

1. The world according to the ~~male-warrior~~ mother

- Ovid *Metamorphoses* 11.238-265: the rape of Thetis by Peleus

There is a cave...Often, Thetis you used to come there, naked, seated on a bridled dolphin. There Peleus seized you (*occupat*, cf. *occupat Ach.1.318*), as you lay, overcome by sleep, and when, though influenced by his entreaties, you refused him, he prepared to use force, winding both arms round your neck. He would have taken you then, if you had not, by your well-known arts, frequently changed your form. But when you became a bird, he still held you as a bird; now as a tree, Peleus clung fast to the tree. Your third guise was a striped tigress: in fear of that the son of Aeacus loosed his arms from your body. Then he entreated the gods of the sea, with wine poured over the waters, with sheep's entrails, and the smoke of incense, until Proteus, the Carpathian seer spoke from his deep gulfs: 'Son of Aeacus, you will have the bride you desire, if you bind her, unawares, with nooses and tight cords, while she is lulled asleep in the rocky cave. Though she deceives you with a hundred counterfeit shapes, hold her to you, whatever she becomes, until she is again what she was before.' So he spoke, and hid his face below the waves, letting the waters flow in upon his final words.

Now Titan was low in the sky, and, his chariot pointed downwards, was close to the western ocean, when the lovely Nereid left the waves, and came to her accustomed bed. Peleus had scarcely taken a good grip of her virgin body, when she took on new forms, until she realised her limbs were tightly bound, and her arms spread wide apart. Then at length she sighed, saying: 'Not without some god's help have you won,' and she showed herself as Thetis. When she acknowledged herself, the hero embraced her, achieved his desire by force (*potitur votis*), and conceived with her the mighty Achilles.

2. Absolute invulnerability/indemnity: the illusion of non-dependency (figured in the island)

Ach.1.393: 'Here there are only the wands of Bacchus, and nothing that is useful for war.'

3. First books: mingling (muscular) epic and (effeminate, vulnerable) elegy

- A. Enter Deidamia at *Ach.1.290ff.* (after Dido at *Aen.1.294ff.*, compared to Diana)

'All were of rarest beauty, all clad alike and all in lusty youth, their years of girlish modesty now ended, and maidenhood ripe for the marriage-couch. But as far as Venus by comparison surpasses the green Nymphs of the sea, or as **Diana** rises taller by head and shoulders than the Naiads, so does Deidamia, queen of the lovely choir, outshine and dazzle her fair sisters. The bright colour flames upon her rosy countenance, a more brilliant light is in her jewels, the gold has a more alluring gleam; as beauteous as the goddess herself, if she were to lay aside the serpents on her breast, and remove her helmet and pacify her brow.'

B.

ut pater armenti quondam ductorque futurus,
cui nondum toto peraguntur cornua gyro,
cum sociam pastus niveo candore iuvencam 315
aspicit, ardescunt animi **primus**que per ora *primus amor, Ov.Met.1.452*
spumat **amor**, spectant hilares obstantque magistri. (Apollo and Daphne + Jupiter's rape
of Io)

As when a bullock, soon to be the sire and leader of a herd, though his horns have not yet come full circle, perceives a heifer of snowy whiteness, the comrade of his pasture, his spirit takes fire, and he foams at the mouth with his first passion; glad at heart the herdsmen watch him and check his fury.

4. Becoming a woman = becoming a body vulnerable to rape

Ach.1.323-331: 'He is softened (*mulcetur*), and blushes for joy, and with sly and sidelong glance repels the robes with a lighter hand (*manu leviore*). His mother sees him in doubt (*ambiguus*. Cf. *ambiguus* at 264 and 337) and willing to be compelled (*cogique volentem*), and casts the dress over him; then she softens (*mollit*) his rigid neck and bows his strong shoulders, and relaxes (*laxat*) the muscles of his arms, and tames and orders duly his uncombed tresses, and sets *her own necklace* about the neck she loves; then keeping his step within the embroidered skirt she teaches him gait and motion and modesty of speech.'

Compare Ovid *Ars* 1.673-4, *grata est vis ista puellis, / quod iuvat, invitae saepe dedisse volunt*. And *Ars* 1.698-700 on the rape of Deidamia:

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.

'By chance in the same bedroom was the royal virgin. By her rape she found him to be a man. By force indeed she was conquered, so one must believe. Yet by force did she wish to be conquered, all the same.'

5. Echo and Narcissus?

*Ach.1.380-81: dum repetit monitus arcanaque murmura figit / auribus et tacito dat **verba novissima vultu**.*

(She repeats advice and implants whispered secrets in his ear and with silent face gives her **final guidance**).

Compare Ovid *Met.3.357-61:*

vocalis nymphe, quae nec reticere loquenti
nec prior ipsa loqui didicit, resonabilis Echo.
corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat, et tamen usum
garrula non alium quam nunc habet oris habebat,
reddere de multis ut **verba novissima** posset.

‘The chatty nymph, who didn’t know how to stay quiet when someone was speaking but could not speak first herself, resounding Echo. Up to this time Echo had form and was not voice alone. And yet, though talkative, she had no other use of speech than now – only the power to repeat, out of many words, **the last ones she heard.**’

- *verba novissima* = last words/very new or original words

6. Rape culture and the affirmation/performance of masculinity

Ach. 1.560-62

At procul **occultum falsi sub imagine sexus**

Aeaciden furto ima *noverat* una latent

Deidamia virum.

‘But far away Deidamia – and she alone – had learnt in stolen secrecy the manhood of Aeacides that lay hidden beneath the guise of a false sex.’

Compare: Actaeon at Ovid *Met.* 3.250: *dilacerant falsi dominum sub imagine cervi...* (they tore apart their master beneath the false image of the deer). Cf. *Ach.* 1.473, *omnis in absentem belli manus ardet Achillen*, which recalled *Met.* 3.244, *et velut absentem certatim Actaeona clamant*? Is Deidamia-Diana about to hurt Achilles – perhaps ensure that he is torn apart by passion – or will the tables be turned?

7. The return of the Bacchic

Nb: **Bacchus helps lovers/love poets in Ovid *Ars* 1:** *Ecce, suum vatem Liber vocat; hic quoque amantes / adiuvat* (*Ars* 1.525-6, and also see passage following)

A. Achilles’ soliloquy at *Ach.* 1.624ff.

...quonam usque premes urentia pectus

vulnera, teque marem – pudet heu! – nec amore probaris?

Ach. 1.638-9

How long will you conceal the wound that burns your heart, and will you not even in love – for shame! – prove your own manhood?

Compare Attis (the only male Bacchant, ‘a woman but not a true one’) at Catullus 63.50-73 (Here Attis regrets having castrated himself, and looks back with nostalgia at his boyhood, when he lived in the cold Phrygian mountains and hunted wild animals.). Cf. Heslin pp257ff.

B. Heslin p254: ‘It is clear that the rape of Deidamia by Achilles stands in opposition to the dismemberment of Pentheus as the assertion of male mastery within the context of maenadism.’

C. **Achilles as Bacchus, *Ach.* 1. 615-18:**

‘Just like Euhius (ie.. Bacchus), when he has relaxed his martial spirit and frowning brow, and sated his soul with the luxury of his native land, removes

chaplet and mitre from his hair, and arms the green thyrsus for the fray, and in more martial guise sets out to meet his Indian enemies’.

D. Achilles as Pentheus

tunc vero, tunc praecipue manifestus Achilles 835
 nec servare vices nec bracchia iungere curat;
 tunc molles gressus, tunc aspernatur amictus
 plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat.
 sic indignantem thyrsos acceptaque matris
 tympana iam tristes spectabant Penthea Thebae. 840

‘Then indeed, then above all is Achilles manifest, caring neither to keep his turn nor to join arms; then more than ever does he scorn the delicate step, the womanly attire, and breaks the dance and mightily disturbs the scene. Even so did Thebes already sorrowing behold Pentheus spurning the wands and the timbrels that his mother welcomed.’

Seminar discussion

The rape scene

Sic ait et densa noctis gavisus in umbra 640
 tempestiva suis torpere silentia furtis
vi potitur votis et toto pectore veros
 admovet amplexus; vidit chorus omnis ab alto
 astrorum et tenerae rubuerunt cornua Lunae.
 illa quidem clamore nemus montemque **replevit**; 645
 sed Bacchi comites, discussa nube soporis,
 signa choris indicta putant; fragor undique notus
 tollitur, et **thyrsos iterum vibrabat Achilles**,
 ante tamen dubiam verbis solatus amicis:
 'Ille ego—quid trepidas?—genitum quem caerulea mater 650 cf. epigram before *Aen.* 1?
 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? 655
 quid gemis ingentes caelo paritura nepotes?
 (")Sed pater—(") ante igni ferroque excisa iacebit
 Scyros et in tumidas ibunt haec versa procellas
 moenia, quam saevo mea tu conubia pendas
 funere: non adeo parebimus omnia matri.' 660
 [vade sed ereptum celes taceasque pudorem.]
Obstipuit tantis regina exterrita monstis,
 quamquam olim suspecta fides, et cominus ipsum
 horruit et **facies multum mutata fatentis**.
 quid faciat? casusne suos ferat ipsa parenti 665
 seque simul iuvenemque premat, fortassis acerbis
 hausurum poenas? et adhuc in corde manebat
 ille diu deceptus amor: **silet aegra** premitque
 iam commune nefas; unam placet addere furtis

altricem sociam, precibus quae victa duorum 670
adnuit. illa astu tacito **raptumque pudorem** cf. *raptus* (Ach) 535, *rapta* (Helen) 47
surgentemque uterum atque aegros in pondere menses
occuluit, *plenis* donec stata tempora *metis*
attulit et partus index Lucina resolvit.

So he speaks; and in the thick darkness of the night, rejoicing that the still silence gives timely aid to his secret deeds, he gains by force his desire, and with all his vigour strains her in a real embrace; the whole choir of stars watched from on high, and the horns of the young moon blushed red. She indeed filled the grove and mountain with her cries, but the train of Bacchus, dispelling slumber's cloud, deemed it the signal for the dance; on every side the familiar shout arises, and Achilles once more brandishes the thyrsus; yet first with friendly speech he solaces the anxious maid: "I am he – why are you afraid? – whom my cerulean mother almost bore to Jove, and sent me to be brought up in the woods and snows of Thessaly. Nor would I have endured this dress and shameful garb, if I not seen you on the seashore; it was for you that I submitted, and it is for you that I carry balls of wool and bear the womanly tambourine. Why do you cry, now that you have been made daughter-in-law of mighty Ocean? Why do you moan now that you will bear valiant grandsons to Olympus? But father –

Scyros shall be destroyed by fire and sword and these walls shall be in ruins and the sport of wanton winds, before you pay by cruel death for my embraces: I am not so utterly subject to my mother."

The princess was horror-struck at such dark happenings, despite long suspecting his good faith. She shuddered at his presence, and his face was changed as he made confession. What is she to do? Shall she bear the tale of her misfortune to her father, and ruin both herself and her lover, who perhaps would suffer an untimely death? And still there remained within her breast the love so long deceived. She is silent in her grief, and dissembles the crime that both now share alike; her nurse alone she resolves to make a partner in deceit, and she, yielding to the prayers of both, agrees. With secret cunning she conceals the rape and the swelling womb and the burden of the months of ailing, till Lucina brought round by token the appointed season, her course now fully run, and delivered her child

Questions for discussion

1. Look at how Statius' account of the rape differs from Ovid's in *Ars Amatoria* 1.689ff. (below). How does Statius respond to Ovid's account: what is different, and to what effect?
2. Consider what happens to Thetis' voice, and who her perspective is represented in this passage.
3. Do you think Statius' Achilles fully succeeds in 'becoming a man' by raping Deidamia? How does Statius' poem get us thinking about the interplay between biological sex, and gender?

Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 1.689ff. [also see handout for week 9]

turpe, nisi hoc matris precibus tribuisset, Achilles
veste virum longa dissimulatus erat.

quid facis, Aeacide? non sunt tua munera lanae;
tu titulos alia Palladis arte petas.
quid tibi cum calathis? Clipeo manus apta ferendo est:
pensa quid in dextra, qua cadet Hector, habes?
reïce succinctos operoso stamine fusos!
quassanda est ista Pelias hasta manu.
forte erat in thalamo virgo regalis eodem;
haec illum stupro comperit esse virum.

‘Shamefully, even if he had not given in to his mother’s prayers, Achilles has disguised his manhood in a woman’s dress. What are you doing, Achilles? Wool is not your business; you seek fame by another art of Pallas. What are baskets to you? Your arm is suited to bearing a shield; Why do you hold a skein in the right hand by which Hector will die? Cast away that spindle, wound with tiresome thread! That hand must shake the Pelian spear! By chance the royal virgin was in the same bedroom. By her rape she found him to be a man’

Pto for extra exercise

Extra exercise to support further study of the *Achilleid*

- **Gift giving and revelation: ambiguous identities in the shield-mirror**

Ach.1.852-857, 864-66

at ferus Aeacides, **radiantem** ut comminus **orbem**
caelatum pugnans—saevis et forte **rubebat**
bellorum maculis—adclinem conspicit hastae,
infremuit torsitque genas, **et fronte relictā** 855
surrexere comae; nusquam mandata parentis, cf. Lucan 9.634 surgunt adversa subrectae fronte
nusquam occultus amor, totoque in pectore Troia est. colubrae

‘But the bold son of Aeacus no sooner saw before him the gleaming shield enched with battle-scenes – by chance too it shone red with the fierce stains of war – and leaning against his spear, than he shouted loud and rolled his eyes, and his hair rose up from his brow; forgotten were his mother’s words, forgotten his secret love, and Troy fills all his breast.’

ut vero accessit propius luxque aemula **vultum**
reddidit et simili talem **se vidit** in auro, 865
horruit erubuitque simul. Cf. Deidamia at v.663, horruit

‘But when he came nearer, and the emulous brightness **gave back his features** and **he saw himself mirrored** in the reflecting gold, he **shuddered and blushed at the same time.** ‘

Questions to consider

- How do you think Statius is playing provocatively with the Greco-Roman epic tradition here?
- Consider the role played by engraved, shiny shields in the *Iliad*, *Aeneid* and *Metamorphoses*. How are Ovidian scenes of mirroring being evoked here, and to what effect?