



The Transvestite Achilles

Gender and Genre in Statius' *Achilleid*

P. J. HESLIN

CAMBRIDGE

THE TRANSVESTITE ACHILLES

Stattius' *Achilleid* is a playful, witty, and allusive epic in the manner of Ovid. As we follow Achilles' metamorphosis from wild boy to demure girl to passionate lover to fierce hero, the poet brilliantly illustrates a series of contrasting codes of behavior: male and female, epic and elegiac. This first full-length study of the poem addresses not only the narrative itself, but also sets the myth of Achilles on Scyros within a broad interpretive framework. This exploration ranges from the reception of the *Achilleid* in Baroque opera to the anthropological parallels that have been adduced to explain the myth of Achilles' transvestism. The expansive approach of this study, which contributes to discussions of Latin intertextuality, the early reception of Ovid, psychoanalytic perspectives on ancient literature, and theorizations of gender in antiquity, makes it essential reading not only for students of Statius, but also for students of Latin literature and of gender in antiquity.

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What Song the *Syrens* sang, or what name *Achilles* assumed
when he hid himself among women, though puzzling Questions
are not beyond all conjecture.

Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall*

For Aideen

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

THE STORY of Achilles' childhood is not very familiar today, even among those who know a bit about classical mythology. It is as the hero of Homer's *Iliad* that Achilles is best known, and rightly so. In the Middle Ages, however, readers in Western Europe did not have direct access to Homer's great epic, and had to make do with various works in Latin that summarized the tale of the Trojan War. These pallid recapitulations could never fully convey the qualities that gave Achilles the reputation he always enjoyed as the greatest hero of Ancient Greece. Disappointment will also have met the medieval reader looking for vibrant portraits of the hero in the great works of classical Latin literature. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Achilles is a figure already frozen in art, pictured on the walls of Juno's temple in Carthage. Ovid, who delighted in drawing alternative portraits of certain heroes drawn from the canon of epic, such as Ulysses and Aeneas, only shows us brief glimpses of Achilles, even in that part of the *Metamorphoses* that tells the story of the Trojan War. The reason for this reticence is easy to understand. If, as Virgil is credited with saying, it is easier to steal Hercules' club than to steal a line from Homer, then only a fool would try to compete directly with Homer's eternal portrait of Achilles in all of his pride, stubbornness, rage, and pity.

One classical Latin poem that was well known in the Middle Ages did provide an alternative sketch of Achilles, at least in part. In the first lines of his epic *Achilleid*, Statius makes the bold claim that he intends to out-do Homer by providing us with a complete and comprehensive poetic biography of Achilles. Fortunately for his readers, Statius was no fool. As we shall see, he in no way intended to compete directly with Homer. Rather, much as Ovid had done with respect to Aeneas in the *Metamorphoses*, Statius chose episodes that did not overlap with the canonical epic text, and which have a far different tone. The *Achilleid* as we have it is brief and unfinished, and it includes only two episodes from Achilles' biography: his early childhood in the care of the half-man, half-horse, centaur Chiron, and his boyhood interlude as a draft-dodging

cross-dresser on the island of Scyros. The contrast with Homer is stark: where Achilles' temporary withdrawal from the Greek forces in the *Iliad* results in bitter tragedy, his temporary withdrawal from military service on Scyros is the stuff of slapstick comedy and romantic melodrama.¹ Statius' comedy was once a very well-known text; its fame is attested by the one story from Achilles' childhood that is still known to the general reader: how he was dipped into the Styx by his mother, Thetis, as she held onto his heel. The myth of Achilles' vulnerable heel is not Homeric; it was preserved and disseminated by Statius. It may be hard for us to grasp completely the significance of the fact that for many centuries the most complete and compelling portrait of the great Achilles available to Western Europe was as the hero of a transvestite sex-farce.

The plot of the *Achilleid* as we have it begins with Achilles' mother, the sea-goddess Thetis, watching the ships of Paris steal away from Greece with Helen of Troy. Knowing that her son is fated to die in the course of the resulting war, she attempts to interfere with his tragic destiny. She first approaches Neptune in an attempt to sink Paris' fleet; but her request is rebuffed. She then heads to the cave of Chiron the centaur, who has been responsible for Achilles' upbringing, and she takes the boy away, deceiving Chiron about her real intentions. She brings her son to Scyros, an obscure island in the Aegean whose king, Lycomedes, has no sons. She asks Achilles to put on female clothing and to act like a girl. He resists, but when he catches sight of Deidamia, the king's beautiful daughter, and her sisters, he agrees that it might not be unpleasant to spend some time in their company. Thetis dresses him as a girl, instructs him in feminine comportment, and introduces him to Lycomedes as Achilles' sister; she warns the king to supervise "her" carefully. The scene then shifts to Aulis, where the combined forces of Greece are gathering to set out for Troy. The absence of Achilles is noted, and the prophet Calchas is called upon to discover the cause. He divines that Achilles has been hidden by his mother on Scyros, and Ulysses and Diomedes set out to find him. The narration then returns us to Scyros, where Achilles and Deidamia have grown very close, though his identity and his sex are unknown to her. He resolves finally to assert his manhood and so rapes her during a nocturnal celebration by the women of Scyros in honor of Bacchus; she eventually delivers a son. At that point, Achilles identifies himself to Deidamia, but they keep their relationship and their child a secret. Ulysses and Diomedes arrive on Scyros, where they are received warmly by Lycomedes; but they do not state the real reason for their visit. They lay out gifts for the king and his daughters, and one "girl" is more interested in the weapons than the jewelry. Ulysses whispers to Achilles that he knows his real identity, and, as previously arranged by Ulysses, a war-trumpet sounds out at that very moment. Everyone scatters, but Achilles grabs the weapons and runs to confront the fictional enemy. When calm is restored,

¹ Thus Steadman (1967: 142).

Achilles confesses his true identity to Lycomedes, produces his son, and offers to marry Deidamia; on the day after the wedding, Achilles departs and the first book of the poem ends. In the small part of the second book that exists, Ulysses explains to Achilles the causes of the Trojan War, and Achilles tells Ulysses the story of his upbringing in the care of the centaur Chiron.

Once upon a time, Statius was not the obscure figure he is today; in the Middle Ages, he enjoyed a central place in the canon of classical literature. He was known mainly as the author of his epic *Thebaid*, a grim and extravagantly bloody telling of the tale of the Seven against Thebes. The *Achilleid* was also well known, not only as the minor work of a major author, but also in its own right as a standard school text.² It is easy to see the qualities that must have recommended it to medieval teachers: it is a brief and lighthearted text by a major author, which introduces students to an important idiom and meter along with some major characters from mythology; it also describes the exemplary education of the young Achilles, his affection for his teacher, Chiron, and his obedience to his mother.³

In the Renaissance, Homer was rediscovered by the West, and competing portraits of Achilles began to hold less intrinsic interest. Statius was the object of intense curiosity in early modern scholarship on account of the rediscovery of his *Silvae*, a text that posed many problems, but also finally revealed some accurate information about Statius' own life and circumstances, knowledge that had been lost in the Middle Ages. In fact, it may be that the discovery that Statius was not a particularly well-born or romantic figure, but rather a professional poet who earned his living with his pen, following in his father's trade, hastened the decline of his reputation as a writer. It did not help that many of the *Silvae* contain effusive panegyrics of Domitian, which Statius did not live long enough to recant after that emperor's downfall. Another problem for Statius was that his Renaissance admirers often had other axes to grind. When the elder Scaliger claimed that Statius was a better poet than Homer, he meant, of course, that he was more Virgilian.⁴ Likewise Malherbe, who preferred Statius over all other ancient poets, had a famously low opinion of Greek literature as a whole.⁵ With friends like these, Statius made even more enemies among the champions of Homer than his irreverent portrait of Achilles might have won him. Statius also suffered from the stigmatization of post-Augustan Latin as belonging to an inferior era: the so-called "Silver" age.⁶

Anyone who would defend the "classics" – Dryden, Sainte-Beuve, and Eliot

² It was one of the school texts of graded difficulty that made up the so-called *Liber catonianus*. On this tradition, see Clogon (1998: 1–3) and Anderson (forthcoming).

³ Anderson (forthcoming) gives some evidence for this attitude in the Middle Ages.

⁴ Scaliger (156r: 325aD), on which see Anderson (forthcoming).

⁵ "Vic de M. de Malherbe, par M. de Racan" in Lalanne (1862: vol 1, lxx).

⁶ On the origins of "Silver" latinity as a judgmental term, see Mayer (1999); on the quarrel between Gronovius and Cruceus over the quality of Statius' latinity, see Anderson (forthcoming).

included – will need to define what a classic is. More often than not, the definition has been determined by the requirements of that defense rather than by a disinterested inquiry. Certain writers such as Lucan and Statius who were unquestionably “classics” to an age that accepted the authority of antiquity *tout court* found themselves fenced outside of newer, more restricted, and thus more easily defended, definitions of classicism. In the *querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Statius was, you might say, a victim of friendly fire.⁷ Take one important text from that polemic, *L’art poétique* of 1674, in which Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, who was on the side of the *anciens*, advises the aspiring epic poet to choose an appropriate hero as his subject:

tel que César, Alexandre, ou Louis,
Non tel que Polynice et son perfide frère.
On s’ennuie aux exploits d’un conquérant vulgaire.
N’offrez point un sujet d’incidents trop chargé.
Le seul courroux d’Achille, avec art ménagé,
Remplit abondamment une Iliade entière.
Souvent trop d’abondance appauvrit la matière.⁸

one such as Caesar, Alexander, or Louis, not one such as Polynices and his traitorous brother. The adventures of an undistinguished hero are tedious. Do not expound a topic too full of incident; a careful description of Achilles’ displeasure alone fills the *Iliad* to overflowing. An excess often spoils the material.

Though no poet is named, the consecutive references to Polynices and his brother, Eteocles, and to Achilles, who are the quasi-heroes of the *Thebaid* and the hero of the *Achilleid* respectively, clearly identify Statius as Boileau’s epic bore. Boileau has insightfully noticed that the preface of the *Achilleid* jokes about flouting Aristotelian “best practice” for writers of epic; but as we shall see (below, p 80), the insinuation that Statius was willing to flood his readers with an undifferentiated mass of biographical detail (*trop d’abondance*) about Achilles is quite unjust.

The French champions of a narrow and dogmatic classicism were extremely influential on the literary criticism of Restoration and Augustan England.⁹ The project of constructing a new Augustan age depended on equating the English civil wars with the Roman civil wars, the end of the Commonwealth with the end of the Roman republic, and the restoration of Charles II with the inauguration of the principate of Augustus. The anticipation of some that Charles would be a benign and glorious ruler was mixed with the fears of others that he would rule as a despot, and this mixture was heavy with implications for the

⁷ On the *querelle*, see Levine (1999: 121–47).

⁸ *L’art poétique* 3.250–6, text given in Collinet (1985: 246).

⁹ For the influence of the French critics Boileau and Le Bossu on Dryden, see Levine (1999: 53–61); for Le Bossu and Dryden, see further Thomas (2001: 134–6).

way contemporaries viewed Rome and its literature. Royalists who idealized the reign of Augustus and the poets of his age, especially Virgil and Horace, anathematized “tyrants” like Nero and Domitian and the poets such as Lucan, Statius, and Martial who had prospered under them.¹⁰ The mixture of Restoration political ideology and French literary polemic was potent, as both discourses tended to narrow the authority of Roman antiquity to the exclusion of many non-Augustan writers. This Royalist background informed the work of John Dryden, and he in particular deserves a great deal of the blame for the decline in Statius’ reputation.¹¹

Dryden’s most widely disseminated work, his translation of the *Aeneid* (1697), carries a preface that begins with a vitriolic attack on Statius.¹² He calls him a “Capaneus of a poet,” meaning that he foolishly tried to imitate the genius of Homer and Virgil, just as in the *Thebaid* the impious and overreaching Capaneus had scaled the walls of Thebes, scorning the gods and his own limitations, only to be struck down by Jupiter’s thunderbolt. Statius cannot win, for when he dares to depart strikingly from the Virgilian model, Dryden accuses him of going “out of his way, as it were on propense Malice to commit a Fault.” Damned by Dryden if he emulates Virgil too closely, damned if he strikes out on his own, Statius only pleases the “middle sort of readers,” whose taste rises above the pure vulgarity of Martial, but who cannot appreciate the restraint and taste that sets Virgil apart. Statius is here not even allowed the faint praise Dryden paid him in an earlier work, that he was “the best versificator next to Virgil.”¹³

Statius and Lucan both wrote Latin in a more condensed and rhetorical style than Virgil had done, and it is on the basis of this style that Dryden says “they affect greatness in all they write, but it is a bladdered greatness.”¹⁴ In an earlier work, the “Parallel of poetry and painting” (1695), the father of English literary criticism went into a bit more detail about this charge:

Lucan and *Statius* often ventur’d them [metaphors] too far, our *Virgil* never. But the great defect of the *Pharsalia* and the *Thebais* was in the

¹⁰ On Domitian seen at the time as the antithesis of Augustus, see Erskine-Hill (1983: 214f, 308f).

¹¹ Not only did Dryden help to narrow the canon, but he also narrowed the interpretation of Virgil, as Thomas (2001: 122–53) demonstrates; on “Dryden and the Augustan idea”, see Erskine-Hill (1983: 213–33).

¹² Hooker et al. (1956– : vol 5, 267f).

¹³ “A Discourse on the original and progress of satire” (1693) (Kinsley and Parfitt, 1970: 216). This is no change of heart; Dryden had always loathed Statius. One of his earliest extant poems (1660) is a set of commendatory verses on the publication by his patron and future brother-in-law Sir Robert Howard of the first English translation of the *Achilleid* (Hooker et al., 1956– : vol 1, 17–20); he applauds the translator for improving on Statius’ “lamely rough” original. From that point onward, and throughout his career, Dryden had frequent recourse to Statius as an example of bad ancient poetry, usually in order to demonstrate how perfect were Homer and Virgil in comparison.

¹⁴ Hooker et al. (1956– : vol 5, 327).

Design; if that had been more perfect, we might have forgiven many of the bold strokes in the Colouring; or at least excus'd them: yet some are such as *Demosthenes* or *Cicero* could not have defended.¹⁵

The reference to Demosthenes and Cicero encodes a perceptive observation about the heavily rhetorical style of Lucan and Statius; but Dryden's point is merely that this is one more example of their undisciplined excess. He goes on to offer a critique of the first lines of the *Silvae*:

Virgil, if he could have seen the first Verses of the *Sylvae*, would have thought Statius mad in his fustian Description of the Statue on the brazen Horse. But that Poet was always in a Foam at his setting out, even before the Motion of the Race had warm'd him.¹⁶

Again, this contains a perceptive comment on the tightly packed intensity of Statian narrative, but it is turned to unjust purposes. Dryden knew that the *Silvae* of Statius were minor, occasional poems, for he had published some of his own miscellaneous verse under the title of *Sylvae* in imitation of Statius. It is hardly fair to compare an ad hoc description of Domitian's equestrian statue with Virgil's most polished work, and Samuel Johnson later censured Dryden for having been arbitrary and unfair to Statius here.¹⁷ In another essay, Dryden quotes the "thundering" first line of the *Silvae* to compare it with the first line of the *Eclogues*; the royalist political subtext is made explicit there: "Virgil had all of the majesty of a lawful prince, and Statius only the blustering of a tyrant."¹⁸ In the "Parallel of poetry and painting," however, Dryden cites the first line of the *Achilleid* as an example of bad poetry, rather than that of the *Silvae*:

The soberness of Virgil, whom he read it seems to little purpose, might have shown him the difference betwixt *Arma virumque cano*, and *Magnanimum Æacidem, formidatamque tonanti progeniem*. But Virgil knew how to rise by degrees in his expressions: *Statius* was in his towring heights at the first stretch of his Pinions.¹⁹

As Boileau had done, Dryden thought he had detected bombast in the opening of the *Achilleid*; as we shall see when we look at this passage closely (below, p 80), Statius in fact knew full well the Aristotelian strictures that Boileau and Dryden charge him with ignoring. The beginning of the *Achilleid* teases the

¹⁵ Hooker et al. (1956– : vol 20, 73f).

¹⁶ Hooker et al. (1956– : vol 20, 73f).

¹⁷ "His [Dryden's] remarks on ancient or modern writers are not always to be trusted . . . Statius perhaps heats himself, as he proceeds, to exaggerations somewhat hyperbolic; but undoubtedly Virgil would have been too hasty if he had condemned him to straw [the madhouse] for one sounding line. Dryden wanted an instance, and the first that occurred was impress into the service." Johnson's "Life of Dryden" (Hill, 1905: vol 1, 105).

¹⁸ "Preface to *The Spanish Friar*" (Kinsley and Parfitt, 1970: 191).

¹⁹ Hooker et al. (1956– : vol 20, 73f).

reader by declaring the author's intention to flout every rule of epic propriety; if one reads beyond the first few lines, it is clear that Statius does not in fact carry through on this mock threat. This allegation of Statian bombast was an old one, and one could offer as a rebuttal the words of the elder Scaliger over a century before Dryden, as he defended the very same words of the first line of the *Achilleid* against precisely this charge:

An verò tumor est, quum Achillem vocat *magnanimum*? quum *Æacidem*? at Virgilius quoque *Æneam* sic. An quum ait, *formidatam Iovi progeniem*? nonne hoc Themis dixit? et vulgatum est. Sanè illi nesciunt quid sit tumor in oratione.²⁰

Is it bombastic when he [Statius] calls Achilles “great-souled”? When he calls him “grandson of Aeacus”? But Virgil also spoke of Aeneas in this way. Or is it when he says “the offspring feared by Jupiter”? Isn't that what Themis said? It's a well-known fact. These people [Statius' critics] truly do not know what bombast is.

Dryden goes on in the same essay to approve of the beauty of a few lines of the *Thebaid*, which describe the start of a horse race, but his praise is mixed with scorn, and he cites them merely in order to reiterate his image of Statius as an overeager racing horse.²¹ Dryden's judgment was hugely influential, and one can see his image of the Silver Latin poet as a rider in poor control of his mount reappear in Swift's *Battle of the Books*, where “Lucan appeared upon a fiery horse of admirable shape, but headstrong, bearing the rider where he list over the field.”²² Pope had begun to translate the *Thebaid* in his youth and in this effort he was heavily influenced by Dryden's translation of the *Aeneid*. As a Catholic living in the wake of the Glorious Revolution and the Act of Settlement that confirmed the succession of the elector of Hanover to the English throne, Pope apparently found relevance in this mythical tale of switching monarchs and foreign meddling.²³ But he left this piece of juvenilia unfinished and he published it later with expressed embarrassment at his choice of material. In the preface to his translation of the *Iliad*, he follows Dryden's example by using Statius as a negative foil for Homer's genius.²⁴

In this way, the impulse to defend antiquity against the products of modernity resulted in a Neoclassical streamlining of the canon that excluded poets like Lucan and Statius who once occupied a central place in the Western literary tradition. These poets then faded into obscurity. Lucan has always had

20 Scaliger (1561: 324bC).

21 The lines he cites are Stat. *Theb.* 6.400f, which, as Mozley (ad loc) points out, Pope later translated and inserted into his *Windsor Forest* (151–4). It seems likely that Dryden's praise here and his comment about the difficulty of translating them recommended Statius' lines to Pope as a challenge.

22 Ross and Woolley (1984: 16).

23 This is the thesis of Aden (1973).

24 Mack (1967: 4f, 6).

his partisans, but Statius is still very poorly known. The *Thebaid* as a whole, despite some excellent recent work, is still something of a critical enigma; for example, the most up-to-date commentary available on many of its books is the wildly idiosyncratic 1664 edition of Barth. The *Achilleid*, on the other hand, has been well served by commentaries, but until now there has been no full-length general monograph devoted to it in any language. A number of scholars, particularly Ovidians, have turned their hand to the *Achilleid* in recent years, and it is from their work that the present study takes its bearings.²⁵ The *Achilleid* deserves to be better known than it is, if only because it was in the Middle Ages one of the most widely read poems in Europe. It may also be that the *Achilleid* can provide an easier “way into” the Statian epic corpus than the *Thebaid*: it is short, light-hearted, and witty, whereas the *Thebaid* is long, serious, and, for the most part, gloomy.

The present book is not a comprehensive study of the *Achilleid*; I have largely restricted myself to the Achilles-on-Scyros story that forms the core of the poem as we have it. So I have barely touched upon the long episode that describes the mustering of the Greek fleet at Aulis and the setting forth to Scyros of Ulysses and Diomedes (1.397–559); and more could have been said about Achilles’ narrative of his early upbringing with Chiron (2.96–167; see below, p 170). I have focussed on a few particular themes: the relationship of the *Achilleid* to the epic tradition and to the mythical biography of Achilles, Statius’ manner of characterization, and the way he explores the nature of sex and gender. It will sometimes be necessary, however, to venture far from Statius’ text in order fully to explore the issues raised by the myth he narrates.

So this book will begin not with the *Achilleid* itself, but with an examination of its reception in Baroque and eighteenth-century opera. My first chapter illustrates the influence that Statius’ work continued to have, even at the point where it was beginning its slide into oblivion. As we shall see, the curious circumstance of Achilles on Scyros reflected quite precisely the situation of the ancient hero on the Baroque stage. For when the male protagonist of early opera, usually a brave and noble hero drawn from the pages of ancient myth or history, opened his mouth to sing, what issued forth was a preternaturally high voice, an unmasculine voice. The librettists writing for the paradoxically heroic castrati and prima donnas of Baroque opera often turned to the paradoxical representation of masculinity offered by Statius’ text when exploring that issue.

There are a number of reasons I want to look first at the reception of the *Achilleid* and the Scyros myth in early opera. Since it is now an obscure text that was once much better known, taking a backward look at earlier appropriations helps to limn the compelling issues that were once at stake in its interpretation and reinterpretation. It also provides a way of introducing the

²⁵ Feeney (2004: 85, n 2) conveniently outlines this tradition of scholarship, pointing to the contributions of Koster (1979), Fantham (1979), Rosati, Barchiesi (1996) and Hinds (1998 and 2000).

reader to the Scyros myth, in terms of both its general content and also the various potential modalities of narration that it presents. This discussion can even serve to highlight, in a negative way, the narrative choices that Statius declined. More generally, foregrounding the reception of the text is a statement of intent. Instead of treating this reception as a pendant to a discussion of Statius, I want to illustrate that previous ways of reading the *Achilleid* will necessarily inform ours, howsoever distantly and indirectly.

My second chapter turns to the *Achilleid* itself, and comes to grips with the questions of closure, form, genre, and literary affiliation posed by the poem's unfinished state, its extravagant and maddeningly vague proem, and its evocation of widely disparate – one might say even contradictory – literary models. First I try to account for the present state of the work, to vindicate its coherence despite its unfinished state, and to explain why it exists in the form we have it. The next section comprises close readings of several passages where the nature of Statius' poetic program is most clearly visible. The first is an analysis of the proem of the *Achilleid* (1.1–19), where the poet announces his subject and his intentions for the work. This passage is a difficult one, as evidenced by the diametrically opposing views on the intended final shape of the *Achilleid* that it has given rise to; nevertheless it can offer some important clues regarding the nature of Statius' project and his method of working. The next passage of interest is a scene in which Achilles accompanies himself on the lyre as he sings a heroic song (1.188–94); this passage offers an interesting metapoetic reflection on the nature of Statius' own heroic song. Given the pious debt to Virgil that Statius acknowledges at the end of the *Thebaid*, he has often been viewed as a plodding and too-faithful imitator of Virgil. In an attempt to revise this estimation, this chapter concludes with a collection of places in the *Achilleid* where Statius engages with Virgilian models in a distinctly playful, Ovidian fashion.

Issues of Virgilian intertextuality bring us to Thetis, who dominates the action of the beginning of the *Achilleid*. Chapter 3, "Womanhood, Rhetoric, and Performance," is a discussion of femininity as it is enacted not only by Achilles, but also by the "real" female characters in the poem, especially Thetis and Deidamia. As we shall see, Achilles is not the only person in Statius' poem who sometimes finds it difficult to maintain proper female decorum. Issues of femininity and intertextuality are closely related in the *Achilleid*, because its "female" characters tend to be successful in their masquerade of womanliness to the extent that they invoke the correct literary precedents. Via their attempts to emulate models of epic femininity, such as the avenging Juno, the motherly Venus, or the abandoned Ariadne, these characters are given by their author access to a kind of literary self-awareness, even though there is always a degree to which the entire discursive network of Latin literature is designed to exclude the full participation of women, real and fictional.

Chapter 4 turns to a closer examination of Achilles, beginning with his

early childhood. It compares the birth, infancy, and education of Achilles as narrated by Statius with its depiction elsewhere, especially in Homer, Apollonius, and in the visual arts. It takes its title, “*Semivir, Semifer, Semideus*,” from three adjectives that are applied in the *Achilleid* not to Achilles but to Paris, Chiron, and the Argonauts, as “half-man,” “half-beast,” and “half-gods” respectively. Statius constructs Achilles as a similarly liminal figure, suspended between masculinity and femininity, humanity and bestiality, mortality and divinity, such that the terms describe him too.

The “liminal” period of cross-dressing at Scyros between Achilles’ quasi-feral childhood and his manhood is often interpreted as an echo of an initiation rite. My fifth chapter, “Transvestism in Myth and Ritual,” discusses the contexts of Achilles’ cross-dressing. I investigate the origins and development of the myth as far as the sources will allow, before turning to prehistory and thinly documented Greek ritual practice. The claim that Achilles’ cross-dressing echoes an early ritual practice purports to be based on evidence from comparative anthropology, which I have tried here to collect and evaluate. We shall see that the anthropological evidence does not necessarily support the usual interpretation of the myth of Achilles on Scyros, but it does provide a valuable background for evaluating the ritual language that Statius himself uses to describe this episode.

Chapter 6, “Rape, Repetition, and Romance,” returns to the topic of gender that was broached in chapter 3, but this time the focus is on masculinity rather than femininity, and on Achilles’ manhood in particular. It is a discussion of gender and paternity as they are articulated by the phallic humor and the sexual violence that accompany Achilles’ eventual assertion of his sex and the beginning of his career as a hero. By comparing the *Achilleid* with the only other completely surviving ancient narrative of the hero’s stay on Scyros in Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, we arrive at some conclusions about how Statius views the nature of masculinity.

If the *Thebaid* is more Virgilian than Virgil, then the *Achilleid* is more Ovidian than Ovid, and my concluding chapter looks at the way Statius constructs a dialogue with Ovid on the nature of gender identity and gender metamorphosis. This discourse looks forward to the operas discussed in the first chapter, and the differences between Ovid and Statius also anticipate some of the particular divergences between the varying psychoanalytic accounts of how sexual difference comes about. Issues surrounding gender identity are attracting intense critical scrutiny at the moment, and the *Achilleid* can claim a great deal of interest in this regard. This circumstance may provide an occasion for the *Achilleid* to gain a few more readers; if so, Statius’ witty and inventive poem will repay them richly.

{ I }

Opening Nights at the Opera 1641–1744

Eccoti ò Lettore in questi giorni di Carnevale un'Achille in maschera.

Preface to *L'Achille in Sciro*, Ferrara 1663*

OVER THE COURSE of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the story of Achilles in Scyros was represented many times on operatic stages across Europe. Given the nature of the young genre, it is not hard to see why this motif was popular.¹ To illustrate the principle, contrast the Elizabethan theater, where the custom of boy actors playing the parts of women lent a certain piquancy to plots in which a female character dressed as a man: thus a boy played a woman playing a man. In Baroque opera, the situation was reversed. The primary roles were almost invariably scored for high voices, which could only be sung by a woman or a man whose secondary sexual characteristics had not developed.² In most cases the choice between a female singer and a castrato seems to have been determined by the local availability of singers rather than the pursuit of naturalism.³ It was not impossible to see the

* "In these days of Carnival, here is Achilles wearing a mask for you, dear reader." On this text, see below (p 11).

¹ Thus Rosselli (1992: 58).

² This was accomplished by cutting the spermatic cords or by orchidectomy before puberty: see Jenkins (1998) on the procedure and physiology, and on the social context, see Rosselli (1988) or more succinctly Rosselli (1992: 32–55).

³ "In early opera, voices were chosen for their beauty, their potential, their virtuosity, and not for their gender" (Dame, 1994: 149). "Statistically it was the age of the character rather than his or her gender that quite observably determined the choice of tessitura. The rule was, the younger the character, the higher the voice" (Durante, 1998: 386). On this problem, see Durante (1998: 385–8), Covell (1984), and Harris (1989: 110–14). Heller (2003: 18) claims that in seventeenth-century

role of Mark Antony interpreted by a woman while opposite her Cleopatra was played by a male castrato.⁴ Except in the public theaters of the Papal States, where women were often prohibited from appearing on stage and thus castrati were the rule, heroic male roles were commonly interpreted by female singers. Thus in the Naples production of *Achille in Sciro* discussed below (p 38), the two leading ladies, Vittoria Tesi and Anna Peruzzi, are reported to have quarreled over who should play Achilles and who Deidamia.⁵

When the character of Achilles on the island of Scyros was interpreted by a woman, the audience saw a woman playing the role of a man pretending to be a woman. When Achilles was played by a castrato, the unveiling of the “girl” as a “real” man might have forced the observation, despite the accepted conventions of the genre, of a contrast between the fictional character who sheds his ephobic androgyny on Scyros and the singer who cannot. Whatever the casting of Achilles, the situation on stage will have tended to produce for the audience a complex counterpoint of biological sex and social gender. A crude taxonomy divides the librettists who dramatized this story into two groups according to how they comment on this relationship between sex and gender. For some, such as Giulio Strozzi, Ippolito Bentivoglio, and Carlo Capece, the myth of Achilles on Scyros embodies the spirit of Carnival: the greatest hero of antiquity puts on a female disguise to pursue his amorous desires. As we shall see, these libretti tend to portray gender as a masquerade, and they abound in complex erotic schemes and sub-plots. For some later writers, such as Pietro Metastasio and Paolo Rolli, the myth teaches the opposite lesson: gender is not contingent but essential, in that the masculinity of Achilles is a primal force of nature that cannot be concealed, despite the efforts of his divine mother and his own devotion to Deidamia. For these writers, the masculinity of Achilles is an aspect of his heroism, which is in turn a product of his illustrious birth. On this reading of the myth, Achilles is a figure who exemplifies the triumph of a noble nature over unprepossessing circumstance; as we shall see, this interpretation of the story has political ramifications for an age torn apart by successive wars in which disputes over legitimate royal succession barely veiled the raw exercise of power.

In discussing these libretti, I hope to show that this double potential for the myth to encode two diametrically opposed conceptions of masculinity is derived not only from the content of the myth itself, but also from Stautius' suggestive manner of treatment. One of the peculiarities of this complex tradition,

Venetian opera, many of the heroes played by castrati had, like Achilles, a masculinity that was compromised in some way.

4 Durante (1998: 386).

5 Interestingly, considerations of naturalism were called upon to justify the choice of the taller Tesi for the role of Achilles, but this may have been a specious, post hoc argument invented to pacify Peruzzi: Croce (1947: 166).

however, is the unwillingness of any of these authors to identify Statius as a source, even when his direct influence is unmistakable. The decline of Statius' reputation as a poet was well under way, and the last of the poets discussed here, Paolo Rolli, seems to be the first not to have known the *Achilleid* at all. This operatic tradition is the swan song of a once well-known classical text whose influence was already on the wane.

Venice, 1641

The element of masquerade in the Achilles-on-Scyros myth was ideally suited to the carnivalistic context of much early operatic spectacle, and it was in seventeenth-century Venice that the opera and Carnival had come together most perfectly. The first treatment of the Achilles-in-Scyros story for the operatic stage was called *La finta pazza* or “the woman feigning madness.” This work, with a libretto by Giulio Strozzi and music by Francesco Saccati, has been called “the first and possibly the greatest operatic ‘hit’ of the [seventeenth] century. It set the standard for measuring operatic success.”⁶ *La finta pazza* inaugurated the Teatro Novissimo in Venice, the world's first purpose-built opera house; it launched the career of the first operatic diva, Anna Renzi; and it started the tradition of the “mad scene” for operatic heroines that eventually produced Lucia di Lammermoor.⁷ It travelled all over Italy as the epitome of the new type of Venetian opera, which had been born, not in the salons of Florentine intellectuals or the palaces of Roman nobles, but in the public theaters of Venice. Some of the noteworthy features of this new, mercenary type of operatic production were astonishing stage designs that employed perspective and movable scenery, and extravagantly melodramatic plots that abounded in incident and spectacle.

Statius' version of the story of Achilles on Scyros serves Strozzi as mere scaffolding for a more important sub-plot in which Deidamia feigns madness, a story which has no ancient source.⁸ Many early opera plots, despite the genre's claims of kinship with Greek tragedy, were in fact based on mythical love stories familiar from well-known Latin texts, treated very freely: Orpheus from the fourth *Georgic*, Ariadne from Catullus' poem 64, Daphne from the first

6 Rosand (1991: 90). The libretto is available in Della Corte (1958: 333–430).

7 Rosand (1991: 88–98, 110–24); Bianconi and Walker (1975).

8 The origins of this “mad scene” go back to a time when Monteverdi suggested an opera based upon a pastoral poem of Strozzi's. Tomlinson (1983) has demonstrated that this project, called *La finta pazza Licori*, never really got off the ground, but much interest in it has been generated by the surviving letters of Monteverdi, which record his thoughts about how to represent madness in music. There is no ancient connection of the Scyros myth with feigned madness except perhaps via the story of Ulysses feigning madness in an attempt to avoid coming to Troy, which is a kind of draft-dodging double of the Achilles-in-Scyros story, in which feigned madness is substituted for feigned womanhood.

book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dido from the *Aeneid*, and singing shepherds from the *Eclogues* of Virgil. Likewise, Strozzi's libretto takes the general lineaments of the dramatic situation from a familiar Latin text. The influence of Statius is apparent in the basic details of the plot: the worry of Thetis for her son, the mission of Ulysses and Diomedes to Scyros, and the stratagem of unveiling Achilles by tempting him with a gift of weapons. Strozzi, however, soon goes off in his own direction; with its broad humor, sprawling plot, gratuitous digressions, weak characterization, and emphasis on the theatrical elements of masquerade, travesty, and play-acting, *La finta pazza* is a quintessential early Venetian opera libretto.⁹

After a prologue spoken by the personification of "Quick Thinking" (*Consiglio Improvviso*), the drama opens with a situation derived from the *Achilleid*: Thetis has hidden Achilles on Scyros; Achilles and Deidamia have fallen in love and secretly had a child; Ulysses and Diomedes have arrived to find their quarry. Where Statius does not provide sufficient epic flavor, Strozzi invents it, such as the divine council he contrives between Thetis, Minerva, and Juno (Act 1, Scene 2), which would have allowed the stage designer, Giacomo Torelli, to show off his machinery. In the second and third acts, however, Strozzi abandons the traditional plot entirely. Deidamia, desperate because Achilles seems set to desert her on Scyros with their secret love child, feigns insanity in order to compel recognition of her plight and Achilles' hand in marriage. In the end, the conflict between love and duty is resolved when Deidamia's quick thinking secures the love of the fickle Achilles.

The first act owes to the *Achilleid* its general situation and a few of its details.¹⁰ It concludes with the scene of Achilles' unmasking, which is not the climax of the action in *La finta pazza*, but is rather part of the preliminaries; at this point the Statian story is concluded and Strozzi's own mad-Deidamia plot begins. Ulysses and Diomedes effect the unmasking by bringing a mixture of gifts to Lycomedes and his daughters; as in Statius' *Achilleid*, they include weapons among the flowers and ribbons. They happen to note the incidental preference Achilles, disguised as "Phyllis," shows for weapons rather than the more feminine gifts they bring, and deduce that this is Achilles. What is striking about this is the almost accidental nature of the discovery. In the *Achilleid*, it is a constant struggle for Achilles and Deidamia to contain the hero's native masculinity and to maintain his disguise, and in the end his discovery is in part

9 Kimbell (1991: 121–39). It is not hard to find other examples of cross-dressing in the libretti of the era, such as the disguise of Ottone as Drusilla in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; see Rosand (1991: 121) on *Ercole in Lidia*, and Heller (2003: 178–262) on *La Calisto* and *La Semiramide*. Compare also the transsexual character Hermaphroditus in both Strozzi's *Delia* and Persiani's *Gli amori di Giasone e Isifile*, on which see Rosand (1991: 118f, n 25).

10 For example, Deidamia's suggestion that she might go and fight alongside Achilles at Troy (Act 1, Scene 3, Della Corte, 1958: 355) anticipates her later frenzy (Act 2, Scene 10, Della Corte, 1958: 395f), but also recalls Statius (*Ach.* 1.949–51).

a result of this essence bursting forth.¹¹ Strozzi has none of this heroic essentialism; the closest he comes is in a defiant speech of Achilles to Deidamia near the beginning of the drama:

Di spirito guerriero
l'ardor non si smorza;
ho grande la forza,
sublime il pensiero.
Non può vero valor perder sue tempre,
in ogni habito Acchille, Acchille è sempre.¹²

The flame of my warrior spirit is not growing dim; my strength is great, and my thoughts are lofty. The keenness of true valor cannot be blunted; in any kind of clothing Achilles is always Achilles.

This declaration serves to emphasize the self-confidence of Achilles' masquerade, which he enjoys fully. He later says:

Dolce cambio di Natura,
donna in huomo trasformarsi,
huomo in donna tramutarsi,
variar nome e figura.
Non son più Fillide bella,
son Acchille hoggi tornato:
quanti invidiano il mio stato,
per far l'huomo e la donzella?
Io per me non veda l'hora,
di tornar maschio guerriero,
molti son d'altro parere,
resterian femmine ogn'hora.¹³

It's a lovely change of nature to transform oneself from a woman into a man, to change from being a man into a woman, to modify one's name and appearance. I am no longer the beautiful Phyllis; I have returned today to being Achilles. How many envy my state, to play the man and the girl? For my own part, I can't wait for the moment that I return to being a male warrior, but many people are of the opposite opinion: they would stay female all the time.

Comfortable in his identity as Achilles, he chooses gender roles to suit the needs of the moment. He has no doubt that he prefers to live as a man, but he is willing and able to live as a girl when his mother's wishes and his own erotic convenience point in that direction. The unmasking of Achilles as a man happens not because he can no longer maintain the pretense of femininity, but because of a simple trick that trumps Achilles' own.

¹¹ See e.g. *Ach.* 1.764-71, 1.835-8.

¹² *La finta pazza*, Act 1, Scene 3 (Della Corte, 1958: 352).

¹³ *La finta pazza*, Act 2, Scene 2 (Della Corte, 1958: 379).

Strozzi's Achilles reflects on his experience not as a matter of disguise, but of transformation: *dolce cambio di Natura*. This metamorphic quality extends to the entire world of the libretto, as Diomedes observes toward its end:

Nell'isola di Sciro
ogni cosa mi sembra
cangiato haver natura. Insin le pietre
nuotono intere, e grandi,
e s'affondan poi trite e minute:
le Fanciulle impazziscono, e ritrovano
nel folleggiar salute.¹⁴

Everything on the island of Scyros seems to me to have changed its nature.
Even the large and solid rocks float, while the finest dust sinks. Girls go
mad and recover their health by means of their madness.

Diomedes captures the spirit of Scyros: by a strange metamorphosis, the ponderous stuff of epic is rendered weightless here.

Achilles describes his experience as a metamorphosis as much as a disguise, and he weighs the pleasure of being a woman against that of being a man. This recalls Ovid's Tiresias, who, not a transvestite but rather a transsexual, transformed himself into a woman and then back into a man, gaining the benefit of experiencing the pleasures of both sexes, and pronouncing on the difference.¹⁵ Achilles' joking reflection on his sexual "transformation" takes on particular poignancy given the nature of the singer who interpreted the role in the Venetian premiere. Achilles was played by "a young castrato of alluring appearance. . . , who combined a warlike spirit with feminine softness such that he seemed an Amazon."¹⁶ As if to make clear the connection between the gender metamorphosis in the drama and the castration of performers in it, Strozzi introduces a eunuch as a character in the drama. He is a singer and a member of Lycomedes' court who entertains the rest of the company, and even makes jokes about his own castration.¹⁷

La finta pazza leaves a great deal to be desired as a depiction of the Achilles-on-Scyros myth, since the final two-thirds of it diverge into the idiosyncratic story of Deidamia's feigned madness. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the ability of the myth to celebrate the sexual masquerade inherent in early opera, depicting gender itself as carnivalesque, both in the pretended femininity of Achilles

¹⁴ *La finta pazza*, Act 3, Scene 7 (Della Corte, 1958: 425).

¹⁵ Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.323. The *Dizionario dell'opera*, s.v. "Finta pazza" (Baldini and Castoldi, 2002), compares the lines of Achilles quoted above with similar words spoken by the transsexual Hermaphroditus in *Gli amori di Giasone e Isifile*.

¹⁶ "un giovanetto castrato. . . , di vago aspetto sì che sembrava un'Amazzone, c'havesse misti i spiriti guerrieri con le delicatezze femminili." From a pamphlet of 1641, *Il canocchiale per la finta pazza, dilineato da M[aiolino] B[isaccioni] C[onte] di G[enova]*, as quoted by Rosand (1991: 415f).

¹⁷ On whom see Heller (1998: 574f) and Rosand (1991: 118f).

and in the pretended “female” hysteria of Deidamia. Because of the popularity of Strozzi’s text, many subsequent libretti on the subject are likely to have been influenced by it. As we shall see, some developed the theme of the power of masquerade still further, and some reacted strongly against it. For an example of the latter view, Metastasio’s Achilles excuses himself to Deidamia for the way his disguise comes near to slipping, arguing that “changing one’s nature is too difficult a task.”¹⁸ Those words, *cambio di natura*, seem almost a direct rebuttal to the words of Strozzi quoted above, where Achilles amiably praises the “lovely change of nature” between male and female.

Paris, 1645

Italian opera met with a warm reception across much of Europe, but not everywhere. In France and England particularly, where national chauvinism was most highly developed, the importation of “foreign” musical styles was most controversial. Cardinal Mazarin, an Italian by birth, tried to interest the French court in the opera of his homeland; and a major part of this project was a lavish production of *La finta pazzia*. This had been suggested by the arrival in Paris of Giacomo Torelli, the set designer for the original Venetian production. His Parisian version of *La finta pazzia* was only the second opera ever staged in France, and it is the first about which substantial details are known.¹⁹ Torelli was granted permission to memorialize his efforts in a publication that was lavishly illustrated with engravings of many of his sets; this document provides much incidental detail about the production.²⁰ The central position of the set designer in this project demonstrates the importance of spectacle to opera productions of the day. Torelli himself had revolutionized stage design in Venice with a system of counterweights, ropes, and pulleys that allowed smooth and simultaneous changes in scenery.²¹

A great deal of effort went into translating the visual idiom of *La finta pazzia* into terms that were flattering to the French court: the island of Scyros was imagined quite improbably as the Ile de la Cité, with the arrival of Ulysses and Diomedes staged against a monumental backdrop that depicted central Paris, including the Louvre and the Pont Neuf.²² Numerous dances were inserted into the plot to suit the French taste for ballet and to capture the attention

18 “Ma il cambio di natura | È impresa troppo dura”: *Achille in Sciro*, Act 1, Scene 8 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 764).

19 Punières (1913: 38–77).

20 Strozzi (1645), on which see Bjurström (1961: 134–43, 243–5) and Kirstein (1971: 70f).

21 Kimbell (1991: 129–31).

22 Bjurström (1961: 138) claims that no such visual equation of the island kingdom of Scyros with Venice was present in the original Venetian production, but Rosand (1991: 115) argues plausibly that, while there is no firm evidence, it is probable that Torelli had “portrayed Skyros in the guise of Venice.”

of the seven-year-old king: at the end of Act 1, there was a ballet of four eunuchs, four bears, and four monkeys; at the end of Act 2, a ballet of ostriches, and at the end of the opera, a boat filled with Native Americans arrived, who performed a ballet and then released five live parrots over the audience.²³ The production was politely received, but it did not launch a vogue for Italian opera. Torelli went on to have a very successful career in Paris, where he was known as *le grand sorcier*; he had a lasting influence on French stage design. He remained in France until the death of Mazarin in 1661, an event which put an end to efforts to import Italian opera into France. The subsequent development of an independent national tradition of opera in French was the result of Louis XIV's patronage of Lully, who stepped into the vacuum created by the failure of *opera seria* to establish itself in Paris in the way that it did in other European capitals, where Italian opera and the Achilles-in-Scyros theme continued to thrive.

Ferrara, 1663

A few decades after the premiere of *La finta pazzo*, an opera called *Achille in Sciro* was performed in Ferrara. It had music by Giovanni Legrenzi, and the authorship of its libretto has been attributed to a Ferrarese aristocrat, the marchese Ippolito Bentivoglio.²⁴ Since this libretto is not available in a modern edition, it may be useful to summarize very briefly some of the highlights of its plot. Deidamia has sworn a vow of chastity to Diana in order to provide a cover for her secret affair with Achilles, who is disguised as the girl Pyrrha. Lycomedes then looks to secure the succession of his throne by betrothing his second daughter, Cyrene, to a prince of Elis called Polycastes. The problem is that Polycastes falls in love with Achilles in his disguise as Pyrrha and becomes unwilling to marry Cyrene. Achilles rejects Polycastes' advances, but Cyrene nevertheless attempts to kill her rival, Pyrrha, while "she" is sleeping. When the truth comes out, Lycomedes pardons both Cyrene and Polycastes and orders them to be married before sundown.

In the second act, there is a rather contrived misunderstanding on the part of Deidamia, who accuses Achilles of harboring feelings for Cyrene. In the midst of this quarrel, Deidamia nearly tells her father the truth about Pyrrha's identity, but is stopped by Achilles. Ulysses, disguised as a merchant, then discerns the identity of Achilles on account of his lack of interest in the womanly goods he displays. At the blast of a trumpet, all flee except Achilles. When Ulysses addresses him by his proper name, Achilles hesitates to respond, thinking

²³ Punières (1913: 73), Bjurström (1961: 136), and Kirstein (1971: 72f).

²⁴ Sartori (1990-4) lists three published editions (nos. 153-5); the text of the libretto as described here refers to the Venetian edition of 1663 (Sartori, no. 154). Bentivoglio was identified as the author of the libretto, which was published anonymously, in the catalogue of operas performed in Venice that was compiled by Bonlini (1979, originally published in 1730: pp 66, 252).

about Deidamia, but eventually yields in the face of Ulysses' mockery, and goes along with him. In the last scene of Act 2, Achilles continues to mope about his beloved and refuses to go on, until Ulysses claims to have a plan that will sort everything out. In Act 3, it is announced to Lycomedes that the disguised "merchant" who has snatched Pyrrha was none other than her brother, Achilles. Lycomedes agrees to pardon Achilles, as long as he returns Pyrrha; meanwhile, Ulysses tells Achilles that their plan is to snatch Deidamia. When Achilles meets Lycomedes, he asks for the hand of his eldest daughter, Deidamia. Lycomedes points to Deidamia's vow of chastity and offers him Cyrene instead, at which Deidamia's jealousy flares up again, and she denounces Achilles. Ulysses engineers a reconciliation between the lovers, but as they prepare to depart, Lycomedes surprises the group. Ulysses stops Achilles as he is about to identify himself, and instead tells Lycomedes that Achilles is really Pyrrha, cross-dressed as a man. When Polycastes, who is not a party to this latest deception, assaults Achilles for being the kidnapper of his beloved Pyrrha, he is disarmed; and he is humiliated when the identity of Pyrrha as a man is finally revealed to him. Polycastes and Cyrene are reconciled, and in the final scene Ulysses explains the truth to Lycomedes, who accepts Achilles as his son-in-law.

The plot is endless and unsatisfying; the first act is mainly concerned with the Polycastes and Cyrene sub-plot, which then all but disappears from the stage. The second and third acts are drawn out with a pointless series of minor reversals. In particular, Deidamia's tiffs and reconciliations with Achilles are implausible in their motivation and seem to be desperate ad hoc inventions by the author. In its sprawling and digressive plot this *Achille in Sciro*, like *La finta pazza*, exemplifies the character of the early opera libretti associated with seventeenth-century Venice. Another such feature they have in common is the contribution of lower-class, servile characters to the sexual comedy.²⁵ Of the two, Strozzi's libretto is far more charming in its idiosyncrasies. The "reform" libretti that followed these two were, as we shall see, more tightly written and more elevated in tone. The interest of Bentivoglio's text lies in the way it introduces themes that are developed at greater length and with greater consistency by later writers. The most important of these is the idea of the disguised and feminized Achilles as the object of male erotic desire.

Bentivoglio's Achilles is not a heroic figure. Unlike Strozzi's Achilles, a cynical sexual opportunist who attempts to abandon Deidamia, this Achilles remains besotted with her even after his discovery by Ulysses. Like Strozzi's Achilles, however, he is perfectly comfortable in his feminine disguise and does not complain about his fate.²⁶ In contrast to the *Achilleid*, where Deidamia has to restrain the spirited Achilles from revealing himself (1.802-5), this Achilles has to restrain a spirited Deidamia from revealing their secret (Act 2, Scene 14).

²⁵ See Heller (1998: 575f).

²⁶ Thus Heller (1998: 575).

The infatuation of Polycastes highlights Achilles' feminine beauty, even as he angrily tries to ward off this unwelcome attention. The comic nurse, when confronted with the prospect of Pyrrha supposedly cross-dressed as the male Achilles, notes the convenience of playing both sexes in terms similar to those used by Strozzi's Achilles:

Con questa somiglianza
 Pirra tù puoi pigliarti un gran piacere
 Nel far l'huomo, e la donna a tuo volere.²⁷

Pyrrha, with this likeness you can obtain great pleasure for yourself, playing the man and the woman at your whim.

The feminization of Achilles is presented most starkly in a sequence of scenes in which the sleeping hero is surveyed as a passive sexual object by a stream of people, both male and female. In Act 1, Scene 17, Achilles wanders alone in the royal gardens, where he waits for Deidamia, praising the beauty of the flowers and surroundings. He falls asleep, and when in the next scene Deidamia arrives, she decides to let him sleep and departs off-stage. In the following scene Polycastes arrives and admires the beauty of the sleeping Pyrrha. He praises the beauty of Achilles' lips, but Lycomedes approaches before he can proceed further. Polycastes hides in the bushes and in the next scene Lycomedes likewise remarks on the beauty of the sleeping figure. The king masters his desires with some difficulty and withdraws to avoid temptation. Then in Scene 21, Cyrene arrives and attempts to murder her sleeping rival; at this the others all leap out from where they have been lurking to stop her. The reactions of the four characters who encounter the sleeping Achilles are strongly stereotyped by gender. The two males are provoked to a predatory sexual desire; one woman is kind and considerate while the other is irrationally jealous. Achilles meanwhile plays a stereotypically feminine role: in a passive posture and surrounded by flowers, he is feminized by the gazes that pass over him.

This theme of latent same-sex attraction was Bentivoglio's most important innovation; particularly significant is the first appearance here of Lycomedes as susceptible to the beauty of the disguised Achilles.²⁸ Bentivoglio's king retains his dignity because he obeys his own "wise counsel" (*saggio consiglio*, Act 1, Scene 20) and flees temptation. As we shall see, in several subsequent versions, Lycomedes does not emerge from this situation so well. There is further homoerotic innuendo provided by the peculiarly close "friendship" between Deidamia and Pyrrha, which is the object of sarcastic comment by the nurse.²⁹

²⁷ *Achille in Sciro*, Act 3, Scene 16.

²⁸ Lycomedes reflects on the charms of Pyrrha in Act 1, Scene 20 and Act 2, Scene 11; and in the final scene he notes that his love has been transformed into paternal affection for his new son-in-law.

²⁹ Act 1, Scene 4, on which see Heller (1998: 577).

Bentivoglio blurs the distinction between passionate female friendship and romantic love by having Deidamia call her lover by the female name Pyrrha even when they are alone (Act 1, Scene 12). When the furious Deidamia attempts to reveal her relationship with Achilles to her father, Achilles explains that her outburst was merely the result of her concern that her excessive attachment to “Pyrrha” may have been detrimental to her vows of chastity (Act 2, Scene 14). As we shall see, the homoerotic potential offered by cross-dressing was employed by the subsequent librettists who dramatized this myth, as light comic relief for some, and as a major theme for others.

Bentivoglio simply made up most of his story out of whole cloth, even more so than Strozzi, who had at least kept his first act true to the ancient story. The *argomento* to the printed drama, which explains the mythical background, shows some acquaintance with the Statian version of the story, but only in an incidental way. A few vivid details certainly come from Statius: that Achilles was fed by Chiron on the entrails of lions, that Proteus had warned Thetis about her son’s fate, and that Thetis took Achilles from Chiron’s cave while he was sleeping.³⁰ On the other hand, the claim that Thetis took Achilles away from Chiron surreptitiously while the latter was out hunting contradicts the account in the *Achilleid* (1.119–97). The impression one gets is that only a few details remained with Bentivoglio from a long-distant reading of the *Achilleid*. On the other hand, Bentivoglio probably did consult Hyginus, where he found “Pyrrha” as Achilles’ female name.³¹

The carelessness with which Bentivoglio handled myth may be seen in the way Polycastes refers casually to Orestes pursued by the Furies, an event that had yet to happen, and which of course had to occur well after the end of the Trojan War (Act 1, Scene 13). The so-called printer’s preface to the Venetian edition of 1663 apologizes for the lack of proofreading, and the production of this edition is indeed dreadfully sloppy: spelling is inconsistent, speeches are sometimes attributed to the wrong character, the design is careless, and the inking poor. However, given the sarcastic tone the preface takes toward the quality of the libretto, and given the aristocratic rank of its presumed author, it is probably the anonymous work of Bentivoglio as well. Its self-deprecating sarcasm makes it the most attractive part of the book. The epigraph of the present chapter (above, p 1) quotes its opening words, and the preface goes on to excuse the anonymity of the author in the spirit of Carnival, just as the cross-dressing of Achilles is explained as carnivalesque. Bentivoglio begs for indulgence:

questo Drama, il quale non camina con le regole severe di Aristotile,

³⁰ *spissa leonum* | *viscera*, Stat. *Ach.* 2.99f; *Protea vera locutum*, Stat. *Ach.* 1.34; Stat. *Ach.* 1.228–31.

³¹ Hyg. *Fab.* 96. This is also the source of the claim made at the beginning of the *argomento* that Peleus was the grandson of Chiron (Hyg. *Fab.* 14).

siegue la piacevole usanza del secolo, essendo questa una sorte di compositione nuova, ch' à differenza dell' antiche, hà più per fine il dilettevole, che l' utile.

this drama, which does not proceed according to strict Aristotelian rules, adopts the pleasant usage of this age, inasmuch as this is a new kind of composition, which in contrast to those of antiquity has delight as its object rather more than usefulness.

The next generation of Italian librettists would not be so blithe about Aristotelian dramatic unities. In the next century, the reform of this “this new kind of composition” was led by Apostolo Zeno and members of the Accademia dell'Arcadia.³² The Arcadians were dedicated to reestablishing in *opera seria* the dignity and the classical ideals that Venetian opera had played freely with. Three of its members wrote libretti on the Achilles-in-Scyros theme in the eighteenth century: Carlo Capece, Pietro Metastasio and Paolo Rolli. All three of these dramas are more compelling and plausible than Strozzi's and Bentivoglio's, but they differ very widely in the route they take to reform.

Rome, 1712

The dramatic possibilities of the theme of gender inversion were explored most elaborately by Carlo Sigismondo Capece in his *Tetide in Sciro* or *Thetis on Scyros*. It was written around the year 1712, and it was set to music by Domenico Scarlatti for a performance in Rome at the theater of the widowed Polish queen Maria Kazimiera d'Arquien.³³ Capece's plot is even more complex than those of Strozzi and Bentivoglio, and like theirs it strays far from classical myth; but unlike theirs it is a coherent and well-paced drama. One can see in it the effects of opera reform: its avoidance of prurient humor and lower-class characters, the serious moral lessons it offers, the elegant symmetry of its plot, and its allowance of some measure of dignity to Achilles, who is depicted as a reluctant and unhappy cross-dresser.³⁴ Nevertheless, it differs from the subsequent libretti of Capece's fellow Arcadians, Metastasio and Rolli, in that it takes the “feminine” topic of romantic love as its theme, rather than male heroism. Capece begins with the basic premise of the *Achilleid*, but he quickly goes off in an original direction, multiplying the motif of transvestism and transgressive desire until it consumes the drama entirely.

³² On opera reform in the early eighteenth century, see Heller (2003: 298f).

³³ The Rome edition of 1712 is described here: Sartori (1990–4: no. 23096). On the context of the opera, see Boyd (1986: 49–54), who also summarizes its plot.

³⁴ Thetis is present on Scyros through the drama, and Achilles complains to her about his dress on several occasions: Act 1, Scenes 2 and 7; Deidamia does not know Achilles' identity, and he tries to tell her at the end of Act 1, but Thetis intervenes.

Achilles, who is in love with Deidamia, has assumed female disguise under the name Arminda, while a character called Antiope, supposed to be Lycomedes' former fiancée and daughter of Theseus, has arrived on Scyros disguised as the male visitor Philartes. Antiope is in Scyros to murder Lycomedes, whom she blames for her father's death, but she cannot overcome her abiding love for him. Lycomedes, however, has fallen in love with "Arminda" (i.e. Achilles), and eventually (Act 2, Scene 10) becomes jealous since he believes that "she" is in love with "Philartes" (i.e. Antiope); the king is confused about the gender and motivations of both characters. In fact Achilles is only keeping a close eye on the visitor "Philartes" because he has detected that his beloved Deidamia has taken a fancy to "him." As Achilles grows jealous, Deidamia asks Thetis why "Arminda" is acting so strangely (Act 2, Scene 9). In this version of the story, Deidamia does not yet know Achilles' true identity; all of the meetings between Deidamia and "Arminda" in the drama are chaperoned by Thetis, who is disguised as Nerea, a mortal woman who connives to keep Achilles' disguise intact. She deceives Deidamia, alleging that "Arminda" is jealous because "she" loves "Philartes," too. Deidamia then nobly forswears her own interest in "Philartes," whom she wrongly believes to be a man, on account of the interest in "him" that she wrongly believes to be afflicting her friend "Arminda," whom she wrongly believes to be a woman (Act 2, Scene 9; Act 3, Scene 5). The erotic energy runs in a circuit: Antiope/Philartes, a woman in the guise of a man, loves Lycomedes, a man, who loves Achilles/Arminda, a man in the guise of a woman, who loves Deidamia, a woman, who loves Antiope/Philartes, and so on.

In Act 3, Ulysses, who claims to have come to Scyros in order to bring a message from Agamemnon suggesting a marriage between his son, Orestes, and Deidamia, sets his trap for Achilles by planting weapons among the wedding gifts he claims to be bringing from Orestes. He discovers Achilles' identity while they are alone, but this news does not immediately spread to the others. Lycomedes therefore is still jealous because he has come to suspect that his beloved "Arminda" (really Achilles) loves "Philartes" (really Antiope), and as a result Antiope/Philartes goes to Deidamia in Act 3, Scene 8 to ask her to attest that "he" has not in fact been trying to seduce "Arminda." Deidamia takes the opportunity of this meeting with "Philartes" to air her own feelings for "him," which prompts Antiope to reveal her true identity and the nature of her continuing love for her former fiancé, Lycomedes. The two commiserate and embrace; but when Lycomedes sees his daughter's apparent display of unchastity with an apparent male, he orders Deidamia to be thrown at once from a cliff into the sea. Antiope thereupon reveals her identity; Ulysses upbraids Lycomedes; the king repents his folly, but it seems too late to save Deidamia. In the final scene, however, the rocks open up to reveal the "grotto of Thetis," where the goddess has united Deidamia with Achilles, having rescued her from

the sea. Achilles is reconciled to Lycomedes as a son-in-law rather than a lover, and Antiope accepts Lycomedes' hand and his vow that he was not responsible for her father's death.

The crucial character in this nexus of desire is Deidamia, who is depicted as innocent of all jealousy and cruelty. She has been kept sequestered from most human contact by her paranoid father, the only man she consciously knows; both she and her father are unaware that her companion, "Arminda," is really male. Deidamia, like Miranda in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, is a completely pure and unworldly soul, whose instinctive reactions focalize the moral judgments the drama pronounces on the other characters; she also provides a foil that highlights their vanity. When she is told that Ulysses and her father have arranged a wedding for her with Orestes, she has no idea what the concept of marriage entails (Act 1, Scene 11). Her reaction is that if Orestes and other men are like Ulysses, she is not interested in the male of the species (Act 1, Scene 12). She finally does meet a "man" who interests her when she observes the sleeping figure of "Philartes" in Act 2, Scene 3, and concedes that, as her friend "Arminda" has claimed, men are not all bad. The fact that the man whose beauty has smitten her is really a woman is not the occasion for sniggering comments on female homoeroticism, as in Bentivoglio's *Achille in Sciro*, but rather emphasizes the Platonic and de-eroticized nature of Deidamia's attraction to beauty and virtue. Likewise, her love for her companion "Arminda" is a product of her innocent reaction to Achilles' noble character, and is entirely nonsexual.

Lycomedes is the opposite of Deidamia: he is lecherous, vain, and cruel. Capece goes much further than Bentivoglio in developing the theme of Lycomedes' interest in the disguised Achilles. This Lycomedes does not preserve his dignity, but eagerly pursues his ridiculous courtship of Achilles. He is obsessed by perceived threats to Deidamia's virtue, and yet he does not realize that he has provided her with a constant male companion in Achilles; the irony is highlighted in Act 1, Scene 8, when Lycomedes asks "Arminda" to instruct his daughter in the ways of love in preparation for her engagement to Orestes. Not only does he fail to identify Achilles, for all his paranoia he does not even recognize his former fiancée, who has come to assassinate him. His malignant jealousy culminates in his order to execute Deidamia. Having had her thrown from a cliff, his subsequent disavowal of responsibility for Theseus' fall from a cliff on Scyros rings hollow.³⁵

The humiliation of Lycomedes is a consequence of his erotic drive, which stands in contrast to the purity of his daughter's emotional attachments. The innocent Deidamia moralizes on the damage passion can do (Act 2, Scene 9), and Ulysses sings an aria on the subject of how love turns kings into fools (Act 1, Scene 6). Lycomedes criticizes his daughter for confessing her affections, which he says a royal lady (*donzella reale*, Act 2, Scene 10) should not

³⁵ He denies responsibility twice, in Act 2, Scene 1 and in the final scene. See below (p 16).

do; but he is more badly let down by his own lack of discretion. The potentially ridiculous relationship between Achilles and Deidamia is mitigated by the far more ridiculous situation between Lycomedes and Antiope. This symmetry frames an opposition between the nobility that animates Achilles' actions and Deidamia's love on the one hand and the vanity and lack of resolve that characterize the actions of Lycomedes and Antiope on the other. When Achilles/Arminda speaks for Deidamia in rejecting Orestes' hand, he makes a strong contrast between true virtue and merely hereditary kingship (Act 1, Scene 11). This outburst anticipates Achilles' later difficulties with Agamemnon at Troy, and also perhaps reflects upon Lycomedes' own unfitnes to rule.

The opposition that Capece frames between the character of father and daughter is only one of the many symmetries to be found in the libretto. Another such pairing is Achilles and Antiope; it appears that the main purpose of Antiope's character is to be Achilles' mirror image: both are cross-dressing visitors to Scyros. The irony of their mirroring is most clear in Act 2, Scene 4, where they come into conflict over Deidamia's new love for "Philartes": the supposedly female Arminda is much more assertive than the supposedly male Philartes. The presence of Antiope permits Deidamia and Lycomedes both to desire someone of the wrong gender, and then father and daughter exchange lovers when the gender masquerade is revealed. Likewise, Thetis and Ulysses form a symmetrical pair. Both are in Scyros under false pretext and they flatter and flirt as they attempt to undermine each other (Act 2, Scene 6). The ultimate effect of the proliferation of masquerade is to reduce the significance of the transformation of Achilles. The distant death of Achilles at Troy is less important than the imminent danger facing Deidamia and Lycomedes on Scyros. For Capece, Achilles' transvestism is a simply a symptom of the power of desire that disturbs or deranges all of the characters in the drama.

It is not surprising that Capece, as a reforming Arcadian, was more careful than his predecessors in dealing with his classical sources. In the *argomento* to the published drama, he says:

L'Amore d'Achille con Deidamia Figlia di Licomede Re di Sciro e il suo scoprimento per la sagacità di Ulysse è favola così nota, che servendo d'argomento alla presente Operetta, non ha il lettore bisogno d'altro, per intenderne, senza pena, gli avvenimenti.

The love affair of Achilles and Deidamia, daughter of Lycomedes, king of Scyros, and his discovery by means of the wisdom of Ulysses is so well known a tale that it may serve as a synopsis of the present work, and the reader has no need of another in order easily to understand its plot.

That the tale is well known is thanks to Statius, and perhaps also Strozzi, but like all of the other librettists, Capece would rather not mention Statius by

name. On the other hand, he is happy to advertise the authority of Plutarch for the story that Theseus had been killed by Lycomedes.³⁶ Nevertheless, the influence of Statius on Capece is clear. The first scene is a recapitulation of the premise of the *Achilleid*: Thetis explains that fortune has decreed that Achilles will be greater than his father, which has led to his mortality and her sorrow; in a futile attempt to delay his fate, she has hidden him on Scyros. In the next scene, Thetis invokes the example of Hercules in order to soften Achilles' reluctance to his female dress, just as she does in the *Achilleid* (1.26of). In Act 2, Scene 12, Thetis mentions her dipping of Achilles in the Styx and her arranging his education with Chiron, and these details are derived from Statius.³⁷

Tetide in Sciro shows with particular clarity the celebration of disguise and sexual confusion that characterized much early opera. It represents a clarification of dramatic structure with respect to the libretti of Strozzi and Bentivoglio, but it shares their carnivalesque spirit.³⁸ The most important change that Capece made in the story was to make the lascivious desire of Lycomedes for the disguised Achilles a central part of the plot, a development that had merely been hinted at by Bentivoglio. Subsequently, the political implications of Lycomedes' characterization were to have a decisive role in the way that the myth was developed. For John Gay, Lycomedes becomes a means of attacking the administration of the English king, whereas Capece's fellow Arcadians, Pietro Metastasio and Paolo Rolli, defended royalty by way of alternative depictions of Lycomedes and his household. By contrast, in Rome, where there was no king to take offense, Capece's drama, performed for an exiled queen, was a harmless entertainment.

London, 1733

The position of Italian *opera seria* in London in the eighteenth century was unique: it inspired devotion and loathing in equal measure. Nowhere in Europe was the public outcry against the corrupting influence of foreign music so loud, and nowhere in Europe were operatic singers so well paid. As in France, the combination of national pride and a strong tradition of spoken drama in the national tongue made it harder to ignore some of the stranger aspects of Italian

³⁶ The incident was narrated, he notes, by Plutarch (*Thes.* 35) and "others" (*altri*), presumably meaning Thucydides (1.98.2). See below (p 200) on the myth of Theseus on Scyros.

³⁷ Cf. *Ach.* 1.38f; 1.133f. A further detail is added in Act 3, Scene 6 that Achilles was nursed for fierceness by Chiron on the milk of a Libyan lioness, which seems to come from Statius' claim that the young Achilles was fed on the meat of lions (*Ach.* 2.99f), conflated with an insult Virgil's Dido levels at Aeneas (*Virg. Aen.* 4.366f).

³⁸ The usual season for most early opera was Carnival, loosely considered as the period between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday, but often the season started much earlier than that. The date of performance of Capece and Scarlatti's opera is not certain, but dates of 10 or 16 January 1712 for the premiere have been suggested: Boyd (1986: 50).

opera.³⁹ In an often-quoted passage from the pages of the *Spectator* of 21 March 1711, Addison reviewed the history of the arrival of Italian opera in England:

For there is no Question but our great Grand-children will be very curious to know the Reason why their Forefathers used to sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country, and to hear whole Plays acted before them in a Tongue which they did not understand.⁴⁰

Addison had himself attempted to remedy this situation by writing *Rosamond*, an English libretto in the style of *opera seria*, but it was not a success, and so he concluded that the rule of the contemporary English stage was that “nothing is capable of being well set to Musick, that is not Nonsense.”⁴¹

The forces of nationalist reaction had to endure many more years of brilliant success in London for the operas of Handel and Bononcini, until in 1728 they had their own runaway success to celebrate. John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* became the first popularly successful opera in English, and it was immediately hailed by many xenophobes as a triumph over the vogue for foreign opera.⁴² It is true that Italian opera was one of the main targets of its satire, both its general conventions and particular London scandals.⁴³ Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Gay himself wrote the *Beggar’s Opera* not as a declared enemy of *opera seria*, but as a past intimate of it. He had shared a patron with Handel in the Earl of Burlington, one of the founders of the Royal Academy, in whose house they had both lodged; Gay had written the libretto for Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*. Several scholars have emphasized that, while Gay was happy to profit from xenophobic enthusiasm for his work, his own attitude toward traditional opera was more complex.⁴⁴

Gay began *Polly*, his sequel to the *Beggar’s Opera*, with a very explicit satire on the tantrums of an operatic prima donna:

3rd Player. Sir, *Signora Crotchetta* says she finds her character so low that she had rather dye than sing it.

1st Player. Tell her by her contract I can make her sing it.

Enter Signora Crotchetta.

Crotchetta. Barbarous Tramontane! Where are all the lovers of *Virtù*? Will they not all rise in arms in my defence? make me sing it! good

39 Smith (1995: 70–80).

40 Bond (1965: vol 1, 79), and see also Bond (1965: vol 1, 26f).

41 Bond (1965: vol 1, 79). For contemporary English criticism of the “effeminacy” of *opera seria*, see Gilman (1997) and Blanning (2002: 171–3).

42 See Dorris (1967: 94–8).

43 In the prologue, the *Beggar* alludes to some of the conventions of *opera seria* and to the rivalry of the divas of the Royal Academy, Cuzzoni and Faustina. The blows they had exchanged on stage during a performance the previous year may be further satirized in the quarrel between Polly Peachum and Lucy Lockit in Act 2, Scene 13.

44 Rogers (1988) and Nokes (1995: 423–32). On the cordial relationship between Handel and Gay, see McIntosh (1974).

Gods! should I tamely submit to such usage I should debase my-self through all *Europe*.

1st Player. In the Opera nine or ten years ago, I remember, Madam, your appearance in a character little better than a fish.

Crotchetta. A fish! monstrous! Let me inform you, Sir, that a Mermaid or Syren is not many removes from a sea-Goddess; or I had never submitted to be that fish which you are pleased to call me by way of reproach.⁴⁵

Given this satirical background, it is curious that in his next work for the musical stage, Gay abandoned the world of thieves and whores, and turned to classical mythology himself. In fact, the first character to speak in his *Achilles* is Thetis, a sea-goddess.⁴⁶ Why did Gay move from this mockery of singing fish to putting a singing fish on stage himself? The *Beggar's Opera* had been interpreted by contemporaries, rightly or wrongly, as a withering and specific attack on the corruption of the Walpole administration. In retaliation, its sequel, *Polly*, had been banned from the London stage, and so Gay had little alternative but to find some other subject matter for his next ballad opera. Gay's flight into the world of classical myth allowed him the possibility of political allegory: one of the characters in this drama is an immoral and pandering minister, who cannot be anything other than a figure for Walpole, even though specific satire is for the most part lacking. Despite this more pointedly political reference, or perhaps because of the specificity it promised and then failed to deliver, contemporaries were disappointed that *Achilles* did not offer more in the way of commentary on the politics of the day. One review said that "the Satyr (said to contain secret history) [is] unintelligible."⁴⁷ A quasi-anonymous pamphlet, which was probably written by a certain Sir Thomas Burnet, was published during the run of the first stage production of *Achilles*; it had the aim of rebutting this charge and decoding the political allegory in the drama.⁴⁸ Even this work,

⁴⁵ *Polly*, Introduction.

⁴⁶ The text of *Achilles* is available in Fuller (1983: vol 2, 221–75, 389–92).

⁴⁷ The review of the *Daily Courant* of 16 February 1733 as quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1733 (vol 3, 78).

⁴⁸ *Achilles Dissected: Being a Compleat Key of the Political Characters in that new Ballad Opera, Written by the Late Mr. Gay* (Burnet, 1733), signed by Atex [sic] Burnet. To my knowledge the author has not been correctly identified previously; Noble (1988: 211, n 16) says that "Burnet's identity is unknown." One peculiarity of the pamphlet is that it mentions frequently and prominently, as an exemplary model for Gay's epic travesty, a certain parody of Pope's translation of the *Iliad*, a work called *Homerides: or, Homer's First Book Moderniz'd*. The pamphlet cites this as the work of George Duckett, "under the name of Sir Iliad Doggrell" (p 14), but in fact the pseudonym disguised a collaboration (Duckett and Burnet, 1716) between Duckett, who wrote the parody, and Sir Thomas Burnet, who wrote the preface and saw to its publication (not the noted geologist of that name, but the son and literary executor of Bishop Gilbert Burnet, the historian and advisor to William and Mary). The prominence given to *Homerides*, and the modesty by which the contribution of Burnet is elided from it in favor of the now deceased Duckett, suggest the identification of this

however, did not go much further than noting the similarity of Lycomedes and his minister to George II and Walpole.⁴⁹

As we shall see, political satire was only one of Gay's motives; he was also concerned with figuring out how his variety of comic opera might gain a new lease on life by tapping into classical myth, the same source that had sustained so much *opera seria*. Gay based his plot on Statius' *Achilleid*, but there are several important modifications. The most important of these is that he followed Capece in turning King Lycomedes into a lecherous fool whose pursuit of Achilles as the girl "Pyrrha" is the mainspring of the plot. It is possible that Gay himself came up with this idea independently, but it is not impossible that Gay might have heard of Capece's drama from the Earl of Burlington or seen it in his library; *Tetide in Sciro* was published in Rome in 1712, and in 1714 the Earl was in Italy on his Grand Tour. There are other similarities between the two operas beyond those that are clearly due to Statius as a common source, but they are not decisive.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to realize that Gay's *Achilles* stands, for all of its comedy, not so far from the mainstream of Italian opera; this is what adds piquancy to Gay's attempt to reappropriate classical myth away from Italian melodrama and for English comedy.

The programmatic prologue of Gay's *Achilles*, like the introductions to the *Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*, sets out its relationship to the tradition that it seeks to burlesque. There are important differences, however. Whereas the earlier works satirized *opera seria* in introductory scenes that were played out between actors, *Achilles* begins with a monologue in rhymed couplets spoken out of character by one of the actors. These verses situate *Achilles* within the context of poetic, rather than musico-theatrical, polemic: specifically, its chosen context is the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns:⁵¹

Burnet with the "Atex" Burnet of the Gay pamphlet. This is confirmed by another particularity of the pamphlet. The political allegory of Gay's *Achilles* is ostensibly expounded not by Burnet, but rather these politically dangerous sentiments are attributed by him to the insight of an even more anonymous "North-British-Seer, just arrived from the Isle of Sky" (p 13). Although Thomas Burnet himself was not Scottish, the Burnets were a well-known Scottish family and his father was born in Edinburgh. Hence the invention of a "Scots oracle" as the source of Thomas Burnet's own musings. The hostility to Pope displayed in the Gay pamphlet is also consistent with Burnet's other work. On the collaboration of Duckett and Burnet, see Smith (1914: xi–xlii, 95–100).

⁴⁹ See also below (n 71).

⁵⁰ For example, it is possible that Gay's Achilles' objection to his mother for his female garb, "In obeying you, I prove my self unworthy of you" (*Achilles*, Act 1, Scene 1), may derive from *Tetide in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 12, where Achilles says that Thetis has raised him to be incapable of such baseness as wearing women's clothes.

⁵¹ The form of the prologue to this drama is different from those of Gay's earlier ballad operas, because its polemical context is different, not because it was not composed by Gay. The author of *Achilles Dissected* (Burnet, 1733) first made the claim that it was written by Pope, and so the first printed version of *Achilles*, which appeared after *Achilles Dissected*, explicitly identifies the prologue as "Written by Mr. Gay." Ault (1949: 215–21, esp. 221) has argued that this "redundant and improbable legend" is evidence that the prologue had in fact been written by Pope; but this is perverse.

I wonder not our Author doubts Success,
 One in his Circumstance can do no less.
 The Dancer on the Rope that tries at all,
 In each unpracticed Caper risques a Fall:
 I own I dread his ticklish Situation,
 Critics detest Poetic Innovation.
 Had *Ic'rus* been content with solid Ground,
 The giddy vent'rous Youth had ne'er been drown'd.
 The *Pegasus* of old had Fire and Force,
 But your true Modern is a Carrier's Horse,
 Drawn by the foremost Bell, afraid to stray,
 Bard following Bard jogs on the beaten Way.
 Why is this Man so obstinate an Elf?
 Will he, alone, not imitate himself?⁵²

Here Gay defends the novelty of his current experiment, and implicitly contrasts himself with his imitators, who had flooded the London stage with ballad operas on low subjects after the success of the *Beggar's Opera*.⁵³ Gay's riddle is that the plodding imitator is not the classicist, but the modern; the "Fire and Force" of the ancients is only available to those who emulate the brash originality that the great ancient writers manifested in their own time. The identification of the "true Modern" with Gay's unoriginal emulators implies that Gay himself is a true ancient in his bold reinterpretation of classical myth. This is mildly paradoxical, since novelty was a virtue associated with modernism, whereas the admirers of the ancients were supposed to be bound by fidelity to their models. The paradox of the freshness of classical antiquity had long before been articulated by Francis Bacon as *antiquitas saeculi juvenus mundi*.⁵⁴ As the prologue continues, Gay develops this conceit further:

His scene now shews the Heroes of old Greece;
 But how? 'tis monstrous! In a Comic Piece.
 To Buskins, Plumes and Helmets what Pretence,
 If mighty chiefs must speak but common Sense?⁵⁵

The "monstrous" offense of the poet consists of putting the heroic figures of classical mythology into a comedy rather than the higher genres of epic and

The statement of Gay's authorship is neither redundant nor improbable, because it was designed explicitly to refute the previously published allegation that Pope had written the prologue. Thus Nokes (1995: 535f, with n 8).

⁵² *Achilles*, Prologue 1–14.

⁵³ This is how the correspondent of the *Daily Courant* (16 February 1733) who attended a performance interpreted it: "those dull Imitators he ridicules in the Prologue"; reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol 3, February 1733, p 78.

⁵⁴ "Ancient time was the youth of the world," *The Advancement of Learning*, 1.5.1 Wright (1900: 38). Gay's friend Swift had cited this "modern paradox" in his *Battle of the Books* of 1705 (Ross and Woolley, 1984: 5f).

⁵⁵ *Achilles*, Prologue 15–18.

tragedy.⁵⁶ Gay and his audience knew, of course, that there were perfectly good classical precedents for this sort of comedic burlesque, such as in Aristophanes and Plautus. More to the point, two Roman poets had put Achilles in the same comical situation as Gay: Statius and Ovid. It is on this basis that Gay can imply that he is a “true Ancient,” since his drama is both innovative and builds upon classical models. The remainder of the prologue brings us to Achilles:

Shall no bold Diction, no Poetic Rage,
Fome at our Mouths and thunder on the Stage?
No—’tis *Achilles*, as he came from *Chiron*,
Just taught to sing as well as wield cold Iron;
And whatsoever Criticks may suppose,
Our Author holds, that what He spoke was Prose.⁵⁷

“Achilles, as he came from Chiron,” is, in this context, a specific reference to the extensive description of Achilles’ upbringing with Chiron in the *Achilleid* (1.158–97, 2.96–167). Statius there highlights the instruction that Chiron gave him in hunting and music. The singing of Achilles, which Statius describes explicitly (1.184–94), suits Gay’s purpose in justifying an operatic treatment of the hero, as it was later to do for Metastasio.⁵⁸ These lines send a signal of the poetic affiliation of the *Achilles*: just as Ovid and Statius had burlesqued the heroic epic while writing within that tradition, so Gay will continue to mock heroic, classical, mythological opera while writing it himself.⁵⁹

In addition to the battle of the ancients and moderns, Gay alludes to another literary polemic. The final lines of the prologue refer to the controversy over the proper medium for drama in English: rhymed couplets, blank verse, or prose. Apart from the songs and this prologue, Gay’s ballad operas were in a distinctly unheroic style of prose, whereas the most prominent advocate of verse drama had been Dryden. It would be appropriate for Gay to target Dryden in this context, since he had been the English champion of a narrow, Virgilian classicism and scourge of the Ovidian and Statian tradition that Gay is appealing to here.⁶⁰

Gay’s prologue makes poor sense unless the reader realizes that the author is actually following ancient models in his “novel” comic representation of Achilles; otherwise the claims of poetic originality he makes for himself and for the ancients fail to cohere at all, even as a paradox. Gay required his audience to

⁵⁶ Note the repetition of the exclamation “monstrous!” from Signora Crochetta’s complaint in the introduction to *Polly*.

⁵⁷ *Achilles*, Prologue 19–24.

⁵⁸ On Metastasio, see Heller (1998: 563).

⁵⁹ The posthumously printed *Achilles* has an epigraph from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* referring to the Scyros story, on which see Noble (1988: 185).

⁶⁰ Noble (1988: 212, n 27) claims that the last two lines have to do with contemporary criticism of Pope’s Homer as “prosaic,” which seems impossibly obscure and irrelevant, even if one accepts the mistaken proposition that Pope himself wrote the prologue.

have a familiarity with Statius and Ovid in order to appreciate fully the spirit of his engagement with the heroic traditions of *opera seria* and of Homeric-Virgilian epic, but not everyone understood what he was doing. Burnet's pamphlet was motivated in part by a desire to explain Gay's classical sources to hostile critics.⁶¹ A negative review in the *Daily Courant* of 16 February 1733 illustrates how badly misunderstood Gay's poetic program could be:

Where is the *Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer*, the Life, the Vivacity of an amorous young Warrior? All lost in the whining, virtuous, yet debauch'd Modern.⁶²

To call Gay's Achilles a "Modern" – of all things – shows that the reviewer completely missed the point of the prologue. The reviewer's quotation from Horace's *Ars poetica* (121) to the effect that Achilles should always be angry and fierce has some justice to it. By contrast with other writers on the Scyros theme who get humor out of the contrast between Achilles' impetuous personality and his disguise as a maiden, Gay's Achilles is utterly demure and self-possessed, the better to contrast Lycomedes' debauchery. The reviewer's appeal to Horace, however, is nothing more than the old charge of veering from a narrow and simplistic classicism; having taken Statius as his model, Gay finds himself subject to the same sort of critique as that to which Dryden had subjected Statius. A writer in the *Grub Street Journal* did come to Gay's defense against his reviewer, picking up the Horatian tag:

There is no Necessity to draw him [Achilles] *impetuous, wrathful, inexorable, and severe*, unless he be plac'd in such a Situation, as where he demands Reparation to his Honour, for the Injuries and Affronts heaped upon him by AGAMEMNON; then

—*Honoratum si forte reponis Achillem,*

he should be

*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.*⁶³

This rebuttal does not quite hit the mark, since Gay's Achilles, the victim of an attempted rape, is in fact placed in a far more injurious situation than Homer's Achilles. A better rebuttal would have looked to Gay's prologue, which gave a

⁶¹ Burnet (1733). For Gay's other classical sources, see Noble (1988: 185–91), who however downplays somewhat the currency of the *Achilleid* and overstates the likelihood that Gay was influenced by an obscure and tiny fragment attributed to Bion (on which see below, p 193). An anonymous pamphlet on the life of Achilles was published to take advantage of the interest generated by Gay's drama (*The Life of Achilles*, 1732). At the beginning, it silently takes one small detail about Chiron from Statius, and at the end, one small detail about the death of Achilles from the cyclic tradition; but in between it is a dreary rehash of the *Iliad*. The author makes excuses for the irrelevance of all this to Gay's *Achilles*; but this is an indication of how unsympathetic to alternative portraits of Achilles was the environment in which Gay was working.

⁶² Quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1733, vol 3, p 78.

⁶³ From 22 February, 1733, as quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1733, vol 3, pp 84f.

clue to its classical antecedents. But Statius was no longer a name to conjure with; in the eighteenth century, the only effective answer to a critic quoting Horace was to quote Horace back at him.

The defense of Gay mounted by Thomas Burnet in his explanatory pamphlet was more cogent, largely because Burnet understood the classical tradition within which *Achilles* was situated. He begins by pointing out that “Mr. Gay has drawn the Drama of this Balladical Entertainment from Statius.”⁶⁴ Burnet even jokes that, if Gay had lived, he might have gone on to write a fourth and fifth act to encompass the tragic destiny of Achilles, and thus satisfy his critics who wanted a bolder hero. As Gay’s *Achilles* is in no way unfinished, this is surely a joke inspired by the incomplete state of Statius’ *Achilleid*, and the uncertainty over what form it might have taken as a finished work.⁶⁵ Toward the end of the pamphlet, he returns to the question of precedent:

But I find the general Outcry against Mr. GAY, in this Performance, is his making so *great* a Hero, as ACHILLES *of old*, so *little*, as to become a *modern one*, and to make him *talk in Prose*. Is not this, says Mr. *Den-nis*, burlesquing HOMER, and turning the ILIAD into Ridicule? This Madam, in some measure may be granted; but then it must, on the other hand, be allowed, that Mr. GAY is not the *first* Offender.⁶⁶

Burnet cites his own parody of Pope’s translation of the *Iliad* as a predecessor in this tradition, and concludes:

Our Friend, Mr. GAY has now farther diverted the Publick, by *Metamorphosing* ACHILLES from a *Merry-Andrew*⁶⁷ into a *Ballad-Singer*; so that we may now say with HORACE:

Ridiculum acri fortius, &c.⁶⁸

So Burnet likewise has recourse to Horace in order to answer Horace, but it is significant that he quotes from the *Satires*, rather than the *Ars poetica*: “ridicule often settles important matters more decisively and more accurately than vehemence.” Even more consequential than this invocation of satire as a model is the word “Metamorphosing,” which inevitably brings Ovid to mind. It is only by understanding of the roots of Gay’s *Achilles* in Ovid and in Statius’ Ovidian *Achilleid* that one can appreciate the paradoxically ancient and yet novel spirit of Gay’s treatment of classical myth for the musical stage.

⁶⁴ Burnet (1733: 1).

⁶⁵ Burnet (1733: 19f). That this is meant in jest is confirmed by a more serious consideration of the scope of Gay’s *Achilles* earlier in the pamphlet: “He [Achilles] takes his leave of DEIDAMIA, and resolves to encounter HECTOR at the Siege of *Troy*. That part of the History may perhaps be the subject of another OPERA: But here ends Mr. *Gay*.” (p 4).

⁶⁶ Burnet (1733: 14); the pamphlet is presented as a letter addressed to a Lady P——.

⁶⁷ A buffoon, as in the parody of Duckett and Burnet.

⁶⁸ Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.14f: *ridiculum acri fortius | et melius magnas plerumque secat res*. A typographical error in the pamphlet gives *furtius* for *fortius*.

Despite its avowed novelty, *Achilles* does have points in common with Gay's earlier work. In *Polly*, the heroine spends much of the play dressed as a man in order to avoid harassment, and finds herself running from the unwanted attentions of Jenny Diver.⁶⁹ In an inverse situation, the hero of *Achilles*, dressed as a girl to avoid the Trojan War, spends most of the drama trying to flee from the attentions of Lycomedes. In both cases, the cross-dressing disguise serves to introduce a theme of predatory lust that comically transgresses sexual norms. A female homoerotic charge is present in the kiss that Jenny gives to the heroine in *Polly* and is likewise hinted at in Achilles' response to Deidamia's fears that her sisters are suspicious of the looks "she" has been giving her: "May not one Woman look kindly upon another without Scandal?"⁷⁰ A male homoerotic element is implicit throughout *Achilles*, first when Lycomedes attempts to rape Achilles in his disguise as a girl; then when Periphas is set up as his intended husband; and finally when Ajax fights Periphas in a duel over the affections of "Pyrrha."⁷¹ Masquerade opens the possibility of other kinds of sexual transgressions. Ulysses and Diomedes present themselves as tradesmen plying their wares, and in this lower-class disguise, they flirt outrageously with the noble sisters of Deidamia.⁷²

The most striking scene in Gay's drama is the one in which Lycomedes finally corners the disguised Achilles (Act 2, Scene 4). Achilles behaves just as a proper young lady should: he is firm but respectful in his refusal of the king's advances. In Capece's drama the innocent and guileless Deidamia was a foil for the unmastered passions of the other characters, but for Gay it is Pyrrha, the female guise of Achilles, who provides this contrast. This provides the humor, not appreciated by the *Daily Courant's* reviewer, of seeing Achilles not, as Horace had insisted, angry, implacable and fierce, but rather as a fundamentally modest if somewhat fiery maiden faced with the sexual violence of a

69 Thus Winton (1993: 158 with n 32).

70 *Polly*, Act 2, Scene 6; *Achilles*, Act 2, Scene 10 (Fuller, 1983: 112, 255). The nurse in Bentivoglio's *Achille in Scyro* made such insinuations about the relationship between Deidamia and "Pyrrha," and according to Feeney (2004: 94f) on *Ach.* 1.583–91, similar suspicions are in the mind of Statius' Deidamia. For Scyros conceived of as a island of separatist Lesbians, see below (p 53).

71 Burnet (1733: 13) claims that the scene was based on the recent duel between Lord Hervey and William Pulteney, which was prompted by, among other things, insinuations regarding the homosexual relationship of the former with Stephen Fox; see Noble (1988: 215, n 44) and Dugaw (2001: 232–6).

72 Gay died before *Achilles* could be staged, and his friends ensured that the production went ahead for the benefit of his sisters. Swift wrote to Pope to complain that he was ruining their late friend's "reputation" in allowing *Achilles* onto the stage (Williams, 1972: vol 4, 133), on which see Nokes (1995: 537). It may be that Swift was worried about the drama's explicit sexual comedy, or that he was concerned because, as Nokes (1995: 530f) notes, Gay himself had begun his life in a very low station, as an apprentice in a silk shop, very much like the saucy "tradesmen" Ulysses and Diomedes. On the relationship between Gay's own sexuality and the homoerotic humor of the *Achilles*, contrast the strongly opposing views of Nokes (1995: 41–50, esp. 48) and Dugaw (2001: 303f, n 25).

more powerful male, and handling it just as any heroine of Richardson's might do.⁷³ Gay could have gotten even more physical humor out of the scene if he had made Achilles' reaction less temperate; but he would have compromised the stark moral contrast between the licentious man of power and his innocent victim. Furthermore, by making Achilles rather than Deidamia the victim Gay was able to put rape, an element originally central to the myth, but suppressed by all the other librettists, back into the story, albeit in a comic guise. Both Ovid in his *Ars amatoria* (l.699f) and Statius (l.642f) had described how Achilles had raped Deidamia while pretending to be her female companion. In Gay's version, the victim is well able to defend "herself," and so the rape ends comically; but by appropriating the "female" narrative of rape and resistance and making a man the potential victim, Gay highlights the fact that it is power, rather than gender per se, that creates victims of sexual violence.⁷⁴

The Italian operas on the subject of Achilles on Scyros can be divided between those before Gay that implicitly view gender as a casual masquerade and those that come after, which imply that innate sex is an ineluctable force. Gay, standing between and somewhat outside these two traditions, confronts the question explicitly. One of the epigraphs to the posthumously printed edition of the drama is a proverb from Horace: "you may shove nature out with a pitchfork, but it rushes right back in."⁷⁵ The other epigraph is a mention of the Scyros episode from the narrative of the judgment of Achilles' arms in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which highlights the mock-epic, Ovidian tradition in which both Statius and Gay were writing.⁷⁶ It is not known whether Gay had chosen these epigraphs prior to his death, but they are extremely apposite. Horace's sentiment is reiterated at the very end of the drama, as Ulysses pronounces:

We may for a while put on a feign'd Character, but Nature is so often unguarded that it will shew itself.—'Tis to the Armour we owe *Achilles*.⁷⁷

This seems a straightforward moral, echoing the Horatian epigraph in its insistence on the strength of the force of nature. But as Noble (1988: 195) has pointed out, it is interesting that Ulysses should say that it was "to the Armour we owe Achilles." This addendum undercuts the moral by implying that it was a different sort of disguise, the armor that he liked so much, that transformed

73 One thinks in particular of *Pamela*, which appeared less than a decade after Gay's *Achilles*, and the attempted rape of the heroine by the cross-dressed Mr B, which ends as a similar debacle for the would-be rapist.

74 For a compelling quasi-feminist reading of this aspect of *Achilles*, see Noble (1988: 207f).

75 *naturam expellas furcâ licet, usque recurret*, Hor. *Epist.* 1.10.24, where the corrected text is: *naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret*.

76 *deceperat omnes | (In quibus Ajacem) sumptae fallacia vestis*, "the deception of the clothing he put on had fooled everyone, including Ajax." This is also the precise authority for Gay's introduction of a doltish Ajax to the Scyros episode.

77 *Achilles*, Act 3, Scene 12 (Fuller, 1983: 274).

Achilles into a man. Is Achilles' masculinity due to his irrepressible nature or is his manliness another costume? As soon as we may have begun to doubt the seriousness of the moral, it is firmly reiterated in song:

Single. Nature breaks forth at the Moment unguarded;
Chorus. Through all Disguise she herself must betray.
Single. Heav'n with Success hath our Labours rewarded;
Chorus. Let's with *Achilles* our Genius obey.⁷⁸

Here the reemergence of Achilles' true nature as a man is likened to the end of the play, when each actor takes off a costume and resumes his or her true identity or "Genius." The girlhood of Achilles is framed as an incident isolated and "unnatural" in the context of the hero's biography, just as the plot of a play is detached from ordinary life. Once again, however, Ulysses intervenes to undermine this tidy moral:

Thus when the Cat had once all Woman's Graces;
 Courtship, Marriage won her Embraces:
 Forth leapt a Mouse; she, forgetting Enjoyment,
 Quits her fond Spouse for her former Employment.⁷⁹

A number of modern readers have commented on the incongruity of this little nursery-rhyme image with an ostensibly serious lesson, and it is illustrative to quote a similar objection from the hostile reviewer in the *Daily Courant*:⁸⁰

As the Simile of the Cat was introduced in the Beginning of the Opera, it is likewise made to conclude it. The Dignity of *Achilles*, when leaving the Toys of Love at the Sight of the Armour, is *pompously describ'd* by the Puss's leaving her *Caterwauling* at the sight of a *Mouse*.

In the earlier passage to which the reviewer refers, a cat toying with a mouse illustrates the behavior of coquette; it is not a very masculine image. For Ulysses to compare the emergence of Achilles' true, masculine nature with the cat's urge to chase mice sounds a peculiarly unheroic note.⁸¹ The chorus has the last word in the drama with a final refrain of "Nature breaks forth . . ." but the play ends on a carefully balanced note of ambivalence. It seems as if the chorus wishes to insist that the "real" Achilles has finally emerged and thus goes on to the Trojan War with a line drawn under the Scyros episode; but Ulysses insists on trivializing Achilles' transformation. Compare the ending of Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro*, where, despite the incidental comedy, there is no doubt about the finality of Achilles' emergence as a man and a hero. Gay's title is relevant: this is *Achilles*, plain and unqualified, not *Achilles in Scyros*. When Gay's drama

78 *Achilles*, Act 3, Scene 12 (Fuller, 1983: 274).

79 *Achilles*, Act 3, Scene 12 (Fuller, 1983: 275).

80 Cited above (n 62); for modern readers, cf. Noble (1988: 194), Nokes (1995: 531), Dugaw (2001: 241).

81 Air 9 in Act 1, Scene 5 (Fuller, 1983: 233).

was revived and adapted by Arne in 1773, he changed the title to *Achilles in Petticoats*, which may have been more helpful to theatergoers, but was less true to the spirit of Gay's heroic revisionism.

Vienna, 1736

As the year 1735 gave way to the next, Vienna was preparing to celebrate the marriage of the Archduchess Maria Theresa, eldest daughter and heiress apparent of the reigning emperor, Charles VI. Piero Metastasio, the official poet of the Habsburg court, was required to write the libretto for an opera to celebrate the occasion, and he produced his own *Achille in Sciro*.⁸² If we set aside the political context for a moment, the drama can be viewed as a part of the tradition of dramas on the same theme described thus far. In a recent article, Heller (1998) has made the important point that Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro* may be read as a reaction to *La finta pazza* and also to Bentivoglio's homonymous drama: that is, as a conscious attempt to recast the myth in a more serious and ennobling form. Thus did Metastasio's work continue the reforms of his predecessor as official poet to the Habsburg court, Apostolo Zeno, reforms that sought to redeem the genre from the charges of unseriousness and immorality that attended it from the moment it emerged as a popular genre. In particular, Heller cites Metastasio's contemporary Scipione Maffei, who praises him for "banishing the effeminacies of the past century."⁸³ The surprising thing that Heller discovers in this polemic is that the alleged "effeminacy" of seventeenth-century opera derives not from its use of male sopranos, but from the prominence it gave to female singers. For us, the shocking thing about early opera is its use of castrati; for contemporaries, it was the appearance of women on stage, in male roles as well as female.⁸⁴ A male soprano was further from the imagined world of prostitution and vice, and closer to the Greek tragic ideal where men played the female roles, rather than vice versa. *La finta pazza*, on Heller's reading, was thought by moralists to be bad not so much because Achilles appeared in drag, but because it made Deidamia rather than Achilles the focus of the drama, and so gave the world the first great prima donna role. By returning the focus of *Achille in Sciro* to Achilles' emergence as a hero at the hands of Ulysses, Metastasio rescued the story from effeminacy. For us the irony is, of course, that this redemption of masculinity occurs at the hands of a castrato.⁸⁵

⁸² The libretto is available in Brunelli (1953: vol 1, pp 751–803).

⁸³ Heller (1998: 571).

⁸⁴ On the lack of respectability of female opera singers, see Rosselli (1992: 56–78).

⁸⁵ Heller (1998: 580, n 25) studied the casting of twenty-two various productions of the opera and found Achilles divided between twelve female sopranos and ten male. In a letter written just after the premiere of his *Achille in Sciro*, Metastasio stressed that no production could do it justice without the talents of Felice Salimbeni, the castrato who inaugurated the role of Achilles (Brunelli,

In Metastasio's treatment, the unmasking of Achilles is the climax of the action at the end of the second act. Ulysses plays his usual trick of placing weapons among his girlish gifts, but the emphasis in this version is less on Ulysses' trick than on Achilles' reaction to the sound of fighting heard nearby. Achilles grabs weapons from the pile of gifts Ulysses has brought; his transformation is not due to an incidental choice, but to his innate and normatively masculine reaction to danger:⁸⁶

E questa cetra
 Dunque è l'arme d'Achille? Ah! no; la sorte
 Altre n'offre, e più degne. A terra, a terra,
 Vile stromento! (*getta la cetra e va all'armi, portate còdoni di Ulisse*)
 All'onorato incarco
 Dello scudo pesante
 Torni il braccio avvilito: (*imbraccia lo scudo*) in questa mano
 Lampeggi il ferro. (*impugna la spada*) Ah! ricomincio adesso
 A ravvisar me stesso. Ah, fossi a fronte
 A mille squadre e mille!⁸⁷

And so is this lyre the weapon of Achilles? Ah! no; fortune offers others, and more worthy. To the ground with you, worthless instrument! (*he throws away the lyre and goes toward the weapons that were brought with the gifts of Ulysses*) My dishonored arm takes up again the noble burden of a heavy shield (*he puts the shield on his arm*); the iron gleams in my hand (*he grasps the spear*) Ah! I am beginning now to recognize myself again. Ah, I wish that I were confronting thousands and thousands of troops!

Compare Strozzi's Achilles, who is unmasked in a moment of careless inattention, with Metastasio's Achilles, whose "true" gender spontaneously asserts itself along with his heroic character in the face of danger. Strozzi's Achilles explains to Deidamia that he knows perfectly well who he is, regardless of what he happens to be wearing; Metastasio's only begins to recognize that true self again when he puts on a shield and holds a weapon.⁸⁸ The ideology of gender essentialism is not merely incidental to Metastasio's drama; it is the mainspring of the plot. In his version, most of the dramatic tension in the first two acts is

1953: vol 3, p 136, letter 105). In Naples and elsewhere, the simple substitution of a female singer could undercut the message of the essentialism of Achilles' masculinity; thus Achilles provided yet another bravura role for the prima donnas of the day.

86 Heller (1998: 565–7) notes that here Achilles rejects music as an occupation unworthy of a man; the paradox is that in the opera he continues to sing, even after his character has rejected music as a part of his feminized existence.

87 *Achille in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 8 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, pp 783f).

88 Achilles earlier says, "Ma lo so ch'io sono Achille, | E mi sento Achille in sen." (But I know that I am Achilles, and in my heart I feel that I am Achilles), *Achille in Sciro*, Act 1, Scene 3 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 759). But the emphasis there is on the uncontrollable tension between the inner, male spirit and the female gender role, rather than on the joys of masquerade.

created by the constant possibility that Achilles' barely concealed masculinity will burst forth.⁸⁹

The influence of *La finta pazza* on Metastasio's drama is most evident in its third act, where Achilles vacillates slightly between the call of glory on the one hand and the call of love on the other. Deidamia grows angry with Achilles for his intention to leave her, and faints: this is a pale reflection of Strozzi's raving Deidamia with her illegitimate child.⁹⁰ In a broader sense, however, Metastasio is responding to the entire tradition that preceded him, which had treated the story of Achilles on Scyros as a pretext for masquerade. In this, Metastasio is responding to his fellow Arcadian Capece as much as to Strozzi.⁹¹ One indication, apart from his title, that Metastasio was influenced by other predecessors is that he provides a male character, Teagenes, who, like Bentivoglio's Polycastes or Capece's Lycomedes, finds himself attracted to the fiery spirit of the disguised Achilles.⁹² As the intended spouse of Deidamia, Teagenes also plays the role of Achilles' rival, like Strozzi's Diomedes or Capece's Antiope/Philartes. There is a crucial difference, however, in that Teagenes contributes some light humor but never becomes entirely ridiculous, a slave to his passions; in fact, in the final scenes he redeems himself fully. In Act 3, Scene 7, he delivers an eloquent appeal to Lycomedes to forgive Achilles and bless a marriage between Achilles and Deidamia. In response, Lycomedes graciously consents. The king is a dignified figure throughout the drama, in pointed contrast to Capece's Lycomedes, and he cannot be blamed for failing to see through Achilles' disguise, as he had encountered the disguised Achilles only in one earlier scene (Act 2, Scene 4). The two most significant changes that Metastasio made to the tradition he inherited were therefore to the characters of Achilles and Lycomedes. He refocused the drama on Achilles and his emergence as a hero. He made Achilles a more serious figure, caught between his obligation to his mother and his love for Deidamia on the one hand and the virile and warlike impulses of his noble blood on the other. Lycomedes also was improved to become a good and dignified ruler, who in the end resolves Achilles' apparent conflict between love and glory. It is worth noting that, in departing so markedly from his immediate predecessors, Metastasio has returned to Statius as the model for his much simplified plot.

89 Nearchus, Achilles' chaperon, anticipates the climax of the libretto near its beginning: "se una tromba ascolta, | se rimira un guerrier, s'agita, avvampa, | sdegna l'abito imbelles" (if he hears a trumpet, if he beholds a soldier, he grows restless, he is inflamed, he scorns his unwarlike dress), *Achille in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 4 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 760).

90 *Achille in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 11, and Act 3, Scene 3; Teagenes in Act 2, Scene 12 speaks of Deidamia's delirium.

91 Mellace (1995: 66) notes that the fourteen-year-old Metastasio was in Rome at the time of the performance there of *Tetide in Sciro*.

92 Act 1, Scene 1 and Act 1, Scene 15 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, pp 769–71). Strohm (1997: 110) suggests that this shows the influence of Capece.

The first scene of the opera opens in front of a temple of Bacchus, amid a chorus of his worshipers, and the arrival of Ulysses' ship interrupts their rite. This recalls one of the most prominent episodes of the *Achilleid*, a nighttime Bacchic rite on Scyros, described at length by Statius (1.593–660). The plot then proceeds to the discovery of Achilles in a fairly linear fashion, without the many digressions and self-contained sub-plots that we have come to expect, and it hews quite closely to the central part of Statius' narrative (1.689–920). In particular, Ulysses' speech in Act 2, Scene 7 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 780), in which he tries to provoke a reaction in "Pyrrha" by describing in stirring detail the assembly of ships at Aulis and the shame of those left behind, is a close adaptation – nearly a translation, in fact – of a speech of Ulysses' in the same context in the *Achilleid* (1.785–802). Another verbal echo may be found at the end of Act 1, when Teagenes describes the beauty of Achilles in terms that seem to come from Statius' description of Deidamia (1.299f). In a number of smaller things there are echoes of the *Achilleid*; for example, Statius describes Achilles catching a glimpse of himself in the highly polished armor Ulysses brings as a gift, and Metastasio has Ulysses offer the shield to Achilles as a mirror.⁹³ Metastasio could scarcely have adhered more closely to Statius' narrative of events, given the requirements of his genre, such as the necessity of providing enough characters to alternate the exit arias at the end of each scene. So it is especially curious that Metastasio omits to mention Statius as his source.

Metastasio gives an account of his sources at the end of the *argomento* prefaced to the published libretto of his *Achille in Sciro*:

Incontrasi questo fatto presso che in tutti gli antichi e moderni poeti; ma, essendo essi tanto discordi fra loro nelle circostanze, noi, senz'attenerci più all'uno che all'altro, abbiam tolto da ciascheduno ciò che meglio alla condotta della nostra favola è convenuto.

This deed [the story of Achilles on Scyros] is found in nearly all the ancient and modern poets; but, since these give such differing accounts, I have taken from each one that which best suited my story, without adhering to one rather than another.

This immediately recalls the suppression of Statius' name in the claim that it "is so well known a tale" (*è favola così nota*) from Capece's *argomento*; but there is even more evasion going on here. The ridiculous contention that the Scyros story is found in "almost all" modern poets is a slightly embarrassed acknowledgment that Metastasio had been preceded by a number of other poets in bringing this story to the operatic stage. More strange is the contention that the Scyros story may be found in "almost all" ancient poets. In fact, it is found in the *Achilleid*, in a very condensed form in a few lines of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*,

⁹³ Stat. *Ach.* 1.864–6 and *Achille in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 8 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 785).

in a few tiny scraps of fragmentary Greek literature, and in brief synopses in mythological handbooks.⁹⁴

The awkwardness of Metastasio's claim did not escape the author of a parody of *Achille in Sciro*.⁹⁵ This detailed travesty makes fun of Metastasio's *argomento* as well as his drama:

Incontrasi questo fatto presso tutti li odierni Poeti: Ma essendo questi pieni di sconcordanze fra di loro noi senza servirci di nessuno abbiamo fatto secondo il corpo nostro si è trovato disposto.

This fact [the story of Achilles on Scyros] is encountered in nearly all the present-day poets; but, since they are full of discrepancies among themselves, I have not used any of them at all, but have acted according to the way my body happened to be inclined.

Apart from the obvious parody of Metastasio's pretentious hand-waving, this makes a serious point. This Neapolitan satire is an intensely derivative work, corresponding almost scene for scene with Metastasio's libretto. The parodist's comic suppression of Metastasio as a model is as insincere as Metastasio's suppression of Statius.

Metastasio's reluctance to specify his most important ancient source is obscured still further by a note on his manuscript that identifies the mythographer Hyginus as a source.⁹⁶ Hyginus' summary of the Scyros myth is extremely brief and lacking in detail, but it does have one piece of information absent from the *Achilleid*: the name that Achilles took as a girl. Metastasio follows Hyginus in calling him "Pyrrha," rather than making up a name as Strozzi and Capece had done. The point of mentioning Hyginus was presumably to indicate that his knowledge of Achilles' name among the women did not depend merely on Bentivoglio's *Achille in Sciro*.⁹⁷ It is interesting that Metastasio only chose to identify the ancient source of the single detail that he did not derive from Statius. This again recalls Capece's *argomento*, which ostentatiously advertises Plutarch as the source for a single detail while remaining silent on the many details derived from the *Achilleid*. It seems that Statius' reputation in Arcadia was such that his name was best left unspoken. Compare the argument of Metastasio's first libretto, *Didone abbandonata*, where he identifies Virgil as a source –

94 On other versions of the Scyros story, see below (p 193). Mellace (1995: 65, n 32) suggests some other potential ancient sources for Metastasio, but it is Statius whom Metastasio has consulted intensively.

95 It is signed by a G. B. G., who is identified in some library catalogues as Giovanni Battista Guidi. It has only a jocular date and place of publication; but it is written in the Neapolitan dialect, and Sartori (1990–4: no. 152) dates it to the late eighteenth century. I have not seen Ivaldi (1998), apparently a eighteenth- or nineteenth-century parody in the Genoese dialect.

96 Hyg. *Fab.* 96: thus Brunelli (1953: vol 1, p 1501n).

97 In addition to Metastasio and Bentivoglio, Gay also used the name "Pyrrha." On Statius' silence regarding the name of Achilles, see below (p 129).

surely unnecessary, but highly authoritative – and the less obvious source of Ovid's *Fasti*. At least Metastasio and his predecessors consulted Statius; as we shall see, Metastasio's successor, Paolo Rolli, probably did not even do that.

We have seen that the two most important changes Metastasio made in his version of the story were in his depiction of the characters of Lycomedes and Achilles; both of these aspects of *Achille in Sciro* had political resonance, so we must turn now to the circumstances of its composition and its political context. The emergence of King Lycomedes for the first time as a dignified and reserved figure is not unrelated to the fact that this drama was commissioned by a king. Note that whereas Statius' elderly Lycomedes is embarrassed at the paltry force he can muster, Metastasio's king boasts of the size of his contribution to the Trojan expedition.⁹⁸ Metastasio's emphasis on the ineluctable force of Achilles' courage, nobility, and manliness is a reflection of the ideology of power that *Achille in Sciro* embodied. John Gay had extracted a dissident political message from the story of Achilles on Scyros; Metastasio extracted nearly the opposite.

The occasion of Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro* was the marriage of Maria Theresa to the man she loved, Duke Francis Stephen of Lorraine. The joy of that event was tempered by apprehension; the emperor had long resisted the match, despite the deep love of his daughter for Francis and the fondness which Charles himself felt for his future son-in-law, for it would bring nothing of immediate benefit to the house of Austria. Habsburgs did not, as a rule, marry for love, and the house had prospered much as a result of shrewd match-making. Other, more pragmatic candidates had been mooted for the hand of Maria Theresa: Don Carlos before he took Naples away from Austria by force, or the young son of the Elector of Bavaria, Charles Albert (later Emperor Charles VII), or even, before his betrothal in 1732, the future Frederick the Great of Prussia.⁹⁹ By contrast, Francis did not even bring his own Duchy of Lorraine to the Habsburgs. France had long controlled the destiny of Lorraine, even though technically it was part of the *Reich*, and the French had occupied it during the War of the Polish Succession (1733–5). As part of the peace terms, Lorraine was to be ceded to the losing candidate for the Polish crown, upon whose death it would finally be absorbed by France. In compensation for renouncing forever his and his family's claim to Lorraine, Duke Francis was to be given the Grand Duchy of Tuscany upon the death of the last of the Medici, who had no heir. The task of persuading Francis to agree to this bitter deal was up to Charles, and the secretary of his cabinet made the quid pro quo explicit: give up Lorraine in exchange for the hand of the archduchess.¹⁰⁰

The benefit this arrangement brought to Austria was that France finally

⁹⁸ Compare Stat. *Ach.* 1.775–9 with *Achille in Sciro*, Act 2, Scene 3 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 774).

⁹⁹ For Don Carlos and Charles Albert's son, see Pick (1966: 34f); for Frederick of Prussia, see Leitch (1995: 14).

¹⁰⁰ Pick (1966: 37f).

recognized Charles' plan for the Habsburg succession after his death, the last of the major European powers to do so. This resolution, called the Pragmatic Sanction, purported to guarantee the indivisibility of the scattered Austrian possessions and the succession of Charles' daughters by primogeniture in default of male heirs. Despite the Pragmatic Sanction, the need for a male child was still pressing, since a woman would not be eligible for election as emperor of the *Reich*; and uninterrupted possession of that office had for centuries been one of the chief sources of Austria's prestige.¹⁰¹ Even Prince Eugene of Savoy, Charles' great general, who earlier had been urging strongly a defensive Bavarian marriage for Maria Theresa, now, at the end of his life, conceded that even a less advantageous marriage for her could no longer be postponed.¹⁰² Charles' wife was forty years old and unlikely to bear him another child, so unless she were to die and he remarry, the best hope of a male heir appearing before the death of the present emperor was to marry off his daughters quickly.¹⁰³ Thus, in apprehension about the succession and in the hope of a male child, Charles finally agreed to expedite the wedding of Maria Theresa to the man she had loved for many years.

Once the emperor's decision was taken, events moved very rapidly. The royal engagement was announced in mid-December 1735, and it was decided that the wedding would be held before the following Lent should intervene: this pushed the date up to 12 February, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, 1736.¹⁰⁴ The brevity of the engagement put an enormous strain on the wedding preparations, a strain which was felt acutely by Metastasio. In several letters written around that time, the poet, who was given to neurasthenia in any case, describes the trauma that the feverish activity of the previous weeks had caused him and attests that he managed to write a libretto in the space of just eighteen and a half days rather than the three months he usually required.¹⁰⁵ The unusual circumstances of the composition of *Achille in Sciro* remained vivid in

101 Browning (1994: 18f).

102 Pick (1966: 39).

103 A son born to Charles himself would take precedence over a son of Maria Theresa, but if Francis Stephen or a son of his had already been elected King of the Romans and was therefore the presumed heir to the imperial throne, then the election of Charles' own son as emperor would be problematic. His hope of eventually fathering a son of his own would explain his long dithering over Maria Theresa's marriage and his subsequent failure to promote Francis Stephen actively as his successor: Pick (1966: 35, 39) and Browning (1994: 19).

104 Zedinger (1994: 117); Hennings (1961: 176f).

105 In one letter to his brother dated 7 January 1736 (Brunelli, 1953: vol. 3, p 133, letter 102), Metastasio reports that he is on the point of finishing it, and if Metastasio's chronology is to be believed, he did not begin work until eighteen days prior to that, or 19 December, which would correspond to the announcement of the engagement in mid-December. It is therefore unnecessary to suppose, as an early anonymous biography of Metastasio did (cited by Brunelli, 1953: vol. 3, p 1197n), that the poet's predicament might have been the result of an oversight on the part of the emperor in neglecting to engage his services in good time; this suggestion has been repeated in a modern biography of Metastasio (Astaldi, 1979: 203). The confusion has arisen from a failure to appreciate

the poet's memory for the remainder of his life. When in 1772 the English musicologist and traveller Charles Burney paid a visit to the septuagenarian poet in Vienna and asked him for examples of his manner of working, Metastasio recalled the frantic scenes during the composition of *Achille in Sciro* thirty-six years earlier. The poet recalled how he had handed over each scene of the completed libretto as soon as it was finished to the composer, Antonio Caldara, who in turn handed the music to the cast for memorization as soon as each scene was completed. The moral the poet drew from this anecdote, as Burney recorded it, was that "necessity frequently augmented our powers, and forced us to perform, not only what we thought ourselves incapable of, but in a much more expeditious, and often in a better manner, than the operations of our choice and leisure."¹⁰⁶ In his letters of that time Metastasio reports that, despite his reservations about the "abortion" he had produced, the opera was acclaimed by his imperial patrons as a success. He modestly attributed this to the indulgence granted him on account of the haste of its composition and to the brilliance of the castrato who sang the title role.¹⁰⁷ Such protestations aside, we can appreciate the magnificent tact with which his libretto articulated the anxieties of the imperial occasion. As we shall see, it was this tact that his patrons appreciated and rewarded so highly.

Achille in Sciro concludes with a so-called *licenza*, where the singers directly address and honor the noble audience. This is where Metastasio explicitly connects the marriage of Achilles and Deidamia, blessed by Lycomedes, with the wedding of Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa, blessed by Charles VI. In the finale of the opera as it was performed on the day after the wedding in the theater of the royal court, there descend from above the figures of Love, Glory, and Time, who declare their devotion to the royal Austrian couple.¹⁰⁸ Glory notes with surprise the friendly attendance of the other two, ordinarily her rivals. Love and Time declare their harmony with Glory and all profess their combined devotion to Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa, united by Love, destined for Glory, and unenvied by Time.

Love the couple certainly had; Time and Glory were, to put it bluntly, in potentially short supply. With respect to each of these three themes, Metastasio's libretto went beyond the obvious allegory to articulate anxieties that could not be spoken of out loud: Love relates to Maria Theresa's stubbornness in opposing a more pragmatic choice of husband, Time to the urgency of supplying a male Habsburg heir, and Glory to the emptiness of Francis Stephen's

just how rushed were the wedding preparations on this occasion. For a discussion of the letters of Metastasio that describe the composition of *Achille in Sciro*, see Mellace (1995: 56–8).

¹⁰⁶ Scholes (1959: vol 2, 103: 5 September 1772).

¹⁰⁷ Brunelli (1953: vol 3, pp 134–6, letters 104 and 105). Mellace (1995: 57f) rightly puts this modesty in the context of the diffidence the poet typically expressed about his own accomplishments.

¹⁰⁸ On such personifications, see Felice (1983: 74f).

title and his lack of experience as a leader. In each case Metastasio managed to make a discreet comment by alluding to particular features of the Achilles myth, or by adding novel features to it. With respect to *Love*, one of the subplots that Metastasio adds makes Deidamia the intended object of a dynastic marriage that her father is trying to arrange with Teagenes, who is a nobleman of Calchis. Deidamia's resistance to this arrangement and her loyalty to Achilles cannot but remind one of the long years that Maria Theresa resisted the various politically advantageous matches that had been mooted for her by her father and his advisors, and of her stubborn insistence on the man of her choice. Maria Theresa and Francis Stephen had not had a secretive relationship, of course, but like Achilles and Deidamia, their love had resulted from growing up together for a while in the royal court of the girl's father.

The next delicate point to which Metastasio makes oblique reference is the question of Time. The haste of the preparations for the wedding will have reminded everyone of the urgency of this match producing a male child. In the myth and in Strozzi's version, Achilles and Deidamia produce a son, Pyrrhus, but Metastasio eliminates any hint of premarital sex from his story. Instead, Teagenes, the defeated rival, recommends Achilles to Lycomedes by emphasizing the prospect of future grandchildren of heroic stock likely to result from a marriage between the hero and Deidamia.¹⁰⁹ There is another more subtle way in which the matter of an heir implies a significant affinity between Lycomedes and Charles VI. The current generation of Habsburgs had failed miserably at fathering viable male offspring. Charles' elder brother Joseph I, his predecessor as emperor, had been survived by two daughters only, and Charles himself had a son who died in infancy, a daughter who died at the age of five, and two surviving daughters. In the *Achilleid*, Thetis chooses Scyros as her son's hiding place because Lycomedes is an old man who has nothing but daughters, and so she supposes it to be a safe shelter from the gathering clouds of war. Staius gets humor out of the desire of the king of Scyros to marry off his daughters in order to try again for males in the next generation. Lycomedes says to the visiting Ulysses, "If only I had offspring suitable for me to send to the war! You can see for yourselves the state of my strength now and these darling daughters of mine. When will this crowd give some young grandsons to me?"¹¹⁰ Metastasio is much more discreet. He says little about the domestic situation at Scyros, and we hear nothing about any siblings of Deidamia. There is nothing in *his* text that might make its royal figure even slightly ridiculous. Nevertheless, the parallel between the problem of excess daughters faced by Charles VI and by Staius' Lycomedes is unmistakable to anyone who knows the latter. By leaving the comparison implicit,

109 Act 3, Scene 7 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 799).

110 *saltem si suboles, aptum quam mittere bello – | nunc ipsi viresque meas et cara videtis | pignora: quando novos dabit haec mihi turba nepotes?* (Stat. *Ach.* 1.780–2).

Metastasio the courtier is able to frame his chosen myth as wonderfully appropriate to its occasion, while keeping his own work free from any hint of indiscretion.

In addition to Maria Theresa's abundance of Love and the emperor's lack of Time, the libretto also has an important point to make about the bridegroom and his expectations of Glory. The opera was very well received by Metastasio's imperial patrons, as we learn from his letters and from the rumors that Charles had even offered to ennoble him in thanks for this libretto.¹¹¹ Even more striking than this, however, was the gratitude of the bridegroom. One of the poet's letters records that the Duke of Lorraine had shown his approval by giving the poet a valuable ring. Metastasio notes that this was an unprecedented gift, and that none of his predecessors had been honored in this way in similar situations. This gesture stands out as exceptional, because the wedding had been planned entirely by Charles' court; Francis Stephen had simply arrived in Vienna from his post as Governor of Hungary at Pressburg, and walked through the ceremony as he was bidden.¹¹² Why did he express his gratitude to the emperor's court poet, who was simply discharging his normal duties? Metastasio will have been a complete stranger to him, since Charles had for some time kept Francis away from Vienna in the hopes that his daughter's ardor might dim in his absence. It is possible that Maria Theresa, with whom the poet had a warm acquaintance, may have been in part behind the gift; but why did she not simply give the gift to him herself, just as she had given him another gift not long before?¹¹³ Perhaps the duke in particular had reason to be pleased with the content of *Achille in Sciro*.

Francis Stephen, who was about to cede Lorraine and become a duke in name only, had nevertheless an impeccably noble pedigree.¹¹⁴ He was said to be handsome, and pleasant company; but he had not done much to distinguish himself. He was a keen hunter, a passion he shared with the emperor, and he was an excellent shot, but he was completely untested in the fields of policy-

111 In his own biography of Metastasio, Burney writes: "All his biographers mention the offer of the dignity of Count, Baron, and Counsellor of the Court, from Emperor Charles VI, after he had written *Achille in Sciro*; and similar honours by the Empress Queen [Maria Theresa], of which he declined the acceptance" (Burney, 1796: vol 3, 312). While on his travels Burney had discussed the composition of this work with Metastasio in some detail (above, note 106), so he may have been in a good position to judge the plausibility of this rumor. He did not mention this item in his earlier memoir of the trip to Vienna, but between the publication of that travelogue and this biography, Metastasio had died, and Burney may have felt less constrained by the poet's claims on his discretion.

112 Hennings (1961: 177-84).

113 In a letter of 15 October 1735 he related to his brother how the archduchesses Maria Theresa and her sister had given him a gift in connection with their recent appearance in a opera whose libretto he had written.

114 Pick (1966: 25n).

making and war. The anomalous position of the house of Lorraine, traditional ally of Austria, but subject to the power of France, had compelled its neutrality in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14) and the other struggles between those two nations. Nevertheless, there had apparently been “whispers about his presumed disinclination to join Eugene’s army” on the Rhine during the recent conflict over the crown of Poland.¹¹⁵ His life had been spent for the most part in various European courts, and only recently had he been appointed by the emperor to a political role as governor of Hungary, and even that post was largely ceremonial.

Now compare the young Achilles of Statius and Metastasio. Brought from his home with the centaur Chiron on Mount Pelion, where he spends most of his time hunting, Achilles arrives at the court of King Lycomedes. He is disguised as a girl, a ruse that succeeds on account of his ephebic and androgynous good looks, and he and the royal princess fall in love. There he remains, an unpromising and unassuming figure until Achilles’ innate nobility of character reveals itself at the prodding of Ulysses. His seemingly unfortunate entanglement with Deidamia is recognized as legitimate and Achilles becomes Scyros’ greatest warrior and its claim to glory, also providing Lycomedes with an heir, the boy called Pyrrhus or Neoptolemus. On this reading, the end of Metastasio’s opera not only promises that this Habsburg love match will be compatible with glory, it holds out the promise that the groom, a handsome sportsman like the young Achilles, has an innate nobility that will likewise begin to bring eternal renown the moment he goes to war. In his *argomento*, Metastasio emphasizes that Achilles, despite his unprepossessing appearance and his being untested in war, is nevertheless ready to leap furiously to arms at the slightest whisper of danger.¹¹⁶ It is no wonder, then, that Francis felt particularly flattered by the drama and was moved to reward the poet for it. If it is true that Metastasio was responding to a certain current anxiety with regard to the Duke’s potential abilities as a leader, then subsequent events were to prove the anxiety more than justified. The archenemy of both Homer’s Greeks and Habsburg Austria was located in Asia Minor: when Metastasio’s Ulysses inveighs against “faithless Phrygia,” the brilliantly polyvalent phrase echoes ancient usage while simultaneously evoking the contemporary struggle against the Islamic Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁷ Vain, however, was the hope that Francis would bring to the Ottomans the measure of sorrow that Achilles had brought to the Trojans. Shortly after the wedding, Francis Stephen went off to lead the Austrian forces against the Turks, and after a few bad defeats for which, rightly or wrongly, he was blamed, Francis was recalled to Vienna in humiliation, and he never led an army again.

115 Pick (1966: 42f).

116 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 753).

117 *Frigia infidel*, Act 2, Scene 3 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 774).

Naples, 1737

Although Metastasio's libretto was very far from being his most popular work, it was nevertheless set to music by twenty-nine different composers in the remaining years of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁸ Normal practice at the time was for composers to write new music for each new production of an opera libretto; as many have remarked, the early eighteenth-century *dramma per musica* was primarily *dramma* and only incidentally *per musica*. Before the coming of Gluck and then Mozart, the librettist was the leading partner in this collaboration, except in Handel's London, and Metastasio in particular dominated the genre as no one else. It is no surprise, then, that the inauguration of the original Teatro di San Carlo in Naples called for a production based on one of his libretti: here again *Achille in Sciro* served the purposes of a prominent royal occasion.

Don Carlos of Spain, or Charles of Bourbon, later Charles III of Spain, was the half-Italian younger son of Philip V of Spain, and he had seized Naples from the Habsburgs by force during the War of the Polish Succession, only a year before Maria Theresa's wedding (1734). Vienna had earlier taken it from Spain as part of its claim to the Spanish crown in the War of the Spanish Succession. Bankrupt Vienna had bled Naples dry, and Don Carlos had been received in the city with little resistance and even with enthusiasm. His usurpation of power was only slowly recognized by the European powers, however, and as part of his efforts to assuage their concerns about Spain regaining a foothold in Italy, Carlos stressed the independence of his new realm.¹¹⁹ Thus Naples greeted the reign of Carlos with new hopes of developing an assertive and independent national spirit, and its new ruler courted the goodwill of the people through a building program whose magnificence proclaimed his own legitimacy and the city's regained status as an autonomous royal seat. One of the first structures to be built was a replacement for the old public opera theater as a gift to opera-mad Naples. He named the new theater after himself, or rather his name-saint, and the original structure of the Teatro di San Carlo was inaugurated on his name-day, the feast of St Charles Borromeo, 4 November 1737, with a production of Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro* with new music by Domenico Sarro.

The man who had appropriated the possession of Naples from Vienna inaugurated his new theater in that city with a production of an opera that was likewise appropriated from the Habsburg court. The choice of *Achille in Sciro* is an interesting one, for Don Carlos had very nearly taken Francis Stephen's place as bridegroom in Vienna. His mother, Elizabeth Farnese, had

¹¹⁸ Heller (1998: 577, n 2).

¹¹⁹ Carpanetto and Ricuperati (1987: 179f).

long wanted her son to marry Maria Theresa, with an eye perhaps to reuniting the Spanish and Austrian lands of the Habsburgs that had been divided by the War of the Spanish Succession. For a number of reasons, including Maria Theresa's devotion to Francis Stephen and the suspicion of Charles VI, this never came about, and so Carlos took a piece of Austria by force of arms rather than by marriage. It was particularly appropriate, then, that he should re-stage Maria Theresa's wedding opera as the seal of his own triumph.¹²⁰ The *licenza*, or finale, of the Vienna production in praise of the newlyweds was naturally cut out at Naples, but a prologue was added to the opera which featured a different set of personifications: Magnificence, Glory, Swiftiness, and Royal Wisdom.¹²¹ These figures drew the attention of the audience to the vastness of the theater, boasting that it was the largest in Europe, to the speed of its construction (just over seven months), and to the greatness of the royal vision that had inspired it. Whereas the Vienna production commemorated the joining of two individuals, this production sealed the union between a ruler and his public.

Apart from the general appeal that Metastasio's conservative, courtly work held for Carlos, and apart from the specific connotations that *Achille in Sciro* carried with it on this occasion, the opera would have had special resonance for the Neapolitan audience. Sarro and Metastasio had collaborated years before in Naples on the premiere of *Didone abbandonata*, Metastasio's first great success. A revival of that work was the last production staged in the old Neapolitan opera house, San Bartolomeo, before it gave way to the new theater.¹²² So it was appropriate that a new partnership between Metastasio and Sarro should open the new opera house. One of Don Carlos' deputies wrote a letter at the time emphasizing the Neapolitan connections of Metastasio, who was a Roman by birth, but whose career in writing for the opera had begun in Naples.¹²³ Not only did Metastasio have special connections with the city of Naples, so too did the author of the text on which *Achille in Sciro* was loosely based. Statius, author of the *Achilleid*, had been a Neapolitan, so the sense of homecoming was double. It was a sensibly patriotic gesture, given the lack of direct connections between the king and his new home; Carlos himself did not like opera and did not speak Italian. If the independence of Naples from Austria prompted the fear that it might be cast adrift from the mainstream of European cultural life, then the appearance of this production in Naples immediately after its Viennese premiere was a reassurance of the cultural continuity of the new regime.

120 On the way Carlos combined the courtly operatic traditions of Vienna with the public opera-going of Naples, see Morelli (1987: 36).

121 *Magnificenza, Gloria, Celerità, Genio reale*: Huckle (1987: 27), Croce (1947: 167).

122 Huckle (1987: 24).

123 Huckle (1987: 31); Croce (1947: 165).

London, 1741

The year 1741 was a watershed for George Frideric Handel. It began with a new opera, *Deidamia*, which like several of its predecessors had a disappointingly short run. The production of opera in London had become fraught with political difficulties and financial risk, and after having composed the music for over fifty operas in his career, Handel had finally had enough. Later in the year he composed the *Messiah* oratorio, which was a triumph in its Dublin premiere, and he never wrote for the opera again. The impact of the *Beggar's Opera* and the subsequent fad for ballad opera on *opera seria* in London can be exaggerated; strains in London's expensive appetite for *opera seria* had already begun to show, and Gay's parody had merely exploited that weakness. Nevertheless, there was a conspicuous contrast in London between the boom in ballad opera and the difficulties that were confronting the companies offering Italian opera; contemporaries often viewed the two trends as connected.¹²⁴ It is possible that these circumstances may have influenced Handel's choice of subject in his last four operas, which all have some lighter and comedic elements; but none were popular successes. The last of these, *Deidamia*, was even based on the same story as Gay's *Achilles*.¹²⁵ Given the perceived impact of Gay's work on *opera seria* in London, it is likely that *Deidamia* is on some level a riposte to *Achilles*; even its title seems to indicate this.

If Gay's *Achilles* is the most riotously transgressive of the operas on the Achilles-in-Scyros theme, then *Deidamia* is its opposite. Despite the feminine title, this is no return to the centrality of the heroine's experience that characterized *La finta pazza*. In this libretto, written for Handel by Paolo Rolli, men are firmly in control.¹²⁶ For example, Ulysses is never fooled by Achilles' disguise for a minute, nor by *Deidamia*, who pretends to reciprocate Ulysses' flirting in order to lead him off the scent. By contrast, *Deidamia* is completely fooled by Ulysses' false identity as Antilochus. A small change, but perhaps the most telling, is that in this version the impulse to hide Achilles on Scyros is attributed to Achilles' father, Peleus, rather than to Thetis. Thetis is a major figure in Statius' *Achilleid*, and all other operatic treatments of the story at least acknowledge her importance, even where she does not figure in the drama herself. If the presence of Thetis in previous libretti is a sign of Statius' influence there, then it is possible that her absence from *Deidamia* indicates that Rolli did not know the *Achilleid*. In any case he made such a radical change in elimi-

¹²⁴ For examples, see Deutsch (1955: 220, 223f, 250, 845).

¹²⁵ Hogwood (1984: 165) calls *Deidamia* a "last-ditch attempt to lift the seriousness from *opera seria*"; similarly Keates (1985: 236).

¹²⁶ As noted by Noble (1988: 193) and Nokes (1995: 529). The libretto is available in Caruso (1993: 511–546). A wildly, comically inaccurate English translation by Ostendorf and Castaldi (2001) accompanies the recording conducted by R. Palmer.

nating Thetis it is clear that he in no way felt bound by Statius' authority, even if he knew it.¹²⁷

Rolli was accustomed to making drastic changes to his models, since London audiences had little patience for recitative that they did not understand; but the substitution of Peleus for Thetis made no difference to length, so it must be explained in other ways. One motivation may have been the general tendency in Rolli's libretto to deny any active role to his female characters, who are easily manipulated by cleverer men. Another tendency is to minimize the importance of pagan divinities; Rolli's Achilles has no time for oracles.¹²⁸ Additionally, the substitution of Peleus for Thetis and the participation of Lycomedes in the deception shows the king of Scyros as acting *in loco parentis* as Peleus' conscious agent, rather than as the dupe of a goddess. By making Lycomedes into a substitute for Peleus and thus a quasi-father figure for Achilles, Rolli is able to minimize the feminine element that other treatments of the Scyros theme explore via the mother/son relationship of Thetis and Achilles and the father/daughter relationship of Lycomedes and Deidamia. The most important change that Rolli makes in the story, therefore, is to make Lycomedes cognizant of Achilles' disguise from the start.¹²⁹

In the first scene of the drama, the disguised Ulysses and Phoenix demand that Lycomedes, as a loyal Greek, should cease hiding the young Achilles, whom the prophet Calchas has declared to have been hidden on Scyros.¹³⁰ The king denies that Achilles is present, and invites them to scour the island to confirm this themselves. As soon as the embassy leaves his presence, Lycomedes declares to the audience that Peleus, his old friend, has indeed hidden Achilles with him, and so his loyalties are divided between friend and country. His

127 It is surprising that Rolli did not know the work of Statius; but in the catalogue of the library Rolli left behind compiled by Caruso (1989) there is no sign of a copy of Statius' works. If, as argued below, the libretto was written in haste, then Rolli may not have had time to consult anything other than Metastasio's drama. There are some potential points of contact between the *Deidamia* and the *Achilleid*, but several of them Rolli may have picked up from Metastasio as an intermediary. For example, the word *magnanimo* in Act 1, Scene 1 (Caruso, 1993: 518) seems to echo the first word of the *Achilleid* (*magnanimum*), but might also have come from Act 2, Scene 2 or Scene 8 of Metastasio's libretto (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, pp 773 and 784). The inability of Lycomedes to go to Troy due to his advanced age may come from either Statius or Metastasio; likewise Rolli has Achilles use the shield offered by Ulysses as a mirror (Act 3, Scene 2, Caruso, 1993: 538; see above, p 93). In Deidamia's aria at the end of Act 1 (Caruso, 1993: 524f), she compares herself to a bird hiding her nest from the snake and the hunter, which just might be adapted from Statius' simile comparing Thetis to a bird sitting her nest (1.212–16); but the resemblance is not very close and it may well be a coincidence.

128 In Act 3, Scene 5 (Caruso, 1993: 543), Achilles says, "L'oracol parla quel che vuol Calcante, | ignoto è l'avvenir," "The oracle says whatever the prophet Calchas wants it to. The future is unknown."

129 Strozzi vaguely implied in *La finta pazzia* (Act 1, Scene 6, Della Corte, 1958: 371) that Lycomedes was party to Thetis' deception, but it was of no relevance to that drama.

130 *Deidamia*, Act 1, Scene 1 (Caruso, 1993: 517–19).

stated devotion to Peleus as a friend and to Achilles as a father figure are difficult to reconcile with his invitation to Ulysses to search Scyros. This seems an inexplicably foolish risk to take. Lycomedes seems even more misguided when he decides to put on a hunt for the entertainment of his visitors. At that point, we have already had our first glimpse of the disguised Achilles when he arrived on stage, singing the joys of life as a huntress. It is no surprise, then, when the visitors marvel at the skills of one of the Scyrian “huntresses” in particular, a development that Lycomedes surely should have anticipated. A further apparent stupidity results from Lycomedes’ knowledge of Achilles’ identity. Should he not, as a father, have anticipated the prospect of the “secret” relationship that develops between Achilles and Deidamia, and kept the two apart?

It is only toward the end, in the third act, that all of Lycomedes’ apparent foolishness is revealed to have been the working out of a clever plan. When Deidamia tries to confess her secret love to her father, Lycomedes tells her that he knew about it all along:

s’io non credea degne al tuo nobil petto
di tale amor le splendide faville,
lunge da te sarebbe stato Achille.¹³¹

If I did not believe that the glowing sparks of this love were worthy of your noble heart, Achilles would have been far away from you.

So Lycomedes has secretly engineered the relationship between Achilles and Deidamia. The final scene of the drama begins with Lycomedes revealing that everything has worked out according to his plan, despite the awkwardness of the position he was placed in:

Itaco prence, testimon sarai
che all’amistà col genitor d’Achille
e al dover verso Grecia io non mancai.
La grave età forzami all’ozio.¹³²

Prince of Ithaca, you will be my witness that I did not betray either my alliance with Achilles’ father or my duty to Greece. My advanced age compels me into retirement.

So, in the last scene, the apparent contradiction in Lycomedes’ behavior in the opening scene is explained: he deliberately encouraged Ulysses to search for Achilles on Scyros, precisely because he knew that he would find him. He even arranged the hunt, just to make sure Ulysses did not miss him. This was his way of reconciling the duty he owed to Greece, which obliged him to ensure that Achilles was found, and his duty to Peleus, which prevented him from revealing the truth directly. Lycomedes has not broken faith with

¹³¹ *Deidamia*, Act 3, Scene 3 (Caruso, 1993: 541).

¹³² *Deidamia*, Act 3, Scene 7 (Caruso, 1993: 544.)

Peleus, since he never admitted that Achilles was hidden with him; he has not betrayed the Greeks, who are not leaving without their quarry. There is one final deft touch we can observe: at the end of the scene where Lycomedes tells Deidamia that he had anticipated, observed, and approved of her secret relationship with Achilles, Lycomedes makes the “mistake” of letting slip to his daughter the knowledge that Achilles is fated to die at Troy. But even this is a shrewd maneuver on his part: Deidamia has been quarreling with Achilles, and this slip works as a subtle encouragement to Deidamia to patch up her row and make sure to marry him before he leaves for Troy, rather than waiting for him to come back.

One other distinctive aspect of Rolli’s characterization of Lycomedes is that the king is quite reflective on the subject of his own advanced age and his mortality; this is evident in the quotation above, where he excuses himself from participating in the Trojan War.¹³³ In an earlier passage, the king gives a more poetic view of his retirement:

Ma in tranquilla vecchiezza
ozio felice anche mi dan gli Dei.

Nel riposo e nel contento
godo e sento
lieve il peso dell’età;
e la vita mia contenta,
lieta e lenta,
alla meta se ne va.¹³⁴

But in my peaceful old age, the gods also grant me a pleasant retirement.
In stillness and contentment I rejoice in my age and carry its burden
lightly; and my happy, contented, and slow-paced life passes to its con-
clusion.

It is interesting that Lycomedes anticipates his own death here, for, as we shall now see, it is possible to read the opera in political terms, as a kind of a requiem for a dead king.

Handel had always been associated with his patron, the king, and the king’s minister, Walpole. It is therefore not surprising that, whereas Gay had used the Achilles-in-Scyros myth to ridicule both king and minister, *Deidamia* presents a much more flattering picture of royalty. What complicates the political picture is Handel’s relationship to Rolli. The two men had written five operas together for the Royal Academy, but they were apparently on opposite sides of the feud that had split it between the supporters of Bononcini and those of Handel.¹³⁵ Since the closure of the Royal Academy in 1728–9 they had not

¹³³ The notion that Lycomedes is too old to go to Troy himself goes back to Statius (1.776).

¹³⁴ *Deidamia*, Act 2 Scene 4 (Caruso, 1993: 529f).

¹³⁵ On Rolli’s relations with the Royal Academy, see Lindgren (1987: 303–7).

chosen to work together, and Rolli was later associated with the Opera of the Nobility that was founded in rivalry to Handel.¹³⁶ This private dispute became public in 1733 in a letter published in the *Craftsman*, a magazine opposed to the government, which attacked Handel (as Mr. H—l) directly and Walpole implicitly; it was signed by P—lo R—li. This letter was such a vicious attack on Handel and on Walpole's administration that it was long doubted to be genuinely the work of Rolli, but the discovery of an Italian translation of the letter among the correspondence of Rolli to the castrato Senesino has moved scholars more recently to accept it as genuine.¹³⁷ Given the public rancor between the two men, it is remarkable that they came together one last time after a gap of so many years to work on *Deidamia*, twelve years after their last collaboration at the now-defunct Academy. Given Rolli's political affiliation with the anti-Walpole faction, it is even more curious that the resulting text has such a pronounced establishmentarian tinge, particularly if it is read as a riposte to Gay's *Achilles*. One simple way of interpreting the politics of *Deidamia* is to read it as a text praising the wisdom of kings, as written by Handel and Rolli, who were respectively music master and Italian master to the household of George II.¹³⁸

One can interpret the politics of *Deidamia* even more minutely, however, if it is viewed in the context of contemporary history. In late 1740, Britain was in the midst of a minor war with Spain that had broken out the previous year as a result of rivalry over trade with Spain's colonies in the New World. This was the so-called War of Jenkins' Ear, a prelude to the general war that was soon to engulf Europe. The significance of the war with Spain as the context for *Deidamia* has been urged by Sasse, who reads the drama as a call to arms for England.¹³⁹ On this reading, the calling of Achilles to the common Greek cause against Troy is a simple paradigm for England rallying around the flag. As it stands, this is not a very convincing argument and it has been rejected by Strohm.¹⁴⁰ Sasse's interpretation is unsatisfactory because it does not make any deeper connection between the very distinctive plot of the Scyros myth and contemporary events; almost any Trojan War plot would have served

¹³⁶ Dorris (1967: 112f).

¹³⁷ For the text of the letter and commentary, see Deutsch (1955: 310–13), who doubted it was Rolli's. The letter is also quoted in full by Dorris (1967: 103–13), along with the Italian translation and a convincing argument that it is Rolli's work; Keates (1985: 167f) also accepts it as genuine. For the unfriendly nicknames Rolli routinely applied to Handel in his correspondence, see Deutsch (1955: index, s.v. "Handel, nicknames").

¹³⁸ On Handel's politics, see Smith (1995: 199f), and on Handel's association with Walpole, Smith (1995: 202–10).

¹³⁹ Sasse (1955: 645); and for Handel's oratorios of the time as allegories of the war, see Smith (1995: 288–99).

¹⁴⁰ "There was no artistic relevance for either Rolli or Handel in the fact that the London *Deidamia* of 1741 was inevitably linked to the actual events of a war." Thus Strohm (1985: 79), who does not elaborate his reasoning further.

equally well. A political interpretation of the plot is much more compelling, however, if we read it not as a call for British unity, but as an appeal for Austro-British solidarity. Such a reading is supported by the close association between the Achilles-in-Scyros theme and Maria Theresa that had been established by Metastasio in his *Achille in Sciro*.

The period in which *Deidamia* was composed was a turning point not only in Handel's career, but also in European history. Shortly before Handel began composing it, Maria Theresa's father, Emperor Charles VI, died after eating what Voltaire famously called the "helping of mushrooms [that] changed the fate of Europe."¹⁴¹ This led swiftly to the Wars of the Austrian Succession that were to carry on until the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. In 1740, Austria was still England's traditional continental ally, even if the relationship had been strained somewhat in the preceding years; the diplomatic revolution that was to create the Anglo-Prussian and Franco-Austrian alliances of the Seven Years' War lay the unforeseeable future. The death of her father put Maria Theresa on the Austrian throne according to the provisions of the Pragmatic Sanction, a document whose guarantees were immediately demonstrated to be worthless by the aggression of Prussia, Bavaria, and France against her. Charles had prepared neither his daughter nor her husband for rule; perhaps he was expecting eventually to produce a son himself, or was waiting for his daughter to do so.¹⁴² Whatever his reasons, Charles' failure to groom Francis Stephen in public as his successor will have been perceived as a vote of no confidence in his son-in-law.¹⁴³ The hopes that Metastasio's libretto had once embodied for Francis Stephen as a military leader had long been dashed, and in subsequent years other Austrian commanders had been equally unsuccessful against the Turks; Austria's military humiliation culminated in the loss of Belgrade in 1739.

In an often-quoted remark from Maria Theresa's political testament, she remembers having found herself on her father's death, "all at once without money, without troops, and without advice."¹⁴⁴ With a bankrupt treasury, incompetent advisors, and a demoralized army, the new queen's chances of holding together the sprawling Habsburg dominions looked very slim. Britain could only look to its traditional ally and hope that some sort of leadership for Austria might emerge from the death of Charles VI. It is the sudden centrality of Maria Theresa in European affairs and her association with the Scyros theme that provided the context which motivated Handel and Rolli to stage *Deidamia*. Maria Theresa's sudden importance only became clear at the death of her father, and

141 "Ce plat de champignons changea la destinée de l'Europe": Moland (1877–85: vol 1, 18).

142 See above (n 103). Maria Theresa had given birth only to girls before her father's death.

143 Browning (1994: 19); Pick (1966: 35).

144 "So sahe mich auf einmal zusammen von Geld, Truppen und Rat entBlößet," Kallbrunner (1952: 26), quoted by Pick (1966: 61) and Browning (1994: 37).

so this argument depends on being able to show that news of the emperor's death had reached London before work began on the opera.

At first glance it seems unlikely that Handel knew of the emperor's death in time for it to affect his choice of theme: Charles VI died on 20 October 1740, and Handel's autograph manuscript shows that he began work on the music for *Deidamia* on 27 October.¹⁴⁵ A week was perhaps not time enough for word of the emperor's death to reach London, and for Handel to have the beginnings of a libretto from Rolli. In 1740, however, Britain was still using the Julian calendar, while continental Europe had long switched to the Gregorian calendar. Thus, when Handel noted the date as 27 October, he will have been using the old style, and we should convert to the Gregorian date by adding eleven days, giving 7 November as the continental-style date on which Handel began the music for *Deidamia*.¹⁴⁶ Therefore when Handel started on his *Deidamia*, eighteen days had passed since the death of Charles VI, who had been gravely ill for over a week before that; so it is clear that the opera could have been conceived as a response to that event. There may not have been enough time for Rolli to have written a complete libretto before Handel began setting the music, but he need not have done so; the *Achille in Sciro* of Metastasio and Caldara is an example of assembly-line production, where the music began to be composed as soon as the first scenes of the libretto were written. The urgency of the occasion might go some way to explaining why Rolli and Handel put aside their bitterness to collaborate one last time.

Rolli's libretto frames the story of the Trojan War in political terms, and the world it describes is very political, male-dominated, and lacking in mythical, supernatural features. War has begun, but it has yet to involve all of its players. The events of the plot are driven by alliances: Paris' violation of the laws of hospitality has caused a war, and the king of Scyros is torn between two alliances. Lycomedes' dilemma is political: he has to balance his loyalty to his friend and ally Peleus with his broader loyalty to the Greeks. In a general sense, this political landscape reflects the contemporary world, where war had broken out, but had not yet spread throughout Europe. England felt itself to be the victim of Spanish duplicity, and in Austria the death of the emperor was about to put to the test the sincerity of those who had assented to the Pragmatic Sanction, especially the French. England and Austria were both in potential need of each other as allies against Bourbon treachery.

The portrait of Lycomedes as a distant and foolish king that had been sketched by Gay and Capece is not so far from one prevailing view of the Austrian emperor. Charles had spent the latter part of his reign squandering

¹⁴⁵ Deutsch (1955: 506), Caruso (1993: 512).

¹⁴⁶ This is helpfully illustrated by the report of the emperor's death in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of October 1740, which is dated not to 20 October, but to "Oct. 9 (O.S.)" in the old style still in use in Britain.

his military and financial resources, and had sacrificed every advantage he had in the fatuous pursuit of gaining approval of the Pragmatic Sanction by the other courts of Europe. The utter folly of Charles' policies was soon to be demonstrated by the combined efforts of Prussia, Bavaria, and France to dismember Maria Theresa's inheritance, but these developments lay in the future. At the point of Charles' death, Rolli seems to be suggesting via his libretto for *Deidamia* that what appears at first glance to be royal foolishness may in fact conceal a cunning plan. Rolli permits the audience to marvel at Lycomedes' naivete in leaving Achilles alone with his daughter, until later we learn that he did so by design. The sudden emergence of Achilles as a hero is mirrored by the revelation of Lycomedes as a shrewd politician, every bit a match for Ulysses. The real surprise in Rolli's libretto is not that Achilles is a male, but that Lycomedes turns out not to be a fool. He is at the center of events, and manipulates them for his own benefit. By secretly engineering the marriage of his daughter to Achilles, Lycomedes provides his land with an hero and an heir; by orchestrating the discovery of Achilles, he also makes an important contribution to his Greek allies in their war effort.

Deidamia expresses in a general way the hope that the death of Charles VI would leave England with a useful ally, despite the unpromising look of things in Vienna, where the emperor had married his daughter to an unprepossessing gallant and appeared to have failed to make realistic provisions for his succession by a male heir. Rolli is much less explicit than Metastasio about how this happy ending might work out. In *Achille in Sciro*, Achilles, as the untested young hero marrying the king's daughter, is clearly a paradigm for Francis Stephen; but given his subsequent military misadventures, his failure to father a son before the emperor's death, and his general irrelevance to the Viennese court after his marriage, it is harder now to see him as Achilles. At the time of the composition of *Deidamia* it was not yet clear whether Maria Theresa would defer to her husband in governing her realms or not. It does not matter to Rolli's libretto, since his innovations highlight Lycomedes rather than Achilles or Deidamia. The message of *Deidamia* is that cunning may underlie a king's seemingly foolish handling of his daughter, and that a loyal ally and noble hero can arise from the most improbable circumstances. It was a message calculated to go down well in England, which was at war and very isolated politically; England needed functioning allies.¹⁴⁷

Deidamia shows the danger of attempting topicality: Rolli and Handel were quick, but Frederick the Great was quicker. On 26 October, six days after the emperor's death, the Prussian king wrote to Voltaire:

L'empereur est mort.

Ce prince né particulier

¹⁴⁷ Browning (1994: 22).

Fut roi, puis empereur, Eugène fut sa gloire,
 Mais par malheur pour son histoire
 Il est mort en banqueroutier.

Cette mort dérange toutes mes idées pacifiques . . . c'est le moment du changement total de l'ancien système de politique.¹⁴⁸

The emperor is dead. This prince of singular birth was king and then emperor; Eugene [of Savoy] was his glory. Unfortunately for his legend, he died a bankrupt. This death disorders all of my peaceful designs . . . this is the moment for a complete change in the old political order.

By the time *Deidamia* was on stage, Prussian troops were already pouring into Austrian Silesia, thereby unleashing twenty years of war that would utterly change the balance of power in Europe.¹⁴⁹ This will have been a surprise to most observers, as Frederick had only recently ascended to the Prussian throne, and was still an unknown quantity; a challenge to Maria Theresa will have been expected to emerge first from Bavaria, which had never ratified the Pragmatic Sanction. In the event, it was not England that needed allies against Spain; it was Austria that needed allies against half of Europe. The world would swiftly ratify Frederick's judgment of Charles VI: that he had foolishly squandered his resources and ended his reign in bitterness and bankruptcy. Contrary to the hopes embodied by Rolli's Lycomedes, there was no secret plan to save Austria; that was left to the initiative of his daughter.

Madrid, 1744

The ability of Metastasio's *Achille in Sciro* to speak to diverse political needs was demonstrated once again when it was performed in honor of another royal wedding. Strohm has noted that the festivities in Madrid during December 1744 in anticipation of the upcoming marriage of the Spanish Infanta, herself named Doña Maria Teresa, to the French Dauphin, featured a performance of *Achille in Sciro* with new music by Francesco Corselli, in a deliberate echo of its premiere in Vienna: "This revival emphasized the idea of a peaceful competition between the Bourbon and Habsburg empires."¹⁵⁰ Competition, yes; peaceful, no. The War of the Austrian Succession was in full swing, pitting Bourbon France against Maria Theresa's Austria. Over the course of the preceding year, the treaty of Worms had pledged Britain, Austria, and Sardinia to the expulsion of Carlos from Naples; Spain and France had renewed their alliance with the pact of Fontainebleau; then in 1744 France declared war

¹⁴⁸ Besterman (1970: letter D2352, 341f).

¹⁴⁹ The premiere of *Deidamia* was on 10 January 1741, which was 21 January by continental reckoning.

¹⁵⁰ Strohm (1997: 108).

against England and Austria. In the second half of the year, Austrian troops were fighting in Italy against a joint Neapolitan-Spanish force, and Europe was firmly divided between a Bourbon camp consisting of France, Spain, and Naples on the one hand, and their enemies, principally Austria and Britain, on the other. In this context, the Madrid performance of *Achille in Sciro* is much closer in spirit to Don Carlos' Neapolitan appropriation of the work than to its premiere. In fact, the same singer, Anna Peruzzi, played Deidamia in Naples and in Madrid. It was an ironic coincidence that an alliance against Maria Theresa's Austria and in support of Carlos was sealed by means of the wedding of another young lady named Maria Teresa; the appropriation of the Austrian Maria Theresa's wedding opera served to underline the irony.

Epilogue

In the light of the connection of Maria Theresa with the myth of Achilles on Scyros, there is a delightful irony in her emergence as her nation's savior. Metastasio clearly envisioned her husband as Austria's deliverer, while Rolli focussed on her father. Neither poet seems keen to suggest that the hero emerging from a girl's clothing in Vienna might be Maria Theresa herself. The real drama that played out in the course of the Wars of the Austrian Succession was not the discovery of a male hero for Austria, but the emergence of one of Europe's greatest stateswomen from unpromising circumstances. The theme of a female political leader was not unthinkable in opera; Metastasio had explored it earlier in his career. Just before his invitation to Vienna, Metastasio had told in his drama *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1729) the story of a woman who rules a nation while disguised as a man, and rules it so justly that she is chosen by her people as their leader even after she is revealed to be a woman. That plot, with its narrative of cross-dressing and discovery, is a rehearsal for *Achille in Sciro*.¹⁵¹ His next opera, performed later that same year, has a character declare, "A royal young lady is not permitted to venture into battle as a warrior may," to which the young lady responds, "Oh, the wretched servitude of our sex!"¹⁵² The strangely prophetic way that *Achille in Sciro* seems to have anticipated the coming of a hero in female clothing for Vienna resulted from Metastasio's reaction to a real gender crisis: the lack of a male Habsburg heir. He did not anticipate that Maria Theresa herself would be the one to rescue her house; on the occasion of her marriage, the only role envisioned for her was as a wife and mother. In the event, Maria Theresa took a much more active role, and so

¹⁵¹ On the varied depictions of Semiramis in opera, see Heller (2003: 220–62).

¹⁵² *Alessandro nell'Indie*, Act 2, Scene 3 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 329): "A una real donzella | Andar cosi fra l'armi, | Come lice a un guerrier, non è permesso.' Misera servitù del nostro sesso!"

found Semiramis a more congenial transvestite exemplar than Achilles was for her husband.¹⁵³

We have seen that Metastasio and Rolli treated the myth of Achilles on Scyros as a paradigm for the inevitability and essentialism of masculinity and aristocratic breeding. On this reading, no disguise could keep Achilles from his destiny. The assertion of Achilles' manhood and heroic spirit are a direct result of his unmistakable nobility of character, which results in turn from his high birth: his mother is a goddess, and his father's paternal grandfather is Jupiter himself. The impossibility of disguising Achilles serves to reinforce the aristocratic principle that nobility inheres in the blood and is not a mirage generated by the trappings of status. In this tradition the aesthetic question of how to represent masculinity on stage is related to the political question of how to represent power. The paradoxical figuration of manly heroism by means of a high voice unattainable by ordinary men served to emphasize the separateness of the elite realm, where heroism was an attribute of birth as much as of deeds.¹⁵⁴

A year before Metastasio's text was written, the myth of Achilles in Scyros was put on stage in Paris as an even more stark illustration of the doctrine of noble birth. An opera (*tragédie lyrique*) on the subject of Achilles and Deidamia had been given in the previous year by the Académie Royale de Musique.¹⁵⁵ The odd thing is that in this version Achilles is disguised as a poor, but male, shepherd rather than as a female. Lycomedes, who is here imagined to be the brother of Thetis, and thus a semi-divine king, opens the drama, addressing his sister:

Quoy! parmi des Bergers, dans ce champêtre azile
 Esperez-vous, à tous les yeux
 Sous un nom supposé cacher le jeune Achille?
 Thetis, tout montre en luy qu'il est du sang des Dieux.

What? Are you hoping to hide Achilles in plain sight, under a false name among shepherds in this rustic asylum? Thetis, everything in him shows that he is of the blood of the gods.

Naturally, Deidamia falls in love with Achilles despite his apparently low station in life, and after his discovery she kills herself in despair at the thought of his leaving for Troy. Antoine Danchet, the author of this dramatic scenario, used the myth as did Metastasio, to illustrate the conflict of love and glory, but apparently he felt that transvestism did not sit comfortably with this aim. The

¹⁵³ Having expelled the French from Prague, Maria Theresa finally had herself crowned Queen of Bohemia in 1743, and celebrated the event with performances of Metastasio's *Semiramide riconosciuta*; and the renovated Burgtheater in Vienna was inaugurated in 1748 with a setting by Gluck of the same libretto: Heller (2003: 299, 352, n 5).

¹⁵⁴ On the appeal of artificially high voices in an "intensely hierarchical-minded" society, see Rosselli (1988: 148).

¹⁵⁵ Danchet (1735).

way he translated the guise of womanhood into peasantry shows the ability of gender in the Scyros myth to function as a metaphor for class. It also exemplifies how the story of the emergence of Achilles as a hero could be used to justify the social hierarchy and the power of noble birth, even though the impulse to sanitize the myth by removing its cross-dressing hints at its potential to undermine such an absolutist reading.

By contrast, Gay's *Achilles* tells a story about the abuse of power and principled resistance to it. The inversion of gender roles that puts Achilles in the position of intended victim of a royal rapist serves to highlight the arbitrariness of social hierarchy: a noble hero is subject to the whims of a worthless tyrant. Achilles, who will later be the victim of Agamemnon's arrogance, here plays the role of Briseis, the woman treated as the object of a king's pride and lust. Gay uses the myth to comment on the contingency of the relationship between masculinity, power, and virtue. This is reflected in the way Gay explicitly confronts at the conclusion of his drama the issue of identity as essential or contingent. Strozzi and Capece likewise use Achilles to make observations about the power of masquerade and the performative nature of gender and personal identity.

It is a distinguishing characteristic of the libretti of Metastasio and Rolli that they are largely free from gross comedic elements, even though they do take limited advantage of Achilles' disguise for some lighter moments.¹⁵⁶ For these two poets, the myth allows them to push *opera seria* in a slightly more light-hearted direction. The other librettists come from the other end of the comedic spectrum. Gay, Capece, Strozzi, and Bentivoglio all play Achilles for laughs, including to varying degrees elements of burlesque, physical comedy, obscene humor, and lower-class comic characters. Given that all of these libretti are based to a greater or lesser degree on Statius' *Achilleid*, a question presents itself: which tradition, comic or serious, is a continuation of that classical heritage and which is the usurper?

Eventually, the reform of opera that stopped heroic male roles from being scored for preternaturally high voices made the Achilles on Scyros story itself irrelevant to the self-consciousness of opera. Likewise, the increasing obscurity of Statius as an author consigned his *Achilleid* to oblivion, except among a small clique of the classically educated. The diminishing potential of the Achilles-in-Scyros story to instruct and to entertain is illustrated in two quite obscure dramas from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England. Both dramas are directed toward tiny, elite, classically educated audiences; but they illustrate in extreme forms the dignified, light-comedic Scyros tradition on the one hand, and the burlesque tradition on the other.

The first of these works is a gentle verse drama called *Achilles in Scyros*, first

¹⁵⁶ Metastasio and Rolli were both mentored by Gian Vincenzo Gravina, whose classicism was of a rather strict variety; see Sadie (200r: s.v. "Rolli, Paolo Antonio") [Lindgren].

published in 1890 by the future British poet laureate Robert Bridges.¹⁵⁷ Bridges was an enthusiastic classicist, and he clearly consulted the *Achilleid* closely.¹⁵⁸ It is less clear whether he knew the operatic tradition at all. Bridges' Deidamia is closest to Capece's, since both are virginal innocents who do not like the look of men, and who are ignorant that Achilles is the true identity of their companion. On the other hand, the conflict between love and glory that Bridges articulates at the end of the drama is reminiscent of Metastasio's ending, and the title, *Achilles in Scyros*, also recalls Metastasio. Once again it is the figure of Lycomedes who is most the interesting for interpreting the drama. He is a philosophical and meditative king, who does not see the point of the Trojan War, and sees no reason for Scyros to get involved, since it is at peace and its people are happy (572–99). Thetis picks up this theme when she wonders what Achilles has done that his presence should be required at Troy (740–4), and even Achilles asks Ulysses and Diomedes what they need with a boy of sixteen years (1100–7). In the conclusion of the drama, Lycomedes praises the joys of peace and retirement, and offers such a life to Achilles on Scyros if he will forsake glory (1663–83). In these passages, one can hear a Briton's weariness with empire and its far-away conflicts.

Just how far away Bridges' gentle drama is from the world of burlesque is clear from a letter he wrote describing his reaction to the only performance it received, which was by the girls of Cheltenham College in 1912. Naturally, in this setting the male parts were played by girls; one would have thought that this would have presented more opportunity than difficulty for a play based on the very idea of cross-dressing, but Graves was strangely disappointed by the resulting lack of realism. He was particularly dismayed that Lycomedes, in being played by a girl, was turned into a "light comedy part."¹⁵⁹ Bridges' naive gentleness would be easy to parody, and an anonymous work from the early twentieth century also called *Achilles in Scyros* appears to be in part a travesty of Bridges' play, though it is much more than that.¹⁶⁰ Like Bridges' work this is a closet verse drama, but it is closeted in more ways than one: it is merry and ribald piece of homosexual pornography.

This *Achilles in Scyros* was printed by the Cayme Press and circulated privately to subscribers; it is signed by a P. G. B., who has been identified as Philip Gillespie Bainbridge.¹⁶¹ It was printed in 1927, but the text carries dates of com-

157 For a discussion of the play, see Stanford (1978: 175–9).

158 For example, the name of Ulysses' servant, Abas, seems to derive from a misunderstanding or adaptation of *Ach.* 1.702.

159 "The fact is that the girls could not get near masculine personation of any kind, and their little shrill argumentative voices w[oul]d have dispelled any ocular illusion if it had existed." Bridges (1940: 113).

160 In both works, Ulysses/Odysseus is disguised as a "pedlar," which may derive eventually from Gay's *Achilles*. Metastasio's dignified version had likewise attracted parody: see above (n 95).

161 D'Arch Smith (1970: 148).

position for various parts ranging from 1911 to 1915; Bainbrigge was killed in action on the Western Front in 1918, so this printing must have been undertaken by friends after his death. It is dedicated to C. K. S.-M. and F. W. H., the former apparently being Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff, the noted translator of Proust. Bainbrigge was a classicist, educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge before becoming a master at Shrewsbury School.¹⁶² This last bit of information is hardly surprising in that his text alludes frequently and approvingly to the opportunities for erotic encounters between master and pupil that were afforded by life at a boarding school: Chiron runs just such a school, where Patroclus is the lover and “tutor” of Achilles. The text, especially its preface, which requests outsiders to read no further, evokes a small and private world of classically trained, homosexual scholars. The preface is dated to 1915, by which time Bainbrigge was teaching, but the drama itself seems to have been a product of his days at university. The dedication and the *explicit* of the drama proper are dated to 1912 and 1911 respectively, and give the place of writing as Trinity College, Cambridge. Bainbrigge’s time there thus coincided with the arrival of A. E. Housman as Professor of Latin in 1911, but it seems that Housman probably was not acquainted with this side of Bainbrigge’s talents.¹⁶³

Bainbrigge took the myth of Achilles on Scyros about as far as possible into the realm of burlesque. His version is extravagantly obscene, but it is also erudite and very funny. It is clear that he knew Statius well: Thetis describes Chiron’s “very good preparatory school” in the prologue, and mentions having dipped Achilles in the Styx: both distinctively Statian details. Perhaps taking a cue from Bridges’ Deidamia, who suggests in jest that the girls of Scyros should seize control of the island, drive off the men, and live like Amazons (291–309), this drama describes the girls of Scyros as separatist lesbians; in fact, all of the major characters are already homosexual, or discover that they are during the course of events.

Thetis describes how, in order to punish Achilles for his sexual relationship with Patroclus, Peleus has sent him to Scyros, dressed as a girl as a token of his depravity. The chorus of Scyrian lesbians commiserates with this new “girl,” Pyrrha, on account of “her” shame; they hope that she did not get pregnant as a result of her misbehavior. Deidamia lusts after Pyrrha, who is strangely resistant to her charms. Naturally, Deidamia suspects that the problem may

162 This information is drawn from the biographical note in Taylor (1989: 229), a collection that includes one short poem by Bainbrigge, which was drawn from the autobiography of Nevil Shute (1954: 28f), who was a pupil of Bainbrigge’s at Shrewsbury.

163 In a letter of 1927 (Maas, 1971: 256f), Housman thanks his correspondent for having sent him a certain book, which the editor of the letter identifies as *Dialogus. Jocundus: Robertus*, another anonymous work of homosexual erotica by Bainbrigge (Maas, 1971: 257, n 3). Housman found the Latin in which it was written “decent,” but did not find the content titillating. He seems to have mistakenly guessed it to be the work of Baron Corvo, since it had been sent to him together with another book by that author, rather than of a man who was possibly one of his former students.

be that this new “girl” is heterosexual; so she resolves to dress herself as a boy in order to attract her attention. Meanwhile, Odysseus arrives, disguised as a peddler of pornography. He suspects Pyrrha’s real identity, and suggests to “her” that, if she is looking for men, the camp of the Greek army is just the place to find them. Achilles is not attracted to the disguised Odysseus, however; he much prefers the new look of Deidamia, who has returned, having assumed a male disguise as her own brother Charmides, and Achilles is smitten by “him.” Achilles and Deidamia, both in cross-dressed disguise, fall to kissing, as “Charmides” describes the sexual activity that is available to boys in “his” boarding school. The chorus is impressed with Deidamia’s role-playing:

I can’t conceive how any girl can have a mind so nasty.
And how did she contrive to learn so much of paiderasty? (p 26)

Achilles and Deidamia debate the appeal of boys versus girls, and the chorus expresses its distaste at this display of apparent heterosexuality on Scyros.

I can’t endure to overhear this prurient conversation.
The only comfort left to us is mutual masturbation. (p 27)

Confusion ensues as the pair attempt to have intercourse, until each discovers the other’s sex organs, and in disgust they drop their disguises. Deidamia suggests that they carry on regardless, and offers to introduce Achilles to the pleasures of heterosexual sex. At this moment, Achilles is overjoyed by the arrival of his beloved “tutor,” Patroclus. Poor Deidamia is left in the lurch once again, until Odysseus steps in and offers his services. It is he who is to father Pyrrhos, and not Achilles, whose attachments remain strictly homosexual. At the end, Odysseus says to Deidamia:

So to-night
We’ll savour all legitimate delight
(For since he’s not appeared throughout the play
I’m sure King Lycomedes is away),
While you can share your tutor’s tent, my boy,
“Love” is the word tonight, to-morrow, “Troy.” (p 29)

This comment highlights Bainbrigge’s awareness of the importance that Lycomedes typically had in the tradition of dramatic representations of the Scyros tale, and thus the different emphasis of this version. The most important change is, of course, the depiction of Achilles as the beloved (ἐρόμενος) of Patroclus, according to the interpretation of their relationship offered by Phaedrus in Plato’s *Symposium* (*Symp.* 180a). This detail is absent from the operatic tradition simply because Patroclus was not a significant part of the story of Achilles’ childhood. Statius merely mentions in passing that Patroclus was already connected to Achilles *magno amore*, “by a great love,” where it may be a significant ambiguity that the Latin word can denote either friendship (φιλία)

or passion (ἔρωϛ).¹⁶⁴ As we have seen, the Baroque dramatic tradition was not unaware of the homoerotic possibilities of the cross-dressing on Scyros; Bainbrigge, however, was keen to associate the myth of Achilles on Scyros specifically with the classical Greek institution of *paiderasteia*, and thence to the world of English schoolboys and their tutors. This innovation and the sexually explicit content notwithstanding, the carnivalesque spirit of this work is entirely true to the tradition of Strozzi, Bentivoglio, Capece, and Gay.

This history of the reception of the *Achilleid* provides a panorama of different, and even diametrically opposed, ways that the Scyros myth can be interpreted, and ways that the *Achilleid* itself can be read. Unlike the episode of Hercules in cross-dressed servitude to Queen Omphale of Lydia, which is a minor parenthesis in a career rich in incident, the Scyros episode looms much larger in Achilles' biography. His discovery by Ulysses marks the start of his brief emergence into the world as a warrior. As such, it can be used to separate and quarantine the unheroic, domestic part of Achilles' biography from the Homeric, heroic part. Equally, it can be used to undercut that heroism by highlighting the contingent nature of its discovery and thus of Achilles' subsequent path in life. The question of which of the later dramas we have looked at, the more serious or the more comedic, are the true inheritors of the classical tradition is not straightforward to answer, since it depends on how one chooses to interpret the *Achilleid*. Did Statius start as he intended to go on? Was the Scyros episode representative of the sort of material that the rest of the epic was going to include? Koster (1979) has argued that the complete *Achilleid* would have consisted of a string of erotic encounters in strong thematic contrast to the tragic events of the *Iliad*. On the other hand, Méheust (xx) has argued that once Achilles got to Troy, "the hero would not have been discovered to be any less brutish than his colleagues from the *Thebaid*." As we shall see, this is a badly framed antithesis, since post-Ovidian Latin epic had plenty of room to intertwine both comic and serious elements. The question of whether the theme of Achilles on Scyros is properly treated as *buffa* or *seria* was as relevant for Statius as it was for his successors.

¹⁶⁴ Stat. *Ach.* 1.174; Achilles also refers briefly to the absence of Patroclus at 1.632f.

The Design of the Achilleid

If anybody should find fault with this story, i.e. How could Pyrrhus son of Achilles be at the battle of Troy if the Greeks were only ten years and six months and twelve days at the siege, and you think it was because of the abduction of Helen, daughter of Leda, by Alexander that that war of the Greeks was begun. Give him this answer, i.e. that Thetis daughter of Nereus brought Achilles to Scyros in order to hide him immediately after the abduction of Helen, daughter of Leda. And shortly afterward Achilles was on the island when Pyrrhus was begotten by him upon Deidamia daughter of Lycomedes. It was long after that the Greeks finished assembling and sent messengers to seek Achilles as is told here.

From a twelfth-century Irish version of the *Achilleid**

THE *Achilleid* is a coherent and polished piece of work, but these virtues have often been overlooked on account of its unfinished state. The usual presumption, which is almost certainly correct, is that Statius' death interrupted his work on it.¹ Because the poem as we have it is in a curtailed state, it will be necessary to consider the circumstances of its composition before we turn to questions of its form and genre. The *Achilleid* is often referred to as a "fragment," but this is a misleading label.² This term, as it is used when speak-

* The English translation is by Ó hAodha (1979: 107); see below (p 83).

¹ There is no sign in his surviving work of the adjustment in rhetoric that Domitian's assassination in September of AD 96 required, and so the poet is assumed to have predeceased the emperor by some short time: Coleman (1988: xx).

² The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* calls it a "charming, almost novelistic fragment" (OCD³ s.v. "Statius, Publius Papinius" [Feeney]).

ing of ancient literature, usually describes a piece of writing that has become seriously mutilated in the course of its transmission to us. This is not true, as far as we can tell, of the *Achilleid*; in fact it is almost certain, as will be argued below, that Statius had given to the public the part of the *Achilleid* that we have in something like its present form.

We should therefore distinguish between works that have been substantially destroyed in the course of their transmission, which would include Statius' epic on Domitian's German campaigns, of which only four lines survive,³ and on the other hand work that was apparently left unfinished at the time of the poet's death. Of this latter category we have two examples: the fifth book of the *Silvae* and the *Achilleid*. These two works differ in important respects, however, and so we should further subdivide his late work to distinguish, on the one hand, material that had not yet left the poet's desk at the time of his death and was only gathered together and published posthumously, such as *Silvae* 5, and on the other hand, partially completed work that Statius had already polished and presented to the world in his lifetime, such as the *Achilleid*.

The Achilleid in the Silvae

The poems of Book 5 of the *Silvae* are generally held to have been published posthumously, and there are several reasons why this is very likely: the preponderance of *epicedia* among the poems in Book 5, the personal nature of several of these, the internal inconsistencies in Stat. *Silv.* 5.3, which may indicate that it was cobbled together from disparate elements in the poet's *Nachlaß*, and the very incomplete state of its final poem.⁴ This last poem breaks off so abruptly it should be considered a fragment in a less technical sense of the term, which is to say that it was probably not damaged in transmission, but its state of composition is so inchoate and its unity so impaired that it warrants the label of "fragment." As we shall see, this contrasts strongly with the *Achilleid*, which, though incomplete, ends at a logical stopping point and exhibits a great deal of symmetry in its structure. It has sometimes been loosely assumed that, because *Silvae* 5 and the *Achilleid* are both unfinished, they were published together, but this is improbable.⁵ First of all, it is strange that the manuscript traditions of *Silvae* 5 and the *Achilleid* are so utterly divorced from each other if they were originally published together as a posthumous compilation. More importantly, there exist several references to the *Achilleid* in the *Silvae*. It would be a pointless eccentricity for a professional poet to allude publicly to a work whose

3 On the fragment of the *De bello germanico*, see Coleman (1988: xv–xvii).

4 See Coleman (1988: xxxi) and Nauta (2002: 203f).

5 One possible reading of what Feeney (OCD³ s.v. "Statius, Publius Papinius") says, in speaking of the *Silvae*: "Book 5 (together with his unfinished second epic, the *Achilleid*) was published after his death" might imply that the posthumous publication of the two works was connected.

nervous beginnings he was husbanding away in his study. Would Statius, as a performer, have advertised his current project to prospective patrons before he had a taste of it ready to declaim, should the invitation be forthcoming? We know from Juvenal that Statius gave public recitations from the *Thebaid*; he did not say that he waited until the epic was finished before doing so.⁶ There is nothing to prevent us imagining that, in order to seek out patronage and popular interest, Statius' epic works might have been recited in partial form prior to their ultimate and definitive publication. It seems likely that what we have in the text of the *Achilleid* is an example of such an intermediate form.

When Statius mentions the *Achilleid* in the *Silvae*, he puts it alongside the *Thebaid* as an existing work with which he wants us to be familiar.⁷ At the death of his son, he says:

pudeat Thebasque novumque
Aeaciden; nil iam placidum manabit ab ore. (5.5.36f)

Let my Thebes and my young Achilles stand abashed; nothing easeful
now will flow from my mouth.⁸

This "Achilles" was no scrap salvaged by the poet's executor from his notebooks; it was a part of Statius' oeuvre that was acknowledged as such on several occasions by the poet himself. The phrase *novum . . . Aeaciden* has a connotation of "my young Achilles," but its primary sense is "my recently composed *Achilleid*," or even "my recently published *Achilleid*," where *novum* "new" has the same force as in Catullus' "elegant new booklet."⁹

Elsewhere in Book 5 there is a scene that conjures up the image of Statius performing the *Achilleid* in precisely the manner that Juvenal described for the *Thebaid*.¹⁰ The poet congratulates the boy Crispinus on his appointment as military tribune, and laments his coming absence from Rome:

sed coetus solitos si forte ciebo
et mea Romulei venient ad carmina patres,
tu deris, Crispine, mihi cuneosque per omnes
te meus absentem circumspectabit Achilles. (5.2.160–3)

but if I attract my usual crowds and the nobility of Rome comes to hear
my song, you will not be there, Crispinus, and my Achilles will look
around, seeking you in vain throughout the sections of the theater.

6 Juvenal 7.82–7, on which see Jones (1982) and Markus (2000: 171–5).

7 On the *Achilleid* in the *Silvae*, see Nauta (2002: 203).

8 Adopting a different tone and a slightly different text, Shackleton Bailey (2003a: 377, with n on p 403) translates, "Should Thebes and my new Aeacides be shamed? Shall nothing that pleases flow any more from my lips?"

9 *lepidum novum libellum* (1.1). *novus* meaning "young" is not very common of persons, and is hard to parallel in that sense with proper names: see OLD s.v. "novus," 11a. The *Achilleid* is denoted by *Aeaciden*, its second word.

10 See Markus (2000: 164f).

The poet imagines himself performing his “Achilles” in a theater and expecting to see the boy in the audience. Is this image supposed to represent the day – perhaps another eleven years hence – when Statius finally has the epic completed?¹¹ Crispinus would be back in Rome by then, one would hope. On the contrary, Statius is evoking an occasion in the not very distant future when he will, as usual (*solitos*, 160) give another of his performances. This passage forces the recognition that Statius could envision a public performance of part of the *Achilleid* in the very near future.

Our most specific information about the composition of the *Achilleid* comes from a poem in Book 4 of the *Silvae*, in which Statius congratulates Vibius Maximus on the birth of a son, expresses his wishes for Vibius’ speedy return to Rome from Dalmatia, and makes a subtle appeal for patronage:

torpor est nostris sine te Camenis,
tardius sueto venit ipse Thymbrae
rector et primis meus ecce metis
haeret Achilles.

quippe te fido monitore nostra
Thebais multa cruciata lima
temptat audaci fide Mantuanae
gaudia famae.

(4.7.21–8)

My Muses are laggards without you; Apollo, lord of Thymbra, himself comes more slowly than he used to; and, look!, my Achilles is stuck at his first turning post, whereas under your faithful guidance my *Thebaid*, tortured by a great deal of polishing, makes a bid with bold lyre for the joys of Virgil’s fame.

In short, Statius wants money and material help, but his request is made very politely, using the conventional and correct rhetoric of patronage.¹² As Coleman says, “*sine te*, originally a religious formula . . . conventionally expresses the poet’s need for the stimulus of inspiration or patronage.”¹³ We might even say that the language of inspiration and poetic guidance was itself a socially acceptable way of discussing the more mercenary aspect of patronage. In the second stanza quoted here, Statius reminds Vibius of his support for the successful project of the *Thebaid*, mentioning the fame that attends the poet and by extension his patron. The previous stanza describes the difficulties that Statius is currently having in making progress with the *Achilleid*. It would be wrong to read this as a case of writer’s block in the light of modern romantic notions

¹¹ Statius claims that it took him twelve years – a conventional figure – to finish the *Thebaid* (*Theb.* 12.810–12). As often noted, the figure is suspiciously round, but Statius clearly meant to stress that the *Thebaid* took a very long time. On Statius’ recitation, see Markus (2000: 163–8).

¹² On the forms that the material benefit of patronage could take, see White (1978: 90–2); and on the identity of Vibius Maximus, see White (1973).

¹³ Coleman (1988: ad 4.7.21).

about the creative process and the tortured artist. Statius was a professional poet, and could ill afford to indulge in hysterical bouts of self-doubt. Indeed, Statius' fecundity and speed of composition are clearly attested in the *Silvae*. In the context of an appeal for patronage it would be naive to think that he was having serious compositional problems and that he was counting on the poetic expertise of Vibius Maximus for help. We may be sure that Statius was as grateful for Vibius' material help in completing the revision of the *Thebaid* as for his aesthetic judgment; tactfully, he mentions the latter alone.

What is interesting is that Statius describes the state of the *Achilleid* in a manner that is very consistent with the way we have it now. As Henderson has noted, the metaphor for a chariot getting stuck while making the first turn on the racecourse is suspiciously apt for a poem that has stopped just after its first book.¹⁴ For Vibius to understand the references in this poem at all, he would have to have known that Statius was working on a poem on the life of Achilles. Had he sent his prospective patron a copy of his current work-in-progress? If Vibius had no specific knowledge about the state of completion of the second book of the *Achilleid*, then he would have been able to understand the metaphor of the "first turning post" (*primis . . . metis*, 23) only in part. He could infer that the new Achilles poem was stalled at its beginning, but he might not have been able to appreciate the witty and precise equivalence made between the books of the epic and laps in a chariot race. What is the force of the word *ecce* ("look!" 23)? It could be an attempt to inject vividness into the metaphor by expressing the suddenness of Achilles' chariot wreck. Alternatively, it could be an indication that *Silvae* 4.7 was the covering letter that accompanied a copy of the *Achilleid* to Dalmatia. At minimum, what we have here is evidence that Statius acknowledged, in a book of *Silvae* he himself published, the existence of the text we have in something like the form in which we have it. This text is not a "fragment," but a prospectus for patrons of a project that was so well advanced that the poet could envision performing it publicly, and perhaps even sending advance copies of the completed portion to important patrons.

The significance of the final remaining passage in the *Silvae* where Statius mentions the *Achilleid* is harder to gauge, as he does so merely as a prelude to asking his addressee whether he should be so bold as to attempt an epic on the emperor's exploits.¹⁵ It may be that the poet is genuinely sounding out Vitorius Marcellus, his well-connected patron, on the idea, or perhaps he is merely flattering him with an appeal to his literary-political judgment.¹⁶ Even

¹⁴ Henderson (1993: 164): "[Vibius] is now needed for further poetic midwifery as Statius is 'stuck getting past his epic's first bend into *Achilleid* book 2' (Stuck there – he already knew? – for ever)." On the details of the metaphor, see Coleman (1988: ad 4.7.23–4).

¹⁵ *Silv.* 4.4.87–100: "I am making an attempt at Troy, in fact, and great Achilles" (*Troia quidem magnasque mihi temptatur Achilles*, 94).

¹⁶ See Coleman (1988: ad 4.4.87–100).

if the true agenda here concerns imperial panegyric, Statius nevertheless takes the opportunity to advertise the successful completion of the *Thebaid* and to inform his patron of his current project, the *Achilleid*.

The *Silvae* demonstrate how Statius tried to interest his patrons in his work-in-progress. When Statius' contemporary, Martial, imagines one of his own patrons exclaiming with respect to himself, "mine! that poet is mine!" (*meus est iste poeta, meus!*, 9.84.8), is he mocking Statius, who had Calchas exclaim of Achilles, "that boy is mine" (*meus iste, meus*, 1.528), and who used nearly the same words of his own son in the fifth book of the *Silvae* (*meus ille, meus, Silv.* 5.5.69, on which see below, p 292)? If so, then Martial, who shared several patrons with Statius, may have seen or heard the *Achilleid*, and perhaps even *Silvae* 5, at some time before the early months of the year 95, when he published his ninth book, and so probably before Statius' death.¹⁷ The question that Statius posed in the *Silvae* to his patrons and that his death left unresolved – what could possibly happen to Achilles next? – is, as we shall see, posed no less clearly by the text as we have it.

Coherence and Design

The most important result to take from the foregoing discussion is that the *Achilleid* did not escape accidentally from Statius' desktop; it had already taken its first steps in the world and the inchoate portion was ready for public recitation and possibly even limited written circulation among some of his patrons. The *Achilleid* is not a fumbling, rough sketch; it is Statius' final masterpiece. It was evidently designed to indicate the possibilities of a longer, complete epic on Achilles, sufficient patronage permitting, and so it is not unreasonable to presume that the text we have, while open-ended, also has a structure that is due to more than random chance. On these grounds it is justified to refer to the *Achilleid* simply as a "poem" rather than a "fragment" and to treat it as though its gross features, such as its starting and ending points, while idiosyncratic, were as deliberately chosen as in any other work. In comparison with such texts as the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus and *Silvae* 5.5, where the process of composition has evidently been interrupted quite abruptly, the rational endpoint of the *Achilleid* clearly marks it as a different beast.¹⁸ It will be worth remembering that the decisive closure at the end of the *Thebaid* is more the exception than the rule in Latin epic. A number of the features of the overall design of the *Achilleid* illustrate its coherence.

In a witty and paradoxical article, W. R. Johnson considered the Achilles of Homer as a literary creation and the Achilles of Statius as a product of an oral

¹⁷ For the dates, see Nauta (2002: 203f and 442), and for the rarity of the repeated possessive used by Martial and Statius here, see Wills (1996: 82).

¹⁸ On the incompleteness of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, see Hershkovitz (1998: 1–34).

culture.¹⁹ This is an interesting point with respect to Statius: the importance of the oral, performative aspect of the work of this poet in particular has not been properly appreciated, given what we know about the popularity of Statius' recitals from Juvenal and indeed from the *Silvae* passage quoted above.²⁰ Johnson notices a symmetry that mere "fragments" are not meant to exhibit:

Whatever Statius intended to do with Achilles after finishing book 1 and starting book 2, there can be no doubt how deliberate, initially at least, his design was: the first 396 verses are devoted to Thetis getting her son safely to Scyros; 163 verses are given over to the Greeks at Aulis. . . ; finally, 400 verses contain the discovery of Achilles by those sent to search for him and his departure with them to Troy. A – B – A: the architecture of the narrative is severe and arithmetically exact. (1994: 34)

A similar symmetry also obtains from the point of view of Achilles' biography. If we consider only the portion of his life covered in the extant poem, then the *Achilleid* is a very well-balanced narrative. It begins *in medias res*, at the point when the boy is just about to leave Chiron's care; he is plunged into a new adventure on Scyros, and only later when he is at leisure does he narrate retrospectively the events of his early childhood as far back as he can recall. He reports at second hand those events that he was too young to remember (*dicor*. . . , 2.96), until, with the final words of his narrative, the hero says that he has told everything he knows about his own life: "my mother knows the rest."²¹ As Achilles disappears into his mother's womb, the poem ends, having given a complete account of all the events of Achilles' life up to his joining the Trojan expedition. There is no formal closure here, but it is an eminently logical place to pause. The two main strands of plot, Thetis' attempt to prevent Achilles from joining the war and Ulysses' mission to bring him to Aulis, have just been resolved and there is no other action immediately pending. The first words of the poem are the pseudo-Homeric patronymic that designates Achilles via his father's father (*magnanimum Aeaciden*); the last word of the poem is "mother" (*mater*). The childhood of Achilles unfolds in the space left vacant by his two absentee parents. It is thus slightly mislead-

¹⁹ Johnson (1994).

²⁰ See above (p 59). Johnson (1994: 35): "the Flavian audience and their poets probably thought of their texts just as actors and theatre directors think of their scripts – as something that must be interpreted with the whole body. . . , as something whose rhetorical energies and visual and verbal glories would only realize their potentialities in the actuality of performance."

²¹ *scit cetera mater* (2.167). Some translators, Dilke (ad loc), and possibly Hinds (2000: 244) have understood these words to refer to the circumstances of Achilles' arrival in Scyros, which does not make good sense. Achilles has already refused to discuss that topic (2.43–8); this is a separate failure to narrate, which, since he has been summing up the story of his childhood with Chiron, must refer to the question, never answered in the *Achilleid*, of how Achilles came to live with the centaur in the first place. The unhappy background must be supplied from Apollonius (*Argon.* 4.865–79), on which see below (p 170).

ing to say that the poem simply “breaks off” as a result of the poet’s untimely death.²²

It is clear that writers of epic often conceived of larger compositional units than a single book; the *Achilleid* as we have it is just such a structure.²³ In Book 2, Achilles’ autobiographical account of his early life with Chiron gives a fuller sense of completeness to the narrative of Achilles’ young life than Book 1 alone possesses. Indeed, any structure that begins *in medias res* demands a retrospective narrative to fill in the story before the opening point of the epic. It is also interesting to note that these 167 lines of Book 2 correspond in length to the 163 lines of the Aulis episode at the center of Book 1. Thus the structure of the *Achilleid* according to Johnson’s schema extends beyond the A – B – A of Book 1 to the even more symmetrical A – B – A – B of the poem as a whole (verses: 396 – 163 – 400 – 167).

Dilke believed that the *Achilleid*, on account of its unfinished state, must have been less than perfectly revised, and so he attempted to identify examples of this lack of polish: “Statius’ death may not only have cut short the *Achilleid*, but prevented any thorough revision of the completed portion” (p 7). Yet the instances he gives of supposedly awkward repetitions of language may be easily paralleled in the *Thebaid*, as Dilke himself acknowledges (7, n 1). This entirely vitiates the force of his argument, since the *Thebaid* is the only epic surviving from the period that we can be reasonably sure was published at Rome in its final form under the supervision of the poet himself, and indeed Statius boasts of the care he took over the *Thebaid*.²⁴ Dilke’s judgment that lines 1.663f of the *Achilleid* are “weak and unpoetic” has not been universally accepted, and even so, they might be interpolated, as Garrod thought.²⁵ The “awkwardness inherent” in lines 1.927–9 is in fact the result of a brilliant narrative *coup de théâtre*: for an explanation see below (p 138). The doubtful hiatus in 2.93 is easily emended, and Dilke himself prints a corrected text. Finally, the expression *sociis multumque faventibus* (“[us, your] very well-wishing comrades,” 2.91) may be in a sense “weak,” as Dilke charges, but this weakness is a reflection of Statius’ characterization of Diomedes, who speaks those words: the well-meaning hero is lamely trying to assure Achilles (and himself, perhaps) that he and Ulysses only have the boy’s best interests at heart in taking him away from Scyros to Aulis; the amplification is weak because Statius has designed Diomedes’ words to ring hollow in the light of Achilles’ fated death at Troy. Dilke’s attempt to demonstrate examples of lack of polish in the *Achilleid*, which he

22 ocd³ s.v. “Statius, Publius Papinius” [Feeney].

23 If it is right to say that the *Achilleid* is a self-consciously Ovidianizing epic, then it is natural to expect that its book endings to be less formally closed. On the fluidity of transitions in the *Metamorphoses*, see Quintilian (*Inst.* 4.1.77) and Fowler (1989: 88–97).

24 See above (p 60).

25 Cf. the apparatus of Garrod’s ocd, and conversely, for approval of the lines, that of Marastoni. Line 1.661, just two lines before, has poor ms support and is universally thought spurious.

took as a given, in fact convincingly demonstrates the opposite. If a reader as careful and critical as Dilke could only produce these few, and easily accounted for, flaws in the poem's language, it is a testament to the careful revision given to the poem.

Incompletion and Pathos

It is unlikely that Statius, as a professional poet, planned that the *Achilleid* should remain forever in its present state of one book and a bit. Experiments at deliberate incompleteness do, however, exist in literature. Walter Raleigh, while imprisoned in the Tower of London, apparently wrote only the eleventh book and a small piece of the twelfth book of *The Ocean to Cynthia*, Cynthia being the moon, Diana, the virgin goddess, and thus the virgin queen, Elizabeth I.²⁶ For Raleigh, fragmentation demonstrates the shattering effect of imprisonment on his powers of praise:

The blossomes fallen, the sapp gon from the tree,
The broken monuments of my great desires,
From thes so lost what may th' affections bee,
What heat in Cynders of extinguisht fiers? (13–16)

The “broken monuments” of his past are reflected in the fragmentary state of the composition. The reason for beginning with the eleventh book in particular may be found in his description of his relationship with the queen as a war of twelve years (120). If Raleigh was making the conventional equation of years and books (cf. *Theb.* 12.811f), then his composition described his current state as a desperate point near the end of the work of his life as a courtier, but with the potential yet for redemption and a happy ending. In a manner strikingly reminiscent of the *error* for which Ovid was punished by Augustus, Raleigh alludes vaguely to his indiscretion as a “myshapp” (10) and an “error” (338). This may not be a conscious echo of Ovid (*Trist.* 2.207), but rather may be due to the similarity of their embarrassment. Raleigh is thought to have been caught in an intimate relationship with one of the queen's maids of honor, Elizabeth Throckmorton, to whom we find him married upon his release from the Tower.²⁷ Despite Raleigh's situation, the incompleteness of his epic is an invitation:

My pipe, which loues own hand, gave my desire
To singe her prayes, and my wo vppon,

26 Latham (1951: 25–43); a version of the poem in modernized spelling may be found in Oakeshott (1960: 176–203). While never published until the modern era, the poem was more than a sketch; the MS is a fair copy, not a first draft: Latham (1951: 124). The short fragment of the beginning of the “twelfth book” is in a different meter to the eleventh book.

27 Oakeshott (1960: 41–51).

Dispaire hath often threatened to the fier,
As vayne to keipe now all the rest ar gonn. (505–8)

Near the end of his work, the poet reminds the queen that the fragmentation and destruction of his poetic voice will silence her praises, too, and implicitly promises the production of further praise poetry should he be released.

This sort of negotiation between power and poetry is not foreign to Latin literature: one might consider the six books of the *Fasti* as a similarly motivated down-payment to Augustus on the complete Roman poem that Ovid would deliver upon his return from exile.²⁸ At the very least, the *Fasti* are a reminder that a Roman poet could publish a work in partially complete form, and still consider it an important part of his oeuvre. The claims of unity made by Barchiesi for the *Fasti* are equally true of the *Achilleid*:

this text had a regular circulation, as Ovid acknowledges. It appeals to a public, and although it is just half of the project, it is not a stolen manuscript: this half has the right to be considered as a text.²⁹

Both texts have suffered from the presumption that they only exist as the result of an accident beyond their author's control. For Statius, who was writing in less desperate circumstances than Ovid or Raleigh, incompleteness is not a plea for forgiveness or a promise to reform; it is an advertisement to prospective patrons like Vibius Maximus that, having completed the *Thebaid*, he was not about to rest on his laurels. It was, like the *Fasti* or Raleigh's *Cynthia*, a down-payment against future patronage.

The Abandoned Loom

The *Achilleid* was written in a spirit of hopefulness: as a token of things to come and as a demonstration of the poet's continuing epic ambitions; but its incompleteness took on a more somber cast after Statius' death. The contrast between what is promised by the poem and what is achieved in it could be seen in retrospect as a tragic failure, as promise cut short, or even as an example of poetic insufficiency, and that is apparently how Claudian read the work, recasting it as a monument to aporia. The *Achilleid* was a fundamental model for the *De raptu Proserpinae* (DRP), which is likewise the story of a mother's concern to protect her child and whose plot also turns on an act of rape. In accordance with his Statian model, Claudian left his own poem incomplete. The possibility has not, it seems, been seriously considered that this might have been an act of deliberate emulation; the usual explanation for the state of Claudian's poem is the death of the poet or "the distraction of some more

²⁸ See Barchiesi (1997: 259–62), who also considers Ovid's claim (*Trist.* 2.549) to have written twelve books, rather than the six that we have.

²⁹ Barchiesi (1997: 261f).

pressing commitment or a waning of enthusiasm for the project.”³⁰ There is in fact strong internal evidence that incompleteness was always an essential feature of Claudian’s project. Claudian abandoned his composition not once but twice, and even tells the reader so, adding a resumptive preface before the second book. This indicates that the composition took place in two stages, with a prolonged interval in between; various biographical explanations of this lacuna have been proposed.³¹ Yet if we look at the end of the first book, an aesthetic rather than a biographical explanation may be preferable.

The first book of the *De raptu Proserpinae* ends with a description of an incomplete work of art (1.248–68). Ignorant of the scheming that will lead to her abduction, Proserpina sits at home singing to herself and weaving a tapestry with a design on it of cosmographic scope and classicizing symmetry. Gruzelier’s comment is worth quoting at length:

Here Proserpina is innocently ensconced in her palace stronghold creating a picture of a harmonious cosmos in which everything is in its proper order: Jupiter on high, Pluto down below, and the world sorted into its appropriate positions. Meanwhile already, unbeknown to her, the dark powers of evil are assembling to upset this order: hence the sudden switch to the bridling of Pluto’s steeds at the end of the book. This seems very much consonant with Claudian’s own world-view – of a small pool of light at centre stage that is the civilized, organized world, surrounded by the monstrous, threatening shadows of destruction, whether they be Pluto ready to burst out of his proper sphere beneath the earth, the giants trying to scale heaven or the Goths massing to invade Rome.³²

The work Proserpina is engaged upon is, however, a vain effort (*invita . . . munera*, DRP 1.256). Her fate has been decided, and Venus, Diana, and Pallas are on their way to lure the girl deliberately out of the house to the scene of her abduction. They arrive, in fact, while she is weaving her tapestry:

cardine verso
cernit adesse deas imperfectumque laborem
deserit. (DRP 1.270–2)

the door opened, she saw the goddesses approach, and she left her work unfinished.

She leaves her work unfinished, its grand ambitions forever beyond attainment, a monument to her lost innocence. The poet rounds out the end of the book with a menacing description of the horses of Pluto preparing for their journey. What a brilliant stroke it was to end the poem at this moment of looming but

³⁰ Hall (1969: 105), quoted with approval by Gruzelier (1993: xx). Cameron (1970: 465f) argues that the poet’s death interrupted the composition.

³¹ See Hall (1969: 94–105) and Felgentreu (1999: 169–73).

³² Gruzelier (1993: ad 1.246ff); on the design of the tapestry, see also von Albrecht (1989).

unconsummated violence, suddenly incomplete, like the tapestry of Proserpina, and like the *Achilleid*.³³ For it must be that at one time the poem ended there, or approximately there.

The second book is preceded by a second pentameter preface. The poet explains that just as Orpheus was asleep for a long time before Hercules came to wake him to singing once more, so too the poet has found his Hercules, a certain Florentinus, to set him singing again.³⁴ This elaborate account of Orpheus awaking explains why Claudian has taken up the poem again after a long interval, and indeed why he is taking it up again at all, after producing a poem with such a striking and effective ending. The answer is: patronage. It is ironic that Statius did not live to see the patronage his own work was designed to attract, while Claudian did reap the profit via his imitation. It may be that Claudian meant his own work similarly as a prospectus to patrons, and that Florentinus simply took up the bid, but that theory is hard to reconcile with the pathos that incompleteness has taken on in the work. Why did Claudian not simply revise the poem and insert his new patron's name into first preface? Perhaps the original had already attained too wide a circulation, or too much time had passed in the interim; but neither of these seem insurmountable problems. Claudian was obligated to proceed in the manner he did, adding a second preface in the middle of the poem to explain his hiatus and resumption, because the previous version of *De raptu Proserpinae* had so dramatically abjured completion that simply to add to it or complete it in a straightforward fashion without explanation and without respecting the fragmentariness of the initial conception would have made a mockery of the original project.

The theme of pathetic incompleteness was not removed, merely postponed. The poem breaks off again in the third book, as Ceres searches frantically for her daughter. Claudian did not forget about the abandoned tapestry. We see it again on the occasion that Ceres returns to her empty house and runs through it in a panic:

semirutas confuso stamine telas
atque interceptas agnoscit pectinis artes.
divinus perit ille labor, spatiumque relictum
audax sacrilego supplebat aranea textu. (3.155–8)

she recognized the web of the loom half-destroyed with confused threads
and saw how the artistry of the weaver's reed had been interrupted. That
heavenly work was undone; a bold and blasphemous spider was filling in
the space remaining with its own weaving.

³³ Like Book 1 itself, its preface ends suddenly with a catastrophic image: the sailor is caught unawares by a storm. Claudian employs the conventional metaphor of the sailor who first left the coastline and ventured onto the deep as a figure for the bold writer of epic and thus, presumably, for himself (Felgentreu, 1999: 161–6).

³⁴ DRP 2. pref. 49–52. On the identity of Florentinus, see Hall (1969: 94–105).

The weaving that was described so beautifully when Proserpina was still working on it, while it still had a teleology, now appears to be a mess of confused threads. All workers have not been idle in the meantime, however. A bold vandal has supplemented the original weaving at its margins and in its gaps, a spider who spins her insubstantial web on the abandoned loom. This is a poignant appropriation of the Ovidian opposition between Minerva's weaving, which like Proserpina's is classical, totalizing and cosmological, and Arachne's mannerist, modern work.³⁵ As Ovid did,³⁶ Claudian seems to view his own work reflected in the image of the spider; but whereas Ovid portrayed the classical poetic tradition in terms of a mean, jealous, and spiteful Minerva, for Claudian classicism is a tragically endangered and incomplete project and his own work is a poor, insubstantial thing in comparison. So in Book 3, Claudian continues to trope his own work through the image of the loom, and he makes sure that we do not mistake his resumption of his project for an attempt to complete it or somehow to redeem the pathos of his original conception. Even an artist who is committed to producing an incomplete work, given the proper patronage, will take it up – and drop it – once again.

The attraction of the *Achilleid* as a model for the later poet may be imagined on a number of levels. It may be that Claudian read the incompleteness of the *Achilleid* as a symptom of a belatedness to epic that he felt himself to share. He may have seen it as Statius' serious response to the monumental and already closed nature of mythological epic discourse; Claudian may have seen himself as emulating Statius' principled "refusal" to advance his poem to treat of the Trojan War, remaining on the margins of the larger epic narrative like the spider on Proserpina's loom. If so, the later poet was reacting to an important element in the *Achilleid*. Of course, we are not obliged to agree with Claudian that the monumental inevitability of Homeric and Virgilian narrative was the cause of Statius' failure to proceed, but it will be useful to recognize from the outset that the ineluctable nature of epic fate and the failure of any attempt substantially to rewrite it are central themes in the *Achilleid*.

In a recent study of intertextuality and literary tradition, Hinds (1998) has interpreted the *Achilleid* in a way that converges with Claudian's approach. His *Allusion and Intertext* has done a great deal to advance our understanding of the *Achilleid*, especially regarding the programmatic Ovidian ambitions of the poem. Because that study ends with a negative judgment of the place of the *Achilleid* in literary history, it may be useful to confront it directly. Hinds illustrates the extensive allusion Statius deploys in the *Achilleid* to Ovid, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*, and to Catullus, particularly in poem 64, and to other poets such as Horace altogether outside the epic tradition; he argues

35 Ov. *Met.* 6.1–145, on which see Heslin (1998). *tela* can refer to the web of a weaver or a spider, just as *pecten* can be the implement of a weaver or a poet, and *textus* can be the product of either.

36 Harries (1990).

correctly that this constitutes an attempt to generate and constitute retrospectively an alternative epic tradition. Because this bid to realign the entire epic genre was unsuccessful, he judges that the poem as a whole was not a success:

this aspect of Statius' own bid to write the tradition into his poem has been, measured by its modern reception, a failure. Statius' literary historiography in the unfinished *Achilleid* constructs a tradition in which Ovid's *Metamorphoses* features front and centre. This is a tendentious rereading of literary history by Statius – more obviously tendentious than his privileging of Catullus 64 – and evidently it is one which has not become canonical.

(1998: 142f)

There are several problems with this formulation: (i) it ignores works like Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, which did continue the alternative epic tradition constructed by the *Achilleid*; (ii) Statius' epic poetry as a whole, including the more obviously Virgilian *Thebaid*, has not been "canonical" in the West for several centuries, so it is not clear that one can extract the "failure" of the *Achilleid* to be understood by modern critics from the general failure of those critics to come seriously to terms with Statius' corpus as a whole; and most importantly, (iii) it reifies a kind of Statian "failure" that the poet has already wittily troped through the figure of Thetis. The plot of the poem as we have it is largely the story of failure, the failure of Thetis to prevent her son from going to war, in fact, to prevent him from entering the *Iliad* and joining the mainstream epic tradition. We know this endeavor is destined to fail, the poet knows it, and most of all, Thetis should rightly have known it.³⁷

We shall examine in the next chapter how Thetis tries and fails to derail Achilles' epic fate; but we should not confuse this with the poet's own failure to overturn the inevitability of the Homeric and Virgilian epic narratives. A story about failure is not necessarily a failure of a story. To suggest the latent imminence of another epic tradition always already alongside and in competition with the dominant paradigm is a big job for a small poem; even had he completed it, Statius would hardly have expected to supplant the *Iliad* with the *Achilleid*, but rather to supplement it. To redeem the text of the *Achilleid* from the prejudgment of pathetic insufficiency or outright failure that its reception has determined for it, whether on account of its apparent aporia and belatedness, as for Claudian, or on account of the misunderstanding of critics and the resistance of Homeric-Virgilian epic discourse to being rewritten, as for Hinds, it will be necessary to attempt an interpretation grounded in more generous premises.

³⁷ The Parcae told her all about it at her wedding: see below (p 113).

The Proem

The *Achilleid* begins with a few lines describing the scope and nature of Statius' project, and this is the passage in the poem that has attracted the most interest. The first seven lines pose a conundrum of poetic affiliation and ambition that is not easy to solve; and perhaps it was not meant to be solved definitively at this stage in the evolution of the composition: this version of the preface may have been provisional.

magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
 progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo,
 diva, refer. quamquam acta viri multum inclita cantu
 Maeonio (sed plura vacant), nos ire per omnem
 (sic amor est) heroa velis Scyroque latentem
 Dulichia proferre tuba nec in Hectore tracto
 sistere, sed tota iuvenem deducere Troia. (1.1–7)

Goddess, consider Achilles, great-hearted grandson of Aeacus, the offspring who was feared by Jupiter the thunderer, and who was forbidden to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Although the hero's deeds are quite famous thanks to the songs of Homer (but plenty more are still available), please permit me to run through the entire hero (for that is my desire), to bring him out from hiding on Scyros by means of Ulysses' trumpet, and not to stop at the dragging of Hector, but to lead the young man all the way through Troy.

Statius begins with "great-souled grandson of Aeacus" (*magnanimum Aeaciden*), a patronymic epithet for his hero that sounds grandiloquent and Homeric; but the source of this particular phrase turns out to be not so much Homer as Ovid.³⁸ In Ovid's account of the judgment of Achilles' arms in the *Metamorphoses*, Ulysses defends his own delay in coming to Troy by adducing Achilles' tarrying at Scyros as a similar misdeed (*crimen*):³⁹

quid, quod me duri fugientem munera belli
 arguit incepto serum accessisse labori,
 nec se magnanimo maladicere sentit Achilli?
 si simulasse vocas crimen, simulavimus ambo. (Ov. *Met.* 13.296–9)

Since he [Ajax] insists that I fled from the duties of an unpleasant war and arrived late at a task already begun, why does he not understand that

³⁸ The combination of patronymic and epithet *Αιακίδης μεγάρθυμος* is not found in Homer, but that epithet and similar others are applied to Achilles, as in *μεγάρθυμος Ἀχιλλεύς* (*Il.* 23.168) and *Πηλεΐδῃ μεγάρθυμῃ* (*Il.* 21.153). Perhaps the closest Homer comes is the three-word phrase *μεγάλας φρένας Αιακίδαο* (*Il.* 9.184) noted by Barchiesi (1996: 49). Also relevant may be Jupiter's promise to Venus in the *Aeneid* that she will bear great-souled Aeneas (*magnanimum Aenean*, *Aen.* 1.260) to heaven. There the epithet "great-souled" looks ahead to Aeneas' immortality, while here it is in compensation for the immortality Achilles will fail to achieve.

³⁹ The Scyrian context confirms that Ovid's *magnanimo . . . Achilli* is the source of Statius' phrase.

he is insulting great-hearted Achilles too? If you call it a crime to have hidden, we both hid.

Ovid's Ulysses manipulates competing mythic traditions to construct a rhetorically useful paradox: the Homeric Achilles, *magnanimus* though he incontestably was, was also the subject of another myth, unknown in Homer, according to which the "great-souled" hero hid from the war dressed as a girl. The *Achilleid* thus invokes the greatness of Achilles in terms that seem to have a superficially Homeric flavor, but which have already been rhetoricized ironically by Ovid; this poem will be no naive attempt by Statius to replicate Homeric epos.

The compositional strategy implied by the phrase "but plenty more are still available" (*sed plura vacant*) can also be analyzed in the light of the *Metamorphoses*. Statius asserts that he intends not to stay at the chronological margins of Homer's stories, as the cyclic poems did, but to run right through Achilles' entire biography (*ire per omnem . . . heroa*, 4f) including the Trojan War and the events of the *Iliad* itself, such as the dragging of Hector (*Hectore tracto*, 7). This ironic claim of a comprehensive and linear narrative, running from the very beginning to the very end, and this supplementary manner of approaching a canonical epic are both Ovidian. The *Metamorphoses* had subsumed in this way the events of the *Iliad* and of the *Aeneid* into a larger design, focussing on events of the Trojan War and of Aeneas' biography that had not been told by Homer or Virgil. Statius' proem therefore opens up the possibility that the *Achilleid* will revise our picture of the Homeric Achilles, just as Ovid had done for the Virgilian Aeneas, exploiting the tension between the canonical epic narrative and competing traditions about the life of the hero.

Another programmatic flag flown by this poem was noted first by Koster, and has been emphasized by others thereafter; this is its use of the word *deducere*.⁴⁰ Ever since Virgil used the word to translate Callimachus' concept of poetic "slenderness" (Virg. *Ecl.* 6.3–5), it was a motto of Roman Alexandrianism. Whereas Virgil had played upon the meaning of the word in the context of spinning, Statius puns on the phrase *iuvenem deducere* (1.7) "to lead the young man" which properly describes what a slave (*paedagogus*) does for his ward. Statius puts himself qua poet in a position akin to one of the surrogate fathers, like Chiron and Lycomedes, that the *Achilleid* supplies for the hero in place of Peleus. The Alexandrian connotations of the word *deducere* also have an important place in the preface to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.4), where it helps to address the apparent contradiction between the poem's exhaustive scope and its Alexandrian execution. As Barchiesi notes, the tension implicit in Ovid's proem between Homeric and Hellenistic poetic paradigms is equally

⁴⁰ "to lead"; Koster (1979: 191–6); see also Hardie (1993: 63, n 8), Barchiesi (1996: 58f) and Hinds (1998: 142, n 26).

present in the *Achilleid*.⁴¹ It is fitting that the Latin generic model for the *Achilleid* will be Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, given that the extant part of the *Achilleid* is a metamorphic tale of Achilles' transformation from wild boy to girl to young warrior.

The poem of the *Achilleid* displays several other prominent "Alexandrian" attributes.⁴² First of all, the effort to distinguish between Homeric and extra-Homeric variants implied by the words *plura vacant* was a fundamental initiative in the scholarship of Hellenistic Alexandria. This was pointed out by Tandoi, who also noted that the metrical form of the first line has an appropriately Alexandrian flavor.⁴³ It is a four-word hexameter, which is a relatively rare phenomenon; this is the unique example in the *Achilleid*.⁴⁴ Such lines are a normal feature of hexameter poetry, but placed in such a prominent position as this they seem a display of virtuosity and take on a programmatic character.⁴⁵ The first hymn of Callimachus and the first book of Apollonius' *Argonautica* both have hexameters that consist of only four words as their third line, and perhaps we should also mention line 15 of Catullus 64, which has four words and is sufficiently close to its beginning to qualify as proemial.

The overall tone of the first seven lines of the poem also recalls Callimachus. This is no grand, sweeping period; it is chatty and informal. The narrator interrupts the exposition of his theme with parenthetical comments addressed to his Muse in the manner of the *Aetia*, not once, but twice. As it happens, few of the standard texts of the *Achilleid* punctuate these lines correctly. Two phrases, *sed plura vacant* and *sic amor est*, are both detached syntactically in equal measure from the rest of the sentence: they are pure parentheses. Yet most editors have played down their impact; Dilke, for example, set off the first phrase with parentheses and the second with dashes, as if varying the punctuation might temper the halting effect of one interjection coming on the heels of the other.⁴⁶

41 Barchiesi (1996: 58f).

42 This is not to say that what Romans came to construe as "Alexandrian" or "Callimachean" must have been entirely accurate. These terms took on a life of their own in Roman polemic: Cameron (1995: 454f).

43 Tandoi (1985: 167).

44 For extensive statistics on the Greek hexameter, see Bassett (1919).

45 Four-word hexameters are moderately rare: there are thirty-five instances in the *Thebaid*. Nevertheless, it is right to say that the appearance of one in the first line of the poem must be taken as significant. In Latin verse, such hexameters commonly include long Greek proper names, particularly patronymics (such as *Aeacides* here), and they often have a distinctively Greek character: thus Thomas (1988: ad *Georg.* 1.470).

46 The punctuation adopted by Méheust and Marastoni, on the other hand, is quite misleading if not simply ungrammatical; they only mark the second parenthesis as such, while putting a comma before *sed plura vacant* and a colon after it. This implies that *sed* coordinates with *quamquam*, but *sed* was not used in place of *tamen* in this period (see LHS 487); it also leaves the sentence divided paratactically into two uncoordinated halves at the colon. The first place one can find these lines printed correctly is in an article by Barchiesi (1996: 50); he silently corrects the usual typographical

The prominent use of parenthetical comments at the start of a poem is a Callimachean technique.⁴⁷ As usual, it is Ovid who brought this to Latin epic: the *Metamorphoses* is interrupted by a parenthetical comment in its second line.⁴⁸

The explicit mention of Homer in the proem of the *Achilleid* is another sign of the rejection of the Homeric-Virgilian epic paradigm; explicitly to mention Homeric poetry is an extremely unepic thing to do. Rather, it usually belongs to the *recusatio* or “refusal” topos of Latin lyric and elegaic poetry: these usually mention Homeric epic by way of rejecting it. Compare Statius’ description of “Homeric song” (*cantu* | *Maeonio* 1.3f) with Ovid’s discussion of the proper meter and matter for elegy and epic in his *Remedia Amoris*:

fortia Maeonio gaudent pede bella referri;
deliciis illic quis locus esse potest? (Rem. am. 373f)

Callimachi numeris non est dicendus Achilles,
Cydippe non est oris, Homere, tui (Rem. am. 381f)

Brave and warlike deeds enjoy being related in Homeric meter; what place could amusement have there?

Achilles must not be discussed in the meter of Callimachus; Cydippe has no place, Homer, on your lips.

Ovid’s discussion of Homer in the *Remedia amoris* serves to establish a separate place for erotic poetry in the elegaic meter alongside hexameter epic, a common strategy of the Latin *recusatio*. The *Achilleid*, by mixing Achilles and erotic content, comes into conflict with this distinction, and Statius highlights the paradox by employing “antiepic” tropes in his epic preface. Overt programmatic discussions of the monumental achievement of Homer do not normally belong to the epic genre, but to other genres that wish to bracket it, to set it aside. Such co-opting of such nonepic traditions is one of the strategies Statius employs throughout the Achilles poem that he writes in the margins of Homer’s. As Hinds has noted, this very practice of reifying generic distinctions by positing epic and nonepic features, only to break those distinctions down, paradoxically itself becomes a epic trope; but it is one particularly identified with Ovid, especially in the *Metamorphoses*.⁴⁹ In fact, the very fact that Statius dresses up Achilles, the quintessential hero of epic, in female clothing, may be read in the light of any number of programmatic statements by Roman elegists, who subjugate grisly epic heroes to the gentle code of elegy, and for

evasion and punctuates the passage as above, as does Shackleton Bailey (2003b). Yet this is not a matter we should pass over without comment, for the discomfort of editors with Statius’ syntax belies their surprise at its conversational tone and lack of epic grandeur.

47 As Tarrant (1998: 143) says, “One of Callimachus’ distinctive techniques is the parenthesis in the opening line of a poem, which appears in several poems of various genres.” Cf. Callim. *Hymn* 3.1, Callim. *Epig.* 4.1, 56.1f and 61.1f. Tarrant also documents Callimachus’ use of multiple parenthesis.

48 (*nam vos mutastis et illa*) (Ov. *Met.* 1.2), where *illa* is the correct reading: Anderson (1993: 108f).

49 Hinds (2000), esp. 224f on the passage from the *Remedia amoris* quoted above.

whom Hercules' cross-dressed servitude to Omphale is a favorite *exemplum* of *servitium amoris*.

Another trope employed here by Statius which is also quite common in various programmatic and metapoetic passages outside of epic is to describe the poet as a part of the poem and manipulating its action, claiming to do that which is described: Statius says that he himself will “bring out” Achilles and “lead him through” Troy (*proferre, deducere*, 1.6f). Compare a *recusatio* of Propertius in which he refuses to write heroic epic:

quod mihi si tantum, Maecenas, fata dedissent,
ut possem heroas ducere in arma manus . . . (Prop. 2.1.17–19)

if only fate had granted me, Maecenas, the ability to lead bands of heroes into battle . . .

Here is Ovid in the *Amores*, distinguishing himself as a writer of elegy from his epic-writing friend Macer:

carmen ad iratum dum tu perducis Achillen
primaque iuratis induis arma viris,
nos, Macer, ignava Veneris cessamus in umbra,
et tener ausuros grandia frangit Amor. (Ov. *Am.* 2.18.1–4)⁵⁰

While you, Macer, lead your poem right up to angry Achilles, and dress up the oath-bound heroes in their first armor, I am relaxing in the lazy shade of Venus, and, should I dare great deeds, slender Love beats me down.

Juvenal used a similar figure to denounce as bombastic and irrelevant precisely the kind of mythological poetry that Statius was writing:

securus licet Aenean Rutulumque ferocem
committas, nulli gravis est percussus Achilles (Juv. 1.163f)

Go ahead and pit Aeneas against fierce Turnus; it doesn't matter to anyone that Achilles has been wounded.

The common poetic trope of portraying the artist as doing that which he describes is often thus used by the opponents of mythological epic in order to stigmatize its bombast. Statius takes this stigma and flaunts it as badge of honor; as we will see, this is not the only traditionally despised attribute of epic that Statius paradoxically and ironically adopts as his own in this proem.⁵¹

⁵⁰ On this passage, see Hinds (2000: 227f).

⁵¹ Statius in the *Silvae* (4.2.1–4) uses the trope in a more complimentary vein with reference to the exemplary achievements of Virgil and Homer. This heroization of the two canonical writers of epic is not far from the stigmatization of Propertius and Juvenal, however; parody is the other side of the medal of praise. The striking thing is that Statius here applies this heroizing/bombastic trope to himself, in the context of an epic.

It is worth comparing the way Statius addresses his Muse here at the beginning of the *Achilleid* with his manner of address in the *Thebaid*. In the *Achilleid*, the poet asks the goddess to be favorable to his request that she inspire an epic about Achilles, which he implicitly acknowledges is a task she has already completed, in her prior role as Homer's muse: "(but plenty more [of Achilles' deeds] are still available!)." Despite this potential objection on the part of his Muse, the poet has a truly heartfelt desire to attempt Achilles nonetheless: "(for that is my desire!)." ⁵² This one-sided conversation constructs the Muse as reluctant, unwilling, in need of the justifications that the parenthetical comments provide. The conversational and Callimachean this give-and-take lends to the proem contrasts sharply with the style of Statius' own *Thebaid*.

Negotiating with the Muses over the content of the his previous epic, Statius posed as their humble servant: "where do you command me to begin, goddesses?" ⁵³ After mooting a series of hypothetical possibilities Statius decides very carefully what the boundaries of his poem will be. ⁵⁴ After excusing himself from the task of writing an epic on Domitian, the poet gets ready to embark on his decided theme, whereupon he once again declares himself the Muse's empty vessel: "which of these heroes do you suggest first, Clio?" ⁵⁵ The *Achilleid* begins with a complete reversal of the power dynamic between poet and Muse. This time it is the poet, not the Muse, who dictates the scope of the epic. Statius knows precisely what he wants to do from the outset, and he addresses his Muse as though she were the unwilling party, unconvinced that the project Statius has in mind is really sensible. This epic will clearly be a quite different performance from the *Thebaid*. It may be that the success of the earlier poem has genuinely bolstered Statius' poetic confidence, but this rhetorical pose should not be reduced to biography. The proem tells us that this song will not be the sort of thing composed by a frenzied poet in the possession of a harrowing divine will. Rather, Statius gives us, his readers, notice to prepare for something completely different, something unexpected and daring.

Secondary Inspiration

After the first seven lines addressed to the Muse, the poet turns to Apollo, asking the god to grant new wellsprings of inspiration and a new garland for his head:

tu modo, si veterem digno deplevimus haustu,
da fontes mihi, Phoebe, novos ac fronde secunda

⁵² For the programmatic appearance of love (*amor*) at this point in the proem, see Feeney (2004: 97f).

⁵³ *unde iubetis | ire, deae?* (1.3f).

⁵⁴ *limes ... carminis esto* (1.16). On Statius' relation to his subject in the proem of the *Thebaid*, see Heinrich (1999: 168–71).

⁵⁵ *quem prius heroum, Clio, dabis?* (1.41).

necte comas: neque enim Aonium nemus advena pulso
 nec mea nunc primis aulescunt tempora vittis.
 scit Dircaeus ager meque inter prisca parentum
 nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae.⁵⁶ (1.8–13)

Give me new springs to drink from, Apollo, if I gulped down the earlier one well enough, and bind my hair with a second garland. For I do not knock for admission to the Aonian grove as a newcomer, nor is this the first time my head has been graced with the chaplet of your priesthood. The territory around Dirce knows it, and Thebes counts me among the names of its founding fathers, and in particular along with its own Amphion.

The phrase “a second garland” (*fronde secunda*) has a number of different connotations: *secunda* can be taken in the sense of “lucky or propitious” (Dilke ad loc) or “second” or “following.” Hinds (1998: 96f) has pointed out that it designates the *Achilleid* as a “second” work within Statius’ oeuvre, and also as a secondary treatment of the Achilles theme, “following” behind Homer’s. The poet takes the same confident tone with Apollo that he used with the Muse, citing his past success as proof of his rights to the sources of epic inspiration. He plays on the two possible ways we might understand the reference to Bœotia (*Aonium*, 10). The obvious denotation of “Aonian grove” here is the home of the Muses on Mount Helicon; but Statius immediately goes on to speak of his presence in the region around Thebes in the sense of having composed the *Thebaid* (*scit Dircaeus ager*, 12). So Statius is an old habitué of Bœotia in two senses: he knows both the abode of the Muses on Mount Helicon and the battlefields around Thebes.

Barchiesi points out an intriguing possibility for the source of the connection between Apollo and the phrase *Aonium nemus*.⁵⁷ In his third book, Propertius (3.3) revisits the scene of Ennius’ dream on Helicon and is about to drink from the fount of the Hippocrene, when Apollo accosts him with a warning not to drink the waters of epic, to stay away from martial themes (*carminis heroï . . . opus*, 3.3.16), and to stick with lesser genres. He leads the poet to the cave of the Muses, where Calliope repeats the warning:

nil tibi sit rauco praeconia classica cornu
 flare nec Aonium tinguere Marte nemus. (Prop. 3.3.41f)

Do not concern yourself with blaring battle signals on a rasping trumpet;
 do not stain the Aonian grove with war.

The notion of bloodying Mount Helicon with the gore of epic is not far removed from Statius’ conflation in the *Achilleid* of his two approaches to the

⁵⁶ On the last two lines, see below (p 102).

⁵⁷ Barchiesi (1996: 54), following up Dilke’s reference (ad 9f).

area: generically, as an epic poet; and with geographic specificity, as the poet of a *Thebaid*. The nearness of the home of the Muses to the action of the *Thebaid* is something that Statius notes on several occasions in that poem.⁵⁸ So once again the project of epic is described in terms that are borrowed from a *recusatio*, i.e. from a tradition hostile to martial epic. Statius thereby implicitly disdains his own *Thebaid* as a bombastic, “kings and battles” kind of epic that Roman Callimacheanism affected to despise. This should bring home the rhetorical quality of such judgments; if Virgil could go from quoting Callimachus against epic to writing the *Aeneid*, then why should Statius not be free to go in the opposite direction?

Statius’ previous drink (*haustu*) from the fount of poetic inspiration calls to mind such noble poetic expressions as Horace’s description of the Theban poet Pindar’s elevated and inimitable style.⁵⁹ Yet the verb Statius uses is odd. *Depleo*, which means “to pour off liquid,” is usually foreign to Latin verse, and indeed to literary prose.⁶⁰ It is used by Cato and Columella in agricultural contexts, of olive oil production and phlebotomizing livestock; the term reeks of the barnyard. Statius deflates his own pretensions to epic fame by ironizing the apparatus of poetic inspiration: the Pierian spring, the crown and the *vittae* of the mantic *vates*. An important effect is to distance the *Achilleid* still further from the *Thebaid*, whose author played the vatic role of the mad poet in earnest.⁶¹ Just such a figure is represented within the *Achilleid* by Calchas, who is the quintessential prophet of Apollo, raving, *vitta*-wearing, and possessed (1.514–37). It is no coincidence that Calchas belongs to the military-epic world that Achilles is set to enter when the poem ends.⁶²

Domitian, poeta doctus

Before the narrative proper begins, there are a few lines that ask Domitian’s indulgence for the current work. The brevity and restraint of this address to Domitian has been analyzed as a significant indicator of Statius’ view of the emperor, but this is an unnecessary hypothesis.⁶³ The *Achilleid* is such a stylistic departure from the *Thebaid* that there is no reason to expect that it would address the emperor in the same way. If, as we have seen, the *Achilleid* is strongly distinguished from the previous epic by its playful and ironic tone, then the

⁵⁸ *Theb.* 7.282–9 and 7.628–31; on which see Barchiesi (1996: 52f).

⁵⁹ *Pindarici fontis qui non expalluit haustus* (*Epist.* 1.3.10); see Barchiesi (1996: 53f).

⁶⁰ Scaliger conjectured *deplete* for *deflete* at Manil. 4.13 (*supervacuis vitam deplete querellis*, “decant your life, ridding it of pointless worries”), and this has been accepted by most editors, including Housman. If this is correct, it is a similarly pungent metaphor.

⁶¹ Cf. Hershkowitz (1995: 62–4).

⁶² Feeney (2004: 88) notes that the invocation of Apollo here adumbrates the darker parts of Achilles’ fate, since that god is responsible for the hero’s death.

⁶³ E.g. Benker (1987: 65–70).

mode of address employed in the *Thebaid* would be heavy-handed and very much out of place here. As it happens, we find an entirely different and more subtle compliment paid to Domitian. Statius says:

at tu, quem longe primum stupet Itala virtus
 Graiaque, cui geminae florent vatumque ducumque
 certatim laurus – olim dolet altera vinci – ,
 da veniam ac trepidum patere hoc sudare parumper
 pulvere: te longo necdum fidente paratu
 molimur magnusque tibi praeludit Achilles. (1.14–19)

But you, at whose preeminent prowess Italy and Greece stand astonished, on whose brow the laurels both of the poet and of the conqueror vie for a place – though for some time that of the poet has been displaced – grant your indulgence and permit me to sweat anxiously in this ring for a little while. I'm building up to you with long training, but I'm not ready yet; great Achilles plays prelude to you.

Suetonius tells us that Domitian had been a literary youth, but that he had firmly put such occupations aside when he became emperor; presumably he did not wish to invite comparisons with Nero.⁶⁴ Statius makes reference to Domitian's poetic activity, but he carefully relegates it to the past: the laurel of the poet has been displaced long since (*olim . . . vinci*, 16) by the success of the warrior. Nevertheless, the invocation of the emperor as a quondam poet gives an indication of what kind of ideal reader the *Achilleid* projects for itself. Because of his former interest in poetry, Domitian will be sophisticated enough to appreciate the kind of densely intertextual and sophisticated poem that Statius is now writing. It is also an effective compliment to Domitian to say that an epic about Achilles is nothing but a warm-up for the emperor, and that, although Statius does not yet have enough confidence to write an epic that would adequately celebrate Domitian's exploits, in the meantime he will write a little poem about Achilles that does nothing more ambitious than challenge Homer's *Iliad*.

In the prose prefaces to the *Silvae*, Statius used similar metaphors from athletic training to justify his publication of those occasional poems.⁶⁵ So Statius' epics stand in the same relation of inferiority to the great hypothetical epic about Domitian as his *Silvae* do to his epics. When Statius referred to the *Silvae* as "preludes," he meant to indicate their tentative and provisional character. Is it a coincidence that the *Achilleid* is described here as a prelude, and that is what, in its incomplete state, we have? It is possible, but unprovable, that the *Achilleid*, which was at the very least going to be recited in incomplete form,

⁶⁴ Suet. *Dom.* 2.2. On Domitian's literary career, see Coleman (1986).

⁶⁵ Compare *praeludit* (19) with *stilo remissiore praeluserit* (*Silv.* 1, pref.) and compare *sudare . . . pulvere* (17f) with *exercere, sphaeromachia*, and *palaris lusio* (*Silv.* 4, pref.). For "play" (*ludere*) as a term for writing in a sub-epic genre, cf. Virg. *Ecl.* 6.1.

was fitted with a specially written “temporary” preface for the sake of such preliminary exposure. It is possible that the word *parumper* (“for a little while,” 17) betrays the provisional character of the proem. The account of the *Achilleid* that Statius gives to Domitian is designed to minimize its scale, difficulty, and importance in comparison to the task of eulogizing the emperor;⁶⁶ but if this preface were written to stand in front of a work-in-progress, then *parumper* makes perfect sense.

Flouting the Rules of Epic

The opening lines of the *Achilleid* announce a poem that will need to withstand comparison with the *Iliad*; yet its style seems to look more to Alexandria than to Homeric Greece, and more to Ovid than to Virgil. The provocative and paradoxical nature of the proem is also illustrated by the way it professes to flout the orthodoxies of ancient literary criticism. First of all, Statius insists that the story of the *Achilleid* will be determined by the hero’s entire life, and that he will follow it from beginning to end (*ire per omnem ... heroa; tota ... troia*, 1.4–7). This goes quite against Aristotle’s observation in the *Poetics* that Homer rightly limited the scope of his plots to a manageable extent, unlike the cyclic poems, which bristle with unrelated incident:

οἱ δ' ἄλλοι περὶ ἓνα ποιοῦσι καὶ περὶ ἓνα χρόνον καὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν πολυ-
μερῆ, οἷον ὁ τὰ Κύπρια ποιήσας καὶ τὴν μικρὰν Ἰλιάδα.

(Arist. *Poet.* 1459a–b)

Others wrote poems about one man or one period of time or one complex action, such as the poets of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*.

Statius insists that he is going to do just what Aristotle condemns the cyclic poets for doing: he means to write a poem that will be a simple, continuous biography of one man, and that will take its unity from that mere fact. A little earlier, Aristotle had given a more specific warning against precisely this sort of project:

Μῦθος δ' ἐστὶν εἰς οὐχ ὥσπερ τινὲς οἴονται ἐὰν περὶ ἓνα ἧ' πολλὰ γὰρ
καὶ ἄπειρα τῶ ἐνὶ συμβαίνει, ἐξ ὧν ἐνίων οὐδέν ἐστιν ἓν· οὕτως δὲ καὶ
πράξεις ἐνὸς πολλάί εἰσιν, ἐξ ὧν μία οὐδεμία γίνεται πρᾶξις. διὸ πάντες
ἐοίκασαν ἁμαρτάνειν ὅσοι τῶν ποιητῶν Ἡρακλεῖδα Ἰθησιῖδα καὶ τὰ τοι-
αῦτα ποιήματα πεποιήκασιν: οἴονται γάρ, ἐπεὶ εἰς ἦν ὁ Ἡρακλεῖς, ἓνα καὶ
τὸν μῦθον εἶναι προσήκειν.

(Arist. *Poet.* 1451a)

Contrary to the opinion of some, a story is not necessarily a unity, if it is about one man. For many and countless are the things that happen to an individual, and no unity emerges from these particulars. In the same

66 Thus Aricò (1986: 2931).

fashion, the actions of one man are many, and no single action emerges from them. So it is clear that all those poets who have written a *Heracleid*, a *Theseid*, or similar poems have made a mistake, for they think that since Heracles was one man, it follows that his story is a unity.

In defiance of these famous strictures against *Heracleids* and *Theseids*, Statius wrote an *Achilleid* and stated bluntly his intention to cover the whole of its hero's life (*ire per omnem*, 4). Dilke claims that "Statius was not alone among Roman poets in rejecting Aristotle's advice" (8); but the examples he gives are obscure, lost works about which we cannot really know anything for certain. Surely no competent poet would ever have advertised his disdain for the most authoritative norms of ancient poetry, unless he had some trick up his sleeve. It would not be the first time Statius had deliberately drawn a title from the annals of literary-critical infamy. The best-known *Thebaid* before Statius' own was written by Antimachus of Colophon, and it had become a byword for bloated, endless, tedious epic.⁶⁷ The proem of the *Thebaid* is very concerned with delineating precise boundaries for its narrative, which is probably a gesture that engages with the spirit of those who criticized Antimachus' lack of self-restraint. The *Achilleid* likewise begins by daring, or seeming to dare, the established canons of epic decorum.

Another controversial prospect offered by the proem is the implication of a more or less linear progression through Achilles' biography, from Scyros to the death of Hector and all the way through Troy (1.5–7). This claim flies in the face of a famous Horatian literary judgment about the superiority of Homeric epic narrative:

nec gemino bellum Troianum orditur ab ovo:
semper ad eventum festinat et in medias res
non secus ac notas auditorem rapit. (Hor. *Ars p.* 147–9)

he [Homer] does not arrange the Trojan War to begin with the twin egg [of Leda and the swan]: he always gets straight to the point and spirits the listener into the middle of things just as if they were already known.

Statius seems bent on flouting this advice, as he ostensibly plans to tell the story of Achilles' life straight from start to finish. This sort of unsophisticated and dull narrative was exemplified for both Aristotle and Homer by the cyclic epics. As Brink put it:

Cyclic poets promise (the whole story of) a memorable happening – *fortunam Priami . . . et nobile bellum* – after which the (unselective) story will fall flat. Inability to select and dullness resulting, that was Aristotle's indictment of the cyclic epic.⁶⁸

67 E.g. *tumido . . . Antimacho* (Catullus 95.11).

68 Brink (1970: ad Hor. *Ars p.* 136–9).

This sort of diffuse plot and inability to select a theme from a mass of biographical incident is just what Statius' proem seems to threaten with the words "whole" and "all" (*omnem*, 1.4; *tota*, 1.7). It is as if the *Achilleid* promises to emulate the most heavily criticized aspects of the cyclic poems.⁶⁹ Statius wrote an epic which took its subject matter material from the *Cypria* and *Aethiopis*, and which declared a cyclic methodology in its intention to supplement stories that were lacking in Homer. As a necessary consequence Statius risked comparison with the cyclic poems; what is striking is that he seems to have courted this stigma.

Statius does not let us imagine for long that the *Achilleid* will really and truly ignore the lessons of ancient literary criticism; it all turns out to be a bluff. It is clear even from the extant text that Statius could not have run through the *whole* life of the hero. When the preface ends, we do not begin at the beginning of Achilles' biography; rather, we are dropped *in medias res* in classic epic style, into circumstances strongly reminiscent of the beginning of the *Aeneid*.⁷⁰ Far from being a straightforward narrative of Achilles' life, the shape of the *Achilleid* turns out to be fairly complex. It begins on the eve of a great change in the life of the hero, the last day of his stay with Chiron; the boy goes to Scyros, and the scene shifts in the meantime to Aulis. We return to Scyros for the unveiling of the hero, and, as he leaves the island, Achilles relates in retrospect the story of his childhood with Chiron and the events of his life prior to the opening of the poem, in the manner of Odysseus and Aeneas. One would not suspect from the preface that the extant part of the poem would have such a nonlinear course, which should be a warning to those who would take it literally as a serious plan for the rest of the work.

The completed portion of the *Achilleid* does tell part of the story of Achilles' young life, but it is very far from being a versified biography. It is organized thematically around Thetis' concern for her son's mortality and the dual springs of its plot are her attempt to keep him away from the Trojan War and Ulysses' competing efforts to find him. So Statius does follow Aristotle's advice after all; he does not rely upon Achilles to provide him with a coherent theme, but imposes one upon the material. The threat here to violate every norm of epic propriety serves merely to highlight the audacity of bidding to write another epic on Achilles. Even the curtailed text we have makes it clear that the banality threatened here is purely tongue-in-cheek, and so criticisms of the *Achilleid* that allege bombast in its opening lines are therefore deeply misguided.⁷¹

69 The verb Statius uses to characterize his compositional activity is *molimur* ("build up," 1.19), which even corresponds to Horace's description of the cyclic poet: *scriptor cyclicus... qui... molitur inepte* (Hor. *Ars p.* 136–40). When *molitor* is used of literary composition, it does not always have a negative sense, but it does seem to connote a certain aspiration to grandness; cf. *Calliope... sublata molire lyra: neque enim altior ulli | mens hausto de fonte venit* (*Theb.* 4.35–8).

70 See below (p 106).

71 On this sort of criticism, see above (pp xiv and xvi).

Scope and Scale

The proem of the *Achilleid* gives away remarkably little of its projected plot beyond what we know from the existing text.⁷² Statius says that he intends to run through the entire life of the hero, starting from Scyros, not stopping at the dragging of Hector's body, but carrying on through the whole of Troy. Of these three points only one is specifically informative: the unveiling at Scyros. The other two merely restate the claim that Statius will treat the entire life of Achilles, without specifying exactly what episodes he will include. Even the dragging of Hector, the climax of the *Iliad*, is mentioned not as a potential incident in Statius' poem, but to say that he will *not* stop there (as Homer did, more or less); indeed it would be strange if Statius were to attempt an extended description of that surpassingly famous scene after saying that "plenty more [incidents] are still available." Compare the lines which form a table of contents, so to speak, at the beginning of the *Thebaid*. In addition to a general statement about the boundaries of the work and the house of Oedipus (1.15–16, 34), a host of incidents from the entire course of the epic are specified (1.34–45). The proem of the *Achilleid* does not give us this kind of detail; indeed it is possible that the proem of the *Thebaid* was revised after the completion of the whole epic. The vagueness of the proem to the *Achilleid* may have been designed to generate interest in the project, or simply to leave the poet room to maneuver in case his own conception should change as the work evolved. It is therefore impossible to make sweeping deductions about the overall character of the projected epic. We cannot say that the eventual design of the poem would have been essentially serious, primarily erotic, consistently parodic, or what have you.

One way of negotiating the contrast between the comic and tragic elements in the story of Achilles might have been to put off his arrival at Troy as long as possible. Statius used this tactic to good effect in the *Thebaid*, as it takes the Seven a very long time to travel the very short distance between Argos and Thebes.⁷³ Even though Achilles ends our text of the *Achilleid* on his way to join the Greek fleet, there was still plenty of room for chronological flexibility. This chapter began with an epigraph from the medieval Irish translator of the *Achilleid*.⁷⁴ He was very concerned about the chronological plausibility of

⁷² If we look at the *Silvae*, we see that Statius did not drop any hints there of the future direction of the epic. In fact, when Statius uses Achilles as a mythological *exemplum* in the *Silvae*, it is striking how often he refers to the very young Achilles with respect to his relationships with parental figures: Peleus, Thetis, Chiron, and Phoenix (*Silv.* 2.1.88–91, 2.6.30f, 2.7.96, 3.2.96–8, 5.2.150f and 5.3.191–4). Even granted that this was the sort of detail that was useful in the domestic context of many of the *Silvae*, we can see that Achilles' childhood was primarily on the poet's mind.

⁷³ Eventually Jupiter grows impatient with the delays (*Theb.* 7.14–20).

⁷⁴ Watkins (1995: 375, n 1 and 513, n 6) has a few interesting comments on this version and its elaboration of the theme of the boyhood deeds of Achilles.

Stadius' epic, particularly with regard to generational succession, and he was anticipating objections from his readers, who would have been familiar with the conventions of Irish vernacular epic as well as versions of Latin epic and the Trojan tales. The potential problem that the translator identifies and anticipates is that Neoptolemus would have been too young to go to Troy as a soldier, given that the war only lasted ten years and that he was begotten just before Achilles set out. The Irish translator points out, however, that by shifting the scene to the gathering of the Greek forces at Aulis (l.397–559) and then to the voyage of Ulysses and Diomedes (l.675–88), Stadius leaves open the possibility that by the time the heroes arrive and meet Achilles, Neoptolemus may have grown up considerably. The medieval translator was more astute in this regard than Mozley, the Loeb translator, who calls Neoptolemus a “babe” (l.952) at the time of Achilles' discovery and departure, even though the Latin is entirely noncommittal about his age at this point.⁷⁵

This was not necessarily Stadius' ultimate answer to the chronological problem, however. We have access to a piece of information that the medieval Irish translator did not: Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* claims that the Greeks mustered at Aulis *twice*. The first expedition goes awry when it lands in Mysia and attacks Telephus' people in the mistaken belief that they are the Trojans. After this fiasco, the troops must all reassemble at Aulis once again, where Achilles eventually heals Telephus' wound.⁷⁶ So even if Neoptolemus were a baby when Achilles left Scyros, there would still have been time for the boy to grow up. Stadius would have been able to put off Achilles' arrival at Troy for a considerable time, if he wished to keep the subject matter of the *Iliad* far in the distance. There is much that could yet happen between the end of Stadius' epic as we have it and the beginning of Homer's.

The End of the Achilleid

We can surely say that the proem of the *Achilleid* distances itself forcefully from the *Thebaid* and advertises something entirely new. This is not surprising, in that the canonical paradigm for a poet having written two epics was Homer, whose two works were recognized in antiquity to be very different in character.⁷⁷ In fact, the difference between the brutal and tragic *Thebaid* and the romantic melodrama of the *Achilleid* as we have it corresponds neatly to the difference between the wartime *Iliad* and the romantic interludes and happy

⁷⁵ *natum*, l.908; *hunc*, l.952; *commissum*, 2.24. When Achilles asks for forgiveness by laying his son at Lycomedes' feet, the most natural assumption would be that he is still a baby; but this is never specified.

⁷⁶ Breslove (1943–4) has suggested that the problem of the relative ages of Achilles and Neoptolemus was the reason the Telephus episode and the double mustering at Aulis was inserted into the cycle.

⁷⁷ On the secundariness of the *Odyssey* in the career of “Homer,” see [Longinus], *Subl.* 11–15.

ending of the *Odyssey*. If the intention to write a second mythological epic was tantamount to going beyond Virgilian ambition to confront the model of Homer's career, then to choose Achilles as subject was to do no more than to acknowledge this fact. It can hardly be pure coincidence that the *Iliad* and the *Thebaid* are both named after the besieged cities that feature in each epic, while the *Odyssey* and *Achilleid* are named after the eponymous heroes whose delays and diversions each poem records. Another model for Statius' emulation of Homer was of course the *Aeneid* itself, which has an Odyssean half followed by an Iliadic half. When Statius "unpacks" these again into two separate epics, he reverts back to the "correct" Homeric order.⁷⁸ The paradox is that this "Odyssean" second work of Statius is on a trajectory to collide eventually with the martial subject matter of the *Iliad* itself. If the *Achilleid* was circulated as a prospectus designed to generate interest in the project, then it is perfectly understandable that its preface should tantalize its audience with such paradoxes more than it satisfies us. To give away the details of the forthcoming solution was not in the poet's interest.

The perceived need to make a decisive judgment about the eventual content of the epic has often bedeviled Statian scholarship, even though the evidence is insufficient to decide the question. At one extreme, there is Koster (1979), who envisioned a series of amorous encounters between Achilles and various women. At the other extreme, Aricò (1986, 1996) claims that the elegiac and Hellenistic side of the *Achilleid* has been overemphasized by scholars such as Tandoi (1985) and Rosati. The problem is that his thesis requires trivializing the part of the epic that we actually have as "a negligible digression,"⁷⁹ in favor of the unknowable remainder of the work, which Aricò is confident would have required a drastic change in tone. The example of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* should be enough, however, to warn against the assumption that any epic treatment of the Trojan War must be necessarily bound to a simple and predictable "heroic" ethos. A much more subtle approach to the question is taken by Hinds (2000: 244), who sees that both possibilities are present in the *Achilleid*:

What is Statius's epic decorum in the *Achilleid*? Will the narrative be presented in Achilles' strictly martial terms from now on, or will there be more backsliding into the unepic softness and effeminacy authorized by the poet in *Achilleid* 1? We can never know.

Might not this extreme sense of *aporia* triggered by the end of the *Achilleid* be a result of its design? If the poem as we have it was a prospectus, designed to whet the taste of the public for the new epic and to offer his patrons a sample of what they would be underwriting, then it might well have been designed

⁷⁸ On Virgil's reversal of the order of the Homeric epics (which however appear in the "correct" order in the phrase *arma virumque*), see Wills (1996: 23).

⁷⁹ "una parentesi da dimenticare," Aricò (1996: 198).

to provoke more questions than answers. Only the generosity of patrons could provide the necessary “inspiration” to unlock the answer. On this argument, the *Achilleid* is not a clumsy sketch toward an unrealized final product, but rather it is already a carefully crafted lure of a poem, designed to pull the audience in and to cause them to wonder, “where could it possibly go from here?” The reductive and stubbornly persistent debate on this very question in the criticism of the *Achilleid* bears out the brilliant success Statius has had in posing that question to the minds of modern scholars.

The *Achilleid* as we have it is largely a light-hearted story, but the hero’s mortality is implicit in the first line of the poem: Jupiter’s fear of marriage to Thetis led directly to Achilles’ birth as a mortal, and thus to his death. The presence of such themes in the preface excludes the possibility of declaring with confidence that a complete *Achilleid* would have completely eschewed serious matters, presenting only romantic situations and embarrassments of the kind we find on Scyros. Even after hearing the proem and the projected contents of the epic, we really do not know how Statius might have handled the more tragic events of Achilles’ short life. Therefore, it is best to steer clear of arguments regarding the ultimate shape of the epic, on the grounds that the issue is hopelessly subjective, and that such debates play uncritically into the hands of Statius, who as a professional poet made his living by keeping his audience and his patrons wondering about what would come next.

If the *Achilleid* proem raises more questions than it answers, it may be that the poet was content, at this stage, to leave us wondering about what will happen at Troy; the proem refuses to preempt such speculation with simple answers. The best one can say about the prefatory material is that it holds out the prospect of a poem that will be both cyclic and Callimachean, Homeric and Ovidian, not only military, but also erotic, and not strictly epic, but inclusive of other genres. The nearest parallel for such a catholic approach to epic is Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which the proem suggests strongly as a paradigm.⁸⁰ If the *Thebaid* was Statius’ devotedly Virgilian epic, the *Achilleid* is his post-Virgilian project. We will now examine a few passages where this newly irreverent attitude towards canonical epic is on display.

Achilles, poeta doctus

Domitian is not the only character in the *Achilleid* who combines military and poetic genius; Statius depicts Achilles himself singing mythological poetry. This is an elaboration of the moment in the *Iliad* (9.189) at which the embassy to Achilles discovers the hero in his tent, playing the lyre to console himself. In the *Achilleid*, the young hero is providing after-dinner entertain-

⁸⁰ The importance of the *Metamorphoses* as a global model for the *Achilleid* in deliberate distinction from the more Virgilian *Thebaid* was pointed out by Fantham (1979: 457).

ment to console his preoccupied mother, who is a guest at Chiron's cave. The centaur takes out the lyre, tests it, and hands it to his ward:

[Chiron] . . . attonitae varia oblectamina nectens
 elicit extremo chelyn et solantia curas
 fila movet leviterque expertas pollice chordas
 dat puero. (l.185–8)

[Chiron], devising various entertainments for the distracted goddess, finally brought out the lyre and played the strings that soothe worries, and having lightly tried out a few chords with his thumb gave it to the boy.

The education given to Achilles by Chiron was a mythical paradigm for pedagogical excellence from Pindar onwards (*Nem.* 3.43–52), and Statius reminds us that music was an important part of that education. Chiron teaching Achilles to play the lyre was a popular motif in Roman art, and Statius' audience would have recognized this intimate scene from such visual representations. In a famous painting from the basilica of Herculaneum, Chiron plucks the strings of the lyre for his pupil just as he does here.⁸¹ The accuracy of the myths that are sung by the poets is endorsed here by the implication that Chiron and Achilles stand at the beginning of a continuous tradition of heroic poetry that goes back to the time of the heroes themselves. Statius makes this metaphor of poetic "tradition" concrete in the act of teacher handing the lyre to his pupil; he used similar language when describing the patrimony of poetry he inherited from his own teacher, his father:

sed decus hoc quodcumque lyrae primusque dedisti
 non vulgare loqui et famam sperare sepulchro. (*Silv.* 5.3.213f)

You first gave to me the honor of the lyre, such as it is, and to speak elegantly and to hope for fame beyond the grave.

Chiron's instruction of Achilles represents one of the first stages in a tradition that bound teacher to pupil and continued all the way down to Statius' own day. If contemporary mythological poetry is to be rejected as sheer invention, then Homer must be thrown out as well, for all poetry at one time was new; even Achilles once was young.

Achilles tries to distract his mother with music, just as he tries to console himself in the *Iliad*:

τῆ ὄ γε θυμὸν ἔτερπεν, αἶδιε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν. (*Il.* 9.189)

Delighting his own heart [with the lyre], he sang of the famous deeds of heroes.

⁸¹ The popularity of the episode in Roman art has been attributed to a sculpture group of the scene that Pliny (*NH* 36.29) says was to be found in the Saepta Julia, and that has been claimed as the model for the painting in the basilica: LIMC s.v. "Achilleus" [Kossatz-Deissmann], nos. 50 and 51.

It would be interesting to know more about the content of the song in the *Iliad*; there is a potential conflict of interest in the circumstance that Achilles was at the same time the subject of heroic poetry *par excellence* and a poet himself. At an absurd extreme the possibility exists of the poet/hero praising his own exploits. In fact, Statius stops not far short of that point. He explores the subject matter of Achilles' verse in much greater detail than Homer:

canit ille libens inmania laudum
 semina: quot tumidae superarit iussa novercae
 Amphitryoniades, crudum quo Bebryca caestu
 obruerit Pollux, quanto circumdata nexu
 ruperit Aegides Minoia bracchia tauri,
 maternos in fine toros superisque gravatum
 Pelion: hic victo risit Thetis anxia vultu. (1.188–94)

He gladly sang of the great occasions for praise: how many commands from his boastful stepmother Hercules, the son of Amphytrion, carried out, with what boxing glove Pollux knocked out bloody Amycus, king of Bebrycia, with how many holds Theseus, the son of Aegeus, encircled and broke the arms of the Minotaur, and finally his mother's own wedding bed when Mt Pelion was burdened with the weight of the gods: at this point anxious Thetis mastered her expression and smiled.

Achilles could hardly come any closer than this to becoming the subject of his own poetry without explicitly mentioning himself: he runs through the material of heroic myth right up to the wedding of his own parents. The most famous narrative of that event was poem 64 of Catullus, in which the Parcae predicted Achilles' own birth, short life, and death. Its relevance here is perhaps indicated by Thetis' reaction to Achilles' song: she might be expected to smile at the memory of their marriage; yet Statius qualifies Thetis' reaction by noting that her smile was forced.⁸² This might be attributed to the general anxiety the goddess has felt about her son's destiny since the beginning of the poem; but the word *hic* ("at this point," 194) implies that it is the final part of Achilles' recitation that provokes her reaction. It seems that the mention of her wedding is the cause not only of Thetis' polite smile, but also of the anxiety it conceals. Thetis apparently remembers the event in the way that Statius' audience will have remembered it, including its premonitions of Achilles' glory and death at Troy.

Hinds (1998: 125–8) has pointed out that Statius' *maternos ... toros* ("his mother's wedding bed," 193) alludes to the famous tapestry on the bridal couch described at such length in Catullus 64. Catullus 64 is the most significant parallel for Achilles' song: both poems bring together the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the voyage of the *Argo*, and Theseus and the Minotaur. In a more general sense, however, the subject matter and manner of treatment of Achilles'

82 As Dilke translates (ad loc): "Then Thetis, though worried, mastered her face and smiled."

song are derived from the poets of Hellenistic Alexandria and the Latin poets who emulated them. Each of the first three episodes in Achilles' narrative is designated by means of an indirect question that focuses our attention on one small peculiarity of each myth. We shall see that these details are not arbitrary; they were all matters of specific concern to the Hellenistic poets. The four details that stand by synecdoche for the topics of Achilles' song are: the quantity of labors performed by Hercules, the type of boxing glove used by Pollux and Amycus, the wrestling holds used by Theseus and the Minotaur, and the bridal couch at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis.

The labors of Hercules are Achilles' first subject – specifically, the number of labors performed by Hercules for Eurystheus (*quot . . . iussa*, 189). The answer is of course twelve; but that exact number does not appear until surprisingly late in the mythological record.⁸³ Euripides gives us a list of approximately a dozen accomplishments in the *Heracles*, but to coerce precisely twelve labors from that passage requires a certain degree of special pleading and the benefit of hindsight.⁸⁴ The first certain attribution, therefore, of a specific number of labors is by Hellenistic poets, and they come in a flood: Callimachus (F 23.19f Pfeiffer), Apollonius (1.1318), Theocritus (24.82), and Euphorion (F 57.13 van Groningen) all mention the number twelve. It is thus with good reason that the establishment of this number as canonical is usually credited to the work of some unidentified author of the Hellenistic period.⁸⁵ Stipulating the precise number of Hercules' labors for Eurystheus was a feature of Hellenistic mythology, and Statius' Achilles shares that interest.

The next episode in Achilles' song is Pollux' boxing match with Amycus; the emphatic detail is the type of *caestus* or boxing glove worn in the bout. In Latin the word *caestus*, which properly denoted a brutal glove weighted and spiked to do damage, had to do service for the different Greek varieties of hand covering. The earliest were evidently supple thongs (ἰμάντες, cf. Hom. *Il.* 23.684), worn to protect the knuckles, which gradually gave way after the classical period to thongs of harder leather with a cutting edge that served also as an offensive weapon.⁸⁶ Apollonius and Theocritus both specify quite clearly that the

83 Brommer (1986: 5, 64, and 77f, n 82) attributed the origin of that particular quantity to the prestige of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, which had a set of twelve metopes; but the number twelve appears nowhere with any certainty before the Hellenistic period and the labors did not take their canonical form until the Roman era. A fragment of Pindar has been suggested to contain a reference to a "twelfth" labor, but the papyrus only has a few letters of that word (δωδ)έξατο[ν, 43], and so the evidence is equivocal, despite Pavese (1968: 81–4).

84 Eur. *Herc.* 394–407, on which see Brommer (1986: 61).

85 Thus Eden (1975: ad Verg. *Aen.* 8.291): "the selection of the canonical twelve from the great mass of adventures connected with him was probably the work of the cataloging Alexandrians." Similarly, Pavese (1968: 83f), and Boardman (LIMC s.v. "Heracles," p 15). The actual makeup of the canon of labors is first recounted in approximately its familiar form by Diodorus (4.8–27).

86 See Poliakoff (1987: 68–79) for an overview of the subject.

ἱμάντες used by Pollux and Amycus were the hardened leather type familiar in the Hellenistic world, made from untanned, raw leather that was left to dry and harden.⁸⁷ Thus Apollonius calls the boxing gloves used by Amycus “bloody” or “raw” (ἱμάντας | ὠμούςς, *Argon.* 2.52f), and Virgil translates this phrase as *crudo . . . caestu* (*Aen.* 5.69), in his account of the funeral games for Anchises. On that occasion, Entellus is convinced to participate in the boxing contest, but only on the condition that they put aside the leather *Troianos . . . caestus* (5.420) to which Aeneas had referred earlier, and instead use equipment along the lines of the massive *caestus* reinforced with lead and iron (5.405) that he had inherited from Eryx. So, like Apollonius, Virgil gives a mythical aetiology for the sort of boxing glove prevalent in his world.

When Statius writes that Achilles specified “with what boxing glove Pollux knocked out bloody Amycus,” the word “bloody” or “raw” (*crudum*) is not merely an epithet that describes this bloody-minded, uncivilized son of Poseidon; it also points to the increasingly bloody nature of the implement he helped to invent.⁸⁸ It also alludes knowingly to Apollonius’ and Virgil’s pun on the “bloody” effect of the “raw” leather. Statius attributes to Achilles a precise knowledge of the equipment used in the bout between Pollux and Amycus, and an appreciation of the importance of such mythical detail; the things that were of concern to Apollonius, Theocritus, and Virgil are also important to Achilles. As a hero, he combines a “professional” interest in the boxing equipment used by Pollux and an aetiologizing poetic mode that is indebted to the Alexandrian tradition. Achilles validates the accuracy of the epic tradition and at the same time he gives us an idea of his own, violent literary tastes.

Achilles’ next subject is Theseus’ encounter with the Minotaur, and once again the wording shows a concern with the practical and minute particulars of the struggle. The emphatic detail this time is the variety of wrestling holds Theseus employed against his half-man, half-bull opponent. The stipulation that Theseus wrestled the Minotaur is again a late development. The earliest visual representations of the scene, which was popular in classical Athenian vase painting, show Theseus grappling with a man who has the head of a bull, and dispatching him with his sword. In Roman art, by contrast, the contest develops into a more equally matched bout, with Theseus using a blunt club to finish off the monster, or using no weapon at all. This shift in the iconography

⁸⁷ Theocritus calls them stiff (στερεοῖς . . . ἱμᾶσιν, 22.108); Polyduces cuts Amycus (22.95–7) and even manages to skin his forehead to the bone with a overhead chop (22.103–5), which implies that the thongs were sharp as well: Gow (1952: ad 22.80f). In Apollonius, when Amycus boasts of his ability to make his opponents bleed, he is speaking of the thongs he has made, which are of dry leather (ἑνωμός . . . ἄζαλέας, 2.58f). See Reed (1972: 48f) on the normal process of shade-curing untanned rawhide; normally the skins are heated slowly, away from direct sunlight, precisely to avoid the surface hardening that Amycus has cultivated.

⁸⁸ See Gow (1952: ad Theocr. 22.80f) on Amycus as the inventor of the ἱμάντες.

from sword to club may not have been entirely due to “the assimilation of his career to that of Heracles.”⁸⁹

Another likely reason for this change in the iconography may be found in the existence of two slightly differing versions of the myth. The usual tale has Theseus arriving in Athens after the yearly tribute to Minos has already been paid once or twice; he resolves to stop it and volunteers himself to go to Crete. Yet there was another version according to which Theseus sailed back to Crete together with Minos on the initial voyage from Athens. This was therefore both the first *and* the last time the tribute was sent; perhaps according to this version it was never intended to be an annual event.⁹⁰ Plutarch (*Thes.* 17 = *Fr-GrH* 4 F 164) tells us that, according to Hellanicus, the agreement was that the Athenian youths would be hand-picked by Minos and would sail to Crete with him; they were to bear no weapons of war (μηδὲν ὄπλον Ἀρχῆιον), and if the Minotaur should nevertheless be killed by one of them, Athens would be freed from paying the penalty. Under these rules of engagement, Theseus could only safely free Athens from its obligations to Minos if he managed to kill the monster without using normal heavy weapons. The increasing appearance of Theseus as a wrestler or carrying only a light club or walking stick in representations of this particular scene seems to be due to an awareness of the constraints within which, according to Hellanicus, the hero operated. In this case too, therefore, Achilles is contributing to an ongoing discussion regarding the proper version of a myth. Some intervention must have caused the shift from the sword-carrying Theseus in Greek art of the classical period to the club-wielding or unarmed Theseus of Roman art; we may, as a hypothesis, attribute the source of this change to Hellenistic literature and scholarship, which was strongly influenced by the atthidography of Hellanicus.

To sum up, Achilles' song manifests the hero's interest in the *realia* of life in the heroic age and accords well with the rest of his education by Chiron; it also appears to endorse certain poetic models. The general content of Achilles' song has much in common with Catullus 64: the *Argo*, Peleus and Thetis, Theseus in Crete. The encounter of Pollux and Amycus on the other hand is particularly associated with Theocritus and Apollonius. Furthermore, the overall conception of the song as “episodic,” i.e. a string of individual mythical vignettes, may also be derived from an Alexandrian style of poetic composi-

⁸⁹ Knox (1995: ad *Ov. Her.* 10.77). The visual representations of Theseus' club in Roman art show a much thinner object than Hercules' customary implement; Woodford in *LIMC* s.v. “Theseus,” p 58r identifies it as a *pedum*, or a shepherd's crook. In some cases the appearance of Theseus' club has clearly been affected by Hercules' iconography (cf. Daszewski, 1977: pl. 68 and perhaps pl. 16), but these are the exception; in most instances the club is more of a thin walking stick (cf. *LIMC* s.v. “Minotaurus,” nos. 58, 68, Daszewski, 1977: pls. 32, 27).

⁹⁰ See Bacchylides 17, in which Minos and Theseus sail back together; Jacoby (ad *FrGrH* 4F 164) rightly saw that Diodorus' version, in which Minos sailed back to Athens to pick up his tribute each year, is an unwieldy attempt to reconcile the two versions.

tion, since Callimachus' *Aitia* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* shared the quality of linking together seemingly unrelated stories by means of ingenious transitions. The presence of Amycus in Achilles' song gives a hint of a subtle bond linking all of the stories he tells; each of the heroes was an Argonaut: Hercules, Polux, Theseus, and Peleus.⁹¹ This provides a unifying principle that these stories otherwise seem to lack; so it may be that this is the implicit theme of Achilles' song. It is an *Argonautica*, of a sort, which would explain why Apollonius is such an important model for Statius here.

Despite Achilles' reliance on Apollonius and Theocritus for the details of his song, its structure has a different Alexandrian model. Looking back to Callimachus' *Aetia*, Achilles takes an Alexandrian theme, the voyage of the *Argo*, and narrates in an Alexandrian style, but one quite distinct from that of Apollonius. It is possible that this may be a comment on contemporary Roman poetics. The *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus had presumably appeared not long before, and it offered a version of Apollonius which follows the outlines of his plot and which is in places a quite close translation. This approach to Apollonius was not new in Latin; it had apparently been pioneered by Varro of Atax. In contrast, Statius in the *Thebaid* took a different approach to the Argonautica tale. In the middle of his epic, there is an interlude narrated by Jason's lover, Hypsipyle, who tells her story to the Argive heroes. With its emphasis on the sufferings of an older woman in contrast to the young heroes around her, this seems to look back to Callimachus' *Hecale*.⁹² In its central position and its nature as an extended narrative excursus, it also looks back to Catullus 64, and for both of these reasons it might accurately be called an "epyllion." So Statius' Argonautic strategy in the *Thebaid* was the same as Achilles': to tell the story of the *Argo* in the style of an Alexandrian poet other than Apollonius, Callimachus in particular. It was Virgil who had insisted on adhering to the spirit of Alexandrian poetry rather than to the letter of its polemics, and there may be an implicit criticism here of the literal-minded way that Valerius emulated Apollonius.⁹³ Regardless of the potential relevance of Valerius Flaccus as a countermodel, it is in any case clear that Achilles and Statius are kindred spirits as poets and as far as the handling of Argonautic subject matter is concerned.

91 Statius, at least, considered Theseus to have been aboard the *Argo*: cf. *Ach.* 1.156f and *Theb.* 5.431f.

92 There are links with the *Hecale* in the content, too. Nemea is where the Argives find Hypsipyle, and it was near here that Molochus entertained Hercules on his way to encounter the Nemean lion, as narrated by Callimachus in the *Aetia*. Now *Hecale* was likewise a humble peasant who gave shelter to a great hero, Theseus, on his way to encountering a fearsome beast, the bull of Marathon. In fact, when Hypsipyle describes Theseus disembarking at Lemnos – and here Statius parts company with Apollonius, who did not include Theseus as an Argonaut – she says that he had recently (*nuper*, *Theb.* 5.431) come from slaying the bull of Marathon, and thus emerges directly from the plot of Callimachus' epyllion into that of Statius' epyllion.

93 See below, p 102.

One reason Achilles chooses the Argonauts as his theme is the difficulty in finding suitable myths that happened before Achilles' childhood. A more extreme form of this problem faced Apollonius when he described the episodes embroidered on the cloak of Jason. His solution pointed to this very difficulty by including the episode of Phrixus and the golden fleece, which directly precipitated the voyage of the *Argo* itself. Likewise, Achilles alludes to the chronological restraint and paucity of heroic material he faced by including his own parents' wedding in his song.⁹⁴ This connection with the tradition of epic ecphrasis via Jason's cloak is not coincidental, as it alludes to the ecphrasis of the coverlet in Catullus 64. The traditions of ecphrasis and embedded mythological narrative often intersected, as in the Trojan War narrative of the frieze on the walls of Juno's temple in Carthage in the *Aeneid* (1.453–93). The song of Demodocus and the shield of Achilles are not so very far apart. By alluding to the tradition of epic ecphrasis in the context of Achilles' song, Statius draws our attention to its programmatic character, since ecphrases from the shield of Achilles onward often comment in a metapoetic way on the main narrative. A Homeric hero who sings the "glories of heroes" (κλέα ἀνδρῶν) might be expected to do so in purely Homeric fashion; but Statius upsets our expectations and attributes to Achilles an Alexandrianizing taste. Statius has provided an aetiology for Hellenistic poetics that he has boldly imported into the world of the *Iliad*. The poet Statius invokes the poet Achilles as the authority for writing an epic about Achilles in a distinctly non-Iliadic vein. Achilles' performance therefore serves as a good illustration of the poetic strategy of the *Achilleid* as a whole.

Statius and Virgil

Until recently, Statius' reputation as a poet had long suffered from his being seen as a slavish imitator of Virgil. We will discuss the reason for this in the next section, but first let us see how the *Achilleid* offers a glimpse of a very different side of Statius' relationship to Virgil. His irreverent attitude toward the canonical Latin epicist may be illustrated by looking at the way Statius introduces the characters of Achilles and Deidamia. He imitates the paired similes by means of which Virgil had described Aeneas and Dido, but does so in a way that challenges the authority of Virgil. Even in this avowedly Ovidian work, Virgil is still of course a vitally important model, but in a different way from before.⁹⁵

When we first meet Statius' Achilles, he is compared to Apollo:

94 The tendency for the distinction between singer and subject, between representer and represented to collapse in the heroic age is illustrated by the ecphrasis of Theseus' shield in the *Thebaid* (12.665–76); Theseus carries a depiction of his own exploits on his shield.

95 Feeney (2004: 89–91) also has a discussion of these interlocked similes.

qualis Lycia venator Apollo
cum redit et saevis permutat plectra pharetris . . . (1.165f)

just as when Apollo the hunter returns from Lycia and trades in his fierce
quiver for a lyre . . .

The young Achilles has just returned from hunting, and has come home to Chiron's cave to get washed and have his dinner. After dinner, he will play the lyre for his mother; he thus embodies both aspects of the god mentioned in Statius' simile: the hunter and the musician. Lycia brings to mind Virgil's simile describing Aeneas as he set out to hunt at Carthage:

qualis ubi hibernam Lyciam Xanthique fluenta
deserit ac Delum maternam invisit Apollo
instauratque choros . . . (*Aen.* 4.143-5)

.
tela sonant umeris. (*Aen.* 4.149)

Just as when Apollo leaves behind his winter quarters in Lycia and the
river Xanthus and goes to visit his mother's Delos and celebrates the
dances anew . . . arrows clatter on his shoulders.

Virgil compares Aeneas, who is setting out for the hunt, with Apollo as he heads from Lycia to Delos. The implied points of comparison between god and hero in Virgil's simile are the arrows that Aeneas carries on his back (148) and the movement from one place to another. What Statius does is to take those rather arbitrary cult-places of Apollo and assign them particular meanings in the economy of his own simile.⁹⁶ Virgil's Aeneas is setting out for the hunt, whereas Statius' Achilles is returning from it. This makes Achilles a much closer fit for comparison with a god coming back from a hunting trip in the wilds of Lycia, and returning to civilization. Statius does not mention Delos; instead he makes the counterpoint between nature and culture explicit ("trades in his fierce quiver for a lyre," 166). This adds another point of comparison between Statius' god and hero, not present in Virgil's Aeneas simile: both are musicians as well as hunters. This sort of allusion gives pleasure not merely in recognizing the borrowing from Virgil, but also in appreciating the careful and intricate way it has been recontextualized and improved.

Virgil's Apollo simile is paired with another simile in which Dido is compared to Diana. It happens that we know quite a bit about contemporary criticism of that simile, and so we can discover much more about the nature of Statius' improvements. Here is the Virgilian simile that introduces Dido, when we meet her for the first time:

⁹⁶ Lycia and Delos in particular were chosen as an echo of Apollonius' Apollo simile for Jason, which had named those same places (*Argon.* 1.307-10): Clausen (1987: 15-25).

qualis in Eurotae ripis aut per iuga Cynthi
 exercet Diana choros, quam mille secutae
 hinc atque hinc glomerantur Oreades; illa pharetram
 fert umero gradiensque deas supereminet omnis
 (Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus),
 talis erat Dido, talem se laeta ferebat
 per medios instans operi regnisque futuris. (I.498–504)

Just as Diana keeps the dance busy on the banks of the Eurotas or the mountain ridge of Delos, and a thousand mountain nymphs follow her, crowding all around, she herself carries a quiver on her shoulder and towers above the other goddesses as she walks – joy thrills the silent heart of Leto. Such was Dido; this is how she gladly conducted herself through the midst of the crowd as she pressed on with the work and with her growing kingdom.

This simile is paired with the Apollo simile, just as Apollonius' *Argonautica* contains one simile comparing Jason to Apollo and another comparing Medea to Artemis.⁹⁷ Some of the similarities between Virgil's two similes are the mention of Delos, the quiver, and the leading of dancers. Servius points out that the conjunction of these similes is prophetic of the ill-fated nature of the romance between Aeneas and Dido, in that Apollo and Diana are brother and sister rather than lovers, and both deities are inhospitable to the institution of marriage.⁹⁸ Given the pair of balanced Apollo and Diana similes in the *Argonautica* and *Aeneid* that introduce the romantic leads of those epics, and given that Statius likewise introduces Achilles with an Apollo simile, we might ask ourselves what the chances are that he has a matching Diana simile for Deidamia.⁹⁹ We might look for one at the point where Deidamia enters the *Achilleid*. As we shall discover, Statius breaks this expected symmetry slightly, and, to explain why, it will be necessary to look in greater detail at one of Virgil's own sources.

Virgil's Diana simile is a translation and reworking of a famous Homeric simile that describes Nausicaa:

οἷη δ' Ἄρτεμις εἶσι κατ' οὖρεα ἰοχέαιρα,
 ἧ κατὰ Τηθύγετον περιμήκετον ἠ' Ἐρύμανθον,
 τεροπομένη κάπρουσι καὶ ὠκείης ἐλάφοισι·
 τῇ δέ θ' ἅμα νύμφαι, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο,
 ἀγρονόμοι παίζουσι, γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα Λητώ·
 πασάων δ' ὑπὲρ ἧ γε κάρη ἔχει ἠδὲ μέτωπα,
 ρεῖά τ' ἀριγνώτη πέλεται, καλαὶ δέ τε πάσαι·
 ὣς ἦ γ' ἀμφιπόλοισι μετέπρεπε παρθένος ἀδιμήτης. (Od. 6.102–9)

97 Thus Clausen (1987: 15–25).

98 Servius ad *Aen.* 4.144.

99 As noted by Hinds (2000: 237f), who also points out the relevance in this context of a simile in which Statius compares Achilles to Diana as a huntress.

Just as Artemis the archer goes down the mountains, over steep Taygetus or Erymanthus, delighting in the boars and swift deer, and the country-dwelling Nymphs, daughters of Zeus who bears the aegis, play together with her, and Leto rejoices in her heart – she holds her head and her brows above them all; she is easily recognized, though all are beautiful. This is how the unwedded girl [Nausicaa] stood out among her handmaids.

This Virgilian imitation of Homer has been much discussed; and we happen to have a record of one discussion of this passage that goes back to Statius' own day. Aulus Gellius records the trenchant criticisms of Valerius Probus, one of the great but shadowy names in the early history of the study of Latin literature.¹⁰⁰ Here is an extract from what Gellius claims Probus said:¹⁰¹

Et quoniam de transferendis sententiis loquor, memini audisse me ex Valerii Probi discipulis, docti hominis et in legendis pensitandisque veteribus scriptis bene callidi, solitum eum dicere, nihil quicquam tam inprosperare Virgilium ex Homero vertisse quam versus hos amoenissimos, quos de Nausicaa Homerus fecit . . .

Primum omnium id visum esse dicebant Probo, quod apud Homerum quidem virgo Nausicaa, ludibunda inter familiares puellas in locis solis, recte atque commode confertur cum Diana venante in iugis montium inter agrestes deas, nequaquam autem conveniens Virgilium fecisse, quoniam Dido in urbe media ingrediens . . . nihil eius similitudinis capere possit, quae lusibus atque venatibus Dianae congruat; tum postea, quod Homerus studia atque oblectamina in venando Dianae honeste aperteque dicit, Virgilius autem, cum de venatu deae nihil dixisset, pharetram tantum facit eam ferre in humero, tamquam si onus et sarcinam. . . ; ipse autem, imitari hoc γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα Λητώ volens gaudia fecerit pigra et levia et cunctantia et quasi in summo pectore supernantia; nescire enim sese, quid significaret aliud "pertemptant"; praeter ista omnia florem ipsius totius loci Virgilium videri omisisse, quod hunc Homeri versum exigue secutus sit: ρεῖά τ' ἀριγνώτη πέλεται, καλαὶ δέ τε πᾶσαι, quando nulla maior cumulatorque pulchritudinis laus dici potuerit, quam quod una inter omnis pulchras excelleret, una facile et ex omnibus nosceretur.

(Gell. *NA* 9.9.12–17)

And since I am talking about translation, I remember that I heard from the students of Valerius Probus, a learned man and expert at reading and judging ancient literature, that he used to say that Virgil had never

100 On Probus as a textual critic, see Keil (1981: vol 7, pp 533–6) and the major studies by Jocelyn (1984, 1985a and 1985b), to which add the important reservation of Kaster (1995: 247). On the influence of Probus, see Leo (1912: 43) with Reynolds and Wilson (1991: 27–9). On the value of Probus' readings as reported by the Virgilian scholia, see Courtney (1981: 24–6) and Delvigo (1987: 16).

101 On the reliability of Gellius' information see Jocelyn (1984: 465), with Holford-Strevens (1982) and Kaster (1995: 245f). See also Gellius himself at 3.1.6 and 15.30; in the apt phrase of Holford-Strevens (1988: 120, n 31), Gellius' Probus possesses a "coherent quasi-personality."

translated anything from Homer so infelicitously than these very lovely lines that Homer wrote about Nausicaa . . .

First of all, they used to say that it seemed to Probus that in Homer, Nausicaa, as a playful girl among her friends in the middle of nowhere, is accurately and suitably compared with Diana hunting on mountain ridges among woodland goddesses, but that Virgil made the comparison completely unsuitable, since Dido, walking in the middle of a city . . ., cannot supply anything that the simile would compare to the games and hunts of Diana. Then secondly, Homer speaks clearly and openly of Diana's enthusiasm and delight in hunting, while Virgil, who has said nothing about the goddess hunting, makes her merely carry a quiver on her shoulder, as if it were a burden or a rucksack . . . Virgil, in attempting to imitate this verse ["and Leto rejoices in her heart"] has made her joy slow and slight and hesitant and floating, as it were, on top of her heart; for he said that he himself did not know what else "pertemptant" could mean. Besides all this, he said that Virgil seems to have omitted the flower of this entire passage, in that he barely touched on this line of Homer: "she is easily recognized, though all are beautiful." For no greater or fuller praise of her beauty may be given than that she alone among all the beautiful girls stood out, and was easily picked out from the rest.

These complaints have seemed to many the carping of a small mind; Probus has had his sarcasm repaid to him a thousand times in the scholarly literature.¹⁰² According to Gellius, Probus' basic point is this: Artemis happily hunting in the woods with her nymphs is a perfectly apt comparison for Nausicaa happily playing ball on the beach with her female friends, but not for Dido dispensing law and justice in the city amidst her male counsellors.

Probus has four main objections:

1. Dido is too urban a figure to compare with the rustic Diana of the simile;
2. Homer's Artemis is a huntress rejoicing in the chase, whereas Diana's quiver becomes so pointless in Virgil's simile that it is mere iconography;
3. Virgil misuses the word *pertemptant*; unfortunately, Probus' reasoning here has become difficult to understand;
4. he underplays the point of the simile, i.e. that even among goddesses Diana stands out in her beauty.

If we may ignore the justice of these points, the interesting thing for our purposes is that Statius shows every sign of having taken these criticisms on board in the *Achilleid*. When we look to see whether Statius imitates Virgil's Diana simile as he did his Apollo simile, we do find something, but not quite a simile;

¹⁰² For bibliography pro and contra Probus: Pöschl (1966: 62–69); Austin (1971) ad *Aen.* 1.498ff; and Holford-Strevens (1988: 148, n 30). Compare a less controversial passage of Virgilian criticism at Gell. *NA* 13.21.1–9, on which see Holford-Strevens (1988: 53).

it is a refusal of a simile and a statement of contrast. Deidamia is on the beach amid a crowd of female companions – just like Nausicaa and unlike Dido – and they are described as they perform a ritual at a shrine of Pallas:

omnibus eximium formae decus (1.290)

.
 quantum virides pelagi Venus addita Nymphas
 obruit, aut umeris quantum Diana relinquit
 Naidas, effulget tantum regina decori
 Deidamia chori pulchrisque sororibus obstat. (1.293–6)

.
 atque ipsi par forma deae est, si pectoris angues
 ponat et exempta pacetur casside vultus. (1.299–300)

They all [Deidamia's sisters] were extremely beautiful . . . but as much as Venus overwhelms the green Nymphs of the sea when she joins them, or as much as Diana rises head and shoulders above the Naiads, by such a margin does Deidamia, leader of the lovely dance, shine and eclipse her beautiful sisters . . . She would be the equal of the goddess herself in beauty, if she were to remove the aegis from her chest, take off her helmet and soften her gaze.

The first thing to notice is that this is not, properly speaking, a simile at all. The passage quoted begins with a comparison, but strictly speaking it pertains to quantity rather than quality. All of the Virgilian similes we have discussed and Statius' Apollo simile begin with the word *qualis* "just as"; by contrast the coordinating conjunctions here are *quantum*, *quantum* and *tantum* "how much." These lines conclude with what we might call the opposite of a simile – Statius explicitly remarks upon the incongruity of the *comparanda*, and where we might expect a simile we have instead a passage denying the propriety of a simile. How does this anti-simile demonstrate an acquaintance with the specific criticisms ascribed to Probus? The first problem was Dido's urban setting; here we are told that the girls have, like Homer's Nausicaa, left the city to go down to the beach. The second criticism was that unlike Homer's Artemis, Diana does not hunt in Virgil's simile, and so her iconological attribute, the quiver, is so contextually inappropriate and superfluous that it might as well be a rucksack (*sarcinam*). Statius does not mention hunting, and the girls are worshipping in the shrine of Pallas, not Diana, but in the anti-simile it is precisely Pallas' iconological attributes of aegis and helmet that are glossed as the problem with this type of comparison; Statius explicitly points out that the goddess would have to remove her distinctive attributes in order to bear a likeness to Deidamia. We may pass over the third criticism, which was Virgil's misuse of the word *pertemptant*, as it is hard to determine exactly what Probus was objecting to.¹⁰³

103 It may be significant that, when Statius imitates the Virgilian line elsewhere in the *Achilleid*, de-

The final Proban objection to Virgil's Dido simile is that the central figure should be surrounded not by wrinkly old Carthaginian statesmen, but by beautiful young girls, whom she nevertheless outshines in beauty and whom she exceeds in height. One could not ask for closer adherence to this stricture than the lines Statius gives us. Deidamia literally eclipses her beautiful sisters in the same measure (*quantum*) that Venus exceeds the Nymphs in beauty and by the same amount (*quantum*) that Diana is taller than the Naiads. Statius effects the same comparison as Homer and Virgil, but by casting it strictly in terms of quantity, he avoids setting up a true simile and its Proban pitfalls. In the last lines of this passage, by explicitly refusing to compare Deidamia to Pallas on account of the iconographical difficulty, Statius calls particular attention to the absence of a simile here, to the importance of attending to the proper attributes of divine *comparanda*, and thus to Statius' deft reconciliation of the Virgilian model and Probus' criticism.

There is then the matter of how Statius would have known of Probus' work. There is no question that they were contemporaries. Probus' reputation was already well enough established near the year 88 for Martial (3.2.12) to name him as an example of an unforgiving critic. Moreover, a connection between the two men has already been postulated independently. Gellius cites a letter published by Probus dedicated *ad Marcellum*.¹⁰⁴ Coleman (1988: 135) has suggested the possibility that this is the same Vitorius Marcellus to whom Quintilian dedicated the *Institutio oratoria*, and to whom Statius addressed Book 4 of the *Silvae*. The name Marcellus was very common, but this Vitorius Marcellus can be argued to have had a reason to be interested in the abstruse material on Punic nomenclature that Probus was addressing to him, namely his friendship with a certain Septimius Severus, whom Statius calls his "schoolmate" (*condiscipulus*, *Silv.* 4, pref.), and who was at least in part ethnically Punic.¹⁰⁵ It thus seems reasonably likely that Statius and Probus shared a patron in Vitorius Marcellus. Virgil had relied on Alexandrian scholarship when reading and interpreting Homer,¹⁰⁶ so it only seems fair that Virgil's successors should follow his example and avail in turn of whatever Virgilian exegesis was available to them. The exiguous remains of the early Latin *grammatici* have hampered investigation of this possibility, but in principle there is no reason why Statius should not have done to Virgil what Virgil had done to Homer.¹⁰⁷

scribing Thetis' reaction to Achilles, he uses a different verb than *pertemptant* and gives his phrase a different meaning entirely: *angunt sua gaudia matrem* ("his mother is distressed by her own joy," 1.183).

104 On Probus' chronology see Kaster (1995: 242–5); on the "publication" of the letter, see *ibid.*, p. 269.

105 See Coleman (1988: 158f) on Septimius' background.

106 Schlunk (1974).

107 This is not to deny other literary presences in these lines. For example, the notion that Deidamia would be as beautiful as Minerva, if the goddess were to remove her armor, may look to the beginning of Ovid's *Amores* (1.1.7f), where the poet imagines Venus and Minerva exchanging roles.

Let us take one more small example as an illustration of Statius' wit, intertextual subtlety, and cheekiness with respect to Virgil. As with Virgil's adaptation of Homer's simile, this passage also relates to a well-known Virgilian intertextual nexus. When Achilles tried to justify himself to Deidamia for having dressed as a girl, he says:

nec ego hos cultus aut foeda subissem
tegmina, ni primo te visa in litore: cessi
te propter. (1.652–4)

and I would not have submitted to this way of dressing or this shameful covering, if first I had not seen you on the shore – I gave in on account of you.

As Barchiesi (2001: 143–6) has pointed out, this is an allusion to a famous line in the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas meets the spirit of Dido in the underworld and tries to justify himself for having left her:

invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi. (*Aen.* 6.460)

Queen, I departed from your shore unwillingly.

The fame of this Virgilian line derives from the fact that it is very nearly the same as a line of Catullus, but from a context that appears to be completely inappropriate.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, Statius adopts Virgil's line in a context that is cleverly appropriate. If one thinks about it carefully, both heroes are giving somewhat lame excuses for rather unheroic behavior, and both are addressing women with whom they became romantically involved on a foreign shore, diverted temporarily from their heroic destinies. The main difference is that Aeneas is explaining why he left, and Achilles why he stayed.

Surprisingly, one crucial part of the original template appears at first to be missing in Statius' imitation: the word "unwillingly" (*invitus/invita*). This is an odd omission, given that the thrust of Achilles' argument is that he put on the clothing of a girl *unwillingly*. If we approach Statius' line with the assumption that it is a virtuoso transformation of its models, then another possible connection exists. Dilke's text, as printed above, is not objectionable and is attested in the manuscripts, but let us consider the possibility of a conjecture. If we allow that it is possible that *tu visa* was the original reading, this opens up the possibility of another allusion to the Virgilian line:¹⁰⁹

For such mingling in the *Achilleid* of the erotic and the military, the epic and the elegaic, see Feeney (2004: 89–91).

108 The lock of hair in Catullus' *Coma Berenices* says to Berenice: *invita, O regina, tuo de vertice cessi* ("O queen, I departed from your head unwillingly," Cat. 66.39). It may be that the awkwardness of the mismatch between the Catullan and Virgilian contexts is a symptom of the awkwardness of Aeneas' excuse to Dido.

109 Garrod printed *tu visa* in his OCT, on the apparently erroneous information that it was the reading

tegmina, ni primo tu visa in litore: cessi

As pronounced, the phrase *tu vis' in* (tu-vi-s-in) is a syllabic rearrangement of the otherwise missing word: *invitus*.¹¹⁰ It may also be more than a coincidence that every letter but the first of the Virgilian word *regina* may be found in proper order in *tegmina*. Unlike Virgil's allusion to Catullus, the context is entirely relevant and the transformation is exceedingly subtle.

Pride and Prejudice

For a long time, Statius was viewed as a slavish imitator of Virgil, and it is only recently that his relationship to Virgil has been evaluated in a more sympathetic light.¹¹¹ That negative view of Statius derives largely from his valedictory address in the *sphragis*, or seal, at the end of the *Thebaid*, where he admonishes his poem to follow a few steps behind the *Aeneid*:

vive, precor; nec tu divinam Aeneida tempta,
sed longe sequere et vestigia semper adora.
mox, tibi si quis adhuc praetendit nubila livor,
occidet, et meriti post me referentur honores. (*Theb.* 12.816–19)

Live on, I pray, and do not rival the divine *Aeneid*, but follow well behind it and always worship its footsteps. If any dark cloud of envy still hangs over you, it will soon collapse, and after my passing well-deserved honors shall be paid.

Statius was expressing here extreme pride in his work, but understanding this attitude of devoted filiation can be difficult for modern readers attuned to romantic notions of creative originality and agonistic accounts of poetic succession.¹¹² If we, as modern readers, find such devotion hard to grasp, it may be easier to understand Statius' fierce expression of pride at the start of the *Achilleid*, which is not encumbered by genuflection to Virgil.

At the beginning of the *Achilleid*, Statius the epic narrator looks back upon the achievement of his previous work.¹¹³ He reminds us that this is not his first epic venture, and says that Thebes knows this:

of the Eton MS; this is according to Marastoni's apparatus. Dilke and most editors have preferred *te visa*; but because of the elision we cannot know the quantity of the final syllable of *visa*. As Dilke shows, there is a good parallel for *nisi* with an ablative absolute in the *Achilleid* (2.127f), and so one cannot object to the syntax of the text he prints, even if *nisi* + subject and finite verb would be the more common construction. The Etonensis is reported now to read *tui visa*, while the Puteaneus has *te vias*; the others have *te visa*. Just because Garrod was mistaken in reading *tu visa* in the Etonensis, this does not mean his text was necessarily wrong, but its status changes to conjecture.

¹¹⁰ For other examples of what he calls "sound allusion," see Wills (1996: 19).

¹¹¹ For Statius' "pride and self-confidence," see Hill (1990: 99).

¹¹² Dante (*Dante Purg.* 21.130–6 and 22.127–9) and Chaucer (*Troilus* 5.1789–92) were more sympathetic to the Statian model of poetic tradition.

¹¹³ On the beginning of the *Achilleid* as a reflection on the end of the *Thebaid*, see Hinds (1998: 91–6) and Barchiesi (1996: 50).

scit Dircaeus ager meque inter prisca parentum
nomina cumque suo numerant Amphione Thebae. (1.12f)

The territory around Dirce knows it, and Thebes counts me among the names of its founding fathers, and in particular along with its own Amphion.¹¹⁴

Amphion was famous for building the walls of Thebes with his brother Zethus, moving huge boulders by the sound of his lyre alone.¹¹⁵ Statius is like Amphion because he “constructed Thebes” with his lyre, building the city in the imagination of his audience of his previous epic, stone by stone, word by word. Statius is not merely making a vague claim to be “regarded as equal to the bards of old” (Dilke ad loc), but to be regarded as equal to the heroic poets of myth, Amphion and Orpheus, who could animate lifeless objects with their lyre. The claim literally to have conjured up a physical city, piece by piece, in a literary work is a striking image in this context. Other poets might use this metaphor of city building, or compare themselves to Amphion and Orpheus; but because Statius has written an epic about Thebes, he can claim a much closer analogy with the lyre of Amphion. More than any ancient author, one thinks of Joyce’s assertion that one could construct the city of Dublin from the pages of *Ulysses*. Such is the confidence in his own powers that Statius expresses at the outset of the *Achilleid*.

Rather than imagining Statius as a mindless idol-worshiper at the shrine of Virgil, it is important to see that the invocation of Virgil at the end of the *Thebaid* is a rhetorical device that serves to locate that poem in particular tradition: serious, martial, mythological epic in Latin. Virgil is invoked not only as the canonical representative of that tradition, but also because the combination of Virgil and Callimachus held particular relevance in the context of an epic *Thebaid*.¹¹⁶ Virgil had rehabilitated the despised material of cyclic epic in retelling the story of the fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2, and following in his footsteps, Statius had rehabilitated the despised material of Antimachus of Colophon, nemesis of Callimachus, in writing a Latin *Thebaid*.¹¹⁷ So Statius was no stranger to playing with the limits of generic propriety.

114 Dilke’s suggestion (ad loc) that the *-que* of *meque* may be an example of its sense of *quoque* is impossible. Fordyce (1961) ad Catull. 102.3 points out that the evidence for such a construction is exceedingly dubious and that even in those doubtful cases the pronoun is always in an emphatic position, which would not be the case here. Rather, *scit* is used absolutely, referring back to the poet’s claims in the previous lines; the first *-que*, in *meque*, coordinates the two clauses whose respective verbs are *scit* and *numerant*, and the second, in *cumque*, coordinates the two prepositions, *inter* and *cum*, both of which depend on *numerant*, which alone takes *me* as its object.

115 *quo carmine muris | iusserit Amphion Tyrios accedere montes* (“with what song Amphion ordered the Tyrian mountains to be added to the walls,” *Theb.* 1.9f).

116 The image of envy falling away comes from the end of Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo* (*Hymn* 2.113).

117 Virgil himself had complained in the opening of the third book of his *Georgics* that the themes of Alexandrian literature – his classics – had “all become hackneyed” (*omnia iam vulgata*,

Once we are alert to the rhetorical nature of such programmatic proclamations, it is easier to reconcile the pious attitude toward Virgil expressed in the *Thebaid* with what we have seen of the irreverent attitude of the *Achilleid*. After all, Virgil himself had gone from abjuring poems on “kings and battles” (*reges et proelia*, *Ecl.* 6.3) in Callimachean fashion to writing an epic on “battles and a hero” (*arma virumque*, *Aen.* 1.1). As noted above (p 78), Statius moved in the opposite direction: from serious heroic epic to a thoroughly Alexandrian antiheroic mode. This is the spirit in which we should understand Statius’ invocation of the epic-revisionist Ovid as patron of this enterprise, and his newly flippant attitude toward Virgil and Homer. Now that we have an understanding of the reasons for Statius’ seemingly blasphemous attitude toward the text he had previously called the “divine *Aeneid*” (12.816), we can go on to look at the beginning of the action of the *Achilleid*, which begins with something very like a parody of the beginning of the *Aeneid*.

Virg. *Geor.* 3.4, on which see Thomas, 1988: ad loc) and so proclaimed his intention to emulate the spirit of Alexandrian poetics rather than the letter of their diktats.

{ 3 }

Womanhood, Rhetoric, and Performance

A status, a position, a social place is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished, and well articulated. Performed with ease or clumsiness, awareness or not, guile or good faith, it is nonetheless something that must be enacted and portrayed, something that must be realized.

Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life**

THE PLOT of the *Achilleid* as we have it describes an arc bounded by Thetis' two failures: her attempt to destroy Paris' fleet, and her attempt to keep her son hidden on Scyros. Accordingly, Statius depicts Thetis as overreaching her powers; the goddess becomes by turns a figure of pathos and of comic ineptitude. The most important manifestation of her haplessness is her frequent misuse of language and rhetorical tropes; and one way of reading this incompetence is that she is trying to usurp modes of behavior inappropriate to her gender. Thetis is the mirror image of Achilles; both have equal difficulty wearing with ease the constricting garb of womanhood. In particular, Thetis' behavior is strangely at odds with what is usual for epic goddesses, and she has difficulty adapting herself to the literary models she tries to evoke, such as the traditional epic roles of protective mother and of avenging nemesis. We begin with Thetis' attempt to recreate the wrath of the Virgilian Juno.

* Goffman (1959: 75).

Stormy Weather

The *Achilleid* begins *in medias res*, and we discover Thetis in mid-ocean as she observes Paris' fleet sailing back from Sparta with Helen aboard. The goddess is spurred to action by her foreknowledge of the destined sequelae to this adventure, and she tries to intervene in the progress of fate by lobbying Neptune to sink Paris' fleet in a storm. This beginning cannot help but recall the opening of the *Aeneid*: a goddess intercedes with a god in order to divert fate from its course, requesting him to stir up a storm to wreck the fleet of a Trojan prince. The fact that the goddess in this case is Thetis, not Juno, may also remind us of the *Iliad*, since it began with Thetis interceding with a god, Zeus, on behalf of Achilles.¹ There is a major hurdle, however, that blocks the narrator's initial attempts to align this story with the lineaments of the *Aeneid* (and the *Iliad*): there is, alas for Thetis, no storm in this particular mythological narrative of Paris' journey, nor can she foil him completely without derailing the course of those very epic tales the poem seeks to invoke as precedents.² Thetis is refused by Neptune, and is forced to have recourse to other expedients in order to protect her son. This refusal is the first of many frustrated efforts in which Thetis will prove to be a failure: she makes requests that are not granted and makes prophesies that do not come true. As Neptune says, "the fates forbid it" (*fata vetant* 1.81); and yet by making Thetis' desired outcome mutually exclusive with the canonical epic tradition, Statius seems to imply that it is just as much literary history as the Fates that stand in the way. Thetis presents herself as another Juno and so the narrator begins by claiming the mantle of Virgil; both are rejected, snubbed by Neptune and denied their pretentious claim to that particular Homeric-Virgilian epic paradigm.

Does the *Achilleid* begin in deliberate failure, a confessedly rash and ill-conceived imitation of the *Aeneid* on the parts of both Statius and Thetis? If we look at the specifics of the relationship between this scene and its Virgilian exemplars, we will discover that Statius is manipulating the contrast between

¹ Thus Hinds (1998: 96).

² There did exist, in fact, a version of this myth in which Paris and Helen were somewhat hindered on their way by a storm, and so Statius could have represented Thetis' embassy to Neptune as successful, if he had so wished. According to Proclus' summary of the *Cypria*, in that poem Hera stirred up a storm against Paris and Helen, forcing them to put in at Sidon while on their way to Troy; this is compatible with Homer's account, although he does not mention a storm (*Il.* 6.289–92). On the other hand, Herodotus claims that, according to the *Cypria*, Paris and Helen reached Ilium in three days, *contrary* to Homer's information that they stopped at Sidon. For a summary of the numerous and diverse attempts to resolve this contradiction, see Bernabé (1987: 52f) ad *Cypria* F 14. At the very least, it seems that Statius could have derived implicit precedent from Homer and possibly explicit authorization from the *Cypria* that Paris was delayed on his way by a storm. On this argument, Thetis has not only Virgil's Juno but also the Hera of archaic epic as a model. Thus her failure even to delay Paris slightly, where Hera had succeeded in so doing, is all the more abject.

his poem and Virgil's rather from a position of strength. It is only the character Thetis who gets her literary models wrong, not her creator. The global model for the plotting and inaugural position of Thetis' request to Neptune for a storm is clearly Juno's intervention with Aeolus, but on the other hand much of the detail of their encounter is drawn from Venus' petition at the end of *Aeneid* 5, in which she asks Neptune for calm seas for her son's crossing.³ The tension between these two competing models of divine comportment, Juno and Venus, is particularly visible in a transitional passage that links Thetis' first musings on what to do and her approach to Neptune. Thetis deliberates:

nunc quoque – sed tardum, iam plena iniuria raptae.
 ibo tamen pelagique deos dextramque secundi,
 quod superest, complexa Iovis per Tethyos annos
 grandaevumque patrem supplex miseranda rogabo
 unam hiemem. (1.47–51)

Even now – but it is too late; the insult done by the rape is complete. Yet I will go and, as it is the only option left, I will embrace the gods of the sea and the right hand of the second Jupiter; as a piteous suppliant I will beg him for a storm by the old age of Tethys and my ancient father.

This passage begins with a pointed allusion to, or rather, according to strict mythical chronology, an anticipation of, Juno's opening speech in the *Aeneid*. The judgment of Paris found a place in her litany of Trojan wrongs: "the judgment of Paris and the insult to her scorned beauty" (*iudicium Paridis spretaeque iniuria formae*, *Aen.* 1.27). These words anticipate Thetis' phrase "the insult done by the rape" (*plena iniuria raptae*, 47) in vocabulary and syntax.⁴ It is not coincidental that both of these "insults" have been perpetrated by Paris. At this stage the audience is still imagining a Thetis who is positioning herself as a second Juno – or rather a prior Juno – affronted by Paris. She intends, like Juno, to avenge the insults (*iniuria*) of Paris with a storm; but by the end of the passage she has declared different intentions: to approach Neptune, not Aeolus; to go as a suppliant, not as an equal bargaining from a position of strength. In these lines we witness Thetis repositioning herself strategically within the epic tradition, dropping the mask of power and adopting the role to which her situation compels her: the suppliant female.

The subsequent epic model in this scene is Venus' approach to Neptune at the end of Book 5 of the *Aeneid* (5.779–826), with which this passage shares some verbal parallels.⁵ No one of these similarities is especially important in

3 For a detailed comparison of Virgil's Juno and Statius' Thetis, see Mulder (1955: 122–4).

4 In both instances, *spretae* . . . *formae* and *raptae* are participles of the *ab urbe condita* type and both are genitives that define the substance of an *iniuria*.

5 Compare *quod superest* (*Aen.* 5.796) with *quod superest* (*Ach.* 1.49, same *sedes*); *fas omne est* (*Aen.* 5.800) with *fas sit* (*Ach.* 1.73); *permulsit pectora dictis* (*Aen.* 5.816) with *dictisque ita mulcet amicos*

itself, but together they have a cumulative weight. These verbal echoes supplement the presence of a major visual landmark in both texts that signposts the connection between the two passages. As Virgil's Neptune departs the scene of his discussion with Venus, his chariot is escorted by a grand procession or *thiasos* of sea-gods and sea-beasts. A similarly sculptural *thiasos* accompanies the chariot of Statius' Neptune, but in this case the entourage is described before the conversation between Thetis and Neptune has started, as if to help us orient ourselves with respect to the conversation's model in the *Aeneid* before it even begins.⁶

There are significant parallels between the situations of Virgil's Venus and Statius' Thetis. Both are the divine mothers of the mortal heroes of their respective eponymous epics; both approach Neptune for help. There are differences, too: Venus is asking for a calm sea, Thetis for a storm; Venus is successful in her request, Thetis is denied. The upshot of this double inversion is an identical result: no storm. It may be the fact of her motherhood that suggests this new epic role to Thetis, i.e. Venus in *Aeneid* 5 rather than Juno in *Aeneid* 1, but, as we shall see, Thetis is making a big mistake. We readers of Virgil know that the result of Venus' interview was not a storm but rather a promise of safe crossing for a Trojan prince. Thetis seems not to know that – for her, it lies in the future – and her lack of awareness of the Virgilian tradition is betrayed by the force of her own language, which moves, as it were, from knowing allusion to unconscious punning that undercuts her own designs.

We can identify the term that mediates between these two role-models, Juno and Venus. The odd phrase “the second Jupiter” (*secundi . . . Iovis*, 1.48f) demands explanation. As a description of Neptune it is unparalleled, but it would seem to be based on similarly periphrastic designations of Pluto, like Virgil's “Jupiter of the Styx” and Homer's “Zeus of the Underworld,” but the apotropaic purpose that motivates those turns of phrase is absent here.⁷ One explanation for this curious coinage has been suggested by Hinds (1998: 96–8). He connects the epithet *secundus* with a series of moments in the *Achilleid* that programmatically lay claim to a kind of belatedness or secondariness in the epic tradition. More specifically he points out that to call Neptune *Iuppiter secundus* is to refer us back by implication to the “original” Jove of the *Iliad*, and thus Thetis' first divine intervention on her son's behalf at the start of Homer's epic.⁸ This is all true, but there is even more to it. For this epithet also looks

(*Ach.* 1.79); *caeruleo . . . curru* (*Aen.* 5.819) with *caeruleis . . . equis* (*Ach.* 1.78); *cete* (*Aen.* 5.822) with *cete* (*Ach.* 1.55); and *Tritonesque* (*Aen.* 5.824) with *Tritones* (*Ach.* 1.55).

6 The difficult epithet of the sea-beasts, *scopulosa* (“rock-like”, *Ach.* 1.55), might even be glossed as “sculptural.”

7 *Iovi Stygio* (*Aen.* 4.638); *Ζεύς . . . καταχθόνιος* (*Il.* 9.457). On this class of epithets, see West (1978) ad Hesiod, *Op.* 465.

8 On Thetis' secondariness and *Iuppiter secundus*, see also Feeney (2004: 86).

forward, by means of a pun, to Thetis' prospective encounter with Neptune. The phrase *Iuppiter secundus* ("second Jupiter") in a poetic context can also be construed to mean simply "favorable weather." In fact, in Catullus' poem about his yacht (4.20f), that is precisely what this phrase does mean: good winds for sailing. With exquisite irony the hapless Thetis designates the figure she wants to lobby for a ship-destroying storm by the name "good weather."

The irony here is constructive, too. It adumbrates the very problem Thetis will have in accommodating herself to the particular requirements of her shifting epic paradigms. As she evolves from identifying with the avenging Juno to the motherly, concerned Venus, she moves from the example of a goddess who like her wants to stir up a storm to one who wants to ensure calm seas. The fit is less than perfect, and Neptune's epithet points out the slippage between Thetis' desires (i.e. a storm, *unam hiemem*) and the outcome of the Virgilian role she tries foolishly to co-opt (i.e. a safe crossing, propitious winds, *Iuppiter secundus*).

As Thetis tries on epic roles like the items in a wardrobe – the indignation of Juno and the supplication of Venus – the epic narrator starts off in complicity with her, beginning his poem in imitation of the *Aeneid*. We first meet a goddess angry at the voyage of a Trojan prince, so the narrator seems at first supportive of Thetis' attempts to position herself as a Virgilian Juno, and it is hard to distinguish between the narrator's invocation of the Virgilian model and Thetis'. Gradually, as Thetis changes her mind and takes on the very different role of Venus, Statius distances himself from her with irony, putting in her mouth "unconsciously" self-defeating language and allusions which serve to characterize Thetis by excluding her from the circle of competence and erudition that Statius constructs between his audience and himself. Thetis may have supernatural insight into the future, thanks to Proteus (*Ach.* 1.32), but we and the poet know our Virgil, which is even more useful in this situation. We, being educated readers of epic, know that if you want to create a storm, you act like Juno; if you want to prevent one, you act like Venus. Thetis, lacking an elite, Roman, male education, does not know this. This handicap will further betray her in her interview with Neptune.

The Wrath of Thetis

When Thetis encounters Neptune, he is in mid-ocean, attended by his *thiasos*; she addresses him thus:

O magni genitor rectorque profundi,
aspicis in qualis miserum patefeceris usus
aequor? eunt tutis terrarum crimina velis,
ex quo iura freti maiestatemque repostam
rupit Iasonia puppis Pagasaea rapina.

(1.61–5)

O father and ruler of the mighty deep, do you see to what sort of abuse you have thrown open the wretched sea? The wickedness of the nations sails on through, unmolested, ever since the *Argo* left from Pagasae with the rapist Jason on board, shattering the prerogatives of the sea and its remote majesty.

Thetis begins her appeal with the very common topos of condemning the first man to sail the seas, and at line 65 we realize that she is making the traditional identification of that ship as the *Argo*. An unconscious irony undercuts Thetis' discourse at this point: her own husband was an active participant in the very voyage that she is so conventionally denouncing. In fact, according to the account in Catullus 64, that was the occasion of his falling in love with her.⁹ When Roman schoolboys practiced their declamations and employed chestnuts like this one as mythological *exempla*, the one thing they might reasonably be sure of is that they were safely removed from contemporary life; mythical events such as the *Argo* voyage did not directly involve themselves or anyone in the audience. Not so for Thetis. She has committed a classic rhetorical blunder in deploying an example that undermines rather than supports her own position.¹⁰

The question, then, is whether a Roman, with ears finely tuned to this kind of speechmaking, would have recognized Thetis' poor choice of starting point. The answer is likely to have been yes, but in case anyone may have missed it, Neptune refers us to her blunder in his reply. He says to her:

Pelea iam desiste queri thalamosque minores. (1.90)

Now stop complaining about Peleus and about having married beneath you.

This line requires some interpretation; it is hard to know, on the face of it, to what Neptune is referring, since this is the very first time Peleus' name is mentioned in the *Achilleid*. Thetis has complained loudly about Paris and about Jason and the Argonauts, but not about Peleus. She had done so "already" in Homer, expressing to Hephaestus her resentment at her mortal wedding (*Il.* 18.429–35). Yet in mythical time this encounter still lies in the future, so strictly speaking Neptune should not be referring to that episode. Mendelsohn (1990: 302) offers this explanation: "Yet Thetis had not in fact mentioned her

- ⁹ *tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore* ("it was then that Peleus is said to have been inflamed with love for Thetis," *Cat.* 64.19). In other versions of the story, Achilles was already born when Peleus embarks; according to Apollonius (1.533–8) and Valerius Flaccus (1.255–9), the boy was brought to see his father off.
- ¹⁰ Quintilian warns that great care must be taken when employing a comparison to ensure that its appropriateness to the argument is more than superficial: "But the superficial appearances of parallels are often deceptive, and so it is necessary to employ your judgment" (*solent tamen fallere similitudinum species, ideoque adhibendum est eis iudicium: Inst.* 5.11.26). Quintilian is speaking here of the figure of *similitudo* rather than *exemplum*, but as he notes, these have much the same force.

marriage at all; Neptune responds to what he expects to hear – such is the frequency with which we may presume she complains about Peleus.” That is one possible reading of Neptune’s annoyance, but such a presumption is not strictly necessary; and the vivid imperative *desiste* (stop) makes better sense if we imagine that he is responding to Thetis as though she were complaining right now. Neptune responds not only to what he “expects to hear,” but to what he has in fact heard. He is pointing out that when the Nereid complains about mortals wandering to and fro on the sea, she is by implication complaining about the behavior of her own husband, too. Neptune thus suggests that Thetis may have personal reasons surpassing the conventional, rhetorical ones to regret the voyage of the *Argo*, since that was the beginning of her own troubles.

Thetis makes a formal error when she blithely employs the clichés of mortal rhetoric without proper circumspection. More important, and beyond her own embarrassment, her *exemplum* risks gravely offending her *supplicandus*. For Thetis is not the only one implicated in the Argonaut story by her own personal history; so too is Neptune. Apollonius lists three sons of Poseidon among the Argonauts: Euphemus, Erginus, and Ancaeus.¹¹ Would this complication have been perceptible to Statius’ audience? Again, we find the answer in the reactions of the characters themselves. Thetis in her speech to Neptune finishes her introductory, Argonautic *exemplum* and goes on to complain at length about Paris (1.66–70), who is the real object of her anger. She then interrupts herself right at the critical point of making her request, reverting abruptly back to the story of the Argonauts:

has saltem – num semideos nostrumque reportant
 Thesea? – si quis adhuc undis honor, obrue puppes
 aut permitte fretum! (1.71f)

At least sink these ships – for *they* are not carrying demigods and our
 Theseus, are they? – or allow me to do so.

The precipitancy of her change in thought is signaled by the violence of the syntax, with *has* (these) separated from its noun, *puppēs* (ships), by two full lines and a parenthetical question. Rhetorically, this interruption could not have come at a worse time, as it diverts the flow of her argument just at the delicate moment when she is formulating her request. Why does Thetis revert to the subject of the *Argo*? Barth was right to note a change in Thetis’ tone: “she speaks more gently and more indulgently now of the Argonauts, calling them demigods.”¹² Indeed, Thetis speaks much more kindly now of the Argonauts, even using them as a standard of nobility that Paris fails to meet. What Thetis is doing here is to backpedal furiously from her earlier condemnation of the

¹¹ *Argon.* 1.179–89. Apollodorus includes only the first two names in his catalogue of Argonauts (*Bibl.* 1.9.16).

¹² *blandius iam et clementius loquitur de Argonautis, semideos eos vocans* (ad loc).

Argo, and the reason is that she has belatedly realized that she has insulted and offended Neptune. For, quite apart from the minor figures of Euphemus, Erginus, and Ancaeus, Statius has added to poor Thetis' troubles by identifying Theseus as both an Argonaut and a son of Neptune. Statius already in Book 5 of the *Thebaid* had put Theseus aboard the *Argo*; the epithet *noster* (our) for *Theseus* here must mean that Statius and Thetis follow the tradition that Theseus was the son not of Aegeus but of Poseidon.¹³ Thetis' faux pas is thoroughly damning; her belated use of the flattering term *semideos* ("demigods," "heroes with one immortal parent") demonstrates that she realizes too late the relevance to her addressee of the immortal parentage of some of the Argonauts. She puts her finger precisely on her own blunder, but too late to repair the damage.

There are other ways in which Thetis miscalculates rhetorically. She veers away from her abuse of Paris and lets her anger settle upon Venus, which serves no point in her argument:

eheu quos gemitus terris caeloque daturus,
 quos mihi! sic Phrygiae pensamus gaudia palmae,
 hi Veneris mores, hoc gratiae munus alumnae. (1.68–70)

Alas! He [Paris] is going to cause such weeping on earth and in heaven – and for me! Thus we pay the price for the palm of victory Paris handed to Venus; this is just like her, giving this gift of thanks to those who nursed her.

This abuse of Venus advances her cause not at all. One might read it as a representation of "female" jealousy over Venus' victory in the beauty contest on Mount Ida. Certainly such a lapse is the mark of a speaker who lets her emotions get the better of her judgment. Moreover, Thetis' decision to single Venus out for abuse is, intertextually speaking, another bad idea, given that Thetis is trying to reproduce Venus' successful petition to Neptune on Aeneas' behalf in *Aeneid* 5. Thetis' continued incompetence in handling the Virgilian paradigm of gods and storms is once more demonstrated in this passage. She breaks off her description of the suffering that Paris will bring (68) by adding at the beginning of the next line a very elliptical pendant: "and for me!"¹⁴ This is not technically an aposiopesis (a syntactic abruption), but rather an ellipsis that depends for its meaning on the previous line. Nevertheless, the two figures are very closely related.¹⁵ As such, Thetis' quasi-aposiopesis *quos mihi!* is strongly reminiscent of the most famous such construction in Latin, also at the beginning of a line, Neptune's *quos ego!* near the beginning of the *Aeneid* (1.135). By

¹³ For Theseus as an Argonaut, see *Theb.* 5.431f and *Ach.* 1.156f; the tradition that Poseidon, not Aegeus, was Theseus' father goes back at least as far as Bacchylides (17), on which see Gantz (1993: 248f).

¹⁴ *quos mihi!* (i.e. *quos gemitus et mihi daturus!*).

¹⁵ "Von der affektischen Ellipse ist nicht immer scharf zu scheiden die Aposiopese" (LHS 823).

now we should not be surprised at any amount of self-defeating foolishness on Thetis' part, and this allusion is of a piece with her other attempts at acting out a Virgilian role. Neptune's outburst in the *Aeneid* belongs of course to the most famous scene in all literature of a god calming the waves. Then, Neptune was calming the seas; now, Thetis wants him to do the reverse. Thetis once again undermines her plea with a completely inapposite allusion; or rather, Statius undermines Thetis' discourse by putting in her mouth an "unconscious" allusion to Virgil's representation of events that are yet to happen.

Thetis' ignorance of the literary canon is put in relief by the unlabored sophistication of Neptune's reply. It has long been noted that this passage is dense with reference to Catullus 64, particularly to the song of the Parcae.¹⁶ In fact, the testimony of Statius has even been used by editors to emend the corresponding text of Catullus.¹⁷ In mythical chronology the Parcae had "already" told Thetis of her son's destiny, and by echoing their language Neptune implies that Thetis should know herself that her request is impossible. When he says "the fates forbid it" (*fata vetant*), Neptune is not merely making a general observation about destiny, but is introducing a near-verbatim quotation from the *Fata* themselves, viz. Catullus' Parcae.¹⁸ Once again, "fate" in the world of the *Achilleid* is identical with literary tradition. Catullus 64 is a particularly appropriate buttress for Neptune's argument, as it takes its start from the voyage of the *Argo* and leads to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis; Neptune, as we have seen, rebuts Thetis by making a polemical connection between the *Argo*, Thetis' marriage, and her son's destined greatness and death. Statius provides Neptune with a Latin allusion that neatly illustrates and supports his case. The contrast between Neptune's elegant handling of Catullus and Thetis' bungling of Virgil is very pointed.

Statius characterizes Thetis and Neptune by a particularly sophisticated deployment of intertextuality. The idea that Greek gods and heroes should be represented in the literature of Rome as speaking Latin is presumably a convention completely naturalized and transparent for Statius and his audience. It may be, however, that a certain slight amount of pressure is put on that concept when Greek gods quote Virgil and Catullus as "classics." This is not necessarily the case, of course; there are endless examples of Roman poets unproblematically

16 Compare *cum Phrygii Teucro manabunt sanguine (campi)* (Catullus 64.344), and *saepe fatebuntur gnatorum in funere matres* (64.349), with *quanta | aspicias victrix Phrygiarum funera matrum, | cum tuus Aeacides tepido modo sanguine Teucros | undabit campos* (*Ach.* 1.84–7).

17 In his 1566 edition of Catullus, Achilles Statius (Aquilaes Estaço) supplied *campi* in 64.344 on the basis of Statius' imitation at *Ach.* 1.84–8; see Heslin (1997: 593). Not all modern editors have been entirely happy with this emendation, but the text is corrupt and no other suggestion has found general favor.

18 For the equation of *fata* with the Parcae, cf. Thetis' pleonastic phrase: *humiles Parcas terrenaque fata* (1.255); see also OCD³ s.v. "fate," which cites Gellius' designation of the Parcae as *tria fata* (Gell. *NA* 3.16.9f).

cally endowing the speeches of their Greek characters with Virgilian phrases in order to lend them depth and epic dignity. Thetis is different in that her lack of rhetorical and literary sophistication makes an issue of assumptions that are usually taken for granted. Neptune's dexterity in his handling of allusion is the norm; Thetis' poor showing is the comic exception which exposes the seams, if we wish to see them, that betray the constructedness of Latin mythological epic. In such characteristic moments we can see the comic spirit of the *Achilleid* very clearly. The example of Thetis also brings to light the extent to which the intertextual mode of ancient poetry implicitly constructs a community of poet, audience, and even fictional characters as knowledgeable and competent interpreters of classic authors. Thetis is a poorly equipped poseur, whose literary incompetence contrasts with the mastery shown by the male characters. On the level of characterization, her discourse represents her as someone whose rhetoric does the opposite of what it should: it betrays her weakness rather than enhances the strength of her argument. We shall consider whether, in the patriarchal economy of Latin epic, there might not be something that can be called particularly "feminine" about such a character.¹⁹

Rhetoric and Maternity

When Thetis arrives at Chiron's cave, Achilles is out hunting alone; the goddess accosts Chiron in alarm, worried about the level of supervision he has been giving her son.

"ubinam mea pignora, Chiron,
dic," ait, "aut cur ulla puer iam tempora ducit
te sine?" (1.127-9)

"Tell me, Chiron, where is my darling?" she said, "And why is the boy
already spending any of his time away from you?"

There is irony manifest in this sudden concern for Achilles' whereabouts. The reader might well ask what right Thetis has to scold Chiron when she herself has not taken part in the rearing of her son. The *Achilleid* is not helpful in explaining why Thetis did not raise her son and how Achilles came to be fostered with the centaur. In the absence of other information, we are forced to sketch in his background from sources outside the poem. As we will see (below, p 170), there are two competing versions, which come from Homer and Apollonius respectively. In the *Iliad*, Achilles grows up at Phthia with Peleus and Thetis, receiving at some unspecified time a certain amount of medical instruction from Chiron. According to Apollonius (*Argon.* 4.865-79), on the other hand, Peleus interrupted Thetis as she tried to make her child immortal

19 On epic poetry and male education, see Keith (2000: 35).

by roasting his mortal flesh in the hearth, whereupon she dropped the baby Achilles and fled into the sea, never to return. In this scenario, Peleus' decision to leave his son with Chiron while traveling with the *Argo* is motivated by Thetis' departure. By implication Statius rejects the Homeric version, since neither the narrator nor Achilles himself in his autobiographical sketch (2.96–167) ever mentions that he spent any time at all at Phthia. Therefore Thetis, who accuses Chiron of paying insufficient attention to her son, is herself guilty of having abandoned him.

Thetis does give us one bit of information about her early involvement with Achilles. She describes a nightmare in which she repeats the now-famous story of her trip to the underworld in order to dip Achilles by the heel into the Styx:²⁰

non merito trepidus sopor atraque matri
signa deum et magnos utinam mentita timores?
namque modo infensos utero mihi contuor enses,
nunc planctu livere manus, modo in ubera saevas
ire feras; saepe ipsa – nefas! – sub inania natum
Tartara et ad Stygios iterum fero mergere fontes. (1.129–34)

Is it not with good reason that my sleep is troubled, and that black portents from the gods afflict me as a mother, and cause me great fears that I can only hope are not justified? Lately I seem to see swords turned against my womb, my arms black and blue from grief, and wild animals approaching my breast to suckle. I often carry my son down again to the ghostly underworld to dip him in the water of the Styx – a horrible memory!

Statius is our earliest source for the story that Thetis had attempted to make Achilles impervious to injury by dipping him in the waters of the Styx when he was a baby, but it should be remembered that the more prestigious epic version of Achilles' infancy in Statius' era will have been the one authorized by Apollonius (below, p 170), and not the story of Achilles' heel so familiar to us now. Both accounts describe Thetis' attempts to make her son immortal, one in the hearth, the other in the Styx; but Apollonius' account takes a much harsher view of Thetis. When Thetis speaks here in her own voice, it is no surprise that what she has to say about her care of Achilles as an infant reflects much better on her than Apollonius' account does.

Thetis' story about her nightmare is rhetorically useful to her in that it reminds Chiron of her past concern for her son, the services she has rendered to him, and the unspeakable unpleasantness to her that she claims it involved. Yet the vision of wild animals trying to suckle at her breast is another rhetorically self-defeating moment, for it may remind us once again of Thetis' distance

²⁰ See further on Achilles' heel below (p 166).

from her offspring more than her motherliness.²¹ Thetis, despite her nightmares, and whatever the reasons for her long absence, did not suckle her own son. Achilles himself says, “it is said that I did not satisfy my hunger on the sweet breast.”²²

Thetis now elaborates the lie she has cobbled together in order to explain her sudden need to remove Achilles from the centaur’s care. She claims that Proteus has advised her to perform certain magical rites in order to purge her fevered mind:

hos abolere metus magici iubet ordine sacri
 Carpathius vates puerumque sub axe peracto
 secretis lustrare fretis, ubi litora summa
 Oceani et genitor tepet inlabentibus astris
 Pontus. (1.135–9)

Proteus, the prophet of the Carpathian sea, commands me to put an end to these nightmares by carrying out a magic rite and to purify the boy in secret waters at the western end of the earth, where the distant shores of the Ocean, and my father, the sea, grow warm on account of the stars setting there.

Thetis, having evoked Juno and Venus in the *Aeneid*, now cannot resist the greatest Virgilian female role of all. Statius, as Dilke pointed out, “seems clearly to have in mind the scene in Virg. *Aen.* 4.480ff where Dido, who is deceiving Anna about her real intentions, tells her that she has found an Ethiopian sorceress who will cure her of her love, and asks her to put relics of Aeneas on a funeral pyre.”²³

Here Thetis would seem to be on safer ground than she was in her earlier attempts to invoke Virgilian models of behavior, inasmuch as her purposes are similar to Dido’s. Each woman is trying to perpetrate a deception in order to induce someone close to her to abet a scheme that would otherwise be unacceptable. To that end, each invents a tale that a faraway magician has ordered her to perform certain rites. Each attempts to lend a sort of magical plausibility to her lie; Dido claims that she will ritually burn Aeneas’ possessions to exorcize his memory, while Thetis implies by the sequence of her argument that her lustrations at the end of Ocean will be something of a recapitulation of her trip

21 Mendelsohn (1990: 301) notes the potency of this image in the light of the poem’s comparison of Achilles to a lion and Thetis to a lioness.

22 *dico* . . . *nec almis* | *uberibus satiasset famem* (2.96–9).

23 With Dilke ad 135ff, compare the similarities in language in *Aeneid* 4.480–502 and *Achilleid* 1.135–40: *abolere* . . . *iuvat sacerdos* (*Aen.* 4.497f) and *abolere* . . . *iubet* . . . *vates* (*Ach.* 1.135f); *magicas* (*Aen.* 4.493) and *magici* (*Ach.* 1.135); *sacris* (*Aen.* 4.500) and *sacri* (*Ach.* 1.135); *Oceani finem* . . . *ultimus locus* (*Aen.* 4.480f) and *litora summa Oceani* (*Stat. Ach.* 1.137f); *ubi maximus Atlas axem umero torquet stellis ardentibus aptum* (*Aen.* 4.481f) and *sub axe peracto* . . . *ubi* . . . *tepet inlabentibus astris Pontus* (*Ach.* 1.136–9).

to the Styx to protect the infant Achilles. This time Statius has given Thetis a Virgilian model appropriate to her goals, and her results improve accordingly; Thetis' deception of Chiron is successful, just as Dido's was. There must be, however, something disproportionate and inauspicious about invoking Dido's suicide as a precedent here. Anna went on to prepare a pyre for Dido, who used it to end her own life. Chiron will likewise unwittingly acquiesce in a process whose consummation he may regret; but Thetis wants to save a life, not to end one. In the final analysis, therefore, this Virgilian paradigm also portends an unhappy outcome for Thetis.

The goddess soon grows impatient with spinning out the details of her lie and abruptly interrupts herself, concluding her speech to Chiron by announcing that she has been told that she has to take Achilles away to the end of the earth:

ibi ignotis horrenda piacula divis
donaque – sed longum cuncta enumerare vetorque.
trade magis! (1.139–41)

There [I must offer] horrible sacrifice and gifts to unknown gods – but it would take too long to go into all of the details, and besides it is forbidden. Rather, hand him over!

Thetis' impatience, her abrupt curtailment of the argument, and the peremptory way she makes her demand are further signs of her lack of rhetorical fluency. She has not fully thought out the details of her lie, and so abruptly brings it to a halt.²⁴

Thetis' blunt command, "Rather, hand him over!" (*trade magis!*), gives the impression of impatience not only with the details of her lie, but also with the fact that, despite being a goddess and Achilles' mother, she has to explain her plans for her son to someone else. With these final words, Statius once again undercuts the force of her rhetoric, foisting upon her another unconscious and self-defeating pun. The word *magis* here admits two meanings, only one of which suits Thetis' purposes. All editors since Barth have explained *magis* as an adversative adverb, meaning, like *potius*, "rather."²⁵ Yet the word stands before a consonant in the next sentence, and so the meter does not allow us to determine whether the second syllable should be long or short. Thus we cannot be sure whether Thetis said, "hand him over, rather," or, "hand him over to the magicians."²⁶ Thetis has, after all, just explained that she is under orders to perform a "magic rite" (*sacrum magicum*, 1.135). In fact, two early commentators on Statius, Maturantius and Britannicus, had explained the meaning of

24 See below (p 129) for another instance of the unprepared Thetis doing the very same thing.

25 For *magis* in the sense of *potius*, see LHS 497f.

26 On indifference to vowel length in Latin wordplay, see Ahl (1985: 56f).

magis in just this way, as the dative plural of *magus*, “magician.”²⁷ The result of this ambiguity is that Thetis raises the possibility that, when Chiron hands his ward over to Thetis, she will simply pass him on to a surrogate. In the event, this is of course what happens, in the more respectable person of King Lycomedes of Scyros. Thetis is successful in her appeal to Chiron, but even here her unique style of self-destructing argument is apparent.

As we saw, Statius never quite explains how Achilles came to be raised by Chiron, nor does he advert directly to Apollonius’ tale of Thetis’ sudden abandonment of her son and husband. Rather, he sketches a certain distance and lack of intimacy between the two that hints at Thetis’ absenteeism. After dinner, Achilles falls asleep, and he cuddles up with Chiron out of habit, despite his mother’s presence:

saxo collabitur ingens
centaurus blandusque umeris se innectit Achilles,
quamquam ibi fida parens, adsuetaque pectora mavult. (1.195–7)

The huge centaur slid down onto a rock and Achilles sweetly entwined himself in his arms; although his devoted parent was there, he preferred the breast he was accustomed to.

There could be no more cutting rebuttal to Thetis’ anguished claims of maternal concern for her son than this tableau.

Thetis the Sophist

After Achilles and Chiron are asleep, Thetis is free to take a walk upon the shore and to ponder where to hide her son. Having decided on Scyros, she carries the boy there while he sleeps. When he awakens, Achilles is surprised at being in a different place, and his amazement is cast in terms that refer to the change of locale,²⁸ but also to the change in his usual caregiver, as Achilles “hesitates to acknowledge his mother” (*dubitatque agnoscere matrem* 1.250). So when Thetis essays her next hortatory performance, common sense would dictate that she should attempt to bridge the gap that heretofore has separated mother and child. She makes a certain effort in this direction, yet her intentions are subverted by a certain contempt for Achilles’ mortality that seeps into her mode of address. Her task is a most nettlesome one and it is a point on which the plot of the *Achilleid* turns: how does she convince the hero to don a girl’s clothes? In the event, her achievement in this matter will be credited more to the fortuitous appearance of Deidamia than to her own powers of

²⁷ The commentary of Maturantius (Francesco Maturanzio) was first published in 1475, and the edition of Britannicus (Iohannes Britannicus Brixianus) in 1485.

²⁸ “What place is this? What sea? Where is Mount Pelion?” (*quae loca, qui fluctus, ubi Pelion?*, 1.249).

persuasion. Notwithstanding this serendipitous success, Thetis' rhetorical incompetence is put on full display in this speech. She begins her petition in terms that could only further alienate her already bewildered son.

Thetis' speech starts and ends on the note of "dear boy" (*care puer*, 1.252, 1.273), and the narrator claims that Thetis is trying to soothe Achilles, who is still disoriented by his new surroundings.²⁹ Despite this, her words are full of reproach to her son's lineage and, though he is never named, to his father. She reminds him that if luck had been on her side and she had made a different kind of marriage, Achilles would have been immortal, and all of Thetis' problems would have been solved:

si mihi, care puer, thalamos sors aequa tulisset,
quos dabat, aetheriis ego te complexa tenerem
sidus grande plagis, magnique puerpera caeli
nil humiles Parcas terrenaque fata vererer. (1.252–5)

If, dear boy, a just lot had granted the sort of marriage that it once offered to me, I would now hold you and embrace you as a great star in the realm of heaven, and, having given birth to the great sky itself, I would not fear the lowly Parcae and their earthbound fates.

Thetis here recalls that she had been wooed by Jupiter himself, until he was warned that she would give birth to a son greater than his father. Thetis would have been the mother of the great sky itself (254), because Achilles would not only have gained immortality from Jupiter as a father, but he would even have taken Jupiter's place as the god of the heavens.³⁰ Just how far that ambition exceeds Achilles' grasp finds expression in the bitterness that Thetis vents on her son, who is the least at fault. This is how she characterizes his lineage:

nunc inpar tibi, nate, genus, praeclusaque leti
tantum a matre via est. (1.256f)

Now, son, your birth is unequal, and the road to death is cut off on your mother's side only.

Méheust translates *inpar tibi, nate, genus* "your birth is unequal, my son" as "Mais tu es un bâtard, mon fils." Dilke's note here (ad 256f) wavers between interpreting the phrase *inpar ... genus* as referring to "illegitimate sons and the like" or rather as indicating someone whose family was simply less distinguished on one side than the other. When we look at the usage of the word *inpar* or *impar* the reason behind Dilke's hesitation will become clear: according to Roman custom and law, a union between unequals need not necessarily

²⁹ "She spoke gently to the frightened boy" (*blandeque adfata paventem*, 1.251).

³⁰ As noted in the second line of the *Achilleid*, Achilles "was forbidden to inherit the kingdom of heaven" (*patrio vetitam succedere caelo*, 1.2). The notion that Thetis could become mother to the sky itself, since Jupiter is its personification, is a paradox with a strongly Ovidian flavor: Hardie (2002: 8f). On Jupiter's pursuit of Thetis, see below (p 160).

be illicit, but was often so. Difference of status could be in the eye of the beholder, as when Augustus' daughter Julia scorned Tiberius for a husband "as unequal."³¹ There was a real bar prohibiting very unequal marriages, particularly after Augustus' marriage legislation. The *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* of 18 BC attempted to maintain the dignity of the senatorial class by forbidding the intermarriage of senators and their descendants with freedmen, freedwomen, and actors. Treggiari has pointed out that the accidental preponderance of heredity along the maternal line in the Julio-Claudian imperial house tended to generate in the general populace an increasing importance placed upon maternal descent.³² Thetis' comment thus marks her as a contemporary snob. The sound of the phrase *impar genus* in the mouth of a woman referring to her husband would characterize her as proud and high-born, fiercely jealous of her station and blood. Thetis reminds her son that she is of high status and Peleus is of (relatively) low status in terms that had resonance at Rome; this is at the very least unkind and could even put Achilles' legitimacy in doubt; for the quasi-legal phrase *impar genus* could also denote a spouse too ignoble to be marriageable.

There is a similar example in Latin literature of the metaphorical use of the relation between social superior and inferior to figure a marriage between immortal and mortal. In the Amor and Psyche episode of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Venus is furious at the thought of her son marrying a mortal and asserts in a parody of legal jargon that Psyche's son will be rendered illegitimate (*spurius*), since the marriage will be between unequals (*impares . . . nuptiae*, 6.9), and besides that there will be no witnesses to the ceremony nor paternal consent. Then Jupiter turns to Venus and reassures her:

"nec tu," inquit, "filia, quiquam contristere, nec prosapiae tantae tuae statuque de matrimonio mortali metuas. iam faxo nuptias non impares, sed legitimas et iure civili congruas." (*Met.* 6.23)

"And you, daughter," he said, "do not be at all sad, and do not fear for the standing of your great family and for the fact that it is a mortal union. I will now make a marriage that is not unequal, but legitimate and conforming to civil law."

Even in its humorous application to the divine realm, the quasi-legal sense in which "unequal" (*impar*) implies bastardy is made clear by its opposition here to legitimate unions.³³ The incongruous use of technical terminology like *impar genus* in a divine or mythological setting has an Ovidian ring to it.³⁴ In

³¹ *ut imparem* (*Tac. Ann.* 1.53).

³² See Treggiari (1991) for references to the importance of maternal lineage (91f, esp. n. 35), and on the provisions of the *lex Julia* (60–4).

³³ Kenney (1990) ad 6.9.6 notes that Jupiter is repeating back to Venus the legalistic language of her earlier complaint.

³⁴ Cf. Coleman (1990).

fact, Alessandro Barchiesi has suggested a particular Ovidian connection for Statius' use of the phrase *impar genus*.³⁵ Ovid argues in one of the *Amores* that his *servitium amoris* at the hands of the beautiful Corinna is an example of the rule that great things may be joined to lesser. He cites a number of examples of goddesses who married lesser beings, including Thetis (Ov. *Am.* 2.17.17f). He also mentions Venus' marriage to the unlovely and limping Vulcan; the mention of limping brings to mind the rhythm of the elegiac meter:

carminis hoc ipsum genus impar; sed tamen apte
iungitur herous cum brevior modo. (Am. 2.17.21f)

The very genre/birth of this song is unequal; but still the heroic measure is pleasingly joined to the shorter one.

For Ovid, *genus impar* is a pun on the nature of elegy. It is an "unbalanced genre" because of the inequality of the number of feet in its alternate lines, but it is also a sort of "bastard child," the result of the joining of the more noble, heroic hexameter to the plebeian pentameter. Like the previous examples, the mating of Calypso and Ulysses, Thetis and Peleus, Egeria and Numa, and Venus and Vulcan, it is a marriage of unequals. This pun is not relevant to Statius' use of the phrase, since the metrical connotation of *impar* would not apply to the hexameters of the *Achilleid*, but Barchiesi's suggestion is attractive nonetheless. If Statius borrowed this legal term from Ovid, then the generic connotations of the phrase cannot be ignored; Achilles, on account of his lower birth, must now proceed to dress as a girl, an extreme humiliation for the sake of love of the kind that is more associated with the *servitium amoris* of elegy than epic. The *Achilleid*, like Achilles, is the offspring of mismatched parents: the epic on the one hand and other poetic traditions, including love elegy, on the other.

Thetis is a harsh mother for casting aspersions on the lineage of her own son; and this is a poor way to introduce a difficult request. As Thetis carries on, her discourse continues to betray her in familiar ways. She embarks on a series of rhetorical *paradeigmata* or *exempla* which attempt to show Achilles that transvestism can be a noble option. Just as her earlier attempt to sway Neptune featured an appeal to the *exemplum* of the *Argo* which actually served to undercut her argument (above, p 109), here too her *exempla* lead in the opposite direction to that which she intends:

si Lydia dura
pensa manu mollesque tulit Tiryntius hastas,
si decet aurata Bacchum vestigia palla
verrere, virgineos si Iuppiter induit artus,
nec magnum ambigui fregerunt Caenea sexus:
hac sine, quaeso, minas nubemque exire malignam. (1.260-5)

35 In a lecture in honor of Elaine Fantham's retirement, delivered at Princeton, 1 May 1999.

If Hercules of Tiryns carried the spinning of Lydian Omphale and the soft spear of the thyrsus in his rough hand, if it is fitting for Bacchus to sweep the ground at his feet with a golden gown, if Jupiter put on the bodily appearance of a maiden – and the double sex of great Caeneus did not weaken him – please permit me in this way to evade the cloud of danger that menaces me.

First she adduces the example of Hercules' servitude to Omphale and their exchange of dress. It is unsurprising and appropriate that she uses this example, as it was perhaps the most famous incident of transvestism in ancient art and literature. In one version of the myth, Hercules was under a constraint to serve Omphale in order to atone for his slaying of Iphitus, and on this reading Hercules remains a fairly heroic and virile role model for Achilles. There was, however, another way of telling the myth that was popular in Rome, especially in love elegy, in which Hercules' servitude was due to his erotic infatuation with Omphale.³⁶ This version of events is not what Thetis has in mind, but it is close to what eventually happens between Achilles and Deidamia. Thetis' next example is reasonable: the god Bacchus' gender-indeterminate dress in his golden gown. Her subsequent *exemplum*, however, is even closer to Achilles' eventual erotic situation: this is the story as told by Ovid of Jupiter's pursuit of Callisto while disguised as Diana (*Met.* 2.401–65). Both Jupiter and Achilles take on female disguise in order to enter into a maiden's company; but both adventures end in rape and discovery, and it is not clear that this constitutes a desirable outcome for Thetis, whatever its appeal for Achilles. Moreover, Jupiter did more than just dress like a maiden; by saying that he "put on" (*induit*) a girl's body as if it were clothing, Thetis begins inadvertently to undermine the distinction she wants to make between seeming and becoming a girl.

Thetis cannot stop while she is ahead. Her fourth heroic exemplar is Caeneus, who contrary to the others was never a transvestite, but like Tiresias a transsexual. Caenis was a maiden who was raped by Poseidon; and when offered a wish in recompense, she chose to be changed into an invulnerable man, thereafter named Caeneus.³⁷ Thetis is apparently trying to argue that having once been female did not interfere with the male Caeneus' later strength as a hero; but this mythical figure actually exemplifies the instability of gender, which is the opposite of what Thetis wants to demonstrate.³⁸ In order to bring out the full force of Thetis' blundering confusion of transvestism and transsex-

³⁶ See *Ov. Her.* 9.53–118 with Casali (1995: ad loc), and Gantz (1993: 439f) on *Sen. Herc. Oet.* 371–7.

³⁷ *Ov. Met.* 12.177–209; in Virgil's underworld she has reverted once more to the female (*Aen.* 6.448f), so Caeneus may represent the transformation of male to female as well as female to male.

³⁸ For example, Plato, in the *Laws* (944d, on which see Brisson, 2002: 62f), states that the ideal punishment for a man who runs away from the field of battle – much as Achilles is effectively going to do – would be to suffer a transformation like Caenis, but in the opposite direction, from man to woman. Thus, for Plato, Caenis is an example of how biological sex ought to reflect gender performance – the very opposite of the point Thetis is trying to make.

uality it may be useful to compare her rhetorical strategy with a real speech from antiquity that deployed similar *exempla*, albeit to a very different purpose. Aelius Aristides addressed the people of Smyrna in January of AD 170 in a speech that attacked the effeminacy of certain crowd-pleasing sophists whose extravagant self-presentation he considered more fitting to pantomime dancers than orators.³⁹ In this speech he mocks their extravagance of dress, grooming, voice, and gesture, calling such performances a kind of rhetorical transvestism. Toward the climax of the speech, Aristides brings forth a parade of mythical cross-dressers as *paradeigmata*. He notes that while Heracles may have danced for Omphale in the manner of these sophists, at least for him there were extenuating circumstances, and thus he did not shame himself in so doing. Aristides then moves to his other two *exempla*, the first of which is Caeneus. He suggests that this effeminate style of oratory would cause speakers to “endure the opposite to Caeneus of Thessaly, and be transformed from men into women.”⁴⁰ That is, the effeminate comportment of these sophists risks even changing their sex definitively, like Caeneus. Aristides then decries the spectacle of a philosophically minded orator preaching self-control while he cannot practice it himself in his style of oratory, comparing him to Sardanapallus vainly singing battle hymns while weaving and doing women’s work. This is how a virtuoso orator deploys his cross-dressing *paradeigmata*. Aristides begins with a kind of preemptive strike, acknowledging the damaging potential of Heracles to operate against him as a counterexample of a virtuous transvestite; he therefore minimizes this threat to his argument by giving extenuating facts about Heracles’ stay in Lydia. Then he proceeds to two figures that are much more useful to his purposes, and who show forcefully the dangers of cross-dressing. Caeneus/Caenis is an extreme example of the way a desire to emulate the opposite gender could corrupt even the subject’s sex. Finally, and most damaging of all, Sardanapallus is an example of a man whose effeminacy cost an entire people its independence.⁴¹

How does this scheme compare with Thetis’ arguments to Achilles, bearing in mind that she is trying to demonstrate the opposite conclusion, namely, that a little transvestism is a harmless thing? She starts excellently with Hercules, whose potential to buttress the sort of case Thetis is making was openly acknowledged by Aristides. She continues well enough with Bacchus and Jupiter, but her climactic example is Caeneus, who can only exemplify, as Aristides knew, the danger of one sex changing to the other. What is more, Thetis’

39 *Or.* 34, Κατὰ τῶν ἐξορχουμένων, or “Against those who burlesque the mysteries (of oratory),” as translated by Behr (1981: 2.173–84); its circumstances of delivery are apparently described by the author in his *Sacred Discourses* (*Or.* 51.38–41); see Gleason (1995: 122–6).

40 τὰναντία μὲν τὰν πάθοιεν τῷ Καινεῖ τῷ Θετταλῷ γυναῖκες ἐξ ἀνδρῶν γενόμενοι (*Or.* 34.61).

41 On Sardanapallus, the last Assyrian king, as the stereotyped epitome of the lazy, effeminate, cross-dressing “Oriental,” see Diodorus 2.23.

language betrays her once again when she speaks of Caeneus' "double sexes"; it bears out this difficulty and calls our attention to her mistake.⁴² It is one thing to change clothing, quite another to change sex. Thetis needs to project a conception of gender that is fixed and constant in order to win her point that Achilles' prospective violation of gender norms poses no threat to his sex. Caeneus, on the other hand, is an *exemplum* of the opposite thesis, i.e. the instability of biological sex. Thetis' own inability to keep these two categories straight is yet another manifestation of her rhetorical incompetence, and a sign of how tricky the subject of transvestism can be. Thetis even directly articulates the fear that cross-dressing can generate, that the change in clothing will affect Achilles' nature as determined by his biological sex:⁴³

cape tuta parumper
tegmina non nocitura animo. (I.270f)

Put on for a while this harmless covering, which will not harm your spirit.

This attempt at reassuring Achilles evinces the same anxiety regarding the mutability of sex. Gellius was at pains to point out that the tale of Caenis/Caeneus, mythical though it was, was the reflection of a real and present danger to the separation of the sexes. He reviewed the evidence given by the elder Pliny (*NH* 7.34–6) for reported cases of spontaneous sex change and came to the conclusion that there must have been something of truth to the myth of Caeneus (Gell. *NA* 9.4.14). Likewise Phlegon of Tralles' *Book of Marvels* (*Mir.* 4–9) has a section on sex changers and hermaphrodites that begins with Tiresias and Caenis and proceeds to supposedly contemporary examples and claimed autopsy.⁴⁴

The usual justification for Achilles' strangely unheroic sojourn in Scyros was that he was being a good son and considerate of his mother's wishes. As Ovid says:

turpe, nisi hoc matris precibus tribuisset, Achilles
veste virum longa dissimulatus erat. (Ov. *Ars am.* 1.689f)

Achilles hid his manhood in a long dress – a shameful act, unless he attributed it to his mother's pleading.

Instead of that approach, Statius poses the problem of why a hero like Achilles would have acted this way in a set of rhetorical questions:

⁴² As Dilke says (ad 264), "In l. 337 *ambiguus* . . . *sexus* is said of Achilles; here the pl. [*ambigui* . . . *sexus*] is more appropriate owing to Caeneus' change of sex." The plurality of Caeneus' sexes highlights Thetis' error.

⁴³ For ancient expressions of the dangers presented by transvestism, see Gleason (1995: 100).

⁴⁴ Hansen (1996: 123–6) speculates that these reports probably had a factual basis in the misunderstanding of a certain medical disorder, male pseudo-hermaphroditism. The discovery in the Roman empire of a sex change of the Caenis type was no trivial event, but a prodigy that demanded expiation at the highest levels (Phlegon, *Mir.* 6.4).

quis deus attonitae fraudes astumque parenti
contulit? indocilem quae mens detraxit Achillem? (1.283f)

What god gave guile and wit to the terrified parent? What plan led bold
Achilles astray?

The questions posed by Statius are reminiscent of rhetorical exercises from the classroom. The problem of explaining Achilles' transvestism comes up in the rhetorical exercises (*progymnasmata*) of Libanius, but was probably also current in Statius' day. For example, Libanius records an exemplary speech in praise of Achilles, which defends the hero for his piety in gratifying his mother's wishes; a corresponding indictment of Achilles criticizes Achilles for his ignoble behavior on Scyros even if it had been to obey his mother.⁴⁵ In a general way, the *Achilleid* conforms to this idea, putting responsibility for the Scyros episode squarely on Thetis' shoulders. Yet the timing of Statius' rhetorical questions is ironic, since Thetis cannot take the credit for her success. Immediately subsequent to these lines, and as if in answer to the narrator's rhetorical questions, Deidamia and her sisters appear on the Scyrian shore by happenstance (1.285) and Achilles falls in love. Statius clearly attributes Achilles' sudden acquiescence to his mother's plan and his new-found willingness to dress as a girl neither to his consideration for his mother's fears, as was traditional, nor to the Nereid's dubious rhetorical gifts, but to the fortuitous arrival of Deidamia. The answer implied hereby to the questions, "What god bestowed guile and cunning upon the bewildered mother? What plan subdued Achilles' pride?" is that Thetis got lucky.⁴⁶ For all of Thetis' lies and cajoling, she owes her success not to her "plan" (*mens*, 283), which was undermined by her poor powers of persuasion, but to the chance appearance of a girl who happened to catch Achilles' fancy.

Thetis the Pedagogue

When Achilles sees Deidamia on the shore and Thetis observes his infatuation with her, she knows she has won her point (1.318, 1.325). Thetis then begins to work her transformation of her son:

mulcetur laetumque rubet visusque protervos
obliquat vestesque manu leviore repellit.
aspicit ambiguum genetrix cogique volentem
iniecitque sinus; tum colla rigentia mollit
submittitque graves umeros et fortia laxat
bracchia et inpexos certo domat ordine crines

45 Libanius, ed. Förster (1915: vol 8, pp 237, 284): Ἐγκώμιον Ἀχιλλέως (8.3.6) and Ψόγος Ἀχιλλέως (9.1.6).

46 Feeney (2004: 92f) suggests that the god Statius has in mind here is Cupid.

ac sua dilecta cervice monilia transfert;
 et picturato cohibens vestigia limbo
 incessum motumque docet fandique pudorem. (1.326–31)

He is cajoled, he blushes happily and he casts sidelong glances as he pushes away the garments with less force. His mother sees that he is hesitant and is willing to be compelled, and she puts the garments on him. Then she softens his stiff neck and his imposing shoulders and relaxes his strong arms and puts his unkempt hair in careful order and transfers her favorite necklace from her neck to his. And she constrains his stride within his brightly colored skirt and teaches him how to walk, how to move, and how to speak modestly.

There is much obvious comedy in this scene, as Achilles takes his first steps as a girl. It is worth noting that Thetis puts just as much stress on the way Achilles comports himself as she does on the way he looks and dresses. There were no ancient guidebooks on how to achieve a demure femininity; but it was a commonly accepted notion in antiquity that, although virtue was largely innate, nevertheless proper comportment as a man was to some extent an achieved and achievable skill.⁴⁷ A young man had plenty of sources of guidance in antiquity on how he could achieve the *gravitas* appropriate to adult manhood. As Gleason has shown, these guidelines often found expression *per contra* as descriptions of effeminate behavior which was studiously to be avoided. She quotes the physiognomical tract of the second-century sophist Polemo as offering the following cautionary portrait of the *androgynos*:

You may recognize him by his provocatively melting glance and by the rapid movement of his intensely staring eyes. His brow is furrowed while his eyebrows and cheeks are in constant motion. His head is tilted to the side, his loins do not hold still, and his slack limbs never stay in one position. He minces along with little jumping steps; his knees knock together. He carries his hands with palms turned upward. He has a shifting gaze, and his voice is thin, weepy, shrill, and drawling.⁴⁸

Compare Thetis' instructions: relax the neck, so that the head is not held stiffly (*colla*, 326), keep the shoulders slack (*umeros*, 327), relax the arms (*bracchia*, 328), and take tiny, mincing steps (*incessum*, 330f). Achilles is getting the imaginary inverse of a Roman education, where his natural virtues are to be hidden rather

⁴⁷ Quintilian, for example, maintains that excellence in oratory requires both aptitude and training (*Inst.* 11.3.11–13); see Gunderson (2000: 63–9).

⁴⁸ Gleason (1995: 63). This English quotation is Gleason's reconstruction of Polemo's argument, which does not survive in its original form. There is an Arabic translation of the treatise, which supplies part of this passage; it is supplemented here by information from a Greek epitomator, and from a Latin treatise that relies heavily on Polemo. All three of these texts, with a facing translation into Latin of the Arabic, are printed by Förster (1893: Arabic, vol 1, pp 276f; Greek, vol 1, pp 415f; Latin, vol 2, pp 123f); see Gleason (1995: 30–2) on the tradition of Polemo's text and its derivatives.

than enhanced. To stand for the notion of a “female” education, which did not exist in antiquity in such terms, Statius has substituted a topsy-turvy version of male education where what was bad is good and what was good is bad, and the *androgynos* is the ideal rather than a figure of contempt.⁴⁹

A Roman education would have included implicit or explicit instruction in posture, gait, voice, and grooming. Attire was taught, too; the proper way to wear a toga and to move about in it with dignity were not entirely intuitive. Thetis’ warning to Achilles that he keep his mincing, ladylike steps within the bounds of his skirt depends for its humorous effect on the contrast with the boldly striding Homeric Achilles, whose speed was legendary. It might also, however, be compared to Quintilian’s warning that the toga-clad orator should avoid movements with the arms that might leave a part of the torso exposed.⁵⁰ In oratory, posture and other nonverbal aspects of male self-presentation were under scrutiny as much as the content of the speech. Cicero describes the comportment of the ideal orator:

Idemque motu sic utetur, nihil ut supersit in gestu; status erectus et celsus; rarus incessus nec ita longus . . . nulla mollitia cervicum . . . trunco magis toto se ipse moderans et virili laterum flexione, brachii projectione in contentionibus, contractione in remissis.

(*Orator* 59)

And he will also employ motion in such a way that nothing is excessive in his gestures; his posture tall and upright; infrequent walking from place to place and never very far. . . ; no softening his neck. . . ; rather, he will express himself by means of his entire trunk and the manly modulation of his diaphragm, extending his arms when making a point strongly, relaxing them otherwise.

In a more explicitly pedagogical context, Quintilian gives similar instructions: hold the head upright (*rectum et secundum naturam*) but not stiff (*praeuro ac rigente*, *Inst.* 11.3.69), keep the neck and shoulders straight (11.3.82), avoid rapid movements with the feet (11.3.128), and so forth.⁵¹ In the physiognomical writers we find that an ample gait was considered a sign of virtue.⁵²

⁴⁹ One of the goals of Polemo’s physiognomical treatise is to enable the reader to penetrate the masks of those around him and to determine their true natures. One deception to which he alerts the reader is the case of these *androgynoi* who attempt to pass as more virile than they are; Achilles’ gender deception inverts for comic purpose the usual forms of a suppression of the “effeminate” that must have been routinely internalized by Roman men: Gleason (1995: 76–81). On Quintilian’s use of effeminacy as a negative paradigm, see Gunderson (2000: 80–2).

⁵⁰ *Inst.* 11.3.118: *ut brachio exerto introspectatur latus*; on the wearing of the toga, cf. also 11.3.137–49. On Quintilian’s advice, see Connolly (1998: 134f). It was proverbial that young orators in training should keep their arms inside their togas – in other words, display self-control and speak plainly: see Cicero, *Pro caelio* 11.

⁵¹ Cf. Gleason (1995: 63).

⁵² The anonymous Latin writer who followed Polemo says that a gait of short steps indicated a feeble and ungenerous nature, while a long stride betokens the man who is *magnanimus* (75f;

Thetis' advice, to relax the body and constrain the gait, is the opposite of the kind of instruction that Roman boys would have gotten from their parents, teachers, and *pedagogi*.⁵³ These lines, apart from their humor, also say something important about Achilles' unusual childhood. By putting Thetis into the role of father or *pedagogus*, Statius points to a potential shortcoming in Achilles' proverbially excellent education. Despite Chiron's best efforts to teach Achilles the skills of the hunter and warrior and the more social arts of medicine and justice, the centaur is a solitary figure even among his own kind; and Achilles has not before now, it seems, ever mixed in human society. The occasion on which a Roman boy officially entered public society was the day he was helped on with the *toga virilis* or toga of manhood for the first time.⁵⁴ On this important day, a Roman boy would doubtless have gotten some words of advice from his father on how to comport himself as a man; and then father, son, and family would proceed to the forum, crowded with other families performing the same ritual. Then the boy was escorted by his father to the Capitol to make his first sacrifice as a citizen.⁵⁵ By contrast, on Achilles' entry into public life, he gets advice from his mother; he is helped on with a kind of *toga muliebris*; and he is introduced by his mother into human society for the first time at Lycomedes' palace. The quintessential Roman ritual at which father introduced his son into public life as a man is parodied in a very similar way by Petronius in his description of Giton's childhood. On the day he should have put on his *toga virilis*, the boy puts on a woman's *stola* instead:

die togae virilis stolam sumpsit, qui ne vir esset a matre persuasus est, qui opus muliebre in ergastulo fecit. (Sat. 81)

On the day of the *toga virilis* he put on a dress; he was persuaded by his mother that he should not become a man; while in a slaves' prison he allowed himself to be used like a woman.

Förster, 1893: vol 2, pp 97–9); see Gleason (1995: 60–2). By way of contrast, when Achilles is discovered by Ulysses' stratagem and tears the woman's robes from his body, he is described as "a giant in his stride" (*immanis . . . gradu* 1.883) where, in addition to its usual meaning of "step," *gradus* is perhaps also a "technical term for the stance taken by a combatant" (Dilke ad loc).

53 It may be significant in the context of such educational parody that Statius was the son of a schoolteacher.

54 This traditionally took place on 16 March in a boy's fifteenth year, at the feast of the *Liberalia*: Ov. *Fast.* 3.771f. It was a memorable family occasion; as Seneca says: "you certainly treasure the memory of the great joy you felt when you put aside the *toga praetexta*, put on the *toga virilis*, and were led into the forum" (*tenes utique memoria, quantum senseris gaudium, cum praetexta posita sumpsisti virilem togam et in forum deductus es, Ep.* 4.2). The technical term for this act was *in forum deducere*; cf. Suet. *Aug.* 26, *Tib.* 15, and *Nero* 7. For a similar use of *deducere* in a pedagogical context, cf. Statius' programmatic claim that he will lead the young Achilles through Troy (*iuvenum deducere*, 1.7).

55 Thus Hunziker in Dar.-Sag. s.v. "Toga," vol 5, pp 35f.

Like Giton, Achilles has received an upbringing that is excessively dominated by his mother. Peleus is conspicuous in his absence here, as he is so often in the *Achilleid*; Thetis has usurped the role of the Roman father, presenting her son to the world in *her* own image. The necklace Thetis takes from her own neck is a token of the feminine family tradition she substitutes for the male one. The extent of Thetis' intrusion into the duties proper to fatherhood is vividly sketched by a simile that compares Thetis, as she transforms her son, to an artist shaping a waxen image (1.332–4). Dilke (ad 332f) suggested that Statius means to evoke the wax *imagines* of the ancestors that adorned the houses of aristocratic Romans. Indeed, this is an explicit demonstration of Thetis' intrusion into the patriarchal realm and her perversion of the expectations regarding public conduct and achievement that connected a Roman son via his father to his male ancestors.⁵⁶ Now that Thetis has transformed Achilles into a girl, let us look at the scene in which she introduces her “daughter” to “her” new home in Scyros.

Naming Achilles

The epigraph of the present book (p v), a well-known passage from Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia*, derives from Suetonius' biography of Tiberius. Suetonius relates that the emperor had a taste for mythological minutiae, and that he used to quiz scholars on points of difficulty:

Maxime tamen curavit notitiam historiae fabularis usque ad ineptias atque derisum; nam et grammaticos, quod genus hominum praecipue, ut diximus, appetebat, euis modi fere quaestionibus experiebatur: quae mater Hecubae, quod Achilli nomen inter virgines fuisset, quod Sirenes cantare sint solitae.

(Suet. *Tib.* 70)

Yet he especially cultivated a knowledge of myth, even to a laughably ridiculous extreme; for he used to test the knowledge of scholars, a class of person whose acquaintance, as I said above, he particularly sought out, with questions of this general sort: who was the mother of Hecuba? what was the name of Achilles among the maidens? what did the Sirens usually sing?

From this we know that the name Achilles took among the women had before Statius already become, if not yet a byword for obscurity, at least a matter of investigation, and so any poet depicting and naming Achilles on Scyros would have to engage in some way with the controversy. It is interesting to observe

⁵⁶ There were no masks of female ancestors in Roman houses, although a distinguished female lineage could be advertised through other types of portraits: thus Flower (1996: 78f and 212).

how Statius proceeds. When Thetis introduces her “daughter” to Lycomedes, she circumvents the problem entirely and simply calls her Achilles’ sister:⁵⁷

Protinus adgreditur regem atque ibi testibus aris
 “Hanc tibi” ait “nostri germanam, rector, Achillis –
 nonne vides ut torva genas aequandaque fratri? –
 tradimus. arma umeris arcumque animosa petebat
 ferre et Amazonio conubia pellere ritu.” (1.349–53)

She approached the king directly and in the presence of altars she said, “I am handing over this girl to you, O king, the full sister of my Achilles – don’t you see how dark her eyes are, just like her brother? She’s a fiery girl, who has always tried to carry weapons and a bow across her shoulders and to shun marriage in the style of an Amazon.”

The parenthetical question of line 351, “don’t you see how dark her eyes are, just like her brother?” depends for its humorous effect on knowledge shared exclusively between the audience and Thetis, and it probably owes something to similar identity-switching situations in comedy. The effect of this gratuitous question is to cover up an awkward gap in Thetis’ fumbled introduction. The interruption very abruptly separates the verb *tradimus* “I am handing over” from the rest of its sentence, and so calls attention to the change in Thetis’ train of thought. The awkwardness of expression and sudden change of direction reflect the speaker’s embarrassment. She needs quickly to find a substitute for something she has belatedly realized she is not in a position to say: the name of her new addition to Lycomedes’ household. Prior to this scene, Thetis successfully changed Achilles’ clothes, hairstyle, jewelry, posture, and comportment (1.325–42), but only as she introduces him does she realize that she has quite forgotten to change his name. So she abruptly substitutes her question instead. It is easy to imagine that someone reciting this passage out loud might pause for dramatic and humorous effect at the end of lines 350 and 351, in order to illustrate Thetis’ momentary embarrassment and to heighten our expectation that we will discover here what name Statius means to give the “girl.” The poet, however, has evaded the onus of choosing a name for Achilles among the women, and has denied us a simple answer, once again deftly shifting responsibility for the failure onto Thetis. So when she forgets to choose a name, the fault is hers rather than the poet’s, and the very obscurity of the answer to Tiberius’ conundrum is here given a founding charter in myth. Statius explains the uncertainty surrounding Achilles’ name in terms of his story; the boy’s mother simply failed to think through the details of her deception adequately,

⁵⁷ Achilles may have had a (half-)sister; in the *Iliad* (16.175), Homer mentions a daughter of Peleus, named Polydora. The scholia explain that this must have been the product of an earlier marriage, or a reference to a different Peleus; see Roussel (1991: 72–4) and Janko (1992: ad 16.173–8). Thetis, as if in rebuttal, makes the explicit and precise claim here that Achilles has a “full-sister” (*germana*).

and so confusion reigned from the very beginning. The traditional ambiguity surrounding the name that Achilles was known by among the women of Scyros is hereby given an aetiology.

Statius never betrays his silence and nowhere in the *Achilleid* does he reveal Achilles' name among the women. Thetis shortly afterward refers to "this girl" (*baec*, 1.355), and the narrator has no reason ever to call him anything but Achilles. On another occasion, however, when the name is focalized by the people of Scyros, the narrator employs a circumlocution (*Pelea . . . virgo*, 1.884), which once again seems deliberately to avoid the issue. We do have external evidence that bears on the question. Hyginus tells us that Achilles was called Pyrrha (fiery), on account of his reddish-blond hair.⁵⁸ The name Pyrrha seems to have established itself as the leading candidate, if not the definitive answer, to Tiberius' query. It is not hard to see why. The name has a vaguely credible origin in the color of Achilles' hair,⁵⁹ and it offers an aetiology for why it was that the son born to Achilles on Scyros was given the name Pyrrhus before he was renamed Neoptolemus.

Thetis and Women's Speech

Thetis' rhetorical efforts are spectacular failures even when she gains her purpose, notable for their misuse of conventional *topoi* of rhetoric. In contrast, Venus' speech to Neptune in *Aeneid* 5 and indeed her other speeches in that epic are calculated to appear unaffected, affectionate, ingenuous, submissive, and "natural." They often have recourse to nothing more sophisticated than indignant rhetorical questions and emotional appeals to natural justice.⁶⁰ In short, they are the kind of discourse a patriarchal society, keeping the benefits of formal education to its males, is likely to categorize as "feminine." Part of the humor of Thetis' speeches is the inept way they transgress these culturally gendered norms of argument. Against this background of "female" speech, Thetis' attempt to deploy the rhetorical flourishes of the classroom transgresses the norms of epic discourse on several levels. Firstly, she confounds divine and

58 [*Thetis*] *commendavit eum [Achillem] in insulam Scyron ad Lycomedem regem, quem ille inter virgines filias habitu feminino servabat nomine mutato, nam virgines Pyrrham nominarunt, quoniam capillis flavis fuit et Graece rufum πυρρόν dicitur* (Hyg. *Fab.* 96). See also a mosaic of the Scyros episode with one figure labelled as "Pyrrha, son of Thetis" (LIMC s.v. "Achilleus" no. 100). Photius records in his *Bibliotheca* (190) what he remembers of Chennos' *Kaine Historia*; this includes a number of bizarre names for Achilles on Scyros. On Chennos and his reliability, see Tomberg (1968: 118–20), Winkler (1990a: 144), and O'Hara (1996: 198–200).

59 ξανθὴν . . . χαίτην (Hom. *Il.* 23.141). As Rose (1963) points out in his footnote to Hyg. *Fab.* 96, the success of this explanation depends upon a certain flexibility regarding the distinction between the colors ξανθός and πυρρός.

60 This is not to say that Virgil's Venus is lacking in intelligence and shrewdness; on the keen subtlety of her address to Neptune, see Highet (1972: 273f). When Venus does use an *exemplum* (e.g. Antenor at *Aen.* 1.242–9), it is apposite and uncontroversial.

human spheres. She invokes the terminology and concepts of Roman law to derogate the nobility of Achilles' birth; she invokes the voyage of the *Argo* as a negative *exemplum* while speaking to Neptune, having forgotten that both herself and her addressee were closely related to members of the crew. An immortal in the mythic past must use with circumspection the *topoi* of a Roman orator.

Furthermore, the very employment of these rhetorical tropes by a woman, even an immortal one, contributes to the humor on the level of gender burlesque. Much of Thetis' speech to her son on the beach of Scyros is mothering and intimate, exemplifying the stereotype of female speech. She touches him as she speaks (1.343); she wishes for a wedding and a grandchild (1.321f); she pays close attention to his facial expressions (1.271f); she makes her suggestions by way of rhetorical questions (1.319–21). In this context Thetis' use of pedantic mythological *paradeigmata* is humorous because she is transgressing not only the existential divide between human and divine, but also the educational divide between men and women. In the course of her "feminine" discourse, the learned *exempla* stand out as inappropriate, since women did not usually have access to the education which encouraged the maintenance of such discursive norms, and Thetis' inept misuse of them highlights her usurpation of an alien rhetorical patrimony.

It is easy enough to pick out the major errors in Thetis' use of mythology and rhetoric, but it is not so clear how to quantify the extent to which the register of her language itself might transgress the norms that a Roman would have found acceptable for female speech. The problem is compounded if we suppose that the frame of epic would have brought with it a further set of rules and expectations. It is not clear whether the diction of female characters in epic can be distinguished from similar male speech, but such a study has been made by Adams (1984) with respect to women's speech in Latin comedy. His results indicate that in that genre at least poets did stereotype women by means of their language. As a first approximation, we may make some tentative conclusions based on Adams' data. Apart from the famous case of exclamations and oaths (*edepol*, *mecastor*, etc.), and the use of *mi* as a vocative, all of which are alien to epic and therefore irrelevant to us, the other important class of data for Adams is the imperatives, with and without polite modifiers:

One of the clearest manifestations of female Latinity in comedy is found in the use of what I term "polite modifiers." Certain verbs were used absolutely in Latin to tone down or modify an imperative or question. Not only are such modifiers considerably more common in female speech than in male in comedy, but the modifier chosen varied with the sex of the speaker. (1984: 55)

So it may be that politeness is a sign of "female language" at Rome, as it is

in many societies; again, one could derive an explanation of this from a lack of access to power.⁶¹ Contrast the string of unmodified imperatives by which Thetis issues her commands to Lycomedes: *frange . . . tene . . . concede . . . ale . . . seclude . . . memento* (1.355–62, passage quoted below, p 149). Her manner with Lycomedes is quite abrupt and “unladylike.” The question is whether this difference in tone can be attributed entirely to the difference in relative status between the interlocutors, or whether gender norms are also relevant here.

The fact of Lycomedes’ mortality is surely important in accounting for the tone Thetis takes with him. The goddess has every expectation that the king of Scyros will be pleased and honored to comply with her orders, so she has no great need to flatter him. Nevertheless, given the importance of this matter to her, Thetis would have done well to accord him a minimum of dignity; according to Adams, the evidence from comedy suggests that Thetis may not even be doing this:

In Terence when the addressee is a freeman, women use modified imperatives almost as often as unmodified (10:13) . . . When a woman addresses a slave, the imperative is almost always on its own (17:1). Women too usually receive a plain imperative (27:3). There seems to be a difference between the way women issue orders to freemen, and the way they issue them to women and slaves. (1984: 66f)

The string of six unmodified imperatives in the space of twelve lines that Thetis issues thus seems to mark the gap in status between the two, analogous to the case of a woman of status speaking to a slave. This contemptuous mode of address is another manifestation of the less-than-expert interpersonal skills with which Statius has gifted Thetis, who is laying claim to a traditionally masculine mode of command. Even a divine goddess addressing a mortal encounters to some degree the ideological construct of male rhetorical mastery and female deference and insufficiency.

Given the subject matter of the *Achilleid*, the presence of Thetis’ discursive “transvestism” is unlikely to be coincidental, nor is it surprising that she trips herself when donning the toga of a male orator. The comedy in the *Achilleid* is not limited to female drag. As Gleason (1995: 98) comments, “If speech itself is gendered, then the possibility of confusion of gender boundaries is inherent in any spoken enterprise.” Thetis’ “transvestism” is an intervention by the author on the level of characterization; her incapacity to perform adequately the roles she sets for herself is what accounts for her repeated failures in the poem. She fails as a terrifying epic goddess on the lines of Virgil’s Juno, and then she fails as a protective epic mother like Virgil’s Venus, or, as we will see in the next section, like Leto of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. She fails as an orator, and in the final analysis Thetis fails to understand and perform “properly” the role

61 Thus Lakoff (1976: 73–83).

of the female. Achilles' failure as a girl is anticipated by his mother's failure as a goddess. Thetis demonstrates that it is burden enough to wear convincingly the mask of gender appropriate to one's sex; yet she has set for Achilles the even harder task of impersonating the opposite sex. The outcome of that experiment looks hopeless from the start.

Thetis the Prophet

As Thetis leaves Scyros, having entrusted Achilles to Lycomedes, she makes a valedictory gesture; it is impossible to know whether Statius envisioned the possibility that Thetis would appear again in the plot of his epic. In case she should not, this moment would have provided a sufficient sense of closure to mark the departure of the character who has been the dominant figure in the opening episodes of the epic. Thetis turns around in mid-sea, and addresses the island with a prayer that it keep her son safely hidden:

Cara mihi tellus, magnae cui pignora curae
 depositumque ingens timido commisimus astu,
 sis felix taceasque, precor, quo more tacebat
 Creta Rheae; te longus honos aeternaque cingent
 templa nec instabili fama superabere Delo,
 et ventis et sacra fretis interque vadas
 Cycladas, Aegaeae frangunt ubi saxa procellae,
 Nereidum tranquilla domus iurandaque nautis
 insula ne solum Danaas admitte carinas,
 ne, precor! "Hic thiasi tantum et nihil utile bellis":
 hoc famam narrare doce, dumque arma parantur
 Dorica et alternum Mavors interfurit orbem, –
 cedo equidem – sit virgo pii Lycomedis Achilles. (1.384–96)

O land dear to me, to whom I have entrusted with timid guile an enormous responsibility and the fond object of my great worry, please be kindly and be silent, in the way that Crete was silent for Rhea. Long honor and everlasting temples will encircle you, and you will not be exceeded in fame by floating Delos. You will be a place sacred alike to wind and wave, and you will be a calm dwelling place for the Nereids amid the shallows of the Cyclades where Aegean storms shatter the rocks, and you will be an island that sailors will swear by – only do not let any Greek ships in – please do not. Tell Rumor to spread this story: "Here are only the worshippers of Bacchus and nothing useful for war." While Greek weapons are being made ready and Mars rages from world to world – so be it, for all I care – let Achilles be the maiden daughter of good Lycomedes.

Unusual among epic goddesses, Thetis makes predictions that do not come true, promising Scyros fame to match that of Delos. Thetis not only erroneously names Scyros as one of the Cycladic islands, she even compares the

future fame of this obscure place to Apollo's island, and essentially promises that Scyros will be in all respects another Delos. The model for this passage is in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. In that poem, Leto is pregnant and looking for a place to rest and give birth to Apollo, but everywhere she tries refuses her. Finally she addresses Delos, noting that it is extremely obscure and poor in resources of all kinds; but she promises that, if Delos will receive her, it will be forever after famous and wealthy on account of its temple to Apollo (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 51–60). Leto goes on to make a solemn promise to Delos that temples will be built and that the island will have great honor among men (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 79–88). Of course, the point of these prophecies is that they reflected the very real importance of Delos in cult and commerce. Thetis makes identical promises to Scyros, but the irony here is that Scyros will *not* keep Achilles safe, and so it will *not* be blessed with temples and will *never* become as famous as Delos.⁶² Statius hereby provides a comical sort of anti-aetiology for the obscurity of the island. The other oddity in Thetis' prophecy, that Scyros will remain among the Cyclades, derives from Statius' adherence to a mythopoetic, rather than physical, geography.

It seems at first glance that Statius thought mistakenly that Scyros was one of the Cycladic islands, whereas in fact it is found near the coast of Eubœa.⁶³ Statius describes Calchas as visualizing Thetis seeking out Scyros among the Cyclades (1.530–2), and later, when the poet describes the itinerary of Ulysses and Diomedes from Aulis to Scyros in search of Achilles, they seem to travel via the Cyclades, and Delos itself is the last landmark the sailors pass before they reach Scyros (1.675–81). This might be attributed to Statius being careless or using geography merely as a source of pretty-sounding names to ornament his verse.⁶⁴ We cannot rule out the possibility that ignorance is at the root of this confusion; there is a Cycladic island called Syros (Σύροζ), which might have been confused with Scyros (Σκῦροζ).⁶⁵ Homer (*Od.* 15.403) speaks of an island near Ortygia (i.e. Delos) called Syrie (Συρίη), which some identified as Scyros, others as the Cycladic Syros.⁶⁶

On the other hand, there is evidence that Statius' geography was more than just erroneous and arbitrary. For example, Kuerschner (1907: 62f) discerned that the seemingly random itinerary Statius describes for Ulysses and

62 Scyros was one of the places that refused sanctuary to Leto in the *Homeric Hymn* (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 35).

63 Pliny explicitly excludes Scyros from both the Cyclades and the Sporades (*NH* 4.69), but see also *NH* 4.72.

64 Thus Köstlin (1875–6: 533), Klotz (1902b: 300), and Jannaccone (ad 1.677).

65 Servius seems to have had this problem, as in one instance he speaks correctly of *Syrum*, *unam de Cycladibus* (ad *Aen.* 3.76), and in another he says incorrectly, *Scyro insula, una de Cycladibus* (ad *Aen.* 2.477). The context of this last example is heavily influenced by Statius; Servius calls Scyros one of the Cyclades because the *Achilleid* had done so.

66 Schol. (ad loc) with Heubeck (1990–2).

Diomedes on their way to Scyros in fact has a more or less rational structure, albeit more literary than geographical: it is an inversion of the order of islands in Aeneas' journey through the Cyclades from Delos to Crete. We might therefore argue that the apparent position of Scyros among the Cyclades was a deliberate literary ploy, inspired by the *Homeric Hymn* and more directly by Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*. Callimachus describes a mythological world in which the islands of the Aegean run away from Leto (*Hymn* 4.70–105), except for Delos, which moves down from Eubœa to the region of the Cyclades to meet and welcome her (*Hymn* 4.196–8).⁶⁷ Later, after Delos has hosted the birth of Apollo, the other islands arrange themselves in a circle around the island, thus providing an aetiology for the name of the Cyclades (*Hymn* 4.300f). As Bing says, “all places (islands, rivers, mountains, etc.), which by nature ought to be fixed, are on the run; only Asteria, the one who, by nature, is free to roam, comes to a halt” (1988: 120). In the world of the mythical past that Statius is describing, the geography of the Aegean was still somewhat unstable, with islands wandering about, and geographical position and relative prestige were still under negotiation – a process in which Scyros came out a loser.

The position of Scyros, which Thetis here guarantees will be fixed forever among the Cyclades, is explicitly contrasted with “unstable Delos” (*instabili . . . Delo*, 1.388). Delos, which had previously floated about the seas, was rewarded for its services to Leto by becoming fixed permanently to the ocean floor in the middle of the Cyclades. By contrast, Statius implies that Scyros was eventually forced to drift from its original location in the Cyclades, where it had been located in the heroic era, and arrived in its present location only later, having been compelled to wander north as a result of its failure to carry out its part in Thetis' bargain. The ironic contrast with Delos, which ended its wanderings in the Cyclades, is complete: Scyros will be compelled to drift from the Cyclades to a place of greater obscurity as a consequence of failing to provide a safe haven for the rebirth of Achilles as a girl. The implication that Scyros was compelled to wander from the region of Delos to the coast of Eubœa, where it is today, is the symmetrical, geographical opposite to Callimachus' assertion that Asteria/Delos was summoned from Eubœa by Apollo to its present position of honor at the center of the Cyclades (*Hymn* 4.196–8).

Thetis compares herself to Rhea and Leto, who had given birth in obscure places under difficult circumstances; the choice of mythological paradigms made by Thetis, who is not pregnant, is once again misguided. More so than any of her previous blunders, this particular faux pas is unmistakable: “be silent, in the way that Crete was silent for Rhea” (*taceas . . . quo more tacebat | Creta Rheae*, 1.386f). Thetis' prayer that Scyros be as *silent* for her as Crete was for Rhea is splendidly absurd, for Crete protected Zeus, the infant child of Rhea, from the attentions of his father Cronus not, of course, by its silence,

67 On the poetic mobility of Delos, see Bing (1988: 91–143) and Barchiesi (1994).

but by making a tremendously loud noise. The Curetes, and sometimes Corybantes, attendants of Rhea, concealed the presence of the baby by clashing their weapons and armor in order to drown out his cries.⁶⁸ In each of her speeches in the *Achilleid*, Thetis uses inappropriate mythological *exempla*; this is just the last of a series – a series of bad examples in which we should include Thetis herself, insofar as she attempts to set herself as a paradigm of feminine behavior for her son to emulate in place of his absent father, Peleus.

A few final oddities characterize Thetis' speech here; and with her very last words the goddess seals her title as the Mrs. Malaprop of Latin epic. Thetis hopes that Scyros will be thought to be only full of "the worshipers of Bacchus and nothing useful for war" (*hic thiasi tantum et nihil utile bellis*, 393), but it is precisely a Bacchic festival (*thiasos*) at Scyros that provides the opportunity for Achilles to rape Deidamia, which does not seem to be the kind of activity Thetis has in mind. Furthermore, it cannot be that she means literally what she says in her prayer: "let Achilles be the maiden daughter of good Lycomedes" (*sit virgo pii Lycomedis Achilles*, 1.396). Thetis does not, we presume, really want Achilles to *be* a daughter of Lycomedes; she means to say "in the eyes of the world let him be a maiden," using *sit* "be" as a shorthand for *videatur* "seem" or *habeatur* "be considered as." This might be thought a flourish of rhetoric or a careless slip of little consequence, except that the distinction between *seeming* a woman and *becoming* a woman was precisely what Thetis failed to grasp when she put Caeneus alongside Hercules. Thetis' final blunder confuses being and seeming in a way that adumbrates suggestively the controversy between essentialist and performative conceptions of gender that will be a point of contention during Achilles' stay on Scyros.

Deidamia Theorizes Gender

As we move from Thetis to Deidamia, we will see that the difference between the two women is that Achilles' girlfriend understands the elegaic role she is destined for, and carries it through with wit and grace, whereas his mother stumbles through the epic roles she tries to play. The even more comical stumbling of the cross-dressed Achilles highlights the extent to which gender itself can be viewed as a performance at which one may excel or not, as a form of self-presentation akin to rhetoric. As we shall see, this point of view is articulated more or less directly by Deidamia; but Statius is not entirely willing to dismiss the opposing idea that sex and gender are identical, innate and essential.

Near the end of Book 1, Achilles has been discovered by Ulysses; he has confessed his relationship with Deidamia to Lycomedes; he has acknowledged the existence of the baby Neoptolemus; and he has been duly married to Deidamia.

68 *Ov. Fast.* 4.206f, Callim. *Hymn* 1.51–3. On the conflation of Curetes and Corybantes, see Fantham (1998: ad *Fasti* 4.210).

The couple are allowed to spend only a single night together as lawful man and wife before Achilles sails away. At this point the narrator changes subject with disorienting abruptness; it is not clear from the lines that precede it who the referent of *illius* (of him/her) in line 927 should be:

tunc epulis consumpta dies, tandemque reiectum
foedus et intrepidus nox conscia iungit amantes.
Illius ante oculos nova bella et Xanthus et Ida
Argolicaeque rates, atque ipsas cogitat undas
auroramque timet. (1.925–9)

Then the day was concluded with a feast, and finally the union between them was revealed and the carefree lovers shared an honest night together. Before his/her eyes appeared the coming war, the river Xanthus, Mount Ida, and the Greek ships; and he/she pondered the waves in front of him/her and feared the coming of dawn.

At first, as Dilke says (ad 927), it seems certain that *illius* must refer to Achilles. The hero seems, naturally enough, to be thinking about and imagining the great adventures that he is finally going to meet. Then we hear the words “he feared the coming of dawn” (*auroramque timet*). What is this? The greatest of heroes was not only a cross-dresser, but also a secret coward? Statius keeps his audience in shock only for a moment; he continues immediately:

cara cervice mariti
fusa novi lacrimas iam solvit et occupat artus. (1.929f)

She poured out tears that ran down the dear neck of her new husband and she seized him bodily.

As soon as we reach the end of the line and hear the word *mariti*, “husband,” our confusion begins to be allayed and soon we realize that *illius* ... *oculos* “before his/her eyes” had referred in fact to Deidamia, who has been only a very shadowy presence in the poem ever since her pregnancy.⁶⁹ Deidamia has not been given any direct speech thus far in the poem, except perhaps for a two-word exclamation just after her rape,⁷⁰ so this sudden shift of focus to her inner thoughts is quite unexpected. The narrator’s momentary substitution of

69 Even in English with its gendered possessive, Mozley felt the shift of focus confusing enough to require glossing the word “her” with a footnote in his translation: “*i.e.*, Deidamia’s.”

70 The exclamation “But [my/your] father!” (*sed pater!* 1.657) that interrupts Achilles’ attempt to console Deidamia after his rape is probably spoken by her, as Rosati (p 131, n 152) has it; it is not an “aposiopesis spoken by Achilles as if it were an objection by Deidamia” (Dilke ad loc, following Jannaccone and ultimately Barth). Ker (1953: 181) saw this as the sign of a lacuna in the text that would have contained the rest of Deidamia’s words, but *aposiopesis* of all kinds are very frequent in the *Achilleid* (cf. Dilke, p 18) and there is no real problem with the text, so it is unnecessary to hypothesize a lost speech by Deidamia here. Both Dilke and Ker suggest needlessly complex solutions to a nonexistent problem. There is no reason why this should not be a momentary objection interjected into the middle of Achilles’ speech by Deidamia herself, and in fact, it is hard

Deidamia for Achilles sets the stage well for Deidamia's speech, in which she will claim a degree of equivalence between the two of them.

Alone with Achilles, Deidamia delivers a *propempticon*, or farewell address, in which she tearfully laments her situation and asks her husband to be careful and thoughtful of her while he is gone. She then makes the whimsical proposal that she accompany him to Troy:

quin age, duc comitem; cur non ego Martia tecum
signa feram? tu thyrsa manu Baccheaque mecum
sacra, quod infelix non credet Troia, tulisti. (1.949–51)

Go on – why not? Take me along as your comrade. Why should I not carry the standards of Mars along with you? You carried the thyrsus and the symbols of Bacchus in your hand with me – but unlucky Troy will hardly believe that.

This is a remarkable statement of the arbitrariness of gender roles. Deidamia says in effect, “If you can perform actions that are constitutive of femininity and therefore be considered a girl, then why should I be prevented from attempting to perform the actions of a man on the grounds of my sex? What constitutes gender if not the performance of certain gender-specific roles? If performative competence is what makes a man go to war and a woman stay home, then what *a priori* reason is there to prevent a woman from trying a male role?” Deidamia brings to the surface a potentially disquieting implication of Achilles' performance in Scyros: if a man like Achilles can perform adequately the duties of the female, then the potential exists for the gender bar to be crossed in the other direction, too. The wording of Deidamia's hypothesis is clever; the military standard-bearer and the maenad are alike in that both carry what is in some sense an ornamented weapon. The *signa* of a Roman military unit consisted of a large pole or spear adorned with a variety of symbols, metal disks, wreaths, and such, while the thyrsus had long been considered in poetry as a kind of decorated spear.⁷¹ The notion that thyrsi are a sort of feminine equivalent to the weaponry wielded by men is a theme that surfaces frequently in the *Achilleid*.⁷² Here we should note one feature in particular of the correspondence between *signa* and *thyrsa* (1.950). In some images of Roman legionary standards there are stylized representations of strands of ivy wrapped around the pole.⁷³ Given the possibility that Roman military *signa* themselves some-

to see how one could possibly know that this was *not* an objection spoken by Deidamia, especially in a recitation or in the absence of punctuation. See further below (p 288). Deidamia's only vocal intervention in the poem since this exclamation has been unspecific wailing (*lamenta*, 1.887) upon the discovery of Achilles, like a violated maiden of New Comedy.

71 E.g. θύρσον . . . χίσινον βέλος (“the thyrsus, missile of ivy,” Eur. *Bacch.* 25), and *redimitum missile* (“decorated missile,” *Act.* 1.612).

72 See below (p 238).

73 A.-J. Reinach in *Dar.-Sag.* s.v. “Signa Militaria,” vol 4, p 1315.

times quoted Dionysiac imagery, including the thyrsus, Deidamia's argument for the equivalence between the two gains in vividness and force.

At the very moment that Deidamia makes a claim that sounds an egalitarian, one might say even protofeminist, note, she is betrayed by her ineluctable femininity; her discourse is signed by the poet as "female" even at the moment it contests the essentiality of such labels. The equation that she makes between military standards and maenadic thyrsi, clever though it is, depends ultimately upon a misunderstanding of military matters, an error which in this context would likely appear as "typically female." Deidamia envisions herself as a standard-bearer in the army as though it were a decorative role, the very slightest, the most unobtrusive capacity in which she might possibly accompany Achilles. By seizing upon the decorative aspect of the standards, she betrays her ignorance of their extreme importance to an army, which culminated at Rome in the religious cult of the *signa militaria*.⁷⁴ In the Roman army as in most armies, the *signifer* was anything but a supernumerary; he held a coveted post of great prestige. Even the subsidiary *signiferi* of small units were substantial figures, whose *cursus honorum* culminated in the position of *aquilifer*, who carried the standard of the whole legion. In peace the *signifer* was the treasurer for the men in his unit, and in war he could function as a petty officer, detached to lead small missions. Moreover, the *signa* themselves were very heavy. Herodian tells the story of the emperor Caracalla deliberately sharing the hardships of his soldiers even to the point of digging ditches and carrying the standards while on the march; he notes that even the best soldiers found the standards, which were ornamented with gold, very heavy to carry.⁷⁵ Nonetheless Deidamia has offered to join Achilles as *signifer*, as though it were an entry-level position into the military and indeed into masculinity. Despite his "decorative" appearance, the standard-bearer is not in fact a particularly suitable position for a woman, nor indeed for any neophyte soldier. While Statius gives voice through Deidamia to a provocative conceptualization of gender as performative, he simultaneously invites us to wonder at the reliability of Deidamia's ideas about military life, and thus to consider the opposite position: that there are some duties to which one sex is more apt than the other, that gender is not a freely negotiable attribute.

It is interesting to note in this connection Statius' employment of the heteroclitc neuter plural form *thyrsa* (1.950). This is apparently the only surviving

⁷⁴ On religious veneration of the *signa*, see Kubitschek in RE s.v. "Signa (Signale)," 2.4.2342.7–2344.53.

⁷⁵ "Even the most excellent soldiers were barely able to carry the legionary standards" (τὰ τῶν στρατοπέδων σύμβολα . . . μόλις ὑπὸ τῶν γενναιοτάτων στρατιωτῶν φερόμενα; Herodian *History* 4.7.7. Indirect evidence for the weight of the *signa* is provided by Suetonius' tale that the Praetorian guard were once in such haste to join Caligula that they adopted the exceptional expedient of packing their standards with the baggage (Suet. *Calig.* 43). See RE s.v. "Signa (Signale)," 2.4.2337.20–36 [Kubitschek].

example of the form in Latin, and it is exceedingly rare in Greek.⁷⁶ The use of the neuter is exceptional: Statius has already used the regular, masculine forms of the word *thyrsus* eight times prior to this in the *Achilleid*.⁷⁷ Is it a coincidence that *thyrsa . . . Baccheaque . . . sacra* is cast entirely in the neuter to match its counterpart, *Martia . . . signa*, given that these terms map out a common middle ground where the male and the female spheres meet and overlap?

Deidamia's discussion of gender and performance is embedded in a speech rich in literary resonance. She is about to be left behind by her husband, and proleptically, as if in anticipation of their separation, she delivers to Achilles a message that draws heavily on the letters of Ovid's abandoned heroines in his *Heroides*. Rosati, who has edited both the Statian and the Ovidian texts, rightly calls her speech "a kind of *herois*" (42). Deidamia shows particular foresight and a meta-literary self-awareness worthy of an Ovidian heroine in her concern for the way in which her story will subsequently be narrated: "I will be narrated to your slaves as a youthful tale of an early indiscretion or I will be completely unknown, my existence denied by you" (*ast egomet primae puerilis fabula culpae | narrabor famulis aut dissimulata latebo*, 1.947f). Deidamia begins by wondering when she will see Achilles again (1.931f), and whether he will be too proud ever to return (1.933f); she then laments her present misery in a string of rhetorical questions: six or seven in the space of eight lines (1.931–8). None of these questions expect any response from Achilles, any more than do her exclamations of misery (*heu!* 1.935; *o timor!* 1.939). Deidamia's rhetoric has been so conditioned by an Ovidian, epistolary mode of abandonment that she carries on as if Achilles were not even there. This mode is fully realized in the turn of phrase that closes this exclamatory, operative part of Deidamia's speech: "Achilles was given to, but now is being taken away from, poor me" (*abripitur miserae permissus Achilles*, 1.939). She uses the third person to name Achilles, despite the fact that he is right next to her and she has hitherto been addressing him in the second person; she speaks to him as if he were already absent, thus objectifying her lover and the narrative of her own plight in a very Ovidian way.⁷⁸ Among Ovid's abandoned women, there is a specific debt to Briseis. She wrote to Achilles and imagined him in his anger sailing away from Troy,

76 This is the reading preserved by the Puteaneus, while the other MSS substitute *pensa*. *Thyrsa* has been accepted by all editors since Klotz, except Shackleton Bailey (2003b). Klotz (1902a: 130) demonstrated the Greek parallels, one of which is from the Greek Anthology and predates Statius; the other is from Nonnus. The corruption *pensa* was probably supplied from *pensa manu . . . tulit* (Hercules with Omphale) at 1.261, a line in which the thyrsus is also mentioned.

77 *Ach.* 1.572, 617, 634, 648, 714, 830, 839, and 849.

78 To mention in the third person the name of the individual whom one is otherwise addressing in the second is a particular feature of the salutation and closing of Latin letters: e.g. "Cicero greets Atticus" (*Cicero Attico salutem*). This feature is also found in the *Heroides*, especially in the opening couplet of most letters. The authenticity of some of these couplets has been much debated, but even if most are inauthentic, they may be supplementary to lost Ovidian originals; thus argues Kenney (1996) ad *Her.* 18.1–2.

and marrying a noble maiden more worthy of his ancestry than she, a slave girl. The princess Deidamia, as if in anticipation of that letter, asks that Achilles not demean his noble lineage in having children by a slave girl.⁷⁹

In addition to the *Heroides*, Deidamia also invokes another, related literary model. Ovid's heroines themselves are epigones of Catullus' Ariadne, the prototypical abandoned woman of Latin literature; and it is to Catullus 64 that Deidamia turns:

i – neque enim tantos ausim revocare paratus –
 i cautus, nec vana Thetin timuisse memento,
 i felix nosterque redi! nimis improba posco. (1.940–2)

Go; for I would not dare to interrupt such great preparations. Go and be careful; remember that Thetis did not fear for you in vain. Go, good luck, and return to me; wickedly, I ask for too much.

The pathetic triple repetition of a word at the beginning of three subsequent lines is a very distinctive feature of Catullus' epyllion; it is found there in four separate passages.⁸⁰ With the repetition of "go" (*i*) three and even four times (*i . . . i . . . i . . . redi*) Deidamia invokes the pathetic tones of Catullus 64, but she does not emulate Ariadne's behavior. She never curses Achilles and her attitude toward him is entirely understanding and supportive, never bitter. Deidamia positions herself beside Ovid's heroines in a long line of abandoned women, but at the same time she evokes a voice from Catullus 64: not Ariadne's, but the narrator's. It is "Catullus" the neoteric, Alexandrianizing *urbanus* to whom the idiosyncratic repetitions of poem 64 belong. In Deidamia's concern with the way her story will be told (*narrabor*: "I will be spoken of," 948) she stands outside her own narrative and judges it. Her appropriation of the voice of "Catullus" similarly provides Deidamia with a frame for distancing herself from her

79 *Ov. Her.* 3.71–4 and *Ach.* 1.953–5; thus Jorge (1990: 225f and 251, n 17). Making explicit the latent connection between these two texts, an anonymous medieval poet composed a pseudo-Ovidian epistle from Deidamia to Achilles in Leonine elegiac verse; the text is given by Riese (1879: 476–80). The general model for the poem is Ovid' *Heroides*, and specifically the letter from Briseis to Achilles (3), but the poet quotes the *Achilleid* too, which he obviously knows well. For example, his Deidamia throws in Achilles' teeth (lines 19–24) the words of the promises that Statius' Achilles made as he departed in the *Achilleid* (1.956–9).

80 *Cat.* 64.19–21, 64.39–41, 64.63–5, 64.256–9; cf. also a triple line-initial anaphora of *saepe* (64.387–94). Wills (1996: 174) begins his discussion of "expanded gemination" with this Statian passage, and later, in his discussion of "triple-line anaphora" (1996: 403), he points out that the appearance of Thetis' name here (941) might remind one especially of the first of the Catullan passages, which features a triple anaphora of *tum* combined with polyptoton of Thetis' name in the genitive, nominative, and dative cases (*Cat.* 64.19–21). This kind of repetition has a strongly Callimachean as well as Catullan flavor; see Wills (1996: 400–5) and Ellis (1889: ad Catullus 64.19–21). Statius' poem on the lock of Earinus (*Silv.* 3.4.1–3) begins with a triple line-initial repetition of the imperative of *ire* (go), and Wills (1996: 403) suggests that it may likewise look back via Catullus to Callimachus, specifically to the "Lock of Berenice."

own rhetoric of abandonment while still generating the pity due to an abandoned woman.

Deidamia's speech is, in comparison to the women of the *Heroides*, a paragon of wisdom and restraint. Ovid's heroines are frequently betrayed by their ignorance of future events; they ask for things that the audience knows to be impossible and tragically ironic in hindsight.⁸¹ By contrast, all of the things Deidamia asks for will in fact come to pass; it is Achilles who makes unbidden and extravagant promises. Compare Thetis' farewell speech to Scyros; she asks for the impossible, that Achilles might stay indefinitely at Scyros, and in return she makes wild promises about the future fame of the island that we know will never come true. The extravagance of her wishes almost seems to justify their complete frustration. Deidamia, on the other hand, makes only very limited requests. She even tells Achilles three times to go, recognizing that she is powerless to stop him. Despite her stated worry that she may never see Achilles again (l.93f–4), her request that he return is only made tentatively and is immediately retracted as excessive: “wickedly, I ask for too much” (*nimis improba posco*, 942).⁸² Deidamia concludes with two hesitant requests (*hunc saltem ... hoc solum*, l.953f): that Achilles remember their son, Neoptolemus (952f), and that he not dishonor her by fathering any children by a slave woman (954f). We happen to know that both of these small requests will be fulfilled.⁸³ Deidamia omits to ask for many of the obvious things that an Ovidian woman in her situation might ask her husband in a *propempticon*: that he should stay with her on Scyros, that he should remain faithful to her, that he should be careful not to let his anger and stubbornness get the better of him at Troy; that he should be nice to Agamemnon, that he should not let Patroclus get carried away, and so forth. It is Achilles who makes sadly overreaching promises in response. He promises to return after Troy is captured – a thing Deidamia is prudently wary of asking, no matter how much she may want it. It is Achilles whose naivete is exposed – just like Ovid's heroines – by the light of subsequent literary history.

The final verse of the first book of the *Achilleid* confirms the importance of Catullus' Ariadne as a point of contrast for Deidamia. Statius concludes with a single line of comment on Achilles' vain promises of return:

inrita ventosae rapiebant verba procellae. (l.960)

81 For example, Laodamia imagines the safe return of Protesilaus from the Trojan War in precisely the way Statius' Deidamia refuses to do. Laodamia even warns him not to be the first off the ships, to beware of someone named Hector, and so forth. On the irony and the complicity between author and reader that is created by the allusions in the *Heroides* that look forward in mythical time, see Barchiesi (2001: 105f).

82 Dilke prefers to take *improba* as neuter plural, rather than nominative singular; it makes little difference to our argument. See Hollis (1977) ad Ov. *Ars am.* l.701 for a different interpretation of this speech by Deidamia.

83 In the *Iliad* (19.326f) Achilles thinks of Neoptolemus on Scyros; children other than Neoptolemus were only rarely attributed to Achilles, and only by eccentric sources: see Roussel (1991: 404).

The gusting winds snatched his words, unfulfilled, away.

This is an elegant *variatio* on Catullus' description of Theseus as he made his surreptitious exit from Naxos: "leaving unfulfilled promises to the gusting winds" (*irrita ventosae linquens promissa procellae*, Catullus 64.59). Statius has changed two words of Catullus' line, but has managed to generate one golden line from another; he thereby lost the alliteration of "p," but substituted an alliteration of "v." The situation of Achilles and Deidamia is parallel to that of Theseus and Ariadne; but there are also important differences. Theseus slipped away like a coward, and he quite deliberately broke the promises he had made. Achilles, on the other hand, will leave Deidamia with his promises unfulfilled (*inrita . . . verba*) not out of any wish to deceive her, but because of his own fate of dying before he can fulfill them. It is a sad line, and Achilles' boyish optimism highlights by contrast the realism of Deidamia's assessment of her situation. Words that for Catullus were a token of the faithlessness of men become here an acknowledgment of the futility of mortal plans and hopes. While the literal meaning of the two hexameters is almost identical, Statius' *variatio* also comprises a change, even a deepening, in the implications of the line.⁸⁴

Deidamia bids farewell to her new husband in a speech that is remarkable for its awareness of the roles she and Achilles are playing out. Whereas she argues that she should be free in principle to throw off the typical assignments of gender in order to accompany Achilles to war, in fact she ultimately finds herself in the quintessentially female role of Ariadne, the woman left behind to wave at a departing ship. To some extent this fact must undercut the force of her radical and humorous critique of normative gender assignments. Yet Deidamia's mourning becomes her; it is contained, moderate, and not irrational. Moreover, her invocation of the urbanity of Catullus and the epistolary mode of Ovid's heroines lends a certain knowingness to her adoption of this literary role. In the end Deidamia accepts the constraints of gender and genre and takes the traditional position of the woman left behind. She gracefully plays the title role of *L'Arianna*, complete with an Ovidian aria of lament and self-pity, but she does not do so merely by default. She first raises the possibility that she might, if she wished to, play out a farce of male drag corresponding symmetrically to Achilles' performance. In the light of this statement, Deidamia appears to fill the role of abandoned woman well because she makes womanliness a deliberate choice, the willful and ironically knowing adoption of the gender modality to which she is destined by her sex. Yet paradoxically, the urbane voice Deidamia adopts is itself a form of literary transvestism with respect to the *Heroides*. She casts Achilles as the naive ingenue, ignorant of

⁸⁴ Damsté (1907: 141) argued unconvincingly that this final line (l.960) was spurious; see the responses of Dilke (ad loc) and Méheust (pp 98f, n 3).

the dangers of war and the wider world; in her knowingness and her realistic appraisal of her situation, she adopts the position of Ovid, or the sophisticated reader projected by Ovid's text, as her own. For Statius, then, womanliness is a masquerade of sorts, either to be carried off well, as Deidamia manages to do, or to be botched, as Achilles and Thetis each does in his or her own way.⁸⁵

Achilles on Stage

Apart from Thetis and Deidamia, there is another "female" character in the *Achilleid* whom we should consider. Achilles, by performing so ineptly his duties as a maiden, throws into relief the nature of gender as a performance. Statius does not give us an Achilles who is constantly closeted with his beloved Deidamia in private, but rather he puts him on display. The couple do spend time alone and in private (1.560–91), but we also see Achilles participating in a Bacchic ritual along with the women of Scyros (1.593–660), attending a mixed-sex banquet (1.750–805), and in public exhibition as part of a chorus of dancers (1.821–40).

One private activity in which cross-dressed heroes regularly participate is the carding, spinning, and weaving of wool, which offers the incongruous spectacle of men like Achilles and Hercules sitting in women's quarters, engaged in a quintessentially female chore. Ovid (*Ars am.* 1.691–6) entreats Achilles to drop the wool, the basket, and the spindle in favor of the spear and shield, thereby identifying the paradigmatic implements of either gender. Propertius' Hercules amusedly looks back on his days of spinning and even boasts that, despite the coarseness of his hands, he was not half bad at women's work.⁸⁶ Statius describes Achilles as suffering from a similar handicap of rough hands (*dura . . . manu*, 1.582f), and his spinning suffers as a consequence; Deidamia has to repair the work that his clumsiness has damaged.⁸⁷ One could call spinning the standard female activity by which the unsuitability of heroic males to women's work is measured.⁸⁸ What is distinctive about Statius' presentation of Achilles' transvestite clumsiness is that, in addition to this typical kind of private display, he puts it on show before a much broader public.

We saw that Thetis, when she transformed Achilles into a girl, paid close

85 The classic article on this topic is Riviere's "Womanliness as a masquerade" (1929), reprinted by Burgin et al. (1986: 35–44).

86 *manibus duris apta puella fui* (Prop. 4.9.50), understanding *apta puella* to refer here not only to Hercules' looks, but also to his dexterity.

87 *Ach.* 1.581–3, and compare Ov. *Her.* 9.77–80. Statius also notes the wear on the thumb that spinning caused: *attrito pollice* (581). The juxtaposition of Achilles' newly abraded thumb with his own rough hands (*dura . . . manu*) implies that women's work leaves its own mark on the body, too. Achilles' problem is not simply that he has calloused and indelicate hands, but that his callouses are in the wrong place for his current chores.

88 There is an accusation of wool-spinning probably spoken by Odysseus to Achilles in Euripides' *Scyrians*: see below (p 197).

attention to his carriage and movement. Deidamia is equally concerned to teach her new girlfriend, the huntress from the wilds of Pelion, how to move more like a lady: “she demonstrated how to move his stong limbs with greater modesty.”⁸⁹ When Achilles participates in wild maenadic rites his vigor is in keeping with the occasion; his boisterous and undisciplined style of movement attracts admiration (1.603–8). Usually, however, Achilles’ expansiveness is not such an asset in counterfeiting the movements of a girl. This is demonstrated on another occasion at which Lycomedes’ daughters perform a dance, an exhibition for the benefit of the visiting Ulysses and Diomedes. At this point Achilles’ interest in remaining a girl has already been dimmed by Ulysses’ tales of brewing war, and he attends to his movements even less than usual. Achilles proves to have just as little delicacy of touch when dancing as when working wool:⁹⁰

tunc vero, tunc praecipue manifestus Achilles
 nec servare vices nec bracchia iungere curat;
 tunc molles gressus, tunc aspernatur amictus
 plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat. (1.835–8)

Then Achilles was indeed particularly obvious: he did not bother to keep his turn or to join his arms with the rest; then he scorned the gentle steps and soft garments; more than usual he disrupted the chorus and made a great tumult.

Statius put Achilles on public display in this manner partly for the sake of the humorous incongruity; dancing in a chorus was as quintessential an activity for young maidens as spinning wool, but more public, more humiliating, and thus funnier to imagine. This scene also contrasts the fierce independence of the Homeric Achilles with the cooperation necessary for choral performance. The iconoclasm of the warrior who carries himself aloof from human standards and judgments (*iura neget sibi nata*, Hor. *Ars p.* 122) is reduced to a simple inability and disinclination to keep time and stay in step with the dance: from “best of the Achaeans” to worst of the dancing girls.

There is another aspect of Achilles’ dancing to consider. This particular choral exhibition is ostensibly religious in motivation, forming part of a larger pattern in the *Achilleid* of putting women on display in the practice of cult. When Achilles first arrived at Scyros he fell in love at the sight of Deidamia leading her sisters in sacred procession to the shrine of Pallas on the shore (1.285–9). The narrator then commented that this was a privilege rarely granted to them.⁹¹ Yet after the poem shifts the scene to Aulis and then back again to Scyros, we find the women of Scyros once again out of the city, off to the

89 *ipsa . . . validos proferre modestius artus . . . demonstrat* (1.580–2).

90 On this passage, see also Feeney (2004: 91).

91 *patriis, quae rara licentia, muris | exierant*, 287f.

woods on their biennial maenadic expedition. In fact, Deidamia and her sisters seem to do little else but celebrate religious rites, both in their father's house and abroad. Statius is exploiting the tension between the Greek ideology that claimed strict isolation of respectable maidens and the reality which must often have been messier and less absolute. Cult was one place where the public appearance of well-born girls was not only acceptable, but essential. For this reason, in other genres, especially comedy, religious displays and festivals were frequently the occasion for respectable girls to get into trouble.⁹²

The situation facing Lycomedes must have been typical: as the father of many daughters he has to protect their reputations; yet he also needs to marry them off, and so he wants to display them in some way, but discreetly and properly. Lycomedes plainly sees the visiting Ulysses and Diomedes as god-sent marriage prospects. He invites his daughters to a banquet in honor of the visiting heroes, and eventually brings the topic of conversation around to his children (1.780–3). He turns to Ulysses and makes the classic lament of the man burdened with unmarried daughters: “when will this crowd give me young grandsons?” (*quando novos dabit haec mihi turba nepotes?* 1.783). Ulysses does not take up this conversational gambit but rather turns in his response to the Greeks' preparations for the Trojan War (1.785–802). Ulysses' true purpose is to flush Achilles out, but Lycomedes does not know this, and so, as Ulysses' intense, desiring gaze moves from girl to girl, Lycomedes must surely think that he has a good chance here of unloading one of his daughters.⁹³ He will soon do so, of course; shortly he will have two fewer unmarried maidens in his household, but not quite in the way he anticipates. Lycomedes correctly interprets Ulysses' gaze as a sign of his desire, but he mistakes its object. Deidamia, who understands the situation far better, becomes fearful that Achilles will betray himself at Ulysses' bellicose goading and gives a signal for the girls to retire from the banqueting hall (1.803f). Only after they are gone does Ulysses pick up the theme that Lycomedes had offered; he praises the beauty of the girls, and tells him not to worry about the war, but to concentrate his energies on marrying off his daughters (*caris . . . para conubia natis*, 1.808). Ulysses apparently intends this as an ambiguous token of his potential interest in Lycomedes' daughters. The king certainly seems to take his remarks as encouraging, for he obligingly conjures up another possible excuse for putting them on display:

occurrit genitor: “Quid si aut Bacchea ferentes

⁹² In Menander's *Epitrepontes* and its derivative, Terence's *Hecyra*, a rape in the course of a nighttime Dionysiac festival provides a parallel for the plot of the *Achilleid*. The danger inherent in the gathering of large groups of women for cult purposes was of course commonplace for Aristophanes, while the classic expression in elegy of the dangers that cult practice posed to the individual maiden is the tale of Acontius and Cydippe.

⁹³ “Then Ulysses gazed very intently at their faces and bodies” (*tum vero intentus vultus ac pectora Ulixes | perlibrat visu*, 1.761f).

orgia, Palladias aut circum videris aras?
et dabimus, si forte novus cunctabitur auster.” (1.812–14)

What if you were to see them carrying out the ceremonies of Bacchus, or around the altar of Pallas? And it will be granted to you, if by chance the south wind delays its arrival.

As promised, the following day the girls perform for the visitors a variety of sacred choral dances (*choros promissaque sacra*, 1.822); this is the occasion, quoted just above (p 146), of Achilles' listless and stumbling performance. There is something odd, however, about the wording of Lycomedes' offer. We very recently witnessed another account of the “ceremonies of Bacchus” (*orgia Bacchi*, 1.593), which were the maenadic rites at which the presence of men was expressly forbidden by the king himself (1.599). Kuerschner also found this odd, and he suggested a simple solution: Lycomedes must be referring here to a very different sort of Dionysiac rite.⁹⁴ Yet the close juxtaposition of the “secret,” women-only maenadic rites with this public spectacle and the similarity of language used to describe them (*orgia Bacchi*, *Bacchea orgia*) makes Lycomedes' suggestion quite startling.

Lycomedes has taken normally private moments of female solidarity and offered them as a kind of beauty pageant for his guests. The reconciliation of his need on the one hand to put his marriageable daughters on display to Ulysses and Diomedes and on the other to enforce their public modesty has led to something approaching a profanation of women's private religious rites. Lycomedes wants to stage-manage the kind of encounter that happened serendipitously between Achilles and Deidamia on the beach when she went to worship at the shrine of Pallas. The tension between public and private displays of womanhood is even more strongly palpable when the girls begin their dance. To begin with, Deidamia and Achilles are compared to Diana and Pallas and Proserpina among the nymphs of Enna (1.823–6). That simile introduces a hint of the Eleusinian story, and cult music is played on the flute and drums of Dionysus and the cymbals of Cybele (1.827–9). The mystic and private atmosphere is intensified in the narrator's description of the dances themselves:⁹⁵

tunc thyrsos pariterque levant pariterque reponunt
multiplicantque gradum, modo quo Curetes in actu
quoque pii Samothraces eunt, nunc obvia versae
pectine Amazonio, modo quo citat orbe Lacaenas
Delia plaudentesque suis intorquet Amyclis. (1.830–4)

Then they lift their thyrsi together and together they lower them; they increase their pace, in the way that the Curetes and the holy Samothracians do in their ritual; now they turn and face each other in the Amazonian

⁹⁴ *hoc loco non orgia spectat trieterica, sed ludos vel spectacula Bacchica*: Kuerschner (1907: 50).

⁹⁵ For further on the religious aspects of this passage, see below (p 232).

comb, in the way that Artemis speeds the women of Sparta in a circle and spins them in her own Amyclae as they beat the rhythm.

The Greek practice of having choruses of young women perform publicly brought with it an anxiety about displaying their sexuality, which is borne out by the many mythical tales of girls being abducted from the dancing area and raped. Calame counts three separate cults of Artemis at Sparta whose mythical history involved the abduction of girls from the dancing floor. Two of these were reasonably well known: Helen was said to have been abducted as a girl by Theseus while she danced for Artemis Orthia, and Pausanias tells a story of the Caryatids, famous from sculptural representations of their dance, who were abducted by Messenians while they danced for Artemis in her cult at Caryae.⁹⁶ The classic instance of this sort of vulnerability was the story of Proserpina, taken as she danced and plucked flowers in the valley of Enna.⁹⁷ Statius began his description of Lycomedes' dancing girls with a simile comparing them to Proserpina and her companions. Should we go so far as to imagine that Lycomedes was staging the dance as an implicit opportunity for one of the Greeks to carry off one of his daughters by force? Perhaps that is too harsh a judgment, but it would be worth remembering Thetis' commands to the king when she left Achilles with him. She says to him:

haec calathos et sacra ferat, tu frange regendo
indocilem sexuque tene, dum nubilis aetas
solvendusque pudor; neve exercere protervas
gymnadas aut lustris nemorum concede vagari.
intus ale et similes inter seclude puellas;
litore praecipue portuque arcere memento.
vidisti modo vela Phrygum: iam mutua iura
fallere transmissae pelago didicere carinae. (1.355–62)

Let this girl [Achilles] carry baskets and ritual objects; tame the wild girl by training her; keep her to her sex until she is of marriageable age and is ready to put aside her modesty; do not allow her to participate in immodest athletics or to wander through the open woods. Bring her up indoors and keep her secluded among girls like herself; in particular, remember to keep her away from the shore and the harbor. You recently saw the Trojan sails – now the ships that are sent across the sea have learned how to abuse the laws of hospitality.

⁹⁶ Calame (1997; Orthia: 159–62, Caryae: 150–2); Helen's abduction: Plut. *Thes.* 10; the abduction at Caryae: Paus. 4.16.9. Another story that featured the Messenian rape of Spartan girls surrounded the cult of Artemis Limnatis; Calame (1997: 143f) suggests plausibly that this too probably took place during a choral dance, although the sources do not specifically mention what kind of rite the girls were performing when they were abducted. For other tales in myth of girls abducted while dancing, see Calame (1997: 92).

⁹⁷ See Lonsdale (1993: 222) on Proserpina's "dancing" or "playing" (παίζουσαν, παίζομεν, *Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 5 and 425).

We may leave to one side the amusing spectacle of Thetis inveighing against the bad faith of others, such as Paris (*iura fallere*, 361f), even as she is duping Lycomedes about the identity of her “daughter,” and in the presence of altars, no less (*testibus aris*, 1.349). Thetis of course has her own reasons for wanting to keep her “daughter” inside and away from visiting ships; but she sketches a different possibility for Lycomedes.⁹⁸ Thetis mentions Paris and Helen specifically to illustrate the danger facing all girls in the area: that they might be abducted by visiting sailors, who may seem friendly but who may also betray the rules of hospitality at any moment. Subsequently Lycomedes, by welcoming the Greeks into his palace, inviting his daughters to recline with them at a banquet, and displaying the girls at a dance that takes place outside the protection of his house, ignores her warning and violates the spirit of her orders.⁹⁹

Thetis thinks that by lodging her “daughter” with a family of girls that she will insulate “her” in a completely immured environment of impeccable modesty; but she has reckoned without the need that besets even the best of Greek fathers eventually to marry off his cloistered children. At the very least, Lycomedes has put his wish to display his marriageable daughters ahead of Thetis’ command to keep her “daughter” strictly away from visiting sailors. Thetis warns Lycomedes to beware of the precedent set by Paris’ abduction of Helen; instead he allows Achilles to perform a dance that is compared to the dancing of Spartan maidens for Artemis, a circumstance reminiscent of the setting of the earlier abduction of Helen by Theseus as she danced for Artemis Orthia.

Not only does Lycomedes allow his daughters to wander outside the house in the presence of strangers, he permits those strangers to have the run of the place. At the end of his welcoming speech to Ulysses, Lycomedes invites them right in; there is no evidence of any worry about the danger this might pose to his daughters:

“nunc hospitio mea tecta piumque
inlustrate larem.” simul intra limina ducit.
nec mora, iam mensas famularis turba torosque
instruit. interea visu perlustrat Ulixes
scrutaturque domum, si qua vestigia magnae
virginis aut dubia facies suspecta figura;
porticibusque vagis errat totosque penates,
ceu miretur, obit: velut ille cubilia praedae

⁹⁸ Noted by Jannaccone (ad loc).

⁹⁹ The girls leave the privacy of their boudoir to dance (*egressae thalamo*, 1.821), and after it is done they go back to the palace where Ulysses has laid out his gifts for them (*repetuntque paterna | limina*, 1.841f). Perhaps they had ventured no further than the porch of the palace to perform, but even that can be a dangerous place for an incautious maiden. Another point on which Lycomedes violated the letter of Thetis’ instructions was to allow Achilles to wander through the woods when he was a maenad; but the king may be forgiven on that count in assuming that an all-female environment would pose no threat.

indubitata tenens muto legit arva Molosso
 venator, videat donec sub frondibus hostem
 porrectum somno positosque in caespite dentes. (1.739–49)

“Now do honor to my house and its household gods as my guests.” He led them straightaway into the palace; a crowd of slaves set right to preparing the tables and couches for dinner. Meanwhile Ulysses peered everywhere and inspected the house, in case there might be some signs of a large maiden or an odd face with suspicious features. He roamed through the winding halls and surveyed the entire house as though he were sightseeing – just as a hunter who is sure he has found the lair of his prey scans the plain with his silent Molossian hound, until he sees his enemy sleeping, lounging under a tree, teeth in the grass.

The simile of the hunter portends violence, and the reaction of the girls of Scyros to the news of the arrival of Ulysses and his companion gives a hint that they have concerns that the visitors’ intentions may not be honorable:

rumor in arcana iamdudum perstrepat aula,
 virginibus qua fida domus, venisse Pelasgum
 ductores Graiamque ratem sociosque receptos.
 iure pavent aliae, sed . . . Pelides . . . (1.750–3)

Straightaway the news echoed through the hidden part of the house, where the maidens had their secure quarters, that Greek generals had arrived, and that their ship and the crew had been given a welcome. Some were properly fearful, but . . . Achilles . . .

Statius emphasizes the seclusion in which the girls normally lived. They are frightened to hear about the arrivals, in contrast to Achilles, whose excitement at the news is described subsequently. It is worth pausing to consider why the girls are afraid. Deidamia certainly has good reasons, since she has a great deal to lose if Achilles is discovered, but it does not seem that her sisters and her companions know about her pregnancy. When Achilles first arrived, before Deidamia’s rape, she fearfully thought that her companions might have already guessed the truth (1.563); but the only person in whom she confides her pregnancy is her nurse (*unam . . . sociam*, 1.669f). So the other girls are afraid not for the sake of Achilles and Deidamia, but for their own. Everyone acknowledges that Scyros is not well equipped militarily. Thetis chose it as an unwarlike spot (*imbelli . . . Lycomedis . . . aula*, 1.207). Lycomedes confesses to the visitors that he is too old to go to Troy and that he has no sons to send in his place (1.775–83), although he does manage in the end to equip two ships to accompany Achilles, begging pardon for being able to do so little (1.923f). Ulysses, concerned that his arrival will alarm Lycomedes, goes to the palace alone with Diomedes, and explicitly orders his crew not even to disembark, but to stay on board the ship (*puppe iubet remanere suos*, 1.700). In the light of these circumstances, the

appearance at Scyros of an armed ship, even a single one, would be enough to inspire a certain reasonable trepidation among the girls for their own safety. The behavior of Lycomedes will not have done much to reassure them.

Thetis explicitly stipulates that the “girl” she is entrusting to Lycomedes is not yet ready for marriage: “[keep her] until she is of marriageable age and is ready to put aside her modesty” (*dum nubilis aetas | solvendusque pudor*, 1.337). Many elements combine to give an impression that Lycomedes has been a bit relaxed about the modesty of the girls in his charge. It may be too much to accuse the king of trying to stage-manage a rape/abduction, but he appears at the very least to be overly trusting and incautious. The cult activity that Statius uses to evoke the nature of the dance indicates that it is not the sort of thing girls normally performed for strangers: the Bacchic, the Eleusinian, and the Samothracian mysteries. Lycomedes makes an offer to Ulysses of a ritual display that comes uneasily close to blasphemy, and the event is described by the narrator in terms that continue to problematize the king’s decision to display these dances to strangers. Finally, we must remark on an exceptional omission: for all of the detailed cult language in the description of the dance, we never find out exactly what ritual the girls are performing and for the benefit of what god or goddess. The god whose cult this dance serves is not named because it is designed to serve no god but rather is intended as a secular pageant for the benefit of visitors. Women who danced simply for the pleasure of men were not respectable, to say the least; hence the almost desperate profusion of religious language that Lycomedes uses to conceal his motives.

It is not surprising that Achilles stumbles badly through dancing which, after all, comprises part of a girl’s rehearsal for womanhood; but the curious thing is that Achilles’ humiliation happens in public. When the dance is over and the girls go back into the palace, they stop on their way to examine the gifts that the Greeks have laid out for them; this is, of course, the trap that Ulysses has laid for Achilles. Statius has worked out the circumstances leading to this moment so fully that the discovery of Achilles seems as much due to the indiscretion of Lycomedes as to the cleverness of Ulysses. Instead of merely celebrating the wit of Ulysses’ trick, Statius explains how he came to be in a position to play it in another man’s household.

Modesty and Surveillance

Statius’ attention to the details of normative female behavior is clearly demonstrated when Achilles attends the banquet given for the visiting Greeks, at which point he nearly betrays his sex because he keeps forgetting to act like a girl. Ulysses and Diomedes are welcomed into Lycomedes’ palace and are given couches spread with gold embroidery to recline upon (*discumbitur*, 1.756).

Then the girls' presence at dinner is requested explicitly; presumably, like most Greek girls, they did not usually dine in company with men:

pater ire iubet natas comitesque pudicas
natarum. subeunt, quales Maeotide ripa,
cum Scythicas rapuere domos et capta Getarum
moenia, sepositis epulantur Amazones armis. (1.757–60)

Their father ordered his daughters and the chaste companions of his daughters to attend. They arrived, just like Amazons from the bank of the Maeotis, when they have finished plundering the homes of the Scythians and the cities of the Getae, and they put aside their weapons and dine.

The aptness of this simile has puzzled some scholars; it is not immediately clear what demure maidens trotting in to dinner have to do with Amazons dining after battle.¹⁰⁰ In the light of the girls' fear at the arrival of the Greek heroes, it is a fine irony that they are compared, as they swarm to the dinner table, to Amazons after a conquest. The important point of the simile, however, is that the girls *recline* on couches (*iacentum*, 1.763, *stratis*, 1.802). Amazons with their weapons put aside (*sepositis . . . armis*, 760) would presumably have adopted male habits of dining, just as Lycomedes' daughters have unexpectedly done. It was usual at Rome for women to sit rather than to recline at table; the presence of respectable women at meals in company was recognized as a particularly Italian idiosyncrasy.¹⁰¹ In Greece, it is hard to imagine a citizen woman attending any such meal, much less reclining with the men; in the world of Homer no one reclined at all. If we consider that the women at this banquet are not *matronae* associating with friends and family, but unmarried girls reclining in the company of male strangers, then we may begin to understand how odd and outrageous their behavior here is – like Amazons, indeed.

Statius points out that Ulysses' examination of the girls in the dim light of evening is hampered when they recline: "as they reclined, the size of each was promptly hidden" (*exemplo latuit mensura iacentum*, 1.763). Evidently someone, presumably Deidamia, has organized this unconventional arrangement, whereby the girls reclined like male diners, or like Amazons, in order to hide Achilles' body from the Greek guests. As Feeney (2004: 95f) has pointed out, it is not only Achilles' size (*mensura*) that would betray him if the girls were to sit up. Ulysses scrutinizes the faces and *breasts* of the assembled company (*vultus ac pectora*, 1.761); and Deidamia must make sure that Achilles does not uncover

100 Sturt (1972: 837–9) complains of the "fundamental disparity between image and context" (839) especially of the warlike imagery, and suggests that the point of the comparison is the "epicene" appearance of Achilles and Deidamia. He appreciates the irony in the epithet "chaste" (*pudicas*) as applied to Deidamia and Achilles. On this simile see Hinds (2000: 239), for whom "the Scyrian girls' own collective femininity has been somehow compromised by their absorption of the cross-dressed Achilles."

101 See O C D ³ s.v. "*convivium*."

his chest in his carelessness (*nudataque pectora*, 1.768). The dim light conceals the girls' faces, and the fact that they recline helps to conceal Achilles' lack of breasts. Just like the breastless Amazons of the simile, the girls of Scyros come to dinner and recline like men, concealing, as much as possible, their relative height and their figures. Unfortunately, as Deidamia discovers, this unwonted posture leads to an unexpected problem: it becomes harder to keep the chest of Achilles modestly covered with his tunic.

During this banquet, the daughters of Lycomedes and their female companions are put on display. Despite the low lighting and the precaution of reclining, Achilles very nearly gives himself away. Ulysses picks out one girl who seems less modest than the rest, while Deidamia does her best under difficult circumstances to help Achilles act like a proper young lady:

[Ulixes] at tamen erectumque genas oculisque vagantem
 nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris
 defigit comitique obliquo lumine monstrat.
 quid nisi praecipitem blando complexa moneret
 Deidamia sinu nudataque pectora semper
 exsertasque manus umerosque in veste teneret
 et prodire toris et poscere vina vetaret
 saepius et fronte crinale reponeret aurum? (1.764–71)

But still Ulysses fixed his gaze on an individual with head erect, wandering eyes, and showing no signs of maidenly modesty, and pointed this one out to his companion with a sidelong glance. What would have happened if Deidamia had not warned the reckless boy, clasping him to her kind breast; what if she had not always kept his bare chest, his extended arms and his shoulders covered by his dress; what if she had not very often forbidden him to leap up from his couch and ask for wine, and had not replaced his diadem on his head?

Achilles has forgotten his mother's instructions on how to behave like a girl: he holds his head erect, he stares around the room, he is careless of his clothing, he makes bold gestures, he exposes his body, he wants to move about, he tries to drink wine, and he is careless of his hair and jewelry. This is a veritable catalog of the things a girl should not do if she wants to preserve her modesty. Deidamia lies next to Achilles, embracing him, and the two of them taken together provide an interesting picture of femininity as self-control. Deidamia is a well-behaved woman who recognizes and controls Achilles' impulses as they arise and threaten to become manifest.

As Ulysses moves his penetrating gaze over the girls assembled at dinner, and over Achilles in particular, Deidamia internalizes that scrutiny and looks at her "friend" with the same eye. Where Ulysses is trying to catch Achilles out by discerning something unfeminine, Deidamia is applying the same rigorous standard of inspection to protect Achilles' disguise. Compare Copjec:

The panoptic gaze defines *perfectly* the situation of the woman under patriarchy: that is, it is the very image of the structure that obliges the woman to monitor herself with a patriarchal eye. This structure thereby guarantees that even her innermost desire will always be not a transgression, but an implantation of the law, that even the “process of theorizing her own intractable situation” can only reflect back to her “as in a mirror” her subjugation to the gaze.¹⁰²

The scrutiny Deidamia pays to Achilles is a visible demonstration of the internalized self-surveillance that produces womanly modesty. Clapsed together as if they were one body on the dining couch, Deidamia is the superego to Achilles’ id. Once again, Statius represents womanliness as a performative construct, not just for transvestites, but for women, too.

A final issue regarding femininity needs to be addressed here: if gender is largely a matter of imitative performance, then who should be in the audience? Modern debates over gender roles and the extent to which they may be essential or performative have usually been closely linked to deeper questions: whether the binary division of gender is “natural,” whether most human behavior is innate or imitative, and so forth. For Statius on the other hand, womanliness, to the extent that it may be a matter of performance, does not raise questions of ontology, but rather of propriety. In a strong reinterpretation of the mythic material, Achilles’ poor public showing as a girl and his ultimate discovery are attributed by Statius in large part to Lycomedes’ improper eagerness to display his marriageable daughters before strangers. The women of Scyros spend much of their time in cult activity, most of which involves dancing. When the king puts these rituals of female solidarity before a male public without a religious context, Statius implies that there is something sacrilegious about it. The paradox of femininity is that even modesty is a performance, but it must seem an unwilling one. Ritual is where an unimpeachable obligation to perform typically intervenes and allows respectable girls the opportunity to display their demureness. Lycomedes manufactures such an event and the results are disquieting, not because Achilles’ masquerade betrays the performative nature of gender, which to some extent is taken for granted in the *Achilleid*, but because maidenhood is not meant to be a matter of *deliberately* public performance and display.

102 Copjec (1995: 17).

* { 4 } *

Semivir, Semifer, Semideus

ὁ δὲ μὴ δυνάμενος κοινωνεῖν ἢ μηδὲν δεόμενος δι' αὐτάρκει-
αν οὐθὲν μέρος πόλεως, ὥστε ἢ θηρίον ἢ θεός.

Aristotle, *Politics**

IF THE preceding chapter seemed to suggest that the *Achilleid* is more about Thetis than Achilles, that conclusion would not be far wrong. It has been claimed that the poem that we have could more accurately be called a *Thetideid* than an *Achilleid*.¹ Thetis has more than twice as many lines of direct speech as the next most voluble character in Book 1.² Despite his sometimes passive role, this is nevertheless a story about Achilles, and it is to the early origins of the hero that we now turn. What distinguishes him most in Statius' characterization is that his position in the world is liminal, still uncertain. The clearest example of this is his shifting gender identity, which we will look at more closely in the chapters subsequent to this one; there are also other ways, however, in which Achilles has one foot in one world and another in another. We will begin first with the question of Achilles' unachieved immortality, and then we will look at the other side of the coin: Achilles' sometimes subhuman upbringing with Chiron. Each of these questions requires an explanation of a particular background myth lurking at the margins of Homer's *Iliad*: the cosmic power of Thetis on the one hand and the early childhood of Achilles on the other. Finally, we will look at two ways in which the competing conceptions of Achilles' family background come into conflict in the *Achilleid*.

* "But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god" (trans. Jowett) Arist. *Polit.* 1253a.

¹ Koster (1979: 199), and *contra*, Aricò (1986: 2960).

² A rough count of Book 1, making some allowance for half lines, gives 107 lines for Thetis, 50 for Ulysses, 44 for Achilles, and 25½ for Deidamia.

The first is in the question of the proper etymology of Achilles' name and the second is the scene in which Thetis, Chiron, and Achilles meet, where the tension between the immortal, the animal, and the human is most evident.

Achilles in the Subjunctive Mood

Achilles' problematic identity is announced by Statius as a theme at the very outset; the question of Achilles' paternity is the subject of the very first lines of the poem:

magnanimum Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
progeniem et patrio vetitam succedere caelo,
diva, refer. (1.1-3)

Goddess, consider Achilles, great-hearted grandson of Aeacus, the offspring who was feared by Jupiter the thunderer, and who was forbidden to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

The subject of the epic is announced in a pair of accusative nouns, *Aeaciden* "grandson of Aeacus" and *progeniem* "offspring." The words do not divide the subject matter of the poem, after the fashion of "arms and the man" (*arma virumque*), into two parts, but rather refer by hendiadys to a unitary topic in the manner of the "battle" (*acies*), "kingdom" (*regna*), and "Thebes" (*Thebas*) at the beginning of the *Thebaid*. And yet there is an important difference between these two modes of reference to Achilles, as the grandson of a mortal on the one hand, and as the potential son of a god on the other. The weighty phrase "great-hearted grandson of Aeacus" (*magnanimum Aeaciden*) gives the hero's genealogy as familiar from Homer: son of Peleus and grandson of Aeacus.³ On the other hand, this "feared offspring" (*formidatam . . . progeniem*) is no one that ever existed, even in fiction; the phrase describes what Achilles might have become had circumstances been different, if his father had been Jupiter instead of Peleus: Achilles in the subjunctive mood.

The story of this son whose potential Jupiter feared so greatly is told by Pindar (*Isthm.* 8.28-45): Zeus and Poseidon were rivals for the hand of Thetis until they were warned by Themis that the Nereid was fated to bear a son greater than his father. In order to avert any threat to his position, Jupiter refrained from mating with Thetis, and ensured that she would bear no son to any of the other gods by marrying her to a mortal, Peleus. The same basic tale is given with some variations by other writers, including the author of the *Prometheus Bound*.⁴ Thematically, this potential threat to Jupiter's hegemony is very reminiscent of Hesiod's tale of Zeus and Metis near the end of

³ On this phrase, see above (p 71).

⁴ There are some noteworthy divergences in the different versions of this story. In *Prometheus Bound* (907-27), it is Prometheus who knows the secret of Thetis' destiny, a fact he has learned from his mother Gaia, on which see Gantz (1993: 160). In Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.790-804), Zeus' fear

the *Theogony* (886–900). In this case it is Gaia and Uranus who warn Zeus of Metis' destiny to bear clever children, including a son destined to be the king of gods and of men. Zeus' wife Metis is already pregnant; but instead of waiting for the child to be born and then swallowing it as Chronus had ineffectually done, Zeus swallows Metis herself. The outcome of Metis' pregnancy is Athena, born from Zeus' head (924). The significance of the Metis episode in the *Theogony* is that it marks the endpoint of the divine succession myth that is the "backbone" (West, 1966: 31) of the poem. Chronus had deposed Uranus, Zeus had deposed Chronus, and Zeus puts an end to this potentially endless sequence of usurpations, thus imposing upon the universe its present stability and form. He succeeds in forestalling the process by swallowing Metis, which prevents her from ever bearing a son and also thereby imparts to him her native shrewdness.⁵ This is a crucial moment in the imaginative history of the world; it is the dividing line between the tumultuous period of the birth of the cosmos and its present state.

The stability of Zeus' dominance rests upon his ability to foresee and neutralize such threats to him as the children who were to become Athena and Achilles. If he did not do so, the universe would be a constant turmoil of son overthrowing father; the female birth of Athena and the mortal birth of Achilles are the price of cosmic stability. Statius emphasizes the far-reaching consequences of Thetis' hypothetical union with Jupiter by describing Achilles as the child who was forbidden to inherit the kingdom of heaven.⁶ Dilke (ad l.f.) points out that *patrio . . . succedere caelo* here follows the model of *regno succedere* "to succeed to, inherit a kingdom," so it "implies overlordship of the gods, not . . . a mere place among them." Yet, as he also notes, *succedere caelo* can also mean "to join the heavenly spirits" (Virg. *Aen.* 4.227). It is an apt phrase in both senses, since Thetis' marriage to Peleus not only denied her son absolute hegemony over the cosmos, it even begrudged him the simple gift of immortality. The word *patrio* "patrimony" is used in a kind of hypothetical prolepsis to refer to Achilles' inheritance of Jupiter's realm, but it may also cause us to think of another way in which Achilles is doomed to forfeit an inheritance. The suspension of *caelo* "heaven" until the end of the line means that at first *patrio* might seem a reference to Peleus and his realm. Achilles not only failed to inherit anything from Jupiter, he also was prevented by his early death from coming into his actual patrimony in Phthia. One thinks of Achilles' lament to Priam at the end of the *Iliad*; he remembers his father alone

was not the only obstacle to his union with Thetis; the Nereid spurned his advances in consideration of Hera's feelings. According to Philodemus, this tradition had its origins in Hesiod and the *Cypria* (F 2 Bernabé). Ovid (*Met.* 11.216–28) has Proteus make a general announcement of Thetis' fate.

5 *Theog.* 900, on which see Detienne and Vernant (1978: 57–92). On the Near Eastern sources of the myth of divine succession, see West (1966: 18–31) and Burkert (1992: 5–7).

6 *patrio vetitam succedere caelo*, "forbidden from succeeding to the throne of heaven as his patrimony."

and unprotected, with no heir except for a son who is doomed to predecease him.⁷

The Power of Thetis

The story that Achilles came close to replacing Zeus as king of gods and men impacts the way that we view Thetis as well. In the epic tradition, the goddess comes to us in two guises: she is so powerful that her potential to overturn Zeus' hegemony must be neutralized, and on the other hand she is a fretful mother, powerless to protect her own son. In order to see how Statius reconciles these two aspects in his portrait of the goddess, we shall begin by examining a tradition that Slatkin (1991) has called "the power of Thetis." Homer normally depicts Achilles as having grown up in the bosom of a close family and in the presence of both Peleus and Thetis, but he occasionally gives a glimpse of other traditions. Thus when Thetis visits Hephaestus to make her request for a replacement set of armor, she begins by complaining that Zeus has sent her more misery than any other goddess, in that she alone was compelled by him to marry a mortal (*Il.* 18.428–41). It seems plausible to explain this comment in the light of the tradition, otherwise absent in Homer, that Zeus needed to marry Thetis to a mortal in order to ensure his continued sway in heaven. When Statius has Neptune tell Thetis to stop complaining about her marriage to a mortal (1.90), we have a clear echo of this Homeric passage.⁸

There is another point in the *Iliad* where allusion is made to Thetis' personal history: in Book 1, Achilles asks his mother to go to Zeus to ask that the Trojans enjoy success during his absence from battle (*Il.* 1.393–412). He directs Thetis to preface her supplication with a timely reminder of the occasion she came to Zeus' aid when he was in need:

πολλάκι γάρ σεο πατρός ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἄκουσα
 εὐχομένης, ὄτ' ἔφησθα κελαινεφέϊ Κρονίῳ
 οἷῃ ἐν ἀθανάτοισιν ἀεικέα λοιγὸν ἀμῦναι,
 ὀππότε μιν ζυνηῆσαι Ὀλύμπιοι ἤθελον ἄλλοι,
 "Ἥρη τ' ἠδὲ Ποσειδάων καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη·
 ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν γ' ἔλθοῦσα, θεά, ὑπελύσσα δεσμῶν,
 ὧχ' ἑκατόγχειρον καλέσας' ἐς μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον,
 ὃν Βριάρεων καλέουσι θεοί, ἄνδρες δέ τε πάντες
 Αἰγαίων – ὁ γὰρ αὐτε βίην οὗ πατρός ἀμείνων –
 ὅς ῥα παρὰ Κρονίῳ καθέζετο κύδει γαίων·
 τὸν καὶ ὑπέδρισαν μάκαρες θεοὶ οὐδ' ἔτ' ἔδησαν.

(1.396–406)

For I often heard you boasting in my father's palace, saying that you alone

7 "A line of royal sons was not born to him [Peleus] in his palace, but only one son, doomed to die young" (οἱ οὐ τι | παίδων ἐν μεγάροισι γονῆ γένετο κρειόντων, | ἀλλ' ἓνα παῖδα τέκεν παναώριον, *Il.* 24.538–40).

8 On Neptune's comment, see above (p 110).

among the immortals warded off shameful destruction from Zeus of the dark clouds, the son of Chronus, when the other Olympian gods, Hera, Poseidon, and Pallas Athena, were wishing to bind him. But you, goddess, came and released him from his bonds, swiftly calling up to high Olympus the hundred-hander whom the gods call Briareus, but whom all men call Aigaion, for he is stronger than his father. He then sat beside the son of Chronus, exulting in his majesty. The blessed gods were afraid, and they bound him no more.

This is noteworthy for being one of the few genuinely cosmological passages in Homer, a poet who was relentlessly allegorized for hidden cosmology. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that Thetis' role here occasioned comment in antiquity.⁹ In some mysterious way, the Nereid had the power to aid Zeus decisively when he was confronted with a rebellion. This sort of Thetis allegory was repeated at Rome by Annaeus Cornutus (*Theol. graec.* 17), and it may be that it influenced the *Achilleid*, for, as we shall now see, Statius alludes to this Homeric passage and its hint of the cosmological role of Thetis.

As Thetis mulls over the question of where to hide Achilles, different locations come to mind. She finally plumps for Scyros, which she had happened to notice recently when she was sent to check on the bonds of the hundred-hander:

inbelli nuper Lycomedis ab aula
virgineos coetus et litora persona ludo
audierat, duros laxantem Aegaeona nexus
missa sequi centumque dei numerare catenas. (I.207–10)

She had recently heard the sound of a crowd of maidens coming from the palace of unwarlike Lycomedes and the shore echoing with their play, when she was sent to inspect the grim bonds of Aegaeon as he worked them loose and to count the god's hundred chains.

With its invocation of the Homeric *hapax*, or unique word, Αἰγαίωνα (*Il.* 1.404), and its talk of binding, this passage is a clear reference to Thetis' assistance to Zeus in the *Iliad*. It is unclear, however, how the description of Aegaeon/Briareus in chains fits with the Homeric story that he came to Zeus' assistance

9 See the bT-scholia ad *Il.* 1.399–406, and for modern bibliography Slatkin (1991: 61–2, n 6). A cosmological commentary on Alcman from a fragmentary papyrus (Page, 1962: F 5, Davies, 1991: F 5, and Calame, 1983: F 81), in which Thetis is conceived of as the demiurge that put order on the formless mass of the cosmos, reveals that she could be considered a primal creative force along the lines of the personifications in Hesiod's *Theogony*. It does not make a great deal of difference to our purposes if the identification of Thetis as a cosmic power was made by Alcman himself, or if it is the product of the anonymous commentator's allegoresis, as Most (1987) has argued. Detienne and Vernant (1978: 133–62) and Slatkin (1991: 81–3, n 32) consider it as an indication of an ongoing tradition of Thetis' cosmic power, while Calame (1983: 445–7) and Most (1987) are more skeptical. The papyrus has been dated to the second century AD and its contents somewhat earlier: Most (1987: 18, n 97).

when summoned by Thetis. In fact, Hesiod (*Theog.* 734–5) describes how he was freed by Zeus from the bonds in which he had been put by Uranus. The information given in the *Aeneid* (10.565–70) and *Thebaid* (2.595–601) that Briareus was the chief enemy of the Olympian gods in the Gigantomachy would seem to confound matters entirely. There are three apparently incompatible roles for Briareus: the ally of Zeus and Thetis in the *Iliad*, the active enemy of the Olympian gods in the Gigantomachy as described by Virgil and Statius, and the confined prisoner of Thetis in the *Achilleid*.¹⁰

In the *Iliad*, Thetis summons Briareus, who stands by Zeus, apparently as an ally and of his own free will, and they prevent the other gods from binding Zeus. In Statius' text, Briareus is bound as a prisoner himself; he is incapable of asserting his will, and Thetis is his warden. This small but significant disjunction can be explained by positing that Statius has tendentiously misread the text of Homer and its description of Thetis' role in the unbinding. Homer actually says that Thetis "came and released him [i.e. Zeus] from his bonds . . . quickly calling up to wide Olympus the hundred-hander."¹¹ By subsequently depicting Thetis as checking on Briareus' bonds, Statius encourages us to construe those words differently; he seems to translate the Greek thus: Thetis "came and released him [i.e. Briareus] from his bonds . . . quickly calling up to wide Olympus the hundred-hander." It is certainly a strain on the syntax of the Greek to refer the pronoun "him" (τόν) at *Iliad* 1.401 not to its antecedent, Zeus, but forward to the "hundred-hander" (ἑκατόγχερον) of the following line; but it is not impossible.¹² This tendentious misreading of Thetis' role in the *Iliad* gives Statius the license to depict her as nothing but Jupiter's turnkey. Briareus is Zeus' prisoner even before the attempt of the other gods to bind him, and he goes back to being a prisoner afterward; Thetis presumably leads him back to his cell.¹³ It is in this pseudo-Homeric capacity as the warden of Briareus that Thetis goes in the *Achilleid* to check on his bonds.

¹⁰ Technically, one can resolve this contradiction by constructing a chronology in which Briareus switches sides. He is imprisoned by Uranus, freed by Zeus, fights on the side of the gods in the Titanomachy, and is later summoned by Thetis to support Zeus against the other Olympians. Then Briareus turns against Zeus for unknown reasons, and he fights with the Giants against the Olympians, as described in the *Aeneid* and *Thebaid*. Following the defeat of the Giants, Briareus is imprisoned by Zeus, and in the *Achilleid*, Thetis is sent to check on his bonds, which reflects the most recent condition (*nuper*, 207) of Briareus, erstwhile ally and current prisoner of Zeus. On the distinction between the Titanomachy and the Gigantomachy here, see Rosati (1992b: 270f).

¹¹ On the process of binding, see Slatkin (1991: 66–9).

¹² Stanford (1950: vol 1, p lxii) on the "attributive sense" of the pronoun in Homer in which it is "followed by a noun or adjective which defines it" gives the example of ἡ μὲν . . . ἀπέβη γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη.

¹³ This reading is not without its problems, in that it does not explain why the Homeric Briareus would be inclined to help Zeus while he is his captive. Statius' version might, however, be pedantically justified in a different respect. The other Olympians are only said to have wanted to bind Zeus, not to have actually done so (Ζυνοῦσσαι Ὀλύμπιοι ἤθελον ἄλλοι, 1.399). So how could Thetis unbind Zeus before he was actually bound? The answer of course is that Homer has omitted an

One indication of the subtlety of Statius' intervention is the way he has beguiled modern scholars of the *Achilleid* into unconsciously misreading Homer in precisely this manner. Several scholars report that in the Iliadic passage Thetis released Briareus, rather than Zeus, from his bonds. Thus Dilke (ad 209f) says that Thetis "saved Zeus . . . by releasing 'the hundred-handed one'." Rosati (95, n 71) is doubtful about the allusion, but nevertheless reports that Briareus was freed by Thetis.¹⁴ Homer actually says nothing at all about Briareus being bound; but Statius wants us to think that that is what Homer says. As Slatkin (1991: 66) has it, "she [Thetis] herself unbound Zeus, summoning the hundred-handed Briareos as a kind of guarantor or reminder of her power." It was really Zeus, not Briareus, that was bound, unless one is reading the Iliadic passage through the distorting frame that Statius provides.

Slatkin has argued that Homer alludes to stories about the power of Thetis in order to add poignancy to the helplessness to which she is reduced by her son's mortality in the *Iliad*. Statius deploys this tradition to a very different purpose. He alludes to Homer's text in a way that reduces her from being the goddess who unbound Zeus (with the help of Briareus) to being Zeus' messenger and turnkey. A jailkeeper in the *Achilleid*, a jailkeeper in the *Iliad*, Thetis is not the agent of stability in heaven, but a messenger "sent" (*missa*, 1.210) on behalf of more powerful gods. By giving Thetis a very prosaic role with respect to Briareus, Statius simultaneously acknowledges and undercuts the tradition of her cosmic role. This allows him to sidestep the tradition of Thetis' power, which would conflict starkly with his own conception of the goddess as an unimpressive, bungling, and inept figure, not least on account of her absurd and unsuccessful plan to save Achilles by dressing him as a girl. The story that Thetis was destined to bear a son greater than his father is important for Statius insofar as it relates to Achilles, but, by deliberately misconstruing Homer, Statius denies that Thetis herself was a figure of cosmic importance.

Homer's Thetis is successful in her two important interviews with other gods, securing from Zeus the temporary Trojan success, and from Hephaestus a new panoply of armor. In the *Achilleid*, by contrast, Thetis approaches Neptune to raise a storm against Paris' fleet, and this small request in her native element is flatly rejected (1.61–94). The condition of having a mortal son itself contributes to Thetis' powerlessness. She recognizes that to be connected by a mother's bond to a mortal son circumscribes and compromises her own divinity; she complains about this in a way that, for example, Virgil's Venus never does. When the departure of Paris' fleet adumbrates the beginnings of war, Thetis responds in an extraordinarily personal way, saying, "This fleet is attack-

obvious intermediary step, but on the reading of Statius, the solution is simpler: the only bonds that Thetis loosened were those of Briareus.

¹⁴ *Egeone-Briareo . . . fu liberato da Tètide* (ad loc).

ing me; it is threatening me with a funeral.”¹⁵ Thetis sees the Trojan War as an attack on herself. She explains why this should be so in her appeal to Neptune:

da pellere luctus,
nec tibi de tantis placeat me fluctibus unum
litus et Iliaci scopulos habitare sepulcri. (1.74–6)

Let me dispel my sorrow, and let it not be your decision that out of such
a vast expanse of sea I should haunt just one shoreline and the rocks of a
Trojan tomb.¹⁶

Thetis asks Neptune not to have pity upon her son as a mere mortal, but to sympathize with *her* plight as a goddess whose own immortality will be compromised by the death of her only child. In the *Odyssey* (24.35–94), the shade of Agamemnon had described Achilles’ funeral mound and Thetis’ lamenting there; Statius imagines that state of mourning as a permanent constraint on the blithe indifference to death that normally characterizes immortality.¹⁷

Introducing Achilles

Before leaving the topic of Achilles’ missed chance at immortality, we should look at a passage where it is not the epic narrator but Achilles himself who mentions his bad luck in failing to have been Jupiter’s son. After Achilles rapes Deidamia, he reveals his identity to her and tries to reassure her that all will be well (1.650–60). He professes his long-standing love (1.652–5) and boasts of his distinguished family connections (1.655–6). He responds to her objection, or her imagined objection, regarding Lycomedes’ reaction to their relationship with the angry guarantee, typical of Achilles’ character but hardly calculated to assuage her feelings, that he will destroy Scyros root and branch before she ever has to pay the penalty for what they have done (1.657–60). Achilles addresses himself to Deidamia, and for the first time in the poem his words are reported in direct speech, so that this passage introduces a new voice into the *Achilleid*, the voice of the hero:

ille ego – quid trepidas? – genitum quem caerulea mater
paene Iovi silvis nivibusque inmisit alendum
Thessalicis. (1.650–2)

.

¹⁵ *me petit haec, mihi classis . . . funesta minatur* (1.31).

¹⁶ The MSS differ between *unum* and *unam* in line 75. Dilke (ad loc) gives a lengthy and convincing defense of the text as printed here; recent editors (Méheust, Marastoni, Rosati) have concurred. Dilke imagines Thetis “confined to the waters immediately below Achilles’ tomb [on Cape Sigeum].”

¹⁷ Cf. Slatkin (1991: 56): “In the *Iliad* Thetis has a present and, prospectively, a future defined by the mortal condition of her son; as such she is known in her dependent attitude of sorrowing and suffering.”

quid defles magno nurus addita ponto?
 quid gemis ingentes caelo paritura nepotes? (1.655f)

I am he – why are you frightened? – the son whom my mother, the sea-goddess, almost bore to Jupiter and whom she sent to be raised in the woods and snows of Thessaly . . . Why do you weep to be counted as the daughter-in-law of the great sea? Why do you moan, you who will give birth to prodigious grandchildren for the sky?

It is hardly surprising that Deidamia is weeping, as she has just been raped by her best girlfriend. Leaving aside for the moment Achilles' lack of sympathy for her distress, we can see that his boasting has a familiar epic source. The classic locus for this sort of speechmaking is the Homeric battlefield, where a regular part of the boasting comprises genealogical information. A hero's father is the most important element of his genealogy; as Edwards (1991: ad *Il.* 20.200–58) says, "it is common for Homeric warriors to recount their pedigrees with pride, because the glory of the fathers is reflected upon their sons." Some examples of Homeric heroes recounting their own lineage at some length are Glaucus (*Il.* 6.145–211), Idomeneus (*Il.* 13.448–54), and Aeneas (*Il.* 20.200–58). Achilles himself makes such a speech over the dead body of Asteropaeus, saying:

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γενεὴν μεγάλου Διὸς εὖχομαι εἶναι.
 τίχτε μ' ἄνῆρ πολλοῖσιν ἀνάσσων Μυρμιδόνεσσι,
 Πηλεὺς Αἰακίδης· ὁ δ' ἄρ' Αἰακὸς ἐκ Διὸς ἦεν. (Il. 21.187–9)

But I can boast that my descent is from great Zeus. The hero Peleus, son of Aeacus and king of the many Myrmidons, gave me birth, and Aeacus in turn was born of Zeus.

In the *Achilleid*, the account Achilles gives to Deidamia of his distinguished ancestors is a parody of such boastful Homeric speeches. It is a sign of the degeneracy of Achilles' position that he is boasting about his famed lineage not over the body of an enemy he has slain in open battle, but over the body of a girl he has raped by stealth.

Another aspect of the travesty of heroism here is that Achilles does not actually name his father, as in Homer, but rather names the individual who would have been his father had circumstances been different. The statement beginning *ille ego* "I am he" continues with *genitum . . . paene Iovi* "the son almost born to Jupiter," which sounds oddly like an admission of inadequacy in the midst of what should be a proud boast.¹⁸ In the terms of Statius' proem, Achilles identifies himself here not as the Homeric *magnanimus Aeaciden* "great-hearted grandson of Aeacus," but as the purely hypothetical *formidatam . . . progeniem* "the offspring who was feared" (1.1–2). This inversion of a basic element

¹⁸ The text of *paene Iovi* is Gustafsson's conjecture, based on the Puteaneus' reading of *paene Iovis*; see Dilke's note (ad 1.650), which provides parallels for "this idea of quasi-relationship."

of the heroic ethos illustrates the continuing absence from the poem of Peleus, who does not even figure in his son's account of his ancestry. This passage also expresses Achilles' awareness of his loss of the immortality and the hegemony over the entire universe that the hero came so close to having as his birthright. Homer's Achilles is a cosmic scapegoat: "the price of Zeus' hegemony is Achilles' death."¹⁹ Statius' Achilles knows it and resents it. When Achilles identifies himself to Deidamia as "the son whom my mother, the sea-goddess, almost bore to Jupiter and whom she sent to be raised in the woods and snows of Thessaly," he mentions two near-father figures, Jupiter and Chiron; he says nothing at all about Peleus. Neither of Achilles' self-identified father-figures is human, a circumstance which goes a long way to explain his confusion about his identity in the *Achilleid*. Next, we will look at another chance at immortality that Achilles just barely missed out on.

Achilles' Heel

One of the peculiarities of Achilles' biography as depicted in ancient literature and art is that the story of his being dipped in the Styx by his heel appears for the first time in the *Achilleid*.²⁰ Three times Statius alludes to Thetis' attempt to make her son immortal by dipping him in the river of the underworld. In the first instance, Thetis is falsely reporting a dream to Chiron in which she says that she has been reliving the experience of taking Achilles to the Styx and submerging him in it:

saepe ipsa – nefas! – sub inania natum
Tartara et ad Stygios iterum fero mergere fontes. (1.122f)

I often carry my son down again to the ghostly underworld to dip him in
the water of the Styx – a horrible memory!

The next reference comes as Thetis is addressing Achilles, and here she supplies some further details; we learn that the purpose of the trip was somehow to protect her son and that she failed to complete the task:

si progenitum Stygos amne severo
armavi – totumque utinam...! (1.269f)

if I fortified you after your birth in the baleful waters of the Styx – would
that I had done so entirely...!

¹⁹ Slatkin (1991: 101).

²⁰ Kossatz-Diessman (LIMC s.v. "Achilleus" no. 12) had reported that there was a Hellenistic gold ring in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art which showed Thetis dipping Achilles in the Styx, but the ring has since been appraised by the museum as inauthentic. Personal communication; also reported by Burgess (1995: 222, n 19).

Achilles' dip in the Styx is mentioned once more, with the more precise information that Thetis brought Achilles to the Styx to make his limbs impervious to weapons. Statius reports it as part of the scuttlebutt among the Greek fleet at Aulis, as though it were general knowledge among them:

quemve alium Stygios tulerit secreta per amnes
Nereis et pulchros ferro praestruxerit artus? (1.48of)

whom else did the Nereid carry stealthily through the waters of the Styx
and make his lovely limbs impenetrable to iron?

The first thing to be said is that these three passages must be allusions to a more complete telling of the myth elsewhere; Statius' remarks are not fully comprehensible on their own; he does not even mention Achilles' leg or ankle as the vulnerable point.²¹ Even if Statius had planned to tell the story in greater detail later in the poem, these three elliptical references presuppose the ability of his audience to appreciate the story at some level.

Statius does not identify his source, and so we are left with the plausible guess of Carl Robert (1923: 67f and 1187) that some Hellenistic writer put the story of Achilles' vulnerable heel together from the various parts of the tradition that were available in Achilles' biography, but which previously had been unrelated.²² Homer does not mention Achilles' heel or ankle, and it is uncertain how the cyclic *Aethiopsis* handled the episode of his death.²³ The existence of early versions of Achilles' death which attribute it to an arrow below the knee, such as in vase painting, can be accounted for without the Styx episode. One explanation that has been offered is the invulnerability not of Achilles, but of his divinely made armor, which required that he be killed by finding a chink in it, just as Achilles does when he kills Hector, who is wearing his old panoply.²⁴ The important thing to note is that the image of a mortal arrow wound in Achilles' lower leg could have persisted in art, particularly in the visual arts, long past the point where the original reasons for it had been forgotten. It was a detail that remained current enough that the inventor of the Styx episode could create a new aetiology for it.

²¹ Representations of Achilles' death tend to place an arrow in the ankle (*talus*), the foot, or even the lower leg, rarely the heel. Gantz (1993: 628) has suggested that we speak of Achilles' "heel" because that is what the Romance reflexes of *talus* mean; see also Burgess (1995: 225f).

²² The argument that the Styx episode went back to the archaic period, surviving underground in Greek "folk memory," only to emerge once again in writers like Statius, Hyginus, and Fulgentius, has largely been abandoned; given the number of surviving Greek treatments of Achilles' life, the silence of our sources on the matter of the Styx is overwhelming; thus Young (1979: 14).

²³ Apollodorus (*Epit.* 5.4) records that Achilles died as a result of a wound to the ankle, and this information may go back to a cyclic source.

²⁴ *Il.* 22.320–5. When Hector kills Patroclus in Achilles' armor, it is first removed by Apollo (*Il.* 16.788–96). The theory of Achilles' magical armor goes back to Paton (1912); see Burgess (1995: 231, n 54) for subsequent bibliography, and Burgess (1995: 224–37) on the ancient evidence generally.

The notion that Thetis had tried to remedy the mortal state of the infant Achilles by special techniques is present in quite a different form in Apollonius, who says that she placed him in the hearth at night to burn away his mortal parts and anointed him with ambrosia:

ἡ μὲν γὰρ βροτέας αἰεὶ περὶ σάρκας ἔδαιεν
 νύκτα διὰ μέσσην φλογμῷ πυρός, ἤματα δ' αὖτε
 ἀμβροσίη χρίεσκε τέρεν δέμας, ὄφρα πέλοιτο
 ἀθάνατος καὶ οἱ στυγερὸν χροῖ γῆρας ἀλάλκοι. (*Argon.* 4.869–72)

Through the middle of the night she always used to surround his mortal flesh with burning fire, and through the day she rubbed his soft body with ambrosia, in order that he might become immortal and keep loathsome old age from his body.

This regimen was clearly invented by Apollonius, for its details were borrowed from Demeter's equally unsuccessful treatment of the infant Demophoon in the Homeric Hymn:

Δημήτηρ
 χρίεσκ' ἀμβροσίη ὡς εἰ θεοῦ ἐκγεγαῶτα,
 ἡδὺ καταπνέουσα καὶ ἐν κόλποισιν ἔχουσα·
 νύκτας δὲ κρύπτεσκε πυρὸς μένει ἡύτε δαλὸν
 λάθρα φίλων γονέων. (*Hymn. Hom. Cer.* 237–40)

Demeter used to rub him [Demophoon] with ambrosia as if he were the offspring of a god, sweetly breathing down on him and holding him in her lap. By night she used to hide him, unbeknown to his beloved parents, like a torch in the full force of the fire.

Just like Demeter in the Hymn, Apollonius' Thetis is interrupted in her ministrations by the objections of a foolish mortal; the goddess reacts angrily and the baby loses its chance at immortality.²⁵ While Thetis is not exactly a model wife and mother in the *Argonautica* nor by extension in the *Achilleid* (see above, p 114), this intervention by Apollonius was presumably an attempt to redeem the utter barbarity attributed to Thetis in other versions, where she killed many of her own infant children by throwing them in the fire or in a pot of water in order to test their mortality.²⁶ In these versions, Peleus finally catches her performing the same test on Achilles, and prevents her from killing him; she then flees her husband's home, never to return, just as she does in the *Argonautica*. Apollonius took several elements in Achilles' biography – Thetis' placing

²⁵ On the other hand, Apollonius' near-verbatim borrowing from the Homeric Hymn has been denied by Burgess (1995: 221) and Mackie (1998).

²⁶ Death by fire: Lycophron 178f with schol. ad loc; by water: Hesiod (*Aegimius*) F 300 Merkelbach-West (ο c τ); the source for this latter *Aegimius* testimonium (Schol. ad Ap. Rhod. 4.816) mentions the existence of both fire and water versions. There are other scholia of lesser relevance that mention Thetis' destruction of her children: see Burgess (1995: 220, n 11).

her child in the fire, her anger at Peleus, and her abrupt departure – and by reading them under the auspices of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, he transformed them from the evidence of monstrously indifferent maternal conduct to the evidence of a somewhat more benign solicitude for her child's mortal state. If we allow the assumption that Statius' allusion to the story of Thetis' trip to the Styx most likely came from some lost Hellenistic poem, then it seems likely that such a text was produced in response to Apollonius. Apollonius transforms death by fire into thwarted salvation by fire, while the Styx poet transformed death by water into imperfect salvation by water.²⁷ It is interesting that the inventor of the Styx version seems to have borrowed from Apollonius the precedent for the partial invulnerability motif too. In the *Argonautica*, the bronze robot Talos was unbreakable except for a vulnerable vein on his ankle, which Medea caused him to cut.²⁸ So there is some circumstantial evidence to support Robert's guess that the Styx episode had its origin in the Hellenistic period or at least at some time later than Apollonius. It is not necessary to go so far as Weitzmann, who postulated the existence of a Hellenistic *Achilleid*.²⁹

Why then did Statius pick up this obscure Hellenistic story and give it such prominence in his own poem? It serves two useful purposes for him. Firstly, it offers another way of presenting Achilles as having barely missed a chance at immortality. In addition to losing out on having Jupiter as a father, Achilles also fails to have been immersed fully into the Styx. Secondly, it contributes to his characterization of Thetis. Neglecting to immerse the point of the heel whereby she held her baby is not very clever, and it is of a piece with her general lack of competence in the *Achilleid*. The trip to the Styx is a botched attempt to redeem Achilles' mortality, and so is hiding him on Scyros.

27 Burgess (1995: 220, n 10) says that it can be "assumed" that boiling water is meant, but one can do so only on the basis of an equally arbitrary assumption that all of the pre-Statian accounts of Achilles' infancy are essentially similar and that differences among them should be effaced as far as possible. Robert (1923: 67f) by contrast suggested plausibly that Thetis, as a sea-goddess, was checking to see if her offspring could swim and survive in her native element. Regardless of the temperature of the water, the same contrast and symmetry obtains between harmful/beneficent fire on the one hand and harmful/beneficent water on the other. The fact that Thetis dips Achilles in the waters of the Styx, which were ordinarily harmful, even to immortals (cf. Hes. *Theog.* 775–806), merely extends the notion of a normally harmful element being put to ameliorative use: Burgess (1995: 224, n 27).

28 *Argon.* 4.1645–82; see Young (1979: 13), who points out that according to one version recorded by Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.9.26), Talos was killed with an arrow to his heel.

29 Weitzmann (1959: 54–9) implausibly claims that, "chiefly on the evidence of the pictorial tradition in Greek monuments, we would surmise that there must have existed also a Greek *Achilleid* after which Statius modeled his" (54). The "Greek monuments" Weitzmann adduces are mostly located in Rome and postdate Statius by several centuries (e.g. the Tensa Capitolina and the Capitoline well-head); these were surely influenced by Statius' *Achilleid* itself. Weitzmann is so sure that these cycles had their origin in "ancient book illumination" that he imagines that Statius' poem could not have inspired these works of art unless every single event depicted on them had been narrated explicitly by Statius; for a fuller, but still insufficiently skeptical, consideration of his thesis, see Manacorda (1971: 46–50).

Achilles and Chiron

How did Achilles come to be living with Chiron instead of his parents? Homer says that Achilles was raised in his father's palace (*Il.* 18.57–60 = 18.438–41), and that Thetis continued to spend time there during Achilles' childhood (*Il.* 1.396, 1.414, 16.574); Thetis even packed warm clothes for him to take to Troy (*Il.* 16.220–4). It is Phoenix, not Chiron, whom Homer depicts as the boy's guardian from infancy (*Il.* 9.485–95). The most that Homer allows is that Chiron had taught medicine to Achilles (Hom. *Il.* 11.831f); but the implication is that this was merely one episode in a childhood that was largely spent at Phthia. There is another tradition, however, which gives a very different picture of Achilles' early childhood. The most important text for this tradition is the same passage in Apollonius that describes Thetis' attempt to make Achilles immortal by roasting him in the fire.

In Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.852–81), Thetis visits Peleus on board the *Argo* for the first time since she had abandoned him and her baby. She gives him some brusque instructions and disappears again; but the narrator fills in some background on how it happened that this was the first time Peleus had seen her since Achilles was a baby. We are told the story of how Peleus had become alarmed and had called out when he saw his wife putting the baby Achilles in the fire; at this Thetis threw the baby down and leaped into the sea, never to return. This version has parallels in many folk tales about humans marrying mermaids: after spending a very short while with her husband, the mermaid is offended by something he does, or by a taboo he breaks, and she leaves for her home in the sea, never to be seen by him again.³⁰ So Peleus was left with a son to raise by himself, and as a consequence decided to foster him with Chiron.³¹ Chiron subsequently takes the young Achilles down to the shore to wave goodbye to his father as he sails off in the *Argo*.³² There were two incompatible accounts of Achilles' childhood in the epic tradition, since Apollonius' account of Thetis' utter abandonment of Peleus and Achilles pointedly contradicts Homer.

This non-Homeric version of Achilles' childhood can be demonstrated to

³⁰ See motifs B 81.2 (mermaid marries man) and B 81.2.1 (mermaid has son by human father) in Thompson (1955: vol 1, p 370f), with motif T 111.0.1 (marriage to supernatural wives who disappear, Thompson, 1955: vol 5, p 352).

³¹ So Apollodorus states (*Bibl.* 3.13.6), and Euripides implies (*LA* 710). Mackie (1998: 329) notes that Thetis' abandonment of Peleus as recounted in *Argonautica* 4 leads directly to Chiron raising Achilles as depicted in *Argonautica* 1: "Despite coming at opposite ends of the epic, these episodes are closely connected because the separation of the parents leads to the rearing of Achilles by Chiron. Thus, as far as the story of Achilles is concerned, the second episode precedes the first and leads directly to it." A scholion on this passage of Apollonius (ad 4.816) adds that Sophocles (F 151 Pearson) had depicted Peleus as vituperating against Thetis when she abandoned him.

³² *Argon.* 1.553–8, a scene imitated by Valerius Flaccus (1.255–9).

go back to origins well before Apollonius. There are two distinct versions of the presentation of the young Achilles to Chiron in Greek vase painting, as analyzed by Friis Johansen.³³ In the first group of representations, Peleus alone is responsible for handing his infant son over to the centaur. In the second group, Achilles is not an infant but a child, older and able to walk on his own, and Thetis is also involved in the transfer of her child, sometimes showing her grief at their parting. Friis Johansen points out that the first group illustrates perfectly the state of affairs described by Apollonius. By contrast, he argues that the second group of vases, in which Thetis actively participates in the family group and in which Achilles is an older child when he goes to Chiron, has been heavily influenced by Homer.

The upbringing of Achilles was a disputed issue that, given his subject, Statius would of necessity have to confront, but his solution was novel. Given the Apollonian tradition in which Peleus was left with sole responsibility for making decisions about his infant son's upbringing, and the Homeric tradition of a big, happy family at Phthia, Statius chose to invent an entirely different scenario, in which Thetis is the one responsible for organizing her baby son's upbringing by Chiron. Statius depicts Achilles as having been raised by Chiron from a very young age – as in Apollonius; but he makes Thetis involved in putting Achilles there. The upshot of this novel combination of traditions is the excision of Peleus from any role in his son's upbringing.

In relating to Ulysses and Diomedes the exploits of his early childhood, Achilles makes it clear that his stay with Chiron extended back as far as he can remember, even before he could walk.³⁴ He disclaims knowledge of anything more and refers them to his mother for further details of his early life.³⁵ When Thetis reproaches herself for having entrusted her son's upbringing to the centaur, she says to herself:

quid enim cunabula parvo
Pelion et torvi commisimus antra magistri? (1.38–9)

Why did I designate Pelion and the cave of its stern taskmaster as the
cradle for my little boy?³⁶

The use of the first person plural (*commisimus*) has no special force in itself; it is entirely possible that Thetis means to do nothing more than to refer to herself alone. Yet in the earlier representations of Achilles' transfer, Peleus is

³³ Friis Johansen (1939); and subsequently Zindel (1974: 15–23), Kemp-Lindemann (1975: 8–17), and Kossatz-Deissman (LIMC s.v. "Achilleus," p 53).

³⁴ "in my tender years, while I was still crawling" (*in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis*, 2.96).

³⁵ "my mother knows the rest" (*scit cetera mater*, 2.167), on which see above (p 63, n 21).

³⁶ Taking *committo* to mean "assign" or "designate" as in Ovid's *Fasti* (1.167): [Janus speaks] *tempora commisi nascentia rebus agendis*, which Frazer (1989) translates, "I assigned the birthday of the year to business." On the difficulty of the syntax here, see Dilke and Jannaccone ad loc.

the primary agent, sometimes accompanied by Thetis.³⁷ So we may choose to read the plural as a gesture of accommodation towards the pre-Statian story in which Peleus was centrally important. The possible “we” in *commisimus* (I/we designated), which has at least the potential to include Peleus, marks the point where the tension between Statius’ version of Achilles’ childhood and the other two versions, Homeric and Apollonian, becomes visible. Elsewhere, the *Achilleid* implies strongly that it was Thetis alone who was responsible for Achilles’ apprenticeship with Chiron. While speaking to Deidamia, Achilles, although he apparently does not know the circumstances of his fosterage, naturally attributes it to his mother.³⁸

The centrality that Statius gives to Thetis in Achilles’ infancy is generally reflected in subsequent Roman art. In contradistinction to classical Greek representations of the handover of Achilles, where Peleus is the dominant figure, in the few surviving monuments of Roman art he never appears.³⁹ The cause of Thetis supplanting Peleus as the dominant parent is surely the *Achilleid* itself, which intensified the focus on Thetis already begun by Homer to such a degree that Peleus all but vanishes.⁴⁰ There are a number of pictorial cycles depicting events in Achilles’ childhood in fourth-century Roman art, and they all marginalize Peleus.⁴¹ Whereas the centrality of Thetis in the *Iliad* was surely of great general importance for her frequent appearance in depictions of Achilles’ later life, her dominance over Achilles’ younger life in later Roman art should probably be credited to the influence of the *Achilleid*.⁴²

What all of this means for our understanding of the *Achilleid* is that Peleus is effectively elided from Achilles’ upbringing, along with the other Homeric father figure of Phoenix; in their place Chiron becomes far more to Achilles than the simple teacher of medicine that he was for Homer, and more the important figure he was for Pindar (*Nem.* 3.40–64). He is not simply a teacher, as Thetis

37 The exception is a single vase (LIMC s.v. “Achilleus” no. 39, ca. 520 BC) on which Thetis, Chiron and the preadolescent Achilles are pictured without Peleus; Friis Johansen (1939: 181–4) takes this vase as the starting point for his investigation of the group of vases with “Homeric” versions of the myth.

38 “I . . . whom my mother, the sea-goddess . . . , sent to be raised in the woods and snows of Thessaly” (*ego . . . quem caerulea mater . . . nivibusque inmisit alendum* | *Thessalicis*, l.650–2), on which passage see above (p 164).

39 Roman depictions of Thetis handing Achilles to Chiron by herself are LIMC s.v. “Achilleus,” nos. 46–9.

40 There are examples in Roman art of Peleus together with the young Achilles, but these depict Chiron holding up the boy to his father as Peleus passes by on the *Argo*, as described by Apollonius and Valerius Flaccus (see above, p 170, n 32), thus emphasizing the distance between the two (LIMC s.v. “Peleus,” nos. 43 and 44).

41 These are the Capitoline well-head, the *tensa capitolina*, and the great silver plate from the Kaiser-augst hoard. LIMC s.v. “Achilleus,” nos. 2, 13, and 4. For a discussion of these cycles, see Guerrini (1958–9), Manacorda (1971: 20–6), and Delvoye (1984).

42 *Contra*, Kossatz-Deissmann (LIMC s.v. “Achilleus,” no. 46).

chooses to call him (*magistri*, 1.39), but a surrogate father, as Achilles himself calls him (*ille pater*, 2.102). The effect of this move is to situate the human child, Achilles, uneasily between two nonhuman parental figures, the divine Thetis and the semibestial Chiron. We now move on to consider a particularly disturbing and brutish aspect of Achilles' upbringing by the centaur.

The Food of Achilles

One of the vases that depicts the handover of the infant Achilles to Chiron is a fragmentary proto-Attic neck-amphora which presents a variant on the usual representation of the centaur. Chiron in Greek art often carries with him a stick or branch on which are tied the fruits of his hunting: birds, hares, and other small animals. On this vase, however, three cubs of much fiercer species hang from his branch: a small lion and boar, and a third which cannot be identified with certainty.⁴³ This is an allusion to a mythical tradition which claimed that Chiron nursed the baby Achilles on the entrails of wild animals such as these.⁴⁴ Statius follows this tradition and adds a disturbing little detail:

Dicor et in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis,
Thessalus ut rigido senior me monte recepit,
non ullos ex more cibos hausisse nec almis
uberibus satiasset famem, sed spissa leonum
viscera semianimisque lupae traxisse medullas.
haec mihi prima Ceres, haec laeti munera Bacchi,
sic dabat ille pater. (2.96–102)

Even when I was of tender years and still crawling, when the old centaur of Thessaly took me in on his harsh mountain, I am said to have devoured no food of the usual kind nor to have sated my hunger on sweet breasts, but to have extracted the viscous entrails of lions and the marrow of the half-alive she-wolf. This was my first bread and wine; this is what that father gave me.⁴⁵

Robertson (1940) first drew attention to the word *semianimis* “half-alive” in line 100 as an indication of a disturbing ancient tradition preserved in the description Statius gives us of Achilles' diet. For whereas the idea of a baby nursed on the meat of wild animals is a bit out of the ordinary, and the notion of a

43 Friis Johansen (1939: 184–6) = LIMC s.v. “Achilleus,” no. 21. Friis Johansen (1939: 186) follows Apollodorus (below) and the original editors of the vase in calling the third animal a bear. For an identification as a wolf, following Statius, see Robertson (1940: 177).

44 Apollodorus says that Chiron gave Achilles a diet of the innards of lions and the marrow of boars and bears ([Χείρων] . . . αὐτὸν ἔτρεφε σπλάγγνοις λεόντων καὶ συῶν ἀγρίων καὶ ἄρκτων μυελοῖς (*Bibl.* 3.13.6).

45 Shackleton Bailey (2003b: ad loc) does not understand what the “wine” refers to; it is the blood that Achilles will have consumed while eating the raw flesh.

baby nursed on raw meat is a disquieting prospect, a baby nursing on the quivering, breathing flesh of a not-yet-dead animal is an entirely disgusting image. Robertson (1940: 178) quite rightly compares Statius' description of Tydeus digging into the brains of Melanippus in the *Thebaid* (8.751–66), and points out that there too Statius revived a disturbing detail that had grown obscure, but which he did not invent. Robertson claims that Pindar was alluding to the same tradition when he describes the animals that the young Achilles brought back to Chiron from the hunt as still panting.⁴⁶ One can adduce ethnographic parallels for the practice of eating the innards of animals raw in order to acquire their power.⁴⁷ The telling of this element of the myth does not end with Statius; the fourth-century Achilles cycle on the silver platter from Kaiseraugst has a very explicit scene in which Chiron holds his right hand out toward the mouth of the tiny Achilles, who has both of his hands outstretched to him. In his left hand, the centaur holds a lioness upside down by the hind legs; bodies of a lion and a boar lie on the ground.⁴⁸

It seems fair to say that *semianimis* was meant to shock and disgust a Roman audience, for whom the eating of raw versus cooked meat marked the division between animal and human as much as or more than it does for us today. It serves to put a different complexion on life in Chiron's cave from the one we are given in Book 1. There we met an elderly and patient centaur, very much a gentleman and concerned for the comfort of Thetis, who is his guest.⁴⁹ In Book 2, Achilles begins his story of his time with Chiron in a way that jars very strongly with that elegant picture.⁵⁰ We are forced to confront the fact that Chiron, for all his virtues, is only half-human, and in the absence of any other parental or nurturing figure, he is Achilles' surrogate father: "this is what that father gave me" (*ille pater*, 2.102). The resulting dehumanization is startling, even repulsive, but does not make Achilles, who is only a child, an unsympathetic figure. Again, the fate of Diomedes' father in the *Thebaid* is a useful point of comparison. When Tydeus was just on the point of transcend-

⁴⁶ Robertson (1940: 179–80). The text (σώματα ... ἀσθμαίνοντα, *Nem.* 3.47f) is not entirely secure. See also Robbins (1993: 12), who argues that the poet is playing here with the etymology of the name of Chiron.

⁴⁷ See Robertson (1940: 177–8) and Frazer (1921) ad Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.6. Modern cultural anthropologists were not the first to see this symbolic meaning in Achilles' diet; Libanius suggested that Chiron chose this diet with a view toward Achilles' "manly spirit" (πρὸς ἀνδρείαν, *Progymnasmata* 8.3.2).

⁴⁸ LIMC s.v. "Achilleus," no. 4; there is a full-length study of the piece by Manacorda (1971). There are a few passing references to Achilles' diet in ancient literature; see Roussel (1991: 95–8) and Pavlovskis (1965: 283).

⁴⁹ For example, in the phrase *admonet antri* (1.125), on which see Rosati (1992b: 267–70), whether Chiron means to tell Thetis to mind her step or whether he is apologizing for the humbleness of his home, the point is to give Chiron a solicitousness that is not just human, but even civilized.

⁵⁰ Barchiesi (1996: 55) points out that this image also contrasts strongly with the picture painted by Homer (*Il.* 9.485–91) of the baby Achilles spitting up his food as Phoenix holds him on his lap.

ing human heroism and achieving immortality, he descended into the worst kind of subhuman brutality. Minerva, who is coming to bring the dying hero away from the battlefield to Olympus, sees him sink his teeth into the skull of his enemy's corpse, and turns away in disgust, letting him die (8.758–66). Thus, according to Statius, the superhuman and the subhuman meet in the extremity of battle. In aiming for more-than-human glory, Tydeus missed the mark by only a small margin and yet he failed utterly. Tydeus' tragedy repeats itself as comedy for Achilles. The upbringing that is designed to train the greatest of heroes comes disturbingly close to producing a rabid animal. Despite being raised by, respectively, a goddess and a half-brute centaur, the boy nevertheless finds a way to become human.

Two Etymologies for Achilles

The issue of Achilles' childhood diet comes up in another context in the *Achilleid*. Having successfully recruited Achilles and having then departed from Scyros in his ship, Ulysses begins a grand peroration concerning the events that transpired there (2.32–42). Achilles is not a bit interested in this rehearsal of his own embarrassment, and cuts him off angrily (2.42); we shall see in a moment how Ulysses bends this sense of shame to his own purposes. Achilles' reluctance to dwell on the Scyros episode was shrewdly anticipated by Deidamia, who feared that she would be forgotten as a result of Achilles' own desire to downplay the episode.⁵¹ Hinds comments:

What the poet does early in Book 2 [of the *Achilleid*], I think, is to emplot a number of moves whose cumulative effect is to put the Scyrian action under erasure, *sous rature*, in a kind of programmatic *damnatio memoriae* of the episode – *proposed by Achilles himself, as epic hero*.⁵²

Achilles suggests that a more congenial topic would be for Ulysses to recount the origins of the current conflict with Troy, claiming that in this way he will be able to work up a suitable sense of indignation: “Speak: and from this let me summon up straightaway a justified wrath.”⁵³ Ulysses responds with a précis of events from the judgment of Paris onward, putting the worst possible spin on the abduction of Helen. What lends his account real brilliance is that he draws

⁵¹ 1.947f, on which see above, p 141. This adds another nuance to the aetiology that Statius is constructing for the very obscurity of Scyros (above, p 134).

⁵² Hinds (2000: 241, his italics).

⁵³ *ede: libet iustas hinc sumere protinus iras* (2.48). This line is surely one of the funniest in the *Achilleid*: Achilles chooses to discover the reasons behind the Trojan War only after he has embarked to fight in it, and then he proleptically decides that the wrath (*ira*) he shall derive therefrom will be justified (*iusta*). Compare the genuinely “justified wrath” (*iustas ... iras* 12.714) of Theseus, when he sees the unburied Argive dead at the end of the *Thebaid*. For an entirely different view of this line, see King (1987: 129).

his portrait of Paris in such a way that he comes dangerously close to painting Achilles with the same brush. As *exempla* of men who have nobly pursued their purloined womenfolk, he adduces Agenor following Europa, and then Aeetes going after Medea and the *Argo*:

Aeetes ferroque et classe secutus
 semideos reges et ituram in sidera puppim:
 nos Phryga semivirum portus et litora circum
 Argolica incesta volitantem puppe feremus? (2.76–9)

Aeetes pursued with weapons and with his fleet the half-divine kings and the ship that was destined for the stars; shall we tolerate a Phrygian half-man fitting around the harbors and shores of Greece with his debauched ship?

A womanly half-man (*semivir*) who nevertheless manages to rape a woman of the household in which he is a guest: does this description better suit Paris at Sparta or Achilles at Scyros? Achilles is implicated even more strongly in the pointed rhetorical question at the end of Ulysses' speech:

quid si nunc aliquis patriis rapturus ab oris
 Deidamian eat viduaeque e sede revellat
 attonitam et magni clamantem nomen Achillis? (2.81–3)

What if someone were now to come with the intention of snatching Deidamia away from her native shores and were to drag her away in shock from her lonely house, as she shouted the name of great Achilles?

This hypothetical rapist sounds more like another Achilles, who raped Deidamia and caused her to cry out in this fashion, than another Paris, especially as Ulysses implies that Helen, unlike Deidamia, submitted of her free will (*facili . . . raptu*, 2.69). Achilles responds naively, and does not see in this crude provocation the ironic reflection of his own actions; he angrily grasps his sword, ready to defend his bride's honor (2.84–5). At this display of anger, Ulysses is pleased to see how well his manipulation of the hero has worked: "Ulysses was happy and went silent" (*tacuit contentus Ulixes*, 2.85). The key to Ulysses' speech is his picture of Paris as the "half-man" (*semivir*) who insinuates himself among the women of another man's household to rape one of his all-too-willing daughters. Statius' Ulysses knows the rhetorical uses of self-loathing; that is, he knows that unseemly behavior is all the more repugnant when it is tinged with the shame of acknowledging it or remembering it in oneself. He takes the shame and anger that Achilles openly manifested when they began to discuss his effeminacy at Scyros, and effectively redirects it at the figure of Paris.

Ulysses riles Achilles with the image of another man raping Deidamia as she calls out his name. This is not the first occasion in the poem on which the name

of Achilles is shouted; the assembled Greek host at Aulis had clamored for the presence of the absent hero on account of his high birth, his invulnerability, and his brutal upbringing (1.473–82), and the narrator repeats the name three times:⁵⁴

omnis in absentem belli manus ardet Achillem,
nomen Achillis amant et in Hectora solus Achilles
poscitur. (1.473–5)

The entire band of warriors yearned for the absent Achilles; they dwelt lovingly on Achilles' name, and Achilles alone was required against Hector.

The repetition highlights the name of "Achilles" as a role and a destiny that preexists the hero, and that destiny is set in motion by the shouting of his name by this crowd at Aulis; Deidamia's hypothetical shout for help likewise calls into being Achilles' famous epic anger. As Ulysses knows, voicing the name has the power to conjure a hero. Achilles exists as a category, defined by his potential and by his name, long before he arrives at Troy. As we shall see, Statius makes explicit this relationship between Achilles' name, his upbringing with Chiron, and his destiny.

There were many ancient etymologies mooted for the name of Achilles, but they fall broadly into two groups, the first of which traces its inspiration to Callimachus, the second to Euphorion; Statius alludes to both. Callimachus proposed a derivation from *achos* (ἄχος) "pain, distress" that came to be popular in several different forms in antiquity. It is not known where Callimachus propounded his version, but its commonest formulation was that "Achilles" came from ἄχος Ἰλιεῦσιν, or "distress to the Trojans" (see below, p 180). Variants of this included ἄχος ἰάλλειν, or "bringing distress," and even ἄχος λύειν, or "relieving pain," in reference to the medical skills Achilles learned from Chiron.⁵⁵ Against this family of etymologies, Euphorion evidently proposed a derivation whose tone may have been intended as whimsical. Fullest information is given in the *Etymologicum magnum*:

Ἀχιλλεύς] Παρὰ τὸ ἄχος λύειν· ἰατρὸς γὰρ ἦν. Ἡ δὲ διὰ τὸ ἄχος (ὃ ἐστὶ λύπην) ἐπενεγκεῖν τῇ μητρὶ καὶ τοῖς Ἰλιεῦσιν. Ἡ δὲ διὰ τὸ μὴ θιγεῖν χειλεσι χιλῆς, ὃ ἐστὶ τροφῆς· ὅλως γὰρ οὐ μετέσχε γάλακτος, ἀλλὰ μυελοῖς ἐλάφων ἐτρέφη ὑπὸ Χείρωνος. ὅτι ὑπὸ Μυρμιδόνων ἐκλήθη, καθὰ φησιν Εὐφορίων·

⁵⁴ For the Callimachean pedigree of this sort of polyptoton, see Wills (1996: 285–9), and on the line-end position of two of the repetends, see Wills (1996: 419f).

⁵⁵ For a listing of ancient etymologies, see Fleischer in Roscher (1884–6: s.v. "Achilles," 1.64.25–65). Modern scholarship has found various derivations from ἄχος attractive: see LSJ and Chantraine (1968: vol 1, p 150) s.v. Ἀχιλλεύς, and Palmer (1963: 79).

ἔς Φθίην χιλοῖο κατήιε πάμπαν ἄπαστος·
τοῦνεκα Μυρμιδόνες μιν Ἀχιλέα φημίξαντο.⁵⁶

Achilles] From the relieving of pain, for he was a physician. Or on account of the bringing of distress (which is pain) to his mother and to the Trojans. Or on account of his not touching fodder (which is food) with his lips; for he did not partake at all of milk, but was raised on the marrow of deer by Chiron. Thus he was called by the Myrmidons, just as Euphorion says:

Achilles returned to Phthia having abstained entirely from eating fodder, and so the Myrmidons called him Achilles.

Instead of *achos*, this etymology derives from the Greek privative prefix *a-* “without” in combination with either *chilē* “fodder” or *cheilos* “lips.” The two cryptic lines from Euphorion seem to refer to the time of Achilles’ return to his father at Phthia after his fosterage with Chiron. The point of the derivation of Ἀχιλεύς from the notional word ἄ-χιλός “without fodder” is a reference to the unusual diet that Achilles was given by Chiron, described here as the marrow of deer (μυελοῖς ἐλάφωων). For the moment it is sufficient to note that the infant Achilles was nourished by Chiron with something other than milk, which, as Euphorion joked, meant that he went without the usual “fodder” (χιλός or χιλῆ) for young children. The description of human nutriment as fodder rather than food points to Achilles’ incongruous wet-nurse, the half-horse Chiron.

The conceit of these two lines is further elaborated in the phrase “not touching fodder with his lips” (τὸ μὴ θιγεῖν χεῖλεσι χιλῆς). Not only was Achilles fed unusual food, he did not touch it with his lips, and was thus ἄ-χεῖλος or “without lips.” The suggestion of van Groningen (1977: ad loc) that this formulation also goes back to Euphorion is likely, if we consider the alliteration and the double etymology. The sense of the derivation has been obscured in the formulation of the *Etymologicum*, however, due to a desire to juxtapose the two words χεῖλεσι “lips” and χιλῆς “fodder.” The problem is that ἄ-χεῖλος, if it means anything at all, means “lipless,” and eventually in fact the explanation reached this absurd extreme. Tzetzes or his source combined this idea with the story of Thetis testing her children’s mortality by pitching them in the fireplace to come up with the notion that in the course of this treatment Achilles had had his lips burnt off.⁵⁷ The real point of Euphorion’s derivation is shown more clearly by Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.13.6), who says that Chiron named the boy Achilles “because he did not apply his lips to the breast” (ὅτι τὰ χεῖλη μαστοῖς οὐ προσήνεγκε). There might be an allusion to this etymological tradition in Apollonius; his Hera mentions to Thetis that Achilles is being raised by

⁵⁶ *Etymologicum Magnum* (Lasserre and Livadaras, 1976– : vol 2, s.v.) = Euphorion (F 62 van Groningen). Similar information and phrasing is found in the other sources: see van Groningen (1977: ad loc).

⁵⁷ Schol. ad Lycoph. *Alex.* 178.

Chiron and that he “longs for your milk” (τεοῦ λιπτοντα γόλακτος, 4.813). Euphorion’s etymological *jeu* may be reconstructed thus: Achilles was raised from his birth by Chiron, and therefore his lips (χείλη) never touched his mother’s breast; instead Chiron nourished him on a regime of offal which was a far cry from the usual diet of children, or even the fodder of horses (χίλος). To use the word “fodder” for the innards of wild animals will have been ironic; centaurs, as emblems of brutish nature, were conceived of in myth as carnivores, and even eaters of raw meat, and this is consistent with the way Chiron raised the young Achilles; but horses are herbivores, so the raw meat diet of centaurs is as paradoxical as that of Achilles.⁵⁸

Returning now to the *Achilleid*, after Ulysses has inflamed Achilles’ “justified anger” (*iustas . . . iras*, 2.48) with an account of the elopement of Paris and Helen, and Diomedes has invited Achilles to tell them about his upbringing (2.86–93), we are obliged with an account in the hero’s own words that occupies the remainder of the poem (2.96–167). Let us look once more at the way Achilles begins his response to Ulysses:

dicor et in teneris et adhuc reptantibus annis,
Thessalus ut rigido senior me monte recepit,
non ullos ex more cibos hausisse nec almis
uberibus satiasset famem, sed spissa leonum
viscera semianimis lupae traxisse medullas. (2.96–100)

Even when I was of tender years and still crawling, when the Thessalian elder took me in on his harsh mountain, I am said to have devoured no food of the usual kind nor to have sated my hunger on sweet breasts, but to have extracted the viscous entrails of lions and the marrow of the half-alive she-wolf. This was my first bread and wine; this is what that father gave me.

It should now be clear that the hero uses language which unmistakably recalls the etymological tradition that goes back to Euphorion.⁵⁹ The phrase “no food of the usual kind” (*non ullos ex more cibos*) strikingly anticipates Tzetzes’ formulation “unlike common fodder” (δίχα κοινῆς χιλῆς, ad Lycoph. *Alex.* 178), and *cibus* “food” recalls Euphorion’s χίλος in its sound and its semantic range, describing both food for men and fodder for beasts. Achilles denies having sated his hunger at any breast (*nec almis | uberibus satiasset famem*); we saw that the etymology from χείλη depended upon the idea of Achilles not suckling at the breast. Finally, Statius gives a description of Achilles’ diet of the type that usually accompanied the ancient explanations of Euphorion’s etymology.

Since Statius’ Achilles is at pains to describe his childhood in terms that support and encourage an Euphorian etymology of his name from ἄ-χίλος or

⁵⁸ On the diet of centaurs as an illogical reflection of their embodiment of “raw nature,” see Kirk (1970: 161).

⁵⁹ The connection is noted in passing by Barchiesi (1996: 55).

ἀ-χελη, we might ask whether Statius plays with any of the other ancient etymologies, or whether this, put in the mouth of Achilles himself, is, as it were, the official answer to the question. There is one other point in the *Achilleid* where this issue may be at play, but the connection is less clear and must remain somewhat speculative. If we turn our attention back to the abortive peroration by Ulysses on the events recently transpiring in Scyros that was cut off by the displeased Achilles, we find that he began by addressing Achilles as “the destined destroyer of Troy” (*magnae vastator debite Troiae*, 2.32), a phrase that might just recall Callimachus’ “distress for the Trojans” (ἄχος Ἰλιεῦσιν). He is interrupted by Achilles, who does not want to talk about Scyros, and so he shifts to another subject; but he concludes his speech with the very words “the name of Achilles” (*nomen Achillis*).⁶⁰ Achilles then turns around and immediately begins his own speech with a reference to an alternative etymology for his own name. Given the juxtaposition of these phrases, the possibility might be allowed that Ulysses is alluding to Callimachus’ etymology, and that Achilles’ reference to Euphorion constitutes a rejoinder to it.

A controversy over the derivation of Achilles’ name, if it is admitted that one is present here, would be highly appropriate to the context of Statius’ poem.⁶¹ Furthermore, an important distinction between these two etymologies had already been articulated by Callimachus, as attested by the following scholion:

Ἀχιλεὺς γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ εἶναι ἄχος τοῖς Ἰλιεῦσιν ἤγγουν τοῖς Τρωσὶ κατὰ φερωνυμίαν· ὑπὸ γὰρ θείας προνοίας, ὡς ἔφη Καλλιμαχος, ἐκλήθη οὕτως.⁶²

Achilles was named after an event: from being a distress to the people of Ilium, i.e. the Trojans; as Callimachus said, it was through wondrous foresight that he was named in this way.

Callimachus evidently foregrounded in his etymology the fact that Achilles was given a name of wondrous foresight (θείας προνοίας). On the other hand, Euphorion’s derivation arises as a consequence of Achilles’ situation as an infant, and does not depend upon prognostication. Thus in Apollodorus’ account Achilles was at first named Ligyrion, but then was renamed Achilles by Chiron because his lips had not touched his mother’s breast (*Bibl.* 3.13.6).

In the *Achilleid*, Ulysses has called Achilles away from Scyros to his destiny, and so he calls him “the destined destroyer of Troy” (*magnae vastator debite Troiae*), interjecting the word “destined” (*debite*) into the middle of the Callimachean etymology in order to put emphasis on the fact that, on Callimachus’ reading, Achilles’ name is a destiny he has yet to fulfill. Understood in this context, Achilles’ own account of his childhood is a perfect riposte to Ulysses. He

⁶⁰ *Ach.* 2.83, quoted above (p 176).

⁶¹ For a similar figure, cf. Dilke’s observation that Statius’ phrase “imposing Agenor” *imperiosus Agenor* (2.72) is an etymological figure, where *imperiosus* glosses ἀγρήγορ.

⁶² *Anecdota graeca (Oxonienisia)* 4.403.27–29, ed. Cramer (1837) = F 624 Pfeiffer.

reminds him that, on another reading, the name of Achilles is not the script for a role he has yet to play out, but is the record of significant events that have already taken place. Achilles himself insists upon the importance of his unconventional upbringing to his identity and even to his name. By extension, he also vindicates the importance of the non-Homeric subject matter Statius brings into play in his epic, and reserves a place for the material of the *Achilleid* next to the *Iliad* as a supplementary account of his character.

Achilles at the Threshold

We have seen that Achilles is sometimes viewed in the *Achilleid* as more than human, nearly Zeus' successor; and sometimes as less than human, the product of a savage upbringing. Both of these perspectives are particularly evident in the scene in which the hero makes his first physical appearance in the poem. Thetis has arrived at Chiron's cave and told him the lies necessary to remove Achilles from his care; at this point Achilles returns home from hunting. This episode is interesting for the way Statius describes the adolescent hero as a liminal figure, caught between child and adult, male and female, divine and human, nature and culture. The careful design is reflected quite literally in the setting: Achilles and his mother appear on the threshold of Chiron's cave (*in limine*, 1.171), which is, like its master, of a twofold nature that reflects the meeting of nature and man: "part [of the cave] was excavated by hand, part had been split open by its age" (*pars exhausta manu, partem sua ruperat aetas*, 1.108).⁶³

Just before Achilles arrives, Chiron has been explaining to Thetis that Achilles has been growing more unmanageable of late. Even the centaurs of the locality, those quintessentially uncivilized beings, are finding his boyish pranks uncivil (1.152–5). Statius stages the reactions of Thetis and Chiron to Achilles' arrival quite carefully. As Chiron continues with his report, he begins to compare the boy with the young Hercules and Theseus, until he silences himself abruptly:

"iuvenem Alciden et Thesea vidi –
sed taceo."

figit gelidus Nereida pallor:
ille aderat multo sudore et pulvere maior,
et tamen arma inter festinatosque labores
dulcis adhuc visu.

(1.157–61)

"I myself saw the young Hercules and Theseus – but I am silent." Cold fear pierced the Nereid: he was at hand, seeming older thanks to a great

63 On centaurs as the embodiment of the tension between nature and culture, see Kirk (1970: 152–62).

candor erat, qualem praefert Latonia Luna,
 et color in niveo corpore purpureus,
 ut iuveni primum virgo deducta marito
 inficitur teneras ore rubente genas. ([Tibullus] 3.4.27–32)

His untrimmed locks were flowing down his long neck and his myrtle-wreathed⁶⁷ hair was dripping with Syrian perfume. There was a brightness such as the moon, daughter of Leto, emits, and a ruddy color in his snow-white body, just as a maiden being led away for the first time by her young husband is tinged with a reddish hue on her delicate cheeks.

This same connection of the beauty of a young god and a young woman is present in Statius' description of Achilles: he has long blond hair, white skin, ruddy cheeks and "there was a great deal of his mother in the look of his face" (*plurima vultu | mater inest*, 1.164f).⁶⁸ The femininity implicit in Achilles' looks will, of course, be important to the subsequent plot of the poem.⁶⁹ Here it functions to paint Achilles' adolescence as a mingling of the adult and the child, the male and the female; and, just as for "Lygdamus," the unspoiled beauty of a maiden also suggests the flawlessness of a god.

The intimation of divinity in Achilles' appearance is reinforced by the simile in which Statius compares Achilles, returning from his hunt, to the ephebic god Apollo:

qualis Lycia venator Apollo
 cum redit et saevis permutat plectra pharetris . . . (1.165f)

just as when Apollo the hunter returns from Lycia and trades in his fierce quiver for a lyre . . .

Achilles, like Apollo, is returning from the hunt and after dinner he too will pick up the lyre (1.186f).⁷⁰ The simile marks Achilles as being capable of both violence and art, beautiful in exertion and repose, just like Apollo, hunter and musician. Apollo joins together in his person high civilization and wild nature, just as do Chiron and his nursling, Achilles. This is the partner of another simile later in the poem, which also compares Achilles to a god who reconciles seemingly antithetical qualities via two different cult-aspects and cult-places. In that case the god to whom he is compared is Bacchus, who could combine effeminacy and aggression in a way that reflects Achilles' state at that point in the poem, dressed as a girl and yet purposing violence towards Deidamia.⁷¹ In the present circumstance, the two aspects of Apollo reconcile the tension

67 Or "myrtle-brown."

68 On the mixture of red and white as a feature of the descriptions of beautiful young women, see Tränkle (1990) ad loc.

69 Thus Aricò (1986: 2937).

70 On the Virgilian and Apollonian pedigree of this simile, see above (p 94).

71 On the Bacchus simile, see below (p 253).

between Achilles' ephobic, almost feminine, beauty and the marks of his masculine exertion: high color, sweat, and dust. After Achilles goes to clean himself off, there is another simile comparing him to a divinity; in this next case the god himself is conceived of as tired and sweating, and Statius presents a fully articulated way of assimilating the filthy and the numinous.

Achilles and Castor

After greeting his mother, Achilles goes to wash up before dinner.

protinus ille subit rapido quae proxima saltu
flumina fumantisque genas crinemque novatur
fontibus: Eurotae qualis vada Castor anhelus
intrat equo fessumque sui iubar excitat astri. (1.178–81)

He went right down with a quick leap to the river which was nearest and he refreshed his hair and steaming face, just as Castor enters the shallows of the river Eurotas on his breathless horse and revives the tarnished shine of his star.

We form an image of Castor refreshing himself in a river after exertion; as usual in the iconography, there is a star above his head.⁷² The Dioscuri were regularly represented in Roman art as having stars above their heads, often attached to the tall caps, or *pillei*, they habitually wore.⁷³ The beam of Castor's star is refreshed because his star itself enters the river along with the hero and his horse, to be cleaned of the dust that has covered it and dimmed its sparkle. In order to see the image of the Dioscuri with stars above their heads, most Romans would have needed to look no further than their purse. As patrons of trade at Rome, they appear very frequently on coinage, often adorned by their star.

There is some evidence that Hyginus knew a text in which Castor and Pollux, while setting out with the Argonauts, were said to have had stars literally adorning their heads, as here.⁷⁴ If we look three centuries after Statius, the *Panegyric* to Theodosius credited to Latinus Pacatus Drepanius contains a passage which has a strikingly similar image. Pacatus claims that the emperor's soldiers were miraculously carried along by the wind, and he assures his audience that they may believe this prodigy, on the strength of the gods' past aid to Rome:

⁷² The commentators (Brinkgreve, Jannaccone and to a lesser extent Dilke) have confused this picture by referring to Castor as both a deified horseman and one half of the constellation of Gemini; but Castor clearly has physically entered into the river with his horse (*intrat*, 181), just as Achilles did. The star alludes to his deification, but otherwise the constellation Gemini is not relevant here.

⁷³ See LIMC s.v. "Dioskouroi/Castores," *passim*.

⁷⁴ Thus Jannaccone (ad 181), seconded by Méheust (p 81, n 5): *his . . . stellae in capitibus ut viderentur accidisse scribitur (Fabulae 14.12).*

nec fides anceps: nam si olim severi credidere maiores Castoras geminos albetibus equis et stellatis apicibus insignes pulverem cruoremque Thessalicum aquis Tiberis abluentes et nuntiassent victoriam et imputassent militiam, cur non tuae publicaeque vindictae confessam aliquam immortalis dei curam putemus adnissam?

(*Pan. lat.* 2.39.4)

The reliability of this story is not in doubt. For if once upon a time our stern ancestors believed that the twins, Castor and Pollux, distinguished by their white horses and the stars at the top of their heads, washed off the dirt and blood of Thessaly in the water of the Tiber and announced our victory and boasted of their participation in the fighting, why should we not imagine that a certain expressed concern on the part of immortal God for protecting you and the state did not exert itself?

The old story to which Pacatus refers is the claim that Castor and Pollux used to appear in Rome after an important battle, and would wash off dirt, blood and sweat at the spring of Juturna in the Forum, as though they had taken part in the battle. This tale goes back to the battle of Lake Regillus, where it was said that the pair appeared in battle to help the Roman cavalry, and that later they were seen in Rome washing down their sweaty horses, where they gave the people advance news of the victory that had been achieved. The story was so popular that it was recycled again and again for Roman victories in later ages.⁷⁵ In the fullest versions of the story, which revolve around the battle of Pydna, the horses of the Dioscuri are usually described explicitly as breathless and sweaty, and sometimes blood-spattered too.⁷⁶

The physical appearance of the *lacus Iuturnae* might have suggested this image to Statius. As it stands now, next to the temple of Castor whose foundation was originally vowed by the victor of Regillus, the complex that houses the spring contains a large, nearly square basin with a rectangular podium set in its center. Inside the basin were found the fragments of a Hellenistic, archaizing marble group of the Dioscuri, and a small altar. The podium was likely just large enough for the statues, and they probably stood atop it, in the middle of the pool.⁷⁷ G. W. Clarke (1968) argues that the position of the statues inside the *lacus* accounts in a very literal way for the words of Minucius Felix:

75 The same story was particularly told of Pydna and Vercellae. For reports of this phenomenon in ancient texts, see Pease (1955: ad Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.6); for Greek parallels and bibliography, see Ogilvie (1965: ad Livy 2.20.12). Sironen (1989: 97–103) has a more detailed discussion of the *topos* of the Dioscuri as helpers in battle and messengers of victory.

76 The mention of Thessaly in Pacatus' account indicates that he associated Castor's epiphany with the battle against Perses of Macedon at Pydna.

77 Thus Richardson (1992: 230), *contra* Nash (1968: vol 2, p 11). On the statue group and its dating, see LIMC s.v. "Dioskouroi/Castores," no. 56.

testes equestrum fratrum in lacu, sicut ⟨se⟩ ostenderant, statuæ consecratae, qui anheli spumantibus equis atque fumantibus de Perse victoriam eadem die qua fecerant nuntiaverunt. (Oct. 7.3)

Take as witnesses the statues in the lake of the equestrian brothers, consecrated just as they had appeared, who, breathless, and on horses that were foaming and steaming, announced the victory over Perses on the same day on which they had accomplished it.

Unfortunately, these statues are too fragmentary for us to know whether they had *pillei* adorned with stars, and thus whether they might constitute the source of Statius' image. Also found inside the pool was a small altar. On one side the Dioscuri appear in relief, with stars atop their *pillei*, but they are leaning on their lances and their horses are not pictured. The altar sits at present on a ledge surrounding the basin; its original location is unknown. The altar has been dated to the era of Trajan, but it is likely that even in Statius' day the iconography in the area around the *lacus Iuturnae* should have featured images of the Dioscuri, marked out, as was normal, by stars.⁷⁸ There is some evidence that Domitian might have been involved in renovating the *lacus Iuturnae* as part of his reconstruction of this part of the forum, but it is not conclusive.⁷⁹

What is the point of Statius' allusion to events from Roman history in the midst of a poem about Greek mythology? We saw that Achilles returned to Chiron's cave covered in dirt and sweat, and yet he had something superhuman about him. Statius tries to convey a sense of this by means of a simile comparing him to Apollo, but even Apollo the Lycian hunter fails to capture the right combination of exertion and sublimity. So too the traditional vocabulary of divine and human beauty (*purpureus, niveus, aurum* "ruddy, snow-white, golden") fails the poet's purpose. So he turns away from the usual stuff of epic to a very Roman point of comparison in order to convey an impression of a god making an epiphany, yet covered in blood, dust, and sweat. Castor is carefully naturalized to the genre, however; he bathes in the Eurotas, the river of Sparta, his home, rather than the *lacus Iuturnae* or the Tiber.

Coruscating, attended by a star, yet filthy and walking among men, the demigod Castor replicates Achilles' liminal position between the divine and the mortal. After he comes in from the hunt, Achilles washes himself and then proceeds into the cave where, in the lair of a beast, he will partake of the human pleasures provided by Chiron – meat (presumably cooked), wine and

⁷⁸ Another visual representation of the horse-bathing scene along with stars comes from a series of *denarii* minted by A. Postumius Albinus, a descendant of the victor of Lake Regillus. These coins depict the twins, who are identified by a star, leading their horses to drink. See Grueber (1970: vol 2, p 310, nos. 718–23), not pictured; LIMC s.v. "Dioskouroi/Castores," no. 147, not pictured; Crawford (1974: 335), illustrated on plate 43, no. 11.

⁷⁹ See Steinby in Steinby (1993– : s.v. "Lacus Iuturnae," vol 3, p 170) and Steinby (1989: 32). Also see Chronographus anni 354 in Mommsen (1892: 146) with Coarelli (1981: 72–5).

music. The river not only washes the dust from him, it also serves as a threshold to the cave, a boundary he crosses before entering human society again, even if that society problematically consists of a half-beast and a goddess. The Castor simile not only adds a Roman touch, it also lends to Achilles' arrival at Chiron's cave something of the nature of an epiphany. Alluding to the Dioscuri just as they were wont to appear to the Roman people adds an almost "realistic" note to Achilles' numinousness. Achilles, as we will now see, is not the only character in this scene whose divinity is sketched by Statius with reference to the realia of Roman religious life.

Thetis at the Table

After Achilles has embraced his mother and washed up, he joins her in the meal that Chiron has prepared for them:

tunc libare dapes Baccheaque munera Chiron
 orat. (1.184f)

Then Chiron begged her to taste the meal and the gifts of Bacchus.

The fact of Thetis' divinity makes this more than an ordinary dinnertime. Statius elides any difficulty about the particular dietary requirements of the goddess by not mentioning the substance of the meal, but at the same time his language draws attention to the issue of sacrifice as food for the gods. The words *libare* "to taste," *dapes* "meal," and *orat* "beg" each have a religious connotation, the metaphor more or less diluted by usage. In the case of *orare*, the religious significance was not original, but was growing more common. On the other hand, *libare* and *daps* were originally very much ritual terms associated with giving sacrifice. *Libare* is the proper term for pouring out a portion of anything as an offering to a god; this was its original significance, before it was extended to the metaphor of tasting or sipping a small portion of something.⁸⁰ The original meaning of *daps* was a sacrificial meal in honor of a god. This sense was still very much current in Statius' day, and its extension to mean a secular festive meal was a recent innovation, as yet limited to poetry; the religious metaphor was certainly not dead yet.⁸¹ It is a word appropriate to the context in both its senses: Chiron is hosting a party for his guest; but since his guest is a goddess, it is also technically speaking a divine offering.⁸²

80 TLL 7.2.1338.16.

81 TLL 5.1.38.4–53. The mingling of religious and secular contexts in this passage of the *Achilleid* is illustrated by the way the TLL has erroneously classified Chiron's *dapes* under the rubric *terminus sacralis*.

82 On a similar issue, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1978: ad Hor. *Carm.* 2.7.17), and compare the mingling of religious and secular senses for these same words at Virg. *Aen.* 3.300–5 and 3.354f, and at Virg. *Aen.* 5.77 and 5.92.

As Dumézil (1970: 567) observes, “To feed the god at the altar is the object of every sacrifice. To serve him a meal is another matter.” Thetis is simultaneously both the guest at a social gathering and a goddess receiving an offering of food. The metaphorical and literal senses of *daps* collapse into one for her, making the occasion both a family dinner and a theoxeny too. What makes this condensation of religious offering and social gathering natural is that the two were habitually combined in Roman cult. Not only were *dapes* given at which humans dined in honor of a god, and perhaps in memory of a deceased person, but there were also the *lectisternium* and similar rituals.⁸³ In these rites, statues of the gods were arranged as if guests at a banquet. In fact, Chiron’s cave had hosted just such a gathering of gods on the occasion of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (I.109f).⁸⁴

Statius uses ritual terminology to convey a sense of Thetis’ divinity in the midst of a cozy domestic scene. The sitting down together for dinner of mortal and immortal is modeled on a Roman way of accommodating the human and the divine together in a social setting. In this it shares something in common with the simile comparing Achilles to Castor. These allusions to specifically Roman myth and cult serve to reify for a Roman audience the issues of life and death that confront Achilles and Thetis. The failure of Achilles to achieve immortality is made more poignant by comparison with the heavenly Castor. After meddling temporarily in the affairs of men, he can wash away mortality with the dirt from his heels. Achilles, on the other hand, cannot set mortal cares aside. In fact, he proceeds straight to a dinner with his mother which is figured as a sacrifice, a rite that emphasizes the distance separating them. In some versions of the myth, Castor possesses only partial immortality, sharing it in alternation with his twin; Achilles likewise has one foot in this world and one in eternity. On the other hand, Chiron, his less-than-human surrogate father, and his cave-dwelling upbringing connect him with the animal world. Next, we shall see that Achilles’ homecoming is presented not only as a divine epiphany but also as the return of a dangerous beast to his lair.

Thetis and the Lioness

Achilles is returning home to Chiron’s cave from hunting when he meets his mother, and he is carrying with him some lion cubs, whose mother he has

83 On the *lectisternium* and *epulum Iovis*, see Latte (1960: 242–4) and Dumézil (1970: 567f); on the history of the rite and its introduction to Rome in 399 BC, see Beard et al. (1998: vol 1, p 63; vol 2, p 130), and Ogilvie (1965: ad Livy 5.13.5–8).

84 Statius tells us that the *signa* and the couches of the gods from that occasion were still pointed out. These *signa* have variously been explained as “tokens,” “images,” “insignia,” and “traces” of the gods, or as merely identical to the couches themselves; but they could also be “statues,” as in a *lectisternium*.

attacked and killed. When he sees Thetis, he throws them aside and runs to embrace her:

forte et laetus adest – O quantum gaudia formae
 adiciunt! – : fetam Pholoes sub rupe leaenam
 perculerat ferro vacuisque reliquerat antris
 ipsam, sed catulos adportat et incitat unguis.
 quos tamen, ut fido genetrix in limine visa est,
 abicit exceptamque avidis circumligat ulnis,
 iam gravis amplexu iamque aequus vertice matri. (1.167–73)

By chance the boy is present and happy too – O how much happiness adds to beauty! – on the slopes of Mt. Pholoe he had run through with his sword a lioness who had just given birth, and he had left her behind in her empty cave, but he brought along her cubs and was making them extend their claws. But when the mother was seen in the trusted threshold, he threw them down and embraced her with eager arms, already strong in his embrace and already his mother's equal in height.

The dead lioness and her cubs are a metaphor for Thetis and her son; Mendelsohn's reading of these lines is worth quoting at length:

The immediacy and vividness of lines 168–70, with their focus on the slaughtered lioness, do not prepare us for the sudden shift of attention to Thetis in line 171. I suggest that it is the poet's intention to create uncertainty here as to which *genetrix* is actually meant, the lioness or Thetis. This momentary blurring of identity serves to establish a powerful parallel between Thetis and the lioness that has compelling ramifications . . . Here the lioness is pointedly described as having just given birth (*fetam*), that is, specifically in its maternal function. Achilles' violence to the newly delivered mother, *fetam . . . leaenam | perculerat ferro* (168f), which Aricò (1986: 2937) rightly calls “un certo selvaggio sadismo,” thus recalls the wounds described by Thetis in her “dream,” *infensos utero mihi contuor ensis* (1.131). (1990: 300f)

The word *genetrix* “mother” does indeed seem at first to point to the lioness, rather than to Thetis.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the words “but when the mother was seen in the trusted threshold” (*tamen, ut fido genetrix in limine visa est*), couched as they are in the passive voice seem at first to refer not to Achilles, but rather to the lion cubs seeing their mother (*genetrix*) and witnessing the attack on her at the threshold of their own den. Only at the beginning of the next verse and the verb *abicit* “he threw down” are we wrenched into the present tense. We then realize that the *genetrix* “mother” is not the lioness but Thetis and the *limen* “threshold” is the entrance to the cave, not of the lioness, but of Chiron. This

85 For *genetrix* used of animals, especially lionesses, see TLL 6.2.1822.77–1823.1, s.v. “genitor (genetrix).”

momentary equivalence between Thetis and the lioness and between Achilles and her cubs is made possible by the poet's careful stage management. He carefully places both mothers in caves, so that both are standing "on the trusted threshold" (*fido . . . in limine*).

This lioness has recently given birth, and so she is presumably nursing her cubs when Achilles kills her.⁸⁶ Given the identification of Thetis and the lioness, Mendelsohn recalls the "dream" Thetis invented to tell to Chiron. In this fictitious nightmare she claims to have imagined that she gave suck to wild animals (1.132f). The irony is that this invented nightmare has, in a way, come true. Achilles, whom she never nursed, but gave to a half-beast to be raised in a cave and suckled on the entrails of wild animals, has turned into a being with all of the ferocity of an animal. As Statius says: "alas! the foreboding of a parent is never in vain!" (*heu numquam vana parentum | auguria!* 1.25f). These playful lion cubs that have yet to realize their deadly powers are an ideal metaphor for the young Achilles as he is presented in the *Achilleid* along with the precocious violence (*vis festina*, 1.148) rapidly developing in him. Thetis, like the lioness, will be powerless to protect her offspring, who will be carried off by strangers.

Achilles, as he stands on the threshold of Chiron's cave, is on the threshold of great changes in his life. Statius describes his hero as being at the turning point of manhood: "not yet had the first stage of life been transformed with a new beard" (*necdum prima nova lanugine vertitur aetas*, 1.163), which is why he is able to impersonate a girl. Achilles is at a crossroads not only of age and gender but also of existential categories. With Peleus and Phoenix out of the picture, the two parental figures that Statius has supplied for Achilles are an absentee goddess and a centaur foster-father; each of these pull him in opposite directions, toward heaven and toward the raw existence of an animal. Achilles' dilemma is a vivid illustration of the situation of any mortal man, in that he must find a *modus vivendi* between these two poles of being. The *Achilleid* is not unique in ancient literature for exploring these concerns. It might be said that heroism as considered in Latin epic is an exploration of man *in extremis*, and so it tends to map the points where the human realm borders on the divine on the one side and on the bestial on the other. Compare Feeney's discussion of Hercules and Cacus in the *Aeneid*:

According to Evander, the monster Cacus is *semihominis* ("half-man," "semi-human," 8.194), and he means that the other half is a beast, as he shows seventy lines later, when he calls him *semiferi* ("half-beast," 8.267); yet the god Vulcan is the creature's father (198), so that he is half-god as well. Hercules' semi-divine parentage likewise places him beyond the normal categories of humanity. Bestial and divine both surround the human, and extreme behaviour on either fringe may meet, so as to be indistin-

86 This is an indication of Achilles' fearlessness: on the proverbial fierceness of nursing lionesses, see Ov. *Met.* 13.547.

guishable. When Servius explains Hercules' difficult epithet of *communis* as meaning "between gods and men" (8.275), he may be mistaking the gist of that particular passage, but he is putting his finger on something determinative about the significance of Hercules.⁸⁷

The problem of Achilles' ontology – his position as not quite a son of Zeus on the one hand and not quite a son of Chiron on the other – is not merely his own; it is an encapsulation of the human condition considered as a state of being lying uneasily between the divine and the bestial.

Achilles finally becomes a man under the tutelage of Ulysses, and it is Ulysses who throws around the terms *semivir* "half-man," *semifer* "half-beast," and *semideus* "half-god." He does not apply these terms to Achilles, but applies them scornfully to others, while speaking to Achilles. Thus the Argonauts are *semidei* (2.77), even as they run away like cowards from Aetes; and Chiron is a *semifer* (1.868). The effeminate Paris is called a *semivir* (2.78), in terms which recall Achilles' behavior on Scyros just as much as Paris' behavior in Sparta.⁸⁸ The epithets *semifer* or *semideus* point to what Achilles might have been; Ulysses addresses Achilles in this way as part of his scheme to point the hero away from his past and forward toward his destiny as a man. On Scyros, Ulysses knew that the cross-dressed Achilles' identity was under negotiation not only between the male and female, but also between the human, feral, and divine. This comes out in the way Ulysses addresses him at the moment he tricks Achilles to reveal his identity. He does not call him by name, as we might expect; instead he refers to his nonhuman quasi-parental figures:

quid haeres?
 tu semiferi Chironis alumnus
 tu caeli pelagique nepos. (1.867–9)

Why do you hesitate? . . . You are the nursling of the half-beast Chiron,
 you are the grandson of the sky and sea.

This yet another clear illustration of the near-total absence of Peleus from the epic. In default of a real father to guide him, Achilles looks to Zeus, who almost was his father, and to Chiron, who has been his foster-father. The problem is that neither of these examples can teach Achilles how to behave as a man. Theis steps into the resulting vacuum and creates an Achilles in her own image, an image that endures until the arrival of Ulysses finally brings a role model who can guide Achilles to his destiny.

⁸⁷ Feeney (1991: 159). On the liminality of Cacus and Hercules with respect to gender in Virgil and Propertius, see further Lindheim (1998) and Janan (1998 and 2001: 142–5).

⁸⁸ See above (p 176). *semivir* here has its usual sense of "unmanly" (cf. Virg. *Aen.* 4.215), rather than its Ovidian sense of "half-human" (*Her.* 9.141, *Ars am.* 2.24, *Fast.* 5.380; but it has its usual meaning at *Met.* 4.386).

* 5 *

Transvestism in Myth and Ritual

Origin is not to be identified with *meaning*.

H. S. Versnel*

WE MAY TURN now to the centerpiece of the action of the *Achilleid*: the episode on Scyros, and the question of how this odd interlude became a part of Achilles' mythical biography. Statius may have been drawn to the story of Achilles' transvestism at least in part because it had not, to our knowledge, been told at great length by any poet since Euripides, nor ever in the epic genre; as he says at the outset, "more incidents [from the life of Achilles] are still available."¹ As we shall now see, Statius was quite right to claim that the Scyros episode was completely foreign to epic before the *Achilleid*. We would like to know how Statius differed in his treatment from earlier versions of the episode in literature and art, but, unfortunately, very few of the materials necessary for such an investigation have survived. Among Roman authors, the account of the Scyros episode in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* occupies a special place, even though it is very brief, since Statius seems to have been responding to it in some important ways; we will therefore defer it for a detailed discussion in the next chapter. Apart from Ovid and the odd casual reference (e.g. Prop. 2.9.16, Hor. *Carm.* 1.8.13–16) there is no extended treatment of the Scyros myth in Latin verse before Statius.²

* Versnel (1993: 242, italics in original), on which see Feeney (1998: 115).

¹ *sed plura vacant* (1.4).

² Bickel's argument (1937) that the *Achilles* of Livius Andronicus, of which only one line survives, was based on Euripides' *Scyrians* is pure speculation.

If we trace the Scyros myth backward in time from Statius, we come first to the Hellenistic age, where we find a small scrap of an epithalamium for Achilles and Deidamia, which was once ascribed to Bion.³ This piece probably influenced Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and, while it is possible that Statius knew the poem as well, there is no passage where its influence on the *Achilleid* could not be attributed equally to Ovid.⁴ This fragment does introduce several motifs into the story that we also find in Statius: Achilles is androgynous in appearance, he works with wool, he presses his attentions on Deidamia, and he maintains the fiction of his femininity even in private. Of these, the closest congruence comes when Statius describes how Achilles picked out Deidamia from among her companions and chose to spend time with her alone (1.560–91). The disguised Achilles teaches Deidamia how to play the lyre and she helps him with his weaving. The lyre lessons afford him the opportunity of touching her, guiding her hands and kissing her in sisterly praise when she does well:

dulcia notae
 fila lyrae tenuesque modos et carmina monstrat
 Chironis ducitque manum digitosque sonanti
 infringit citharae, nunc occupat ora canentis
 et ligat amplexus et mille per oscula laudat. (1.573–6)

He shows her the sweet strings of the lyre he knows so well and its gentle tones and Chiron's songs; and he guides her hand and strikes her fingers against the instrument to make it play. Then he kisses her lips as she sings and embraces her warmly and praises her as he gives her a thousand kisses.

It is possible that this may have been inspired by this description of the secretly cross-dressed Achilles importuning Deidamia with equal relentlessness:

ἐξ ἁοῦς δ' ἐπὶ νύκτα παρίζετο Δηϊδαμείᾳ
 καὶ ποτὲ μὲν τήνας ἐφίλει χεῖρα, πολλάκι δ' αὐτᾶς
 στάμονα καλὸν ἄειρε, τὰ δαίδαλα δ' ἄτρι' ἐπῆνει. ([Bion] 2.22–4)

From dawn until nighttime he sat near Deidamia and sometimes kissed her hands, often lifting up her lovely weaving and continually praising its ornate work.

When that fragment breaks off, the disguised Achilles is in the midst of a disingenuous attempt to convince Deidamia to share a bed with him. This seems to have inspired Ovid, for whom the rape of Deidamia was a direct result of the physical proximity of boy and girl sharing the same quarters.⁵ By contrast, Statius situates the rape outdoors, in a nearly public setting. There

3 [Bion] 2, *Bucolici graeci* (ed. Gow, OCT).

4 Hollis (1977: ad Ov. *Ars am.* 1.681–704).

5 *forte erat in thalamo virgo regalis eodem* (Ov. *Ars am.* 1.697).

are other divergences, too: in the fragment ascribed to Bion, Thetis is not mentioned, and there seems to be a rival or chaperone who stands between the couple. The fragment we have breaks off after only thirty-two lines, so there is not a great deal we can know about its possible influence on Statius.

Euripides

For Statius the most influential treatment of Achilles among the women of Scyros would probably have been Euripides' lost play on the subject, the *Σκύριοι*, a work that has usually been classed among the poet's early plays.⁶ Nothing is known directly about the circumstances of its first performance, but given the nontragic subject matter, Körte (1934: 12) guessed that it stood like the *Alcestis* as a melodrama in lieu of a satyr-play at the end of a tetralogy. Very little of the play survives: there are a handful of quoted fragments, the longest of which is of five lines, and a fragment of a hypothesis on papyrus, which gives us the first line and some background to the plot, and then breaks off just as it is beginning to describe the action of the play itself.⁷ A certain amount can be reconstructed on the basis of these fragments, and the assumption that Statius knew the play can also help.⁸

The influence of Euripides on Statius is assured, despite the exiguous state of his play, because Statius signalled the debt overtly. After the narrative of Deidamia's rape in the *Achilleid*, there intervene several lines in which the princess debates whether she should confess to her father what happened. At this point she makes reference to a figure whose presence is never alluded to anywhere else in the poem:

unam placet addere furtis
altricem sociam, precibus quae victa duorum
adnuat. illa astu tacito raptumque pudorem
surgentemque uterum atque aegros in pondere menses
occuluit, plenis donec stata tempora metis
attulit et partus index Lucina resolvit. (1.669–74)

6 There seems to be no firm evidence for dating the play early, but more a general intuition; thus Robert (1923: 1108), and *contra*, Jouan (1966: 216–18). That Sophocles' play of the same name treated an entirely different circumstance, the fetching of Neoptolemus to Troy, was demonstrated long ago by Tyrwhitt (thus Robert, 1881: 34).

7 The fragments are F 682–6 Nauck (1889), and have recently been re-edited by Jouan and Van Looy (2002: 72–4). Gallavotti (1933) discovered the hypothesis and re-edited it (1951); it has also been published by, among others, Austin (1968) and Luppe (1982). Its state is imperfect and there have been some minor differences regarding the supplements added, but none materially affect the interpretation of the hypothesis. Its accuracy is relatively secure, not only because of its general congruence with the brief accounts of the Scyros episode found in Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.13.8) and Hyginus (*Fabulae* 96), but also because the hypothesis that precedes it on the alphabetically ordered papyrus scrap is of the *Rhesus*, and it agrees well with our manuscripts of that play.

8 See Körte (1934), Waldner (2000: 82–6), and Jouan and Van Looy (2002: 65–70).

She decided to admit one ally to her secret, her nurse, who agreed after being worn down by the entreaties of them both. She concealed with quiet guile the girl's stolen virginity, her swelling womb, and the months of illness through her pregnancy, until her course was run and Lucina, goddess of childbirth, brought her destined time around and guided her through the delivery of her child.

So this nurse, the couple's sole confidante, helps them conceal the pregnancy and birth. The nurse then disappears from the epic as quickly as she entered it. Her cameo appearance raises a few questions. Why do we need to know about her at all? What purpose does it serve to introduce a new character for the space of only six lines? Statius could have described the concealment of Deidamia's pregnancy just as economically without introducing us to its agent, or he could have referred to the help of her sisters, for Deidamia is not an only child in the *Achilleid*. The answer is surely that these lines are a nod to Euripides. While nurses may be sometimes found in epic, the sudden and superfluous presence here of a nurse, tragic and Euripidean figure *par excellence*, should alert us to the possibility of an interloper from that genre.⁹ The few fragments of Euripides' *Scyrians* that we have permit us to know that Deidamia's nurse was indeed a character in that play:

⟨Τρ.⟩ ἡ παῖς νοσεῖ σοῦ κάπικινδύνως ἔχει.
 ⟨Λυκ.⟩ πρὸς τοῦ; τίς αὐτὴν πημονὴ δαμάζεται;
 μῶν κρυμὸς αὐτῆς πλευρὰ γυμνάζει χολῆς;
 (F 682 Nauck)

Nurse] Your daughter is sick and is in danger.
 Lycomedes] What from? What affliction overcomes her?
 Does a chilling of the bile afflict her chest with
 pleurisy?¹⁰

The hypothesis tells us that Deidamia was motherless and so scholars have been unanimous in attributing the first line to Deidamia's nurse; we are explicitly told that the following two are spoken by Lycomedes.¹¹ Perhaps the nurse manages to deflect Lycomedes' curiosity at this stage, perhaps not. The question of whether the nurse succeeds in continuing to hide the nature of Deidamia's illness is critical for a reconstruction of Euripides' play, but it is not so important for our purposes. What is clear is that the nurse is presented here as the agent concealing Deidamia's pregnancy. By a fortunate chance we know

9 Körte (1934) thought that the very brevity of the nurse's appearance in the *Achilleid* indicates that the likelihood of a connection between Statius and Euripides is also very slight; but the opposite conclusion should be drawn: the nurse appears briefly, because her only function in the epic is to provide a pointer to Euripides' play. Körte notes that nurses may be found in Latin hexameter, but that does not diminish their far more usual association with tragedy.

10 On Deidamia's illness, see Jouan and Van Looy (2002: 71, n 55).

11 Thus Körte (1934: 5), Jouan (1966: 209) and Webster (1967: 96).

that the nurse served the same purpose for Euripides as she does for Statius. It is no wonder, then, that Statius does not elaborate on how Deidamia kept her confinement a secret from her father; the invocation here of the Euripidean nurse tells the reader the answer: she feigned an illness. Statius deploys his nurse almost as a footnote: for further details on Deidamia's pregnancy and the method of its concealment, cf. Euripides' *Scyrians*.

To return then to the plot of the *Scyrians*, one possible reconstruction of the order of the fragments is given by Webster (1967: 97). The play begins with a prologue in which someone, probably Thetis or possibly the nurse, apostrophizes Helen, as we are told by the papyrus hypothesis. Then the nurse tells Lycomedes that Deidamia is ill (F 682 Nauck), and someone, perhaps the nurse, urges the wisdom of dissimulating domestic problems (F 683 Nauck). Lycomedes bemoans the capriciousness of fate toward mortals (F 684 Nauck). Presumably, after the birth of Neoptolemus occurs, Odysseus and Diomedes arrive on the island (F 686 Nauck). Achilles is discovered, though probably not by means of the usual stratagem of the weapons hidden among the gifts (see below). Odysseus upbraids Achilles for avoiding the war (F incert. 880 Nauck), and for spinning wool, despite his high birth (F 683a Nauck). At the end of the play, Achilles presumably left Scyros, after reconciling the obligations of love and honor.

There is not much that can be gleaned from these scraps, but in a few places we may see where Statius has followed or diverged from the Euripidean model. To begin with, the first line contains an invocation of Helen that probably formed part of a diatribe spoken by Thetis, evidently placing blame for the whole situation on her shoulders.¹² The *Achilleid* also begins with Thetis, likewise furious at the elopement of Helen with Paris. Statius directs Thetis' anger more at Paris than Helen, in keeping with her recapitulation of the role of Juno at the start of the *Aeneid*. But her diatribe against the fleet of Paris may owe something to this Euripidean prologue, assuming that it was spoken by Thetis.

Deidamia is motherless, which helps her in her deception of her father, and Statius implicitly agrees in this; but the most striking thing we can learn from the hypothesis is that, apparently, Euripides' Deidamia is an only child.¹³ The

¹² Such was Gallivotti's original suggestion, but some disagreement was voiced by Körte (1934: 3–4), who would rather give the prologue to the nurse. His objection to Thetis is that, because her plans are frustrated in the course of the drama, she is not an appropriate figure to speak the prologue; but the nurse's plans to conceal Deidamia's pregnancy are equally frustrated. Jouan (1966: 208), and Jouan and Van Looy (2002: 65) follow Körte, but Webster (1967: 96) sees that Thetis is the only character with sufficiently ample knowledge of the situation to trace it back to its causes. As he notes, even Achilles himself has imperfect knowledge; he is likely not even to know who Helen is at this point, so why should the nurse know any more?

¹³ The circumstantial evidence for this conclusion, adduced by Körte (1934: 4f), is strong; the hypothesis introduces Deidamia as if Lycomedes had no other children: "This man [Lycomedes]

consequence, as Körte pointed out, is that in Euripides' version of the story, Odysseus must not have required any devious stratagem in order to find Achilles out. Since the only two maidens in the household were Lycomedes' single daughter and a stranger, and the chorus was all male, it would not have taken much cleverness to solve the puzzle of finding Achilles. So there was probably no elaborate trap involving gifts and a trumpeter such as we find in the *Achilleid* and so many visual representations.¹⁴ Instead, we may speculate that Euripides concentrated on articulating the competing claims on Achilles of his love for Deidamia and his desire for glory. Some of the rhetoric Odysseus must have deployed to sway him, as surviving in two of the fragments (F incert. 880 Nauck and F 683a Nauck), may be reflected in the *Achilleid* (1.795–802, 1.867–74). We might imagine that the *Scyrians* had some affinity with Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, with love rather than hate as the obstacle to the hero's departure for Troy.

It follows therefore that some of the most theatrical moments in the *Achilleid* do not derive from Euripides at all. The scene of Achilles' discovery (1.841–85), with its complex movement and staging, thus evokes, as has long been recognized, the popular visual representations of the scene in Roman art, but it does so in a way that is nearly unprecedented in any other literary representation of whose existence we have notice.¹⁵ As a result of departing from Euripides, Statius gave himself the chance to introduce a host of other young females on Scyros, "into whose colorful swarm the young hero disappeared."¹⁶ It is an opportunity that Statius seized with enthusiasm. There may be no chorus of girls in Euripides' *Scyrians*, but there are several in the *Achilleid*, and significantly so. Achilles exists as a girl among girls, sometimes blending smoothly in, sometimes standing awkwardly out, but he is always seen in a thoroughly female milieu. As we saw in the previous chapter, this opens up remarkable possibilities for burlesque.

was raising his daughter, named Deidamia, who had lost her mother" (τρέφων δ' ἔκεινο[ς θυγατέρα] μητρὸς ὄρφανήν ὄνομα [α Δηιδάμειαν]). Then the nurse refers to her simply as "child" (ἡ παῖς) in the fragment quoted above (p 196); it seems that was enough to identify her to her father. Finally, the chorus of the play is made up of male Scyrians, Σκύριοι, and not female Σκύρια as would likely have been the case if the play had featured a crowd of girls in Lycomedes' household, as the *Achilleid* does.

¹⁴ At the very most, it is possible that the trumpeter who fools Achilles into thinking an attack is imminent may belong to Euripides' version, since Apollodorus mentions him (*Bibl.* 3.13.8). On the other hand, the weapons mixed among the gifts would have no point at all unless there were a plurality of maidens.

¹⁵ For Roman wall paintings, mosaics, and sarcophagi showing the discovery of Achilles, see LIMC s.v. "Achilleus," nos. 107–66. The most important model for these, especially for the Pompeian wall paintings, was apparently Athenion's painting of the scene as described by Pliny (35.134); for bibliography, see LIMC s.v. "Achilleus," no. 105 [Kossatz-Deissmann]. Almost all of these show a plurality of girls, and so probably belong to a different tradition from Euripides.

¹⁶ "in deren buntem Schwarm der jugendliche Held verschwand," Körte (1934: 4).

Polygnotus and Cimon

Continuing our movement backward in time from Statius, we find that the earliest certain attestation of the story of Achilles in female disguise comes slightly earlier than Euripides' play.¹⁷ When Pausanias describes the already ancient and faded paintings executed by Polygnotus that hung in the Propylaea of the Athenian Acropolis, he lists among the subjects represented there the sacrifice of Polyxena at the tomb of Achilles. He approves of Homer for having avoided mentioning a nasty act like that, and then makes the following comment:

εὖ δέ μοι φαίνεται ποιῆσαι Σκύρον ὑπὸ Ἀχιλλέως ἀλοῦσαν, οὐδὲν ὁμοίως
καὶ ὅσοι λέγουσιν ὁμοῦ ταῖς παρθένους Ἀχιλλέα ἔχειν ἐν Σκύρω δίαταν,
ἃ δὴ καὶ Πολύγνωτος ἔγραψεν. (1.22.6)

It also seems to me that he did well to depict Scyros as having been sacked by Achilles, as opposed to those who say that he led his life on Scyros together with the maidens, which Polygnotus has in fact also painted.

Polygnotus' painting of the sacrifice of Polyxena reminds Pausanias of another incident from the Trojan War myth that in his view Homer had been right to suppress: Achilles at Scyros. Pausanias does not quite say that Polygnotus' painting of Achilles among the women was specifically at the Propylaea, however.¹⁸ Wherever this painting may have stood in Pausanias' day, it will not have been meant originally for the Periclean Propylaea, as the time of the painter's activity is generally reckoned to have been the 470s through the 440s, while the Propylaea was built between 436 and 432 B.C. It is likely that the paintings were executed for Polygnotus' patron, Cimon, and then possibly moved to the Propylaea by Pericles' architect, Mnesikles.¹⁹ It seems that a previously unheard-of myth concerning Achilles in Scyros suddenly appeared in Cimon's Athens around the time of the conquest of that island by Cimon himself (ca. 476–463 B.C.), as recounted by Thucydides.²⁰ Others have noted the propaganda value to Cimon of various mythological paintings by Polygnotus and Mikon.²¹

It is surely no coincidence that the story of Achilles among the women of Scyros appears for the first time in the history of Greek myth at the precise time and place that the island was colonized by Athens.²² The likelihood of

17 If, as argued below, Polygnotus' painting was inspired by Cimon's expedition to Scyros, then it predates Euripides' first entry in the City Dionysia in 455 B.C. by a decade or more. Robert (1881: 34) argues that Euripides' drama was directly inspired by Polygnotus; see also Kullmann (1960: 191).

18 As Robert (1881: 34) cautions.

19 As argued by Jeffery (1965: 45–6); see also Robertson (1975: vol 1, p 245, n 153).

20 On the dating, see Podlecki (1971).

21 Jeffery (1965) and Robertson (1975: vol 1, 242–5); they naturally focus on other paintings whose content lends itself more readily to a political reading than this one; see also Simon (1963).

22 See the next section for a demonstration that the myth was not widely known before Polygnotus.

coincidence is reduced still further if we consider that we know of an equivalent case in which Cimon capitalized upon the mythological potential of Scyros for his own propaganda. The only other event of significance in Greek myth that happened on Scyros, apart from the involvement of Achilles and Neoptolemus, was the murder there of Theseus by Lycomedes. Once again this is a tale whose first appearance in the mythical record is attested in Cimon's Athens.²³ Cimon made much of returning Theseus' bones from Scyros to Attica, and he raised a funeral mound in Athens to which hero cult was thereafter given. For the sake of rounding out the biography that the Athenians gradually developed for him, Theseus was provided with a death tale, and there may be reasons to explain why it had to happen in exile from Athens, but why set it in such an obscure place as Scyros?²⁴ The answer seems to be that it fitted in nicely with Cimon's war plans: the story that Theseus retired to his property there was an invented mythological precedent for an Athenian proprietary interest in the island, and the treachery of Lycomedes provided a *casus belli* for the Athenian invasion. The only thing that remains to be explained is the notion that Lycomedes pushed Theseus off a cliff. It would have provided a particularly ignominious crime for Cimon to avenge; it explains how a nonentity like Lycomedes could have been responsible for the death of a hero such as Theseus; finally, the specific modality of Theseus' death – to be pushed from a cliff – might well have been adapted from an element of some local story on Scyros.²⁵

The story of the death of Theseus and the story of Achilles among the maidens both seem to have been imported from Scyros to Athens at around the same time and promoted there by Cimon. Yet the tales differ in one important way. The death of Theseus on Scyros is neatly explicable in political terms, and it serves Athenian interests down to its minutest particular. By contrast, the propaganda value of Achilles' Scyros story is unclear. Cimon's objective would seem to have been even better served by the already existing story from the archaic epics that Achilles had attacked and sacked the place. Cimon would thus be following in the Homeric Achilles' footsteps in sacking Scyros. So why did the story of Achilles' involvement in the island change from one that would better suit the conquerors to one less tailored to their purposes? Why did Polygnotus promulgate the transvestite episode at all, if its political value was nil?

23 Thucydides tells the story of Cimon "finding" Theseus' bones in Scyros (1.98.2); the complete story of Theseus' death there is first found in Diodorus (Diodorus 4.64.4), and thereafter in Plutarch (*Thes.* 35), Pausanias (1.17.6), and Apollodorus (*Epit.* 1.24).

24 Gantz (1993: 297–8) makes an interesting guess about the circumstance that might have obliged the Athenians to invent a death-in-exile tale for Theseus. He suggests that the absence of Theseus' sons from the Catalog of Athenians in the *Iliad* (2.545–56) was an awkwardness that demanded such an explanation as this.

25 For what it is worth, the site of the ancient acropolis on Scyros is perched atop a very precipitous rocky eminence, presumably the source of its Homeric epithet, "steep" (Σκῦρον ... ἀίπειαν, *Il.* 9.668).

Carl Robert gave some thought to the problem, and his solution is appealing. According to him, the notion that Neoptolemus was a native Scyrian and a descendant of their royal house was flattering to local vanity, and conversely the story that his birth was the result of Achilles' successful sack of the island was an insult to their pride. The locals therefore said that Achilles had not come there as an aggressor, but as a draft evader from the Trojan War, hiding among their women.²⁶ This model accounts for the motivation behind the change of story, but it is not without its problems. It assumes that these locals would have had the power, despite their defeat, to promulgate at Athens their own version of Achilles' stay on the island, and that their mouthpiece in doing so was Polygnotus from Thasos, supposedly a fellow Ionian from an island off the coast of Thrace.²⁷ While Polygnotus, being from Thasos, was an "Ionian artist" (*ionische Künstler*), it is hard to see why he should have been so keen to uphold the honor of another island, particularly one that had never to our knowledge been Ionian at all, but rather was inhabited at that time, as Thucydides (1.98.2) says, by Dolopes from Thessaly.²⁸ Scyros is not really very near Thasos, and Polygnotus, though born in Thasos, was a naturalized Athenian citizen. Given this, should we really look in Polygnotus' work for the voice of the feelings of these dispossessed and enslaved Thessalian pirates rather than of his own friend and patron, Cimon? Rather, it seems that, in the process of the Athenian takeover of Scyros, a complex merger of traditions took place, combining elements of Athenian propaganda, such as the murder of Theseus, with elements of local color, such as the myth of Achilles' transvestism.

The circumstantial evidence is strong that the introduction of the story of Achilles among the women into the body of Greek myth was directly connected with Cimon's sack of the island. What conclusions can be inferred from this, and what relevance does it have for the *Achilleid*? If the Achilles-on-Scyros myth was a local tradition on an obscure island, and it only entered wider circulation after Cimon's conquest, then some of the claims that have been made for the myth are less likely. As we will see, it is sometimes assumed that the Scyros myth was an ancient and authentic part of Achilles' biography, which, as Pausanias said, Homer chose to pass over in silence. This misguided attempt to find evidence of the Scyros myth disseminated in the broader culture of archaic Greece is what we must turn to next.

²⁶ Robert (1923: 1106–7).

²⁷ Robert (1923: 1108); see also Robert (1881: 34).

²⁸ According to Dowden (1989: 54), "they [the Dolopes] can scarcely belong to any other dialect group than the Aeolic." Vidal-Naquet, on the other hand, says in a preface contributed to a recent book (Calame, 1996: 11 and 13, n 4): "Et Thésée mourra à Scyros, chez les Dolopes qui ne sont pas vrais Grecs, mais des *mixéllènes* ou encore *mixobárbaroi*." It may be that the Dolopes, like the Macedonians, were slanderously accused of being half-barbarian by their fellow Greeks; but their membership in the Delphic Amphictyony would seem nevertheless to demonstrate their true Hellenic credentials.

The Epic Cycle and Homer

According to two brief notices in the *Iliad*, Achilles at some time before his arrival at Troy captured a place called Scyros and left behind a child, Neoptolemus, to be reared there.²⁹ The familiar story of Achilles' evasion of military service has left no surviving trace in archaic epic. It has long been claimed that such a story, even if it had been available for inclusion at the time of composition, would have grossly violated the particular decorum of the Homeric poems.³⁰ Thus it can be argued that Homer's pretermission of the transvestite version of the Scyros story is deliberate, and that the story is nevertheless very old and native to epic. Many modern authorities state with confidence that the cyclic epics in general, and the *Cypria* in particular, told the story of Achilles among the women of Scyros.³¹ Such was the case made by Severyns in his influential monograph, *Le cycle épique dans l'école d'Aristarque*, and despite occasional challenge this has remained a commonly held view.³² This is, however, a very unlikely hypothesis, and it is a serious mistake to project the story of Achilles on Scyros back into the archaic period. In the brief summary of the *Cypria* that comes down to us, the Greek fleet leaves Aulis and makes its first mistaken landing in Telephus' territory in Mysia, and then:

ἀποπλέουσι δὲ αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῆς Μυσίας χειμῶν ἐπιπίπτει καὶ διασκεδάννυνται. Ἀχιλλεύς δὲ Σκύρω προσσχὼν γαμεῖ τὴν Λυκομήδους θυγατέρα Δηϊδάμειαν.³³

Stormy weather hit them as they were sailing away from Mysia and scattered them. Achilles put in at Scyros and married Deidamia, daughter of Lycomedes.

This passage cannot reflect the presence of a story involving Achilles among the women; he does not evade the draft here, since he is already a part of the expedition to Troy when he arrives on Scyros. It would be dangerous to make an argument purely from silence, since all we have is the epitome of a summary of the poem, yet it might be noted that Proclus does not mention Achilles' transvestism at all, while he does tell us that the *Cypria* did contain an account of Odysseus' own similarly draft-dodging ploy of madness. There is also a related fragment from another cyclic epic, the *Little Iliad*:

29 Capture of Scyros: *Il.* 9.666–8; Neoptolemus raised there: *Il.* 19.326–7; Odysseus, in his consoling report of Neoptolemus' prowess to the shade of Achilles at *Od.* 11.504–38, claims to have brought the boy to Troy from Scyros, but he does not say how he came to have been raised there.

30 Griffin (1977: 46) commends Homer's restraint in much the same terms as Pausanias did in the passage quoted above (p 199).

31 E.g. Roussel (1991: 121–5) and Davies (1989: 45).

32 Severyns (1928: 285–91); a notable challenge was made by Kullmann (1960: 189–92). Joan (1966: 213–14, n 8) concisely reviews the scholarship; Joan and Van Looy (2002: 51–4) accept Severyns' conclusions.

33 Procl. *Cbrest.* 80 (Bernabé, 1987: p 41, ll. 38–40); see Breslove (1943–4: 159–61).

Πηλείδην δ' Ἀχιλλῆα φέρεν Σκυρόνδε θύελλα
 ἔνθα γ' ἔς ἀργαλέον λιμέν' ἕκετο νυκτὸς ἔκεινης.³⁴

A storm brought Achilles, son of Peleus, to Scyros and there he came to a troubled harbor that night.

According to the Homeric scholia that gives us these lines, the situation here is just as it was in Proclus' summary of the *Cypria*: the Greek fleet had just left the land of Telephus when the storm hit.³⁵ This passage agrees with the *Cypria* in every detail, so the only question is why the story was told again at this point in the narrative of the *Little Iliad*, after Achilles was already dead. One incident in this poem was Odysseus' expedition from Troy to retrieve Neoptolemus from Scyros. The poem presumably gave a background account of how Achilles came to have a son there, and it might easily have mentioned the original circumstances of the father's arrival there. This is likely to be the context in which this fragment fits.

The Homeric and cyclic texts agree on a narrative like this: Achilles, already a member of the Greek expedition, was blown to Scyros by a storm while sailing back from encountering Telephus. He sacked the island and took the king's daughter, Deidamia, as a wife. It seems reasonable to posit this as a coherent and archaic form of the Achilles-in-Scyros myth which did not coexist alongside the transvestite version of the story but rather preexisted it and was common to the *Iliad*, *Cypria*, and *Little Iliad*. How then can it be argued that the *Cypria* told the story of Achilles' cross-dressing? Severyns is obliged to construct a hypothesis of the plot of the *Cypria* in which Achilles visits Scyros *twice*:

CHANTS CYPRIENS – Achille adolescent parmi les filles de Lycomède. Intrigue secrète avec Déidamie. Arrivée des Grecs. Départ d'Achille. Naissance d'un fils, "Pyrrhos." Après l'affaire de Mysie, Achille est rejeté par la tempête à Scyros. Mariage. "Néoptolème."³⁶

This influential formulation has no direct support from anything we know about the plot of the *Cypria* and no subsequent authority – not even Apollodorus, whom we know to have relied fairly heavily on the cyclic epics – gives even a hint of this odd sequence of events. There must surely be, then, a compelling reason for Severyns to insist that the story of Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes must be inserted willy-nilly into the plot of the *Cypria*, even at the expense of supposing that later, by purest coincidence, he is blown back to the same place to marry the girl he had raped on his earlier visit. The evidence for this is, however, very far from certain.³⁷ The only putative support

³⁴ *Ilias parva* F 4 Davies.

³⁵ bT-scholia ad Hom. *Il.* 19.326.

³⁶ Severyns (1928: 291), on which see Kullmann (1960: 191).

³⁷ As Burgess (2001: 21) notes, it is not impossible that Achilles might have visited Scyros twice, but the real problem is that there is no reliable evidence to suggest that the story of Achilles' cross-dressing was mentioned at all in the epic cycle.

for attributing the cross-dressing story to the *Cypria* is an Iliadic scholion of very doubtful authority.³⁸ In the *Iliad* (19.326), when Achilles refers to Neoptolemus on Scyros, the valuable *scholia vetera* cite the two lines from the *Little Iliad* quoted above.³⁹ The much less valuable D-scholia, however, give a rambling account of the Scyros episode as we know it; a brief paraphrase should suffice to illustrate its flavor.⁴⁰ It tells us, as if a reader in the middle of the *Iliad* needed telling, that Paris raped Helen and so Agamemnon and Menelaus made war against Troy. Peleus knew that Achilles would die in the war, and so he hid his son on Scyros, to be brought up among the daughters of Lycomedes. The Greek delegation searching for Achilles visited Peleus and then Scyros, where they found him out by the familiar stratagem of mixing weapons among the girls' gifts. The scholiast continues by noting that Achilles had previously attacked Deidamia and that she had borne a son originally called Pyrrhus. He was later called Neoptolemus, because he went to war very young. In some manuscripts, but only some, the scholion concludes with the fateful statement that this story was derived from the cyclic epics.⁴¹ This phrase, doubtfully attested, is the sole piece of evidence for ascribing this entire tale to the *Cypria*.

The scholiast's account contains what could be called only with great charity two "variations" on the standard story which appear nowhere else in the mythological record:

1. Peleus rather than Thetis is uncharacteristically the parent who is concerned with Achilles' destiny to die at Troy; it is he rather than the goddess Thetis who can predict the future, and, implausibly, it is Peleus who wants his son to avoid a future as a warrior.
2. Neoptolemus gets his name from his own youthful war service, rather than that of his father, as we know the *Cypria* had it.⁴²

Thus this scholion represents not an independent tradition to be cherished, but a bungling and implausible version of the post-Homeric vulgate. Further difficulties stand in the way of considering this scholion "comme un résumé des *Chants Cypriens*."⁴³ Why did the scholiast feel the need pointlessly to remind

³⁸ The scholion belongs to the so-called *scholia minora* or D-scholia. Its content perfectly exemplifies the characterization of Erbse (1969: vol 1, p xi): *scholia D praeter interpolationes leviores e narrationibus (ιστορίας) constant et verborum singulorum explicationibus. haec illis vetustiores sunt*; paraphrased by Kirk (1985: vol 1, p 40): "These D-scholia are . . . either brief notes on single words . . . or long and often rambling ιστορία [narratives] from much later sources."

³⁹ bT-scholia, Erbse (1969: vol 4, pp 635f).

⁴⁰ Since Erbse is only concerned to edit the *scholia vetera*, he does not print this text; but Dindorf (1875–88: vol 4, pp 222f) has the D-scholion that Severyns relies upon for his argument; there are partial French translations given by Severyns (1928: 286f), Jouan (1966: 214), and Jouan and Van Looy (2002: 52f). Gantz (1993: 581f, 873, n 23) is skeptical of Severyns' faith in the scholion.

⁴¹ ἡ ιστορία παρὰ τοῖς κυκλικοῖς.

⁴² *Cypria* F 16 Davies.

⁴³ Severyns (1928: 289); his sentiment is echoed with approval by Roussel (1991: 125).

us that the Trojan War began with the rape of Helen, and yet, if it is a *résumé*, why not go back one step further to the point where the *Cypria* itself began: the plan of Zeus and the judgment of Paris? Then there is the argument Kullmann put forward against Severyns: the whole idea that Achilles would need to return to Scyros to regularize in marriage a union that had begun in rape is to import modern social transactions into archaic Greece.⁴⁴

It may be that this is not, as has been thought, yet another example of Homer censoring undignified behavior that found its way into the less scrupulous cyclic poems. Rather it seems that Homer and the cyclic texts are in full accord regarding Scyros: after the first mustering of the Greek fleet at Aulis and its misguided attack on Telephus in Mysia, on the way back from Asia Minor a storm separated the ships and drove Achilles to harbor in Scyros. He sacked the town and took prisoners, including Iphis, whom he gave to Patroclus.⁴⁵ Achilles then raped or married Lycomedes' daughter Deidamia and sailed off, leaving her pregnant with Neoptolemus.⁴⁶ Thus the tale of Achilles as a transvestite draft-dodger was probably a local Scyrian version, which entered the mythological tradition at a later point in time, motivated by the particular historical circumstances of Cimon's expedition. We will need to bear this in mind as we examine the way that the origins of the myth have been traced, rightly or wrongly, further back into Greek prehistory.

Transvestism and Initiation

Since the publication of an article by Crawley in 1893 it has been usual to explain the origins of the myth of Achilles' cross-dressing as an echo of an adolescent initiation rite that is alleged to have been practiced in the prehistoric Greek world, or at least an echo borrowed from another culture that did practice such a rite:⁴⁷

As this seclusion of Achilles was, in a way, a preliminary to his bear-

⁴⁴ Kullmann (1960: 191–2). Robert (1923: 1108, n 6) is also skeptical of this scholion: “die *κυκλικοί* . . . sind nicht die Kyprien . . . sondern irgendwelche Mythographen.”

⁴⁵ *Il.* 9.667f. Homer never mentions Lycomedes, but names an otherwise unknown Eneues.

⁴⁶ It may be that Ovid was aware of the disjunction between these two incompatible traditions. His Ulysses mentions Achilles' transvestism while boasting that he was the one who found out Achilles by means of the trick of including weapons among the girlish gifts (*Met.* 13.162–70); he does not name Scyros. Then a few lines later, while listing a number of places that Achilles had sacked, including *en passant* the land of Telephus, he does mention Scyros (*Met.* 13.175). It seems plausible to see in this an attempt to reconcile the two stories in a way that curiously anticipates Severyns' tactic; Ulysses implies that there might have been two different trips by Achilles to Scyros under radically different circumstances, or two different islands. At the very least Ovid alludes to two available versions of a myth in a way that keeps the potential incompatibilities between them in suspension.

⁴⁷ For an account of the ways myth might derive from initiatory ritual, see Graf (1993b: 116f), and more generally, Calame (1996: 15–60).

ing arms at Troy, so the “initiation” of the savage boy marks the end of boyhood, and admits him to the full rights of man. The candidates are secluded in special places, often in the depths of the forest, where they pass their time of probation, often extending to weeks or months, and undergo the various tests or operations prescribed by custom, the most conspicuous of the latter among many peoples being circumcision or a similar mutilation. (1893: 243)

Even though there were very few puberty rites in Greece in the historical period, it is now widely accepted that the initiation of young men was a significant influence on many kinds of myth and ritual in classical Greece.⁴⁸ The typology of initiation has thus been productive as a matrix for understanding certain aspects of ancient culture.

In an influential formulation, van Gennep (1960: 10f) categorized the ceremonial *rites de passage* that mark transitions from one social state to another as divided into three types, which are often found together as different phases of the same ritual: rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation. The period of transition or suspension between the old status and the new is characterized by “liminal rites.” This time is often passed in the wilderness or away from the main part of society, where the participants often may not wear standard clothing, eat an unusual diet, and generally act in ways not usually sanctioned in that society. After this period of “social death,” the initiate rejoins the mass reborn into a new role.⁴⁹ In the ancient Greek world this pattern has been divined, for example, in the background of the *krypteia* at Sparta and in aspects of the *ephebeia* at Athens; in both cases young men spend time on the margin of the city’s territory before joining the army as hoplites, while engaging in a style of fighting that was not customary for citizens.⁵⁰ There is little direct evidence for true initiation rituals being practiced in Greece, and what there is confined to the Doric ambit; nevertheless, it has been claimed that echoes of adolescent initiation rituals may be found in aspects of social practice throughout the Greek world.⁵¹ In complementary fashion, various stories of myth have been inspected for reflections of initiation rituals; the legend of Theseus and the tale of the Argonauts, for example, have both been interpreted in the light of such rituals.⁵² Furthermore, it has been alleged that there is comparative evidence from other cultures to indicate that cross-dressing of initiates may sometimes play a part in the coming-of-age ceremonies of both

⁴⁸ For a slightly skeptical view, see Price (1999: 17).

⁴⁹ See Turner (1967: 93–111, 152).

⁵⁰ Vidal-Naquet (1986: 106–28).

⁵¹ E.g. Winkler (1990b), Calame (1996: esp. 432–5). On historical initiation rituals in Crete and Sparta, see Burkert (1985: 261–3). On the gradual stretching of van Gennep’s criteria, see Waldner (2000: 46f).

⁵² Theseus: Jeanmaire (1939: 227–383) and Dacosta (1991: 11–29); Argonauts: Hunter (1993: 15–17) and Dacosta (1991: 90–106); for a survey, see Dowden (1992: 102–18).

boys and girls; this style of dress has been seen as a marker of the “liminal” state of the initiates.

Despite the common currency of the claim that the Achilles-in-Scyros myth probably reflects an otherwise forgotten initiation rite, it is hard to find firm evidence that would substantiate this.⁵³ Firstly, one would like to see other aspects of ancient Greek culture in which distant echoes of this allegedly widespread practice might be detected. Secondly, one would like to be sure that cross-dressing really is a common feature of initiatory *rites de passage*. As we shall see, both types of evidence are lacking. It may be that in matters of prehistory, “puzzling Questions” by necessity invite conjecture somewhat freely. What evidence there is, however, points in a different direction.

Cross-dressing in Ancient Ritual

In order to search for other traces of the putative ritual origins of the myth of Achilles on Scyros, we will need to look at the episodes in Greco-Roman cult practice that have been alleged to involve initiatory transvestism by adolescent boys.⁵⁴ We begin our search with the *Ekdysia* at Phaistos, which has been a favorite candidate.⁵⁵ Antoninus Liberalis, following Nicander, records the story of a Cretan woman whose husband would only agree to rear their child if she gave birth to a male; when a girl was born, her mother raised her as a boy named Leukippos. At the point of being discovered, the mother prayed to Leto to change her daughter’s sex, and the prayer was granted. Liberalis says that the people of Phaistos commemorated this event in a festival called the *Ekdysia*, or “disrobing.” Delcourt (1961: 5) imagines that the festival was originally “a collective ceremony . . . in which boys wearing feminine clothes took them off and donned those of their own sex.” This thesis has convinced many; a recent article by Leitao begins:

This paper examines an annual initiation ritual celebrated in Hellenistic Phaistos, at a festival known as the *Ekdusia*, in which young men were required to put on women’s clothes and swear an oath of citizenship before they could graduate from the youth corps (known as the *agela*) and enter the society of adult male citizens.⁵⁶

The evidence does not bear out any of the details of this confident characterization. The only other ancient testimony offered in addition to the myth of

53 For the currency of this explanation of Achilles at Scyros, see OCD³ s.v. “initiation” [Bremmer]. Versnel (1990b: 80, n 102 = 1993: 56, n 105) comments that “[Crawley’s] views are generally accepted.” On the difficulty of finding any other evidence for this purported ritual, see Waldner (2000: 86).

54 For a survey, see Delcourt (1961): ch. 1, “Transvestism in private and public rites,” pp 1–16.

55 See Delcourt (1961: 4), following the idea of Jeanmaire (1939: 442).

56 Leitao (1995: 130).

Leukippos is a set of inscriptions from several other cities in Crete that mention the act of disrobing in the course of taking an oath of citizenship. These inscriptions simply speak of disrobing; they say nothing whatsoever about the wearing of women's clothing. So the most natural interpretation is that the candidates for citizenship were subject to an inspection or *dokimasia* in which they had to present themselves naked before the magistrates. It is well documented that such nudity is precisely what was required at Athens when a young man was enrolled as a citizen.⁵⁷ Here is Willett's much more reasonable assessment of this same evidence:

It seems likely, from epigraphic evidence, that the Cretan youths, when they took part in the ceremony of graduation from the *agela*, having now reached the final stage of their initiation into manhood, laid aside their boyhood garments before assuming the warriors' costumes which each had received as a gift after his period of seclusion. Confirmation of this formal ritual derives from our knowledge of a festival at Phaistos, known as the *Ekdysia*, during which the youth put aside his boy's clothes.⁵⁸

So what connects these citizenship ceremonies with male cross-dressing? The myth describes a girl cross-dressed as a boy, not a boy dressed as a girl. It is alleged that there is one peculiar detail that might suggest otherwise. The girl who was disguised as Leukippos was said to have disrobed and put aside her *peplos*. This is odd, since that is a female garment, and she is meant to have been dressed as a boy; so something has become garbled here. Leitao argues that the combination of a cross-dressing child and a female garment implies that the rite of *Ekdysia* really involved boys dressing in feminine *peploi*.⁵⁹ It would be much simpler to suppose, however, that Antonius Liberalis momentarily forgot that the girl was then disguised as a boy, and so got the type of garment wrong; it is not necessary that this inconcinnity points to anything deeply significant. Indeed, it would be a likely mistake to make if, as we will see, the *Ekdysia* was a ritual for girls in which they stripped off their *peploi*, rather than a ritual for boys.

In fact, the relevant passage in Antonius Liberalis does not say that the *Ekdysia* was a rite for boys; it suggests the opposite:

ταύτης ἔτι μέμνηνται τῆς μεταβολῆς Φαίστιοι καὶ θύουσι Φυτῆν Λητοῦ, ἥτις ἔφουσε μῆδεα τῇ κόρῃ, καὶ τὴν ἑορτὴν Ἐκδύσια καλοῦσιν, ἐπεὶ τὸν πέπλον ἢ παῖς ἐξέδου. νόμιμον δ' ἐστὶν ἐν τοῖς γάμοις πρότερον παρακλίνεσθαι παρὰ τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Λευκίππου. (Ant. Lib. Met. 17.6)

The people of Phaistos still remember this metamorphosis and they sacrifice to Leto Phythia, who made genitals grow on the girl, and they call

⁵⁷ See Aristophanes, *Wasps* 578 with Robertson (2000).

⁵⁸ Willetts (1962: 175).

⁵⁹ Also argued by Ferrari (2002: 119).

the festival *Ekdysia*, in memory of the moment when the girl laid aside the *peplos*. It is customary, before the nuptials, to lie down beside an image of Leukippos.

It was a custom to lie beside a statue of Leukippos before a wedding; but who was it that did so? It sounds much more like a prenuptial ritual for girls, who took off the *peplos*, and then slept in the temple of Leto in preparation for their wedding night.⁶⁰ The only thing that Liberalis tells us that pertains directly to the ritual, rather than the myth, is that it is a prenuptial rite; and these are common for girls in traditional societies. This was a festival in honor of a goddess, Leto, and so the statue next to which the participants laid themselves down – and perhaps even slept overnight – was presumably located in her temple.⁶¹ The natural presumption is that those worshipping a female divinity in this way would themselves be female. We are also told that the festival was in honor of Leto in her character as a fertility goddess, because she made a phallus grow on the girl. Phallic fertility imagery would not be out of place at a girl's rite, and it seems very unlikely that a prenuptial fertility rite would involve anything other than girls.⁶² What is more, this connection with the institution of marriage, rather than citizenship, is helpfully confirmed for us by an outside source. Ovid's story of Iphis (*Ov. Met.* 9.666–797) is also set in Phaistos and its plot is nearly identical, except for the names of the characters; like Antoninus Liberalis it is presumably based on Nicander's *Heteroeumena*. The wedding of Iphis and Telethusa is absolutely central to Ovid's version, tending to confirm that preparation for marriage, rather than citizenship, was the central theme of the Leukippos myth and its attendant ritual.⁶³

There is only one example of an ancient ritual that carries firm evidence of cross-dressing. It is also the only instance of transvestism in the ancient world that can be associated with a ceremony in which adolescent boys were certainly involved: the Athenian *Oschophoria*, held at the time of the grape harvest. This feast involved the participation of *epheboi* in several ways. There was a procession from a certain shrine of Dionysus to the temple of Athena Skiras at Phalerum; this was led by two noble and wealthy boys of the Salaminioi *genos*.⁶⁴ They carried grapevines (*ῶσχοι*) and were dressed as girls. Another event was a foot-race between the adolescent boys of different tribes.⁶⁵ There has been controversy over whether the feast was primarily in honor of

60 In the French translation of Papatomopoulos (1968: 31), it is assumed that the ones lying down are the brides-to-be.

61 For a hypothetical reconstruction of what this involved, see Papatomopoulos (1968: 110, n 21).

62 For an attempt to explain this sort of objection away, see Leitao (1995: 136).

63 Thus Waldner (2000: 223f); she also points out another objection: neither text mentions anyone who would correspond to the adult male "initiators" in an initiation rite. For more on the scholarship regarding the Leukippos myth, see below (p 226).

64 Parke (1977: 77), Simon (1983: 89f), Calame (1996: 128f, 143–8) and Waldner (2000: 102–34).

65 On the race, see Rutherford and Irvine (1988).

Athena Skiras, at whose shrine the festivities took place and with whose cult the Salaminioi are known to have been associated, or primarily in honor of Dionysus, invariably the god of the grape, and from whose shrine the procession began.⁶⁶ If we admit that Dionysus was among the recipients of cult, then the transvestism of the two boys might be explained within that context. The cult of the god who himself was often attired in garb of ambiguous gender did sometimes feature a disruption of normal gender assignments.⁶⁷

The case for initiatory transvestism here might seem to have some plausibility, because this ritual is connected by Plutarch with the myth of Theseus' Cretan voyage, which Jeanmaire had tried to explain as an initiatory narrative. Theseus was said to have founded the rite on his return to Athens from Crete. The explanation of the boys' transvestism was that they were dressed in memory of two of Theseus' companions. Plutarch says that, to better his odds, he brought five maidens and nine boys instead of the required seven of each, disguising two young men and teaching them to act like girls.⁶⁸ Given Jeanmaire's argument that Theseus' Cretan adventure reflected a narrative of initiation, we finally seem to have here a nexus of myth, ritual, initiation, and transvestism that might reflect their connection in the deep structure of Greek society.⁶⁹ Calame, however, has recently revisited the evidence for both the myth and the cult and concludes that neither are likely candidates for initiatory narratives. He allows that Theseus' voyage from Troezen to Athens has initiatory features, but insists that the Cretan adventure does not.⁷⁰ As for the ritual, Calame notes that it is difficult to make its details correspond with anything like an initiation.⁷¹ He goes on to note that the rite itself does not show any sign of van Gennep's scheme, that Theseus is too old, and that his companions on the voyage to Crete show no signs of changing their status as a result of their experiences. In short, "even less so than the myth, the ritual does not conform to the schema or the function of tribal initiation."⁷² Another problem is

66 Deubner (1932: 142–7) and Simon (1983: 90–2, esp. n 7) have argued for Dionysus, while Parke (1977: 79) has insisted on Athena.

67 Thus Simon (1983: 91); cf. Henrichs (1982: 158f), Bremmer (1999). See Waldner (2000: 144–50) for the transvestism of the *oschophoroi* as Dionysian rather than initiatory.

68 *Thes.* 23.2–3.

69 Jeanmaire (1939: 227–383) and Vidal-Naquet (1986: 114–17); for the history of this interpretation, see Calame (1996: 461f, n 77) and Waldner (2000: 134–8).

70 Calame (1996: 432–5).

71 "Ce qu'il est possible d'affirmer pour l'instant, c'est qu'aussi bien les connotations civilisées impliquées par les nourritures cuites consommées aux Oschophories que la constellation des classes d'âge invitées à assumer leur célébration exclut toute interprétation du rituel des Oschophories dans un sens initiatique," Calame (1996: 339). This is an implicit retraction of his prior position on the Oschophoria, as stated in passing in an earlier work (1997: 146, orig. pub. 1977).

72 "Puisque moins encore que la légende, ces rites n'adoptent ni le schéma ni la fonction de l'initiation tribale," Calame (1996: 448); see also 433f and 191. For similar scepticism regarding the initiatory context of the myth of Theseus at the temple of Apollo Delphinion, see Waldner (2000: 190–2).

the fact that only two boys cross-dress. It is a common argument among those who advocate the initiatory paradigm that one or two ritual actors can stand in the stead of the rest of their peers; but initiation as typically described by ethnographers is the antithesis of a spectator sport. It would be well to apply a similar standard of evidence to the Scyros theme, where there is not even an attested ritual to accompany the myth.

Apart perhaps from an obvious general association with Dionysus, there is in fact no striking pattern that emerges from the ritual use of cross-dressing in the ancient world.⁷³ As far as its cult associations are concerned, there is as much connection between transvestism and the great milestones of marriage and mourning as there is with coming to maturity. For example, there are several notices of brides dressing as men on their wedding night,⁷⁴ and of men dressing as women while in mourning.⁷⁵ Even more common are stories of cross-dressing as a stratagem, either military,⁷⁶ or erotic.⁷⁷ According to Artemidorus, it is not a bad thing to dream of oneself wearing women's clothes, provided that it is in the context of festivity, and indeed there are a number of carnivalistic occasions attested on which men might put on female dress.⁷⁸ It should be clear that annual periods of general carnivalistic license and role-reversal represent a phenomenon distinct from life-crisis rituals, such as initiation.⁷⁹ The cross-dressing of drunken komasts may mark the intersection of carnivalistic and Dionysian transvestism.⁸⁰ Finally, we should mention the well-known case of the gender-indeterminate dress of the eunuch priests of certain divinities, such as Cybele.⁸¹ The exchange of garb between men and women was evidently a practice that occurred in a wide range of contexts in antiquity, humorous and serious, just as it does in most societies. Nothing of

73 For a good recent survey, see Miller (1999: 241–6), who concludes (243) that “attempts to identify a common element among the transvestite cults are not entirely convincing.”

74 At Sparta: Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 15; at Kos: Plutarch, *Quaest. graec.* 58; on these examples, see Brisson (2002: 64).

75 Lycian men dress as women while in mourning: [Plutarch], *Cons. ad Apoll.* 22 and Val. Max. 2.6.13.

76 Soldiers dress as women to set an ambush: Plutarch, *Solon* 8; to escape captivity: Hdt. 4.156. For more examples, see Leitao (1999).

77 Jupiter woos Callisto dressed as Diana: Ov. *Met.* 2.401–530; Leukippos woos Daphne: 8.20.2.

78 Artemidorus 2.3.84. Compare the story of the philosopher Demetrius, allegedly the only man in Alexandria who refused to put on female attire at the Dionysia: Lucian, *Calumniae* 16.

79 Halliday (1909–10) looks at the report of Herodotus and Plutarch that at the annual festival at Argos of the Hybristika, men dressed as women and vice versa, while slaves and masters reversed roles; he rightly connects it with Carnival, but wrongly with *rites de passage*.

80 For the evidence regarding post-symposium komasts, see Philostratus, *Imagines* 1.2 with Miller (1999) and Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague (1990). On males dressed as maenads and females as satyrs in Greek vase painting, see Caruso (1987).

81 Certain cults of female deities had male priests; this fact and the confusion of female and sacred garb may be the origin of the story of the supposedly cross-dressed priest of Athena Ilias at Siris: Schol. ad Lycoph. *Alex.* 984–92, with Bremmer (1992: 195 and 1999: 188–90), who considers it as an example of initiatory transvestism.

what we know from the ancient world demonstrates any necessary or remarkable connection between transvestism and adolescent initiation.

Cross-dressing in Rites of Passage

The next step in evaluating the theory that the myth of Achilles on Scyros is the echo of an initiatory practice is to work out just how cross-dressing generally figures in the typology of initiation rites in traditional societies throughout the world. It should be a simple matter to follow the footnotes of those who have made this claim and read the evidence in the relevant ethnographic reports. Having attained the status of received wisdom, however, the theory is not always supported with evidence, and the same few references to the ethnographic literature recur again and again. As we shall see, many of these references are of dubious value. Some prove upon closer inspection to have nothing to do with cross-dressing at all, and others are vitiated by various flaws, such as the presumption by Victorian travellers that anything *they* thought to resemble a skirt must necessarily be considered female garb. This is not an exhaustive survey of the literature on initiation, which is vast.⁸² It is simply an attempt to test the ubiquitous proposition that “transvestism is familiar in passage rites” (Dowden, 1989: 65) against the evidence supplied by those who make the claim.

The most commonly cited authority for the claim of cross-dressing by initiands is Mircea Eliade:

It will help us to understand these Australian data [regarding ritual subincision of the penis] if we remember that the novice’s ritual transformation into a woman during his initiation is a rather commonplace phenomenon in other cultural areas. In Africa, for example, among the Masai, the Nandi, the Nuba, and other tribes, the novices are dressed as girls; while among the South African Sotho, girls who are being initiated wear men’s clothing. Similarly the novices to be initiated into the Arioi Society in Tahiti are dressed as women. According to Wilhelm Schmidt and Paul Wirz, ritual transformation into women is practiced in New Guinea. And Haddon has found it in Torres Strait. Even the quite widespread custom of ritual nudity during the period of segregation in the bush can be interpreted as symbolizing the novice’s asexuality. (1958: 26)

We will return to the important point regarding initiatory nudity below; but the first point to make is that a number of these examples of cross-dressing are spurious or irrelevant. Firstly, the long-extinct Arioi society of Tahiti had nothing to do with coming-of-age rites; its exact nature is uncertain, but it had a

⁸² As Versnel (1990b: 78, n 88 = 1993: 50, n 91) acknowledges, “the amount of literature on initiation is overwhelming.”

complex initiatory hierarchy of seven grades.⁸³ The would-be initiate into this group exhibited his worthiness and his interest by displaying a frenzy of divine possession. He “repaired to some public exhibition in a state of apparent derangement. He was dressed and adorned in the most fantastic manner.”⁸⁴ This garb might include gender-inappropriate items, but that was not the defining feature of his outfit. Eliade’s footnote refers us to Mühlmann (1955: 43–6), who tendentiously misread the reports of the early missionaries who are our only source for the Arioi; none of them, however, said that they witnessed ritual cross-dressing.⁸⁵ A commonly cited witness is Ellis (1969: 241; reprint of the 1831 ed.), who merely says that an initiate “was then commanded to seize the cloth worn by the chief woman present, and by this act he completed his initiation.” Ellis does not even say what the boy did with the “cloth,” which was probably just “the badge of the society, only worn by its members.”⁸⁶ Both women and men were members of the society, so this cloth was a marker not of gender but of status and initiation. In any case, with the Arioi one is dealing with a case of induction into a selective society rather than an age-class ritual, so this would not be a particularly compelling parallel even if it were a true instance of ritual cross-dressing.

Turning to Eliade’s evidence from New Guinea, none of his examples are convincing illustrations of cross-dressing, if that is what Eliade intended them to be.⁸⁷ A reference may have gone astray, for the ritual described by Wirz in the pages to which Eliade’s accompanying footnote refers is an initiation that entails ritual pederasty, serial rape, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, but not transvestism.⁸⁸ Among the other initiations conducted by the Marind people

83 For the claim of “initiatory transvestism” among the Arioi, see Bullough and Bullough (1993: 17), Eliade (1958: 26), and Baumann (1955: 58). Depending on whose report one believes, they were either “professional entertainers” (Williamson, 1939: 116), “a political, warrior and plundering association” (van Gennep, 1960: 83), or some combination of the two.

84 Williamson (1939: 118).

85 Apart from Ellis, cited below, Mühlmann (1955: 37f) also quotes the diaries of two Spanish missionaries, who do not mention women’s clothing or anything remotely like it; the diaries may be consulted in Corney (1915: vol 2, 329f). Furthermore, the Polynesian parallels Mühlmann (1955: 77) adduces are of male actors performing female roles on the stage, and of men who spent their whole lives as women, both of which are entirely distinct phenomena.

86 Williamson (1939: 119) describing the *abu haio*.

87 That is what Eliade seems to mean, and what Bullough and Bullough (1993: 17, n 51), accepting his authority, took him to mean.

88 Wirz (1922: vol 1, pt 1, pp 43–8). It could be that Eliade mistook for one of the otherwise exclusively male initiates the “in vollem Schmuck prangende und von Öl und Farbe tiefende *Iwäg*,” who is actually a maiden of marriageable age (Wirz, 1922: vol 1, pt 1, p 40) and a sacrificial victim (1922: vol 2, pt 3, p 43). It is also possible that Eliade meant to move on from his preceding examples to another topic entirely, viz. ritual pederasty. On this reading, Eliade’s “ritual transformation into women” does not mean cross-dressing, but is code for boys adopting the passive homosexual role. This is not borne out by his other examples, so I will carry on assuming that these latter citations of his were meant, like the preceding ones, to illustrate ritual transvestism.

of Papua New Guinea who are described in Wirz's book there is one that does involve some incidental cross-dressing, but not on the part of the initiates themselves.⁸⁹ Eliade's next authority describes a ritual in which it is not clear that the boys' garb should be considered feminine. Schmidt, who was not a witness to the rite himself, merely says that, after the circumcision is performed, the boys wear a sort of belt. Neither Schmidt nor his native informant, however, calls this a woman's garment, and so it is unclear on what grounds it might be considered female dress.⁹⁰ It is equally unclear how transvestism enters into Haddon's report from the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua New Guinea. It is true that he repeatedly employs the quaint term "petticoats" to denote the grass skirts that were sometimes worn in ceremonial dances by the men of the Torres Strait islands. He also, however, expressly notes that, "this kind of petticoat was used by the men alone and only when dancing"; so this particular kind of skirt was not in fact women's garb.⁹¹ In any case, it is the elders who wear the "petticoats," not the boys being initiated, who wear instead a string-like belt.⁹²

Eliade's African examples hold up to inspection somewhat better.⁹³ We should note that almost all of these examples pertain to circumcision rites. Boys and girls both apparently cross-dressed as part of their respective circumcision ceremonies among the Nandi of Kenya.⁹⁴ Hollis (1909: 52-7) reports that boys were dressed as girls during the preparatory stages of the rite, and for four days after their circumcision. At this point they exchanged the girls' clothing for an elaborate headdress and the clothing of a fully grown woman, donated by their mothers. During the ensuing months of convalescence the boys continued in this mode of dress while living apart from the rest of the community, observing various restrictions on diet and behavior, and receiving instruction from the elders who dwell with them. At the conclusion of this period, a feast is held and the boys trade their female garb for the weapons of a warrior. Again it is Hollis (1905: 298) who reports on another ritual, that of the Masai. He says that, following their circumcision, boys wear women's clothes until they have recovered, at which time they put on the accoutrements of a warrior; in this case there is apparently no long communal period of seclusion, recovery, and initiation. Likewise, Raum (1967: 308f) records that among the Chagga of

89 It is the already-initiated men (*Metoar*) who dress as women; on this distinct phenomenon, see below (pp 220 and 230).

90 There is a an element of transvestism in the ritual, as a girl appears dressed as a man (Schmidt, 1907: 1052), but there is no cross-dressing on the part of the boys that is recognized by Schmidt as such; cf. Baumann (1955: 228).

91 Haddon (1893: 136).

92 Haddon (1893: 141).

93 His footnote refers to two useful sources for bibliography: Baumann (1955: 57f) and Jensen (1933: passim).

94 Hollis (1909: 52-7); Bryk (1964: 113-27).

Kilimanjaro the novice wore his mother's sheepskin dress while recuperating; this is another case in which the circumcised boy recovered at home, rather than with his age-group.

Another of Eliade's examples is the Sotho of South Africa, one group of whom are said by Endemann (1874: 37f) to have practiced an elaborate circumcision rite in which each boy exchanged his normal loincloth for one that resembled the sort usually worn by girls.⁹⁵ Here too the girls cross-dressed symmetrically during their coming-of-age ritual, wearing boys' clothes and carrying weapons; each sex was equally prohibited from encountering the other while in seclusion. Another report from South Africa concerns a different Sotho people; Eiselen (1932), or rather his informant, described a skirt of plaited leaves worn by the initiates as resembling a girl's skirt. It is not entirely clear, however, whether this turn of phrase was used to give to a European some idea of the garment, or whether this was a judgment within the context of his own people's sartorial usage.

To move on from Eliade, among classical scholars who have invoked the initiatory paradigm, Brelich (1969: 72, n 60) is noteworthy for having treated the anthropological data at first hand and in some detail. As an example of initiatory cross-dressing, he adduces Elmberg's description of the Mejbrat of Irian Jaya (Western New Guinea). On this occasion Elmberg does, it is true, say, "In connection with male initiates transvestitism is observed, as well as a hair-do imitating that of the full-grown women, [and] the manufacture of bark cloth (otherwise a typically female occupation)."⁹⁶ Yet when we compare this quotation, which comes from a brief paragraph on the subject of initiation, with the same author's subsequently published and much more detailed fifty-page account of Mejbrat initiation rites, this earlier characterization is not repeated.⁹⁷ In his subsequent description of this and other Mejbrat initiation rites, Elmberg does speak of transvestism on the part of the adult men (1965: 121, 125), but not on the part of the initiates themselves. In addition to observing ritual nudity (1965: 113, 118), Elmberg says that the novices wear ceremonial necklaces, armlets, cloth, and so forth; yet it is clear from his earlier discussion of Mejbrat attire that these were not uncommon for men to wear on festive occasions.⁹⁸ We are told, on the other hand, of "transvestite pranks" that are a feature of Mejbrat death ritual and courtship (Elmberg 1955: 69f, 1965: 96). It seems that Elmberg gradually refined his understanding of Mejbrat initiatory ritual over the course of time; his later presentation (1965: 111-27), while

95 Endemann (1874: 18, 37f).

96 Elmberg (1959: 76f).

97 Elmberg (1965: 92-142); there is also no mention of transvestism in Elmberg's prior account of the same initiation (1955: 43-5).

98 Elmberg (1955: 10f) In this context, note the caution expressed by Donald Tuzin (Herdt, 1982: 343, n 10), regarding the problem in speaking of "transvestism" among people who do not normally wear much if any clothing.

mentioning some women's tasks performed by the novices, concentrates on the way their initiation ceremony enacted a symbolic death and rebirth, a pattern whose worldwide diffusion is indubitable.

So the evidence for initiatory transvestism is not as general as sometimes supposed: it appears to be limited for the most part to African circumcision rituals. There are very few reliable reports of transvestism in boys' initiation rites that do not involve circumcision. Nadel (1947: 242) claims that the Moro of the Nuba mountains in Sudan held a dance that marked an entry into adulthood, and at this dance the young men adorned themselves as girls. Other possible examples are fatally flawed by the same evidentiary problem we have already encountered; they depend on naive European notions of what female dress ought to look like, as in two reports from German colonial Cameroon. Morgen reported that Ewondo boys (Morgen's "Yaunde") had to wear a sort of grass skirt in the period following the end of their long instruction in the bush and until the feast that was held to celebrate its end.⁹⁹ On this latter occasion their "imitation female dress" was torn from the boys by the assembled women.¹⁰⁰ Another German soldier in Cameroon, Hans Dominik, described a very similar scene among the nearby Bane.¹⁰¹ Again, after a period of isolation and instruction, the boys assemble: "they are entirely naked, painted with white clay, and wear bundles of dried banana leaves around their waist in the manner of women."¹⁰² As with the Ewondo boys, the costume is torn from these boys by the assembled women. In both cases the "transvestism," if that is what it really was, was not a part of the "liminal" time spent by the novices apart from the community, but was rather a part of the celebration that attended their rejoining it. This is emphasized in Dominik's account, where the grown men also wear a "feminine outfit" (*weiberartige Kostüm*) while dancing at the festival, and other eccentric garb, the point of which, we are told, was to make people laugh.¹⁰³ This sounds much more like carnivalistic cross-dressing than a marker of the boys' transitional or provisional gender status. The other problem is that these accounts from the turn of the twentieth century do not explain on what basis these costumes were adjudged to be feminine. One suspects that Morgen and Dominik might have judged any sort of grass skirt to be self-evidently feminine attire, regardless of how the participants might have felt about it. The unfortunate fact is that most of the evidence for cross-dressing

99 Morgen (1893: 50–2). On the name "Yaunde" for the Ewondo, see Biebuyck et al. (1996: 83).

100 "imitierten weiblichen Tracht": Morgen (1893: 52).

101 Both the Bane and the Ewondo are part of the Betsi or northern Fang division of the Bantu-speaking Fang-Pahouin cluster in Cameroon: Biebuyck et al. (1996: 49, s.v. "Betsi").

102 "Sie sind ganz nackt, mit weisser Thonerde bemalt und tragen nach Weiberart trockne Bananenbüschel um die Hüften." Quoted by Schurtz (1902: 100) evidently from Dominik (1901: 164); I have not been able to check the quotation. The combination of grass "skirts" and white clay markings will recur among the Ndembu; see below (p 218).

103 Schurtz (1902: 101), quoting Dominik (1901).

in boys' initiation ceremonies is to be found in older works of ethnography which do not always provide the information one would wish for: the nature of the clothing in question, the criterion for adjudging it female, the precise circumstance of its wearing.

The evidence that has been adduced from the South Pacific does not withstand scrutiny, so the few plausible examples of boys' initiatory transvestism in the scholarship are from sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁰⁴ Adolescent initiation itself is a very widespread practice, but its modalities are patterned by culture, and it appears that, if we may meaningfully speak of initiatory transvestism at all, it belongs to an African context.

Gender and Dress in Tribal Initiation

Cross-dressing certainly plays a role in *rites de passage*, but that role is a bit more complex than appears from the usual account, which calls it a simple marker of liminality. It may be helpful to look in greater depth at an example of a male coming-of-age ritual, one that has been very thoroughly and carefully described by one of the scholars whose name is particularly associated with expanding the use of van Gennep's term "liminal" as a behavioral category. Building on the earlier work of Gluckman (1949) and White (1953), Victor Turner gives in *The Forest of Symbols* an extended account of *Mukanda*, a boys' circumcision and initiation ritual practiced by the Ndembu of northwestern Zambia.¹⁰⁵ This rite shares a number of features in common with the others we have glanced at, and so looking at it in detail may help to clarify how they function.

Turner's evidence is not usually considered in association with claims of initiatory cross-dressing for the simple reason that neither Gluckman, White, nor Turner himself ever gave the name "transvestism" or anything like it to the practices they recorded. Yet the Ndembu evidence is much less ambiguous and more fully documented than the purported cases of ritual transvestism discussed above, and also conforms very closely to the same typology. According to Turner, *Mukanda* is an ideal illustration of a *rite de passage*, because the Ndembu themselves divide it into three phases, corresponding closely to van Gennep's tripartite scheme: *kwing'ija* or "causing to enter," *kung'ula* or "at the circumcision lodge," and *kwidisha* or "to take outside or make public."¹⁰⁶ A

¹⁰⁴ Within Africa the examples are geographically and linguistically diverse, however. The Bantu-speaking Betsi (Ewondo and Bane), Ndembu, Sotho, and Chagga live in Cameroon, Zambia, South Africa, and Tanzania respectively; the Nuba of southern Sudan belong to the related Kordofanian language group. The Nandi and Masai of Kenya and Tanzania on the other hand speak languages belonging to the Nilo-Saharan family. This information comes from the table entitled "Ethnic and identity groups," which is app. C of Middleton (1997: vol 4, 477–563).

¹⁰⁵ For a post-Turner account, see also Pritchett (2001: 143–9).

¹⁰⁶ Turner (1967: 185–7).

very rough outline of the ceremony and the changes in attire it entails is as follows: the novices gather with their families outside their villages at a campsite in the bush. The mothers will remain here for the several months that the rite lasts, cooking for their sons, but never seeing them; they only communicate with them via group chants, to which the novices respond in unison. The boys' circumcision lodge is built within earshot, but no woman or uninitiated man is allowed to approach. The boys are led to the lodge by a new path over which a lintel has been erected; they throw their old clothes over the beam and will wear them no more as men. They are circumcised, and the subsequent period of recuperation may last anything from two to four months; during this period the novices wear no clothes.¹⁰⁷ After they have recovered, but before they rejoin their mothers, the appearance of masked dancers marks the beginning of the end of the period of seclusion; now the boys weave themselves a garment, called *fwefweta*, from the roots of a certain tree. Turner describes it variously as a "skirt" (241) and a "girdle"; from the photograph it appears to consist of scant bundles of fiber hanging in bunches from the waist.¹⁰⁸ Turner does not suggest that this rude construction had any particular gender associations. Then, after a few weeks of instruction in esoterica, the *kwidisha*, which is roughly the rite of incorporation in van Gennepe's terms, begins.

As part of the boys' preparations for reappearing to their mothers and rejoining the rest of the community they construct a knee-length skirt of stiff grass, the *nkambi*. Again, however, Turner refrains from making any judgments about the gender connotations of this garment. In fact he generally calls it a kilt in preference to a skirt, as if to downplay its potential to be interpreted as female garb.¹⁰⁹ The boys dress up in their kilts, but that is not the most distinctive feature of their appearance; they are also spotted and striped all over with white clay. In this state each boy is carried on the shoulder of another boy's guardian, and they go out to meet their mothers again. While the novices are not so fully disguised as to render them unrecognizable, some part of the effect of the clay and the kilts and the fact that each novice returns on the shoulders of a different boy's guardian is to mark their change in status through defamiliarization.¹¹⁰ After a joyous reunion, dancing, and celebration, the boys go at dawn of the next day to a river where they strip naked and wash the clay off; their supervisor takes the rolled-up ritual clothing, the *nkambi* and *fwefweta*, and flings it all into the river. After further rituals the boys dress in the new

¹⁰⁷ Turner (1967: 238).

¹⁰⁸ Turner (1967: pl. 10, betw. pp 274 and 275); a detail of the photograph is reproduced on the cover of the paperback edition.

¹⁰⁹ For a photograph, see Turner (1967: pl. 11, betw. pp 274 and 275).

¹¹⁰ Turner (1967: 255). Coloring the boys' bodies with clay or ochre is a frequent part of initiation rites: see above (n 102). For another example, told in the first person, see Nelson Mandela's account in his autobiography of the Xhosa circumcision ceremony (1994: 22–7).

clothing that has been bought or made for them; thus attired they complete the final ceremonies.

It will be clear from this outline that forms of attire are an important marker of the different stages in the Ndembu ritual; it is also clear that to describe the wearing of this distinctive clothing – the *fwefweta* and *nkambi* – as cross-dressing would be a distortion. Turner is careful not to label these idiosyncratic ritual garments as feminine, but rather asserts that liminality is marked, in terms of attire, by nakedness or uniformity of clothing.¹¹¹ His point is that during the time of isolation old distinctions of rank are suspended and new ones are negotiated, and that uniformity of dress or undress aids this process. This way of looking at the matter is supported by an anecdote related by Turner. During the celebration of *Mukanda* that he attended, a fierce controversy broke out between the conservative leader of the rite and some of the adults who had been educated at a mission school. These latter wanted to put Bermuda shorts on their boys underneath their sparse grass kilts, claiming that it would not be “decent” to display them to their mothers as they were. It is interesting that in the course of this dispute as Turner recounts it the accusation that the kilts might be feminine never surfaces; the concern on the part of the Christianized is over the boys’ partial nudity, and on the part of the traditionalists it is over the conservation of tradition and the enforcement of uniformity in dress.¹¹²

The grass kilt worn by Ndembu boys at the end of their ritual is precisely the kind of thing that in the older literature had been casually assumed to be an example of initiatory transvestism. Here we find a “skirt” of exactly the kind innocently reported by early travellers; but it turns out not to be women’s garb at all.¹¹³ The judgment of transvestism can very easily be an artifact resulting from the casual imposition of one interpretive frame regarding gender and dress upon a foreign set of cultural norms. The Ndembu evidence thus suggests the possibility that the “transvestite” element in boys’ initiation rites has sometimes been overstated.

It should also be said that the supposedly “female” element of dress may not be the most distinctive and emphatic part of the display of otherness on the part of the novices. The Ndembu wear kilts, but they also paint their bodies with white clay; the Nandi boys who wear women’s ornaments also wear an elaborate headdress to which they attach the small birds that they have

¹¹¹ Turner (1969: 95f, 106, 108).

¹¹² Turner (1967: 253); his wife, Edith Turner (1987: 44f), also recounts the same story, necessarily at second hand, since women were excluded from the rite, but working from her late husband’s field notes (preface, p x). She quotes the head circumciser as saying, “Pants at the dance of the spotted boys? Impossible!” (p 45), which is a telling detail, for it implies that it was the white clay spots rather more than the grass kilts that were the distinctive aspect of the boys’ appearance for the Ndembu.

¹¹³ The accounts noted above of Morgen (1893), Dominik (1901), and Eiselen (1932) regarding the grass skirts of the Ewondo, Bane, and Sotho are particularly suspect in this regard.

shot.¹¹⁴ As with those Victorian “skirts,” the boys of the Ndembu wear these strange and festive outfits as part of their joyous reintegration into the community. This demonstrates another problem with the usual account of initiatory transvestism: if it is a marker of liminality, it should belong to the liminal phase of the rite, rather than to the rite of incorporation.

Another problem with the usual account is that, although there is genuine cross-dressing during the liminal phase of *Mukanda*, it is done not by the initiands, but by the adult initiators. Turner describes an encounter with an elder “dressed like a woman with blouse, skirt and headband,” and although he did not witness this part of the ritual, he was later told that this figure had mimed copulation with the boys, symbolizing their first sexual encounter with a woman.¹¹⁵ Given that the pedagogical content of initiation rites often concerns matters sexual, and that in most adolescent initiations the sexes are strictly segregated, it is a matter of structural necessity that the roles of characters of the opposite sex, both human and supernatural, must be interpreted via cross-dressed pantomime.¹¹⁶ This sort of burlesque is an extremely widespread phenomenon in initiations, and it should be clear that it has nothing to do with the issue of cross-dressing as a marker of the liminality of the initiates themselves. Unfortunately this basic distinction is often ignored by those who make such claims. Thus Vladimir Propp, in the course of a discussion of initiation, asserts that “the organizer of the rite disguises himself as a woman. He is a woman-man. A straight line runs from this to the gods and heroes who disguised themselves as women (Hercules, Achilles) and to the hermaphroditism of many gods and heroes.”¹¹⁷ To that, one can only say that one man’s straight line is another man’s hairpin turn. This sort of transvestite burlesque serves the purposes of gender solidarity, not androgyny; it reinforces the separation of the sexes by ridicule of the other.

This is not to say that the gender of initiates may not be problematized during an initiation. Baumann (1955: 58) argues that initiates are assimilated to the status of women during their liminal period, and he notes that in many Bantu languages the word for initiates, *mwali*, also means “girl.” Against this one may put Turner’s discussion of the term *mwadi* (1967: 95f, 222f), which is presum-

¹¹⁴ Hollis (1909: 56).

¹¹⁵ Turner (1967: 253f).

¹¹⁶ See Baumann (1955: 228), Wirz (1922: vol 2, pt 3, p 12), and Propp (1987: 132). The essays collected by Herdt (1982) provide many accounts from Papua New Guinea of older women acting out the parts of men for the benefit of female novices (pp 116, 215f, 224, 229, and esp. 231), and conversely, of men pantomiming the roles of women. See further below (p 230).

¹¹⁷ “Der Organisator des Ritus *verkleidet sich* als Frau. Er ist Frau-Mann. Von hier führt eine gerade Linie zu als Frau verkleideten Göttern und Helden (Herakles, Achilles) und zum Hermaphroditismus vieler Götter und Helden,” Propp (1987: 133); emphasis present in the translation from the Russian into German. The examples from ritual and folktale adduced here by Propp (131–4) do not involve transvestism on the part of the youths concerned.

ably a dialect variant of the same word, employed among the Bantu-speaking Ndembu. According to Turner, the Ndembu likewise use the word *mwadi* to mean either “novice” or “first wife.” Turner’s native informants explained the fact that this same word denoted “novices” and “first wives” by pointing out that “the novices were regarded as ‘married’ by the lodge Instructor, whose Ndembu name . . . means ‘husband of the novices.’”¹¹⁸ Yet the same word can also refer to a chief being installed in his office. On this basis, Turner argues that the most general semantic force of the word is to denote “a person undergoing an experience for the first time” (223). Thus the application of the term *mwadi* or *mwali* to novices may not be primarily a token of gender.

How then do candidates for initiation dress when they are away from their community? The almost universal answer is that they do not dress at all. While transvestism may be practiced, as we have seen, in very, very few instances, nudity is nearly universal. Even Eliade notes this in the passage quoted above (p 212): “Even the quite widespread custom of ritual nudity during the period of segregation in the bush can be interpreted as symbolizing the novice’s asexuality.” Turner agrees:

In societies dominantly structured by kinship institutions, sex distinctions have great structural importance. Patrilineal and matrilineal moieties and clans, rules of exogamy, and the like rest and are built upon these distinctions. It is consistent with this to find that in liminal situations (in kinship-dominated societies) neophytes are sometimes treated or symbolically represented as being neither male nor female. Alternatively, they may be symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes, irrespective of their biological sex . . . They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows . . . In the words of King Lear they represent “naked unaccommodated man.”¹¹⁹

It is in the context of this effacement of gender and status that we may explain the occasional cross-dressing of initiates and related phenomena; nudity, however, is far more common.¹²⁰ Note, however, that assimilating initiates to the category of the feminine is the opposite of what most boys’ initiations seek to accomplish.

Now we can see the way that womanliness functions in the context of boys’ initiations. To the extent that the novices are treated as not-men, it is in

¹¹⁸ Turner (1967: 223); the instructor says to his wards, “I am your husband; I have married novices. I am your husband, I will guard you and look after you.”

¹¹⁹ Turner (1967: 98f).

¹²⁰ For example, Brelich (1969: 72, n 60) cites as a purported example of initiatory transvestism the report from Cameroon by Nicol (1929: 105) that Bakoko novices wore their hair like women while in seclusion. Yet these novices also spent their confinement completely nude, a prescription that Brelich acknowledges to be much more widespread.

pointed contrast to the already initiated adult men who are also present. Womanliness is a relative judgment made about the novices by men in a completely male ritual, from which all women have been banished. The initiates are at a point between boyhood and manhood, and the imperfect state of their masculinity may sometimes be emphasized by ascribing feminine traits to them. As for real women, in the milieu of the Ndembu circumcision lodge anything feminine was regarded as “inauspicious and polluting” and even the use of the normal word for “woman” was taboo.¹²¹ In Turner’s analysis, the point of *Mukanda* is typical of boys’ initiation rites: to remove each boy from the apron strings of the domestic sphere, to integrate him into the world of men, and to create a sense of solidarity among his peer group.¹²² We have come a long way indeed from Achilles, obedient to his mother, hiding alone amid a crowd of girls.

Achilles and Initiation

In the next section we will turn to some general methodological problems with the myth-and-ritual mode of interpretation, but let us for the moment assume for the sake of argument that the Achilles-in-Scyros myth might have arisen out of some forgotten initiation ritual. Now that we have some idea of the typical practices and symbolism of such rituals, we can compare them to the myth we know. One thing to emerge from the evidence is the strong connection of initiation with circumcision. All of the few well-reported cases in which the boys undergo a period of seclusion like Achilles on Scyros and are dressed as girls are not only initiation rites in general, but are also more specifically circumcision rites.¹²³ Quite apart from the absence of circumcision in pagan antiquity, one must confront the problem of Neoptolemus. One reason for the lengthy seclusion of the novices is that the wound from circumcision takes much longer to heal in adolescents than in infants; in the absence of modern antiseptics, it can take several months. During this time it is of course impossible for the boys to have sexual intercourse without enormous pain. In the Ndembu ritual described below, even the parents of the novices, as if in sympathy, are prohibited from intercourse for the duration of their sons’ confinement, believing that to break this taboo would be to delay their sons’ healing.¹²⁴ The birth of

121 Turner (1969: 41 and 1967: 254).

122 Turner (1967: 153) quotes Gluckman (1949: 145): “the boys are ritually separated from their mothers to be identified with their fathers.” See also Turner (1967: 265f).

123 The Freudian explanation for circumcision in initiation ceremonies is that it represents the threat of castration with which the father enforces the incest taboo; the representation of boys as girls as they recover from the operation would agree with this account: Freud (1946: 197, n 87). For a very different psychoanalytic account, see Bettelheim (1962: esp. 19–23; on transvestism: 35f, III–13), against which see Turner (1967: 35).

124 Turner (1967: 5, 256).

Neoptolemus on Scyros is our earliest datum of the myth, and it is hard to reconcile with the usual conception of the island as the place of Achilles' initiatory withdrawal. Surely if anything was remembered of the "initiation" on Scyros, it would have rendered the notion of a novice fathering a child while in seclusion absurd.

This leads us to a more general objection. In the relevant cases in the ethnographic literature, boy novices who undergo a period of seclusion apart from the community are strictly enjoined from seeing or meeting with any woman during this period.¹²⁵ The separation of the sexes is an essential feature of adolescent initiation rites in most traditional cultures. In some cases any woman, or indeed any uninitiated man, who happens upon the secluded boys is subject, at least in theory, to summary execution.¹²⁶ This period of "seclusion" is therefore primarily a seclusion from women and secondarily a seclusion from men outside the tribe, whereas initiated adult males are usually free to come and go when visiting the camp. The motive behind adolescent initiation ceremonies is to separate the boys from their homes and their mothers and to integrate them, while in seclusion, into the community of men.¹²⁷ To the extent that initiation is a symbolic death and rebirth, it is a rebirth into a purely male society that is accomplished without the aid or intervention of women.¹²⁸ This will pose a serious problem for anyone who wishes to connect the myth of Achilles with initiatory practices, for the hero is always in a very feminine environment on Scyros, and indeed is secluded at his mother's behest entirely among women.

So there are many problems when we try to compare Achilles on Scyros to a novice undergoing initiation. Whereas novices are secluded in a community of peers and older men, Achilles is secluded in a community of girls. Whereas women would be absolutely prohibited from most *rites de passage* for adolescent boys, Deidamia is present in all versions of the Scyros story, and in some there is a crowd of maidens around Achilles. Whereas the purpose of a tribal initiation is to bond men to men, Thetis' purpose on Scyros is to prevent Achilles from joining the male community of Greek warriors. Whereas in traditional rites the boys' bond with their mother is weakened, Achilles only stays on Scyros in obedience to his mother's wishes. Whereas the initiatory novice some-

125 According to Hollis, the case of the Nandi is a partial exception, since this prohibition was eased after the boys recovered from their circumcision and a washing ceremony was held (1909: 56); they continued to wear women's clothes for some months afterward.

126 Cf. Eiselen (1932: 11). For worldwide statistics on the same-sex exclusivity of adolescent initiation rites, see Schlegel and Barry (1980: 707).

127 Thus Gluckman (1949). On the nature of initiation ceremonies in the ancient world as a transition from the private, female sphere to the public, male world, see Leitao (1995: 142, 152–5).

128 This fact has already been noted with respect to the classical evidence by Casadio (1982: 228), who was arguing, against Brelich (1969: 32f), that ancient mystery cults could not have derived from tribal initiation. He contrasted the universal participation of women in mystery cults with the strict separation of the sexes in initiation rituals among traditional peoples.

times takes on a new male name, which stays with him ever afterward, Achilles takes on a new female name which is only temporary. Whereas the purpose of an initiate's sometimes unorthodox and eclectic dress is to defamiliarize rather than to deceive, Achilles takes on the clothing and full social role of a maiden. Whereas the initiation of adolescent boys often entails grueling physical ordeals, among which circumcision and scarification figure prominently, Achilles suffers nothing but embarrassment on Scyros.

Is this pedantry? In isolation some of these objections might amount to logic-chopping, especially in a field where a measure of speculation is inevitable; but taken as a whole, there is far more to be said against the equivalence of Achilles with an initiate than for it. Another consideration is that cross-dressing is simply too widespread and multivalent a cultural practice for us to read it as an initiatory feature without some further contextual support. The lack of such a context in the ancient world is evident if we compare the story of Hercules and Omphale, which is the other episode of transvestism in the biography of a well-known hero. Initiation rites are even less plausibly connected to the story of Hercules' cross-dressing. In all versions of that tale, it belongs to the latter stage of the hero's life, certainly not to his youth. Hercules is sold to Omphale as a slave to atone for the slaying of Iphitus, brother of Iole, who provoked Deianeira's murderous jealousy; thus the hero is no ephebe, but married and a father when he goes to Lydia.¹²⁹ The most obvious similarity between the stories of Achilles and Deidamia and Hercules and Omphale is the romantic element.¹³⁰ This element of heterosexual duality is antithetical to the spirit of group and gender solidarity that initiation ceremonies are designed to inculcate. For not only are initiation rites in traditional cultures almost always strictly segregated by gender, there is sometimes a homosexual, and especially a pederastic, element to some of these rituals.¹³¹ The end of initiation often marks the beginning of a boy's sexual life and of his freedom to marry, so rites of reincorporation often take on a heterosexual aspect; but this is quite distinct from the strict separation of the sexes that characterizes the "marginal" period.

129 On the difficulty of applying initiatory paradigms to nonephebic heroes, see Versnel (1990b: 56f = 1993: 69–71).

130 Even Delcourt acknowledges this: "The constant link between *transvestism* and *sexual union* prevents our considering the exchange of garments as merely a passage-rite signifying no more than the final incorporation of young men into complete manhood." Delcourt (1961: 16); emphasis present in the translation from the French. Waldner (2000: 98f) points to the connection of the Scyros episode with heterosexual reproduction and the resulting conflict with any initiatory paradigm.

131 The extreme exception that proves the rule that heterosexual sex is excluded from initiatory practice is the gang rape of a female victim; this sort of activity also serves to bond men together by collective violence and to distance the other sex by objectifying it; see above (p 213, n 88), and Herdt (1982: 9). For the plausible argument that initiatory pederasty was at the origin of Greek homosexuality, see Sergent (1987), esp. 40–54 on the extensive comparative evidence, which comes from Melanesia and Australia.

The fact that the “seclusion” and transvestism of both Achilles and Hercules is intertwined with romance indicates that they do indeed belong to a similar narrative typology, and that it is unlikely to have derived from initiation.¹³²

Inventing Ancient Ritual

If the evidence for so-called initiatory transvestism is so scanty and becomes even less so when applied to Greek myth, how did the idea become so entrenched? Initiation was first mentioned in connection with Scyros by Crawley, but his article (1893) was written before van Gennep’s book (1960; orig. Fr. pub., 1908), and so he did not account for the myth as a matter of liminality. Rather, taking his cue from James Frazer, Crawley saw Thetis’ disguising of Achilles as belonging to a range of rituals designed to hide a child from evil spirits.¹³³ To his credit, Crawley acknowledged the connection between cross-dressing and circumcision, and tried to account for the specific details of the myth, such as Thetis’ involvement, in terms of the ritual. As Frazer’s theory of disguises was gradually displaced in popularity by van Gennep’s account of initiation, Crawley’s hypothesis was adapted to the new climate by W. R. Halliday and Jane Harrison, who postulated arbitrarily and without good evidence that cross-dressing could be a sign of liminality.¹³⁴ This theory could look for support to a recent best-seller that seemed to supply evidence for the connection of cross-dressing and boys’ coming-of-age ceremonies. Lane’s *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, which was very widely read, especially in the Everyman edition, described how young Egyptian boys were paraded to their circumcision, dressed in part in female clothing.¹³⁵ The problem is that this cross-dressing only lasted for the duration of this brief procession, and Lane makes it clear that its purpose was apotropaic: to ward off the evil eye and to keep hostile powers away from the ceremony by disguising its nature.¹³⁶ Halliday and Harrison were content to let such examples of carnivalistic and apotropaic transvestism stand as their ethnographic evidence for initiatory cross-dressing. They did not recognize that the shift to this initiatory paradigm made it suddenly difficult to explain certain details of the myth, such as Thetis’ role, and the very feminine environment on Scyros.¹³⁷

132 For a recent attempt to read both the Hercules-and-Omphale myth and the Achilles-on-Scyros myth as initiation narratives, see Cyrino (1998).

133 Cf. Frazer (1966: 263f).

134 This subtle transformation of Crawley’s thesis was first effected in an article by Halliday (1909–10), and quickly seconded by Harrison (1912: 505–7). Subsequently, Eliade (1958: 109) promoted the theory to great effect. On the history of the initiatory paradigm in general in classical scholarship, see Versnel (1990b: 44–6 = 1993: 48–51) and Waldner (2000: 4–50).

135 Lane is best known now as one of Said’s (1978) “orientalist” bugbears.

136 Lane (1904: vol 1, 71f; vol 2, 246).

137 On Harrison’s abuse of van Gennep’s model, see Waldner (2000: 46f).

Once invented, the idea that boys in ancient Greece engaged in ritual cross-dressing took on a life of its own. Jeanmaire (1939) thought that he discerned further examples in other myths, and others followed suit, including Delcourt (1961) and Brelich (1969). The spread of this thesis has not been impaired by a near-total lack of evidence that cross-dressing was a part of boys' ritual experience. More recently, the article by Leitao on the *Ekdysia*, quoted above (p 207), has been influential. We saw earlier that the *Ekdysia* was likely to have been a prenuptial fertility rite for girls, or perhaps a *dokimasia* of naked boys; but Leitao has managed to convince many readers that the participants were cross-dressed boys.¹³⁸ Perhaps one of the reasons this argument has succeeded so well, despite the lack of evidence, is that Leitao simply suppresses the part of the ancient text that contradicts his thesis. He begins his article by quoting prominently and at length most of Antoninus Liberalis' account, but he silently omits the crucial, final sentence of the passage, which describes the actual ritual connected with the myth.¹³⁹ This is not an accidental oversight; after persevering through another thirty pages or so of the article without hearing any mention of the prenuptial rite that our text gives as the context for the myth, only then, subsequent to the conclusion of the article, does the reader come to Leitao's "epilogue," wherein the crucial final sentence of Antoninus Liberalis' account is quoted at last, as though it were a separate and entirely unrelated piece of evidence.¹⁴⁰ Leitao's rationale for this extraordinary manner of presenting the evidence is his claim that the prenuptial rite mentioned in the final sentence is something completely separate from the *Ekdysia*; it certainly seems so, when Antoninus Liberalis' two concluding sentences are artificially separated from each other by thirty pages of dense academic prose. A reader presented with the integral passage might well come to a different conclusion. Here it is once more, the two final sentences of Liberalis' account joined together again: "they call the festival *Ekdysia*, in memory of the moment when the girl laid aside the *peplos*. It is customary, before the nuptials, to lie down beside an image of Leukippos."¹⁴¹ On any plausible reading of those two sentences, they are closely connected: the customary (*νόμιμον*) act refers to something that happened in connection with the festival (*ἑορτήν*) called *Ekdysia*. For Leitao, however, the genuinely attested ritual attached to the myth is subordinated to the presumption of cross-dressing and it is even said to be "possibly unrelated" (161, n 137) to the Leukippos story.¹⁴² There

138 See above (p 207). For continuing acceptance of Leitao's argument, see e.g. Ferrari (2002: 119); *contra*, see Waldner (2000: 238f).

139 Leitao (1995: 130f). The omission is not indicated by the presence of an ellipsis in the Greek text, although another perfectly routine omission is so marked.

140 Leitao (1995: 161, n 133).

141 For the Greek of this quotation in slightly fuller form, see above (p 208).

142 This would be contrary to the evidence of Ovid, whose version of the myth is entirely about marriage: above (p 209).

must have been initiatory cross-dressing in antiquity, and so the ancient text that runs counter to this *must* be wrong; the academic fantasy of transvestism carries more weight than the ancient testimony that contradicts it.

This is not to say that the Leukippos myth is without interest to the student of religion; it may be interpreted as an expression of the transformative power of ritual, as Graf (1993b: 118) does, or as the dramatization of opposites, as Vidal-Naquet (1986: 117) does. Forbes Irving provides a convincing account of the myth as “a metaphor for the growth of boys into men,” while rightly rejecting the theory of a transvestite ritual at the *Ekdyisia*.¹⁴³ Likewise, this does not mean that there are no other aspects of the mythology of Achilles’ early life that might repay study in the light of Greek initiatory social practice. For example, the story of his dedicating a lock of his hair to the god Sperchius recalls similar dedications by boys at the Spartan Apatouria festival.¹⁴⁴ As another example, the instruction of Achilles by Chiron in the wilds of Pelion might recall the old Indo-European practice of fosterage.¹⁴⁵

What is it about the phantasm of initiatory transvestism that has appealed so strongly to today’s scholars? One would have thought that the culture of classical Greece was strange enough without having to invent further manifestations of its otherness. It may be that this academic “myth” has exercised the same appeal in the modern world as the Achilles-in-Scyros myth once did in the ancient world. That story appealed to writers like Euripides and Statius at least in part because of its potential to undermine the manliness of the paradigmatic epic hero. In similar fashion, the prospect of visualizing the forefathers of Western culture mincing around in dresses at the point when they became men seems to have been too much for many scholars to resist, despite the absence of evidence that it really happened.

In addition to the difficulties with the specifics of the evidence for and against initiatory transvestism, the scholarship on this question also illustrates a problem with methodology. It has too often been the case that several, or even a single, supposed attribute of initiation ritual, such as cross-dressing, has been identified in ancient myth, and this is then thought to be enough to demonstrate the applicability of the initiatory paradigm. Firstly, this begs

¹⁴³ Forbes Irving (1990: 152–5) discusses the lack of evidence for cross-dressing; Willetts (1962: 175) (quoted above, p 208) argues plausibly that the festival was part of Cretan male initiation ritual, but without admitting transvestism to his account.

¹⁴⁴ Burkert (1985: 263).

¹⁴⁵ In the light of the old Irish practice of fosterage and its importance in Irish heroic myth, it is interesting that the translator of the *Achilleid* into Middle Irish insistently and with a repetitiousness that is almost obsessive refers to the relationship between Chiron and Achilles using the terminology of fosterage: Ó hAodha (1979). Chiron is the foster-father (*aite*), and Achilles is his fosterling (*daltae*); the same terms were also used in Irish to describe the relation between teacher and disciple. The translator sometimes makes heavy weather of understanding certain elements of the Latin poem, such as pagan cult practices; it is as if here he came at last upon an aspect of Statius’ story that made excellent sense to him within his own cultural context.

the question of whether it is in fact true that myth commonly reflects forgotten ritual.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, to single out discrete practices such as transvestism as indications of the initiatory paradigm was not the way van Gennep worked. The explanatory power of his model is rooted in the fact that he described a functional typology and not a game of transcultural semiotic bingo. Using his method, we may examine a ritual to see if it can profitably be analyzed as exhibiting a dynamic of marginalization and reabsorption in its own terms. No signifier, however, transcends culturally embedded systems of meaning to provide us with an immediately distinctive and self-evident transcultural sign of initiatory status. In other words, you should not simply latch onto one or two superficial attributes of a rite and announce that it reflects an initiation rite. The purported evidence for “transvestism” in the initiation of adolescent boys has too often been abstracted from various cultures without reference to the particularities of its ritual context.

Cross-dressing on Scyros

The Achilles-in-Scyros myth is unusual in that we know how and when it entered into the broader Greek consciousness and we can speculate plausibly as to why it did so. We saw earlier in this chapter (p 199) that the myth of Achilles on Scyros first gained diffusion beyond that island at the point when its inhabitants were conquered by the Athenians. It was a byproduct of the Athenian colonization of Scyros and Cimon’s appropriation of the mythical past of that island.

The tale probably had its origin in the local patriotism of the people of Scyros; this picture of Achilles’ stay as a draft-dodger was more flattering to them than the Homeric and cyclic story that they were conquered by Achilles. Whatever the local circumstances may have been that gave rise to a tale of Achilles’ transvestism, it was disseminated through the ancient world thanks to its place in the work of artists like Polygnotus, Euripides, and Athenion of Maroneia.¹⁴⁷ It is curious that those searching for a ritual origin for the myth of Achilles on Scyros have ignored a ritual that is still practiced on that island, and which involves boys dressing as girls.

In the Orthodox calendar, the three weeks of Carnival culminate on the first day of Lent, a Monday (Καθαρή Δευτέρα, or “Clean Monday”). On Scyros, the distinctive feature of this celebration is a procession up to a monastery adjacent to the ancient acropolis. This is led by a man, called a γέρος “old

¹⁴⁶ The scholarly literature on the relation of myth to ritual is vast; two discussions of the problem as it relates to initiation rites in the ancient Mediterranean are Versnel (1990b = 1993: 15–88) and Calame (1996: 15–60).

¹⁴⁷ Pliny (*NH* 35.134) described a painting by Athenion of the discovery of Achilles by Ulysses that has been claimed by Robertson (1975: 583f) as the probable prototype for Pompeian wall paintings of the scene; for bibliography, see LIMC s.v. “Achilles,” no. 105.

man,” dressed up in goat skins, and with a multitude of sheep-bells around his waist; he leaps about, frightening passers-by and making as much noise as possible. This goat-man is accompanied by a boy dressed as a girl (the “maiden,” or κορέλλα), who wears a Scyrian girl’s wedding dress and a painted mask, and carries a broom. As the “maiden” flirts with the “old man,” both are attended by a clownish figure called the “foreigner” (Φράγκος, or the “Frank”). The “foreigner” is accompanied by “ladies” (*kyries*), who are men dressed as women, but less elaborately than the “maiden.” As is common in Carnival celebrations worldwide, different processions compete to see who can put on the best show.¹⁴⁸ Given that the festival involves a goat-man, heavy drinking, ribaldry, good-natured abuse, and dressing up, it is not impossible that it may be Dionysian in origin. It certainly existed in exactly the same form with the same cast of characters when it was attended a hundred years ago by two visitors from the British School at Athens.¹⁴⁹

Dawkins says that the shepherds came into town in their best clothes while the boys of the town dressed up as girls or as shepherds.¹⁵⁰ The locals are said to explain this widespread transvestism with reference to the disguise of Achilles, and who is to say they are entirely wrong?¹⁵¹ If it is true that the goat-man and the effeminate boys are survivals from a Dionysian ritual, and if Cimon’s Athenian colonists had happened upon an amusing scene of social inversion such as this at Scyros, the legendary cradle of Neoptolemus, might they not have done precisely what the emissaries of the British school did, and report the curiosity back to the metropolis?

Myth vs. Ritual

When I first began to research the question of Achilles’ cross-dressing, I took for granted the common belief that transvestism in the ancient world mainly had its origins in adolescent age-group initiations, and when I saw that Statius had used the language of initiation, religious and tribal, to describe Achilles’ comportment on Scyros, I thought it would be easy enough to draw a line from one to the other. It was only after a long and disappointing trawl through the ethnographic literature that I began to realize that it was not, perhaps, a question of a search for origins, but, to use the distinction made by Vernes in the epigraph of the present chapter (above, p 193), a search for meaning. In other words, the fact that a story like the Scyros myth can be interpreted as symbolizing the transformation, via puberty, of a child into a man, and the fact that this kind of transformation may also be symbolized via various social

¹⁴⁸ For descriptions of the event, see de Sike, Y. (1993), Dawkins (1904–5), and Lawson (1899–1900).

¹⁴⁹ Lawson (1899–1900) and Dawkins (1904–5).

¹⁵⁰ Dawkins (1904–5: 74).

¹⁵¹ De Sike (1993: 122f).

rituals, do not, when put together, imply that one necessarily has a causal relation with the other.

The invention of ritual out of myth is a kind of reification whereby a society's thoughts about itself are confused with reality. It is one thing to say that aspects of feminine identity, such as clothing, might usefully help to symbolize the status of boys before their initiation as men. It is another therefore to say that novices are likely to have been dressed up as girls. Where the idea is suggestive, the act is likely to become ridiculous. The point of a *rite de passage* for boys is to illustrate their rebirth as men; frank transvestism would invite the possibility of illustrating the opposite. It is no coincidence, therefore, that it is far more often the elders, the initiators, that we see cross-dressing in coming-of-age rites, for they are unlikely to have made plausible women; by their nature they perform a comic burlesque that illustrates by its implausibility and lack of naturalism the differences between the sexes. By contrast, the transvestism of pubescent or prepubescent boys carries the danger that it might succeed all too well, thus delivering the wrong message about the incommensurability of the sexes. We can sum up this distinction between the uses of myth and the uses of ritual by adapting the famous dictum of Lévi-Strauss and saying that some symbols are good to act out, while some symbols are good to think with.¹⁵² The diffusion and longevity of the myth of Achilles on Scyros has demonstrated its usefulness as a way of thinking about gender and adolescence; it does not follow that ritual cross-dressing must once have been a good way to act out those thoughts.

Whether or not ritual transvestism was practiced on prehistoric Scyros, and whether its origin was initiatory or carnivalesque and Dionysiac in nature, are ultimately questions that have little repercussion beyond the ethnography of the island of Scyros. As we will now see, however, Statius himself uses the imagery of initiation to dramatize Achilles' situation, but by this we primarily mean initiation into mystery religions rather than coming-of-age ceremonies for adolescent boys. The very fact that Statius himself illustrates Achilles' transformation by referring to various rituals of initiation does not mean that he had some special anthropological insight *avant la lettre* into the *origins* of the myth; it simply means that he was as capable as we are of interpreting its *meaning* symbolically.

Statius was not privy to some special knowledge about the pre-historic origins of Greek myth; he was simply trying to understand what the Scyros-episode might mean in the context of Achilles' biography. When he looked around his conceptual world for other episodes of personal transformation attended by the wearing of unusual clothing, he found a number of these, many of which were religious in character, and some of which may even have

¹⁵² "The animals in totemism . . . are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think'." Lévi-Strauss (1964: 89).

had their origins in age-group initiations. There is a link between Achilles' transvestism and initiations, but it a link that Statius, and perhaps his sources, invented, and that modern scholars have naively re-invented, all in the search for meaning. The irony is that it was always attractive, long before the current vogue of "liminality" as a concept, to interpret the meaning of the story of Achilles' transvestism in the light of an initiatory transformation.¹⁵³

Initiation in the Achilleid

The Roman world was replete with opportunities for personal initiation into religious cults whose practices and teachings were available only to the adept. Several of these cults marked the internal transformation of the initiate and his place apart from the everyday world by means of an external show of clothing. Just as a modern priest's ritual garb marks its difference from everyday clothing in part by blurring normal distinctions of gender, in the ancient world it was also possible for the clothing that marked the separation of the sacred from the quotidian to be construed as feminine. In the case of the *galli* of Cybele and of the *Dea Syria* this was evidently quite intentional; but the male worshipers of Isis wore a linen garment that apparently was not designed to evoke femininity per se, but rather purity or even transcendence.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, this sort of attire could be slandered as feminine by the cult's enemies. Josephus, for example, tells the story that Caligula used to mock a certain captain of the guard, his eventual assassin, Chaerea, by insinuating against him the charge of effeminacy: "He did this even though he was not free from it himself, putting on women's clothing in the rites of certain mysteries that he himself organized, and devising wigs to wear and many other ways of counterfeiting a feminine appearance."¹⁵⁵ It is either the case that the emperor's sartorial flamboyance is being used to support charges of private blasphemy, or that a genuine ritual activity of the emperor's has been distorted into a private perversion.¹⁵⁶ Thus

¹⁵³ For a skeptical view of this vogue, see Versnel (1990b: 50–59 = 1993: 60–79): "Nearly all (groups of) people, then, are marginal in some respect or another, or are potentially so, and so also are most situations" (1993:65).

¹⁵⁴ According to Griffiths (1975: 271.15, ad Apul. *Met.* 11.10), the Isaic white linen garment had its origin in the normal garb of Egyptian priests. In addition to the normal white robes worn by initiates, Apuleius (*Met.* 11.24) also speaks of twelve highly ornate robes that were put on Lucius after his initiation, on the occasion when he was put on display before the congregation; see Griffiths (1975: 285.17) ad loc. On the other hand, there is one genuinely cross-dressed figure in the Isaic procession described by Apuleius (*Met.* 11.8), whose attire is motivated by theatrical masquerade, not by ritual: Griffiths (1975: 272.7) ad loc.

¹⁵⁵ καὶ ταῦτα ἔπρασεν αὐτὸς οὐκ ἀπηλλαγμένος ἐν τινῶν τελεταῖς μυστηρίων, ὡς αὐτὸς συνίστατο, στολὰς τε ἐνδεδυμένος γυναικείους καὶ τινῶν περιθέσεις πλοκαμίδων ἐπινοῶν ἄλλα τε ὅποσα ἐπικαταψεύσασθαι θηλύτητα τῆς ὀψεως ἔμελλεν (*Ant. Jud.* 19.30).

¹⁵⁶ Turcan (1996: 89) and Griffiths (1975: 272.18, ad Apul. *Met.* 11.9) claim that Caligula was possibly devoted to Isis.

the accusation made against both Caligula and Elagabalus that they indulged in wearing women's clothes was presumably political slander making capital out of ritual practice.¹⁵⁷ Either way, the link that could easily be made between effeminate dress and mystery religion is well illustrated by Josephus' accusation.¹⁵⁸ In the light of the potential connection between cross-dressing, or at least gender-ambiguous clothing, and mystery cults at Rome, it is perhaps not surprising that Statius decided to present Achilles, while dressed as a girl on Scyros, engaged in cult activity which is described in the language of religious initiation.

To return at last to the text of the *Achilleid*, we find the atmosphere dense with references to mystery cult on the occasion of the dance that Deidamia, Achilles, and their companions perform for the visiting Ulysses and Diomedes. We looked at this episode earlier (pp 146ff), from the point of view of Achilles' public performance as a woman. We saw then that the allusions to various secret rituals gave a sense that Lycomedes was revealing something private. Here is that scene again, this time in full:

nitet ante alias regina comesque
Pelides: qualis Siculae sub rupibus Aetnae

825 Naidas Henneas inter Diana feroxque
Pallas et Elysii lucebat sponsa tyranni.
iamque movent gressus thiasisque Ismenia buxus
signa dedit, quater aera Rheae, quater enthea pulsant
terga manu variosque quater legere recursus.

830 tunc thyrsos pariterque levant pariterque reponunt
multiplicantque gradum, modo quo Curetes in actu
quoque pii Samothraces eunt, nunc obvia versae
pectine Amazonio, modo quo citat orbe Lacaenas
Delia plaudentesque suis intorquet Amyclis.

835 tunc vero, tunc praecipue manifestus Achilles
nec servare vices nec brachia iungere curat;
tunc molles gressus, tunc aspernatur amictus
plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat.
sic indignantem thyrsos acceptaque matris

840 tympana iam tristes spectabant Penthea Thebae. (1.823–40)

The royal young lady and her companion, Achilles, son of Peleus, were more splendid than the others; just as Diana, fierce Pallas, and Persephone, bride-to-be of Pluto, tyrant of Elysium, used to outshine the Naiads who inhabit Henna under the slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily. Now they begin their steps and the Theban flute gives a cue to the groups: four times they strike with their hands the bronze cymbal of Rhea, four times the holy drum, and four times they retrace their winding steps. Then they

157 Suet. *Calig.* 16 and 52; and *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Comm.* 5.

158 On this link, see Cumont in Vogliano and Cumont (1933: 257), and Turcan (1959: 200f).

lift their thyrsi together and together they lower them; they increase their pace, in the way that the Curetes and the holy Samothracians do in their ritual; now they turn and face each other in the Amazonian comb, in the way that Artemis hastens the women of Sparta around in a circle and spins them in her own Amyclae as they beat the rhythm. Then Achilles was indeed particularly obvious: he did not bother to keep his turn or to join his arms with the rest; at that point he scorned the gentle steps and soft garments; then more than usual he disrupted the chorus and made a great tumult. In just this way Thebes was disappointed at the sight of Pentheus when he scorned the thyrsus and the drums that his mother had welcomed.

The narrator alludes to the Eleusinian narrative of the rape of Persephone (824–6), to the Bacchic mysteries (827–30), the cult of Cybele (*aera Rheae*, 828),¹⁵⁹ to the Curetes (831), to the Samothracian mysteries (832), to an otherwise unknown Amazon dance (832f), and finally to a chorus of Spartan maidens dancing for Artemis (833f). The scene goes on to end with a simile comparing Achilles' ineptness at dancing to Pentheus' rejection of ecstatic Dionysian religion (839f).

What impression was this passage designed to give? A first attempt to answer the question could begin from the situation being described in the poem. Achilles is a boy dressed as a girl, and so perhaps Statius has put together the kind of dances in which cross-dressed or effeminate men might be seen or imagined to have taken part. This would explain the presence of Cybele, and the Bacchic imagery, since Dionysus himself was sometimes an effeminate figure.¹⁶⁰ If we stretch the definition of the term, the Amazons were cross-dressers of a sort, too.¹⁶¹ Yet the references here seem organized around the theme of initiation into mystery cult and dancing rather than cross-dressing per se, so perhaps there is more going on here than a list of examples designed to evoke a scene of ritually sanctioned transvestism. As we will see in the next chapter, the most prominent and extensive episode in Achilles' cross-dressed

159 The *locus classicus* for the assimilation of elements (particularly musical instruments) from the Corybantes, the Cretan Curetes, and the cult of Cybele into Dionysian rites is the *parodos* of Euripides' *Bacchae*, on which see Dodds (1960: ad 120–34) with Versnel (1990a: 180).

160 On the "effeminate" Dionysus, see Csapo (1997: 260–2). As Jameson (1993) argues, "asexuality" may be a better characterization of Dionysus than "effeminacy." As for the possibility of ritual cross-dressing, compare Csapo (1997: 262): "The god's worshippers imitate his image (and *vice-versa*). Cross-dressing is widely attested for both public and private Dionysiac ritual," and *contra*, Henrichs (1982: 159): "In any case, ritual transvestism was never prominent in Dionysian cult, and apart from the concept of the effeminate Dionysus, it has left no trace in the Dionysian iconography of the Hellenistic or imperial period." See Strabo (*Geogr.* 10.3.8) for a suggestion of transvestism by certain "Curetes."

161 One could pursue this line of argument further, as it has been argued, for example, that in the dances for Artemis Korythalia at Sparta, the girls wore phalluses, and so they would constitute parallels for Achilles as a male interloper: Gallini (1963: 219). It has also been argued that there were transvestite dances for Artemis Orthia at Sparta: Ephraim (1989: 9) and Miller (1999: 242).

life on Scyros as described by Statius is his participation in a Bacchic rite with strong echoes of Roman mystery cult. In that rite, Achilles reprises and revises the role of Pentheus, and the connection between that passage and this one is made explicit by the simile here that compares Achilles to Pentheus.¹⁶² It seems that this passage is primarily designed to reinforce that link between Achilles' transition to manhood and status-changing ceremonies in cult. It should be emphasized, however, that these are distinct in important ways from the sort of coming-of-age ceremonies usually invoked to explain Achilles' transvestism.

Literary convention may also have played a role in shaping this passage; certainly maenads and Amazons are a staple of exoticism in poetic imagery. Yet there are other rites mentioned that are far from any literary convention; in particular, the Samothracian mysteries stand out as a piece of "real" ritual introduced into the conventional world of mythological epic; this is apparently the first mention of the Samothracian mysteries in Latin verse.¹⁶³ Such an interpolation should come as no surprise from a poet who had described Adrastus, in the hymn that concludes Book 1 of the *Thebaid*, as invoking Apollo in the name of Osiris, and even of Mithras, whose name is the last word of the book (*Theb.* 1.717–20). As Ahl (1986: 2856) says, "Statius is clearly trying to startle us with this reference to Mithra." There, the poet effects a startling connection between the world of the *Thebaid* and the religious milieu of its audience, integrating two indisputably ancient but non-Greek and initiatory gods into the epic framework. There is nothing quite so startling here, but still the "Great Gods" (Μεγάλοι Θεοί) of Samothrace belong more to the world of Roman traders and travelers in the Aegean than to classical epic.¹⁶⁴ One possible attraction of this particular piece of "realism" is that, like the Bacchic mysteries, like the rites of the *Magna Mater*, like the rites of the Curetes, and like the choruses of Spartan girls, it was an initiation ceremony that may have involved dancing.¹⁶⁵

The one thing, then, that unites these dances is initiation; all of them, with the one possible exception of the obscure "Amazonian comb" (*pectine Amazonio*,

162 1.839f. See below (p 253).

163 It is also one of the very few occasions that the cult is mentioned at all; there is a fleeting reference to it by Juvenal (3.144f).

164 The true names of these gods seem to have been a part of the mystery, and they do not have a mythology that has come down to us. They were often assimilated to the Cabiri, from Herodotus (2.51) onward: see Cole (1984: 1–4). On Roman interest in the Samothracian mysteries, see Latte (1960: 274) and Cole (1984: 87–103).

165 Lobeck (1829: 1291–3) claims, on the basis of rather weak and equivocal evidence, that the Romans derived from Samothrace the dances of their Salii; cf. Servius (ad *Aen.* 2.325 and 8.285). Plutarch (*Numa* 13.4) considers this theory only to reject it. Better evidence for dancing as part of the rites comes from a relief found on Samothrace that shows a female chorus: Conze (1860: 62f); cf. Nock (1941: 579), Cole (1984: 29, 107 n 61), and Burkert (1993b: 185). On the connection of the Samothracian rites with the *galli* of the *Magna Mater*, see below (p 257).

833), are unambiguous indications of dramatized status transformations in the course of either mystery cult or puberty rites.¹⁶⁶ The scene is set with a simile that alludes to the Eleusinian tale, and when the dancing starts, the steps are described by means of analogy with both kinds of ritual: mystery and puberty initiations. It is of great interest that Statius mixes together two categories that we might otherwise have thought distinct: on the one hand, rituals like those of the Curetes and the choruses of Spartan girls, which are artifacts of age-group initiations, and on the other, rituals like the Samothracian, Bacchic, and Eleusinian mysteries, which feature initiations into cult groups.¹⁶⁷ It is clear that the ancients understood mystery religions as a particular category, and had words to describe the process of initiation (*initiare*, τελεῖν). It is not so certain that what anthropologists call secular initiation was understood as such in the ancient world.¹⁶⁸ For Statius, however, the ritual change in status accompanied by dancing and unusual clothing that characterized both private mystery cult and public age-group initiations made them good illustrations of Achilles' change of status on Scyros, and so he grouped both types of transition rite together.¹⁶⁹

It is not really very surprising that Scyros came to be interpreted as a threshold in Achilles' life: he puts aside there the childish and unmanly aspects of life in favor of the life of a warrior and its accoutrements. This is attested by the fact that eighty percent of all surviving visual representations of Achilles'

166 On the word *pectine* in this context, see Feeney (2004: 95). It is not provable, but it is highly likely that the Amazon dance was also meant as an allusion to mystery rites for Artemis, and that the reference has simply become opaque to us. Callimachus (*Hymn* 3.237–47) described the establishment of a statue and cult of Artemis at Ephesus by the Amazons. They danced in their armor and then danced in a circle, while their leader, a woman named Hippo, performed some sort of rite (τέλεσεν . . . ἱερὸν, 239). It seems, however, that Hippo refused to dance, for in the final lines of the hymn the poet adds Hippo to a list of more famous characters from myth who offended Artemis and were punished: Calydon, Agamemnon, and Orion (*Hymn* 3.260–5). He admonishes everyone to attend the goddess' yearly dance, saying that Hippo's refusal to dance in the circle around her altar did not go unpunished (οὐδέ . . . ἀκλαυτί, 3.266f). Callimachus clearly expected his audience to be familiar with the identity of this Amazon and his allusion to her crime against Artemis, but the story has been lost to us. It is her refusal to dance that makes it likely that Statius was alluding to the Callimachean myth, since it is a perfect parallel for Achilles, likewise a gender-bending and reluctant dancer. Pentheus (1.839–40) is a third cross-dresser who was reluctant to participate in the rites of a god.

167 It is not clear whether Statius means to refer to the Curetes of ritual or to their mythical avatars who kept the infant Zeus safe with their noisy dancing. The latter is what Nock (1941: 580) intends when, in the course of discussing this Statian passage, he says, "there was no little resemblance between the emotional ceremonies of the Corybantes, Curetes and Cabiri . . . they were in the main minor deities, and they could easily be put in one category."

168 See Burkert (1987: 7–11) and *NP* s.v. "Initiation" [Graf] on the ancient terminology of initiation. TLL 7.11.1651.3–17, s.v. "initio" lists some wider uses of *initiare* beyond the field of mystery cult, none of which are quite able to carry the very broad sense of *rite de passage*.

169 This connection is not inevitable: "ancient mysteries still seem to form a special category: they are not puberty rites on a tribal level" (Burkert, 1987: 8).

life on Scyros depict the moment of that transition, the scene of Achilles' unveiling by Ulysses.¹⁷⁰ These artists understood instinctively that the moment when Achilles seized the weapons divided his biography into two halves; they accordingly represented him at the critical moment of that transition. What Statius adds is the element of ritual. He illustrates Achilles' social transformation and transition from childhood to manhood with reference to rites whose transformative force his audience could appreciate. At a crucial moment within the poem, the dance Achilles is performing is associated with girls' initiation, and his clumsiness at it is a sign of his true sex; Achilles' transformation into a warrior is comically adumbrated by a description of his bungled transformation into a woman. The other rituals of transformation or status-dramatization that Statius adduces here are from the mystery religions, and some of them may be associated with ritual cross-dressing, or at least with ambiguously gendered clothing. Taken together, the adolescent *rites de passage* and the mystery religions provide a comprehensive ritual model for explaining the myth of the adolescent Achilles' social transformation via transvestism. The common element that unites both types of ritual is the concept of "initiation" in its broad sense, and the dance. As Lucian said, "There is scarcely an ancient mystery cult to be found without dancing in it."¹⁷¹

What Statius does here is particularly striking in that he explains the symbolic force of a myth with reference to a collection of ritual practices: the inverse of normal aetiology. Statius gives two examples of adolescent initiation rituals taken from Crete and Sparta respectively; this is, if it is not a coincidence, a sign that he knew that those were the places where such practices were most prominent and lasted longest. When explaining classical myth with reference to initiation rites, it must be remembered that the data may reflect prior analysis along these lines by Greek and Roman writers themselves.¹⁷² Authors like Statius (for Achilles) and Plutarch (for Theseus) are too sophisticated for us to use them as inert sources to be mined for a vein of pre-historic fact. The desire to connect myth with ritual is no modern innovation; it is the essence of the ancient aetiological mode of explanation.

170 Unveiling: LIMC s.v. "Achilleus," nos. 105–75; other scenes: nos. 94–104, 176–81. Omitting Kossatz-Deissmann's "unsichere Darstellungen" (nos. 182–5), this yields a ratio of 71 representations of the unveiling to 17 of everything else on Scyros. Admittedly, this may also have been because it was an attractively dynamic scene and because the alternative, to represent Achilles as being a maiden and yet identifiably his heroic self, was more difficult.

171 τελετήν οὐδεμίαν ἀρχαίαν ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἄνευ ὀρχήσεως (*De saltatione* 15). Cf. also the "secret dances" for Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae* (χοροὺς κρυφαίους, 1109).

172 For an example of Plato doing this, see Calame (1999).

✧ 6 ✧

Rape, Repetition, and Romance

“*This is my favorite,*” he said. He held the object toward me. I took it in my hand. It was a little bronze statue, helmeted, clothed to the foot in carved robe with the upper incised chiton or peplum. One hand was extended as if holding a staff or rod. “She is perfect,” he said, “*only she has lost her spear.*” I did not say anything.

H. D., *Tribute to Freud**

A STATUE of Pallas Athena guards the shore of Scyros in the *Achilleid* (*Tritonia custos | litoris*, 1.696f), and Ulysses and Diomedes venerate the image upon landing on the island (1.697f). It is a lucky omen: the presence of Ulysses’ patroness adumbrates success for his mission. This is not the first time that we have seen this particular statue. It is to a shrine of Pallas on the beach, presumably this same one, that the procession of Deidamia and her sisters made its way on the occasion of Achilles’ own arrival at the island (1.285f). The virgin goddess presides, not without irony, over the arousal of Achilles’ interest at his first sight of Deidamia: Pallas, the virgin goddess who guards the kingdom’s boundary, will prove an ineffectual guardian of her ministrant’s virginity.

The cult activity of Deidamia and her sisters on that occasion is described by the poet in some detail:

* H. D. (1974: 68f), italics in original; on this passage, see Garber (1997: 59f). The statuette is today in the collection of the Freud museum in London.

Palladi litoreae celebrabat Scyros honorum
 forte diem, placidoque satae Lycomede sorores
 luce sacra patriis, quae rara licentia, muris
 exierant dare veris opes divaeque severas
 fronde ligare comas et spargere floribus hastam. (1.285–9)

By chance Scyros was celebrating a day of rites in honor of Pallas, the guardian of the shoreline, and the daughters of peaceful Lycomedes had left their father's house at dawn of the feast-day – a freedom rarely granted to them – in order to offer her the bounty of spring and to tie a wreath around the severe hair of the goddess and to strew flowers upon her spear.

On this festive spring day, the girls relieve the severity of Pallas' stern statue by tying a crown of leaves to its head; they also adorn the statue and its spear with flowers. That detail is not an arbitrary piece of religious color, for the image of a spear whose appearance and deadly purpose has been softened by vegetative decoration has a particular resonance within the *Achilleid*.¹ Throughout Statius' poem, the distinction between male and female is expressed by means of an opposition between the spear and the thyrsus. We have already examined in detail (above, p 139) one striking example in Deidamia's farewell speech to Achilles. There, arguing for a certain equality between the sexes, she made a comparison between the thyrsus Achilles carried on Scyros and the decorative *signa* that are carried by soldiers in wartime; her argument depends upon seeing both implements as varieties of decorated weapons. The thyrsus and the spear are the tools proper to each gender; they are much alike, and yet importantly different. The idea that the thyrsus, the quintessential implement of maenadism, is like a decorated spear is a commonplace that goes back at least as far as Euripides.² The *thyrsi* are a feminine equivalent to the spears carried by men within the world of gender inversion and female violence in the *Bacchae*.³ The thyrsus, which was made from a stalk of giant fennel, would have been a less than optimal weapon, so the connection is primarily metaphorical.⁴ The thyrsus is often represented in Latin poetry as a sort of spear manqué; it is used as a weapon by maenads and by the mythical legions of Bacchus in his eastern campaigns, but is just as often contrasted to and juxtaposed with real weaponry as a harmless toy.⁵ Originally, the fennel stalk was topped with a bunch of ivy, while in Hellenistic and Roman representations it was usually

¹ Thus Hinds (2000: 237).

² E.g. “the thyrsus, a missile wreathed in ivy” (θύρσον . . . χισσινον βέλος, Eur. *Bacch.* 25).

³ The maenads inflict wounds on men with their thyrsi at *Bacch.* 761–4.

⁴ As Ovid noted: “they throw thyrsi not designed for that job” (*coniciunt thyrsos non haec in munera factos*, *Ov. Met.* 11.27f) and cf. *Met.* 3.712.

⁵ Compare “the Ganges, subdued by the warlike thyrsus” (*thyrso bellante subactus* | *Ganges*, *Stat. Theb.* 12.787f) with “the soft thyrsus” (*molles thyrsos*, *Theb.* 9.435). The supposedly unwarlike nature of the Thebans as expressed in their worship of Bacchus is often illustrated in the *Thebaid* by their association with the thyrsus as an anti-spear: 2.664, 7.171, 9.795f.

capped with a pine cone and wrapped with streamers of ivy and vine leaves.⁶ Sometimes its weaponlike aspect was made explicit by showing it with an iron tip.⁷

The thyrsus frequently serves in the *Achilleid* as a symbol of unmanliness; it is often deployed as the representative of what is proper to women, in direct opposition to the weapons of masculinity. Achilles, for example, imagines Patroclus back in Thessaly borrowing his own weapons, while he is on Scyros instead, shaking the thyrsus and spinning wool (1.632–6). When Ulysses sets out to Lycomedes' palace with the girlish gifts that he will use to set his trap, we find that they are mostly implements of Bacchic cult, including “unwarlike thyrsi” (*imbelles thyrsos*, 1.714). In joking incomprehension, the slightly dim Diomedes then asks him, “are you going to arm Achilles for the destruction of Priam and the Trojans with these things?” (*hisne gravem Priamo Phrygibusque armabis Achillem?* 1.717). When the trap is sprung, the girls go to play with the gifts laid out for them, including the “elegant thyrsi” (*teretes thyrsos*, 1.849); they ignore the real weapons (*arma*), thinking that they are for their father. Achilles, of course, picks up the spear and shield instead of the thyrsus and tympanum. The juxtaposition of these particular male and female implements highlights their similarity of form and difference of function.

The twofold nature of the thyrsus as potential weapon and harmless toy for women is apparent in the simile that compares Achilles to the effeminate Bacchus transforming himself into a warrior as he sets out for India: “he arms his luxuriant thyrsus.”⁸ By changing an emblem of femininity into a paradigmatically male weapon, the transformation of Bacchus' thyrsus into a spear reflects the god's move from leisure to violence, and adumbrates the forthcoming transformation of Achilles into a warrior. The fearful instrument of Troy's destruction will be discovered underneath the feminine decoration that covers it and conceals its deadly purpose.

In addition to the leaves or pine cone at its tip, another feature that distinguishes the thyrsus from a simple staff consists of the ivy or vine leaves hanging from it and entwining the stem.⁹ This decorative aspect is relevant to the description of the ritual activity of Deidamia and her sisters at the shrine of Pallas. They “offer the bounty of spring,” “tie a wreath around the severe hair of the goddess,” and “strew flowers on her spear.” This transformation and feminization of the warlike image of the goddess by decking it with foliage and flowers

6 Dodds (1960) ad Eur. *Bacch.* 113 and 1054–5.

7 Dodds (1960) ad Eur. *Bacch.* 761–4.

8 *thyrsumque virentem | armat*, 1.617f. Dilke (ad loc) explains that “Bacchus is regarded as converting his thyrsus into a spear by fitting it with an iron tip.” Perhaps so, or it may be that Statius is thinking that the thyrsus is already like a spear with its tip covered; if so, *armat* would mean to remove the pine cone or ivy bunch that blunts it.

9 E.g. “the wreathed missile” (*redimitum missile*, 1.612) and “the thyrsus with its vine tendrils” (*pampineis . . . thyrsis*, 1.634).

is suggestive of the thyrsus as a merely decorative and womanly spear. If all that Statius meant to do by mentioning Athena's spear was to name the statue by metonymy, he chose a slightly unusual attribute. The iconography associated much more distinctively with the goddess is her aegis and her helmet.¹⁰ The motivation behind this apparent association between the thyrsus and the transformation of Athena's spear may be made clearer by examining the way Statius plays on the phallic humor of the spear and the thyrsus in two other passages in the *Achilleid*.

When Thetis is trying to coax her son into a girl's garment, she offers a series of mythological *exempla* to support her case. We looked at the rhetoric of this speech earlier (above, p 122), and we saw that her strongest example was Hercules' sojourn with Omphale:

cedamus, paulumque animos submitte viriles
atque habitus dignare meos. si Lydia dura
pensa manu mollesque tulit Tirynthius hastas . . . (1.259–61)

Go on, relax your manly spirit a bit and stoop to put on my clothing. If Hercules of Tiryns carried Lydian wool and soft spears in his calloused hand . . .

In these lines, Statius takes the contrast of the soft weaving and the hard hands of Hercules from Propertius, and he adds the thyrsus, considered here as a "soft spear."¹¹ What distinguishes it from a true weapon is its "softness," presumably referring both to its material substance and its womanly associations. Thetis says, "relax your manly spirit," and refers to the "soft spear" that Hercules carried while dressed as a woman. The phallic humor in these passages is quite obvious.¹² Statius' contrast between the implements of weaving and war is derived from Ovid's account in the *Ars amatoria* of Achilles raping Deidamia; the narrator addresses the hero:

Reice succinctos operoso stamine fusos:
quassanda est ista Pelias hasta manu. (Ars am. 1.695f)

Cast aside the spindle wound with the thread at which you toil – that hand of yours is meant to brandish a spear from Mount Pelion.

Stephen Heyworth has demonstrated that Ovid's lines are full of sexual *double entendre*, and that Achilles' "spear" is here the "weapon" he uses to rape Deidamia.¹³ If we read Statius' passage in this light, we might object that it would

¹⁰ Pallas identified with her aegis: *Silv.* 1.1.38, 3.1.131, *Theb.* 2.597, 12.606f, *Ach.* 1.486; identified with her helmet: *Silv.* 2.2.117, *Theb.* 2.243; aegis and helmet: *Ach.* 1.299f.

¹¹ "He wielded the soft wool for spinning with his very calloused hand" (*tam dura traheret mollia pensa manu*, Prop. 3.11.20) cited by Dilke ad loc, which see for other examples of the thyrsus identified as a form of spear.

¹² Cf. Adams (1982: 19–21), esp. p 19: "the frequency of *ad hoc* metaphors both in Greek and Latin shows that the sexual symbolism of weapons was instantly recognizable in ancient society."

¹³ Heyworth (1992). On this passage, see below, p 268.

hardly be in Thetis' interest to imply that, dressed as a girl, Achilles' spear (*hasta*) might become soft (*mollis*); yet earlier we saw Thetis tangle herself inextricably in precisely this kind of self-destructing language.

An even more explicit phallic joke which contrasts the spear and the thyrsus is made at the moment of Achilles' discovery. Ulysses baits his trap by including weaponry among his gifts to the girls of Scyros. They delight in the "elegant thyrsi" (*teretes thyrsos*, 1.849), along with drums and jewelry, while Achilles is drawn to the shield and spear (*orbem*, 1.852; *hastae*, 1.854). The spear and shield are the masculine reflections of the forms of the feminine thyrsus and drum, and so it is appropriate that when Achilles' true identity is finally revealed, they are all that he is left wearing. As Ulysses goads him, Achilles' female garb begins to slip off (*iam pectus amictu | laxabat*, 1.874f), and then it comes off entirely:

illius intactae cecidere a pectore vestes
iam clipeus breviorque manu consumitur hasta –
mira fides. (1.878–80)

Untouched, his garments fall from his chest, and now his shield and spear are swallowed up in his hand and seem shorter – astonishing, and true.

As with Hercules' "soft spears" (*molles . . . hastas*, 1.260f), the "shorter spear" (*brevior . . . hasta*) is a clear phallic joke, and it is especially obvious here, since Achilles is now as naked as a hero on a painted Greek vase. One could in fact interpret the Latin quite naturally to mean not that Achilles' grasp made the spear seem shorter, but that he was left grasping his "shorter spear" with his hand. As we shall see in the rest of this chapter, a central question the *Achilleid* asks is which sort of "spear" turned Achilles into a warrior, the organ or the weapon; in other words, biology or social role?¹⁴

To return to Athena's spear, it may be clearer now why she is the ideal goddess to preside over the transformation of Achilles into a phallic girl. Athena herself is a cross-dresser, of course, wearing her armor and helmet; in the *Iliad*, she puts on Zeus' own chiton.¹⁵ While the girls of Scyros are adorning and feminizing the statue of Pallas, it is no coincidence that Thetis is within sight, just down the beach, simultaneously adorning and feminizing Achilles. The flowers with which the girls bestrew the spear of Pallas' statue transforms it temporarily into something like a thyrsus. One could press further an interpretation of Athena's spear as the symbol of Athena's "masculinity."¹⁶ Standing in the midst of Lycomedes' daughters, the statue of Athena, if we consider it as a representation of a phallic woman, is a reflection of Achilles on Scyros, orna-

14 On this scene, see Feeny (2004: 95f): "Achilles' gesture of revealing his naked body as if to declare a definitive solution to the problem of his masculinity is less decisive than it looks."

15 χιτῶν' ἐνδύσα Διός, *Il.* 5.736.

16 See Pomeroy (1975: 4) on Athena as the "archetype of the masculine woman."

mented, ostensibly female, surrounded by girls, yet armed and masculine. The thyrsus is associated with Achilles' transvestism and compromised masculinity in the *Achilleid* because it is a hidden and veiled weapon, and so can stand in its own right as a symbol of male cross-dressing, just as Athena's spear is a symbol of her own gender-bending. Ornamented and ornamental, the thyrsus serves no useful purpose, whereas the spear is a purely functional and phallic object. The thyrsus is a spear in drag, so when Achilles chooses the spear instead of the thyrsus, both of which are laid out before him by Ulysses, he chooses masculinity in a very graphic way.

The thyrsus, which Statius employs as a token of Achilles' compromised masculinity, belongs of course to a Bacchic ambiance. It is no coincidence that the most extensively described and dramatic episode in Achilles' life as a young girl as it is imagined by Statius is a Bacchic ritual: the maenadic rites celebrated by the women of Scyros, during the course of which Achilles rapes Deidamia (1.592–660). Why did Statius choose to imagine that the rape of Deidamia took place in the midst of a Bacchic festival? It is not the case, first of all, that Statius merely associated the worship of Bacchus with licentiousness and sexual promiscuity. As we shall see, the women worshipers of Scyros are very chaste, as cultic maenads were supposed to be.¹⁷

There are a number of potential connections between transvestism and maenadism to consider. One possibility is that Statius intended a tongue-in-cheek reference to the libretto which, according to Juvenal (7.82–7), he wrote for Paris, Domitian's favorite actor. It was named *Agave*, after Pentheus' mother in Euripides' *Bacchae*; and the connection between cross-dressing and maenadism may have been inspired by Paris playing the role of Agave the maenad. This interpretation is problematic, however, since Paris had been executed at Domitian's orders in AD 83, and Juvenal implies that having written for the pantomime is not something one would wish to advertise in any case. Another literary precedent is in the plots of New Comedy, where girls frequently get into trouble at religious festivals, particularly those which, like the maenadic festival on Scyros, take place at night. In Menander's *Epitrepontes*, for example, the heroine becomes pregnant at the Tauropolia, a *pannychis* for Artemis celebrated near Brauron.¹⁸ A similar motif is found in Euripides' *Ion*, where Xuthus claims to have fathered Ion during the course of maenadic rites.¹⁹ This plot device seems possible as a general influence on Statius, but it is not a very useful explanation of the specifics of his narrative. The problem in comedy was to get the maiden out of the house to a

¹⁷ Maenads were not always represented chastely in art, however; see below (nn 57 and 59).

¹⁸ See Gomme and Sandbach (1973) ad *Epit.* 451.

¹⁹ Eur. *Ion* 550–4; I owe this point to Albert Henrichs. It is possible that Euripides might have indicated similarly in his *Σκῦροι* that Neoptolemus had been conceived, like many another child in the plot of an ancient drama, during a nighttime Dionysiac festival.

place where she is vulnerable to seduction or rape, but Achilles is living in the same quarters as Deidamia, and so he hardly needs to await such an opportunity. Aristophanes on several occasions has cross-dressed male characters in attendance at exclusively female rituals; but those episodes too are motivated by dramatic objectives that are not present here. A vaguer explanation might point to the association between effeminacy and cross-dressing and ecstatic cult, including that of Dionysus. This is articulated most famously in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where the disguised god himself is accused of effeminacy (353), and Pentheus is eventually dressed by the god as a maenad (913–15). None of these general considerations give a completely satisfying explanation of the motive behind depicting the cross-dressed Achilles as a maenad, so a more complete answer may be found by examining the details of the episode.

Statius describes the scene of a maenadic ritual that had been a staple of literature since Euripides, but he also directs his presentation of this episode toward the so-called ritual “maenads” of his own day, i.e. the participants in the Bacchic mysteries, a very different sort of cult. In effect, he offers a revision of Pentheus' transvestism in the *Bacchae* that serves as an alternative aetiology for male participation in the mysteries of Bacchus at Rome. Before embarking on such an interpretation, we will need to examine two topics: mythical maenads as represented in the art and literature of classical Greece, and their counterparts in the ritual of the period; and secondly the Bacchic mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman world, which affected to share some common features with maenadism proper, but which were largely a distinct phenomenon.

Maenadism in Greek Myth and Cult

Statius designates with great specificity the precise type of Dionysiac ritual the women of Scyros were performing when Deidamia was raped, and this means that we can compare his depiction of the rite with what we know of its activity in myth and in cult:

Lucus Agenorei sublimis ad orgia Bacchi
 stabat et admissum caelo nemus; huius in umbra
 alternam renovare piaae trieterida matres
 conserant scissumque pecus terraque revulsas
 ferre trabes gratosque deo praestare furores. (1.593–7)

There stood a towering wood devoted to the rites of Bacchus, descendant of Agenor, and the grove reached up to the sky; in its shade the devoted matrons of Scyros used to repeat the biennial maenadic festival, and so to bring torn-apart cattle and trees wrenched from the earth, and to offer to the god the frenzy which pleases him.

The word *trieteris* (595) is the *vox propria*, the technical term, for the central rite of mountain-going maenadism.²⁰ Statius helpfully glosses it with the adjective *alternam* “alternating,” as it was celebrated every other year (the term *trieteris*, or “every third year,” comes from inclusive counting). The influence here of Euripides’ *Bacchae* is made clear by the mention of rending cattle (cf. *Bacch.* 734–6) and digging up trees (cf. *Bacch.* 1103f). This rite, which belonged to Greek history as well as to myth, involved women traveling to the mountains every other winter to engage in ecstatic worship of Dionysus; but even in the classical Greek world maenadism was never universal.²¹ The *trieteris* was exclusive to women, at least originally, and the participants wore distinctive garb. It was held in the mountains, with the worshipers organized into troops under the leadership of a chief maenad. The dancing and the physical effort required led to exhaustion and perhaps to an elevated mental state. Mythical maenads were said to perform an act called “raw-eating” (ὠμοφαγία) in the course of their rite; much remains obscure about the possible counterpart of this act in historical ritual.²² It is doubtful whether mountain-going maenadism of this type ever really existed in Italy; if it did, it did not survive the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* of 186 B.C., which banned the Bacchic mysteries in Italy. Henrichs (1978) has sharply distinguished these real maenads of ritual from the maenads of myth, who loomed large in later Dionysiac iconography, due in part to the prestige lent by Euripides’ portrayal in the *Bacchae*. Even if Euripides may have represented certain aspects of ritual maenadism faithfully, the play is very far from being a documentary account of Greek ritual.²³ The influence of the play was also surely felt in the evolution of later rituals that aspired to the level of communion with the god for which Euripides had made maenads famous.

Another difficulty in interpreting the *Bacchae* with respect to ritual is that Euripides sometimes appears to employ the language of initiation and mystery cult, and this has been taken to mean that the *Bacchae* is not only a reflection of mountain-going maenadic cult practice, but also of initiatory Dionysiac religion in Athens.²⁴ Seaford is candid about the lack of relevant historical evidence: “it must be immediately and frankly admitted that we do not know

20 Cf. Eur. *Bacch.* 132f, χορεύματα . . . τριετηρίδων, and Virg. *Aen.* 4.302, *trieterica* . . . *orgia*. See Hinds (2000: 239) on *Agenorei*.

21 See Henrichs (1978: 153) on the scantiness of the evidence.

22 For a more extensive summary of maenadic ritual, see Henrichs (1982: 143–7); on the vexed question of the nature of the ὠμοφαγία, see Henrichs (1978: 147–2) and Obbink (1993: 68–72). On the ecstatic aspects of the ritual, see Bremmer (1984) and Henrichs (1994: 51–6).

23 “In the *Bacchae* both the ‘black’ maenadism of the Theban women and the ‘white’ maenadism of the maenadic chorus from Asia contain elements that are derived from real cult” (Henrichs, 1978: 144). On the intercontamination of ritual and fictional maenadism, see *ibid.*, 121f.

24 Some interpretations of the play put great stress on its initiatory features: Seaford (1996: 39–44), Boyancé (1966: 55f), and Coche de la Ferté (1980: 232–50). On the centrality of Dionysiac ritual to the play, see the exchange between Seaford and Segal in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (95.10.20, 98.3.10, 98.5.26, 98.7.01), and the afterword to the second edition of Segal’s book on the *Bacchae*

much about the mysteries of Dionysus and that most of what we do know is from the Hellenistic and Roman period ... [We must] suppose a degree of continuity between the Dionysiac mysteries of the classical and later period."²⁵ Fortunately, it is not necessary for our purposes to decide the extent to which the *Bacchae* was influenced by initiatory religion; it is only necessary to point out that it could have been interpreted in this way by a Roman audience. In Statius' day the only "maenads" to be found in Italy were the participants in the Bacchic mysteries who styled themselves as such. Contemporary linguistic and ritual practice would have authorized them to read the "secret rituals" (ὄργι[α] ... ἄρρητ[α], 471f), and "initiations" (τελετάς, 74) in Euripides' text in terms of mystery cult, whether or not that is what they had primarily meant in fifth-century Athens.²⁶ For Roman and Hellenistic "maenads" the language of initiation that is occasionally used by Euripides would have entitled them to feel that they themselves were the inheritors of mythical maenadism, whether or not this was in fact true. There is little doubt that subsequent worship of Dionysus invoked the example of mountain-going maenadism:

Certainly, the Dionysian mysteries preserved some features of the ancient orgy. Their liturgy incorporated the ... appearances of mountain-going maenadism: dances, rhythmic swaying of the body and prophecies ... drunkenness and music, garments of animal skins, the brandishing of staffs wreathed in ivy.²⁷

This continuity is due in no small part to the influence of Euripides' account. It is likely then that the example afforded by the *Bacchae* also affected the social construction of "maenads" at Rome.

The Bacchic Mysteries at Rome

Despite the fact that the Bacchic mysteries at Rome appropriated much of the imagery of maenadism, there were also important discontinuities between the two. Mountain-going maenadism was strictly limited to women, whereas the mysteries were open to the participation of both sexes.²⁸ Bianchi (1976: 13) points out that the shift from the outdoors to indoor *telesteria* was another

(1997: 349–93). See also Henrichs (1982: 147): "In Euripides' *Bacchae* the non-maenadic, esoteric and private cult of Dionysus coexists with maenadism."

25 Seaford (1981: 252). This position has gained some strength in recent years on the back of discussion of the "Orphic" gold lamellae; see Graf (1993a: 239–75) and Burkert (1993a: 259f): "We find evidence for Bacchic mysteries from the sixth to the fourth century."

26 Henrichs (1982: 223 n 91): "maenadic rites are never called *mysteria* in classical or Hellenistic texts, although they are occasionally said to involve 'initiation' (*teletê*)."

27 Turcan (1996: 296). In fact, drunkenness was almost certainly not an aspect of mountain-going maenadism: Henrichs (1982: 145; 1984: 69).

28 "The available evidence suggests very strongly that the sexual barriers separating male and female followers of Dionysus began to break down in the late classical period": Henrichs (1984: 70).

major typological change. In fact, the entire nature of the ritual changed from that of an ecstatic and explosive riot to that of an escapist drinking club: “maenadism degenerated into Dionysiac carnival and merrymaking.”²⁹ Thus an inscription from Phylakos in Locris of the second-century AD records a group of “maenads” who are essentially members of a well-organized and hierarchical social club.³⁰ The same hierarchy is evident in another second-century inscription, this one from Italy. It was set up at Torre Nova near Tusculum to honor a woman from a well-known family, a consul’s wife, Pompeia Agrippinilla, and it records the names of four hundred initiates into the Dionysiac mysteries together with their ranks: “the old names for the maenads had become mere titles.”³¹

The first literary notices we have of Dionysiac mysteries at Rome are from the scandalous events of 186 BC, but there is archaeological evidence that Bacchic cults already existed in Italy before that date.³² For the events of that year, we have Livy’s account of an alleged Bacchanalian conspiracy (39.8–19) and an inscription has preserved the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* which suppressed it.³³ There are also some allusions to the crisis in Plautus. These accounts seem at first to give the impression that there was a vigorous cult of ecstatic worshipers of Bacchus throughout Italy. The anxiety generated at Rome by the idea of maenadism is striking, given what we know about the cult of Dionysus as it existed elsewhere. In the Hellenistic world the tendency had long been towards more sedate communities of mystery worship that were hierarchically organized and met regularly; while their rituals may have included music and dancing and such, they were not the ecstatic rites that the maenadism of the classical period had been. When the cult appears next at Rome, it is in the initiatory form common in the Hellenistic world, which may be because the Roman magistrates succeeded in suppressing the ecstatic form of worship, or, much more likely, because that is what it had been all along. The Roman authorities were doubtless suspicious of organized religious structures beyond the control of the state, and their anti-Dionysiac propaganda was highly effective; we see it reflected in Livy’s tale, and even in the hinted scandal and the “popular fears” of the cult that find expression in Plautus.³⁴ Gruen has suggested that the cult was never very dangerous and that the crisis was a mere pretext for the Roman senate to extend the reach of its powers in Italy, while Walsh has emphasized the dramatic and fictive nature of Livy’s narrative.³⁵ Livy’s drama, involving “the son of a good family, his wicked step-father and

29 Henrichs (1978: 155).

30 See Henrichs (1978: 155f).

31 Henrichs (1978: 156); on the inscription, see Vogliano and Cumont (1933).

32 Beard et al. (1998: 93f).

33 Dessau (1892–1916: no. 18).

34 Thus Gruen (1990: 150–2).

35 See Gruen (1990: 34–78) with extensive bibliography on the episode, and Walsh (1996) on Livy’s version.

his freed-woman mistress with a heart of gold," is clearly derived from New Comedy and the Roman stage.³⁶ One could take this a bit further and argue that not only is Livy's account of the affair colored by literature, so too was the senate's campaign itself. The substance of the charges made about the cult also derives from a dramatic source: Euripides' *Bacchae*. The senate's inherent suspicion of nighttime worship and the mixing of the sexes, and its accusations of drunkenness and sexual promiscuity, are very similar to the concerns voiced by Pentheus when he returns to Thebes. Pentheus has heard that the women of Thebes are going off into the mountains to worship Dionysus, where he imagines that they are drinking wine and having sex with men: worshipping Aphrodite rather than Dionysus (*Bacch.* 215–25, 260–2). Livy describes how the rites included wine and feasting; drunk and under the cover of night, men and women mixed together and indulged their vices. The Roman version is more exaggerated than the Greek, with insinuations of magical practices and with the addition of some quintessentially Roman fears about legitimacy and inheritance, but the picture is essentially similar.³⁷ This kind of accusation, though inspired more by literature than fact, did take hold in the Roman popular imagination.³⁸ The reason the charges were credible may not in fact be because truly ecstatic worship comparable to Greek maenadism was taking place in Italy, but rather because the Bacchic mysteries at this stage were open to both sexes and did involve the drinking of wine.

The Bacchanalian affair and the introduction some years earlier of the cult of *Magna Mater* have been interpreted by Gruen as a watershed in the development of the definition of the Roman religious sensibility against the Greek.³⁹ If the Roman senate was asserting its ability to regulate and control Greek cult and Greek culture, it was doing so in part by demonstrating its freedom to rewrite Greek literature as it saw fit. The *Bacchae* was revised by the Roman Senate from the perspective of Pentheus, considered not as an impious and feckless tyrant, but as a dutiful Roman magistrate. The Bacchanalian affair itself, and not just Livy's narrative of it, was carefully scripted:

Roman leaders built a carefully constructed scenario in 186. Sympathetic witnesses appeared, their characters scrutinized and their stories verified, their testimony then presented to the *patres*, who sanctioned firm consular action, without apparent dissent. Denunciation of the Bacchants came in virulent terms, stressing the alien features of the cult, alleging a combination of crimes, and stigmatizing the movement as a *coniuratio*.⁴⁰

This is how the Roman senate announced to the world the way it would handle the unauthorized arrival of cults from the East, which is, after all, the subject

36 Walsh (1996: 195–9); quotation: Beard et al. (1998: 92).

37 Orgies of this kind were likewise ascribed to early Christians: Henrichs (1982: 225, n 104).

38 Cf. Gruen (1990: 50f), and Beard et al. (1998: 93, n 77).

39 Gruen (1990: 5–78).

40 Gruen (1990: 77).

of the *Bacchae*. In Greece, the claims of religion might sometimes prevail over the objections of the secular authorities, but not at Rome. The dénouement of Euripides' play was accordingly rewritten by the Roman senate in line with proper Roman sensibilities. The blatant theatricality of Livy's narrative, which in turn is likely to reflect senatorial propaganda, suggests that, despite the sober language of the *senatus consultum* itself, the self-conscious manipulation of literary models was not beyond the capabilities of the senate.⁴¹ The relevance of all this to Statius lies in the fact that he repeats this process of rewriting the role of Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, although for Statius he is not an allegory of the watchful and duteous Roman magistrate, but rather he represents the problematic status of the male companion of the "maenads" in the Bacchic mysteries.

Cult Practice in the Bacchic Mysteries

The nature of the practices of the Bacchic mysteries remains obscure.⁴² It is not necessary to attempt here a comprehensive description of the cult, but there is one particular aspect of the mysteries, its phallicism, that forms part of the cultural background against which the *Achilleid* should be read. The iconography associated with the Bacchic mysteries is varied, and some of its symbols overlap with the general Dionysiac idiom: Silenoi and maenads, thiasoi of revellers, the thyrsus, the torch, the vine, dancing, and music. Some, on the other hand, seem to belong more specifically to the mysteries: representations of the infant Dionysus, the basket or *cista mystica*, the egg. One distinctive symbol of the cult was the *liknon*, a winnowing basket in which either the infant god or a phallus was placed, together with fruit.⁴³ The *liknon* was also associated with Dionysus in nonmystical contexts.⁴⁴ So too the phallus always had a part in the traditional Dionysus cult, particularly as carried in procession.⁴⁵ The combination of the two, however, is distinctive, and the *liknon* containing a

41 Walsh (1996: 200f), drawing on the model proposed by Wiseman (1994: 1–22), suggests that the events of the Bacchanalian affair, or rather the senate's approved version of those events, might have been dramatized on stage for the edification of the *populus*. Against this view, see Flower (1995) for the argument that the *fabulae praetextae* were a feature of aristocratic competition and patronage closely linked with specific military successes, and thus an unlikely venue for the expression of the senate's corporate will.

42 See Turcan (1996: 306–12), but see also the caveat at Turcan (1959: 195).

43 See Nilsson (1957: 66–98), who calls the *liknon* "the sign of the Bacchic mysteries" (95).

44 Nilsson at one time wrote that "earlier the *liknon* had no special religious significance" (1953: 177); but he presumably changed his mind, as he later sketched at some length the ritual use of the *liknon* in classical Athens, particularly as associated with Dionysus and Sabazios (1957: 21–30), concluding that "in the classical age the *liknon* was not sacred in itself but like other profane implements sometimes occurred in sacred use." The syncretism of the Dionysiac and Eleusinian mysteries, and Dionysus' assimilation to the Eleusinian figure of Iacchus, yielded Virgil's famous designation of the *liknon* as the *mystica vannus Iacchi* (*Geor.* 1.166), on which see Harrison (1903).

45 Cf. Athenaeus 622b–c.

phallus, either veiled or not, was apparently a unique symbol of the Dionysiac mysteries, and Matz (1963) uses it as a litmus test in categorizing which of the monuments belonged to mystery cult.⁴⁶ This position is criticized by Boyancé (1966: 42–4), who accuses him of slighting the other aspects of the iconography and of ignoring literary accounts of the mysteries in which the *liknon* is not prominent. Nevertheless, Matz does usefully bring together a number of images of the unveiling of the *liknon* with phallus from Italy and North Africa, the earliest of which is the famous fresco in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii (first century B.C.).⁴⁷ Nilsson (1953: 178) concludes that “The culminating point of the Bacchic rites was the revealing of the *liknon* with its contents.” Whether or not this is true, it does seem that this act was a significant part of the rite and something that set the mysteries apart from other forms of Dionysiac worship.

There have been many attempts to understand the meaning of this gesture. Cumont (1949: 251), connects it with the use of phalloi as grave markers, taking the *liknon* and phallus as symbols of generation and thus of the immortality that awaited the initiate. Nilsson, who has put the most influential stamp on the interpretation of this material, essentially agrees (1957: 143).⁴⁸ Turcan (1996: 309) similarly says that the unveiling “revealed to the candidate the triumph of life over death.” The ritual has been compared to a wedding by Merkelbach (1988: 113), who interprets the moment of unveiling as a symbol of the initiate’s introduction to the mysteries of sexual union. Zuntz (1963: 182f) expresses the view, which has not found much acceptance, that the fresco in the Villa of the Mysteries in particular depicts someone not revealing the phallus, but veiling it in order to protect it; he also questions the assumption that these scenes necessarily represent an initiation.⁴⁹ There does nevertheless appear to be a strong relationship in these representations between the phallographic *liknon* and one figure in particular, who is usually taken to be the initiate. Sometimes the *liknon* is held over the head of this figure; sometimes his or her head is turned away or the figure is bent at the waist, or the head or entire body is

46 Matz (1963: 16). Some of the depictions in his collection simply show a *liknon*, veiled or unveiled, and the process of veiling or unveiling must be inferred from those other pictures that do show someone doing it.

47 A complete list of the monuments Matz refers to (not all of which in the end he convincingly relates to the mysteries) is found on pp 8–9 of his monograph; excellent plates illustrate nearly all of them (the poor picture of the Villa of the Mysteries fresco is excused by its frequent illustration elsewhere; see Henderson, 1996: 237–40 for the modern history of the reproduction of the fresco). Most of the important monuments were already brought together by Rostovtzeff (1927), and nearly all of them are also illustrated by Nilsson (1957).

48 On the Bacchic mysteries in general, see Nilsson (1957); and on the Roman material alone, Nilsson (1953); on the generative symbolism of the phallus, see Nilsson (1957: 142), citing an allegory of Iamblichus (*Myst.* 1.11).

49 On the history of interpreting the Villa of the Mysteries, see Henderson (1996), esp. 329, n 29 on ritualist explanations of the fresco.

veiled.⁵⁰ There seems to be some truth to Matz's judgment that "it is essential that the person to be initiated should not see the act of unveiling."⁵¹ Yet it is curious that so many of the representations of the scene are keen to show us, the spectators, precisely that moment which the initiand is not allowed to see. The person in the picture is afraid or ashamed or terrified of what is about to be unveiled, and so turns away; or the head of the initiand has been veiled. Generally those with their heads veiled are boys and those who are fully veiled are women, while men simply turn their gaze away or are covered with a cloak.⁵² The people in the representations run away or protect themselves, while we are permitted to gaze on the whole process. One way of looking at these pictures, then, is as instructional: they teach us how we ourselves should respond to the unveiling. They show the viewer something and at the same time show us that it is not to be looked at. Thus Burkert (1987: 95f) points out that the important thing is not so much the identity of the banal objects themselves that the hierophant revealed, but the meaning with which the unveiling invested them.

The phallus may be a symbol of fertility or power or protection or emerging sexuality, but it is first and foremost a male symbol. This is one of the major discontinuities between the Bacchic mysteries at Rome and the maenadism of classical Greece, which was entirely *chose féminine*.⁵³ The question then arises of how the later mysteries managed to reconcile the contradiction between this apparent focus on male potency and the fact that they traced part of their heritage and much of their imagery to a ritual that excluded men and in some sense even "empowered" women, inasmuch as it released them temporarily from the confines of their household and city. The problem of phallic imagery in the Bacchic mysteries is a distillation of the more general contradiction that existed between the congregation of men and women in the mysteries and the total exclusion of men from maenadism proper. This is part of the problem with which Statius is engaged here; when he took the figure of the transvestite Achilles and made him surreptitiously attend a trieteric

50 For the typology of the scenes, see Matz (1963: 19–20); *liknon* over the head: Matz nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14; head turned away: nos. 1 (the fresco from the Villa of the Mysteries) and 3; bowed at the waist: nos. 4, 7, and 14; head veiled: nos. 10, 11, 12, and 13. These details come from Matz's commentary; the details are not always discernible in the reproductions.

51 "Wesentlich ist, daß die einzuweihende Person den Akt der Enthüllung nicht sehen darf," Matz (1963: 18).

52 According to Matz (1963: 18), nos. 2 and 9 are boys with only their heads veiled; nos. 10 through 13 are entirely veiled women; 4, 7, and 14 are men bending away, and in the first two of these the figure is covered with a cloak. The most notable exception to this pattern of concealment is "the terrified woman" in the Villa of the Mysteries fresco, who appears to be looking across the corner of the room at the phallus as it is unveiled. If we suppose that the cloth billowing above her head was a veil which had covered her head, then we may be meant to imagine that she too had been covered just a moment before.

53 Gernet (1953: 383), echoed by Detienne (1977: 216, n 138), and reiterated by Henrichs (1982: 147, 1984: 69, and 1994: 51), who adds that "Male maenads in the ritual sense did not exist" (1982: 147).

maenadic rite, he clearly invited comparison with Pentheus, also cross-dressed as a maenad and also secretly spying on precisely the same festival. By revising the outcome of this mythical story of a male intruder among the maenads, Statius is able, as we will now see, to account for the disjunction between the mythical paradigm of maenadism and Roman ritual.

The Achilleid as Aetiology

When the participants in the Bacchic mysteries, a cult that had little historical connection with Greek maenadism, went about wearing fawn-skins and carrying thyrsi, they exhibited the impact at Rome of the *Bacchae*.⁵⁴ As an account of the arrival of Dionysus and his worship in Greece, the play was an aetiology of the origins of maenadism, or at the very least it could have been read in this way by a Roman audience. Pentheus too served an explanatory purpose, as an illustration of the rule that maenadism was for women only and of the price to be paid for infringing that rule.⁵⁵ Pentheus' fundamental crime was impiety, but the modality of his punishment illustrated the danger to men of violating the rites of maenadism. A Roman male worshiper of Bacchus was at a disadvantage vis-à-vis his female companion in that the quintessential Dionysiac text endorsed her attainment of the most elevated state of mind while the only man to join that number was torn limb from limb. Statius' text addresses this imbalance on the level of myth. His Achilles recapitulates the role of Pentheus as interloper, but rather than suffering violence at the hands of women, he inflicts it.

The exclusion of men from maenadism is an issue that Statius raises explicitly:

lex procul ire mares; iterat praecepta verendus
ductor, inaccessumque viris edicetur antrum. (1.598f)

The law was for males to keep far away; the honored king [Lycomedes] reiterated the command and decreed that the rocky hollow should be forbidden to men.

This stipulation is violated by the smirking Achilles (*tacitus sibi risit*, 1.602), but it shows a good understanding of the cult practices of maenadism, which is borne out by the text in other ways, too.⁵⁶ As we saw above, Statius uses the

⁵⁴ Tacitus (*Ann.* 11.31), for example, describes an elaborate Bacchic reenactment, heavily influenced by the *Bacchae*, that was put on by Messalina and Silius, on which see Henrichs (1978: 156–9).

⁵⁵ Cadmus and Tiresias participate in the general worship of the god, but only Pentheus joins the maenads on Mount Cithaeron: Henrichs (1984: 69f, esp. n 3). The messengers spy on the maenads, but do not attempt to join in.

⁵⁶ Modern scholarship has not always been clear on this point: see Henrichs (1984), who corrects the erroneous view, shared by Dodds and others, that there was a male priest presiding over the rites of maenadism.

proper name for the rites, *trieteris*, and he understands that they only took place once every two years. These details are important, because they set the activity that follows in a specific ritual context, exactly parallel to the *Bacchae*. Otherwise, we might dismiss the rape that follows as simply inspired by the lechery of the satyrs who chase after maenads in traditional Dionysiac iconography; in the *trieteris*, however, promiscuity did not feature.⁵⁷ Statius' most important source for the activity of these maenads of myth was of course Euripides:

conseruant scissumque pecus terraque revulsas
ferre trabes gratosque deo prestare furores. (1.596f)

they used to bring torn-apart cattle and trees wrenched from the earth,
and to offer to the god the frenzy which pleases him.

These introductory words whet our expectations for maenadic violence on the model of the *Bacchae*, from which Statius draws this picture of the women of Scyros tearing up trees and rending cattle limb from limb; yet when we meet these maenads, they turn out to be a much meeker group than Euripides'. They do share some superficial features in common with the maenads of myth: they wear fawn-skins (*nebrida*, 1.609), adorn themselves with ivy (*bedera*, 1.610), and carry a thyrsus (1.612, 1.648), but on this particular occasion there is none of the violence – female violence – that the Euripidean atmosphere portends. The Scyrian maenads shake their thyrsi, clash cymbals, and dance until they fall asleep, but they do nothing more. It might be argued that Statius' depiction of Dionysiac cult is unconsciously reflecting the disjunction of his sources: the violence of mythical maenads versus the calmer forms of ritual that he and his audience knew.⁵⁸ Yet there are several details of the setting that contradict each other so conspicuously that it seems more likely that the juxtaposition of mythical and Roman maenads was not merely accidental.

Given that Achilles is here recapitulating the role of Pentheus, it is hard not to interpret the divergence in the fates of the two men as a significant matter. Pentheus comes to grief at the hands of women who act with a violence usually reserved to men; Achilles by contrast announces in a soliloquy his determination to act like a man (1.624–39), and he apparently succeeds, raping his foster-sister, Deidamia, while the other maenads are exhausted and asleep (1.640–4).⁵⁹ The balance of power and of violence in maenadism has

⁵⁷ The sexual activity commonly attributed to maenads in art and myth was not a reality of cult; Henrichs (1994: 55) explains it as an “invention of male society in antiquity” (“Konstrukt der antiken Männergesellschaft”).

⁵⁸ Euripides himself had also superimposed the maenads of myth and the maenads of cult in this way.

⁵⁹ The fact that the other maenads are asleep during the rape suggests that Deidamia was sleeping, too. This would put her at the end of a long tradition in Greek vase painting (echoed in Pompeian wall painting) of sleeping maenads who are approached or assaulted by satyrs while sleeping; on which see Osborne (1996: 72–6).

been restored by Achilles to the male sex.⁶⁰ In a parody of the empowerment of women that maenadism might, rightly or wrongly, be seen to represent, the other women misinterpret Deidamia's cries as a signal for the maenadic celebrations to begin anew (1.646–8).⁶¹ Whereas, in the *Bacchae*, Pentheus among the maenads was deluded and unable to make sense of the world before his eyes, it is the maenads of Scyros themselves who misunderstand their situation, marveling at the figure of Achilles (1.603–6), but not divining the truth about him; hearing the cries of Deidamia, they awaken and misconstrue them, ignorant of the violence she has suffered. Statius' Achilles therefore rewrites the ending of the *Bacchae* to suit Roman circumstance, just as the Roman senate had done centuries before. Women were prominent in Dionysiac cult at Rome, but not to the exclusion of men; both sexes mixed freely.⁶² Accordingly, Statius projects back into the mythical past a revised version of the *Bacchae*, providing a less distressing precedent for the male worshiper of Dionysus who wished to join his “maenadic” companions in their revels.

Statius' engagement with Euripides' play is explicitly signaled in a simile which compares Achilles not to Pentheus, but to the god himself.⁶³ Achilles is an imposing sight in his fawn-skin and thyrsus, a mixture of the warlike and the effeminate:

talis, ubi ad Thebas vultumque animumque remisit
 Euhius et patrio satiavit pectora luxu,
 serta comis mitramque levat thyrsumque virentem
 armat et hostiles invisit fortior Indos. (1.615–18)

Just as when Bacchus has relaxed his body and mind at Thebes and has taken his fill of the luxury of his native land, he removes his miter and garland from his hair, arms his thyrsus, and all the more boldly approaches his Indian enemy.

This passage should be considered together with its doublet, an earlier simile that likewise compares Achilles to a god in the process of moving from one place to another and thus revealing a different aspect of his divine presence:

qualis Lycia venator Apollo
 cum redit et saevis permutat plectra pharetris . . . (1.165f)

just as when Apollo the hunter returns from Lycia and trades in his fierce quiver for a lyre . . .

⁶⁰ As noted by Cyrino (1998: 236).

⁶¹ Statius leaves it for us to decide whether Deidamia cries out of pleasure or terror. The backward glance of the pursued maenad on Greek pottery may likewise be read as expressing either invitation or anxiety: Osborne (1996: 73).

⁶² Vogliano and Cumont (1933: 237–40).

⁶³ There is also a later simile in which Achilles, unwillingly dancing before Ulysses and Diomedes, is compared to Pentheus (1.839f), on which see above (p 234).

Part of the point of the Apollo simile was to illustrate Achilles' epicene appearance, and likewise the Bacchus simile exploits the god's ambiguity to account for the successful blending of aggression and femininity in Achilles' looks. Statius illustrates his combination of male and female, toughness and beauty, adulthood and immaturity, by comparing the boy first with Apollo, who could be both hunter and poet, and secondly Bacchus, both a sybarite and a conquering hero; and the very combination of these two divinities is telling. The two gods who were so often set in pointed contrast to each other are the joint *comparanda* for Achilles, and this itself is a token of the ephebic hero's radical ambiguity.⁶⁴ In context of the Apollo simile, the comparison with the god is apt because Achilles is at that moment returning from the hunt to Chiron's cave, where later on he will sing and play the lyre, thus demonstrating both features of Apollo's nature, moving from hunter to artist, as described in the simile. The Bacchus simile is no less apt.⁶⁵ Achilles has hitherto been living a girl's life on Scyros, but now his vigorous wielding of the thyrsus adumbrates his intentions toward Deidamia and the violence that he will shortly visit upon her.⁶⁶ In short, the point of the simile is that even someone in effeminate dress like Bacchus is capable of effective violence.⁶⁷ Thebes, the thyrsus, the miter, and the garlands all are reminiscent of the *Bacchae*, and the dramatic situation described by the simile is precisely that of Euripides' play, but in reverse. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus is returning triumphantly from a campaign in Asia to his home in Thebes, whereas in Statius' simile Achilles is compared to Bacchus, about to leave the comforts of his Theban home for a military campaign in the east. The simile is an inversion of the dramatic situation of the *Bacchae*, which reflects the inversion Achilles himself is about to accomplish, turning the role of Pentheus from victim to conqueror. Statius compares Achilles here not to Pentheus, but to Bacchus himself, who, as the mysterious stranger, is the other disguised and effeminate character in the *Bacchae*, a much more auspicious role model for the male worshiper of Dionysus than Pentheus.

As we have seen, the maenads of Scyros do not do much on this occasion to deserve their comparison to the maenads of myth: they tear up no trees, rend apart no animals, and practice no violence of any kind. If we accept that Achilles is revising the role of Pentheus in the light of Roman cult, then we may take this reading of the episode still further. It is clear that the rape of Deidamia by Achilles stands in opposition to the dismemberment of Pentheus as an assertion of male mastery within the context of maenadism. We saw that one distinctive moment in a certain type of Bacchic rite at Rome was

64 On the ambiguous appearance of Statius' Achilles, see Rosati (1992a: 236–41).

65 Thus Sturt (1972: 836).

66 "and he shakes the wreathed missile in his massive right hand" (*vibravitque gravi redimitum missile dextra*, l. 612).

67 The effeminacy of Bacchus' dress was noted earlier by Thetis (*Ach.* 1.262f).

the unveiling of the phallus in the *liknon*, and it may be that the culminating moment of Statius' ritual was designed to evoke this particular act. Achilles, veiled in women's clothing, finally attempts to assert his masculinity by means of rape; is this not an unveiling of a phallus? This identification of the unveiling of the phallus with the unveiling of a person is not alien to the cult, since in the surviving representations of the act, the initiate himself is often veiled along with, or in addition to, the phallographic *liknon*. Given that phallic images and humor play an important role in the *Achilleid*, it is not entirely implausible that we should read Achilles' phallic intervention in the maenadic *trieteris* as an aetiology, either comic or serious, for the unveiling of the phallus in the Bacchic mysteries at Rome.

An argument along similar lines was once made by Turcan (1959) regarding an episode in Ovid's *Fasti* (2.303–58). He claimed to see the Bacchic mysteries as the background to Faunus' humiliating encounter with Omphale and the cross-dressing Hercules. The pair enter a cave on Mount Tmolos in a district sacred to Bacchus (313), and Faunus spies Omphale from afar and sets his mind on having her. Inside the cave, the couple exchange clothing, and, because they wish to remain pure for the Bacchic rites that they intend to perform in the morning, they go to sleep on separate beds (329f). In general it seems plausible that some sort of Bacchic ritual is important for the understanding of this scene, even if the connection Turcan describes between caves and initiation into the Bacchic mysteries is not entirely beyond doubt. The real problem with Turcan's otherwise attractive theory was recognized by Fantham (1983: 196): the evidence that he tries to adduce for initiatory transvestism in the worship of Dionysus is not convincing.⁶⁸ Does this then mean that there was no influence of Bacchic ritual on the depiction of the cross-dressed couple in the cave as they prepared to worship Dionysus? We may be able to put Turcan's argument on a better footing by rejecting the delusory notion that there was literal transvestism practiced in Bacchic cult at Rome, and by reading the cross-dressing in Ovid's text as a more subtle rendering of the symbolism of the rite. When Faunus entered the cave at midnight, he recoiled from the couch where he felt the lion skin and sought instead the soft clothing of Omphale, which of course Hercules was now wearing. The god approached the other couch and its "soft coverings" (*velamina . . . mollia*, 343f) in a state of arousal:

Ascendit spondaque sibi propiore recumbit
 et tumidum cornu durius inguen erat.
 Interea tunicas ora subducit ab ima:
 horrebant densis aspera crura pilis. (Fast. 2.345–8)

He climbed up and lay on the bed that was nearer to him and his swollen

68 See also Henrichs (1982: 159).

groin was harder than horn. As he drew up the tunic from its bottom hem, the coarse thighs there bristled with a thick matting of hair.

Faunus removes the clothing of a man who has been dressed as a woman to reveal a surprise underneath. The notably phallic figure here is Faunus himself and not the cross-dressed Hercules, but otherwise this scene is explicable as a symbolic narrative of the unveiling – or attempted unveiling – of the phallus. If we see Faunus, rather than Hercules and Omphale, as the prospective initiate for whom the phallus is to be unveiled, then the episode becomes a parodic inversion of a successful initiation: the erect phallus is in the wrong place. As a mock-initiate, Faunus wanders and stumbles in the darkness, but the unveiling is a disaster for him, ending in his humiliation before a laughing crowd of bystanders. Since Ovid had already figured the ritual unveiling of the phallus in the Bacchic mysteries as the undressing of a transvestite male, Statius' variation of the trope follows easily. Whereas Faunus is a failed initiate, Achilles himself successfully enacts the founding moment of the ritual.⁶⁹

The focal point of the plot of the *Achilleid* as we have it is Achilles' cross-dressed stay on Scyros, and the central event of that sojourn is the *trieteris*. The idea that gender identity is subject to lability is an important part of the conceptual world of Dionysiac religion, and so, since this part of the poem describes one young man's inversion of sex roles, the adoption of male roles by women makes maenadism well suited to being the ironic backdrop for Achilles' symmetrically opposite gender inversion. Moreover, this scene corresponds to the other evocations of the Eleusinian, Bacchic, and Samothracian mysteries during Achilles' stay on Scyros. In the next section we shall see that the cult of the *Magna Mater* is also evoked by Achilles' transvestism. The various vestmental displays of otherness that such cults sometimes occasioned, which could be caricatured as effeminate, are likely to have been one reason that Achilles' transvestism was visualized by Statius in a cult setting. This is not to say, however, that cross-dressing was necessarily a routine practice in Bacchic mystery cult at Rome. Rather, in a general sense, the kind of personal transformation advertised by initiatory religions is accomplished by Achilles on Scyros: he enters a boy and leaves a man, while in between he spends most of his time dressed in unfamiliar clothing, performing ritual dances. The conceptual grid that the *Achilleid* offers us for understanding Achilles' stay on Scyros configures

69 See Fantham (1983: 196–8) for the similarities between Ovid's tale and the end of Plautus' *Casina*, first suggested by F. Skutsch. It should be noted that in Plautus the humiliated *senex* who discovers a phallic male dressed as a bride in his bed (907–13) later attempts to blame the Bacchantes for his discomfiture and the loss of his cloak (978–81). It cannot be safely asserted, however, that Plautus was also punning on the nature of the same ritual, as the earliest surviving representation of the unveiling of the phallus is much later, in the Villa of the Mysteries (mid-first century BC). See MacCary (1975) for an account of the Plautine allusion that refers it to a different purported aspect of Bacchic cult.

it as a personal transformation, and even as an initiation; not the distant echo of a purported age-group rite from Mediterranean prehistory, but a concrete process comprehensible to a contemporary Roman audience.

Achilles' Castration Anxiety

The connection between extravagant, effeminate dress, phallicism, and initiatory religion at Rome manifests itself in other ways in the *Achilleid*. Compare this syncretic account of Attis and the spread of the cult of Cybele, as given by Lucian:

Ἄττις δὲ γένος μὲν Λυδοῦς ἦν, πρῶτος δὲ τὰ ὄργια τὰ ἐς Ῥέην ἐδιδάξατο. καὶ τὰ Φρύγες καὶ Λυδοὶ καὶ Σαμόθρακες ἐπιτελέουσιν, Ἄττω πάντα ἔμαθον. ὡς γὰρ μιν ἡ Ῥέη ἔτεμεν, βίου μὲν ἀνδρῆιου ἀπεπαύσατο, μορφὴν δὲ θηλέην ἠμείψατο καὶ ἐσθῆτα γυναικίην ἐνεδύσατο.

(*De Syria Dea* 15)

Attis was of the Lydian race, and the first to teach the rites of Rhea [Cybele]; and all those initiations that the Phrygians, the Lydians, and the Samothracians perform, they learned from Attis. For when Rhea cut him, he ceased to live the life of a man, changed into female form, and put on women's clothes.

Not enough is known about the Samothracian mysteries for us to understand quite why Lucian associates them in this way with the worship of the *Magna Mater* and *Dea Syria*, but it is interesting to note that Statius makes a similar association. At the dance performed for Ulysses and Diomedes, the girls of Scyros play the cymbals of Rhea (i.e. Cybele, 1.828) and are compared to Samothracian dancers (1.832). The archaeological evidence indicates that the mysteries at Samothrace may have involved a chorus of dancing girls,⁷⁰ while the literary evidence associates the rites with phallicism. Herodotus (2.51) and Callimachus (F 199 Pfeiffer) both allude to the presence of ithyphallic herms in the cult, and it seems that two ithyphallic statues played a prominent role.⁷¹ By describing the cross-dressed Achilles as a Samothracian dancer, Statius is perhaps making a humorous allusion to the secret phallicism of the cult. Similar, and even more appropriate, is the connection the poet implies with the *galli* of Cybele, since Achilles has in a sense temporarily emasculated himself on Scyros. The most noteworthy group of transvestite males at Rome were these eunuch priests, who had long been assimilated, on account of their drums, tambourines, and ecstatic worship, to the maenads of myth.⁷² Paradoxically, the real maenads at Rome were male. Could this fact have influenced Statius

⁷⁰ For the frieze of dancing girls found there, see above (p 234, n 165).

⁷¹ This information derives ultimately from a Gnostic source, quoted by Burkert (1993b: 182).

⁷² See Eur. *Bacch.* 78f with Seaford (1996: ad loc).

in his decision to portray his cross-dressed hero as a maenad? Lauletta (1993) has argued that not only are there are echoes of Catullus 64 in the *Achilleid*, which no one would deny, but also of Catullus 63. He frames his argument not so much as a case of demonstrable allusion, but of evanescent hints. In fact, the case for allusion to Catullus 63 can be presented even more forcefully than was done by Lauletta.

In Catullus' poem, Attis comes to his senses momentarily, and before Cybele drives him mad once more he looks out across the sea and regrets all that he left behind at home. The maenadic Achilles likewise takes a moment to pause and reflect upon his situation in the middle of his ecstatic worship of Bacchus. He too thinks regretfully of his homeland and rebukes himself for the dishonorable and unmanly course he has taken. In this case we are dealing not so much with the kind of parallels in language and vocabulary that Lauletta documents as with a similarity in dramatic situation and in rhetoric. While the other maenads sleep off their exhaustion, Achilles delivers this soliloquy:

haec secum: "quonam timidae commenta parentis
 usque feres? primumque imbelli carcere perdes
 florem animi? non tela licet Mavortia dextra,
 non trepidas agitare feras? ubi campus et amnes
 Haemonii? quaerisne meos, Sperchie, natatus
 promissasque comas? an desertoris alumni
 nullus honos, Stygiasque procul iam raptus ad umbras
 dicor, et orbatus plangit mea funera Chiron?
 tu nunc tela manu, nostros tu dirigis arcus
 nutritosque mihi scandis, Patrocle, iugales:
 ast ego pampineis diffundere brachia thyrsis
 et tenuare colus – pudet haec taedetque fateri –
 iam scio." (1.624–36)

He said this to himself: "How long will you continue to endure the fabrications of your frightened mother, and waste the early flower of your courage in this gentle prison? Are you forbidden to brandish the weapons of Mars in your right hand, and to rout and chase wild game? Where are the fields and streams of Thessaly? Do you, river Sperchius, in whom I used to swim, look for the lock of hair that once was promised to you? Am I said to be a runaway foster-child, without honor, carried off already to the faraway shadows of the Styx, and does Chiron weep at my funeral like a bereaved parent? Patroclus, do you now wield my spears and bows in your hand and mount the chariot-team that was raised for me? But I, on the other hand, now know how to waggle my arms with an ivy-covered thyrsus and how to spin wool; it shames and disgusts me to admit it."

The monologue of Catullus' Attis likewise takes place during a brief pause in his wild ravings: "while for a brief period my mind is free from wild raving" (*ra-bie fera carens dum breve tempus animus est*, 63.57). He addresses his fatherland,

“O land that gave me life, land that gave me birth” (*patria O mei creatrix, patria o mea genetrix*, 63.50), and wonders in what direction it might lie: “where, then, or in what place do I imagine that you might be located, my fatherland?” (*ubinam aut quibus locis te positam, patria, reor?* 63.55). Achilles similarly turns to his Thessalian homeland, addressing the river Sperchius (628), and he wonders where the fields and streams of Thessaly are located (627f). Attis compares himself to a runaway slave (*ut erifugae famuli*, 63.51f); Achilles calls himself a runaway foster-son (*desertoris alumni*, 629). Another point of contact in the situations of the young men is an inversion: Attis was a city-dweller who deplores the savage wilderness of the mountains and forests where he finds himself, whereas for Achilles that sort of place *is* home. So Attis hates “the snow and the frozen lairs of wild animals” which are his home in his madness (*nivem et ferarum gelida stabula*, 63.53), while that is precisely the environment to which Achilles longs to return (627).

Attis mentions the specifically urban pleasures that he misses, such as the forum and gymnasium (63.60), which would not apply to Achilles; but first he notes some more personal losses: his fatherland, possessions, friends, and parents (*patria, bonis, amicis, genitoribus abero?* 63.59). Achilles likewise laments his absence from his fatherland, and the other items in his soliloquy correspond to Attis’ complaint, too. Achilles, like Attis, regrets the loss of his possessions: his spears, his bows, and his chariot (632f). He imagines his friend Patroclus enjoying their use in his absence, just as Attis thinks of his friends (*amicis*) back home. Finally, corresponding to the parents (*genitoribus*) Attis remembers, Achilles thinks of his foster-father, imagining Chiron as a bereaved parent.

There are a few similarities in language between the two speeches; they are not significant enough to be compelling on their own, but taken together with the situational parallels they have some interest. Achilles complains that he is wasting “the early flower of [his] courage” (625f) on Scyros, which metaphor might be compared with Attis’ “I was the flower of the gymnasium” (*ego gymnasi fui flos*, 63.64). The shame that they both express is couched in similar language, too. Attis says, “Now, now what I have done grieves me; now, now I regret it” (*iam iam dolet quod egi, iam iamque paenitet*, 63.73); Achilles says, “it shames and disgusts me to admit it” (635). These verbal similarities are not decisive, however, and this is why the argument as made by Lauletta is not entirely convincing. He attempts to demonstrate the allusion in terms of these slight likenesses of language, but that is not where the true correspondence lies. Not all allusion necessarily manifests itself in terms of language, and considering the difference in meter between the galliambics of Catullus 63 and the hexameters of the *Achilleid*, we have little right to expect that Statius should borrow phrases from Catullus. Rather, it is in the situations of the two characters and the rhetoric of their response to it where lies the connection whose presence was rightly intuited by Lauletta.

Attis is perhaps the only other male maenad in Latin literature apart from Statius' Achilles; he makes the identification himself: "shall I be a maenad?" (*ego maenas . . . ero?* 63.69).⁷³ Thus when Achilles pauses in the middle of his "frenzy" to reflect upon his state and turns his thoughts to his home, he cannot but call to mind the pathetic soliloquy of Attis. We might even refer to the wound of Attis the "wound" of love for Deidamia that Achilles complains of: "how long will you suppress the wound that burns your heart?" (*quonam usque premes urentia pectus | vulnera?* *Ach.* 1.638f). At a further extreme, we might associate with Attis' self-mutilation the reference here to the lock of hair that Achilles was growing in order to cut it off as an offering to the river Sperchius on his return, as promised by Peleus (629; cf. *Hom. Il.* 23.141–53). If that seems unlikely, compare the conclusion of Lucian's essay on the Syrian goddess. His mock-Herodotean narrator describes the custom, in which he claims to have participated himself, of children growing a lock of hair long, which is then cut off and dedicated to the goddess in her temple at Hierapolis (*De Syria Dea* 60). As Stephens and Winkler comment (1995: 360f, n 6), "This rite of passage might be regarded as the ordinary level of dedicating one's manhood to the goddess, whereas the *galli's* act is an extraordinary version of the same."⁷⁴

This implication that Achilles has temporarily emasculated himself on Scyros fits into the broader context of the phallic humor in the *Achilleid*.⁷⁵ Thetis ineptly offers to her son the chance of carrying like Hercules the *mollis hasta* (1.621), and of emulating the transsexual Caenis (1.624); and then we find Achilles echoing the rhetoric of the recently castrated Attis. The difference is that Achilles' unmanned state, unlike that of Attis, is reversible. That is what makes the *Achilleid* essentially comedic, in contrast to Catullus 63. The hinted assimilation of Achilles to a eunuch may have roots not only in Catullus, but also in New Comedy. The stratagem whereby a young man disguises himself as a non-threatening figure in order to gain access to his beloved comes in two closely related forms. He may disguise himself as a girl, as in Menander's *Androgynos*, or he may disguise himself as a eunuch, as in Terence's *Eunuchus*. From the latter, here is the slave Parmeno, explaining to the young man Chaerea the advantages of impersonating a eunuch, in words that could apply equally well to Achilles' pursuit of Deidamia:

cibum una capias, adsis tangas ludas propter dormias;
quandoquidem illarum neque te quisquam novit neque scit qui sies.
praeterea forma et aetas ipsast facile ut pro eunucho probes. (*Eun.* 373–5)

You can take your meals together with her, look after her, touch her, relax with her, and sleep next to her, for none of the women there recognize

⁷³ There are males who dress up as maenads in Greek vase painting, however: Caruso (1987).

⁷⁴ This is a connection made implicitly by Statius in the *Silvae* (3.4), when he celebrates the dedication of a lock of hair by Domitian's eunuch, Earinus.

⁷⁵ See Hinds (2000), *passim*.

you or know who you are. In fact, your very beauty and youth make it easy for you to pass for a eunuch.

In Terence's play, much amusement is had from the allegedly improbable fact that this "eunuch" has, like Achilles on Scyros, committed a rape while a trusted member of the household (*Eun.* 653–8).⁷⁶ If we recall that this play was originally performed in 161 B C for the Megalesian games, the feast of the *Magna Mater*, then the juxtaposition of sacred eunuchs and romantic pretend-eunuchs may have had a long pedigree on the Roman stage. The romantic eunuch from comedy and the religious *gallus* seem to have been combined in this way also by a Greek novel whose papyrus fragments go by the name of *Iolaos*. Dodds made the suggestion, which has been generally accepted, that the part of the novel we have is a scene where a young man is "initiated" in order to carry off the part of a *gallus* well enough to gain access to a woman.⁷⁷ So the examples from New Comedy and the *Iolaos* show that Statius was not alone in connecting transvestism as an erotic stratagem with the role of a eunuch or even a *gallus*. What is different here is that this comedic role is juxtaposed intertextually with the tragic lament of Catullus' *Attis*.

Whereas *Attis*' period of lucidity ends when Cybele sends a lion to provoke him to madness once more, Achilles, at the culmination of his speech, forms a resolution to prove himself a man: "and will you not prove yourself a man – oh! the shame! – by means of your love/desire?" (*teque marem – pudet heu! – nec amore probabis?*, 1.639). The hero acts immediately on this decision, and his "love" or "desire" (*amor*) finds expression in the violent rape of Deidamia which follows (1.640–4). Thus the problem of Achilles' ambivalent gender and his compromised phallic potency is apparently resolved instantly by the expression of his innate capacity, as a male, for sexual violence. Or is it? That moment at which Achilles asserts his masculinity in the act of rape has a very significant Ovidian pedigree, and before we examine that scene, we must turn first to an earlier point in the *Achilleid* where another Ovidian rape forms the background to Statius' narrative.

Rereading Ovid's Rapes

When Thetis arrives in Thessaly at the beginning of the *Achilleid* to retrieve her son from Chiron's care, it is not her first visit to the place. She has been

⁷⁶ In fact, eunuchs created by prepubertal orchidectomy or by severing of the spermatic cords (which causes testicular atrophy by cutting off the blood supply to the testes) rather than by amputation of the external genitalia are often capable of intercourse, but not procreation: Jenkins (1998: 1879f).

⁷⁷ Dodds' suggestion was reported by Parsons in *Ox. Pap.*, vol. 42, p 35, n 1. On the *Iolaos*, and on transvestite plots in antiquity, see Stephens and Winkler (1995: 358–74). What they call "this old plot," meaning the erotic stratagem of a young man dressing as a woman, is a version of what Garber (1992: 67–77), in her more general survey, would call a "transvestite progress narrative."

away for some time, but according to Statius, she was originally responsible for delivering Achilles to Chiron.⁷⁸ Not only that, Chiron's cave was the site of her formal wedding to Peleus, as Statius makes clear.⁷⁹ There were two incompatible versions of the union of Peleus and Thetis in Latin hexameter verse, one as told in Catullus' poem 64 and the other by Ovid. Catullus made the match a love affair; Peleus falls in love with Thetis and their joyful union is sanctified by a great gathering of men and gods. Yet even Catullus alludes to Jupiter's interest in the matter:

tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore,
 tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos,
 tum Thetidi pater ipse iugandum Pelea sensit. (Cat. 64.19–21)

Then Peleus is said to have been inflamed with love for Thetis; then Thetis did not scorn marriage to a mortal; then the Father himself judged that Peleus should be joined to Thetis.

In this account, Thetis marries Peleus willingly, or at least without disgust (*non despexit*), but the mention of Jupiter's interest (*pater ipse*) reminds us of the tale that Thetis was forced to marry a mortal in order to eliminate the potential that she might bear a son who would be his rival and successor. As early as Homer (see above, p 160), Thetis complains that she was compelled to marry a mortal, and this unwillingness on the part of Thetis is an important aspect of the myth. In fact, there was a long tradition in which Peleus had to attack and rape Thetis, while she fought back and metamorphosed into various animals. This version of events is told by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* (11.221–65), where there is no mention of the formal wedding. Thus Catullus and Ovid present what would seem to be diametrically opposed and contradictory accounts of the union between goddess and mortal: either formal wedding or brutal rape.

This disagreement in the Latin tradition arose from a tension that was always, as far as we know, present in the myth. Images of the elaborate wedding of Peleus and Thetis and of Peleus wrestling with Thetis are both popular in Greek art from a very early period.⁸⁰ Lesky (1956) claimed that the two motifs were distinct and of separate origin, but others have emphasized that the two stories are not necessarily incompatible; as Gantz puts it, "there is no reason why such a hero [as Peleus] should not be asked to prove himself worthy of the gift [of Thetis]" (1993: 229). Likewise March (1987: 11) says that "in literature this wrestling-match is taken to be an integral part of the Peleus/Thetis story and an established preliminary to their wedding from Pindar onwards." Indeed both Pindar (*Nem.* 4.62–8) and Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 3.13.5) explicitly make

⁷⁸ See above (p 171).

⁷⁹ In his description of Chiron's cave, Statius notes that the place where each god reclined on that famous occasion is still pointed out (1.109f).

⁸⁰ The chest of Cypselus as described by Pausanias (5.18.5) depicted the struggle and the François Krater and the Erskine Dinos depict the wedding; on these see Gantz (1993: 229).

the rape a preliminary to the wedding. As to the evidence from art, Boardman (1976: 4) says, “the same painters show equal familiarity with both episodes and we do not look for contradictory stories in the repertory of such a close-knit group as that of the black figure vase painters.” Nonetheless it is interesting that apparently no single vase depicts both events together. So it may be that even in Greek art a certain tension was felt between the story of rape and that of the wedding; but this did not make them incompatible. Thetis in the *Iliad* complains that she was forced to marry Peleus, and she seems to live away from him in the sea at the point of the action; but we also hear of Achilles’ life with both his parents in Phthia, so perhaps this tension between the two sides of the tradition is very old indeed.⁸¹

Catullus transforms this tradition by eliminating Thetis’ reluctance toward the match, thus making the rape superfluous; for him the wedding of Peleus and Thetis is an example of the intimate commerce between gods and men in the golden age. This intervention tended to make the rape and wedding stories incompatible, rather than complementary. Accordingly, Ovid’s response was to reassert the story of the rape and Thetis’ multiple metamorphoses, without making any attempt to reconcile it with the story of their wedding. This is how the matter stood for Statius, for whom both Catullus 64 and the *Metamorphoses* were important sources. On the surface, it would seem that he followed Catullus in the *Achilleid*. Statius mentions the wedding and the attendance of the gods on Pelion, and he says not a word about the rape. Nevertheless, the Thessalian landscape as described by Statius is framed in terms of Ovid’s description of the area as the setting for the rape of Thetis. Here is Ovid’s description of the location of that event:

est sinus Haemoniae curvos falcatus in arcus,
 bracchia procurrant: ubi, si foret altior unda,
 portus erat; summis inductum est aequor harenis;
 litus habet solidum, quod nec vestigia servet
 nec remoretur iter nec opertum pendeat alga;
 myrtea silva subest bicoloribus obsita baxis.
 est specus in medio, natura factus an arte,
 ambiguum, magis arte tamen: quo saepe venire
 frenato delphine sedens, Theti, nuda solebas. (*Met.* II.229–37)

There is a bay in Thessaly, shaped like a sickle and curving in a bow, its arms thrust out; there would be a harbor there if the sea were deeper. The water just skims over the top of the sand; the shoreline is firm, of a kind that preserves no footprints nor slows down the step nor is it hung with a covering of seaweed. A wood of myrtle with its colorful berries runs up to it on the other side. There is a cave in the middle, and it is unclear whether it was made by nature or by artifice, but perhaps more by artifice.

81 See above (p 160) and Gantz (1993: 229–31).

Thetis, you were accustomed to go there often, nude, and riding on your bridled dolphin.

Peleus is ordered by Jupiter to seek the “embraces” (*amplexus*, 11.228) of the Nereid. As it turns out, this hint from Jupiter hides the key to the challenge the hero faces. Peleus at first tries to seize Thetis, but he is foiled when she transforms herself into new shapes. He prays for guidance and eventually Proteus comes to tell him what he must do: he must take hold of the Nereid and refuse to let go regardless of what metamorphoses she attempts. Armed with this knowledge, Peleus holds on resolutely and finally succeeds in pinning Thetis down. In this light, it is interesting how Ovid describes the bay here; its arms run out into the sea, as if the land is attempting in vain to embrace the water, just as Peleus attempts to hold the slippery and shifting water-goddess in his grasp.

In the *Achilleid*, Thetis swims toward Thessaly, and when she arrives, the landscape near Chiron’s cave is reminiscent of the site of her rape as described by Ovid. Ovid claimed that it was difficult to discern whether the cave in which Peleus raped Thetis was either man-made or natural (235f), as if it were a grotto in the garden of a tasteful Roman aristocrat. Statius glosses this ambiguity when he describes the cave in which Chiron lives:

domus ardua montem
perforat et longo suspendit Pelion arcu;
pars exhausta manu, partem sua ruperat aetas. (1.106–8)

His lofty dwelling cut into the mountain and its long vault bore the weight of Pelion; part had been excavated by hand, part had been split open by age.

The half-and-half nature of this cave, part artificial and part man-made, reflects the combination of raw nature and human culture in the centaur’s own identity, but, as Dilke (ad 108) noted, it also owes something to the cave described by Ovid, where it was “unclear whether it was made by nature or by artifice” (235f). Furthermore, the sea floor is said by Statius to strike Thetis’ feet when she arrives in Thessaly (1.100); the inversion of the usual action, feet striking the ground, gives the impression that she reached the shore quickly, or even unexpectedly. This might be a reference to the extreme shallowness of the bay described by Ovid, whose water is spread thinly over the surface of the sand (231).

Another peculiarity of the place Ovid describes is that the sand is so firm that it retains no impression of footprints (232). In a practical sense, this helps Peleus, since Ovid implies that the hero went ahead to lie in wait for Thetis in the cave where she usually slept; she will not have been alerted to a foreign presence by any footprints. On a metaphorical level, it may be significant that Ovid

is describing here an event in the history of the world that had become obscure, replaced by descriptions, such as Catullus 64, of the glorious wedding of Peleus and Thetis. The beach is the setting for a violent act whose “traces” (*vestigia*) had become effaced from history by Catullus and others. This metaphorical reading is taken up again by Statius, whose beach does retain footprints:

laetantur montes et conubialia pandunt
 antra sinus lateque deae Sperchios abundat
 obuius et dulci vestigia circuit unda.
 illa nihil gavisa locis. (I.IOI–3)

The mountains rejoiced and her bridal cave opened up its recesses to her and the wide river Sperchios flowed out abundantly to meet the goddess and it washed her footsteps in fresh water. She, however, was not pleased by the place at all.

The river Sperchios washes the feet of the goddess, which are designated by the metonymy of “footprints” (*vestigia*). On this beach, Thetis does leave her footprints, if only temporarily. Statius modifies Ovid’s description: this sand is not so firm that no impression is made on it by passers-by, but it is true that they will vanish quickly, washed away by the river. For Statius, the “traces” (*vestigia*) of Thetis’ rape are real, but evanescent. Thetis is preoccupied with Achilles, and that is one reason why she takes no pleasure in the welcome she receives from the Thessalian landscape; but we might read a little more into her mood. If this landscape was, as argued here, the site of her rape by Peleus as described by Ovid, then it is not surprising that she does not rejoice in her memories of the place.

Statius describes Chiron’s cave in a way that not only identifies it explicitly as adjacent to the site of Thetis’ formal wedding, but also hints clearly at a context of sexual violence. Thus this is her “bridal cave” (*conubialia* ... *antra*, *roif*) in two senses: on one level it is near the location of the formal wedding ceremony but, on another level, the Ovidian epithet *conubialia*⁸² reminds us that the Ovidian rape narrative really was set in a cave. We can see further oblique hints of rape in Statius’ description of that cave:

domus ardua montem
 perforat et longo suspendit Pelion arcu;
 pars exhausta manu, partem sua ruperat aetas.
 signa tamen divumque tori et quem quisque sacrarit
 accubitu genioque locum monstrantur; at intra
 Centauri stabula alta patent, non aequa nefandis
 fratribus: hic hominum nullos experta cruores
 spicula nec truncae bellis genialibus orni

82 Before this, the word *conubialis* is only found in Ovid (*Her.* 6.41) and in the *Thebaid* (5.112): thus Dilke (ad loc).

aut consanguineos fracti crateres in hostes,
sed pharetrae insontes et inania terga ferarum. (1.106–15)

His lofty dwelling cut into the mountain and its long vault bore the weight of Pelion; part had been excavated by hand, part had been split open by age. The statues and the couches of the gods were marked out along with the places each had sanctified by his recumbent presence. But inside there lay the centaur's imposing barn; he was not like his nasty brothers: here there were arrows which had not tasted human blood; there were no ash spears broken in domestic violence; there were no mixing-bowls smashed against a kindred enemy; only blameless quivers and the empty hides of wild animals.

For such a peaceful scene, the language of this description is strikingly violent and full of sexual imagery, more appropriate to the scene of the rape than the wedding. The innocuous decor of Chiron's abode is described by means of a contrast with the sort of things the other centaurs might hang on their walls. Obviously, the point of this is that Chiron, whom Homer calls "the most righteous of the centaurs," is completely unlike his fellows.⁸³ Yet it is interesting that Statius describes at such length what Chiron is *not*. The bloody and broken weapons and the shattered bowls might be read as symbols of spent sexual violence. In a similarly sexual way, this cave "penetrates" the mountain (*perforat*, 107), which age has "split apart" (*ruperat*, 108), and it welcomes Thetis again into its "recesses" (*sinus*, 1.101f). The violent episode explicitly alluded to is the wedding feast of Pirithous and Hippodameia, another event where marriage and attempted rape intersected. Chiron's cave, overtly the location of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, implicitly the location of the rape of Thetis by Peleus, is aptly connected with an event that combined a wedding and sexual violence.

Ovid reintroduced into Latin verse an episode whose "traces" (*vestigia*) had been effaced from the tradition. Statius brings the two versions back together, but he does not juxtapose them chronologically, making the rape a preliminary to the wedding, as Pindar, for example, had done (above, p 262). Rather, the reconciliation is effected by openly adhering to one version and implicitly alluding to the other. In this way the story of the formal union of Peleus and Thetis is found under examination to carry at its center an Ovidian tale of violent rape. So too for the upcoming tale of Achilles on Scyros. That amusing romantic interlude has at its center the act of rape with which Achilles begets Neoptolemus. The connection between the father's act of rape and the son's is far from coincidental, as the language shows. In Ovid's account, after Thetis has exhausted her transformations, Peleus finally overcomes her:

83 δίκαιότατος Κενταύρων, *Il.* 11.832.

confessam amplectitur heros
 et potitur votis ingentique inplet Achille. (Met. 11.264f)

She revealed herself, the hero seized her, and he obtained his desire; he impregnated her with great Achilles.

In the *Achilleid*, Achilles gains his bride and begets his own son in identical language, taking advantage of the exhaustion of his maenadic companions:

vi potitur votis et toto pectore veros
 admovet amplexus. (1.642f)

By violence he obtained his desire and with all his determination he seized her in a real embrace.

Like father, like son; they both get what they want and take it by force from an exhausted female: "he obtained his desire" (*potitur votis*). In fact, the rape of Deidamia is also described by Ovid; in the *Ars amatoria* it is a paradigmatic moment at which the rhetoric of romance yields to the law of force. So we must now move on to compare how Ovid and Statius depict the rape of Deidamia by Achilles.

Statius Reads Ovid

The central moment in the completed portion of the *Achilleid* is when Achilles rapes Deidamia. As we have seen, this event comes in the middle of the maenadic rites celebrated by the women of Scyros. Achilles delivers a monologue in which he thinks of Thessaly and expresses his regret for the shameful position he has taken. He concludes by resolving to prove himself a man by means of his love for Deidamia. He approaches his foster-sister, who is presumably asleep like the rest of the maenads, and he rapes her. With the loss of Euripides' *Skyrians* and most of the poem ascribed to Bion, Ovid's is the only literary treatment of the rape of Deidamia that survives before Statius.⁸⁴ At first, it seems that the *Achilleid* conforms entirely to Ovid's narrative in Book 1 of the *Ars amatoria*, except that Statius locates the rape outdoors, rather than in a shared bedroom (*Ars am.* 1.697). Like Statius, Ovid makes the rape of Deidamia the centerpiece of the Scyros episode. This story is present in the *Ars* as an *exemplum* of the erotic usefulness, when other means fail, of physical force, and to illustrate the point that a man should always take the initiative with a woman.⁸⁵ After all, says Ovid, a woman's very struggle against you tells you that she wants to be dominated (*pugnando vinci se tamen illa volet*, *Ars am.* 1.666).⁸⁶ Brute physical force is not really unwelcome to women: "you may

84 On these and other sources for the Scyros myth in general, see above (p 193).

85 Thus Hollis (1977) ad 1.705–14.

86 In the *Achilleid*, compare how Achilles, having caught sight of Deidamia, is "willing to be compelled" (*cogique volentem*, 1.325) to impersonate a girl; cf. Jorge (1990: 192).

call it violence, but this sort of violence is what pleases girls” (*vim licet appelles: grata est vis ista puellis*, 1.673). This argument might seem to run counter to the more subtle modes of seduction that the *Ars* advocates elsewhere, but the main point here is that there are natural gender roles, and the man’s role is always to be the aggressor, and to press forward with words or deeds regardless of resistance: “the man takes the initiative; the man is the one who speaks pleading words; the woman listens complacently to his flattery and entreaties . . . no girl has abducted mighty Jupiter.”⁸⁷ The *exemplum* of Achilles on Scyros thus serves two related purposes in Ovid’s argument: it demonstrates that women like Deidamia *want* to be raped; and it proves that, however it may be concealed, masculinity will reveal itself through the aggression that is its natural expression. Here is Ovid’s description of the rape:

quid facis, Aeacide? non sunt tua munera lanae;
tu titulos alia Palladis arte petes.
quid tibi cum calathis? clipeo manus apta ferendo est:
pensa quid in dextra, qua cadet Hector, habes?
Reice succinctos operoso stamine fusos:
quassanda est ista Pelias hasta manu.
forte erat in thalamo virgo regalis eodem;
haec illum stupro comperit esse virum.
viribus illa quidem victa est (ita credere oportet),
sed voluit vinci viribus illa tamen. (*Ars am.* 1.691–700)

What are you up to, Achilles, grandson of Aeacus? Your business isn’t with wool; quite different skills of which Minerva is patron will win you fame. What have you got to do with wool baskets? Your hand is suited to the wielding of a shield – why are you holding a measure of wool in the right hand that will slay Hector? Cast aside the spindle wound with the thread at which you toil – that hand of yours is meant to brandish a spear from Mount Pelion. By chance the royal princess was in the same bed as he; she discovered that he was a man when she was raped. She was surely overwhelmed by his strength (or so it is fitting to believe), but she wanted to be overwhelmed by his strength nevertheless.

In Ovid’s account, despite the feminine camouflage, Achilles’ masculinity reveals itself irresistibly in the act of rape: “she discovered that he was a man when she was raped,” and that was that. In the *Achilleid*, however, the consequences of this seemingly definitive demonstration of Achilles’ masculinity are curiously ambivalent. After Deidamia cries out, and awakens the other maenads, who begin their revels again, Achilles finally identifies himself to her (1.645–60). The narrator describes very briefly Deidamia’s reaction and her decision to keep her rape a secret from everyone except her nurse (1.662–71). The

⁸⁷ *vir prior accedat, vir verba precantia dicat | excipiat blandas comiter illa preces . . . corruptit magnum nulla puella Iovem* (1.709f, 1.714).

nurse helps to conceal the pregnancy, which is accounted for in the matter of a few lines, and Neoptolemus is born. The narrator turns his gaze away from Scyros to the approaching ship of Ulysses and Diomedes (1.675), and that is that. It seems that Thetis' foolish attempt to keep Achilles in girlish clothing has been shattered, just as in the *Ars amatoria*, by the instincts that are natural to his true sex. The story of Achilles on Scyros according to Statius does not end there, however.

When Ulysses arrives on Scyros, at least nine months have passed since the rape, because Neoptolemus has already been born.⁸⁸ Yet when we next see Achilles he is still cross-dressed, and apparently no one else has discovered his true sex. We might pass this off as a trivial detail, except that Statius goes out of his way to put Achilles on display, dressed as a girl, long after the rape by means of which he has supposedly asserted his masculinity. He could have merely depicted the hero succumbing to Ulysses' trap, but instead he shows him attending a banquet as a girl and even performing a choral dance for the benefit of the visitors. These gratuitous and humiliating scenes are vividly described and elaborately contrived. Even under normal circumstances it would not have been usual to put the daughters of a respectable house on display in this manner, and so Statius arranges that Lycomedes happens to be desperate to marry off his daughters. By contrast, Ovid exemplifies the way that Achilles was normally portrayed on Scyros: in private. He spins and weaves, just like Hercules with Omphale. These are private occupations that typically take place in the women's quarters of a house. Visual representations likewise usually show Achilles in the female quarters, often spinning, often negligent of his female disguise.⁸⁹ There is no identifiable precedent for Statius' extended, public display of Achilles as a cross-dresser, and, since the most humiliating scenes for him are staged after his self-assertion of his masculinity and his consequent rape of Deidamia, the insult to the hero is even stronger. One way of understanding this development, therefore, is as a rejection of the Ovidian notion that rape alone is a simple and effective statement of masculinity. Before attempting such an interpretation, however, it would be useful to know

88 And perhaps far more time has passed than that: see above (p 84).

89 In the representations catalogued by Kossatz-Deissmann in the LIMC, Achilles is usually distinguishable as a figure in female clothing grasping weapons, but sometimes he is shown with his female garb already half fallen off, as if to show concretely the process of his emergence into heroic nudity (LIMC, s.v. "Achilleus," 105–75, with Achilles partially nude: 110, 143, 148, 169, and 172). Far fewer are representations of Achilles' life at Scyros before his discovery (LIMC, s.v. "Achilleus," 94–104). Most show him playing a stringed instrument; all show him in private in the girls' quarters (with one exception from the mid-fourth century, no. 94, showing Thetis presenting Achilles to Lycomedes, which likely was inspired by the corresponding scene in the *Achilleid*). Of these boudoir scenes, several (nos. 98, 99, 102) portray Achilles as bare-chested and obviously careless of his disguise. In the *Achilleid*, however, the pretense of Achilles' girlhood is strictly maintained, even in private, and even after Deidamia has silently guessed the truth (1.560–3: on which see Heslin, 1998).

whether a Roman audience would have noticed the pointed contrast to Ovid that Statius was making. Would they have noticed that Achilles fails in his stated purpose of becoming a man by means of rape? Would they have found it surprising that sexual violence was portrayed as such an ineffectual measure of male self-fashioning?

Tertullian Reads Statius

We have from the pen of Tertullian one example of an ancient reaction to the plot of the *Achilleid*. He does not mention Statius, but it will be clear nevertheless that he knew our poem very well. Tertullian is a famously polemical writer, and so one must be careful not to pretend his reaction to the *Achilleid* is that of a disinterested reader, but the rhetorical purpose to which he turned Statius' text is nevertheless a demonstration that the interpretation of the poem that we have been elaborating was also available to an alert reader in antiquity. In a witty and allusive work, the *De pallio*, Tertullian makes the argument at great length that there is nothing wrong with wearing the casual Greek cloak (*pallium*) rather than the formal Roman toga. In his fourth chapter, he anticipates the objection that might be put against him that the clothes might, as it were, unmake the man. He runs through *exempla* from myth that could be proposed in support of the assertion that unmanly dress leads to unmanly behavior – and we have seen this list before – Achilles on Scyros, Hercules with Omphale, Sardanapallus, and so forth.⁹⁰ He acknowledges that not all changes in appearance are for the good, and that affectation in dress can be the result of vanity, pride, or, worse, effeminacy. His argument at this point is that only those changes which go against nature are ignoble. Here is the relevant passage:

Habitu transferre ita demum culpae prope est, si non consuetudo, sed natura mutetur. sat refert inter honorem temporis et religionem. det consuetudo fidem temporis, natura deo. naturam itaque concussit Larissaeus heros in virginem mutando, ille ferarum medullis educatus (unde et nominis concilium, quandoquidem labiis vacuerat ab uberum gustu), ille apud rupicem et silvicolam et monstrum eruditorem scrupea schola eruditus. feras, si in puero, matris sollicitudinem patiens; certe iam histriculus, certe iam virum alicui clanculo functus adhuc sustinet stolam fundere, comam struere, cutem fingere, speculum consulere, collum demulcere, aurem quoque foratu effeminatus, quod illi apud Sigeum strongyla servat.

Plane postea miles est; necessitas enim reddidit sexum. de proelio sonuerat, nec arma longe. ipsum, inquit, ferrum virum attrahit. ceterum, si post incentivum quoque puellam perseverasset, potuit et nubere. ecce itaque mutatio. monstrum equidem geminum, de viro femina, mox de fe-

⁹⁰ See above (p 122).

mina vir, quando neque veritas negari debuisse neque fallacia confiteri. uterque habitus mutandi malus, alter adversus naturam, alter contra salutem.

(*De pallio* 4.2)

A change in one's attire is thus blameworthy only insofar as it is one's nature that changes rather than one's habits. There is a significant difference between the homage due to the fashions of one's own time and that due to one's religion. Let custom pledge allegiance to time, and nature to God. Thus Achilles, the hero from Larissa, struck a blow against nature when he changed himself into a maiden, the very same person who had been reared on the marrow of wild beasts (from which derives the composition of his name, since he had missed out on tasting the breast with his lips), and who was educated in a rough school by a monstrous schoolmaster who lived among the mountains and woods. You would be able to stand it if it was while he was still a boy, putting up with his mother's fussing; but he kept it up, even after he had sprouted some stubble and had performed the job of a man for someone in secret: still he wore a flowing gown, arranged his hair, took care of his skin, gazed in the mirror, relaxed his shoulders, and wore that effeminate gold earring which the statue at Cape Sigeum still shows him wearing.

To be sure, he was a soldier later on; necessity gave him back his sex. The trumpet had sounded of battle and weapons were at hand. Steel itself, said Homer, attracts the hero. Otherwise, if he had carried on as a girl even after that overture, he could even have married. Imagine the transformation! He was truly a twofold prodigy, a man turning into a woman and a woman turning into a man, for neither should the truth have been hidden nor should the lie have been confessed. Both changes of attire were wrong: the first worked against his nature and the second worked against his longevity.

This is, as should be immediately clear, a full and precise résumé of the plot of the *Achilleid*. Geffcken (1909: 105–7), however, considered the question of Tertullian's sources here and perversely ruled out Statius, preferring to credit unknown works of satire, particularly by Varro, that are conveniently lost.⁹¹ Fortunately, this argument has been refuted in convincing detail by Gerlo in

⁹¹ For Geffcken (1909: 106), Tertullian's clear references to Statius imply paradoxically that Statius was *not* Tertullian's source: "Daß bei Tertullian Statius vorliegen sollte, ist mir unwahrscheinlich; die Ausmalungen z. B. der Einzelheiten seines Wechsels sind, wie neben Statius (325ff) auch Bion 11 18 zeigt, alexandrinischer Kunst geläufig. Die ganze Episode kann also schon in der satirischen Vorlage des Kirchenvaters enthalten gewesen sein." In fact, there is no meaningful correspondence between this passage of Tertullian and the tiny surviving scrap ascribed to Bion, nor is there any good evidence that there was another account of the Scyros story either in Alexandrian literature or Roman satire. A footnote to these lines adds, somewhat desperately: "Daß Statius 326 *colla rigentia mollit* eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit Tertullians *collum demulcere* hat, kann nicht für Tertullians Abhängigkeit von Statius entscheidend sein." Gerlo (1940: 106, n 1) comments on Geffcken's tendency always to imagine lost works of Varro as Tertullian's source.

his commentary on the *De pallio*; he thoroughly documents Tertullian's dependence on the *Achilleid*, so it will not be necessary to belabor Geffcken's objections here.⁹² We may therefore proceed to examine in detail the relationship between Statius and Tertullian.

Tertullian begins by contrasting Achilles' harsh upbringing with Chiron and his womanly seclusion on Scyros, a contrast that is fundamental to the *Achilleid*. The detail that he was nursed on "the marrow of wild beasts" comes directly from Statius (2.100), and it is encouraging to note that he explicitly connects this fact with the Euphorian etymology of Achilles' name, for that was precisely the interpretation that we reached above (p 177). Like Statius, he credits Achilles' arrival on Scyros to his mother's worry (*matris sollicitudinem*), and excuses him to a certain extent for that. What Tertullian claims is shocking, however, is that Achilles continued to tolerate acting like a girl (*sustinet stolam fundere*, etc.), long after he had definitely ceased to be a boy. He even continued after he had started to grow a beard or perhaps pubic hair.⁹³ He even carried on living as a girl after he had raped Deidamia (*virum alicui clanculo functus*). In the *Achilleid*, when Thetis collects Achilles from Chiron's cave, his facial hair has not yet grown (*nequid prima nova lanugine vertitur aetas*, 1.163). Since then, however, at least nine months have passed and probably more than that. The bare-cheeked boy is sexually mature and sexually active by the time Ulysses arrives, and that is why it is unforgivable that he is still playing the girl. Tertullian then lists several aspects of female behavior in which Achilles is implicated. Among these, care of the hair and relaxing the neck are strongly reminiscent of Thetis' transformation of Achilles in the *Achilleid*: "[Thetis] softens his stiff neck and his imposing shoulders and relaxes his strong arms and puts his unkempt hair in careful order."⁹⁴ The only detail in all of Tertullian's narrative that is unrelated to the *Achilleid* is the reference to an object of some kind (*strongyla*) at Cape Sigeum that represented Achilles wearing an earring. More detail on this object is given by Servius: "Indeed it is said that there was a statue of Achilles at Cape Sigeaum, which had an earring in the lobe, or lowest part of the ear, in the fashion of a woman."⁹⁵ So there was a male statue, perhaps "in the round" (στρογγύλη) and wearing an earring, at Cape Sigeum near Troy, which in the ages of Tertullian and Servius was identified

92 See passim all of the lemmata of Gerlo (1940) for section 4.2 and his general comment on Tertullian's dependence on the *Achilleid* on p 106.

93 "even after he had sprouted some stubble" (*iam histiculus*). If *histiculus* is the correct reading here, it might mean "prickly-bottomed," which would correspond to the (Greek) definition given in the glossary entry cited by Gerlo (1940: 109), and in L-S and TLL (6.3165.9) s.v. "hystriculus"; it would be a bilingual pun, combining a quasi-diminutive of *hystrix* (ὑστρίξ), "porcupine," and *culus* "anus."

94 *tum colla rigentia mollit | submittitque graves umeros et fortia laxat | braccia et inplexos certo domat ordine crines* (*Ach.* 1.326–8).

95 *sane apud Sigeum Achillis statua fuisse dicitur, quae in lanna, id est in extrema auris parte elenchum more femineo habuerit* (Serv. auctus ad *Aen.* 1.30).

as a representation of Achilles. It has been suggested by Ferrari (2002: 115f) that this might have been an archaic kouros. Even here, we may perhaps see an effect of Statius' influence. A statue of venerable antiquity at Cape Sigeum in the Troad might logically have come to be identified in later antiquity as depicting Achilles, particularly if its earring could be explained as a relic of his days on Scyros, an episode lately repopularized by Statius.

Tertullian then turns to the discovery of Achilles by Ulysses, and here too the influence of Statius is apparent. The sound of battle that he mentions refers to the trumpet blast that Ulysses had arranged to sound out while Achilles fondled the weapons he brought (1.875f). Achilles is "attracted" to the weapons rather than the girlish gifts that are on display alongside, a circumstance that Tertullian glosses with a witty Homeric tag: "Steel itself attracts the hero."⁹⁶ Tertullian's final comment on the events on Scyros displays an even more fundamental debt to the *Achilleid*. He says: "Otherwise, if he had carried on as a girl even after that overture [the trumpet blast], he could even have married."⁹⁷ Where does this idea come from? We saw that Statius characterizes Lycomedes as desperate to marry his daughters and deluded into thinking that Ulysses and Diomedes might be good candidates as husbands. The king takes encouragement when he sees the force of Ulysses' desire for one of his daughters, but misreads the character of his gaze as erotic. Tertullian appreciates the spectacle of Achilles and the other girls on display as marriageable maidens that Lycomedes stages for his guests, and he extrapolates from that to the prospect of Achilles as bride for some poor unsuspecting groom.

Tertullian knows the whole plot of the *Achilleid* at a level of completeness that could not have been gleaned from an intermediary source. He also shows evidence of having reflected on the meaning of the poem, for he has three keen insights which have not been matched by any subsequent commentators. Firstly, he knows that the discussion of Achilles' diet in Book 2 of the *Achilleid* is closely linked to the question of the correct etymology for Achilles' name, which is a matter of implicit debate between the hero and Ulysses in that same part of the poem (see above, p 173). Secondly, he understands the humor Statius injects into Lycomedes' situation as the father of many daughters and that in effect he offers Achilles, just like the rest of his girls, to Ulysses as a potential bride. Finally, he appreciates that Achilles' violation of the norms of gender was excusable to some extent in the usual narration of the myth, because he was simply following Thetis' orders: "you would be able to stand it if it was while he was still a boy, putting up with his mother's fussing."⁹⁸ Ovid agrees,

96 *ipsum ... ferrum virum attrahit* = αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐφέλκεται ἄνδρα σίδηρος (*Od.* 16.294 and 19.13); Tertullian's satirical use of this tag was surely influenced by Juvenal's parody: "the catamite himself attracts the man" (αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐφέλκεται ἄνδρα κίναιδος, 9.37).

97 *ceterum, si post incentivum quoque puellam perseverasset, potuit et nubere.*

98 *feras, si in puero, matris sollicitudinem patiens.*

saying, “Achilles hid his manhood under a long dress – shamefully done, if it were not that he had conceded this to the pleading of his mother.”⁹⁹ The really shocking thing for Tertullian is that Statius here parts company with Ovid; Statius’ hero continues the charade long after Thetis’ departure, after the boy has been left to his own devices, after he has grown to sexual maturity, and even after he has committed rape; Thetis cannot be blamed for this anymore. As Tertullian says, “he kept it up, even after he had sprouted some stubble and had performed the job of a man for someone [namely, Deidamia] in secret.”¹⁰⁰

Statius Rewrites Ovid

In the *Ars amatoria*, Achilles on Scyros is an *exemplum* of the inevitability of the normative mapping of gender to sex; this Ovid, the cynical teacher, the *praeceptor amoris*, is an essentialist, in contrast to the narrator of labile identity the *Metamorphoses*. In the *Ars*, there is a male role and a female role, and even if you dress Achilles up in skirts, he is still Achilles, he is aggressive, and his masculinity will come out. The rape of Deidamia puts things back as they should be, as they must be. Statius follows Ovid up to the point of the rape, but draws a very different conclusion. Even after the rape, after the birth of his son, after the arrival of the Greeks, Achilles remains the girl he was. His attempt at self-consciously asserting his manhood fails to take effect, which comes to the reader, as Tertullian testifies, as quite a disconcerting surprise. It is certainly not the case that Achilles remained in disguise out of fear. We hear of no noble males on Scyros other than the old and infirm Lycomedes, who has no sons. Ulysses and Diomedes even command their men not to disembark from the single ship they have brought, lest they alarm the natives (1.700). It would have been simpler for Statius if the first time Ulysses laid eyes on Achilles had been the moment of springing the trap, but the poet goes out of his way to put the cross-dressed Achilles on extensive and humiliating public display prior to that.¹⁰¹

So Statius’ decision to represent Achilles as a female, in public settings, even *after* his attempt to declare his independence from Thetis by means of raping Deidamia, was remarkable. It was recognized as a very significant choice by at least one perceptive reader in antiquity, Tertullian. Given all these data, the

99 *turpe, nisi hoc matris precibus tribuisset, Achilles | veste virum longa dissimulatus erat* (*Ars am.* 1.689f; see also above (p 125).

100 *certe iam histiculus, certe iam virum alicui [sc. Deidamiae] clanculo functus adhuc sustinet stolam fundere.*

101 It is this helplessness and the continuing, deliberate humiliation of Achilles, even after the boy has declared to us that he does not want to be a girl anymore, that argues most strongly against naive readings of the *Achilleid* as a simple heroic progress narrative, e.g. Aricò (1996: 196): “verrà progressivamente maturando la sua crescita, rivendicando a se stesso la gestione del proprio destino.” Achilles does indeed progress from boy to hero, but his path is far from direct.

most plausible conclusion is that Statius intended a rejoinder to Ovid's account. For Ovid, to be a rapist is the quintessentially male erotic role, once all the rhetoric and sweet talk has been stripped away. Statius, however, implies that, even if sexual violence is one aspect of masculinity, it *on its own* is not enough to constitute manliness. To become a man, Achilles requires something more than rape. In the *Ars amatoria*, the act of rape decisively clears the way for Achilles the Homeric hero; in the *Achilleid* there is still an obstacle or two in his way. Here is Richlin on Ovid's Achilles in the *Ars amatoria*:

His point is that *pati* – “to suffer,” “to be passive,” “to be penetrated sexually” – is pleasing to women, and this is the mark of the woman, as *vis*, “force,” is the mark of the man . . . When we want to know the gender of the adolescent hero dressed in women's clothing, the signifier of his maleness is his ability to commit rape. (1992: 169)

For Statius as for Ovid, rape is the natural and proper course of action for Achilles; Deidamia wants to be raped; the outcome of the rape is happy for the couple; and rape is a problem of male self-fashioning, not female victimization.¹⁰² Nevertheless, there is one important difference in the *Achilleid*; Statius' Achilles, even after showing himself as a man to Deidamia, still lacks something. His willful and deliberate assertion of his manhood fails, somehow, to take hold.¹⁰³ Rape, that Ovidian signifier of maleness, has surprisingly limited repercussions for Achilles' own identity.

Can we identify a reason why Achilles' attempt to shake off his femininity fails so unexpectedly? The missing element might be discovered in the act of violence itself: “by violence he obtained his desire and with all his determination he seized her in a real embrace.”¹⁰⁴ This is a “real embrace” with respect to the sisterly play that preceded it (cf. 1.571f), but the other point of comparison is Peleus, whose “embrace” (*amplexus*, *Ov. Met.* 11.228) of Thetis failed at first, but ultimately succeeded through perseverance: “the hero embraced her, and he obtained his desire; he impregnated her with great Achilles.”¹⁰⁵ Masculinity proves for Achilles as slippery in the embrace as Thetis been for his father. Statius describes the act of rape by means of an allusion to a line in the *Metamorphoses* just as he is in the process of turning Ovid's version of that event in the *Ars amatoria* on its head. By revising the essentialism of the *Ars amatoria* in the light of the antiessentialism of the *Metamorphoses*, Statius creates an *Achilleid* more Ovidian than Ovid himself. Moreover, the allusion to Peleus' rape of Thetis in the *Metamorphoses* is the pointer to what is missing in Achilles' attempt to prove himself a man. His attempt to assert his gender becomes an

102 On rape as happy outcome in Greek comedy, see Sommerstein (1998).

103 “And will you not prove yourself a man – oh! the shame! – by means of your love/desire?” (*teque marem – pudet heu! – nec amore probabis?* 1.639).

104 *vi potitur votis et toto pectore veros | admovet amplexus* (1.642f).

105 *amplexitur heros | et potitur votis ingentique inplet Achille* (*Met.* 11.264f).

emulation of his father's rape of his mother; and this is the first moment in the poem that Achilles has done anything to emulate his *real* father, Peleus. It is, in fact, the first time the presence of Peleus is felt in the *Achilleid*. The question of Peleus' absence is an important one for how we interpret Achilles' behavior, and we can draw some conclusions about the poem as a whole in the light of this strange omission.

{ 7 }

Conclusion

Dans tout usage du vêtement, il y a quelque chose qui participe de la fonction du transvestisme . . . Les vêtements ne sont pas seulement faits pour cacher ce qu'on en a, au sens de *en avoir ou pas*, mais aussi précisément ce qu'on n'en a pas. L'une et l'autre fonction sont essentielles. Il ne s'agit pas, essentiellement et toujours, de cacher l'objet, mais aussi bien de cacher le manque d'objet.

Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre IV: La relation d'objet**

AS WE SAW in the preceding chapter, Statius in the *Achilleid* revises the Ovidian account of Achilles' rape of Deidamia. For Ovid, that incident represents the collision of gender as artifice and sex as reality, and the way Achilles yields to his desire illustrates the irreducible imperative of biology in his own destiny. In the *Achilleid*, however, even though Achilles explicitly announces his intention that his phallic intervention should restore him to his gender, the rape is a failure. The child Neoptolemus is thereby conceived, so the sexual act is not a failure in the ordinary sense, but rather in the symbolic sense, in that it fails to have the corrective effect upon himself that Achilles intended, as he continues thereafter to live as a girl. This is not an isolated incident: the *Achilleid* is a poem of failure, most generally in that it tells the story of Thetis' epic failure to divert the impending epic destiny of the *Iliad*;

* "In all custom of dress there is something that participates in the function of transvestism . . . Clothes are not only designed to hide that which one has in the sense of *having it or not having it*, but also precisely that which one does not have. Both functions are essential. It is not a matter, essentially and always, of hiding the object, but equally of hiding the lack of an object." Lacan (1994: 166).

but as we have seen this broader failure is mirrored in many particular incidents which show Thetis to be not quite up to the task she has in mind.

This failure is different in that it concerns Achilles, and it undercuts one of the few conscious assertions of his own will that the hero is allowed in the course of the narrative, and it is elaborated in an exquisitely ironic manner. Statius framed the scene with two references; one is from literature: Catullus' Attis; and the other is from cult: the unveiling of the phallus. Before the rape, as Achilles declaims his woe and announces his resolve to end his abasement, the rhetoric and situation are reminiscent of the Attis of Catullus 63. So Achilles, as he articulates his frustration with the female role he has been playing, is implicitly compared with a castrated male. As if to disavow that *comparandum*, Achilles rapes Deidamia. On one level, as we have seen, this is a successful display of mastery, which revises the male maenadism of Pentheus to restore the normative gender assignments of violated and violator. Within the context of Achilles' own biography, on the other hand, what does it mean that his act of sexual violence fails to produce the other desired outcome – the restoration of Achilles' masculinity?

It seems plausible to read Achilles' phallic intervention in the context of the overt phallicism of the cult in the midst of which the rape takes place. The unveiling of the phallus as the centerpiece of the Bacchic mysteries is substituted here for a symbolic equivalent: the lifting of Achilles' female robes to reveal his manhood. One could stop here and leave our interpretation of the incident at this: Achilles' assertion of his masculinity is expressed in terms of a cult symbol of male potency. This would find support in the numerous interpretations of the role of the *liknon* and phallus in the Bacchic mysteries that see it merely as a symbol of potency and fertility (on Cumont, Nilsson, and others, see above, p 249). There seems to be more to it, however, since the unveiling of Achilles' phallus at the Scyrian *trieteris*, while a success in terms of fertility, is a failure as an expression of masculinity. This aspect of Achilles' adventure also corresponds to the symbolism of the cult: a remarkable thing about the veiled phallus as it sits in the *liknon* is that it is detached from the male body. In this way it can serve as not only a symbol of male potency, but also of its opposite: a symbol of castration, and of the possibility of detaching masculinity from the man.

This is an aspect of the Bacchic mysteries that has been emphasized in an interpretation better known among psychoanalysts and gender theorists than among students of ancient religion. The unveiling of the phallus in the Bacchic mysteries occupies a central place in Jacques Lacan's revision of Freud's theories of the Oedipus complex, castration anxiety, and the emergence of the gendered subject. In fact, Lacan's revision of Freud has a number of striking parallels with the way that Statius revised Ovid on the subject of Achilles' sex, and so it may afford an interesting perspective on the debate staged in the *Achil-*

leid between essentialist and constructivist views of gender. The fact that both Statius and Lacan framed their evasion of essentialism in terms of precisely the same ancient Roman ritual suggests that Statius' analysis of gender was more subtle than many might give him credit for, and also that Lacan's analysis of the ancient ritual may be of interest not only to psychoanalysts, but also to classicists.

Statius with Lacan

Freud's use of ancient Greek myth is well known, and so it is not unreasonable to look for traces of the same in Freud's follower, Lacan, who drew his metaphors from an even wider range of disciplines. So a recent essay by Darian Leader asks the question, "Can we, indeed, speak of 'Lacan's myths' in the same way that we can speak of Freud's?"¹ Leader convincingly shows the importance of Lévi-Strauss' brand of structuralist mythography to Lacan, but he gives a positive answer to his own question only by expanding the term "myth" to include almost any sort of narrative or image. The narrower question still remains, then, of what use Lacan made of classical myth. One place to look might be in his discussion of the castration complex, since this is the context in which Freud makes use of Oedipus. What we find there is not, however, a classical myth but rather a classical ritual: the unveiling of the phallus in the Bacchic mysteries. The myth and ritual school may have had an influence here alongside Lévi-Strauss. Given Lacan's wit, it seems plausible to see this as a deliberate stroke intended to turn Freud's Oedipus on its head. Instead of a story that symbolizes a desired action, Lacan gives us an action that symbolizes its feared result. On the other hand, when examined from a different angle, myth and ritual are not so far apart, since Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* was originally acted out as part of a Dionysiac ritual, and conversely, the Dionysiac ritual of the unveiling of the phallus is only accessible to us via its representations in art.

Lacanianians have long emphasized the "unveiling of the phallus" as a central feature in Lacan's system, but often without noticing the allusion to a particular classical context every bit as specific as Sophocles' plays. It is to one work of art, the fresco cycle in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii, that Lacan primarily refers.² Given that Freud had been fond of using the excavations at Pompeii as a metaphor for the exploration of repressed memories in analysis, one can see why this particular representation appealed to Lacan, quite apart from the fact that it is the best preserved and most vivid representation of the unveiling ceremony.³ Lacan refers to this painting in some detail in two works dating

¹ Leader (2003: 35).

² One Lacanian who gives full attention to the Villa of the Mysteries is Benvenuto (1994: esp. x, xiii–xviii). A detail of the fresco is reproduced on the cover of Lacan (1974).

³ On Freud and Pompeii, see Payne (1993: 90).

from 1957–8: his seminar on “The formations of the unconscious,” and a lecture on “The meaning of the phallus.”⁴ Here is a passage from the seminar:

I have alluded to the ancient Mysteries. It is quite striking to see that, in the frescos of the villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, rare works that have been preserved intact to a remarkable degree, it is very precisely just to the side of the spot where the exposition of the phallus is represented that there arise various types of life-size demons ... These demons ... begin to apply a ritual chastisement to the aspirants or initiates that are in the image. Thus the fantasy of flagellation arises in its most direct form and in the closest connection with the unveiling of the phallus.⁵

When Lacan highlights the chastisement that seems to be delivered to the initiate for whom the phallus is unveiled, he seems to suggest the castration threatened by a parental figure in Freud’s Oedipus complex. Thus he finds an item from classical culture that neatly compliments Freud’s use of Sophocles, in that it provides an otherwise missing link between the Oedipal conflict and castration, or at least the disembodiment of the phallus. But Lacan is doing something more than just restating Freud’s doctrine with the aid of a different classical metaphor. The Greek term “phallus” is important, since it allows Lacan to distinguish, in a way that Freud really did not, between the penis as an organ and the phallus as a symbol:

Why does one speak of the phallus, and not purely and simply of the penis...? Let us look at what the phallus is at its origin, i.e. the phallos, φαλλός. We see it attested for the first time in ancient Greece. If we go to the texts, to the different passages in Aristophanes, Herodotus, Lucian, etc., we see immediately that the phallus is not at all identical to the organ insofar as regards belonging to a body, its length, or its functioning as a member or organ. The dominant usage of the word is its employment with respect to a simulacrum, an emblem, in whatever way it is presented – a wooden stick on the top of which male organs are hung, the introduction of the male organ, a piece of wood or leather, or the other fashions in which it presents itself. It is a substitute object.⁶

4 The former is Lacan (1998a); the latter is in Lacan (1966: 685–95).

5 “J’ai fait allusion aux Mystères antiques. Il est tout à fait frappant de voir que, sur les rares fresques conservées dans une remarquable intégrité, celles de la Villa des Mystères à Pompéi, c’est très précisément juste à côté de l’endroit où se représente le développement du phallus, que surgissent... en taille naturelle, des sortes de démons ... Ces démons ... commencent d’appliquer le châtiement rituel à une des impétrantes ou initiées qui sont dans l’image. Ainsi surgit le fantasme de la flagellation sous la forme la plus directe et dans la connexion la plus immédiate avec le dévoilement du phallus.” Lacan (1998a: 347f).

6 “Pourquoi parle-t-on de phallus, et non pas purement et simplement de pénis...? Observons ce qu’est le phallus à l’origine. C’est le phallos, φαλλός. Nous le voyons pour la première fois attesté dans l’Antiquité grecque. Si nous allons aux textes, à différents endroits chez Aristophane, Hérodote, Lucien, etc., nous voyons d’abord que le phallus n’est pas de tout identique à l’organe en tant qu’appartenance du corps, prolongement, membre, organe en fonction. L’usage du mot qui

This movement from the biological to the metaphorical is a fundamental aspect of Lacan's revision of Freud. Freud's Oedipus complex had been criticized by anthropologists as determined by Western stereotypes, by feminists as being an expression of male chauvinism, by Marxists for reifying bourgeois neurosis as normative, and by other psychoanalysts as being a crude generalization.⁷ In a sense, Lacan's revision of Freud's biological essentialism was not dissimilar in motivation to Stautius' revision of Ovid's gender essentialism. In both cases it seems not to have been a matter of rejecting the work of one's predecessor, but rather of revising the letter in order to preserve the spirit.⁸ In defending Freud against the charge of scientism, Lacan did not run away from the scientific aspect of his work, and he continually stressed the empirical, clinical results Freud had achieved; yet he also managed to recast some aspects of Freud's ideas as metaphorical. He did this by stealth, adopting a scientific and mathematical vocabulary and using it so outrageously that it took on a surreal aspect. It would be possible to read Freud and to come away with the expectation that the drives he described might be neurologically measurable things, but no one will go looking for a torus, or a doughnut-shaped area, in the brain after reading Lacan's discussions of the topology of neurosis, such as his claim that: "It is not an analogy . . . This torus really exists and it is exactly the structure of the neurotic. It is not an analogon; it is not even an abstraction, because an abstraction is some sort of diminution of reality, and I think it is reality itself."⁹ It is the precision that Lacan insists on that produces the paradox: by making his models more abstract and elaborate, Lacan forces us to read them as metaphors, even as he insists that these are not metaphors but the thing itself. In fact, these protestations are quite genuine, since Lacan claims that the unconscious itself is a set of metaphors. Thus any accurate and precise account of it will necessarily consist of metaphors, and on this level Lacan is correct to insist that his seeming analogies are in fact the thing itself. When Lacan famously said that "the unconscious is structured like a language," he meant that it is a differential set of signs constituted by metaphor and metonymy.¹⁰

Of all the metaphors that structure the unconscious, the most fundamental is the one symbolized by the phallus. As we shall see, this is not a biological

domine de beaucoup, c'est son emploi à propos d'un simulacre, d'un insigne, quel que soit le mode sous lequel il se présente – bâton en haut duquel sont appendus les organes virils, initiation de l'organe viril, morceau de bois, morceau de cuir, autres variétés sous lesquelles il se présente. C'est un objet substitutif." Lacan (1998a: 346).

⁷ On Lacan as a bridge between Freud and those once hostile to psychoanalysis, see Turkle (1992: 27–46, 69–93).

⁸ On the "Oedipal issues" evoked by Freud as a father figure within psychoanalysis, see Turkle (1992: 137).

⁹ Lacan (1970: 196); on Lacan's relationship to science, see Fink (1995: 138–46).

¹⁰ See e.g. Lacan (1998b: 48). On Lacan's use of Jakobson's linguistic concepts to substitute for Freud's mechanism of "condensation" and "displacement," see Lacan (1966: 511).

organ for Lacan, but rather, it originally stands for an infant's urge to be one with its mother, to monopolize her desire. This is, of course, impossible, and the infant's failure creates the emptiness that motivates his or her desires from then onward in life.¹¹ This failure comes to be attributed to the father, who most obviously prevents the child from monopolizing the mother's attention. For Lacan, this is the locus of the Oedipus complex. The imaginary phallus is that which would, ideally, satisfy the child's mother completely, and it is the father's presence that demonstrates to the child that it will never be able to fulfill that role. Hence, Lacan speaks of this as a "castration" of the child by the father, but unlike the biological threat Freud spoke of, this has to do with a symbolic lack of an imaginary organ.¹² This intervention is in fact a liberation in that it allows the child to leave the mother behind and go out into the world as a desiring subject. The unveiling is not just a ritual counterpart to Freud's mythopoetic Oedipus, the *dromena* to Freud's *legomena*; it occupies in its own right a central position in Lacan's thought.

In fact, the phallus is for Lacan much more than the symbol of what is at the root of the Oedipal conflict, for the successful negotiation of the Oedipus complex not only marks the birth of the desiring subject, but also of the symbol-using subject who is alienated from his desire within language. In his lecture on the meaning of the phallus, therefore, Lacan's perspective is much broader than the Oedipus complex:

For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of analysis, perhaps lifts the veil from the function it occupied in the mysteries. For it is the signifier ordained to designate the effects of signification taken as a whole, insofar as the signifier affects them by its presence as a signifier.¹³

This idea that the phallus symbolizes not one particular thing, but the effect of symbol formation as a whole, is taken up again a few pages later:

At any rate, man cannot aim at being whole (in the sense of the "total personality," another premise in which modern psychotherapy has gone astray), since the play of displacement and condensation, to which he is devoted in the exercise of his functions, marks his relationship as a subject to the signifier.

The phallus is the privileged signifier of this mark where the participation of the logos is linked to the advent of desire.¹⁴

¹¹ See Turkle (1992: 56).

¹² See Evans (1996: 127–30, s.v. "Oedipus complex") and Lacan (1994: 227).

¹³ "Car le phallus est un signifiant, un signifiant dont la fonction, dans l'économie intrasubjective de l'analyse, soulève peut-être le voile de celle qu'il tenait dans les mystères. Car c'est le signifiant destiné à désigner dans leur ensemble les effets de signifié, en tant que le signifiant les conditionne par sa présence de signifiant." Lacan (1966: 690).

¹⁴ "De toute façon, l'homme ne peut viser à être entier (à la 'personnalité totale,' autre prémisses où

Man is not whole; he is alienated from his desire, ever since he realizes as a baby that his mother is a separate being with autonomous desires of her own, beyond him and beyond his control. This then becomes an alienation within language as the desires and frustrations of infancy become sublimated and only later reappear as effects of metaphor and metonymy within the symbolic realm that the child comes to inhabit as he learns language. It is this meeting of language and desire that the phallus signifies for Lacan, because both are only made possible by lack: the incest prohibition forces Oedipal drives eventually to find other outlets; and language is made possible by the gap between word and thing, between signifier and signified.

After imagining a number of possible reasons one might give to explain why it is that this organ in particular plays such a symbolic role, Lacan continues:

All these notions do no more than veil the fact that it can only play its role when veiled, which is to say, as itself the sign of the latency by which everything signifiable is struck from the moment it is raised (*aufgehoben*) to the function of the signifier.

The phallus is the signifier of this very *Aufhebung* which it inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance. This is why the demon of *Aἰδώς* (*Scham* – the demon of Shame) arises at the very moment in the ancient mystery when the phallus is unveiled (cf. the well-known painting from the Villa at Pompeii).

It then becomes the bar in the hand of the demon which strikes the signified, marking it as a bastard offspring of the signifying chain.¹⁵

As often with Lacan, the connotations of the words he uses are as important as their denotations. The veiling of the phallus is explicitly connected with the “latency” of meaning inherent in symbolism itself, but that word suggests Freud’s latency period during which the drives of the Oedipal phase are repressed, before reemerging at puberty with different objects. Then, switching to the terminology of another thinker, Lacan describes the process by which signs or symbols are formed by using the Hegelian term *Aufhebung*. This term was appealing for Lacan as for Hegel on account of its ambiguity, since it

se dévie la psychothérapie moderne), dès lors que le jeu de déplacement et de condensation où il est voué dans l’exercice de ces fonctions, marque sa relation de sujet au signifiant. Le phallus est le signifiant privilégié de cette marque où la part du logos se conjoint à l’avènement du désir.” Lacan (1966: 692).

¹⁵ “Tous ces propos ne font encore que voiler le fait qu’il ne peut jouer son rôle que voilé, c’est-à-dire comme signe lui-même de la latence dont est frappé tout signifiable, dès lors qu’il est élevé (*aufgehoben*) à la fonction de signifiant. Le phallus est le signifiant de cette *Aufhebung* elle-même qu’il inaugure (initie) par sa disparition. C’est pourquoi le démon de l’*Aἰδώς* (*Scham* [le démon de la Pudeur]) surgit dans le moment même où dans le mystère antique, le phallus est dévoilé (cf. la peinture célèbre de la Villa de Pompéi). Il devient alors la barre qui par la main de ce démon frappe le signifié, le marquant comme la progéniture bâtarde de sa concaténation signifiante.” Lacan (1966: 692).

can mean “elevation” or “annulment.”¹⁶ Hegel used the word, which is usually translated as “sublation” or “synthesis,” to describe the process whereby thesis and antithesis are superseded by an idea that simultaneously transcends, preserves the essence of, and obliterates them. This is the sort of ambiguity that Lacan wishes to express with regard to the emergence of the signifier: the signifier “dog” transcends each particular dog, embodies some essential aspect of all dogs, and erases the differences between individual dogs.¹⁷

So for Lacan, the phallus is the symbol of symbolism itself. The demon of Shame arises when the phallus is unveiled, not because the object itself is shameful, but because it symbolizes the act of repression by which the drives of the id have been channeled into other, substitute, symbolic objects.¹⁸ The *Aufhebung* by means of which the symbolic comes into being is “inaugurated” by the “disappearance” of the phallus. This intertwining of the development of sexuality and the symbolic implies an identical mythology of fullness and lack for both: just as the child, if he wants to grow up, has to give up the dream of returning to the womb and recreating his complete identification with the mother, so too does using language imply a renunciation, a settling for something less than that powerful, alluring myth: an ideal language, which would give things their real, true names.¹⁹ The essentially contingent nature of linguistic signifier was Saussure’s fundamental insight, and this contingency is often elsewhere described by Lacan as a “bar,” which here is symbolized for Lacan in the scourge wielded by the demon in the ancient fresco.²⁰

What, then, does any of this have to do with Achilles? There is a remarkable parallel in the way Statius and Lacan interpret the role of the phallus in Bacchic ritual. Contrary to modern historians of religion, who see the phallus as a symbol of fertility, or potency, or generation, or masculinity, Statius and Lacan both see it as a symbol of lack, insufficiency, in fact, as a signifier of castration. Lacan’s interpretation of the symbolism of the unveiling of the phallus turns on the fact that, detached from the body and stylized, the organ which is the quintessence of biological, essentialist accounts of human subjectivity becomes a signifier of the detachability of word and meaning, of body and identity. Statius likewise sees phallicism as a paradox. Achilles stages his own unveiling of the phallus when he rapes Deidamia in the midst of a Bacchic ritual, an act by which he intends to demonstrate the essential presence

16 Lacan (1998a: 344f) discusses further the meaning of *Aufhebung* in this context.

17 This example is suggested by a passage in Kojève’s lectures on Hegel, which were an enormously important influence on Lacan. Discussing Chapter 7 of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Kojève (1980: 140) uses it to describe conceptual understanding (*Begreifen*) as a “murder” in which concrete entities are obliterated by abstract concepts.

18 Shame is one of the common identifications of the winged figure in the fresco. For criticism of this transcendental aspect of Lacan’s phallus, see Bowie (1991: 141–3).

19 For a slightly different view of the lack which generates language for Lacan, see Fink (1995: 103).

20 On the “bar,” see Evans (1996: 15f, s.v.).

of his manhood, but which in the end demonstrates the insufficiency of the phallus in engendering masculinity. Achilles may have the phallus on Scyros, but in the midst of the maenadic rites, so too may all of the other ladies of the island, who might just be imagined as shaking their phalloi, like Achilles himself, along with their phallic thyrsi and the other traditional Bacchic implements (I.612, I.648).

In sum, Lacan explains the Bacchic ritual of the unveiling of the phallus not as a fertility symbol, but as a token of the fertility of symbolism. The possibility that it might be correct to interpret it as a signifier of lack rather than of fullness is given some support by the equivocal way both Ovid, in the Faunus episode of the *Fasti*, and Statius, in the *Achilleid*, play on the role of the phallus in Bacchic contexts in ways that emphasize, not, as we might expect, male potency, but male humiliation and inadequacy.²¹ Conversely, it is intriguing that Statius, who has not typically been viewed as a profound thinker on the subject of gender, chose the very same ritual context as Lacan for demonstrating the incommensurability of masculinity and biology. The rape scene in the *Achilleid* dramatizes Lacan's notion that "there is no manliness but that which is consecrated by castration."²²

A further similarity between Statius and Lacan may be seen in their treatment of the role of the father figure in the formation of the subject. One of Lacan's most significant departures from Freud's Oedipus complex is that for him both boys and girls go through the complex in the same way; they both go from desiring to be what the mother desires to identifying with the father, and thus they both have the same relationship to the imaginary phallus.²³ By insisting on the imaginary nature of the phallus which is threatened with castration in the Oedipus complex, Lacan sees both sexes as going through the very same process. He thus is able to deemphasize and render as an abstraction Freud's concept of penis envy which has been the target of so much derision by feminists.²⁴ For Lacan, gender is a matter of the subject's relationship to language, and to the phallus as a symbolic object. Since the Oedipus complex initiates the subject's alienation within symbols and language, male and female differ only in the sort of alienation they experience.²⁵

21 On the Faunus episode, see above (p 255).

22 "Il n'est pas de virilité que la castration ne consacre." Lacan (1966: 733).

23 Evans (1996: s.v. "The phallus and sexual difference," 141).

24 "Thus while Freud conceives of the castration complex and sexual difference in terms of the presence and absence of the penis, Lacan theorizes them in non-biological, non-anatomical terms (the presence and absence of the phallus). This has been one of the main attractions of Lacanian theory for certain feminist writers who have seen it as a way of constructing a non-essentialist account of gendered subjectivity." Evans (1996: s.v. "Biology," 18). On Lacan and feminism, see Wright (2000) and Luepnitz (2003).

25 On the complex subject of Lacan on sexual differentiation, see Shepherdson (2003: 137–47), Evans (1996: 178–81), Fink (1995: 98–125), Frosh (1994: 65–88), and Butler (1990: 43–57) with Lacan

If it is not a threat to the phallus on a biological level that resolves the Oedipus complex, and thus ushers the subject into his or her gender, what is it for Lacan that accomplishes this resolution? It is not a real father who threatens a real castration as a consequence of the child's attachment to his mother, but rather this attachment is displaced by an identification with the father, as a result of what he calls a paternal metaphor.²⁶ This third term that comes between mother and child is designated by Lacan as the Name-of-the-Father, as if to emphasize its symbolic character. This is the signifier that indicates the person who lays down the Oedipal prohibition against incest, who "confers identity upon the subject."²⁷ This need not have anything to do with the real father, as Lacan makes clear in his work on psychosis, which, he claims, results from a "deficiency" of this signifier, rather than an absence of the real father.²⁸ Let us compare Achilles. As we have seen, one of the most striking features of Statius' family portrait is that his father, Peleus, has been almost totally elided from it, beginning with the statement of Achilles' patrimony in the first line of the poem. As we have seen, there are other figures who attempt to fill this void – Chiron, Thetis, Lycomedes – but all of these are defective in some way. It is only when Ulysses arrives and whispers the name "Peleus" in Achilles' ear that he sheds his female identity and embarks upon his destiny.

The Name of the Father

Let us review our findings with respect to Achilles' father in the *Achilleid*. In the first line of the poem, the hero is named as the grandson of Aeacus (Peleus' father and son of Jupiter) on the one hand, and as the hypothetical son Jupiter never had on the other, whereas in the first line of the *Iliad*, Achilles is named by means of a patronymic that identifies him as the son of Peleus (Πηληϊάδεω; see above, p 71). It is therefore notable that Statius' two ways of designating Achilles, as the grandson of Aeacus and as the potential son of Jupiter, omits mention of Peleus. From the very first line of the poem to the very last line, where Achilles says of his earliest childhood, "my mother knows the rest" (*scit cetera mater*, 2.167, on which see above, p 63, n 21), Peleus is conspicuous in his absence. Earlier accounts of the early childhood of Achilles in literature and the visual arts either, like Homer, pictured him as part of a more or less nuclear family of Peleus, Thetis, and Achilles, or, like Apollonius, saw Peleus as

(1998b: 64–77) and Lacan (1994: 153). See also now Ragland (2004), which appeared after this chapter was written.

26 See Evans (1996: s.v. "paternal metaphor," 137f) and Fink (1995: 55–8).

27 Quote: Evans (1996: s.v. "Name-of-the-Father," 119). See further Fink (1995: 55–8).

28 "Deficiency" (*carence*): Lacan (1966: 557). In a clinical discussion of transsexualism from a Lacanian perspective; Millot (1983: 39) suggests that it is an attempt to remedy such a deficiency ("la tentative de pallier la carence du Nom-du-Père").

a single father who was abandoned by his mermaid wife and therefore fostered his son with Chiron (see above, p 170). In Roman art after Statius, on the other hand, Thetis dominates the young life of Achilles (see above, p 172); this is probably a result of the influence of the *Achilleid* itself. The Nereid is extraordinarily active in our version of events; Statius even makes Thetis, contrary to both traditions from Greek epic, responsible for Achilles' presence with Chiron (above, p 171). Effectively, Statius extends to Achilles' childhood the interest that the Homeric Thetis takes in her son in the *Iliad*. Compare Apollonius' Thetis, who wants nothing to do with her family and only assists Peleus at Hera's insistence. The absence of Peleus from Achilles' childhood is unprecedented in Homer, Apollonius, and most of the visual arts before Statius.

As we saw above (p 164), the most vivid illustration of the missing part in Achilles' life comes from the mouth of the hero himself. When he introduces himself to Deidamia, he gives an account of his illustrious genealogy:

"Ille ego – quid trepidas? – genitum quem caerulea mater
 paene Iovi silvis nivibusque inmisit alendum
 Thessalicis. nec ego hos cultus aut foeda subissem
 tegmina, ni primo te visa in litore: cessi
 te propter, tibi pensa manu, tibi mollia gesto
 tympana. quid defles magno nurus addita ponto?
 quid gemis ingentes caelo paritura nepotes?"
 "Sed pater –"

(1.650–7)

"I am he – why are you frightened? – the son whom my mother, the sea-goddess, almost bore to Jupiter and whom she sent to be raised in the woods and snows of Thessaly. And I would not have submitted to this way of dressing or this shameful covering, if I had not seen you first on the shore. I gave in on account of you. For you I carry the wool in my hand and the soft tambourine. Why do you weep to be counted as the daughter-in-law of the great sea? Why do you moan, you who will give birth to prodigious grandchildren for the sky?" "But [my/your] father!"

Achilles mentions Thetis as his mother, Jupiter as his almost-father, Chiron as his foster-father, Oceanus as his maternal great-grandfather, and finally Jupiter as his paternal great-grandfather.²⁹ We discussed this passage earlier in relation to Homeric self-introductions, and saw how odd it was by the standards

²⁹ This is Rosati's interpretation of the lines, which is surely correct. "Counted as the daughter-in-law of the great sea" (*magno nurus addita ponto*) has also been taken to refer to Thetis once again, but that would be pointlessly repetitive; Achilles has moved on to enumerate his more distant and even more awesome and elemental ancestors. L - s give parallels from Justinian's *Digest* of passages where *nurus* is used to mean the wife of a grandson or great-grandson, in which case, by "great sea" (*magno . . . ponto*) Achilles means Nereus, or more likely Oceanus. Dilke claims that Mozley is wrong to take *caelo paritura nepotes* as a reference to Peleus' descent from Jupiter, but his note (ad 656) does not make sense. The reference could not be "still to Thetis," since she was not related

of heroic epic that Achilles omits to mention Peleus (above, p 164). He alludes to Jupiter as his father's grandfather, but that is as close as he comes. So when Deidamia interrupts with the objection in aposiopesis, "But [my/your] father!" (*sed pater!*), there are two things she might mean.³⁰ What Achilles takes her to mean, and what all commentators have taken her as meaning, is that her own father Lycomedes will be furious with her for losing her virginity. What if, however, Achilles has misunderstood her in formulating his reply? The speech she interrupts is an account by Achilles of his own family tree, and so the interjection *sed pater!* might well be a query with regard to that. Perhaps Deidamia finds Achilles' bizarre and periphrastic self-designation confusing and she simply wants to know who he is. She asks for the most important identifying fact, which Achilles has omitted: who is your father? Achilles understands her differently and goes on to reassure the girl that *her* father will not punish her.³¹ The audience, however, must be wondering by now what has happened to Peleus, and why the cross-dressed Achilles elides him from his lineage.

The only places where Peleus is mentioned in the *Achilleid* are the following. Neptune rebukes Thetis for complaining about her marriage to a mortal (*Pelea . . . thalamosque minores*, 1.90). The people of Thessaly express their regret at not contributing to the war effort, because Peleus is too old and Achilles is not yet old enough (1.438–40). Old enough or not, the Greeks at Aulis want Achilles, and rumor (*fama*) tells them that he is not in Chiron's cave, nor in the house of his father, Peleus (*nec antris | Chironis patria nec . . . Peleos aula*, 1.507). Both the narrator of the *Achilleid* and Achilles himself omit to mention Peleus when giving an account of the hero's descent. Before Achilles' transformation into a warrior, Peleus is mentioned only in passing. When Thetis tries to get Achilles to put on a girl's clothing, the boy resists, thinking of his father (*genitor*, 1.275) and Chiron. It is Chiron's opinion which is Achilles' main concern, however, and Thetis assures her son that the centaur will never know (*nesciet hoc Chiron*, 1.274). When Thetis pictures Achilles growing up in Chiron's cave, she thinks of him measuring himself against his father's spear (*patria . . . hasta*, 1.41). The great spear did belong to Peleus, but it was originally a gift from Chiron, and so in the adjective *patria* is doubly appropriate, for it had belonged both to his father and his foster-father. Chiron even refers to the

to Jupiter, and, since Jupiter did not in fact mate with Thetis, it could not refer to that possibility, either. For Senecan influence on these lines, see Fantham (1979: 458).

³⁰ See above (p 138, n 70).

³¹ Achilles boasts of the violence he will visit upon Lycomedes if he dares to punish her (1.658–60), but in the event, they do not confront Lycomedes with such defiance, but rather conceal Deidamia's pregnancy from him. Thus this is another example of how the bold assertions that Achilles makes of his male, heroic identity in the context of this rape are undercut by their failure to materialize subsequently.

worrying “omens of a father” *patria omina* (1.147) that he feels with respect to Achilles.³²

When Achilles considers the shame he has brought upon himself on Scyros, he does not think of Peleus, but of Chiron, imagining him as a bereaved parent: “does Chiron weep at my funeral like a bereaved parent?” (*orbatus plangit mea funera Chiron?* 1.631).³³ In even more direct language, Achilles describes his upbringing on Pelion by Chiron, “that father of mine” (*ille pater*, 2.102). Achilles was with Chiron from before he could walk (*reptantibus annis*, 2.96), and he mentions no interruption of his stay there until Thetis comes to collect him, so in Statius’ version Achilles has never lived with Peleus, but has been with Chiron from infancy until Thetis brings him to Scyros. This contradicts the *Iliad*, where Achilles’ early years at Phthia are mentioned a number of times (see above, p 170). Later on, Achilles also calls Lycomedes “dear father” (*care pater*, 1.892), but there is an important difference here, for at this stage, Achilles has discarded his disguise and introduces himself as a man:

Me tibi, care pater – dubium dimitte pavorem –
me dedit alma Thetis: te pridem tanta manebat
gloria; quaesitum Danais tu mittis Achillem,
gratior et magno, si fas dixisse, parente
et dulci Chirone mihi. sed corda parumper
huc adverte libens atque has bonus accipe voces:
Peleus te nato socerum et Thetis hospita iungunt
adlegantque suos utroque a sanguine divos. (1.892–9)

It was I, dear father – put aside your doubt and fear – whom loving Thetis gave to you; this great honor has been awaiting you for quite some time: it is you who sends Achilles to the Greeks, in response to their great desire, O you who are dearer to me than my noble father, if it is right to have said such a thing, and dearer to me than sweet Chiron. But be gracious and turn your thoughts toward me and listen in good faith to what I have to say: Peleus and your guest Thetis admit you to their family as father-in-law to their son and they can point to gods on both sides of my ancestry.

This speech serves much the same purpose as that in which Achilles introduces himself to Deidamia, but this time Peleus takes his rightful place in Achilles’ self-presentation. What has changed since then? When Achilles explained himself to Deidamia he was in the course of a failed attempt to assert his masculinity on his own, emulating his father’s rape of his mother, without,

³² Thus Rosati, correcting Dilke’s improbable notion that prophecy was a gift bestowed on Chiron by *his* father, Saturn. Dilke’s discomfort with the natural sense of the word *patria* is a sign of how surprising it is that Chiron calls himself Achilles’ father.

³³ This may have been inspired as an inversion of Ovid’s description of the death of Chiron in the *Fasti*, where the young Achilles calls Chiron “father” (*pater*, 5.412) and cries, “as if Peleus were dying” (5.408). On this scene, see Brookes (1994).

however, acknowledging Peleus as his father, whereas at this point he claims his true patrimony and successfully reveals himself as a man. The phrase “they can point to gods on both sides of my ancestry” has, as Dilke points out, “a distinctly legal sound . . . his parents are imagined as reciting their illustrious ancestry to the prospective father-in-law.”³⁴ This is a direct rebuttal to the similarly legal language used by Thetis to impugn Achilles’ legitimacy on account of the low birth of his father, as measured in relation to the immortal Thetis.³⁵ At that point, Thetis’ disparagement of Achilles’ father for his low birth – as compared to her – is a prelude to her usurping the paternal role as a guide and mentor, when she trains Achilles to dress and walk like a girl. By contrast, in the present scene, Achilles reasserts the nobility of his father as well as his mother in equal terms, since Peleus was a grandson of Jupiter in his own right, and he was certainly of greater fame and more illustrious ancestry than Lycomedes. Achilles ejects Thetis from the position as his sole parent that she was able to occupy until now, by virtue of the absence of Peleus.

It seems plausible to connect this new-found acknowledgment of Peleus with the arrival of Ulysses and his discovery of Achilles. When Ulysses delivers his shrewd recruitment speech to Lycomedes’ household, designed to provoke Achilles into revealing himself, he says: “fathers are handing over their weapons, and young men are grabbing them and refuse to be called back” (*tradunt arma patres, rapit inrevocata iuventus*, 1.791). The upcoming war is an opportunity for sons to take over from their fathers and to succeed them in valor. Then, when Ulysses is just about to spring his trap, he whispers a few words in the ear of the still disguised Achilles:

“quid haeres?
scimus,” ait, “tu semiferi Chironis alumnus,
tu caeli pelagique nepos, te Dorica classis,
te tua suspensis exspectat Graecia signis,
ipsaque iam dubiis nutant tibi Pergama muris.
heia, abrumpe moras! sine perfida palleat Ide,
et iuuet haec audire patrem, pudeatque dolosam
sic pro te timuisse Thetin.”

(1.867–74)

“Why are you hesitating? We know,” he said, “that you are the foster-son of the half-beast Chiron, that you are the grandson of the ocean and the sky; the Greek fleet, your Greece, is waiting for you, with its standards at the ready, and Troy itself trembles at you and its walls threaten to fall already. Come on now, quit delaying! Allow treacherous Mount Ida to grow pale, and let your father be pleased to hear these things, and let crafty Thetis be ashamed for having feared for you.”

34 Dilke ad 1.899. The technical meaning of the word *allego* relevant here is “to produce evidence or witnesses before a magistrate in support of a plea”; for the rarity of the use of this technical term in poetry, see TLL s.v., 1.1666.65–7.

35 On Thetis’ accusations regarding Achilles’ “unequal birth” (*inpar . . . genus*, 1.256) see above (p 119).

As prearranged by Ulysses, the trumpeter blows on his instrument at this very moment and Achilles discards his disguise and runs to join the battle. This speech was surely not part of the earlier versions of the story; the whole point of the trumpet blast is to fool the disguised Achilles into thinking that an attack is imminent, so that he will take hold of the weapons and betray himself.³⁶ Statius makes Achilles' transformation as much a product of Ulysses' rhetoric as his clever trick.³⁷ Indeed, his recruiting speech the previous night very nearly did the job on its own, except that Deidamia intervened and took Achilles away. Ulysses addresses the hero in a manner we have heard before: Chiron's fosterling, descendant of sky and sea. The difference is Peleus: "let your father be pleased to hear these things" (*iuvet haec audire patrem*). For the very first time in the poem, Achilles is addressed as the son of Peleus. Just after he hears these words, he begins his transformation into a man; this time the transformation is successful.

When Achilles says to Lycomedes that he is as dear to him, "if it is right to have said such a thing" (*si fas dixisse*, 1.895), as his great father or sweet Chiron, the language is telling. The epithet "sweet" (*dulcis*) reminds us of Achilles falling asleep on the centaur's breast (1.195f), and however much respect Achilles now expresses for Peleus, it is with Chiron that he was raised. Now Achilles says that Lycomedes is even more dear to him (*gratior*) than they, which is flattery in part, but this sentiment also resonates with something Statius said in passing in the *Silvae*:

natos genuisse necesse est,
elegisse iuvat. tenero sic blandus Achilli
semifer Haemonium vincebat Pelea Chiron.
nec senior Peleus natum comitatus in arma
Troica, sed claro Phoenix haerebat alumno. (*Silv.* 2.1.87–91)

It is an obligation to bear sons, but it is a pleasure to choose them. Thus Chiron, the charming half-beast, was more important to the young Achilles than Peleus of Thessaly. Nor did the elderly Peleus accompany his son to the war at Troy, but rather Phoenix stuck fast by his famous foster-son.

Here, Peleus is an *exemplum* of a father who was displaced in his son's heart by other parental figures, and this passage affords us insight into his absence from the *Achilleid*. The position of "father" in Achilles' life is under continual negotiation; the role is first filled by Chiron, and then usurped by Thetis. Then it is filled incompetently by the unheroic Lycomedes, who is ineffectual and disarmed by the feminine environment on Scyros; he is "unwarlike" (*inbelli*, 1.207), and "peaceful" (*placido*, 1.286). Despite Achilles' fondness

³⁶ Thus Ov. *Met.* 13.162–70, and see Gantz (1993: 581).

³⁷ This may be a reflection of Euripides' handling of the scene in his *Scyrians*: see Körte (1934: 9) with F incert. 880 Nauck and F 683a Nauck.

for these figures, none of these ersatz fathers is an adequate substitute for Peleus. This was a very personal topic for Statius, who was himself childless, but who had adopted an infant slave as his own son.³⁸ When he died, the poet expressed his grief for his adopted son in emphatically proprietary terms:

meus ille, meus. tellure cadentem
 aspexi atque unctum genitali carmine fovi,
 poscentemque novas tremulis ululatibus auras
 inserui vitae. quid plus tribuere parentes? (*Silv.* 5.5.69–72)

Mine, he was mine. I saw his arrival into the world and I celebrated the occasion of his anointing with a birth-song,³⁹ and as he breathed in the new air with his tremulous wails, I enrolled him among the living. What more did his parents do for him?

Note how Statius values his own role in the social construction of his adopted son's identity as a nonslave as highly as his parents' role in his biological creation. This quasi-parental role gives him a claim of possession: "he was mine." Compare the frenzied Calchas, possessed by Apollo and equally possessive of Achilles: "mine, that boy is mine!" (*meus iste, meus*, 1.528). Calchas disputes Thetis' right, even though she is his biological mother, to keep possession of Achilles: "why are you taking him away. . . ? Oh! he is snatched away from me and is gone" (*quid aufers. . . ? ei mihi raptus abit!* 1.528–35). What Achilles lacks is not a biological father, but rather an adoptive parent who can fill the symbolic role of the father, and introduce him into his destined place in the world, as Statius himself did for his adopted son. Peleus cannot fill this role on account of his absence; Chiron cannot fill it on account of his failure to prepare Achilles for a place in human society; Thetis tries to fill that role and the result is Achilles' cross-dressing; the unwarlike Lycomedes is only a fit father for girls; Calchas stakes a claim to the role; but it is the man he sends, Ulysses, who finally fills the symbolic place of the father for Achilles.

When Thetis convinces Achilles to go along with her plan, she usurps, as we have seen (above, p 125), the role of the Roman father and presents her son to the world in her own image. Perhaps the problem Achilles has when he tries to prove himself a man with his rape of Deidamia is that the transformation wrought by his mother cannot be undone by the boy himself, but can only happen with the aid of his father, or a substitute like Ulysses. It is certainly not a coincidence that Peleus starts to be mentioned regularly in the poem only after Achilles has been revealed to all as a man:

38 For a discussion of the parallels between Chiron in the *Achilleid* and the various foster-parents in the *Silvae*, including Statius himself, see Fantham (1999).

39 Shackleton Bailey (2003a: 379) adopts a very different Latin text here, giving, "I picked him up as he fell upon the ground, anointed him with festal oil, took him in my arms . . ."

mittitur Haemoniam, magnis qui Pelea factis
impleat et classem comitesque in proelia poscat. (1.921f)

Thessaly is sent to, in order to inform Peleus of the great events and to request a fleet and companions to lead into battle.

Presumably among these “companions” (*comites*) would figure the Homeric Phoenix, another surrogate father, who has thus far been missing. Is it plausible to ascribe Achilles’ waywardness and transvestism to lack of proper supervision by a normal, human father? Certainly this is what allows Thetis free rein with the boy. To claim that Achilles lacks a proper father figure, who would provide him with a role model, might sound like a modern concept applied anachronistically to Statius’ poem, but there is in fact a precedent in ancient epic for such a situation.

We have already noted that the *Achilleid*, as a second epic, confronted the model of Homer’s *Odyssey* (see above, p 85). In a general sense this holds true, for the portion of the epic that we have is a story of delays and diversions. There is one other, rather more specific aspect of the plot of Homer’s second epic that might also bear consideration. The Achilles described by Statius is a young man of a very particular age at the transition from puberty. Achilles is an epebe, but unlike a figure such as Hylas, he is destined to be a great warrior. It is hard to think of parallels in ancient epic, Greek or Latin, for a boy at such an awkward and transitional age, with one major exception: Telemachus. Fatherless, with only his mother to guide him, struggling to find a sense of himself as a man, Telemachus has much in common with Statius’ Achilles, and it is worth considering whether Statius might have been influenced by Homer’s portrayal.

Carolyn Higbie, in a recent study of Homeric patronymics, has claimed that, “In the *Odyssey*, Telemakhos learns who he is, that is, in a Homeric sense, whose son he is, and he learns it in a number of ways,” and she documents Telemachus’ initial reluctance to identify himself as his father’s son.⁴⁰ At one point he expresses doubt about his paternity:

τοιγάρ ἐγώ τοι, ξεῖνε, μάλ’ ἀτρεχέως ἀγορεύσω.
μήτηρ μὲν τ’ ἐμέ φησι τοῦ ἔμμεναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγώ γε
οὐκ οἶδ’· οὐ γάρ πώ τις ἐόν γόνον αὐτὸς ἀνέγνω. (Od. 1.214–16)

So I will tell you the truth, stranger. My mother tells me that I am his [Odysseus’], but I don’t know. For no one knows his own parentage.

This sort of evasion is unusual in the Homeric poems, because heroes identify themselves by means of their lineage: “when a warrior goes into battle or meets a stranger, whether in his own home or elsewhere, it is important that he identify himself with his name and that of his father or, very rarely,

⁴⁰ Higbie (1995: 148).

that of his grandfather.”⁴¹ As we have seen, Statius’ Achilles shows an equal reluctance to do just that on a similar occasion (above, p 288). Telemachus, like the young Achilles, lacks a sense of his own destiny and is easily directed by others. He finally comes into his own, of course, when Ulysses arrives on Ithaca. There is a recognition scene, and father and son go into battle together. In the *Achilleid* it is Achilles who is in disguise, not Ulysses, and the Ithacan is not really his father, but at least Ulysses belongs to the same masculine and heroic world as Peleus. And it is he who utters in Achilles’ ear the words which, as much as the trumpet blast, cause him to reveal his Homeric self: “let your father be pleased to hear these things” (*iuvet haec audire patrem*, 1.873). Only then does Achilles identify himself, for the first time in the poem (1.898), as the son of Peleus, and only then, at the very moment when his father’s name is first spoken to him, does he successfully emerge as a man. Only then does Achilles begin to develop a sense of himself as a Homeric hero, a social role that is intimately bound up with the identity of one’s father. The lesson that Statius took from Homer is the same one that Joyce took in his *Ulysses*: the development of a boy into a man can only happen with the help of the right kind of a father figure, who need not necessarily be the boy’s biological father. Statius’ Ulysses stands in the same relation to Achilles as that modern Ulysses, Leopold Bloom, does to Stephen Daedalus.

Biology and Biography

At only two points in the *Achilleid* does Achilles assert his own will. He declares his intention to prove himself a man when he rapes Deidamia, and he responds to Ulysses’ tales of war and glory, and to the trumpet of war, by seizing the weapons that make him a warrior. Both of these are attempts to put his girlishness behind him and to open up his Homeric destiny, but only one of them succeeds. We saw by comparing accounts of the rape of Deidamia that Statius was revising Ovid’s view that Achilles’ masculinity, as immanent in his capacity for sexual violence, represents something irreducibly biological at the heart of the rhetorical strategies of seduction in the *Ars amatoria*. Achilles attempts to assert his identity as a man by means of sexual violence, but the result is that he is embroiled all the deeper in the women’s world on Scyros. Achilles’ failure to pull himself up by his biological bootstraps is finally made good when Ulysses arrives on Scyros and provides the effeminate environment on the island with an external injection of masculinity that Achilles can identify with. The mere presence of men in the feminine context of Scyros begins to break down Achilles’ will to continue his transvestite pantomime, until Ulysses finally tricks him into manhood. For Ovid, the rape of Achilles by Deidamia

⁴¹ Higbie (1995: 148).

is a demonstration of the naturalness of normative gender assignments. For Statius, sexual violence may be a necessary condition of masculinity, but it is not sufficient on its own. On this reading, Statius seems to suggest that gender is a social construction.

On the other hand, one can also construct a reading of the *Achilleid* as an essentialist text. After all, Achilles makes a very poor show at being a girl, and his native masculinity is constantly threatening to show itself; Achilles only restrained by his respect for his mother and then by his love for Deidamia. This ambivalent attitude toward the nature of gender is on clear display at a number of points in the poem. We saw above (p 139) how, at the very moment that Deidamia articulates a radical critique of normative gender roles, Statius undercuts her rhetoric by having her fall into a “typically female” error. The same ambivalence presides over the moment when Achilles is exposed as male by Ulysses; on the one hand, he is transformed by the whispering of Peleus’ name that shames Achilles, and on the other, a trumpet blast startles Achilles into revealing his true, essential nature, as he instinctively grabs the weapons he has been admiring and rushes to battle.

In the *Silvae* too, Statius can be seen to have given credit now to nature, now to nurture, depending on the needs of the moment. When discussing Earinus, Domitian’s eunuch, he praises the emperor’s legislation forbidding castration, even though it came too late for Earinus:

nunc frangere sexum
atque hominem mutare nefas, gavisaeque solos
quos genuit natura videt.

Now it is unlawful to weaken the sex and change man; Nature only likes
to see those to whom she has given birth.

Here, Nature is the guardian of masculine identity, but in the lines cited above (p 292) from the poem on his adopted son, Statius elevates his own contribution above that of the boy’s natural parents. It is hardly surprising that Statius sometimes preferred to stress the biological and sometimes the cultural; this is to do no more than state the obvious. For Statius as for any writer in antiquity, biology is destiny, but that destiny may be thwarted, for it needs a suitable environment to develop. Gender in the *Achilleid* is not only natural and inevitable, but it is also, to an extent, socially constructed.

The Destiny of Achilles

The masculine destiny to which Achilles is called at the end of the completed portion of the *Achilleid* is, of course, an eminent literary tradition. It is not just any glorious mythical future, but specifically the plot of the *Iliad* that beckons. Chiron recognizes this when he makes a prediction to Thetis:

fronting Homer's portrait of Achilles, Statius employs a broad range of poetic models, both Greek and Latin, epic and nonepic, but this was not a mere exercise in literary formalism. Despite being only one part of a work-in-progress, it does yield a coherent meaning. Pelion and Scyros function as opposite poles, too little culture and too much, and our poem is a study in how the pre-Iliadic Achilles negotiates a path between them. It is about a wild boy brought up in the disappointment of lost immortality, his first experience of human culture, his encounter with the odd puzzles of sex and gender; and it dramatizes the emergence, despite Achilles' confused family circumstances and lack of clear paternal guidance, of his innate virtue and destiny as an epic hero. It is thus a meditation on sons, mothers, foster-fathers and biological fathers, men and animals, men and gods, sex as power, gender as a cultural construction, and gender as innate and essential.

The question is inevitable: as Achilles leaves Scyros, what happens next? It was suggested above (p 83) that the Trojan myth was packed with enough incident that Statius could easily have tarried for twelve books before even bringing his hero to Troy. Alternatively, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provides a model for how the tragedy of the Trojan War could be dissolved into something approaching farce. Perhaps the *Achilleid* would have taken a somber turn; but this is not a question we can answer on the basis of the evidence we have, for the simple reason that the proem is too elliptical and ironic. Statius apparently did not want to foreclose potential solutions to his *Ergänzungspiel* at this stage, and it has been suggested here (above, p 85) that this kind of uncertainty could actually have been an asset for a work-in-progress by a professional poet. So it would be more productive to consider the *Achilleid* as we have it against the background of the *Iliad* than to speculate naively about its unfinished portion. A better question than "how would the *Achilleid* have been completed?" is "how do the events of the *Achilleid* make us look differently at the Homeric Achilles?" More specifically, does his time spent as a girl and the humiliations to which Statius subjects him leave a trace in our minds when we turn to Homer? When Homer's Achilles tells the dying Hector that he would like to "cut [his] flesh into pieces and eat it raw," does it change the way we hear his rhetoric if we know that Achilles was raised by Chiron on a diet of literally raw and palpitating flesh?⁴⁴ Is the indignation that Achilles feels upon his insult by Agamemnon lessened if we know that his famous anger (μῆνις) and touchy pride stem from a deep sense of shame at his humiliation on Scyros?⁴⁵ Is Odysseus' failure to assuage Achilles' anger in the embassy scene of *Iliad* 9 rendered ironic by the knowledge that he had easily manipulated him into feel-

44 ὦμ' ἀποταμιόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι (22.347). On the diet of Achilles, see above (p 173).

45 As they are leaving Scyros, Ulysses attempts to speak to Achilles about what happened there, but Achilles cuts him off in mid-sentence, promises that his sword will answer for his shameful attire, and insists on changing the subject (2.42–5), on which see above (p 175).

ing angry at the abduction of Helen?⁴⁶ Is Achilles' ability finally to empathize, and to see his own father in the figure of the weeping Priam, given a deeper context by the variety of ersatz father-figures who occupied Peleus' role in the hero's early life?

A similar debate has taken place with respect to the transvestite plots of Shakespearean comedy, which might clarify the issues at stake here. For example, at the end of *As You Like It*, Orlando's mock courtship of Ganymede is redeemed as legitimate when the boy is revealed to have been Rosalind in disguise. Rosalind marries Orlando, life returns to normal, and normative gender roles are reestablished and reaffirmed. Greenblatt (1988: 90f) claims that the qualities of the male identity conjured up by Rosalind, "will not . . . endure: they are bound up with exile, disguise, and freedom from ordinary constraint, and they will vanish . . . when the play is done. What begins as a physiological necessity is reimagined as an improvisational self-fashioning that longs for self-effacement and reabsorption in the community." One could apply a similar judgment to the *Achilleid*; for, in our case, we do not have to imagine what happens after leaving the forest of Arden, because we know from Homer that Achilles leaves behind girlish things when he leaves Scyros and joins the community of warriors. Yet even in Homer, Achilles is a unique figure who interprets the heroic code according to his own lights. Garber (1992: 75–7) contests Greenblatt's interpretation of Rosalind's reabsorption, pointing to the epilogue of the play. This speech is delivered in the character of Rosalind, but in its course the boy actor acknowledges his true sex ("If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me") and teases the audience with the kind of transvestite humor and homosexual innuendo that was a part of Rosalind's masquerade in the play as Ganymede.⁴⁷ Garber suggests that, while Rosalind takes up her proper wifely role as the play ends, nevertheless a "supplement" remains that does not vanish when the curtain comes down, namely the erotic charge that Ganymede has brought to the play.

This study began by looking at some of the operas that were based on the *Achilleid*, and we found that some librettists rendered the story as a carnivalesque tale of transformation, contingency, and labile desire, while others used it to frame a progress narrative of the inevitable emergence of Achilles' innate heroic qualities. We ended with the question of which of these two approaches was more faithful to the Statian original. Clearly, neither of these views of the Scyros episode is alien to the *Achilleid*. Perhaps the work that comes closest to recapturing Statius' playful ambiguity on the question of Achilles' identity is John Gay's *Achilles*, which ends with the chorus singing about the power of Nature breaking forth as its members step out of character and compare their

46 Ulysses asks Achilles to imagine a strange man carrying Deidamia off (2.81–5); on the irony of Ulysses' speech, see above (p 176).

47 On the uniqueness of this moment in Shakespeare, see Orgel (1996: 50f and 63f).

own transformation as actors at the end of the play to Achilles' departure from Scyros; and then Ulysses in response playfully undermines the tidiness of any heroic, essentialist moral (above, p 25).

If we read the *Achilleid* in the light of its own epilogue, which is the *Iliad*, do our perceptions of the hero in either text change? As we have seen, Achilles' stay on Scyros can be read as confirming the inevitability of gender assignment and the triumph of innate male virtue, and therefore as an amusing but unproblematic prelude to Homer. It can also be read, by a small shift in emphasis, as a problematization of gender, which locates a large part of its formation in convention and circumstance rather than in nature. On this reading, it is an invitation to deconstruct the Iliadic hero by locating certain Homeric traits, such as his pride, his brutality, his excellence as a warrior, his sensitivity to humiliation, and his disdain for certain conventional limits on human behavior, in the contingent details of his biography as well as in the essence of his character. Debate about the *Achilleid* has usually been cast in terms of the hypothetical future progress of the poem: would it have been a continuing romantic comedy or a recapitulation of the tragedy of the *Iliad*? What such debates may really be about, however, is the proper function of literature. Does it confirm what we already know or does it provoke us to reevaluate the myths which we live by?

The question of whether gender derives from quintessence or circumstance is a matter with wide ramifications. As we proceed to divide the world up into categories, Greek versus barbarian, slave versus free, Roman versus Greek, we are extrapolating a process that begins with gender.⁴⁸ This was Lacan's insight. The first distinction we make between external objects is between mommy and daddy, and the first category in which we are entered is boy or girl. Thus it is that for Lacan the phallus is the first signifier, which makes all subsequent symbolic distinctions possible. The essential character of gender ostensibly guarantees the stability of our categories, and yet it can never handle all of this burden. The potential for the distinctions between these categories to collapse was highlighted in antiquity by Bacchic rituals which celebrated the detachability of masculinity from biology at the same time that they effaced distinctions between the human, the divine, and the bestial. Accordingly, Statius takes a Bacchic episode in which Achilles' gender is inverted and sets it into a narrative framework that casts him also as having come close to transcending the distinction between gods, men, and animals. In the *Thebaid*, the fate of Tydeus demonstrated the proximity of the superhuman and the subhuman (see above, p 174); in the *Achilleid*, that ontological tragedy is repeated as farce, and Achilles bridges the distance not only between man and god and man and

⁴⁸ For the association of the sexes with other pairs of opposites in early Greek thought, see Lloyd (1966: 50f, 58f, 73f).

beast, but also between the hypermasculine world of the Homeric battlefield and the hyperfeminine domestic environment on Scyros. Whether we read the *Achilleid* as ultimately confirming or subverting the masculinity, the humanity, and the heroism of the Homeric Achilles, Statius provides the hero's journey to his literary destiny with a curious and witty detour at Scyros.

Works Cited

ABBREVIATIONS for the names of ancient authors and their works follow the conventions of the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (OCD³, pp xxix–liv), except that abbreviations which seemed obscure have occasionally been expanded. I have not been able to take full account of the very recent Loeb edition and translation of the *Achilleid* by Shackleton Bailey (2003b).

Editions of the Achilleid and General Abbreviations

- Barth Statius, *Opera quae extant*, ed. K. von Barth. Zwickau (Cygnea), 1664. Cited on pp 111, 117, and 138 (n 70).
- Dar.-Sag. *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines d'après les textes et les monuments*, ed. C. Daremberg and E. Salgio. Paris: Hachette, 1877–1919. Cited on pp 128 (n 55) and 139 (n 73).
- Dilke Statius, *Achilleid*, ed. O. A. W. Dilke. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954. Cited on pp 63 (n 21), 64f, 73, 77 (with n 57), 81, 88 (n 82), 100, 101 (n 109), 102 (with n 114), 116 (with n 23), 119, 124 (n 42), 128 (n 52), 129, 138 (with n 70), 143 (n 82), 144 (n 84), 159, 163, 164 (n 16), 165 (n 18), 171 (n 36), 180 (n 61), 182 (nn 64f), 184 (n 72), 239 (n 8), 240 (n 11), 264, 265 (n 82), 287 (n 29), 289 (n 32), and 290.
- F Fragment (followed by number and editor).
- FrGrH *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby. Berlin: Weidmann, and Leiden: Brill, 1923–. Cited on p 91 (with n 90).
- Jannaccone Statius, *L'Achilleide*, ed. S. Jannaccone. Florence: Editrice Barbera, 1950. Cited on pp 135 (n 64), 138 (n 70), 150 (n 98), 171 (n 36), and 184 (n 72).
- LHS *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*, M. Leumann, J. B. Hoffman, and

- A. Szantyr. Vol. 2 of *Lateinische Grammatik*. Munich: Beck, 1965. Cited on pp 73 (n 46), 112 (n 15), 117 (n 25), and 296 (n 42).
- LIMC *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*. Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1981-. Cited on pp 87 (n 81), 89 (n 85), 91 (n 89), 131 (n 58), 166 (n 20), 171 (n 33), 172 (nn 37 and 39–42), 173 (n 43), 174 (n 48), 184 (n 73), 185 (n 77), 186 (n 78), 198 (n 15), 228 (n 147), 236 (n 170), and 269 (n 89).
- L-S *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. C. T. Lewis and C. Short. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879. Cited on pp 272 (n 93) and 287 (n 29).
- LSJ *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edn., H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, revised by H. Stuart Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940. Cited on p 177 (n 55).
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