

Analyse some uses of the depiction of Achilles as a youth in any Latin texts focussed upon in this module. Do not use more than three sources.

Due to the fact that Achilles' entire life story can be traced, from birth to death, and is the only epic hero to be able to claim this fact, there is resultingly much to speak of about his character¹. Within Latin texts, Achilles can be found numerous times, and within those his youth has often been depicted- the symbolism and intention behind said depictions often furthering certain narratives². Of the Latin sources available, Statius' *Achilleid* one of the main texts useful for viewing Achilles' youth, is as such one of the main sources available for exploring what Achilles' youth and the events which occurred within it could be used to represent³. Other sources which are useful for this are that of Ovid- with his writing before the time of Statius allowing insight into forms of inspiration from which Statius drew, and of how depictions of Achilles were used at an earlier time⁴. Due to the fact that Achilles did spend much of his youth disguised as a woman, the subject of gender plays a massive role in all aspects of his life- Statius especially uses this opportunity to explore a number of themes emerging from this moment⁵.

Statius' *Achilleid* gives a very good comprehensive view of Achilles' youth and, as commented by Feeney, this work is definitely an interesting epic⁶. This is because writing relatively later than other prominent authors creating works around the same topic, Statius had to create his in a manner which would hold the interest of those who had heard the same story many times prior⁷. Achilles in this tale, therefore, can be seen to be used to draw an interested new audience by crafting the character in a way that is loyal to the source material, but still 'new'. One of said ways that Statius crafted his narrative was to draw upon various source material, with obvious references to Homer's creation, but also of a number of prior authors including (and especially) that of Ovid, with it even being labelled 'Ovidian'⁸.

Ovid, as an author of much influential poetry, created multiple works which referenced Achilles, but of those relevant to the topic of his youth, *Metamorphoses* and *Ars Amatoria* are very useful⁹. This is because, within these works, sections not only specifically reference aspects of Achilles' youth- making this very relevant for the topic at hand, but also because aspects found within this can be felt keenly within Statius' later work- *Achilleid*¹⁰. As a result, looking at the inspiration in comparison with the later work allows a deeper insight into how the idea of the Achilles character may have changed or developed as the different writing styles required the use of the character in different ways.

As mentioned by Cameron, by the Roman period, Achilles' youth was one of, if not the, most popular period of his saga- especially that of him being disguised and then exposed in women's clothing¹¹. This theme being so popular makes it clear that it served a major role within the Roman mindset- it was something which they connected to and thought of as compelling. Within Statius' *Achilleid*, for

¹ Cameron, 2010, p.1

² Cameron, 2010, p.1

³ McAuley, 2010, p.37; Stat. Ach.

⁴ Ov. Met; Ov. Ars.; Feeney, 2004, p.83

⁵ Hinds, 2000, p.244

⁶ Feeney, 2004, p.85

⁷ Feeney, 2004, p.85

⁸ Kozac, 2013, p.247

⁹ Ov. Met. 13.1-381; Ov. Ars.

¹⁰ Ov. Met. 13.1-381; Ov. Ars.; Kozac, 2013, p.247

¹¹ Cameron, 2010, p.2

instance, with it being so comprehensive of Achilles' youth as it is, the theme of feminine dress is used in a number of different ways, as is his elongated stay on Scyros¹². This is done in a manner which would both elongate on an event which was not portrayed within Homer's Iliad, and also expand upon works of authors who came before him, and convey a more contemporary take on the character and what his personal motivations would be¹³. For example, his reason for being placed on Scyros in women's clothing in the first place remains fairly consistent throughout most sources, it was done so by his mother to keep him safe¹⁴. However, his reasons for continuing to stay there do vary, and as a result, so do the ways in which his character is used to portray a certain narrative.

In the Achilleid, his continued stay is one which can be attributed above all else to his love or desire of Deidamia. The text stating, in a moment where Achilles is speaking to himself prior to him taking her by force, that he has "passion" for his "beloved girl"¹⁵. As a result, it becomes clear that his feelings for her are one of his major motivations, at least in this moment, and that this emphasis on his obsession for her is indicative of a number of themes. For example, the most obvious one would be the dynamic between love and war (a common theme), and by centering her in the middle of the major events occurring within the Scyros episode, it emphasises her place within Achilles' life¹⁶. The tone in which Statius crafts their story is also interesting. This is because whilst other sources may have depicted their romantic story as more lighthearted or elongated, Statius does not dwell on it much more than he was required to in order to recount Achilles' life¹⁷. He also kept it relatively dark, as although a rape scene is not uncommon amongst heroes, his attempts to comfort her afterward are short-lived¹⁸. Instead he reveals that it is fate that "Scyros shall lie razed by fire and sword" and "you shall expiate my nuptials by a cruel death"- she is destined to be killed by him¹⁹. Statius therefore uses this darker form of their relationship to progress Achilles' character into one which does not bow down to love or desire. Instead, the complexity of his character within the moment comes from the idea that though he has just taken what he's wanted, he also knows he will take military glory over personal happiness- Statius has firmly placed Achilles in this moment as the archetype of a warrior over a lover, and also more like his father than his mother in this moment²⁰. Deidamia is left behind like many women within a love elegy, and this rings true of Ovid's influence as this was typical of his works, especially that of the Heroides²¹. Achilles abandoning Deidamia also aligns with general epic themes whereby the focus is upon the male characters and their progression and as a result, the relationship is used to further confirm that this is in fact Achilles' personal journey as one would expect²².

This characterisation of Achilles and use of his character to push the theme of love and the trope of "militia amoris" forward stands in stark contrast to Ovid's Metamorphoses in the fact that within the telling of this moment, Deidamia is not mentioned at all- instead all focus is on his mother, and how she was the one who orchestrated the whole thing and that when seen once more, "the hero still wore girl's clothing"²³. This, therefore, implies that his elongated stay on the island was due more

¹² Stat. Ach.

¹³ Cameron, 2010, p.5

¹⁴ Cameron, 2010, p.18

¹⁵ Stat. Ach. 1.635

¹⁶ Drinkwater, 2013, p.194; Stat. Ach. 1.635

¹⁷ Cameron, 2010, p.20

¹⁸ McAuley, 2010, p.50

¹⁹ Stat. Ach. 1.655-660

²⁰ Cameron, 2010, p.21; Feeney, 2004, p.93

²¹ Feeney, 2004, p.93

²² Hinds, 2000, p.244

²³ Boyd, 2018; Ov. Met. 13.160-170

to filial piety, as that was the reason which was felt most important to detail in the brief recounting, rather than a desire for a girl. This idea, is even further compounded when within *Achilleid* Achilles says to Deidamia after he rapes her, “not so in all things shall I obey my mother”, thereby removing any idea which may remain in the reader’s mind that his stay on the island was solely for his mother’s wishes²⁴. This contrast in authorial intention demonstrates that the character of Achilles, though coming from the same source material served different uses depending on which themes were required for the story that they wished to tell²⁵. In one, the filial piety reigns as one of the more motivating factors behind decisions made by Achilles, whilst in the other though that piety was still there to some extent- he did agree to this charade and keep it up- it was in no way as significant to the portrayal of Achilles’ character that he was to remain entirely faithful²⁶.

Furthermore, the representation of cross-dressing as a whole is significant in the manner in which it is used and represented. This is because as to be expected from any plot in which someone was to hide as the opposite sex, themes of gender become very explicit- especially in the way that they represent the character’s values on the topic²⁷. For example, within the *Achilleid*, a certain passivity of Achilles’ character can be seen throughout- and especially within the scenes of him dressed as a woman²⁸. This is shown, not only in the manner in which he obeys his mother and follows her orders to go through this charade in the first place, but also in the way that Deidamia treats him at certain points throughout his stay²⁹. In fact, at 1.770 it is shown that Deidamia had no problem ordering him to behave and hide properly “what if Deidamia... had not always held his bared chest and naked arms and shoulders in her gown and told him more than once not to go forward from the couch and ask for wine”³⁰. The fact that Deidamia is shown to lead and order him in such a manner, adds to the implications shown throughout the *Achilleid* that Achilles, at least until he is prompted to take some agency, is on quite a passive path. Using what is known to be a well-established heroic character in such a manner is interesting as it adds a layer of complexity to the story that they likely already know extremely well.

Within *Metamorphoses* the themes of gender surrounding these circumstances are also clear. Within the speech, it is stated that whilst Achilles was still disguised that “placed among women’s wares some arms such as would attract a man”³¹. This is a clear correlation of masculinity to warfare, and demonstrates the Roman societal thought that masculinity was tied to far more aggressive and dominant acts than femininity³². It demonstrates the idea that gender was part of nature, and it would go against that for a man to be able to resist such temptations as these- and therefore planting such items would have been seen as a cunning move³³.

As argued by Cameron, it does seem most likely that the exposure of Achilles is one which lends itself more to themes of fate than of any overt gender notions³⁴. This is because fate, as an enduring theme, is one which is seen throughout the *Achilleid* and much ancient work³⁵. Fate, as a concept is

²⁴ Stat. Ach. 1.660

²⁵ Feeney, 2004, p.86

²⁶ Stat. Ach. 1.660; Ov. Met. 150-170

²⁷ Hinds, 2000, p.236

²⁸ Hinds, 2000, p.240

²⁹ Stat. Ach. 1.323-331

³⁰ Stat. Ach. 1.770

³¹ Ov. Met. 13.160

³² McAuley, 2010, p.39

³³ Hinds, 2000, p.236

³⁴ Cameron, 2010, p.3

³⁵ Cameron, 2010, p.3

seen also in the moment where it is clear that Achilles would choose the military over his love, which establishes precedent³⁶. This theme is one which is not just subtext, and therefore it being fate that he would eventually be discovered in one way or the other does seem to align with the wider themes of the work. This would also add something to the passivity of Achilles within the *Achilleid*- if fate is controlling everything, he has no choice but to be a relatively passive observer to his life and continue the trend his mother started. Of course, one of the interpretations which Cameron first considers, that this moment is symbolic of his coming of age, does also seem reasonable- if only in the sense that it marks a major shift in Achilles' life³⁷. This is because this moment forces Achilles to explicitly, to the characters within the tale, be seen as male, and start to take the agency which that role would expect³⁸. This further seems correct as cross-dressing did not necessarily automatically imply the person doing so was endangering their gender, as this theme in itself was not one unheard³⁹. Therefore, whilst it certainly does seem most likely that Cameron's interpretation is correct, it also seems likely that both instances can be true- this moment was certainly likely used to demonstrate the inevitability of fate, but it could also symbolise Achilles' coming into his own and becoming 'explicitly' male. The character of Achilles within the work is therefore becomes one used to express how gender and presentation can alter both a person's perception of an individual, and of how they may perceive themselves.

Themes of gender are further explored in representations of his education. This is shown only briefly within the *Achilleid*, likely a move on Statius' part to keep Achilles' story still full, but succinct in places where references could be made in their stead and were already well-established in the source material⁴⁰. For example, whilst the fact that Chiron was Achilles' teacher, and taught him how to use the lyre was well established in other works, within the *Achilleid* it is only mentioned in passing, "he shows her the familiar lyre's sweet strings, the slender measures and Chiron's songs"⁴¹. Using the character in this manner allows all the good faith of being a student of Chiron to remain with him, alongside the added culture of musical knowledge, but also allows Statius' wider themes of gender to take certain stage- such as Achilles taking over the dominant role instead of his previous passive one with Deidamia when teaching her⁴².

Ovid, on the other hand, within *Ars amatoria* explores his education a little more thoroughly, though still quite succinct- "The son of Philyra made the boy Achilles accomplished on the lyre, and by his peaceful art subdued those savage passions"⁴³. Using the character in this manner demonstrates different goals when writing- Ovid wished to portray merely an example within Achilles' life as was typical of rhetorical poetry, and by doing so framed Achilles' youth in this instance as something almost fond to look back on⁴⁴. It too demonstrates how important a name Chiron was- a name common enough within myth and heroic tales that it became archetypal- and how Achilles was important and all the more wise for it⁴⁵.

Overall it is clear that Achilles' youth was often used within works to explore the themes of love, gender and filial relations. Gender, as to be expected from a story which often has at least one

³⁶ Stat. Ach. 1.655-660

³⁷ Cameron, 2010, p.2-3; Stat. Ach. 1.860-80

³⁸ Stat. Ach. 1.875-80

³⁹ Cameron, 2010, p.2-3

⁴⁰ Cameron, 2010, p.15

⁴¹ Stat. Ach. 1.570-75

⁴² Cameron, 2010, p.15

⁴³ Ov. Ars. 10

⁴⁴ McAuley, 2010, p.39

⁴⁵ McAuley, 2010, p.39

reference to his time hiding as a woman on Scyros, is an enduring theme which is hard to avoid. It is one which Statius particularly uses to demonstrate how Achilles changes from one so passive to one with more agency⁴⁶. Ovid on the other hand, uses the ties of masculinity to warfare, and how even if one was hidden, a man would likely not be able to resist the calls to weapons⁴⁷. Both reference the conflict of wanting to appear one way but nature pushing you to act as you are. In addition to these uses of character, his familial ties are often present as well- mostly due to the fact that his mother was the one responsible for his position upon Scyros and is therefore engrained into the narrative. Familial ties, in addition to romantic plots were all areas in which Achilles' youth was explored, and whilst not all themes were present in every source, all were important as it gave an indication of what sort of character Achilles was going to be presented as. The base found within the Iliad may have been consistent- a heroic figure- but the ways in which the complexities of his character were explored involved the use (or disuse) of various themes to indicate overarching symbolism⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Stat. Ach

⁴⁷ Ov. Met. 13.1-381

⁴⁸ Feeney, 2004, p.86

Bibliography

- Cameron, A. (2010). 'Young Achilles in the Roman World', *The Journal of Roman Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 99, pp.1-22
- Drinkwater, M. O. (2013). 'Militia amoris: Fighting in love's army', in Thorsen, T. S. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy*. Cambridge University Press
- Feeney, D. (2004). 'Tenue ... Latens Discrimine: Spotting the Differences in Statius' Achilleid', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici*, 52, pp.85-105
- Hinds, S. E. (2000). 'Essential Epic: Genre and Gender from Macer to Statius', in Depew, M. Obbink, D. (ed.). *Matrices of Genre, Author, Cannons and Society*. Harvard University Press
- Kozac, D. (2013). 'Traces of the Argo: Statius' Achilleid 1 and Valerius' Argonautica 1-2', in Manuwald, G. (ed.). *Flavian Epic Interactions*, 21, pp.247-266
- McAuley, M. (2010). 'Ambiguous Sexus: Epic Masculinity in Transition in Statius' Achilleid', *Akroterion*, 55, pp.37-60
- Ovid. *Art of Love. Cosmetics. Remedies for Love. Ibis. Walnut-tree. Sea Fishing. Consolation*. Mozley, J. H. (trans.). Revised by Goold, G. P. 1929. Loeb Classical Library 232. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses, Volume II: Books 9-15*. Miller, F. J. (trans.). Revised by Goold, G. P. 1916. Loeb Classical Library 43. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Statius. *Thebaid, Volume II: Thebaid: Books 8-12. Achilleid*. Shackleton Bailey, D. R. (trans.). 2004. Loeb Classical Library 498. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press