

“Soft dresses and other shameful feminine attire” : approaching the “gender line” while
translating Statius’ *Achilleid*

In Statius’ *Achilleid*, Achilles is taken to the island of Scyros and dressed by his mother as a *virgo* in order to prevent the young hero from voyaging to Troy. Statius’ version of this myth has occasioned a large number of highly variable readings of Achilles’ gender and identity while dressed as a woman (e.g., Heslin’s [2005] comic crossdressed Achilles at odds with the Homeric hero, Cyrino’s [1998] heroic crossdressing *vir*, Augoustakis’ [2016] emphasis on the liminality of both gender and geography, and Keith’s [2017] elegiac/lyric Achilles). I assert that this variability is already a feature in Statius’ text and recognizing this feature provides a tool to better understand how our own contemporary conceptions of gender entangle with our translations of the *Achilleid*. Further, reading the text with a focus on how different characters vocalize Achilles’ gender provides a new tool to read the *Achilleid* and understand Roman conceptions of gender identity.

The fluidity of Achilles’ gender in the *Achilleid* directly impacts its translation. My analysis of Lombardo’s (2015), Shackleton Bailey’s (2004), and Mozley’s (1928) translations of the text reveals distinct differences in translating Achilles’ gender and identity. Mozley’s translation never questions Achilles’ masculinity and heroism and any threats to his masculine identity are downplayed. Shackleton Bailey translates an Achilles whose masculinity is momentarily compromised because of the liminal nature of boyhood. And Lombardo depicts a Achilles comically crossdressing to pursue Deidamia whose masculinity is never really in danger. I reach these conclusions through both a numerical analysis of the pronouns and

gendered terms used for Achilles within each translation and comparative readings of specific passages.

Since our understanding of Achilles' gender is incomplete (due to the incomplete nature of the *Achilleid* and the difficulty of unpacking ancient conceptions of gender and identity), each of these translators must turn to contemporary ideologies of gender to attempt to fill in the gaps. Mozley turns to gender essentialism, Lombardo uses the trope of the 'man in a dress', and Shackleton Bailey casts Achilles as an obedient British schoolboy (emphasizing boyhood, liminality, and respect for authority).

After this analysis of translations, I turn to why Statius' text lends itself to such variable readings and find that the tension surrounding Achilles' identity is propagated within Statius' text, for Achilles' gender is voiced in three different ways, by three different characters. First, Thetis consistently expresses the hope that the external societal pressures that come from Achilles adopting the *habitus* of a woman would be enough to change his nature making Achilles, at least temporarily, into a woman (see Stat. *Achil.* 355–56). Achilles himself always sees himself as male, his crossdressing a ruse for sexual conquest (see 310–12), rejecting the idea that *habitus* might affect *natura*. The narrator falls in between these two views, consistently emphasizing that Achilles by nature is a man, but also that the liminality of his position as a boy grants his identity more fluidity (see 336–337), a fluidity that Calchas reminds the reader is dangerous (560–62).

These different viewpoints on identity reflect the tension between *habitus* and *natura* that is pervasive in Roman conceptions of identity in the first/second-century C.E. (e.g., Sen. *Controv.* 5.6; Sen. *De Beata Vita* 7.13.7; Tertullian *De Pallio* 4.2), and I argue that Statius' *Achilleid* should be read with these tensions in mind. Lombardo, Mozley, and Shackleton Bailey

each emphasized a different portion of this tension in their respective translations and modern scholarship tends to choose one aspect to emphasize (either *natura*, *habitus*, or liminality; e.g., Panoussi emphasizes the power of women's *habitus and ritual*, Heslin emphasizes *natura*, Augoustakis liminality etc.

These tensions enable a vast range of receptions, translations, and interpretations of Achilles' identity and gender, and recognizing these tensions allows us both to better unpack how our own ideologies of gender impact our readings and also to better understand how these very tensions shaped Roman conceptions of identity formation and gender identity.

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