

Kids These Days: *Pudor*, *Adulescentia*, and Comedy in Book 1 of Statius's *Achilleid*

Early in Book 1 of Statius's unfinished epic the *Achilleid*, Chiron bemoans to Thetis (who has just arrived to collect Achilles) that his charge has gotten out of hand: where once he obeyed Chiron's *imperia* and stayed close to home, now he ranges far and wide, and "the Centaurs themselves" (*ipsi . . . Centauri*) complain that Achilles has plundered their homes, openly (*coram*) stolen their cattle, and put them to flight (149-154). Far from this world of goddess parents and terrorized Centaur neighbors, the *senex* Demea in Terence's *Adelphoe* reproaches his son Aeschinus (who has himself just plundered a neighboring home) in terms that might just as easily apply to the delinquent Achilles: "What has that one done?! Whom neither anything shames (*pudet*), | nor does he fear anyone, nor does he think that any law holds him," (84-86).

In this paper I explore the conjunction between these two out-of-control *adulescentes* and the parents (and audiences) who worry about them. I argue that by positioning Achilles not only at a transitional moment in his famous career – just leaving Thessaly but not yet headed to Troy – but also at a transitional age in the life of a Roman male – no longer a boy but not yet fully an adult – Statius brings his epic hero into a larger conversation in Roman literature on navigating the perils of this tricky period, during which the problem of regulating male desires becomes a particular focus. Recent scholarship on the *Achilleid* has investigated the tension between Achilles' two emerging desires in Book 1 – his erotic desire for the princess Deidamia and his desire for martial glory – particularly as they relate to genre and gender (cf. Hinds 2000, Feeney 2003, Barchiesi 2005, Heslin 2005). However, there is also a complementary focus, which has received less attention, on the forces that should check these desires in order to prevent them from getting out of control, chief among them the socially-oriented emotion of *pudor*.

By reading the dynamics of *pudor* in the *Achilleid* through the lens of the *Adelphoe*, I argue that, in Statius's hands, Achilles' stay on Scyros is not just a humorous burlesque of foreignness and femininity (though it is undoubtedly that) but also another permutation of a problem that Romans have wrestled with since the Republican period and their earliest extant literature: how to raise Roman (elite) men in such a way that their problematic desires will not threaten the very social order they are supposed to lead. Toward this end, the eponymous brothers of the *Adelphoe*, despite their opposed parenting philosophies, both agree on the importance of instilling *pudor* in Aeschinus: where Demea's greatest concern is that "nothing shames" Aeschinus (i.e. nothing restrains him from socially unacceptable actions), Micio is finally convinced that all will be well only when he sees a physical sign of Aeschinus' *pudor*: "erubuit: salva res est" ("He has blushed: the matter is safe," 643).

The *Achilleid* both draws on this conception of the problem of adolescence and provides a highly ambivalent resolution to it. While *pudor* has a central place on Scyros, it never works quite as it should: Achilles is initially held back from seizing Deidamia by his *pudor*, but eventually conflates his sense of shame at cross-dressing and not being able to fight into shame at the frustration of his sexual desires. He thus transforms his *pudor* from a restraint to a *motivation* to rape Deidamia. And while ultimately Achilles, like a comic *adulescens*, "makes good" by marrying Deidamia, this resolution is undermined by the decided lack of *pudor* in his confession to her father and his impending departure to Troy to consummate his other desire.

Bibliography

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