2013

Dancing in Scyros: Masculinity and Young Women's Rituals in the Achilleid

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Statius' *Achilleid* presents Achilles in the remote island of Scyros, wearing a dress, and confined to the company of young women. Scholars have identified Achilles' stint in Scyros as part of a larger narrative strategy dramatizing his transition from adolescent boy to adult warrior.[1] In this chapter, I shift the focus of analysis from Achilles to the rituals of the girls of Scyros, and argue that female ritual activity is used to express and emphasize female agency and power. The performance of rituals, especially dances, serves as a marker of the power of the girls' sexuality and desirability. Their association with the Amazons in this context also enhances their representation as resistant of traditional gender roles and hierarchies. The girls' power, however, does not appear to threaten the essence of masculinity: Achilles is represented as a male through a repeated narrative focus on his tremendous physicality. Nevertheless, the girls' ritual dance performance succeeds in manipulating and even thwarting the manifestation of Achilles' bursting masculinity and by extension its successful correlation with martial prowess, an important indicator of true manliness.

Ritual activity in literature is often used as a marker of gender, and Statius' *Achilleid* is no exception.[2] Ephebic rituals provide girls with the necessary preparation for their religious duties, domestic and civic, which they will be performing throughout their lives as wives and

[1] See, most recently, Heslin (2005: 205–36).

[2] See Panoussi (2007b: 114–34).

mothers;[3] these rituals constitute a medium through which some aspects of female socialization are inculcated, while being also a way of containing and controlling emerging female sexuality. Religious activities, however, also offer the girls opportunities for social participation, which brings them into contact with men and thus entails risks for the preservation of their chastity and threatens to upset social protocols which demand that the husband be the sole proprietor of a woman's sexual abilities and powers. For example, in the *Achilleid*, as in other genres and in comedy in particular, religious festivals afford opportunities for respectable girls to get into trouble.[4]

In Statius' *Achilleid* (1.285–92), the girls are first presented as a group making offerings to 'Pallas of the Beach' (*Palladi litoreae*, 1.285). When a little later in the narrative Thetis asks Lycomedes to accept Achilles as his ward, she provides a description of the appropriate activities that will keep Achilles, who is now metamorphosed into a girl, 'in her sex' (*sexu ... tene*, 1.356), effectively making the argument that gender is constructed through a repeated series of performative actions and not simply through biology.[5] Indeed, as we shall see, the poem repeatedly confirms this notion by pitting Achilles' amazing, overwhelming physicality against the girls' ritual performance and having the latter succeed in overpowering it every time.

The girls are themselves depicted as doing their own gender-bending, inasmuch as they are consistently portrayed through references to the Amazons (1.353, 1.760, 1.833). Amazons are the quintessential emblem of female power and thus underscore the girls' agency through their participation in and performance of religious duties. Furthermore, by making the girls engage in rites which are mostly Bacchic in nature, Statius further reinforces the theme of gender-bending, as Maenadism routinely involves negation of social protocols.[6]

In the *Achilleid*, then, the girls' role underscores the rather modern notion that masculinity is constructed and performed socially and is not simply determined through biology. Achilles' physicality and male-oriented education are introduced early on in the poem and are never truly endangered in Scyros. Quite the opposite: Achilles manages to impregnate Deidamia, an act that proclaims his masculinity. Achilles, however, is effectively hidden by the dancing girls repeatedly; the poem

[3] Dillon (2002: 4).

[4] See Heslin (2005: 147 and n. 9), on Menander's *Epitrepontes* and Terence's *Hecyra*, where rape takes place during a Dionysiac festival at night.

[5] Butler (1990).

[6] See Panoussi (2003: 102–3, 105–6).

thus shows female ritual activity as capable of containing (or at least delaying) even an overwhelming physicality, such as Achilles', and of obstructing the performance of gender.[7]

In what follows, I shall argue that the girls' power and agency are indicated through three main areas: the power of their beauty/sexuality to attract and potentially dominate men; their association with Amazons; and their performance of Bacchic rituals. An analysis of these narrative strategies demonstrates that Statius puts to unique and interesting use what are considered traditional and rather typical motifs surrounding the activities of women, investing them with an exceptional power and agency that appears capable of posing a real threat to the full articulation of masculinity.

GENDER AS PERFORMANCE

Statius' constructionist view of gender as performance is vividly outlined in Thetis' speech to King Lycomedes as she seeks to convince him to take Achilles into his custody:

> 'hanc tibi' ait 'nostri germanam, rector, Achillis—
> nonne uides ut torua genas aequandaque fratri?—
> tradimus. arma umeris arcumque animosa petebat
> ferre et Amazonio conubia pellere ritu,
> sed mihi curarum satis est pro stirpe uirili.
> haec calathos et sacra ferat, tu frange regendo
> indocilem sexuque tene, dum nubilis aetas
> soluendusque pudor. neue exercere proteruas
> gymnadas aut lustris nemorum concede uagari.
> intus ale et similes inter seclude puellas...' (1.350–59)

> 'I give this girl, oh king, the sister of Achilles (see you not how fierce she looks, how like her brother?) into your keeping. High-mettled, she asked for weapons on her shoulders and a bow, asked to shun wedlock Amazon fashion. But I have enough to worry about on my man-child's account. Let her convey the baskets and the holy things, do you rule and tame the forward wench and keep her in her sex, till it is time for marriage and relaxing of modesty. Do not let her practise wanton races or wander in woodland wilds. Raise her indoors, shut her among girls like herself...'

[7] The girls' performative power also indicates a power of artistry of a feminine artistic voice that is pitted against the epic male voice. So the role of women reflects not only social tensions but also generic and metapoetic ones.

Thetis enumerates the activities of girls of premarital age: one of their duties is to carry various 'religious items' (*sacra*) needed for cult rituals and baskets in particular. 'Girls bearing baskets' (*κανηφόροι*) are mentioned in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (641–6), where a young Athenian girl's ritual duties are enumerated; this then becomes a topos in the literature and iconography of young girls, in addition to dancing and singing. The girls in Lycomedes' court engage in all these activities. In his monograph on the religious roles of Classical Greek girls and women, Matthew Dillon rightly posits: 'these roles were open to girls and adolescent women partly because as they were unmarried they had no other responsibilities; once married, public roles as these, particularly in a city such as Athens, were presumably thought inappropriate for them as wives of Athenian citizens. But the virgin status of girls must have been a factor in their filling these roles: in serving as attendants bringing the sacrificial items their purity was doubtless important.'[8] Not only is their purity significant, but also, I would add, it is visually reinforced and emphasized.

The tension between 'nature' vs. 'culture' or between the essence and performance of gender is also revealed in the emphasis Thetis places on the safeguarding of the chastity and virginity of Achilles-as-a-girl. This tension is expressed in terms that also typically describe girls of premarital age in Greek and Roman literature as inherently wild and in need of taming (*frange regendo*; *indocilis*): marriage is, of course, the medium through which this taming will take place and which will ensure their complete integration in society as wives and mothers.[9] Thetis portrays the performance of ritual duty as constitutive of this containment of Achilles-as-a-girl's wild nature, in that both these strategies will 'keep her in her sex' (*sexu . . . tene*) until marriage. The goddess' remarks, however, reveal some of the tensions those ritual activities entail: she refers to them as *gymnadas*, a word first attested in Statius,[10] and one that describes athletic contests of various sorts including not only wrestling (which may be perceived as more appropriate for adolescent boys) but also boxing or racing; it could also be describing the contestants collectively.[11] To be sure, athletic contests are important in various cult activities of young girls, especially in Sparta.[12] Yet evidence exists of what are believed to be

[8] Dillon (2002: 37).

[9] On these ideas about girls, see Panoussi (2003; 2007a) on Catullus and marriage rituals.

[10] Statius uses the word five times (*Silu.* 2.2.8, 3.1.44, 4.2.48; *Theb.* 4.106), elsewhere in the singular, though.

[11] Dilke (2005: 109).

[12] Cf. Prop. 3.14.4 and Ov. *Her.* 16.151–2; see Ripoll and Soubiran (2008: 205).

mock ritual races in Attica that involve nudity, in the context of the ritual of ἀρκτεῖα ('she-bears') for Artemis at Brauron.[13] The risks that a display of such activities poses for the girls' chastity is obvious in Thetis' use of the adjective *proteruas* ('impudent', 'shameless', 'forward'; cf. *OLD* s.v. 2) to describe them and her injunction to Lycomedes not to allow them to tend to such practices (*neue exercere . . . concede*).

The importance of performance of specific roles as determinant of sex resurfaces in the 'courting' scene between Achilles, now a woman, and the unsuspecting Deidamia:

> nunc nimius lateri non euitantis inhaeret,
> nunc leuibus sertis nunc lapsis sponte canistris
> nunc thyrso parcente ferit, modo 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.
> illa libens discit quo uertice Pelion et quis
> Aeacides puerique auditum nomen et actus
> adsidue stupet et praesentem cantat Achillem.
> inque uicem et ualidos proferre modestius artus
> et tenuare rudes attrito pollice lanas
> demonstrat reficitque colus et perdita dura
> pensa manu; (1.570–83)

'Now he clings too closely to her side (nor does she avoid him), now hits her with light garlands, now with baskets that fall over on purpose, now with gentle thyrsus. Now he shows her the familiar lyre's sweet strings, the slender measures of Chiron's songs, guiding her hand and making her fingers strike the sounding instrument. Now he seizes her lips as she sings and twines embraces and praises her in a thousand kisses. Willingly she learns what peak is Pelion, who is Aeacides, wondering and wondering at the boy's name and deeds as she hears them and sings of Achilles to his face. She in her turn shows him how to advance his strong limbs more decorously and how to draw out raw wool with his thumb's friction, repairing the distaff and the skeins that his rough hand has spoiled.'

Once again the ritual setting (in the midst of garlands, baskets, and a Bacchic thyrsus) is exploited by the poet to showcase Deidamia 'teaching' Achilles the feminine activities of dancing and handling the wool, while he introduces her to the more 'masculine' pursuits of singing (epic)[14] and

[13] Dillon (2002: 220–21).

[14] I believe that Deidamia is singing epic because she sings of Achilles' deeds—yet another metapoetic hint in this deeply self-conscious poem.

playing the cithara.[15] But the contrast between Achilles' and Deidamia's abilities to carry out their respective activities is also remarkable: while Deidamia's singing appears to be so good as to inspire ever greater displays of affection on the part of Achilles, he himself appears to be not very good at them and in need of her help (*reficitque colus et perdita dura/pensa manu*).[16] This inability of Achilles to perform convincingly as a woman will prove to be a problem throughout his appearances as a girl in the first book, while, by contrast, Deidamia's masculine attributes are a constitutive part of the construction of her identity.

VIRGINITY AND SEXUALITY

The dangerous potential of the combination of virginity and wild sexuality (to which Thetis' request to Lycomedes alludes) proves for the girls a source of empowerment, which they successfully manipulate throughout the first book of the poem. In Greek and Roman thought, virginity exudes a strong sexual appeal that has great potency over the male, as is obvious in the first appearance of the girls of Scyros in the *Achilleid*:

> omnibus eximium formae decus, omnibus idem
> cultus et expleto teneri iam fine pudoris
> uirginitas matura toris annique tumentes. (1.290–92)

'All possessed surpassing beauty, all were dressed alike; they had reached the term of tender modesty, their maidenhood, their burgeoning years, were ripe for the marriage bed.'

The girls' exit from the domestic to the public space of the temple of Pallas of the Beach reveals their beauty, which in the text is directly linked to their *pudor*, *uirginitas*, and readiness for marriage (*toris annique tumentes*). The powerful sexual appeal of these qualities for the men who are in the 'audience', as it were, is underscored by the following double simile likening Deidamia and the girls to Venus, the sea Nymphs, Diana, and the Naiads (1.293–300). In addition to the obviously sexual connotations of the reference to Venus, Diana's sexual magnetism is also conveyed through this image, as it recalls the setting of her heavily

[15] This reversal of sexual performance also corresponds to the generic tensions within the poem between epic and elegy.

[16] Cf. Heslin (2005), 145: '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.'

eroticized encounter with Actaeon in Ovid (*Met.* 3.165–205). Moreover, the allusions of the passage to Virgil's Dido (*Aen.* 1.498–504) only serve to intensify the attraction of Achilles, whose falling for Deidamia thus emerges as almost predetermined.[17] To be sure, the greatest effect of the sexual power of the girls, and Deidamia in particular, is none other than Achilles' reaction which is described as feminizing him both figuratively, in the scene of his blushing (1.302–6), and literally, in that he subsequently agrees to be dressed as a woman:[18]

> hanc ubi ducentem longe socia agmina uidit
> trux puer et nullo temeratus pectora motu
> deriguit totisque nouum bibit ossibus ignem.
> nec latet haustus amor sed fax uibrata medullis
> in uultus atque ora redit lucemque genarum
> tinguit et inpulsam tenui sudore pererrat... (1.301–6)

'When the truculent boy, whose heat no stirring had ever assailed, saw her leading her attendant column form far ahead, he stiffened and drank novel flame in all his bones. Nor does his draught of love stay hidden; the brand waving in his inmost parts goes to his face and tinges the brightness of his cheeks, wandering over then with a light sweat as they feel the impulse...'

Furthermore, the same power of the dancing girls of premarital age over the men receives elaborate attention in the exchanges between Ulysses and Lycomedes, where once again ritual performance is described as enhancing the girls' desirability:

> 'at tu tranquillus in alta
> pace mane carisque para conubia natis,
> quas tibi sidereis diuarum uultibus aequas
> Fors dedit. ut me olim tacitum reuerentia tangit!
> is decor et formae species permixta uirili.'
> occurrit genitor: 'quid si aut Bacchea ferentes
> orgia Palladias aut circum uideris aras?
> et dabimus, si forte nouus cunctabitur Auster.'
> excipiunt cupidi et tacitis spes addita uotis. (1.807–15)

[17] On the intertextual canvas of this episode, see also Feeney (2004b: 90) and Heslin (2005: 93–101).

[18] Thetis' shaping of Achilles into a girl (1.325–37) is yet another example of the performative notion of gender operative in the *Achilleid*, as well as its explicit correlation with artistic creation. On the latter, see Hinds (1998: 138–40). It is also relevant in the poem's articulation of tensions between the genres of epic and elegy. Achilles here is analogous to the elegiac *seruus amoris* ('slave of love'), who foregoes male duties in order to be with his girl (*puella*).

> '[Ulysses says] "But do you stay tranquil in peace profound, preparing marriages for your beloved daughters, Fortune's gift, whose starry countenances equal goddesses. How silent reverence touches me this while! What charm, what beauty mingled with manly shape!" The father answers: "What if you see them bearing Bacchus' sacred emblems or surrounding Pallas' altar? And we shall let you see, if a new South Wind shall tarry." Eagerly they take him up and hope joins their silent prayer.'

Ulysses' praise of Lycomedes' daughters betrays that the dance they have just performed (1.755–60) provides testimony regarding their beauty and suitability as brides.[19] Lycomedes' response to Ulysses that their virtues would become even more apparent if the guests saw them perform ritual duties, followed by his proposal to allow his guests to witness them, reveals Lycomedes' desire to secure perhaps one of his guests as a spouse.[20] The eagerness of Ulysses and Diomedes to agree to such a viewing (1.819–20) also testifies to the pleasure that the spectacle of the girls' ritual performance provides to the male viewing audience, even as in terms of the plot it ostensibly gives them another chance to detect Achilles.

GIRL POWER: AMAZONS AND PALLAS

The power that the girls of Scyros are portrayed as exerting through their performance of ritual acts and dancing in particular may help shed light on their consistent connection to Amazons accompanying all three of their 'public' appearances in the *Achilleid*. Each capitalizes on the previous one to express the girls' empowerment through the exercise of their religious duties.

As we have seen, the first Amazon reference occurs in the scene of Thetis' orders to the king of Scyros, Lycomedes. There Thetis' comparison of Achilles-as-a-girl to an Amazon is a convenient way for her to hide from Lycomedes her son's masculinity, and aptly encapsulates the actual crossing of gender boundaries that he perpetrates. At the same time, however, Thetis' portrait of Achilles-as-a-girl is convincing precisely because it presents him as possessing a trait that, as we have already seen, is commonly associated with virgins and is exploited here

[19] Heslin (2005: 147): 'Ulysses apparently intends this as an ambiguous token of his potential interest in Lycomedes' daughters.'

[20] On the public aspect of this Bacchic *orgia* and the private/exclusive character of the rites in 1.593 (forbidden to men, 1.603), see Heslin (2005: 148).

with great irony: a virgin's wild, uncivilized nature that resists marriage. The Amazon metaphor thus encapsulates the inherent tension between society's need to keep girls chaste, confined, and away from the presence of men and their nature, which at once defies this confinement and relishes in it, as it offers a means of resisting male domination altogether.

The Amazons exemplify this tension, since they are transgressive women in both appearance and lifestyle and often pose a threat to men.[21] As such, they live in the fringes of civilization, thus embodying a menacing 'other' that stirs in men the desire to conquer and tame them.[22] At the same time, Amazons are fierce and feared warriors and thus constitute the perfect medium that reflects the power to which the girls lay claim when they make public appearances:

> iamque atria feruent
> regali strepitu et picto discumbitur auro.
> tum pater ire iubet natas comitesque pudicas
> natarum. subeunt, quales Maeotide ripa
> cum Scythicas rapuere domos et capta Getarum
> moenia sepositis epulantur Amazones armis. (1.755–60)

> 'And now the halls are alive with regal noise and they lie down on embroidered gold. Then the father gives order for his daughters and his daughters' chaste companions to come in. They enter like Amazons on Maeotis' bank, when they feast with weapons laid aside after plundering Scythian homes and captured towns of the Getae.'[23]

The image of the Amazons feasting after a victorious battle is undeniably one emphasizing their 'masculine' power, and relates very well with the use of the Amazon metaphor in the previous passage to denote female resistance to marriage.[24] Once again, this metaphor showcases the sexual

[21] On transgressive, monstrous female figures in Statius' *Thebaid*, see Keith, Ch. 17 above.

[22] Compare e.g. the image of the pregnant Hippolyte in Theseus' triumphal procession in the *Thebaid*: *Hippolyte, iam blanda genas patiensque mariti/foederis* ('Hippolyte, now bland of eye and patient of the marriage bond', 12.534–5). As Augoustakis (2010: 79) observes, 'although the Amazons still remain fierce and do not show any signs of weakness (such as lament . . .) . . . their queen seems subdued.' On Theseus as the king who imposes civilization (in this case, on the barbarian Amazons), see Augoustakis (2010: 78 n. 111) for further bibliography, and Bessone, Ch. 8 above.

[23] Hinds (2000: 239) argues that the girls' femininity is compromised by their absorption of the cross-dressed Achilles. See also Heslin (2005: 153), who connects their transgressive participation in the banquet as appropriately compared to the behaviour of Amazons: '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.'

[24] Hinds (2000: 239–40) notes that the image of the Amazons occurs at a moment when they are temporarily dissociated from their weaponry. Yet I believe the texts' reference of

power of the girls over the men, who constitute the audience of the banquet, as well as the transgressive potential of their defying traditional gender roles. The emphasis on the girls' empowerment in this regard is reinforced by Deidamia's subsequent successful concealment of Achilles' bursting masculinity from Ulysses' discerning gaze (1.767–71).[25] I will return to the idea of female power and the concealment of masculinity shortly, as it is also related to the poem's use of the girls' rituals and their engagement in Bacchic rites specifically.

The link between the girls' potential (or actual) empowerment and the power exerted by the Amazons is also reinforced through their connection with the goddess Pallas. In Greece, young girls, and especially *κανηφόροι*, become associated with rituals of Athena and Artemis, as I have already mentioned. Female offerings to Pallas are an epic topos, although it usually involves married women, as well as girls during the time of war (Hom. *Il.* 6.297–311; Virg. *Aen.* 1.479–82 and 11.475–85). In addition, the island of Scyros is famously linked with Athens since the fifth century BCE, via the Theseus myth: Theseus is believed to have died on Scyros; and Cimon transfers the legendary hero's bones from Scyros to Athens, thus claiming a close connection between the city and the island and legitimizing Athenian interests in the area.[26] At the same time, however, there are other narrative reasons for the use of Pallas: as a virgin warrior, she is both an emblem of chastity and a formidable female presence; as such, she combines precisely the attributes that Statius bestows on his girls. She is worshipped by the girls in a liminal place, the shore, the island's boundary, as we have seen above (*Palladi litoreae*, 1.285), while there is a statue of the goddess there too (*placidique super Tritonia custos/litoris*, 'and Tritonia above, guardian of the tranquil shore', 1.696–7). As P. J. Heslin correctly observes, however, '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

their previous battle and plundering (*Scythicas rapuere domos et capta Getarum/moenia*, 1.759–60) evokes and stresses their potentially dangerous power as warriors and conquerors.

[25] On the Amazons as creating the possibility for Achilles' ultimate manifestation, see Feeney (2004b: 95). On Deidamia's protective gaze and surveillance of Achilles, see Heslin (2005: 154–5), and cf. 'Statius represents womanliness as a performative construct, not just for transvestites, but for women, too' (155).

[26] Cf. Plu. *Thes.* 36. I believe that there is a layer of political and ideological implications in Statius' connection between Scyros with Athens and by extension its empire. Given the poem's address to Domitian, these connections would obviously pertain to Rome. On the transfer of empires from the East to the West, see Augoustakis (forthcoming b).

kingdom's boundary, will prove an ineffectual guardian of her ministrant's virginity.'[27]

Like the Amazons, Pallas is mentioned three times in the *Achilleid*, in the first public appearance of the girls,[28] in Lycomedes' description of the maidens to Ulysses (1.813), and in the description of Achilles' and the girls' ritual performance (*feroxque Pallas*, 'and bold Pallas', 1.825–6). As Dennis Feeney notes, this last instance draws some explicit parallels between Achilles and the first appearance of Deidamia in the epic, thus underscoring the feminization of the hero.[29] At the same time, it provides yet another example of the poem's systematic link between the girls' virginity and 'masculinity'. This connection has also surfaced earlier in Ulysses' comments to Lycomedes that the girls' beauty has a masculine quality (*is decor et formae species permixta uirili*, 1.811). Aside from the obvious humour and irony, Ulysses' statement is congruent with the depiction of the girls as possessing a sort of masculine agency and power. This agency and power over the male reaches its climax in the girls' performance of Bacchic rituals, to which my discussion will now turn.

MAENADISM AND SEX

Maenadism in literature is synonymous with female negation of civilized values and resistance to the male. Most notably in Greek tragedy but also in Roman epic, Bacchic rituals are used to showcase female crossing of traditional gender boundaries, with disastrous results for men and women alike.[30] Since Bacchic rites in literature are portrayed as a means of female empowerment, it is not surprising to see them figure prominently in Statius' portrait of the girls of Scyros. In addition to their initial exit to the temple of Pallas, Bacchic rites are the main ritual activity the girls perform. Unlike many of his famous predecessors who have engaged in the depiction of Bacchic rites, in the *Achilleid* Statius manipulates the

[27] Heslin (2005: 237).

[28] Hinds (2000: 237) correctly notes that the girls revise Pallas in this scene by making her more feminine. Yet the subsequent comparison of Deidamia with Diana provides a further connection between virginity and rather masculine pursuits.

[29] Feeney (2004b: 89–91).

[30] On Maenadism in Greek myth and cult, the Bacchic mysteries at Rome, and their connection with the poem, see Heslin (2005: 243–51).

usual themes associated with Maenadism—negation of marriage, resistance to the male, and crossing of gender boundaries—to display the power of femininity not only to encroach upon but also to eclipse the performance of masculinity. In the *Achilleid*, as Achilles continuously threatens to expose his bursting manliness, the women's Bacchic rites are very effective in repeatedly preventing him from doing so.

Achilles' physicality surfaces in all the descriptions of Maenadic activity in the poem. We see it first in the Bacchic rite the women perform in the woods:[31]

> illum uirgineae ducentem signa cateruae
> magnaque difficili soluentem bracchia motu
> et sexus pariter decet et mendacia matris.
> mirantur comites, nec iam pulcherrima turbae
> Deidamia suae tantumque admota superbo
> uincitur Aeacidae quantum premit ipsa sorores.
> ut uero e tereti demisit nebrida collo
> errantesque sinus hedera collegit et alte
> cinxit purpureis flauentia tempora uittis
> uibrauitque graui redimitum missile dextra,
> attonito stat turba metu sacrisque relictis
> illum ambire libet pronosque attollere uultus.
> talis ubi ad Thebas uultumque animumque remisit
> Euhius et patrio satiauit pectora luxu,
> serta comis mitramque leuat thyrsumque uirentem
> armat et hostiles inuisit fortior Indos. (1.603–18)

> 'As he leads the standard of a virgin troop and clumsily waves his great arms, his sex and his mother's lies are equally becoming. His companions marvel; no more is Deidamia the fairest of her throng, beside proud Aeacides her stature is surpassed by as much as she herself out-tops her sisters. But when he dropped the fawn-skin from his rounded neck, collecting the straying folds with ivy and binding his flaxen temples with purple fillets and brandishing the wreathed missile with heavy hand, the throng stood amazed and afraid; leaving their rites, they are fain to gather round him and lift their downcast faces. Even as Euhius at Thebes has relaxed countenance and spirit and satisfied his heart with his native luxury, he lifts garland and headband from his locks and arms the green wand and visits his Indian foes stronger than ever.'

Achilles' description provokes humour for the reader (as he dances *difficili... motu*), but he inspires fear in the maidens: his size, together

[31] On the passage's mobilization of the intertext of Euripides' *Bacchae*, see Heslin (2005: 253–5).

with the aggressiveness of his thyrsus, cause them to be amazed and afraid (*attonito stat turba metu*) and to abandon their rites. The fearsome image of Achilles is intensified by the military language used to describe his size (*uincitur*) and the thyrsus as weapon (*missile*). Although a staple in Maenadic descriptions and indicative of the women's transgressive actions, military language is here put to use to convey the potency of lurking masculinity. The subsequent comparison of Achilles to Dionysus continues and reinforces this theme. The god's power is once again stressed through military language (*armat, hostiles, fortior*), even as he is presented in non-threatening or effeminate terms (*uultumque animumque remisit; patrio satiauit pectora luxu*), foreshadowing the rape of Deidamia that follows.[32]

Yet Achilles' powerful masculinity meets its match twice in the course of Bacchic rites, first during the rape of Deidamia and then in the court of Lycomedes. Deidamia's rape occurs in the context of Maenadic activity:

> ...densa noctis gauisus in umbra
> tempestiua suis torpere silentia furtis
> ui potitur uotis et toto pectore ueros
> admouet amplexus: uidit chorus omnis ab alto
> astrorum et tenerae rubuerunt cornua Lunae.
> illa quidem clamore nemus montemque repleuit
> sed Bacchi comites, discussa nube soporis,
> signa choris indicta putant: fragor undique notus
> tollitur, et thyrsos iterum uibrabat Achilles. (1.640–48)

'And happy that in the night's thick darkness timely silence lies inert upon his dalliance, he gains his desire by force, launching veritable embraces with all his heart. All the choir of stars saw it from on high and the young Moon's horns blushed red. The girl filled wood and mountain with her cries, but Bacchus' companions shake aside their cloud of slumber and think it a signal for the dance. From all sides the familiar shout is raised and Achilles once more brandishes the thyrsus.'

Achilles' rape of Deidamia is described in no uncertain terms as violent (*ui potitur*), while her resistance is vividly noted. P. J. Heslin interprets the rape as a symbolic aetiology (humorous or serious) of the ritual unveiling of the phallus, which presumably takes place during Bacchic

[32] The image of a powerful individual at a moment where they have laid aside their weapons is recalled in the description of the girls as Amazons during Lycomedes' banquet. I believe it encapsulates the ambiguity of feminine power, both threatening and non-threatening at the same time. Cf. Heslin (2005: 256): 'The adoption of male roles by women makes maenadism well suited to being the ironic backdrop for Achilles' symmetrically opposite gender inversion.' For a different view, see Hinds (2000).

rites.[33] I argue, however, that in this passage the opposite occurs, as once again the exposure of Achilles' masculine power is thwarted. As the rape takes place, Deidamia's cries merge with the other girls' ritual clamour and Achilles-as-a-girl is shown to participate in the ritual by brandishing the thyrsus and by resuming the orgiastic activity in the context of the ritual. As Deidamia's pregnancy is subsequently hidden, so Achilles' male identity remains hidden within the *thiasos* of Bacchants, who misconstrue the rape as a sign for celebrations to commence anew.[34] Thus within the Maenadic context the girls emerge as capable of controlling the manifestation of manliness, if not its essence or physicality, while the poet underscores the fallibility of the chorus in its Maenadic state of mind.

Bacchic rites have a similar function at the court of Lycomedes, where Deidamia successfully hides Achilles during the banquet (1.802–5) and during the girls' ritual dance:[35]

> nec minus egressae thalamo Scyreides ibant
> ostentare choros promissaque sacra uerendis
> hospitibus. nitet ante alias regina comesque
> Pelides: qualis Siculae sub rupibus Aetnae
> Naidas Hennaeas inter Diana feroxque
> Pallas et Elysii lucebat sponsa tyranni.
> iamque mouent gressus thiasisque Ismenia buxus
> signa dedit, quater aera Rheae quater enthea pulsant
> terga manu uariosque quater legere recursus,
> tum thyrsos pariterque leuant pariterque reponunt
> multiplicantque gradum, modo quo Curetes in actu
> quoque pii Samothraces eunt, tunc obuia uersae
> pectine Amazonio, modo quo citat orbe Lacaenas
> Delia plaudentesque suis intorquet Amyclis.
> tunc uero, tunc praecipue manifestus Achilles
> nec seruare uices nec bracchia iungere curat:
> tum molles gressus tunc aspernatur amictus
> plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat.
> sic indignantem thyrsos acceptaque matris
> tympana iam tristes spectabant Penthea Thebae. (1.821–40)

'The maidens of Scyros left their chamber and came to show their dances and promised rites to the honoured guests. Before them all glistens the princess and her companion, Peleus' son; even as under Sicilian Aetna's

[33] Heslin (2005: 253–5).

[34] Heslin (2005: 253 n. 61) notes, 'Statius leaves it for us to decide whether Deidamia cries out of pleasure or terror.'

[35] Analysed by Heslin (2005: 232–6) as an initiation ritual.

> crags among the Naiads of Henna shone Diana and bold Pallas and the spouse of the Elysian king. Now they are on the move and the Ismenian boxwood gives signals to the choirs. Four times they clash Rhea's cymbals, four times beat the frenzied drums, four times wind their shifting movements back. Then together they raise their wands, together lower them, and multiply their steps. Sometimes they move in the manner of the Curetes or pious Samothracians, now they turn to face each other in an Amazonian comb, now ply the ring in which Diana summons the girls of Laconia and twists them clapping in her own Amyclae. Then, ay then above all is Achilles manifest. He cares not to keep turns or link arms; more than usual he scorns womanish steps and dress, disrupting the choirs and causing untold confusion. So Thebes already sad watched Pentheus indignant at his mother's wands and the drums he had accepted.'

As in other Bacchic narratives, here too we encounter a mixture of ritual elements. The maidens' ritual dance (*sacra*) is explicitly Bacchic: the girls form a *thiasos*, the signal is given with the Ismenian boxwood (*Ismenia buxus*), that is, the Theban flute used by Bacchants, and the Maenads brandish the thyrsos as they dance. Furthermore, Statius' conflation of various mystery rites in this description is actually typical of such narratives (e.g. Eur. *Ba.* 73–87 and 120–34). He specifically includes the rites of Rhea/Magna Mater, those of the Curetes, and the mysteries of Samothrace, among others, creating a mosaic of exotic and transgressive behaviour.[36] Finally, the role of Achilles and Deidamia as protagonists is emphasized by the special mention of their position in the thiasos (*nitet ante alias regina comesque/Pelides*), another common motif that accompanies descriptions of the leader of Bacchic rites (e.g., Eur. *Ba.* 681–2 and 689–91; Virg. *Aen.* 7.396–400). Statius' faithful adherence to the protocols of Maenadic portrayal reveals that Achilles successfully fulfils the role of a Bacchant.

The delay in Achilles' masculinity being exposed, even as he fails equally miserably to dance as a girl, is of paramount importance. The comic elements of the scene do not obscure the reality of the girls' power during the performance of the dance.[37] It is not a coincidence that the imagery that has so far accompanied them in the poem comes together in this scene, with Bacchus, Pallas, Diana, and the Amazons making an

[36] See extensively Heslin (2005: 233–4, 257–61) on the role of the Magna Mater and the Curetes/Corybantes. On the Magna Mater elsewhere in Flavian epic, see Fucecchi and Chinn, Chs 1 and 18 above. Chinn also offers an extensive discussion of the role of Cybele, the Curetes, the Corybantes, and Orphic ritual in general in the *Thebaid*, an important intertext for this passage.

[37] The power of their sexuality is also analysed by Heslin (2005: 145–7), who notes instances of rape during dancing elsewhere in literature.

appearance in the description of the dance.[38] Bacchic rites, whether they take place in the wild or in a domesticated space, afford the women the power to dominate the men, and in this case to prevent the performance of masculinity and its successful correlation with martial prowess. This interpretation also helps explain Achilles' puzzling comparison to Pentheus: just as the Theban prince is ultimately conquered by the Maenads, so Achilles' masculinity has been once again thwarted by the dancing girls of Scyros and contrasts neatly with his earlier likening to the powerful Dionysus.

To be sure, the girls are only temporarily successful. Achilles will eventually present himself as a man to Ulysses, will marry Deidamia, and the book will end with all the social roles falling into their normative place. Achilles-as-a-man will forego the feminizing (and elegiac) role of lover in order to assume that of the male (epic) warrior. Yet the exposure of his masculinity is itself rendered in feminine terms, as it occurs during the girls' excited perusal of their shiny gifts. The shield catches Achilles' attention mainly because of its brilliance (*radiantem . . . orbem*, 'the shining round', 1.852; note also the description of the shield as a mirror: *luxque aemula*, 'the rival radiance', 1.864), while the gore on it seems almost like an afterthought (*saeuis et forte rubentem/bellorum maculis*, 'and by chance it was ruddy with cruel spots of war', 1.853–4). The attraction to shiny, beautiful objects is of course a standard trait of women (e.g. Livy's Tarpeia, 1.11.5–9) and can be treacherous for warriors (e.g. in Virgil's Camilla, *Aen.* 11.854, or Euryalus, *Aen.* 9.359–66). Achilles' attraction to the shield's glow is both a reminder of his tragic fate in battle[39] and a comment on the fragility of his masculinity.[40]

In the *Achilleid*, ritual activity is used to relate female power and agency to virginity, sexuality, and potential resistance to the male. Ritual

[38] Heslin (2005: 234–5 and n. 166) also notes that the Amazonian dance (*pectine Amazonio*) is otherwise unknown. This is yet another element supporting the importance of the Amazonian motif in the portrayal of the girls of Scyros.

[39] As Augoustakis (forthcoming b), observes, 'through his own cross-dressing and the impregnation of Deidamia, marked in the text as a violent attack, Achilles comes of age on the liminally *other* island of Scyros by replicating Paris' . . . kidnapping of the queen of Sparta. Therefore, the "European" Achilles incorporates both the effeminate traits of the East and the warlike manliness of the West, but also he ultimately embodies the "Asian" *other*, which he is destined to overcome and annihilate by sacrificing his own life.'

[40] The previous observations can also be used to help frame questions regarding the generic tensions within the *Achilleid*, since the girls' role can be said to articulate an alternative mode of expression that complicates the poem's other generic voices, elegiac and epic. In other words, the transgressive girls match the transgressive character of the poem.

renders the girls successful in thwarting, even only temporarily, Achilles' trajectory to fulfil his role of male warrior. In addition, the performance of ritual, and of Maenadism in particular, affords women of pre-marital age a space in which they can exert agency and power.[41]

[41] I would like to express my warm thanks to the editor, Antony Augoustakis, for inviting me to participate at a highly stimulating conference at the University of Illinois and for his thoughtful and meticulous help on the final draft of this chapter.