

Stuck in the Middle with You: Quintus of Smyrna's Reception of Homer

The Homeric epics were very popular in the imperial world in both the “high” and in the “low” registers. The latter is demonstrated, for instance, by a fourth-century C.E. quotation of the *Iliad* scrawled in an Ephesian latrine (Hunter 2018: 10-12), by imperial performances of the *Homeristai* (e.g., Parsons 1974 on P.Oxy 3001), and by verses of the *Iliad* to be chanted to cure illnesses on a fourth/fifth century papyrus (Rowlandson 1998: 340-1). The former is demonstrated by Herodian's grammatical treatises of the third century C.E. and the activity of the Homeric scholiasts. This paper focuses on how the third-century C.E. Greek poet Quintus of Smyrna navigates these two registers in his epic *Posthomerica*.

A long-running debate about Quintus' 14-book poem that fills in the narrative gap between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the identity of the author. Was Quintus one of the *pepaideumenoι*, the educated elite of the Roman Empire? Or was he a poet who performed on the festival circuit? A contention of this paper is that, whatever the truth of the matter, Quintus navigated these two positions by blending them together, to create an epic in the middle, as he claims at one point: οὐρεῖ οὐτε λίην χαμαλῶ οὐθ' ὑψόθι πολλῶ (*PH* 12.313).

The high register is predominated by the “neo-Hellenistic” aesthetic (Ma 2007): a focus on rare, or even unique, words from the Homeric poems. This use of *hapax legomena* had a long history by Quintus' time, most famously instantiated in Apollonius of Rhodes' third-century B.C.E. epic *Argonautica* (see Kyriakou 1995). The imperial version of this phenomenon is satirized in an epigram by the second-century Cerealis and appears in the fragments of an epic by the late second-/early third-century poet Nestor of Laranda and another epic by his son, Pisander. When these three texts are juxtaposed with Quintus' *Posthomerica*, it becomes clear that Quintus did engage in this practice. At times, he uses Homeric *hapax legomena* that

appear only in the *Argonautica*, such as the adjective ἀαγής, -ές (*Od.* 11.575, *Arg.* 3.1251, *PH* 6.596; cf. Appel 1994: 11-12), which is evidence of Quintus' engagement with the Hellenistic poet, as explored by, e.g., Vian 2001 and Maciver 2012. Other examples, such as the verb παπάζω, "to call someone 'papa'" (used by Dione at *Iliad* 5.408), appear only in Homer and in Quintus (*PH* 3.474), demonstrating that Quintus took care to create an independent relationship with the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The low register is replication and redeployment of diction that appears more frequently in the Homeric epics. In spite of his overly critical estimation of Quintus as "the last irregular heartbeat[] of a moribund culture," Knox is right to identify the *Posthomerica* as a kind of Homeric cento (1985: 715) that re-uses the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*--and yet it is not either poem. A similar practice appears in P.Oxy. 3001, attributed to the popular performers of Homer, the Homeristai. This papyrus evinces a strategy parallel to Quintus', with a line from various books of the *Iliad*, followed by a non-Homeric line. We see a version of this in the *Posthomerica* in the re-arrangements of words that appear frequently in the Homeric poems, such as at *PH* 6.515: αὐτίκα (109x) κάλλιπε (6x) λαὸν (136x) ὅσον (28x) κατὰ (923x) νῆα (194x) ἔλασσε (44x).

Quintus mixes the high and low registers of Homeric reception that had been largely separate before his *Posthomerica*. In doing so, he creates a vision of Homer between the extremes of the high and the low: a middle course that acknowledges a wide spectrum of different understandings of what Homer was in the Roman Empire.

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