



shield and spear, I said: 'Pergama the citadel doomed to be destroyed, waits for you, son of the goddess! Why do you hesitate to overthrow mighty Troy?' ...

I seek these arms for the arms that revealed Achilles: I gave to the living, I claim from the dead.

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 1.681ff:

Vim licet appelles: grata est vis ista puellis:  
Quod iuvat, invitae saepe dedisse volunt.  
Quaecumque est veneris subita violata rapina, 675  
Gaudet, et improbitas muneris instar habet.  
At quae cum posset cogi, non tacta recessit,  
Ut simulet vultu gaudia, tristis erit.  
Vim passa est Phoebe: vis est allata sorori;  
Et gratus raptae raptor uterque fuit. 680  
Fabula nota quidem, sed non indigna referri,  
Scyrias Haemonio iuncta puella viro.  
Iam dea laudatae dederat mala praemia formae  
Colle sub Idaeo vincere digna duas:  
Iam nurus ad Priamum diverso venerat orbe, 685  
Graiaque in Iliacis moenibus uxor erat:  
Iurabant omnes in laesi verba mariti:  
Nam dolor unius publica causa fuit.  
Turpe, nisi hoc matris precibus tribuisset, Achilles  
Veste virum longa dissimulatus erat. 690  
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?  
Reice succinctos operoso stamine fusos! 695  
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. 700  
Saepe 'mane!' dixit, cum iam properaret Achilles;  
Fortia nam posita sumpserat arma colo.  
Vis ubi nunc illa est? Quid blanda voce moraris  
Auctorem stupri, Deidamia, tui?  
Scilicet ut pudor est quaedam coepisse priorem, 705  
Sic alio gratum est incipiente pati..

Though you call it force: it's force that pleases girls: what delights is often to have given what they wanted, against their will.  
She who is taken in love's sudden onslaught is pleased, and finds wickedness is a tribute.  
And she who might have been forced, and escapes unscathed, will be saddened, though her face pretends delight.  
Phoebe was taken by force: force was offered her sister: and both, when raped, were pleased with those who raped them.  
Though the tale's known, it's still worth repeating, how the girl of Scyros mated Achilles the hero.  
Now the lovely goddess had given her fatal bribe to defeat the other two beneath Ida's slopes:

now a daughter-in-law had come to Priam  
 from an enemy land: a Greek wife in Trojan walls:  
 all swore the prescribed oath to the injured husband:  
 now one man's grief became a nation's cause.  
 Shamefully, though he gave way to a mother's prayer,  
 Achilles hid his manhood in women's clothes.  
 What's this, Aeacides? Spinning's not your work:  
 your search for fame's through Pallas's other arts.  
 Why the basket? Your arm's meant to bear a shield:  
 why does the hand that will slay Hector hold the yarn?  
 Throw away the spindle wound laboriously with thread!  
 The spear from Pelion's to be brandished by this hand.  
 By chance a royal virgin shared the room:  
 through her rape she learned he was a man.  
 That she was truly won by force, we must think:  
 but she still wanted to be won by force.  
 She often cried: 'Stop!' afterwards, when Achilles hurried on:  
 now he'd taken up stronger weapons than the distaff.  
 Where's that force now? Why do you restrain  
 the perpetrator of your rape, Deidamia?  
 No doubt as there's a sort of shame in having started first,  
 so it's pleasant to have what someone else has started.

## 2. Ambiguous (Latin: *ambiguus*) Achilles

*Ach.*1.264 (*ambigui sexus*)

*Ach.*1.325 (*aspicit ambiguum*)

*Ach.*1.337 (*ambiguus tenui latens discrimine sexus*)

*Ach.*2.95 (*ambiguus*)

## 3. *genus impar*

**1.257-8:** *nunc impar tibi, nate, genus, praeclosaque leti / tantum a matre via est.*

('But now you are of unequal birth, my son, and only on your mother's side is the way of death barred to you')

**cf.** Ovid *Amores* 2.17.21-2: *carminis hoc ipsum genus impar: sed tamen apte / iungitur herous cum brevior modo* ('This very kind of verse is unequal; and yet the heroic line is aptly joined to the shorter')

## 4. Thetis as failed Juno/Venus

***Ach.*1.47ff:** 'It is too late, ...but I will go, and clinging to the ocean gods and the right hand of the second Jupiter (i.e. Neptune) – I have no more options – I will beg him, by the years of Tethys and his aged father, for one single storm.' (cf. **Virgil *Aeneid* 1.65ff:** Juno asks Aeolus to rouse a storm to sink the Trojan fleet, bribing him with seven gorgeous nymphs. At 124ff., Neptune is troubled and reins in the winds. At *Aeneid* 1.229ff., Venus chastises Jupiter and succeeds in persuading him to protect the Trojans. Jupiter replies reassuring her that young Iulus will survive and thrive, and his gens will build a great city, which will become a great empire, boundless in space and time.). At ***Ach.*1.80ff.**, Neptune turns down Thetis' request. 'The fates forbid it'.

## 5. An experiment in time

1.440: *quod senior Peleus nec adhuc maturus Achilles* ('For Peleus is too old and Achilles is not yet grown')

This plot is 'late' (*tardum*, 1.47), and time is moving too fast for Thetis (e.g. 1.257-8: *quin et metuenda propinquant / tempora*: 'fearsome times hurry on'). Thetis is frustrated by the delay in Achilles' return at 1.127, and in abducting and disguising her son attempts to 'seize time' at 1.318 (*arrepto...tempore*) cf. Ulysses at 1.784 (*arrepto tempore*, again) who by the end of the book has taken back control of (epic) time. In the centre of *Achilleid* 1, however (see esp.445-6. 454-5) the Greek ships are much delayed, prevented from sailing for a whole year by Diana-Artemis, who stole the winds (she was offended that Agamemnon, the Greek leader, had slaughtered a deer sacred to her: Agamemnon followed the advice of the seer Calchas and sacrificed his own daughter Iphigenia in order to placate the goddess). Note that Thetis wants not just to delay epic time, but to reverse it (a little like Seneca's Medea, both a model and an anti-model for Thetis): she would like to go back in time (e.g. 1.133-4) and to immunize her son properly from mortal vulnerability. Note that at 1.63ff. Thetis sees the Trojan abduction of Helen by ship as the latest in a long list of crimes that began with the first ship, the Argonaut, on which Jason abducted Medea – it is this abduction that would 'bring to much pain' (v.68).

## 6. The *Theteid*: Thetis as (rival) poet?

E.g. compare *deducere iuvenem* in line 7 of the proem (Statius will 'lead down the young hero through the whole of the Trojan war') to 1.348 (where Thetis is disguising Achilles as a girl, putting him in a dress and combing his hair: *vestemque latentem / deducit sparsosque tumet componere crines* ('she pulled down his tucked-up dress and proudly adjusted his messy hair.' – here Thetis is compared to Diana). Yet note that Achilles when he first appears is compared to Diana's brother, Apollo (1.165-6), and proceeds to play the lyre like Apollo, singing in 1.188ff. of epic deeds that confer glory on men. Likewise Achilles takes up the role of singing his own story in *Ach.*2.50ff.

## 7. A second epic, another Achilles

*Ach.*1.10-11: 'I do not seem entrance to the Aonian grove as a newcomer, nor are these the first fillets that magnify my brow.'

*Ach.*1.321-2: (Thetis) 'If only it were my lot to match two loving hearts, and to bear another Achilles (*alium ...Achillen*)'. Cf. Virgil *Ecl.*4.35-6 ('A second Tiphys will then arise, and a second Argo to carry chosen heroes; a second war will be fought, and great Achilles will be sent again [*iterum*] to Troy.). Compare also the use of *iterum* in the *Achilleid*.

## 8. Stuck in the epic cycle?

***Silvae* 4.7.21-8** (also see *Silv.*4.4.93f.)

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

quippe te fido monitore nostra      25  
Thebais multa cruciata lima  
temptat audaci fide Mantuanae  
gaudia famae.

‘Without you my Muse is sluggish, even Thymbra's lord (i.e. Apollo) is slower than usual in coming, and look! My Achilles halts at the first turning point of his course: while it is with you for trusty advisor that my Thebaid, tortured by endless polishing, attempts with audacious string the joys of Mantuan renown.’

#### 9. Critical assessments, summary

A) *The Achilleid is a charming un-epic epic poem, a Catullan epyllion, a 'failure' qua proper epic poem.* An old-fashioned view: e.g. Dilke, p8, book 1 is a ‘pretty epyllion’.

B) *The Achilleid is a clever post-Ovidian, neo-Callimachean epic.* E.g. Davis, Hinds, Feeney, Barchiesi, Heslin.

C) *The Achilleid is a poem that showcases intense imperial poetics.* E.g. Fantham, Feeney.

D) *The Achilleid is a poem about the anxiety of influence (in literary terms), and more generally about the fraught relationship between parents and children, or between mother and son and father and son.* E.g. Mendelsohn.

E) *The Achilleid is a poem about exploring the constructedness of gender / about the role of women in Roman epic.* Gender studies. E.g. McAuley, Heslin.

F) *The Achilleid is a poem that stages an interaction and battle between different ways of writing epic, or rather between different genres, martial epic and the rejection of martial epic.* E.g. McAuley, Davis, Heslin.

G) *The Achilleid is a poem about the rite of passage of adolescence, and alludes to various rituals of transformation, both mythical and historical.* E.g. Heslin, Sanna.

H) *The Achilleid is a poem about (Roman) education of young men which appeals to contemporary Roman obsessions about the correct performance of masculinity.* E.g. Barchiesi.

#### Extra Bibliography not in module booklet:

Cameron, A. (2009) 'Young Achilles in the Roman World' *Journal of Roman Studies* 99: 1-22.

Davis, P.J. (2006) 'Allusion to Ovid and others in Statius' *Achilleid*' *Ramus* 35.2: 129-43.

Fantham, E. (1979) Statius' Achilles and his Trojan model' *Classical Quarterly* 29: 457-62.

McAuley, M. (2010) 'Ambiguous sexus: epic masculinity in transition in Statius' *Achilleid*' *Akroterion* 55: 37-60.

## Seminar discussion

**Thetis tries to convince Achilles to become a girl, *Achilleid* 1. 247ff.**

- Do you think Thetis' speech is convincing? (Focus especially on the exempla she chooses at 260-63, in **bold** in the translation).
- How does the speech evoke imperial Roman attitudes to 'feminine' *imbecillitas* (vulnerability)?

cum pueri tremefacta quies oculique patentes  
infusum sensere diem. stupet aere primo:  
quae loca, qui fluctus, ubi Pelion? omnia versa  
atque ignota videt dubitatque agnoscere matrem. 250  
occupat illa manu blandeque adfata paventem:  
'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. 255  
nunc inpar tibi, nate, genus, praeclusaque leti  
tantum a matre via est; quin et metuenda propinquant  
tempora et extremis admota pericula metis.  
cedamus, paulumque animos submitte viriles  
atque habitus dignare meos. si Lydia dura 260  
pensa manu mollesque tulit Tirynthius 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.  
mox iterum campos, iterum Centaurica reddam  
lustra tibi: per ego hoc decus et ventura iuventae  
gaudia, si terras humilemque experta maritum  
te propter, si progenitum Stygos amne severo  
armavi—totumque utinam!—, cape tuta parumper 270  
tegmina nil nocitura animo. cur ora reducis  
quidve parant oculi? pudet hoc mitescere cultu?  
per te, care puer, cognata per aequora iuro,  
nesciet hoc Chiron.' sic horrida pectora tractat  
nequiquam mulcens; obstat genitorque roganti 275  
nutritorque ingens et cruda exordia magnae  
indolis. effrenae tumidum velut igne iuventae  
si quis equum primis submittere temptet habenis:  
ille diu campis fluviisque et honore superbo  
gavisus non colla iugo, non aspera praebet 280  
ora lupis dominique fremit captivus inire  
imperia atque alios miratur discere cursus.

When the boy's sleep was stirred, and his opening eyes grew conscious of the inpouring day. In amazement at the light that greets him he asks, where is he, what are these waves, where is Pelion? All he sees is different and unknown, and he hesitates to recognize his mother. Quickly she caresses him and soothes his fear: "If, dear boy, a kindly lot had brought me the marriage that it promised, in the fields of heaven should I be holding you a glorious star, in

my embrace, nor as a divine mother should I fear the lowly Fates or the destinies of earth. But now unequal is your birth, my son, and only on your mother's side is the way of death barred for you; moreover, times of terror draw nigh, and peril hovers about the utmost goal. Let us retire then, relax awhile your mighty spirit, and do not scorn this dress of mine. **If the Tirynthian (i.e. Hercules) took in his rough hand Lydian wool and women's wands, if it becomes Bacchus to trail a gold-embroidered robe behind him, if Jupiter put on a woman's form, and doubtful sex did not weaken the mighty Caeneus, this way, I beg of you, allow me to escape the threatening, baleful cloud.** Soon will I restore you to the plains and the fields where the Centaurs roam: by this beauty of yours and the coming joys of youth I ask you, if for your sake I endured the earth and an inglorious mate, if at your birth I fortified you with the stern waters of Styx – alas, if only I had done this fully! – take these safe robes awhile, they will in no way harm your virtue. Why do you turn away? What does that look mean? Are you ashamed to soften yourself in these clothes? Dear boy, I swear by my kindred waters, Chiron shall know nothing of this.” So she works on his rough heart/touches his rough/trembling chest (*horrida pectore tractat*), vainly cajoling him; the thought of his father and his great teacher, together with the raw beginnings of his mighty spirit oppose her prayer. Just as if you try to subdue with reins a proud horse that is full of the fire of ungoverned youth, and that has long delighted in stream and meadow and his own proud beauty – he does not give his neck to the yoke, nor his fierce mouth to the bridle; he snorts with rage at passing beneath a master's sway and marvels that he learns another gait.

The myths:

- 1) Hercules: as a punishment for his murder of Iphitus, Hercules was ordered to spend a year as the slave of Omphale, queen of Lydia. He had to wear female clothes and perform traditional female tasks such as weaving.
- 2) Bacchus (Dionysus), god of winemaking, fertility, religious ecstasy and theatre, was traditionally depicted wearing effeminate clothes; during his infancy, he was also disguised in girls' clothes to escape the persecution of Juno.
- 3) Jupiter disguised himself as Diana to rape Callisto (see e.g. Ovid *Met.*2.425ff.)
- 4) Caeneus was a Lapith hero of Thessaly. He was born a woman (Caenis), but after Poseidon abducted and raped her, he granted her a wish, and she chose to be transformed into a man, so that she might never be violated again. Poseidon gave her an impenetrable skin, and she was named Caeneus. He is said to have died in the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs. The story is told in Ovid *Met.*12.