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‘Always the Foremost Argive Champion’? The Representation of Neoptolemus in Quintus of Smyrna’s *Posthomerica*

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Abstract:
Neoptolemus rather seldom figures in Ancient Greek literature. The Posthomerica of Quintus of Smyrna is one of the scarce examples in which the son of Achilles is staged as a hero on the battlefield. This paper investigates the representation of Neoptolemus as the successor of his father in the Trojan War. The vigorous youth who takes Achilles’ place as the principal Achaean champion is repeatedly recognised as latter’s heir. Various narrative techniques reinforce this profound assimilation, which proves crucial to determine Neoptolemus’ identity as a warrior. The image that is thus created of the young hero clearly enters into dialogue with the Homeric epics, in which the post-Achilles episode of the Trojan War is only indirectly treated. To complete what his father has left unfinished, Neoptolemus finds inspiration in his rich inheritance.

> ‘And in truth, as often as we took counsel around the city of Troy, he was always the first to speak, and never erred in his words; godlike Nestor and I alone surpassed him. But as often as we fought with the bronze on the Trojan plain, he would never remain behind in the throng or press of men, but would run forward far to the front, yielding to none in his prowess; and many men he slew in dreadful combat.’ (Odysseus: *Odyssey* 11, 510-516)[1]

During his visit to the Underworld in *Odyssey* 11, Odysseus encounters Achilles and describes to him how his son Neoptolemus became a worthy champion in the Trojan War. Summoned from his homeland Scyrus by Odysseus himself, the boy gladly came to Troy after his father’s death and proved to be one of the best of the Achaeans in both battle

[1] The translation of the *Odyssey* is taken from Murray [1919] 1995.

and council. His killing of Eurypylus and his prominent place in the Trojan horse gained him glory and a gift of honour (*Odyssey* 11, 506-540).

This is the oldest attestation of Neoptolemus known to us. Homer's short description has launched Neoptolemus into history as a hero worthy of honour and ever since, many other sources have revived his myth. Neoptolemus or 'Pyrrhus', as he is called in later traditions, figures in several Greek tragedies.[2] He is mentioned by Pausanias and is a recurring character in Latin (hexameter) poetry[3] and Medieval stories. Through the course of history, he gradually turns into a rude and cruel warrior without mercy. This typically negative characterisation is mainly inspired by his performances in Vergil's *Aeneid*, especially the cruel murder of Priam (*Aeneid* 2, 547-558). This contrasts with earlier, mainly Greek sources, whose focus is more nuanced.[4] His representation throughout literary tradition is, therefore, rather complex. Homer and (probably) several epics of the Cycle describe Achilles' son as a valiant warrior in Troy. After these first epic appearances, however, the oldest accounts of Neoptolemus mainly focus on his time after the Trojan War, both his deeds in the aftermath of the sack and his life beyond Troy. As a consequence, Neoptolemus seldom appears on the battlefield in later literature, which leaves Odysseus' tale in *Odyssey* 11 in a narrative vacuum.

In this paper, I want to go back to the roots of his reception and examine one later example that explicitly enters into dialogue with Homer's particular representation of Neoptolemus, namely as a war hero on the Trojan plains. The *Posthomerica* by Quintus of Smyrna is one of the rare examples in Greek literature that display Neoptolemus as an active fighter on the battlefield.

The *Posthomerica* is conventionally situated in the 3rd century AD. It is written by an otherwise unknown person who is called 'Quintus' in the manuscripts and claims to be 'of

[2] He is a principle character in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, is repeatedly mentioned in Euripides' *Andromache* and briefly in Euripides' *Troades* and *Hecuba*.

[3] He appears in Vergil's *Aeneid* (books 2 and 3), in Seneca the Younger's tragedy *Trojan Women* and repeatedly in Ovid's poetry (a.o. *Metamorphoses* 13).

[4] In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, for example, Neoptolemus is presented as a more moderate and compassionate youth.

Smyrna' in book 12 of his own poem.[5] The epic consists of fourteen books of 'Homeric length' and uses a Homerising language and style to relate the events between the end of the *Iliad* and the beginning of the *Odyssey*. It describes the death of Achilles, the arrival of his son Neoptolemus, his duel against Eurypylus and, of course, the ruse of the horse that results in the sack of Troy. Hence, the aim of Quintus' poem is well-reflected in the title of some later manuscripts: τὰ μεθ' Ὅμηρον or 'a sequel to Homer'. Achilles and his son are the most prominent characters and could even be called the protagonists of the epic (James 2004: xxx). Unlike other heroes, their presence is felt even when they are not actively engaged in the plot. Neoptolemus' arrival is foreshadowed long before his actual appearance in book 7 and the spirit of his father remains omnipresent in the Achaean army even after his death. Neoptolemus easily earns the place of his father on the battlefield, with equal recognition from both friends and enemies.

In early Quintus scholarship, Neoptolemus' Achilles-like characterisation would have been interpreted as an unoriginal assimilation inspired by the meaningless *imitatio Homeri* the *Posthomerica* was believed to represent.[6] These last few decades, however, new light is shed on the epic. Despite the obviousness of its Homeric tone, the *Posthomerica* is composed in a completely different literary era than its model. Embedded in the time of third century imperial literature, it inherits a rich and multiform tradition, which it reworks into a colourful reception of Homer.[7]

This paper will examine how the *Posthomerica* presents the character of Neoptolemus in a seemingly Homeric Trojan context and characterises him as the hero that Odysseus described to his deceased father. First, I will give an overview of Neoptolemus'

[5] Recent scholarship interprets the seemingly autobiographical passage in book 12, 306-313 as a literary statement. The narrator presents himself as a Smyrnean herdsman who is inspired by the Muses in a rural setting. Whereas this bucolic scene is clearly reminiscent of Hesiod's *Theogony* (22-25) and Callimachus' *Aetia* (fr. 2), the geographical reference to Smyrna could refer to a well-known tradition in the *Vitae Homeri*, according to which Homer himself would have his roots in Smyrna. The most recent study that discusses Quintus' uncertain origin in detail is Bär (2009: 11-23), while Maciver elaborates on the interpretation of this passage as an intertextual statement about Quintus' literary inheritance (esp. 2013: 64-69).

[6] An overview of negative appreciations of the *Posthomerica* in early Quintus scholarship is given in Schmidt 1999.

[7] This important shift in Quintus research is initiated by the edited volume of Baumbach and Bär 2007, which is the result of the innovative conference "Quintus Smyrnaeus – ein kaiserzeitlicher Sophist im homerischen Gewand" (University of Zürich, 2006). Maciver's even more recent monograph critically discusses Quintus' multiform reception of both Homer and later sources (2012).

appearances in the *Posthomerica*, which extends from books 3 to 14. Next, I will discuss the methods of characterisation used to portray him. Finally, a few significant passages will be highlighted in order to reach a conclusion about the interpretation of Neoptolemus in the *Posthomerica*.

1. Neoptolemus in the Posthomerica[8]

Books 1-6: expectations

Although Neoptolemus does not enter the stage before book 7 of the *Posthomerica*, his arrival is foreshadowed from the death of Achilles in book 3 onward. Hera is the first to name Neoptolemus as Achilles' successor:

> 'But I don't think the Trojans' labor will be lighter
> For the fall of Aiakos' grandson, because his son
> Shall very soon come from Skyros to help the Argives.' (Hera: 3, 118-121)[9]

Besides this mission, Neoptolemus will also inherit his father's armour: in his final words, Achilles threatens that his spear will be whirled to the doom of the Trojans even after his death (3, 167-169) and despite their grief, Achilles' divine horses feel obliged to stay in Troy to await their fourth owner (3, 760-762). In book 4, Nestor finishes his praise song for Achilles by looking forward to Neoptolemus' arrival (4, 169-170). It is not surprising, then, that the Achaeans have high expectations as they send away an embassy to call Neoptolemus to arms in book 6. He will be their only hope against Eurypylus, who has simultaneously arrived as the new Trojan champion and promises to be a formidable opponent.

> 'Use persuasion to bring the sturdy son of Achilles
> Back with them, to come as a brilliant light for us all.' (Calchas: 6, 66-67)

[8] A most detailed overview of the Posthomeric text passages in which Neoptolemus figures, is provided by Toledano Vargas (2002: 20-30).

[9] All translations of the *Posthomerica* are taken from James 2004.

Books 7-8: the new champion

Neoptolemus' first appearance in book 7 is significant for his further characterisation in the *Posthomerica*.[10] As soon as Odysseus and Diomedes meet him at Scyrus, they are struck by his resemblance to Achilles (7, 169-177). The young warrior possesses both the looks and the fighting spirit of his father and, despite the desperate pleas of his mother Deidameia (7, 227-252), bids his childhood farewell to become a worthy Aeacid:

> 'If I am destined to perish for the Achaeans' cause,
> Let me first do something worthy of Aiakos' bloodline.' (Neoptolemus: 7, 290-291)

Both his Achilles-like appearance and his personal wish to be like his father are recurrent motifs in the epic and will serve him well to earn his place in the Achaean ranks. Upon his arrival in Troy, the Achaeans are about to lose the ships to Eurypylus. The embassy decides to join the fight immediately[11] and Odysseus, whose tent is nearby, provides weapons for everyone.[12] With his father's armour,[13] Neoptolemus inherits the latter's fearsome battle appearance (7, 537-539) and saves the day (7, 627-630): he is feared by the Trojans[14] and warmly welcomed by the Achaeans as a second Achilles. After this significant initiation, Neoptolemus is eager to confront Eurypylus the next morning. In his flyting speech, he impatiently introduces himself as the son of Achilles and includes a

[10] In the *Posthomerica*, Neoptolemus arrives earlier than Philoctetes, which is an innovation compared to the traditional order of episodes. This reinforces Neoptolemus' central position in the epic (Vian 1963 Tome 2: 47 and Maciver 2012: 20-21).

[11] In contrast with four other arrival scenes in the *Posthomerica,* Neoptolemus' battle actions take an abrupt start in this *in medias res* situation. For further discussion on this topic, see Calero Secal 1995.

[12] The central position of Odysseus' ship in the Achaean camp is a famous Iliadic theme (*Iliad* 8, 222-226 and 11, 5-9) which is now of crucial importance to the Posthomeric plot. It is mentioned for the first time in book 5 (211-214), when Aiax loathes the 'cowardice' and Odysseus defends the diplomatic symbolism of his ship's position (275-277) (James 2004: 297). Indeed, only thanks to this central position the heroes can now be armed to join the decisive fight. This interesting armouring scene, in which Odysseus attributes to each man weapons fitting for his vigour, serves to underline Neoptolemus' rightful inheritance of his father's armour.

[13] Odysseus possesses the armour since he has won it from Aiax in the judgement of arms (book 5, see also footnote 10). In their agonistic speeches, Odysseus had convincingly argued that his cunning would bring new champions to Troy if necessary (5, 257-262). As he gives these weapons to Neoptolemus, the clever hero puts this claim into practice. In book 6 (85-92), Menelaus had listed the presents he would offer to Neoptolemus if he joined the war. In addition to that, Odysseus cleverly promised Neoptolemus Achilles' armour (7, 194-212), which immediately convinced the youth. His wielding of Achilles' weapons will now become a crucial part of his warrior identity. Hence, Neoptolemus' arrival is carefully prepared in book 5.

[14] Their reaction is similar to *Iliad* 16, 278-283, where Patroclus appears in Achilles' armour (James 2004: 310).

genealogy of the horses and spear he inherited from his father (8, 147-161). The duel starts with even odds and is extended by the narrator, until the Pelian spear in Neoptolemus' hands strikes Eurypylus:

> 'For all your tireless strength you have been destroyed
> By my father's mighty spear, which none has ever escaped
> Of those who came to face us,[15] even if made of bronze'
> (Neoptolemus: 8, 214-216)

Books 9-14: a battle hero

With his feats of arms in books 7 and 8, Neoptolemus has unmistakably earned recognition as the best champion of the Achaeans and he will maintain this position, even if he is not always equally prominent in the narrative. Whenever he appears, his father's inspiration is apparent. In book 9, Neoptolemus visits Achilles' grave and assures him that his son and spear are still doing their job (9, 46-61). Indeed, Neoptolemus' appearance has puzzled the Trojans and some actually believe that Achilles has returned (9, 6-22). In an attempt to shatter this illusion, Deiphobus sets out to confront Neoptolemus:

> '(…) Achilles
> No longer lives to fight against us now that he
> Has been consumed by fire. It is some other Achaean
> Who now has rallied their army. It's shameful that either Achilles
> Or any other Achaian should terrify those who defend
> Their homeland.' (Deiphobus: 9, 97-102)

However, Deiphobus' ancient fear for Achilles (9, 227-229) resurfaces when they come face to face. As he finds Neoptolemus in no way inferior to his father (9, 233-246), the Trojan prince is paralysed with fear and must be saved by Apollo. Angered by Neoptolemus' furious attack, the same god intends to kill him 'on the same spot as his father' (9, 304-306), but is stopped by Poseidon. Hence, book 9 clearly contributes to consolidate Neoptolemus' identity as a warrior. His performances in books 10 and 11 are

[15] I have corrected the translator's 'me' in 'us', which more literally represents the Greek οὔ τις ἄλυξεν *ἡμῖν* ἄντα μολών.(text edition: Vian 1963).

shorter and few.[16] In book 10, Neoptolemus only briefly appears to kill 12 Trojans with the spear of his father (10, 84-85). In book 11, the Achaean army storms the Trojan city walls. As missiles and stones violently shatter the troops, Neoptolemus orders his section to keep their ground, despite the desperate situation:

> 'The son of the steadfast fighter Achilles
> Was exhorting the Argives to stay by the famous walls
> Of Troy until they had taken and burned the city down.' (11, 433-435)

In book 12, the Achaeans realise that Neoptolemus' Achilles-like force and favourite tactic of open battle will not suffice to take Troy.

> 'Stouthearted son of Aiakos' fearless grandson,
> Every confident word that you have spoken trusting
> In your strength is worthy of a true and brave man.
> Yet neither the dauntless valor of your invincible father
> Was sufficient to sack the wealthy city of Priam,
> Nor were all our endless efforts.' (Odysseus: 12, 74-78)

Neoptolemus vehemently reacts against Calchas' suggestion to use a ruse (12, 50-72) and openly refuses to accept Odysseus' idea of the Trojan horse, until Zeus' thunderbolt convinces him otherwise (12, 84-100). Finally, he decides to put his heroic code in the service of the new strategy and is the first to enter the Trojan horse. During the sack of Troy in book 13, he encounters Priam. The old king begs him to end his suffering (13, 222-225) and Neoptolemus replies that he did not need to ask: he would never spare his enemies (13, 226-240).[17] In book 14, finally, the Achaeans celebrate their victory. In their triumphant song, Neoptolemus is mainly remembered for killing Eurypylus (14, 136-137). That night, the hero dreams of his divine father, who gives him a long account of how to behave in battle and in life and simultaneously claims Polyxena as his ultimate price of

[16] The establishment of Neoptolemus as the new champion of the Achaeans is unmistakably the main subject of books 6 to 9. After book 9, Neoptolemus' prominence is reduced (Vian 1963 Tome 2: 47-49).

[17] In itself, this is a cruel scene. Boyten suggests that, in contrast to Vergil, Priam's plea in Quintus' version actively soften its harshness and therefore the traditionally violent characterisation of Neoptolemus (2007: 314-316, 320-323). However, Neoptolemus also explicitly states that he would have committed the murder even without Priam's consent, which adds a sinister note to this interpretation. For other sources describing Priam's murder, see Vian's list (1963 Tome 3: 138 footnote 6).

honour (14, 185-222). Neoptolemus' last deed in the *Posthomerica* is to kill the Trojan princess as a sacrifice for his father:[18]

> 'His [Achilles'] beloved son first drew his whetted sword,
> Then with his left hand held the maiden, while his right
> Was placed on the tomb as he spoke the following words:
> "Father, hear the prayer of your son and of the other
> Argives and be no longer harsh and angry with us.' (14, 305-309)

2. Techniques of characterisation

Characters are consciously "crafted"[19] in interaction with the plot development. Various direct and more indirect techniques can be used to present the narrative players to the reader. Some passages give very obvious (direct) statements about a character, whereas other techniques reflect aspects of his or her personality in a more subtle way. Clues can lay hidden in name-giving and descriptions,[20] in his or her emotions, speech, actions, focalisation, appearance and the group or setting in which he or she is placed. More technical methods such as the use of similes, comparisons and intertextual references may also provide significant clues.[21] While examining these features, it is important to take into account that different characters (including the narrator) can represent different views on the same fellow-character.

Thanks to his prominence in the epic, Neoptolemus' portrayal is conceived with the help of a varied spectrum of these techniques, which allows profundity and nuance. Nonetheless, his characterisation is based on two fundamental pillars. Both of them are revealed when Neoptolemus makes his first impression on the embassy. As Odysseus and Diomedes set foot on shore, they see Neoptolemus from afar:

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[18] Again, Boyten states that Neoptolemus' negative characterisation in this scene is reduced to a minimum, without however forsaking the pathetic character of the events (2007: 326-333).

[19] This brief overview is based on the framework of narratological characterisation, such as it is described in the introduction of De Temmerman's 2014 monograph: *Crafting Characters. Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel* (26-45).

[20] De Temmerman refers to the rhetorical technique of "antonomasia", i.e. 'the substitution of a proper name by a word or parafrase' (2014, 33).

[21] Maciver provides a detailed study of this metaphorical aspect concerning Neoptolemus in his monograph (2012, 171-192). He mainly focusses on Homeric intertextuality in similes and interprets Neoptolemus as an embodiment of his father or a second Achilles.

‘Meanwhile the men on the fast black ship had arrived at Skyros.
There they found the son of Achilles in front of his home,
Dividing his time between the shooting of arrows and spears
And exercising with his fleet-foot horses.
They were glad to see him pursuing thus the work
Of unrelenting war in spite of the grief he felt
For the death of his father, already reported to him.
As they hurried to meet him they were amazed to observe
How like brave Achilles he was in his handsome form.’ (7, 169-176)

In this passage, the young Neoptolemus is practicing his war skills. Odysseus and Diomedes rejoice in both this and the resemblance of the youth to his father. Henceforward, Neoptolemus will be presented as the heir of Achilles and the hero that will save the Achaeans. Both ‘faces’, which I will discuss successively, are inevitably entwined.

Inheritance

In book 3, Neoptolemus is introduced as the heir of Achilles’ horses and place on the battlefield. His apparent physical, mental and emotional resemblance to Achilles is directly described by the narrator and reflected in the speeches and (often emotional)[22] focalisation of many characters who meet him. The impression that Achilles has returned rouses the Achaeans and overwhelms the Trojans on several occasions. This determines Neoptolemus’ place on the battlefield and quickly earns him a place in the Achaean army as the new Achilles. The Myrmidons accept him as their leader (8, 13-23), Agamemnon bids him welcome with equal honour as his father before (7, 685-699), Phoenix treats him as another son (7, 630-669) and Briseis takes care of him as of Achilles (7, 722-727). Book 7 ends as Neoptolemus symbolically sits in the tent of his father among the latter’s

[22] Grief for the loss of Achilles and joy in Neoptolemus’ resemblance to him are often deeply entwined in recognition scenes (the divine horses in book 3, Phoenix and Briseis in book 7). Particularly pathetic is the reaction of Neoptolemus’ mother Deidameia: she tries to stop her son from going to war, for fear that he will meet the same doom as Achilles (focalised in 7, 242-252 and expressed in her imploring speech in 266-274). Her despair is illustrated by several similes (7, 257-261; 317-326; 330-338). Eventually, she is left behind in the palace, among the toys and weapons that symbolise her son’s youth (7, 338-343).

spoils and wails for his loss as a lion cub for his father (7, 707-722). The son of the lion has arrived.[23] Many more indirect references stress this resemblance. Most importantly, Neoptolemus perfectly fits into the armour of Achilles and willingly uses the effect to influence his friends and foes during battle.[24] Moreover, in using the weapons of his father, he sometimes mirrors Achilles' deeds.[25] More than once, the narrator describes Neoptolemus' deeds with Homeric similes and comparisons that echo imagery used for Achilles in the *Iliad*.[26] Last but not least, Neoptolemus himself explicitly and repeatedly refers to his inheritance and his wish not to shame its reputation.[27] Taking all of this into account, some passages give a very lively impression of Neoptolemus as the new Achilles.[28]

Heroism

As he is the son of his father, it need not surprise that the young Neoptolemus is an eager warrior himself. The Achaean assembly in book 6 talks about him as their saviour before he ever appears. He clearly is ready to meet these expectations. His mother may find him very young,[29] but his fighting spirit makes him decisive: he eagerly accepts to sail to Troy

[23] For more research on this particular simile, see James 2004: 311 and Boyten 2010: 223-285 (the latter's unpublished PhD-thesis is available online).

[24] His exhortation speech to the Myrmidons finishes with the words: '(…) make them | Believe that Achilles is still alive in the Argives ranks' (Neoptolemus: 8, 21-22).

[25] For example, Neoptolemus' only deed in book 10, 84-85 is to kill twelve Trojans, a number that has become symbolical since Achilles captured twelve Trojan youths as a sacrifice for Patroclus in the *Iliad* (21, 17-33; 23, 19-23 and 175-183) (Vian 1963, Tome 3: 19 footnote 7).

[26] Examples include the simile of the dawning sun in 8, 28-33 (cf. Achilles, *Iliad* 22, 134-135) and the lion cub in 7, 715-722 (the lion being the most famous image for Achilles in the *Iliad*). For further discussion on this topic, especially concerning intertextuality to the Iliad, and a specific case study on the simile of the dawning sun, see Maciver 2012: 182-191.

[27] Neoptolemus repeats this in several speeches: 7, 290-291 (his goodbye to his mother), 7, 382-385 (his reaction to the stories of Odysseus and Diomedes on the ship), 7, 701-704 (his reply to Agamemnon's formal welcome) and 9, 50-60 (at the grave of his father).

[28] Examples include Neoptolemus' battle appearance at the beginning of book 8, which starts with his exhortation of the Myrmidons and the joyful focalisation of Thetis and the horses as the youth appears in the shining armour of his father, as a star (9, 28-33). Another example is the explicit attempt of Deiphobus to prove Neoptolemus inferior to his father, which fails and evokes an ever bigger and literally 'Achilles-like' rage of the son (9, 268).

[29] His inexperience could be confirmed by his very short speeches and the queer impatience with which he responds to Eurypylus in book 8. There is still much to be said about Neoptolemus' rhetoric. Boyten, for example, would rather interpret these short speeches as an indication of the hero's temperance (2007: 310-312). However, this could be contested by the boy's impetuous battle spirit. Vian sees Neoptolemus as a man of action, rather than of words and praises him as an actual hero: 'C'est qu'il est avant tout un homme

and is unmoved by Deidameia's warnings. During his journey from Scyrus to Troy, which could be called a symbolic step from childhood to glory (Boyten 2010: 206), Neoptolemus himself hardly changes: he has always longed for war and now sees his wish come true. Rather, the way in which he is represented by the narrator undergoes a clear evolution from the moment he leaves his mother behind. Described with new imagery and titles, he leaves behind his land and subjects as a shining leader. In Troy, he disembarks as a true champion and immediately proves his worth by saving the day (7, 627-630). During the rest of the epic, his excellence on the battlefield and prominence in the assembly only confirm his heroic status.[30] During the fight, he is never tired nor (severely) wounded. His interventions are so overwhelming that he is calmed down by the gods more than once.[31] At the climax of his prowess, Neoptolemus defeats the fierce Eurypylus,[32] a deed for which he gains much honour, as expected.[33] Neoptolemus has a clear battle code, which he expresses in ample speeches, both on the battlefield and in the assembly and to which he is very loyal.[34] Above all, he loves to gain glory in the open battle and is unwilling to accept that this plain tactic eventually will not suffice to conquer Troy.[35] He is strong-willed

d'action, soucieux "non de paraître un héros, mais de l'être"' (1963 Tome 2: 104). Achilles brings nuance to Vian's definition of 'héros' in book 14, where he stresses not only the importance of good battle, but also of good council (14,190-194).

[30] The double expectation for a hero to be 'a speaker of words and a doer of deeds' (e.g. *Iliad* 9, 442-443) is an Iliadic ideal that is recommended to Neoptolemus by the epiphany of his father in *Posthomerica* 14 (189-191).

[31] In book 8, Neoptolemus gladly confronts Ares himself (8, 239-343) and makes Ganymedes fear that Troy will fall that day, until Zeus stops the fight with a dense fog (8, 427-479). In the next book, Apollo saves Deiphobus and even intends to kill Neoptolemus in his fury (9, 304-323). In book 12, Zeus launches his thunderbolt to make Neoptolemus obey to the ruse against which he fervently revolted (12, 84-100).

[32] The extended characterisation of Eurypylus (books 6 to 8) is instrumental to the characterisation of Neoptolemus as well: from his first appearance, Eurypylus is presented as a fearful opponent, which logically increases the glory of the one who can defeat him. For further research on this topic, see Vian 1963 Tome 2: 52-54 and Maciver 2012: 188-190.

[33] It is repeatedly stressed that this deed in particular will be remembered: see first of all *Odyssey* 11 (519-520). Phoenix refers to the same theme in *Posthomerica* 7 (663-664) and is proven right during the feast at the end of book 8 (489-498) and especially the victory song in book 14 (136-137), in which Neoptolemus is individually remembered for only this accomplishment.

[34] He accepts to sail to Troy for his ideal (7, 290-921), exhorts the Myrmidons on the battlefield (9, 275-283) and under the Trojan walls (11, 217-220) and actively engages in the debates of the assembly (12, 67-72; 275-280; 298-300). James points at the parallel in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (e.g. 86-99), where Neoptolemus takes part in a similar discussion (2004: 329). In the *Posthomerica,* Neoptolemus' principles reach a sinister climax in book 13, when he replies to Priam's death wish that he would never have spared an enemy anyway (13, 238-240).

[35] Neoptolemus' statement matches his father's in book 3, 68-77 and Neoptolemus' own aversion of ruse in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (Boyten 2007: 317).

even to the extent that he prepares to revolt against the 'cowardly' decision to use a ruse. Only Zeus' thunderbolt makes him – reluctantly[36] – obey (12, 84-100). As he finally comes to terms with this new strategy, he will be the first to enter the Trojan horse (12, 314-315) and receive Nestor's praise for that (12, 287-305).[37] This is the second heroic deed for which he will be remembered.[38]

Inevitably, both aspects of Neoptolemus' identity are entwined: thanks to his father, Neoptolemus is a warrior and as a champion, he follows the principles of his father. On a deeper level, this assimilation goes even further.

3. The shadow of his father

'I am his son'

As is shown above, Neoptolemus' identity is inevitably and very explicitly interwoven with his father's. This is reflected in his name-giving throughout the epic. Instead of being given his proper name or even a warrior title, both of which happen rather seldom in the epic, Neoptolemus is very often called either 'the son of Achilles' or simply 'child' (in direct speech). This antonomasia is a significant feature of his characterisation. Contrarily, the first name 'Neoptolemus' occurs only seventeen times,[39] which is about fourteen percent of all the times he is mentioned in the *Posthomerica*.[40] Curiously, all of these seventeen

[36] Boyten states that 'he [Neoptolemus] reverently bows to the will of the gods' (2007: 318). *Posthomerica* 12, verse 100, however, stresses the reluctance of both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes, who are said to obey 'despite their will' (οὐκ ἐθέλοντε).

[37] Kneebone (2007) extensively discusses the fact that Neoptolemus has no choice but to surpass his father and reconcile strength and guile to end the war and sack Troy. She specifically focusses on a few Posthomeric fish similes and their intertextuality with Oppian's *Halieutica* to study this switch in battle tactics and the subsequent differences in characterisation between Neoptolemus and other heroes he encounters (mainly Deiphobus).

[38] In both Odysseus' speech in *Odyssey* 11 (523-532) and – collectively – in the victory song in *Posthomerica* 14 (139-141).

[39] Nine of them occur in the second half of book 7 (his first battle in Troy) and four of them in the first half of book 8 (his duel with Eurypylus). It could hence be stated that the use of his proper name stresses his most important performances in the *Posthomerica*. For comparison: Achilles' name is mentioned 222 times, a substantial part of which is used in descriptions for Neoptolemus (i.e. 'son of Achilles'). In line with the earliest traditions, Neoptolemus is never called 'Pyrrhus' in the *Posthomerica* (Vian 1963 Tome 2: 103 footnote 3).

[40] Further, I have counted fourteen occurrences of warrior titles (such as 'king', 'leader' or 'hero') and eighty-eight descriptions that call him 'child (of Achilles)'. Due to lack of space in this paper, I am unable to explore

mentions occur in narrator text. Even Neoptolemus introduces himself to others as 'the son of Achilles'. The most striking example is his reply to Eurypylus' flyting speech, moments before their duel:

> 'I am the son of stalwarthearted Achilles, the one
> Who with his long spear's blow once put your parent to flight.
> (…)
> Now that you know my horses' lineage and my own,
> You must also learn about my tireless spear
> By testing it face-to-face. Its lineage belongs
> To Pelion's lofty heights, where it left its stump and bed.' (Neoptolemus: 8, 147-151)

You are what you wear

Probably the most apparent part of Neoptolemus' assimilation with Achilles, which will be vital for this duel, is also mentioned in the speech cited above: the fact that Neoptolemus inherits his father's weapons.[41] The importance of this armour for Neoptolemus' characterisation has been underlined quite clearly in the symbolic armouring scene in Odysseus' tent, during which the latter attributes a fitting outfit to every warrior who is with him:

> 'The brave put on the best of the armor, while the worse
> Was donned by those whose breasts contained a feebler spirit.
> (…)
> The son of Achilles put on the armor of his father,
> Which made him look exactly like him. Very lightly,
> Because of Hephaistos' handiwork, it fitted his frame,
> Though others would have found it enormous.' (7, 440-448)

these statistics in more depth. A more detailed analysis will be developed for my PhD dissertation in progress. I also refer to Boyten 2007: 308, footnote 7, who has made similar counts.

[41] Maciver convincingly interprets the fact that Neoptolemus succeeds to lift the heavy spear of Achilles, which no-one else could wield, as an indication that 'he has taken "the sword of the stone"', which is – in an anachronistic way – comparable to the symbolism of Excalibur in the Arthurian myth (Maciver 2012, 182).

In this passage, the narrator leaves no doubt about the significance of the outfit for Neoptolemus: he is what he wears, namely his father Achilles.[42]

The spear that kills

From this moment on, Achilles' armour will literally play a prominent role in Neoptolemus' battle performances, especially in his confrontation with Eurypylus. Neoptolemus kills his opponent with the weapons he has explicitly introduced to him moments before (citation 11). The particular phrasing of the sentence in which the deadly blow is given makes of the Pelian spear itself the main actor:

> 'At last the great long
> Pelian spear cut through the throat of Eurypylus
> After all that toil.' (8, 199-201)[43]

In his subsequent flyting speech, Neoptolemus stresses the proper identity of the spear again (citation 5). Rather than to give credit to Neoptolemus for his grandest war deed, the weapons seem to act on their own behalf. Even when, on other occasions, Neoptolemus is the grammatical subject of a verb in which he kills, the spear is often prominent.[44] In book 9, Neoptolemus proves that he is aware of that:

> 'But even with you [Achilles] far away among the dead
> Your spear and your son in the fray are filling the foe
> With terror, while the Danaans rejoice in the sight
> Of one who is like you in body and spirit and deeds.' (Neoptolemus: 9, 57-60)

This passage is one more example of what has repeatedly been described above: Neoptolemus explicitly longs to honour the inheritance of his father, to carry on his task and to be like him. In *Posthomerica* 14, Achilles even pays his son a visit to instruct him.

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[42] Neoptolemus puts his new identity into practice moments later, stirring the Achaean troops and overwhelming the Trojans with his resemblance to Achilles (7, 522-555).

[43] In Iliad 22, 326-327, Achilles hits Hector's throat with the same spear (James 2004: 313).

[44] It is also interesting to note that the spear is the only piece of Achilles' armour not used by Patroclus. It was so heavy Achilles alone could wield it (*Iliad* 16, 140-144). Neoptolemus, handling it with ease, will prove more successful in wearing his father's armour and impersonating Achilles than Patroclus was. For further discussion on this topic, see Boyten 2007: 332.

In his dream appearance, he does not only explain how his son should behave,[45] he also demands to be honoured with a sacrifice (209-222).[46] This is the most concrete example of Achilles' deification in the *Posthomerica* and Neoptolemus obediently responds to it. His last deed in the *Posthomerica* is the killing of Polyxena, a (human) sacrifice to his divine father. With this, Neoptolemus' worship of his father reaches its climax.

Conclusion

These observations open many possible interpretations about Neoptolemus' relationship to his father in the *Posthomerica*. Contrarily to what former research has repeatedly suggested, I am not inclined to see Neoptolemus as a mere embodiment or even as an improved version of his father.[47] Achilles' lively prominence in everything Neoptolemus does rather suggests that the son honours his father as an incarnation of the heroic model that he strives to follow. His own war deeds add to the greater glory of Achilles, whose influence is always felt, even as Neoptolemus reaches his highest accomplishment in slaying Eurypylus.

With this message, Quintus enters into dialogue with Homer's version of Achilles and Neoptolemus in the *Odyssey*. Even if Achilles complains about his miserable existence in the Underworld (*Odyssey* 11, 488-491), the *Posthomerica* proves that the big hero is never forgotten among mortals. On the contrary, his son reaches success mainly thanks

[45] In her unpublished 2005 DPhil dissertation, which she kindly provided to me, Aikaterini Carvounis interestingly observes that this advice of Achilles looks forward to his dialogue with Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 (see citation 1), where the latter confirms the boy's vigour in both battle and council (2005: 193-195).

[46] An interesting parallel – and to a certain extent contrast – to the Posthomeric dream scene, and to the final part of Achilles' speech in particular, is the dream appearance of Patroclus to Achilles (*Iliad* 23, 69-92), in which the former's restless spirit requires a proper burial. Achilles' subsequent sacrifice of twelve youths on the pyre (*Iliad* 18, 336-337) is a gift for the dead, rather than an offering to the gods (James 2004: 342). The rest of Patroclus' speech has a more sorrowful tone, recalling a happy past in which he was Achilles' fatherly mentor. Contrarily, Achilles' spirit in the Posthomerica first seeks to comfort Neoptolemus and urges him not to worry about his deified father. Guez also discusses the Homeric intertextuality in this dream scene, but focusses mainly on its inconsistencies and shortcomings in that respect (1999: 88-92).

[47] Based on the close reading of two similes of Neoptolemus with complex Homeric intertextuality, Maciver interprets Neoptolemus as a second Achilles (2012: 191-192). Moreover, some traditionally cruel deeds of Neoptolemus – part of which I have discussed in previous footnotes – are only vaguely described in the *Posthomerica*, as if they were softened to minimise Neoptolemus' negative characterisation. This leads Toledano Vargas (2002) and Boyten (2007 and 2010) to interpret the Posthomeric Neoptolemus as an ideal warrior, a better version of Achilles in the last phase of the Trojan War. Toledano Vargas links this idealisation to stoic influence (2002: 39-42)

to the memory of his father, whose inheritance he worships as a god. On a deeper level, this could even neutralise the assumed contradiction between Homer's version of Achilles' death in the Underworld and Quintus' epiphany and deification of the same hero on earth: Achilles may be dead, but those who remember him treat his memory with the utmost respect. Among those, his son is the first and foremost, to the extent that Neoptolemus' veneration of his father influences his daily behaviour on the battlefield.

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