachic comparisons mark the deaths of the first two Achillean heroes in the *Posthomeric*. Achilles, who is killed by Apollo as a result of his insolence towards the god, is compared to Tityus, the Giant who attempted to rape Leto but was slain by Apollo.⁴⁰ Ajax is compared first to Typhon, “blasted by

³⁶The common tomb of Paris and Oenone is also attested in Strabo, but without the detail that the stelae are turned towards different directions (τάφον τε γὰρ Ἀλεξάνδρου δείκνυσθαι φησιν αὐτόθι καὶ Οἰνώνης, 13.1.33). For Quintus' use of landscape markers to link the time of the narrative to the present and future, see Carvounis 2014: 192.

³⁷Zanusso (2014: 17) lists the following thematic, though not verbal, echoes: *Supp.* 1057, 1072, and 1075: cf. Quint. Smyrn. 10.430–431; *Supp.* 1038–39: cf. Quint. Smyrn. 10.435–440; *Supp.* 1002–4: cf. Quint. Smyrn. 10.437; *Supp.* 1070–71: cf. Quint. Smyrn. 10.464–468; *Supp.* 1010–11: cf. Quint. Smyrn. 10.482.

³⁸For Oenone's lack of moderation and the contrast with Evadne, cf. Calero Secall 2000: 191–192; also 198–202 on Helen and Oenone: both women lack self-control and *sophrosyne*, leading to the adultery of one and the suicide of the other.

³⁹Capaneus is already called a “Giant” in Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (γίγας, 424).

⁴⁰Quint. Smyrn. 3.392–395: οἶος ὑπερφίαλος Τιτυὸς πέσεν, ὁππότε Λητώ / ἐρχομένην Πυθὸν δὲ βιάζετο, καὶ ἔχολωθεῖς / ἀκάματόν περ ἔοντα θοῶς ὑπεδάμνατ' Ἀπόλλων / λαιψηροῖς βελέεσσιν (“As once the insolent Tityus fell, when he assaulted / Leto on her way to Pytho, and Apollo /

Zeus' thunderbolts" (Τυφῶν ὥς τὸν Ζηνὸς ἐνεπρήσαντο κεραυνοί, 5.485), and later on, at the moment when his body is consigned to the flames, to Enceladus, equally subdued by "Zeus' deadly thunderbolt" (Διὸς στονόεντι κεραυνῷ, 5.641).⁴¹ In spite of the female gender of the heroic character who suffers the suicidal short-circuit here, the mention of Capaneus and his punishment by Zeus is a likely indication that the same type of excessive heroism is at work in this episode.

Quintus' epic seems to warn against the inability of such characters, both male and female, to resist their strong emotions,⁴² but at the same time the poem cannot entirely avoid or suppress the excess of passion that forms an integral part of Homeric epic territory. In the last book of the poem, a divinized Achilles will demand the sacrifice of Polyxena, claiming—for reasons he never specifies—that he is even angrier now than he had been in the past over Briseis (ἐπεὶ σφισι χῶμαι ἔμης / μᾶλλον ἔτ' ἢ τὸ πάρος Βρισηίδος, 14.215–216). In his final words in the epic, Achilles is—still or again—angry and demanding a woman as compensation for his efforts. He threatens to make his comrades suffer, this time in a storm, unless he receives what he deserves. The very last hero whose fate is recorded in the poem is the Locrian Ajax, the blasphemous rapist of Cassandra, who is punished while still railing against the gods: as Poseidon hurls a whole hill on top of him, this Ajax (like the one before him in Book 5) is compared to the giant Enceladus.⁴³ Like Achilles, the Locrian Ajax brings about his own death by challenging and provoking the gods.⁴⁴ The *Posthomerica* can warn against the short-circuiting, suicidal heroism that was first embodied

in anger swiftly slew him with his speedy shafts / in spite of his boundless strength"). The fullest study of gigantomachic comparisons in the *Posthomerica* is Baertschi 2019, but its approach is chiefly metapoetic.

⁴¹ An earlier simile (at 1.516–519) compares the martial achievements of Ajax and Achilles to Otus and Ephialtes, who famously tried to scale Olympus, but the point here is not to call attention to the punishment of the two gigantic brothers, which is not mentioned in the simile itself. For the different temporality of this simile, which presents the gigantomachic threat as still in action, see Greensmith 2020: 243–244. For the focalization of the simile through the intra-diegetic Achaeans, who rejoice at the intervention of Ajax and Achilles, as creating an ambivalent effect between horror and pleasure, see Baertschi 2019: 192–193. Interestingly, Virgil's Aeneas is also compared to a theomachic monster, the hundred-armed Aegaeon (10.565–568) at his most Achillean moment (when he rages in battle after the death of Pallas); here too the punishment of the monster is not included in the simile.

⁴² Cf. Goldhill 2022.

⁴³ Quint. Smyrn. 14.582–586: εὔτε πάρος μέγαλοιο κατ' Ἐγκελάδοιο δαΐφρων / Παλλὰς ἀειραμένη <Σ>ικελὴν ἐπικάββαλε νῆσον / ἥ ῥ' ἔτι καίεται αἰὲν ὑπ' ἀκαμάτοιο Γίγαντος / αἰθαλόεν πνείοντος ἔσθ' ἡσθονός· ὧς ἄρα Λοκρῶν / ἀμφεκάλυπεν ἄνακτα δυσάμμορον οὔρεος ἄκρη ("As long ago upon the giant Enceladus warlike / Pallas lifted Sicily and hurled it down, / so that still it burns with the invincible giant's / fiery breath below the ground; like that / the mountain crag then buried the hapless lord of the Locrians"). For this comparison within the context of a nexus of themes in the final book which mark the end of an era, see Carvounis 2007.

⁴⁴ For the connections between the Locrian Ajax and Achilles, see Greensmith 2020: 274.

by Achilles, but it can never entirely dispense with it. Its eruptions accompany the poem until its very end.

CENTRO DE ESTUDOS CLÁSSICOS
FACULDADE DE LETRAS
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
ALAMEDA DA UNIVERSIDADE
1600-214 LISBOA
PORTUGAL

f.hadjittofi@campus.ul.pt

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baertschi, A. 2019. *Titanen, Giganten und Riesen im antiken Epos. Eine literaturtheoretische Neuinterpretation*. Heidelberg.
- Bär, S. 2016. "Reading Homer, Writing Troy: Intertextuality and Narrativity of the Gods and the Divine in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*," in J. J. Clauss, M. P. Cuypers, and A. Kahane (eds.), *The Gods of Greek Hexameter Poetry: From the Archaic Age to Late Antiquity and Beyond*. Stuttgart. 215–230.
- . 2022. "Sinon and Laocoon in Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*: A Rewriting and De-Romanisation of Vergil's *Aeneid*," in Bär, Greensmith, and Ozbek 2022: 55–74.
- , E. Greensmith, and L. Ozbek (eds.). 2022. *Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica: Writing Homer under Rome*. Edinburgh.
- Barbaresco, K. 2021. "Φαίνεθ' ὁμοῦ νεφέεσσιν ὁμοῦ νεφέεσσιν? Vedere gli dei sul campo di battaglia dall'*Iliade* ai *Posthomerica*," in V. Veronesi and B. Callegher (eds.), *Nuovi volti della ricerca archeologica, filologica e storia sul mondo antico—II. Atti del II Seminario interdisciplinare organizzato dai dottorandi del Dottorato interateneo Trieste—Udine—Venezia in Scienza dell'Antichità*. Trieste. 309–320.
- . 2022. "Disempowering the Gods," in Bär, Greensmith, and Ozbek 2022: 118–137.
- Baumbach, M. and S. Bär (eds.). 2007. *Quintus Smyrnaeus: Transforming Homer in Second Sophistic Epic*. Berlin.
- Boyten, B. 2007. "More 'Parfit Gentil Knyght' than 'Hyrcanian Beast': The Reception of Neoptolemos in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*," in Baumbach and Bär 2007: 307–336.
- Calero Secall, I. M. 1998a. "La figura de Neoptólemo en la epopeya de Quinto de Esmirna," in F. Rodríguez Adrados (ed.), *IX Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos: Madrid, 27 al 30 de septiembre de 1995* 4. Madrid. 101–106.
- . 1998b. "El Ayax de Quinto de Esmirna y sus precedentes literarios," in F. J. González Ponce and M. Brioso Sánchez (eds.), *Actitudes literarias en la Grecia romana*. Seville. 77–92.
- . 2000. "Paralelismos y contrastes en los personajes femeninos de Quinto de Esmirna," *AnnPisa* 4: 187–202.
- Carvounis, K. 2007. "Final Scenes in Quintus of Smyrna, *Posthomerica* 14," in Baumbach and Bär 2007: 241–257.
- . 2014. "Landscape Markers and Time in Quintus' *Posthomerica*," in M. Skempis and I. Ziogas (eds.), *Geography, Topography, Landscape: Configurations of Space in Greek and Roman Epic*. Berlin. 181–208.

- 2019. *A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna*, *Posthomerica* 14. Oxford.
- 2024. “Recalling and Reworking: Quintus’ *Posthomerica* as a Sequel to the *Iliad*,” in D. Cuny and A. Perrot (eds.), *Suites d’Homère de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*. Turnhout. 185–196.
- Dillon, J. 1994. “Singing Without an Instrument: Plotinus on Suicide,” *ICS* 19: 231–238.
- García Romero, F. A. 1985. “El destino en los *Post Homerica* de Quinto de Esmirna,” *Habis* 16: 101–106.
- 1986. “La ‘intervención psíquica’ en los *Post Homerica* de Quinto de Esmirna,” *Habis* 17: 109–116.
- 1989. “Un estoico en Troya: Nestor en los *Post Homerica* de Quinto de Esmirna,” in *Actas del VII congreso español de estudios clásicos: Madrid, 20–24 de abril de 1987* 2. Madrid. 197–202.
- 1990. “Aportaciones al estoicismo de Quinto de Esmirna: un comentario a la figura de Anfitriete y a *Posthomerica* XI, 106 s.,” *Emerita* 58: 119–124.
- Gärtner, U. 2005. *Quintus Smyrnaeus und die Aeneis. Zur Nachwirkung Vergils in der griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit*. Munich.
- 2014. “Schicksal und Entscheidungsfreiheit bei Quintus Smyrnaeus,” *Philologus* 58: 97–129.
- Goldhill, S. 2022. “Temporality and Temper: Time, Narrative and Heroism in Quintus of Smyrna,” in Bär *et al.* 2022: 17–37.
- Greensmith, E. 2020. *The Resurrection of Homer in Imperial Greek Epic: Quintus Smyrnaeus’ Posthomerica and the Poetics of Impersonation*. Cambridge.
- Hadjittofi, F. 2007. “*Res Romanae*: Cultural Politics in Quintus Smyrnaeus’ *Posthomerica* and Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*,” in Baumbach and Bär 2007: 357–378.
- Hardie, P. 1993. *The Epic Successors of Virgil: A Study in the Dynamics of a Tradition*. Cambridge.
- Hopkinson, N. 2018. *Quintus Smyrnaeus*. *Posthomerica*. Cambridge, MA.
- James, A. 2007. *Quintus of Smyrna*. The Trojan Epic: *Posthomerica*. Baltimore.
- and K. Lee 2000. *A Commentary on Quintus of Smyrna*, *Posthomerica* V. Leiden.
- Langella, E. 2016. “L’eroe stoico e le similitudini in Quinto Smirneo,” *Koivovía* 40: 555–581.
- Maciver, C. A. 2007. “Returning to the Mountain of Arete: Reading Ecphrasis, Constructing Ethics in Quintus Smyrnaeus’ *Posthomerica*,” in Baumbach and Bär 2007: 259–284.
- 2012. *Quintus Smyrnaeus’ Posthomerica: Engaging Homer in Late Antiquity*. Leiden.
- 2016. “A Homeric Afterlife in Quintus Smyrnaeus’ *Posthomerica*?,” in I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, A. Lefteratou, G. Ryser, and K. Stamatopoulos (eds.), *Reading the Way to the Netherworld: Education and Representations of the Beyond in Later Antiquity*. Göttingen. 123–137.
- Mackie, C. J. 1997. “Achilles’ Teachers: Chiron and Phoenix in the *Iliad*,” *G&R* 44: 1–10.
- Ozbek, L. 2022. *Filottete in Quinto di Smirne*, *Posthomerica* 9.333–546. Pisa.
- Papazian, M. 2015. “Late Neoplatonic Discourses on Suicide and the Question of Christian Philosophy Professors at Alexandria,” *JHS* 135: 95–109.
- Rabel, J. 1990. “Apollo as a Model for Achilles in the *Iliad*,” *AJP* 111: 429–440.

- Robbins, E. 1993. "The Education of Achilles," *QUCC* 45: 7–20.
- Scheijnen, T. 2018. *Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica: A Study of Heroic Characterization and Heroism*. Leiden.
- Schmitz, T. 2007. "The Use of Analepses and Prolepses in Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*," in Baumbach and Bär 2007: 65–84.
- Tsomis, G. P. 2018a. *Quintus Smyrnaeus. Kommentar zum siebten Buch der Posthomerica*. Stuttgart.
- 2018b. *Quintus Smyrnaeus. Originalität und Rezeption im zehnten Buch der Posthomerica. Ein Kommentar*. Trier.
- Vian, F. 1963, 1966, 1969. *Quintus de Smyrne: La suite d'Homère*. 3 vols. Paris.
- Wenglinsky, M. 1999. "Response to Philosophical Criticism of the Portrayal of the Gods: The *Posthomerica* of Quintus of Smyrna," *Ancient Philosophy* 19: 77–86.
- Zanusso, V. 2014. "Quinto di Smirne e la tradizione mitica di argomento troiano: imitatio, variatio, allusività," *Atlantide* 2: 1–17.