

BOOK REVIEW

Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica: A Study of Heroic Characterization and Heroism.
By TINE SCHEIJNEN. Leiden, NL and Boston, MA: Brill, 2018. Pp. xviii + 393.
Hardback, \$166.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-37343-3.

The fourteen-book epic of the “things after Homer,” ascribed to one Quintus of (possibly) Smyrna (“Quintus the Calabrian” for those interested in Bessarion’s 15th-century discovery of the text at Otranto), should be enduringly popular and – not least due to the efforts of scholars like Scheijnen – it is becoming both better known and of greater interest to classical and literary scholars who have come to appreciate the artistry and allusiveness of an author who has long languished under the unfair verdict of being a fifth-rate Homer.

These have been good recent years for Quintus. One of the first volumes in the Loeb Classical Library was devoted to his epic; it has at last been revised in a fine edition by Hopkinson. Vian’s magisterial text for the Budé series has been supplemented by a steady stream of commentaries, monographs and journal articles. Quintus has even been promoted – after a fashion – to the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics so-called Imperial Library, even if only as part of an anthology of “imperial” Greek verse.

Amid this bibliographical richness comes Scheijnen’s treatment of Quintus’ work, which is both a *vademecum* to key themes of the narrative of the entire work, and to the question in particular of the depiction of heroes and the heroic. Throughout, there is engagement with the key question of Quintus’ response to his epic predecessors, including Virgil. Brill has a history of producing monographs on Quintus; the continent has in general been far more sympathetic to the poet’s charms than either Britain or North America.

To begin: this is a beautifully produced and splendid book. Scheijnen provides a quasi-commentary on extensive sections of the epic, such that her book admirably encourages a constant reengagement with the text. Quintus’ work is taken seriously, as a masterful intertextual encounter with the vast tradition that precedes him. Quintus’ epic is seen as offering a verdict on the Homeric and Virgilian traditions of heroism, with implicit reflection and commentary on the realities of

empire that existed in his own day (even if “his own day” admits a relatively wide range of possible dates).

If there is a supreme virtue to Scheijen’s book, it is her comprehensiveness. Every hero and heroine of the poem receives careful consideration; all of the major and many of the minor episodes of the epic are analyzed. The *Posthomerica* is situated between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, with judgment both implicit and explicit on both (especially the later and its depiction of Achilles in Hades). Quintus’ work is a commentary on Homer distilled through Virgil and other intermediary works, not least Attic tragedy. The engaging drama of the poem’s action (both human and divine) is juxtaposed with the dazzling intersection and conjunction of Quintus with his literary predecessors. Scheijen is well aware that it is impossible in the absence of new evidence to determine definitively the possible influence of, say, Virgil on Quintus. She also realizes (in line with Gärtner and other recent scholars) that the inability to prove something beyond doubt does not diminish the value of analyzing how successive epic poets treat similar episodes (in this her consideration of the relationship of Quintus to Triphiodorus – another imperial Greek poet slowly coming into his own on the scholarly radar – is also of noteworthy quality). The same willingness not to shudder at learned speculation informs Scheijen’s consideration of why Quintus seems to depict his Trojans with less sympathy than we find in Virgil. All of this is part of her determination to make more of her author than a mine of parallel passages to be dutifully transcribed to no clear end beyond that of mere intertextual cataloguing.

In fine, those who already delight in Quintus’ epic will be thrilled anew by Scheijen’s masterful work. Those who want to know more about the author of the “things Homer didn’t tell” cannot do better for a reliable, well-documented introduction to the poem’s major themes. Lastly, those who despise Quintus as an author scarcely to be bothered with would do well to let Scheijen convince them otherwise.

All Greek is translated for the convenience of users outside of Classics. The bibliography is especially rich; there is an *index locorum* alongside the general index.

There will in all likelihood be many more books on Quintus’ poem as more scholars begin to plumb the depths of this unfailingly exciting and vivid literary work. Scheijen’s work deserves first place for her reliable, sympathetic and detailed treatment of one of the last great surviving epics of antiquity. Readers will emerge from her pages with a renewed appreciation for the manifold virtues of her subject.

LEE FRATANTUONO

Ohio Wesleyan University, lmfratan@owu.edu