HEROES IN D(U)RESS: TRANSVESTISM AND POWER IN THE MYTHS OF HERAKLES AND ACHILLES*

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> Non cultu lingua retenta silet?
> Is your tongue not silenced by your outfit?
> Ovid *Heroides* 9.102

> [To] put on a sequined halter top makes me feel like a total person and not just a one-dimensional man.
> Dennis Rodman, *Bad As I Wanna Be* (166)

In the 1995 box-office hit movie, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*, three New York drag queens decide to drive cross-country to participate in the "Drag Queen of the Year" national competition in Hollywood.[1] On the way, the two elder stateswomen, played by hunky movie heroes Patrick Swayze and Wesley Snipes, attempt to mentor their little protégée, the self-described "drag princess," played by John Leguizamo. Snipes' character, Noxeema Jackson, imparts her words of wisdom on the varieties of gender-bending to her eager trainee, the young Chi-Chi

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1 Reviewed in "Girls on the Side" by Oliver Gleiberman in *Entertainment Weekly* 291, September 8, 1995.49–51.

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Rodriguez (Leguizamo): "If a straight man puts on a dress to get his sexual kicks, that's a transvestite; a girl born into a boy's body, has the operation, snip-snip, that's a transsexual; but a gay man who just has FAR too much style for one gender, honey, that's a DRAG QUEEN. Anything else is just a boy in a dress."

Such definitions are no doubt intended to educate the surprisingly receptive mainstream PG-13 multiplex audience, but the importance here is not so much the message but the messenger/s. The actor Wesley Snipes is well known for his macho roles in such movies as *Passenger 57*, and he is widely regarded as a muscular action hero, every inch the weapon-toting super-male. Patrick Swayze, who delivers drag-counsel as earth mother goddess Vida Boheme in *To Wong Foo*, has also played the action hero in such movies as *Point Break* (as a renegade surfer), but he is probably best known for his romantic straight male leads in such hits as *Dirty Dancing* and *Ghost*. Rumor in the "biz" had it that a chorus of A-list male actors was lining up to be considered for the roles of the drag queens in *To Wong Foo*,[2] including that paradigm of sexy male stardom, Mel Gibson of *Mad Max* and *Braveheart* fame, who has for years been accused of homophobia and criticized for being "antigay" in his films.[3]

Thus the question presents itself: why would such successful, macho thespians, who would probably never play a gay man in street clothes, be finger-snapping their enthusiasm to star in Hollywood's first cross-dressing buddy picture? Why doesn't the show-business industry's conventional wisdom, "play queer and ruin your career," hold true in the case of boys in femme finery?[4] Is this just another instance of men pre-empting women's roles in a business where there are precious few good parts for actresses already, as some feminist critics have argued?[5] Or, more

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2 As disclosed by *To Wong Foo* screenwriter Douglas Carter Beane to reporter Steve Daly in "It's Not Easy Being Queen," *Entertainment Weekly* 293, September 22, 1995.34–35.

3 In January of 1997, Gibson reached out to make amends with the gay community by joining in a filmmaking seminar sponsored by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), a media watchdog group, organized by Chastity Bono. Degen Pener describes the forum in "Gibson's GLAAD Handling," *Entertainment Weekly* 367/368, February 21/28, 1997.25–26: "Gibson's willingness to meet with GLAAD marks a growing recognition of gay concerns in Hollywood."

4 Here let me suggest that Columbian-born comedian Leguizamo, whose film *The Pest* was in theaters for a short while early in 1997, since he is "out" as a gay man, faces different career challenges from straight, or closeted homosexual, actors.

5 See Garber 1992.6–7 for an introductory summary of the arguments.

subtly, does the popularity of these film roles suggest an audience willing to accept that men are more successful at playing women than "real women" are?[6] The obvious professional success and relative "safety" for actors in female-impersonation roles has been well demonstrated ever since 1959's *Some Like It Hot*, and 1982's *Tootsie*, to 1992's *The Crying Game*, which earned an Oscar nomination for Jaye Davidson as the cross-dressed shocker, Dil. More recently, 1996's *The Birdcage* was a huge commercial hit and led to a number of new professional opportunities for its transvestite star, Nathan Lane. Why do such characters feel so comfortable in and, in these notable cases, even emerge triumphant from their fantasy roles as women? The answer perhaps lies in Swayze's own words in a recent interview: when asked whether he felt his masculinity threatened by wearing a push-up bra, Swayze boasted: "I don't have anything to prove: I'm as heterosexual as a bull moose. That's what made me so comfortable as Vida."[7] That is, the butch-male image of stars such as Swayze or Snipes cannot in any way be made vulnerable to "feminization" by the layering of make-up and lingerie: certain super-virile figures are capable of performing, or absorbing, femininity without the risk of becoming feminized. In fact, as I will argue, the female costume can serve to camouflage, cover, protect, and thereby ultimately reinforce the power of the male hero.

Beyond the realm of the cinema, other public male figures have shown an interest in drag performance as an expression of their masculine power and/or star status.[8] By co-opting the feminine through real or theoretical transvestism, in Suzanne Moore's term a kind of "gender tourism,"[9] the male celebrity is able to reinforce his simultaneous attraction to and dominance over the female spheres of, for example, emotion and

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6 The recent documentary on the depiction of gay characters in film, *The Celluloid Closet*, suggests a comparison between Hollywood's easy acceptance of the heroic bisexual female wearing men's clothing in 1930s movies and the current popularity of transvestite roles for men. See Richard Corliss' review, "The Final Frontier," *Time*, March 11, 1996.66–68.

7 See note 2.

8 See Moore 1988.185 for a similar concern about the underlying currents of masculine power evinced by the appropriation of the feminine by male theorists: "In deciphering the language of the 'other' and then claiming it for themselves, these theoretical drag queens don the trappings of femininity for a night on the town without so much as a glance back at the poor woman whose clothes they have stolen."

9 Moore 1988.167.

sexual objectification.[10] This can be compelling for those male personalities seeking to work their influence over pop culture, where images of simulated femininity are displayed as symbols of privilege and priority, or even flaunted as trophies of commercial success. Two widely divergent examples will suggest the variety of ways in which such gender appropriation can be employed. First, recent criticism has begun to unravel the importance of drag as a context and theme for the artist Andy Warhol, in particular tracing how the feminized surface of his work provided him with the necessary "cover," that is, a survival strategy with which to negotiate a homophobic society:[11] Warhol's "relatively 'straight assumption' to the art world pantheon,"[12] refracted through the protective aesthetic of drag, allowed him to occupy a position of undeniable authority and privilege in Pop high culture. Second, that perennial bad boy of the NBA, Dennis Rodman, considered one of the best rebounders ever in the history of basketball, has explicitly stated that his experimentation with transvestite behavior grants him a freedom and power over his competitors on the court, whose ability to play the game is impaired by their confusion and concern about Rodman's unpredictability.[13] The veneer of drag shields and thereby heightens his athletic advantage, as well as his status as an icon of supercharged popular masculinity. These two examples indicate that powerful male figures can protect and enhance their positions through their use of drag performance or, as Rowena Chapman puts it, "the dominant culture can absorb what were previously considered deviant forms of behavior."[14] Such masculinity appears beyond deviancy and even seems to take pleasure in the assertion of privilege through the elision of male identity by the layering of feminine dress and gesture. Yet the secure reality of maleness must re-emerge as an expected product of the transvestism for the episode of drag to be considered a success.[15]

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10 Chapman 1988.240–41 explores the mechanism by which the heterosexual male cross-dresser "hijacks" femininity, and how such transvestism enlarges the scope of behavior appropriate for men, "thus strengthening their position."

11 See especially Merck 1996.224–37 for an analysis of the interplay between the ideas of drag and work in Warhol's 1980 silkscreen *Diamond Dust Shoes*.

12 Doyle, Flatley, and Muñoz 1996.4.

13 Rodman 1996.168: "They look across at me with my painted fingernails and it gives me another psychological edge; now they're looking at me like they really don't know what I'm going to do next."

14 Chapman 1988.241.

15 See Moore 1988.188 for a discussion of how some films portray the unsettling, and thus necessarily temporary, pleasure derived from the insecurity of gender identity.

Classical antiquity affords numerous contexts in which to explore the blurring of boundaries between gender identities, wherein the fiction of femininity enacted by means of cross-dressing is ultimately intended to reassert the reality of maleness. In ancient Greek puberty rituals, the principle of gender inversion through transvestism is often called into play to symbolize the adolescent's transition into adulthood.[16] That the evidence for such rites is better attested for boys than for girls indicates the greater emphasis Greek society placed on the production of male citizens.[17] After a temporary period of wearing women's clothing, the young male initiate, in the climax of the ritual, is invited to enter into the domain of masculinity and accept the civic responsibilities of manhood.[18] The Greek sources also record that gender reversal was a feature of some wedding ceremonies, where it was customary for both bride and groom temporarily to assume the dress and activities of the opposite sex.[19] Such nuptial transvestism would have served to mark the individual's complete separation from a previously indistinct gender identity and his/her successful passage to the fixed masculine and feminine roles of husband or wife. Here again, the evidence tends to focus on the figure of the cross-dressed groom, as Vidal-Naquet has shown, to "dramatiz[e] the fact that a young man had reached the age of virility and marriage."[20] These rituals invoke the symbolic power of cross-gender impersonation to effect a simultaneous expansion and definition of the subject's own sexual identity. A similar act of gender confiscation took place within the social and artistic formalities of the classical Greek theater, by which male actors in transvestite gear played all the female roles: the "rules" of gender mimesis would have allowed the dramatic productions to retain their institutionalized masculine character in a festival celebrated by and aimed primarily at the entertainment of citizen men.[21]

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16 On gender inversion in Greek initiation rites, see Delcourt 1961.5–6; on transvestism in such rituals, see Loraux 1990.34.

17 See Zeitlin 1996a.344–45. For the exclusivity of the male initiation sphere, see Detienne 1979.24–26.

18 On the highly eroticized quality of some Greek puberty rituals for boys, and its relationship to the origins of classical pederasty, see Cantarella 1992.6–8.

19 Some examples of cross-dressing in Greek marriage customs are given by Bullough and Bullough 1993.26.

20 Vidal-Naquet 1986.116. For the "law of symmetrical inversion" applied to the bride in Spartan and Argive wedding rites, see Vidal-Naquet 1986.114; on the unusual prominence of women in Spartan ritual experience, see Vidal-Naquet 1986.150–51.

21 For the City Dionysia as an almost entirely all-male event, see Zeitlin 1996a.343 n. 5. On the power of transvestism in the Greek drama, see also Zeitlin 1996b.385: "From a

At Rome, the interest in cross-gender performance and transvestite experience continues unabated, as is demonstrated by the ubiquity of the topic in Latin authors and in Roman art.[22] And yet the Romans' fascination with sexual category-confusion may go beyond the structuralist model of ritual/cultic inversion exhibited in the Greek texts: theirs was an obsession that reflected a deeply ingrained appreciation for, and strong attraction to, the unresolvable tensions in Roman society between difference and sameness, or, as Carlin Barton puts it, between "distinction and identity . . . hierarchy and collectivity."[23] Barton suggests that the Romans recognized the social and psychological imperatives of role-playing and reversals, of "the Saturnalian theater," as a remedy to assuage the envy rampant along the vertical axes of their culture's severely articulated and fractured hierarchical structures of gender and class.[24] Excitement and pleasure were the rewards derived from such blurring of boundaries, and they led the "affect-hungry"[25] Romans to ever more dangerous and even shameful attempts to break the barriers of their own identities through impersonation and cross-dressing.[26] The importance of role-playing in Roman society, of the "festive" co-existing in a mirror image with the

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theatrical perspective, to take the role of the opposite sex is not simply a question of loss. Rather, it invests the wearer with the power of appropriation, of a supplement to what one already has." See also Wyke 1995.123 on "the discursive mastery of the male voice" even when playing the female role.

22 The Roman male's fascination with playing the female has recently become the object of much critical attention. For analyses of male authors' feminine role-playing in Latin poetry, see Skinner 1993.109–21 and Wyke 1995.115–24. For the depiction of "feminized male forms" in Roman erotic painting, see Fredrick 1995.279–85.

23 Barton 1993.177: "The reversal and obliteration of distinctions formed as vital a part of a system as the distinctions."

24 On role-playing and the transgression of hierarchies, see Barton 1993.130–38; on mimicry as a cure for envy, see especially 1993.140–44. Barton 1993.136: "The Roman fascination with the monster, with the actor, with gambling and spectacles, often used as evidence (by ancients as well as moderns) of the moral laxness of the culture, are at the same time evidence for its excessive rigidity and inflexibility." For the Roman attitude towards hierarchy implicit in the literary depiction of rape, and the paradoxical beauty and debasement of the victim, see Richlin 1992.162–78.

25 Barton 1993.65.

26 On the varieties of Roman desire for "the impossible," see Barton 1993.49–65. On the pleasure mixed with horror experienced by the Roman gaze confronted by "unstable boundaries" in visual art, see Fredrick 1995.284–85. For some (in)famous examples of the transvestism of specific emperors, see Bullough and Bullough 1993.38–39. On the legal interpretation in the later Empire of transvestism, "a private habit which enjoyed relatively wide social toleration," see Cantarella 1992.177–79.

"serious," was not merely to reinforce the Roman sense of order through the principle of inversion, but to establish the balanced poles of a reality across which movement was not only possible, but crucial:[27] "without fictions there can be no reality."[28] Thus, while in Greek society the figure of the transvestite can represent a moment of fabrication necessary to effect a transition to a state of reasserted sexual reality, in Roman society, the transvestite, as the negotiator of boundaries, can be seen as an essential agent in the formation and organization of gender identity itself.[29]

In Greco-Roman mythology, there are two prominent tales that explore the representation of the male über-hero cross-dressed in feminine garb.[30] This paper will focus on the story of Herakles in servitude to the Lydian queen Omphale and the tale of Achilles hidden by his mother Thetis among the daughters of Lycomedes. These stories present Greek heroes of strictly canonical masculinity, the pan-Hellenic macho man, Herakles, and the greatest and best warrior of the Trojan War, Achilles, both of whom experience their episodes of transvestism in the context of social necessity: each hero is compelled to cross-dress by the will of a powerful (royal or divine) woman. Such a situation of d(u)ress corresponds to what Garber calls "the progress narrative,"[31] in which the subject is forced, and thus characterized as unwilling, to assume the disguise of the opposite sex as a functional strategy to satisfy some real personal need or obtain some goal (like Dorothy's acting job in *Tootsie*).[32] In the cases cited by Garber, especially from literature and films, however, she notes that the cross-dressers' assumed identities cause them to repress their sexual desires at least until they can "unmask":[33] even Chi-Chi, in an uncharacteristically

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27 Barton 1993.181: "The greatest threat to social and psychological life is from the absolute, from the end or absence of mobile relations between sets of assumptions."

28 Barton 1993.137.

29 See Wyke 1995.125 on how, in Propertian elegy, the author's appropriation of the feminine role, a kind of literary transvestism, becomes "a social technology through which gender was constructed at Rome."

30 Bullough and Bullough 1993.31 provide a useful review of cross-dressing themes in mythology, noting that such elements in traditional Greek tales "stress the dual nature of their strongest and greatest heroes."

31 Garber 1992.8, 67–71.

32 Garber 1992.71 goes on to analyze the problematic nature of the "progress narrative" read outside of strictly literary contexts, where, she contends, cultural theorists tend to ignore "the extraordinary power of the transvestite as an aesthetic and psychological agent of destabilization, desire and fantasy."

33 Garber 1992.70.

selfless act, gives up her boyfriend to the "real" girl in the film *To Wong Foo*. Yet we will see how this is certainly untrue in the literary myths of Herakles and Achilles, who both vigorously exercise their heterosexual passions in scenes of erotic play and who both father healthy sons while cross-dressed, implying that the heroes' sexual power is not diminished, but rather paradoxically heightened by the imposition of the female disguise.[34] After Herakles' and Achilles' periods of obligatory transvestism, a temporary period of "carnivalization,"[35] we will see how each hero is disrobed and, in a sense, reborn to his new, super-masculinized self.[36] Each overcomes the strictures of the female bond, breaking free both from an actual woman and the clothing she forced him to wear, and then, having cross-dressed for success, each goes on to fulfil his heroic male purpose.[37] In other words, if the hero's encounter with the feminine is the ultimate danger, the escape from her is the ultimate test of his performative excellence and proves his "risk-taking manliness."[38]

The story of Herakles' servitude to the Lydian queen Omphale has often been dismissed by critics determined to preserve and maintain the masculinity of the great hero: the story has been denigrated as an aberrant

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34 The image of the sexual superstar is also at work in the manufacture of the Dennis Rodman mystique: he devotes an entire chapter of his book to his love affair with Madonna, "the most famous woman in the world, the diva of sex." See Rodman 1996.181–206. Cantarella 1992.156–59 explores the paradox in the public sexual image of Julius Caesar, "a man who was such a he-man that he could afford to turn passive once in a while." For the notion of competitive sexuality as a measure of masculine success, see Gilmore 1990.40–42.

35 Garber 1992.70 uses the term "carnivalization" to describe the temporary inversion of gender through cross-dressing, where the "carnival" is seen as a privileged site controlled by those empowered to regulate its performance; she thereby extends a critique of Bakhtin's theory of comic reversal and the "carnivalesque" potential of lower and upper bodily inversion: see Bakhtin 1984, esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

36 For the notion of a "pressured" manhood, a "critical threshold that boys must pass through testing," see Gilmore 1990.9–12.

37 There may be an instructive parallel in the story of Odysseus' seven-year stay on the island of the goddess Kalypso depicted in *Odyssey* 5: although Odysseus does not explicitly wear women's clothing, he is unquestionably held back from his heroic journey by the goddess' all-encompassing female sexuality, a situation that requires the intervention of the male/father principles, Zeus and Hermes. For Kalypso as "she who hides," see Boedeker 1974.39; for the *Odyssey* as a model of Mediterranean "dramatized manliness," see Gilmore 1990.37–38.

38 Gilmore 1990.36–37 traces the male impulse towards risk-taking back to the Greek "agonistic view of life."

Hellenistic addition to the saga.[39] Other critics have been eager to divest the tale of its cross-dressing theme, claiming that the episode where hero and queen exchange clothing as a type of sexual foreplay was an invention or exaggeration of the priapic Roman love poets. But such attempts to obelize this part of the Herakles story have recently been upset by the reinterpretation of a number of images from Greek vase-paintings that suggests that the transvestism of the hero was well known even in the classical period.[40] The frequent depictions of the cross-dressed Hercules in Roman wall painting and sculpture indicate the certain popularity of the theme during Roman times and may also attest to the presence of the image of the hero in drag in the visual art of the Hellenistic period.[41] The literary sources for the episode in Lydia range from some titles and fragments from fifth- and fourth-century Athenian drama, to later historians and mythographers; and the episode finds its most striking contours in the work of Ovid who, like his audience, hungry for the pleasures of boundary-crossing entertainment, could not pass up a story of such juicy metamorphic proportions.[42] Thus, it is hardly possible to deny the importance of the transvestism theme in the hero's tale.

The outlines of the story remain fairly static throughout antiquity with only minor plot variations: the hero Herakles is sold as a slave to Omphale, queen of Lydia, a wealthy and luxury-loving country, for a period of one to three years in order to expiate the crime of murder, to cure his

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39 The debate over the date and significance of the Omphale episode in the myth of Herakles is summarized by Loraux 1990.35–36.

40 Loraux 1990.35 n. 56.

41 See Kampen 1996.233–46 for reproductions of the Hercules/Omphale story in Roman art; for the importance of the theme of gender destabilization in the Roman visual and cultic tradition, see especially Kampen 1996.243–44: "Hercules and Omphale tell stories that challenge as well as reinforce normative sexual and gender relations." On the familiarity of the image in Roman art, see also Galinsky 1972.156.

42 Ovid's fascination with the erotics of metamorphosis permeates his work. Some examples include the story of the boy Hermaphroditus raped by the naiad Salmacis (*Met.* 4.285–388), where during sex the couple is transformed into a single bisexual hermaphrodite; the tale of the girl Iphis, changed into a boy in order to marry her beloved Ianthe (*Met*. 9.704–97); and stories where a male cross-dresses for sexual conquest: Jupiter rapes Callisto while disguised as Diana (*Met*. 2.401–95) and Vertumnus (god of the "changing" year), dressed as an old woman, wins the love of Pomona (*Met*. 14.623–97). Note that the cross-dressed character played by Jack Lemmon in *Some Like It Hot* is named Daphne, no doubt after one of Ovid's more memorable transformational heroines (*Met.* 1.452–567).

madness, or to pay for stealing the tripod from Delphi. Omphale has him do some clean-up jobs around her realm appropriate to his status as a powerful fighter, such as ridding the area of various beasts and ruffians: it was, in fact, a type of community-service sentence. At home in the palace, she has him dress in exotic female clothing and perform women's work, in particular the spinning of wool: the ancient sources delight in emphasizing the juxtaposition of the huge rough hands of the hero on the fine soft thread.[43] Sometimes Omphale herself puts on Herakles' lion skin, the defining vestment of the hero, in an inversion that is more than just symbolic, since the queen, during his stay in Lydia, is dominant over the hero, as he is usually dominant over his foes. She represents the transition or middle of his heroic life, the *omphalos*, or "belly-button" through which he must be reborn on his journey to immortality.[44] As such, she is as much a "mother figure" to Herakles as Thetis is a real mother to Achilles, and her (pro)creative power in the hero's life is strongly inscribed.[45] This transvestite role-reversal does nothing to strip the hero of his masculine strength, however, as he accomplishes all the different tasks set before him; nor does it decrease his sexual potency, as he impregnates Omphale with a son, Lamos. After his term of servitude is over, Herakles proceeds to the next stage of his destiny: becoming a god.

It is the ritual of cross-dressing that marks this transitional passage from human to divine in Herakles' life, just as many rites of passage in the Greek world, including ephebic and nuptial rituals, often utilize the principle of inversion to symbolize the moment of initiation to a changed status:[46] from boy to man, or as here, from hero to god. As Loraux

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43 See especially the reference to Hercules' wool-working in Ovid *Heroides* 9.79–80 and *Ars Am.* 2.215–22; also at Propertius 4.9.47–50. An interesting echo of the image can be found in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (chapter 11), in the scene where the cross-dressed Huck is found out by his obvious ineptness with a needle and thread.

44 The play on the words *Omphale/omphalos* is already noted in the classical authors. See Loraux 1990.25 for an assessment of the importance of physical imagery in the myths of Herakles: "The life of Herakles is turned into a journey across the female body."

45 See Gilmore 1990.26–29 for the significance of the mother-figure in developmental models of manhood, as the negative pole from which the young boy must separate himself.

46 See Detienne 1979.24–25; Vidal-Naquet 1986.106–07, 112–17, 137–52. On cross-dressing in ancient initiation rituals, see Bullough and Bullough 1993.25–30. On the difficulty of the transition from *paideia* to young manhood and its sexual implications, see Cantarella 1992.31–32: "the attainment of adult status meant a change in sexual role, from the passive to the active."

demonstrates,[47] throughout his career as a hero, Herakles experiences a complex and suggestive relationship with items of clothing, especially the *peplos* or woman's dress: for example, his own mentor, the goddess Athena, gives him a *peplos* to wear when he is not fighting, and the gift from his wife Deianira is a *peplos* smeared with the erotic magic that finally kills him. Loraux argues that Herakles' occasional wearing of female clothing admits a temporary inversion that simultaneously dramatizes the balance of masculine and feminine within the hero: "The *peplos* of Herakles is at once a revelation of weakness hidden in strength and a chance for strength to circumscribe the feminine contained within it."[48] In Garber's terms, Herakles is experiencing a "category crisis"; he is negotiating "a borderline that becomes permeable"[49] somewhere in that indistinct liminal space between the poles of male and female. I suggest that the episode of cross-dressing in the palace of Omphale is an evolutionary moment in the life of Herakles that serves primarily a conservative function: to reaffirm his high-octane masculine sexuality, the power of which the transvestism briefly blurs, only to allow it to re-emerge with increased vitality as he crosses back over the border to maleness.[50] Moreover, Herakles' movement across sexual boundaries also delineates and confirms the existence of that space, thereby underscoring the reality of male and female gender differentiation: the image of the hero in drag, while at the same time vulnerable and invincible, conveys a "phallic message."[51]

The extant sources from the fifth century b.c. that mention the episode in Lydia include the tragic play *The Women of Trachis (Trachiniae)* of Sophocles, where the herald Lichas briefly describes to Deianira the enslavement of Herakles in Omphale's realm (248–53). Lichas, however, is represented as being very reluctant to speak of the servitude, so disgraceful to his master, and it is perhaps not surprising that there is no hint of the

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47 Loraux 1990.33–40.

48 Loraux 1990.39.

49 Garber 1992.16.

50 Ferris 1993.18 poses the question essential to the present inquiry, that is, whether the transvestite appropriates the female image in order to validate his own male power and authority: "[D]oes cross-dressing undermine conventional masculine and feminine behavior or does in reinscribe the binary, the 'truth' of masculinity and femininity?"

51 Although Fredrick 1995.279–80 argues that the message of Roman domestic painting is not always about power, he points out that the privileged male image can sometimes deliver its "message of power" paradoxically from a position of extreme sexual defenselessness or even passivity.

transvestism.[52] We know that Kratinos, the fifth-century comic playwright who was one of Aristophanes' greatest rivals, wrote a comedy called *Omphale*: in the fragment that remains (fr. 177 Kock), Kratinos seems to state that drinking is a better occupation than performing labors. In the fragments of a satyr play entitled *Omphale* by the Athenian dramatist Ion, also active in the mid-fifth century, we see more of the story developed.[53] The play takes place in front of Omphale's palace, where one of the characters addresses the god Hermes: some of the later sources have Hermes (Mercury, in the Roman authors) escort Herakles to Lydia. There are some geographical place names, perhaps indicating the route by which the hero travelled east (frs. 18–19). Then a chorus of Lydian women comes onstage, calling for goblets of wine (fr. 20): the bacchic ambience of feasting and revelry continues throughout the fragments. Next, Herakles tells them he must be there for one year (fr. 21). When Omphale herself speaks, she seems to command the women to grant a special welcome to Herakles (fr. 22):

> ἀλλ᾽ εἶα, Λυδαὶ ψάλτριαι, παλαιθέτων
> ὕμνων ἀοιδοί, τὸν ξένον κοσμήσατε.
>
> But come, Lydian women playing your harps,
> singers of the hymns made long ago,
> dress up the stranger.

The chorus appears happy to acquiesce to her order (frs. 24 and 25):

> βακκάρεις δὲ καὶ μύρα
> καὶ Σαρδιανὸν κόσμον εἰδέναι χροὸς
> ἄμεινον ἢ τὸν Πέλοπος ἐν νήσῳ τρόπον.
>
> unguent and oils
> and to know (how to wear) Lydian dress for the skin
> is better than the gear on the island of Pelops.

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52 See Easterling 1982.110 for Lichas' defensive posture.

53 The *Omphale* fragments are numbered 18–33 in Nauck 1964. On the reputation of Ion of Chios, see Lesky 1983.394–95.

καὶ τὴν μέλαιναν στίμμιν ὀμματογράφον.

and the black kohl to line your eyes.

Note the use of foreign words, like βακκάρεις "unguent" (fr. 24.1) and στίμμις "kohl powder" (fr. 25) to heighten the sense of exotic luxury surrounding the Lydian court. Although the lines are fragmentary, they seem to represent the costuming of Herakles as a woman, which would be an appropriate scene for the beginning of a satyr play: perhaps the drama would then have developed the scenes of Herakles doing women's work or celebrating a Dionysian ritual (the word *thiasos* "ritual band" occurs in fragment 32).[54] The figure of Omphale is prominent as the initiator of the transvestism. More significantly, what is indicated in these lines from fifth-century classical Attic drama refutes those critics who wish to make the episode a late or "Hellenistic" addition to the Herakles saga.

In fact, later sources for the servitude in Lydia often omit the element of cross-dressing altogether. Diodorus Siculus, in his *Biblioteca*, a synchronous account of Greek and Roman history written in the mid-first century b.c., describes the episode without the transvestism (4.31.5–8): Herakles willingly sells himself to Omphale, here an unmarried queen, to cure the disease that has befallen him as a result of the murder of Iphitus, son of a local king, Eurytus. As her slave, he performs many heroic acts in Lydia, and, upon seeing his valor, Omphale frees him and bears him a son.[55] Similarly, Apollodorus, in his *Library of Greek Mythology* written in the first century a.d., does not relate the cross-dressing part of the story: in his account (2.6.3), Herakles, to raise money to pay for the murder of Iphitus, is sold by Hermes to Omphale, heir to the throne of Lydia after the death of her husband Tmolus. Apollodorus stresses the number and danger of the deeds the hero accomplishes for the queen.[56] Hyginus, in his *Fabulae* (32), dated probably to the second century a.d., summarizes the whole episode in one sentence: because of the murder of his wife Megara and the

54 For the role of transvestism and the feminized persona in Dionysiac ritual and in Greek drama, see Zeitlin 1996a *passim*.

55 According to Diodorus, Herakles had already fathered a son Kleodaios by a slave woman (4.31.8).

56 During this period, in Apollodorus' account, Herakles finds and buries the body of Icarus, whose fall from the sky represents one of the starkest examples in Greek mythology of the failure of the adolescent's ephebic transition to manhood.

theft of the tripod from Delphi, Mercury gives Hercules to Omphale as a slave. All of these authors shy away from the tale of Herakles in feminine dress, although, as we have seen, the literary tradition for this story existed at least as early as the mid-fifth century b.c. These texts instead emphasize the hero's strength and courage—and sexual mastery—even within the confines of his servitude.

Never one to hesitate in the face of unusual erotic themes, the Roman poet Ovid explicitly develops the transvestism motif in the myth of Hercules. This he does twice in the corpus of his work, first in one of the *Heroides*, literary letters from famous ancient heroines, then again later in the *Fasti*, a kind of verse calendar, suggesting Ovid's attraction to the more complete, complex, and definitely better accessorized version of the hero's tale. The serious image of Hercules as the great warrior and civilizer had already taken on tremendous importance and popularity in Roman literature, and, as Karl Galinsky has pointed out, this depiction was almost entirely free of the burlesque treatment suffered by the "drunken Herakles" in the Greek comic theater.[57] Since the Roman hero Hercules had now assumed the respectable contours of Stoic *gravitas*, during Augustus' reign the Latin authors, especially Vergil, began to deploy the hero as a figure for the *princeps* in their poetry: the association was based mainly on Hercules' role as peace-maker and bringer of civilization, as well as his ultimate deification after his many labors.[58] The application of Herculean allusions to Augustus becomes so natural in this period that the occasional derisory reference to the hero, in particular in Roman elegy, obviously capitalizes on the association and is largely due to "anti-Augustanism and literary parody rather than a mockery of the hero himself."[59] Thus, to represent Hercules in a ridiculous posture is to undermine a conspicuous Augustan symbol. This may form part of the authorial motivation of Ovid, "the most prominent non-Augustan poet at Augustus' time,"[60] when he highlights the humorous

57 See Galinsky 1972.126–30 for the absorption of the Greek Herakles into the Roman literary tradition.

58 On the association of Hercules with Augustus, and especially Vergil's use of the connection refracted through his portrayal of the hero Aeneas, see Galinsky 1972.131–46.

59 Galinsky 1972.128. On the Roman elegiac poets' "refus[al] to take the Augustan symbols seriously," see Galinsky 1972.153–60.

60 Galinsky 1972.156. On Ovid's consistently mocking tone, see Williams 1983.119.

episode of the cross-dressed Hercules as slave to the Lydian queen.[61] So, we can imagine, although the audience for Ovid's daring and sometimes politically subversive poetry might have responded enthusiastically to his rendering of the hero's sexual role-reversal, the emperor would surely not have been amused and perhaps may have even been insulted.[62]

Yet Ovid's "anti-Augustan," poet-as-rebel stance provides only a partial explanation for his interest in the figure of the transvestite Hercules. Ovid twice represents the hero in this potentially damaging and emasculating scenario, but in both poems, as I will show, through the trope of cross-gender impersonation, Ovid actually reasserts Hercules' male strength, sexuality, and aggression. Critics of the genre of Roman elegy have noted the distinct and pervasive element of "feminization" in the poetic persona of the male narrator and have elucidated its role in the disturbance and destabilization of traditional gender categories.[63] Similarly, Ovid's appropriation of feminine dress and behavior for his literary depictions of the enslaved Hercules allows the poet another means by which to interrogate the mysterious space between the poles of gender differentiation. Ovid's own artistic pleasure in creating such a paradoxical image of conquest and submission in a single character cannot be underestimated;[64] however, his investigation of the transvestism theme in the tale of the overtly macho Hercules underscores his goal of destabilizing gender boundaries in order to reinforce the idea of male dominance. As Amy Richlin argues in her

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61 On the use of the Hercules/Omphale paradigm to illustrate elegiac *servitium amoris*, see Galinsky 1972.156 and 165 n. 4. For the representation in elegy of the "unorthodox erotic system" in which the woman is master and the man is slave, see Wyke 1995.116–17.

62 Galinsky 1972.155 suggests that the transvestism motif in elegy may have reminded Romans of the Bona Dea scandal of 55 b.c., when Clodius, disguised as a woman, infiltrated the exclusively female ritual presided over by Julius Caesar's wife, Pompeia, later famously divorced. Such an evocation, while providing a *frisson* of naughty pleasure to some, may not have pleased Caesar's heir. On Augustus' own "sexually disconcerting side," see Cantarella 1992.158–60.

63 Most recently, Wyke 1995.110–28 offers an overview of the criticism in this area. On the destabilization of gender categories in the elegiac texts and its relationship to other hierarchical modes of difference and power, see especially Wyke 1995.115–21.

64 Skinner 1993.120–21 proposes that Roman male authors enjoyed, and may have been psychologically compelled to seek, the confusion of identity within female sensibility: "The craving to undergo such a disorienting emotional experience, if only temporarily and artificially, was, I believe, a basic component in the construction of ancient male sexuality."

analysis of power dynamics in Ovid's representation of rape, "the cross-sex fantasy model offers no exit from gender hierarchy."[65]

In fact, in the *Heroides*, Ovid goes one step further in his effort to renegotiate the boundaries of sexual difference, in that the poet himself appropriates the voice and attitude of each of his female speakers.[66] Moreover, in *Heroides* 9, written around 20 b.c., the appearance of Hercules in drag is strikingly paralleled by Ovid's own literary transvestism, as he takes on the role of the hero's abandoned wife. Ovid portrays a distraught Deianira as she addresses her wayward husband, who is dying in the fatal robe she gave him, and as she herself prepares to commit suicide. Deianira laments the many *amours* of Hercules, including his present passion for the girl Iole that has brought them both to ruin, but none causes her so much pain and humiliation as the rumor of his tryst with the Lydian queen, Omphale (53–117). Deianira asks him how he can bear the shocking fact of his role-reversing love affair (101–04):

> haec tu Sidonio potes insignitus amictu
> dicere? non cultu lingua retenta silet?
> se quoque nympha tuis ornavit Iardanis armis
> et tulit a capto nota tropaea viro.
>
> Can you narrate your deeds, all decked out in a Sidonian
> dress? Is your tongue not silenced by your outfit?
> The nymph Omphale has even arrayed herself in your armor,
> and has won famous trophies from her captive man.

The source of Deianira's emotional upset is manifold: that the great Hercules, her husband, was the queen's slave (*monilia*, "necklaces" or "chains" 57); that he wore her luxurious feminine clothing (*gemmas*, "jewels" 60; *mitra*, "headband" 63; *zona*, "belt" 66; *amictu*, "dress" 101),

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65 Richlin 1992.178. Although arguing for the male narrator's possible identification with feminine subjectivity, Skinner 1993.130 n. 81 agrees that "the ancient authors do not reconfigure asymmetrical gender polarities in the process of creating their transvestite plots."

66 On Ovid's rhetorical mastery over the "female" in his poems, see Wyke 1995.113: "When Ovid rereads the elegiac processes of male erotic desire and poetic creativity, the sheer power of the male artist over his created *puella* is rendered totally exposed."

making himself look "just like a sexy girl" (*lascivae more puellae*, 65); that he was forced to do women's toil in the palace (*inter Ioniacas calathum tenuisse puellas diceris*, "they say you held the weaving basket among Ionian girls" 73–74); and that he allowed Omphale to wear his own manly gear (*armis*, "weapons" 103; *leonis vellera*, "lion skin" 111–12; *clava*, "club" 117). Every element of the hero's inversion is present in Ovid's account. Notice how the poet emphasizes the many jarring juxtapositions inherent in the reversed imagery of this scene: gold and gems on the brawny arms of Hercules (59–60), his shaggy curls bound by the hairband (63), the reproaches of his enemies who once feared him (67–72), the hero's calloused fingers on the soft thread (79), his telling of his manly deeds while at leisure in a woman's gown (101–02), and finally, the soft body of Omphale clad in the rough lion's skin (111–12), as the queen temporarily assumes the masculine heroism of Hercules along with his equipment.[67]

But what disturbs Deianira most is the erotic nature of the Lydian rendezvous as she now imagines it. She knows the lovemaking between Hercules and Omphale produced a son (Lamus, 54), and she focuses with a betrayed woman's intensity on the thought of the lovers together in the palace, especially the intimate image of Hercules and Omphale wearing each other's clothes. One does not have to be a Roman to understand the *double entendre* in Deianira's suspicious fascination with the idea of Omphale holding Hercules' "club" (*clava*, 117). In her final outburst of jealousy, Deianira fixes on her husband's heroic energy, his weapons and his emblems, now relinquished to the languid queen who is scarcely strong enough to handle women's work (*ferre gravem lana vix satis apta colum*, 116). Yet Ovid's prolonged description of Hercules' mighty deeds and his successful conquest of numerous foes in this passage only heightens the impression of the hero's strength and virility. Through Omphale's eyes, Deianira has forced us to focus on the image of the reinvigorated, reborn hero as he is about to leave Lydia: when Omphale, dressed in the lion's skin, looks in the mirror (*vidit et in speculo coniugis arma mei*, 118), the reflection she sees is not of her own strength and dominance, but that of the superman Hercules. Just so, the poet in drag is able to advertise his message of masculine power.

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67 Jacobson 1974.240–41 stresses the idea that Omphale has stolen the hero's glory that should rightly belong to Deianira. It is Deianira, after all, who will "dress" Hercules in his final outfit, the poisoned robe.

The collocation of eroticism and male aggression, "where pleasure and violence intersect,"[68] in the transvestite relationship between hero and queen becomes even more explicit in Ovid's version of the tale in the *Fasti* (2.303–58), his aetiological poem about Roman holidays completed shortly before his exile in 8 a.d. To explain why the ithyphallic Faunus[69] hates clothing, Ovid relates "a story full of old-fashioned fun" (*antiqui fabula plena ioci*, 304), describing how the god is inflamed with lust at the sight of Hercules and Omphale. As the two walk together to the Lydian grove of Bacchus, Ovid details the queen's feminine beauty, her long scented hair (*odoratis perfusa capillis*, 309) and the Venus-like glow around her breasts (*aurato conspicienda sinu*, 310).[70] Then, at evening-time, they enter a cave (314–16): the poet emphasizes the liminality and isolation of the natural location, where, as Richlin says, "the circumstances allow license."[71] Ovid plays down the servitude theme, and although Omphale is called "mistress" (*dominae*, 305) and Hercules, like a slave, carries her "parasol" (*umbracula*, 311), this can be interpreted as appropriate amatory language and behavior for an elegiac couple. Inside the cave, Omphale arrays her lover in her own luxurious royal clothing (*cultibus suis*, 318) (319–24):

dat tenuis tunicas Gaetulo murice tinctas,
dat teretem zonam, qua modo cincta fuit.
ventre minor zona est; tunicarum vincla relaxat,
ut posset magnas exseruisse manus.
fregerat armillas non illa ad bracchia factas,
scindebant magni vincula parva pedes.

She gives him thin tunics dyed in Gaetulian purple,
she gives him the soft belt, which was just now around her.
The belt is too small for his gut: he undoes the tunic clasps,
so he can thrust his big hands through.

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68 Richlin 1992.165. On the way Ovid marks some of the rapes in the *Fasti* as "comic relief," see Richlin 1992.169–72.

69 For the Roman poets' identification of Faunus with the Greek Pan, "inveterate pursuer of the nymphs," see Williams 1983.32, 123.

70 Richlin 1992.170 notes the presence of "visual stimulus" in this tale, where the appearance of the female incites the aggressive gaze of the potential rapist.

71 Richlin 1992.170.

He broke the bracelets, not made for those arms,
his big feet split the tiny slippers.

Even as he yields to being dressed up, Hercules' rampant masculinity cannot be contained by the female finery: the belt is too small for his notorious belly (321), his big hands burst through the fine tunic (322), the delicate bracelets crack on his biceps (323), and his big feet tear into her slippers (324). By representing Hercules as a total failure at being *mollis*, Ovid confirms that the power of the male super-hero cannot be weakened by the imposition of a layer of feminized costume. Omphale herself takes up the hero's gear, the big club and lion's skin (*clavamque gravem spoliumque leonis*, 325). With the exchange complete, they drink and feast in a carnival-like atmosphere: yet in ritual preparation to celebrate Bacchus, they refrain from having sex ("they slept apart," *secubuere*, 328), in what Ovid seems to suggest is the exception to their usual practice. But such a scene of sensuous repose invites the interruption of someone's urgent sexual desire (*amor improbus*, 331), and the story continues after nightfall. In comes the god Faunus eager for illicit love (*temerarius adulter*, 335). Bypassing with fear the bristly lion's skin (*hirsuta leonis vellera*, 339–40), in the dark he gropes for the soft female clothing (*velamina tangit mollia*, 343–44), and mounts the figure he thinks is the sleeping Omphale. But Faunus is tricked (*decipitur*, 344) by the cross-dressing, and both he and his huge erection (*tumidum inguen*, 346) are in for a surprise (347–50):

interea tunicas ora subducit ab ima:
horrebant densis aspera crura pilis.
cetera temptantem subito Tirynthius heros
reppulit: e summo decidit ille toro.

Meanwhile he draws up the tunic from its lower edge:
rugged thighs bristled with thick hair.
Before he could try anything, the hero Hercules suddenly
thrust him back: he fell down from the top of the bed.

Faunus lifts the mendacious garment and finds the hairy thighs of our hero (348). Hercules knocks him down with a single forceful blow (349–50), his strength not at all diminished by his transvestite pajamas, and everyone has a good laugh at the horny god's expense (*ridet . . . ridet*, 355–56). This aetiological tale can be interpreted as a warning about the social

problematic inherent in cross-gender performance:[72] stung by the deception, and the disguised but potent fist of Hercules, Faunus orders his devotees to worship him without clothes (357–58). The figure of Faunus can be read as a representation of male lust in its most "primal" state, that is nude, obvious, and easily defeated by a more sophisticated composition of manhood: perhaps Faunus represents an incomplete, unaccessorized Hercules. If so, then the story could also dramatize the difference between the naked sexuality of Faunus, as the spirit of unclothed nature, rude and unadorned, and the sophisticated eroticism of the hero and his royal lover, whose cross-dressing interlude re-enacts the cultural inscription of gender and the social construction of roles in their sexual play. Thus, we see in stages how Hercules' masculine power is increased and rendered a greater threat to Faunus, first by its temporary concealment and then by its unexpected, violent appearance from underneath the female dress. Ovid has again reasserted the dominance of the canonical male hero.

Unlike the story of the transvestite Herakles, the tale in which Achilles' mother Thetis dresses him in her clothes and hides him among the daughters of Lycomedes is not so strenuously avoided by the sources.[73] The second-century a.d. tourist Pausanias, in his *Description of Greece,* tells of a painting by the eminent artist Polygnotos set up in the entryway to the Athenian Acropolis depicting "Achilles living in Scyros with the maidens" (1.22.6).[74] The Scyrian episode was also popular in Roman wall painting in depictions that presented both Achilles' rape of Deidamia while still in female disguise and the moment of the hero's discovery, literally his unveiling, by the Greek captains.[75] This receptive, even celebratory, reaction to the hero's brush with glamour may reflect the ancient attitude towards transvestism as an acceptable way of marking the child's ritual

72 The historical interpretation of transvestism as dangerous to the social order is discussed by Bullough and Bullough 1993.113–44.

73 A curious modern reference to this myth occurs in Bob Dylan's song "Temporary Like Achilles" (from the 1966 album *Blonde on Blonde*), where the song's lyrics imply that hidden masculine aggression is a feature of the image of the cross-dressed ancient hero.

74 Pausanias, however, notes with approval that Homer omits the tale of Achilles' youthful transvestism, "that act so crude" (1.22.6).

75 On the depiction of the transvestite Achilles' rape of Deidamia among other scenes of temporarily reversed sex roles in the House of the Vettii, see Fredrick 1995.280–82. For a comparison of two images of Achilles' unmasking from the House of the Dioscuri and a smaller Pompeian house (IX 5, 2), see Ling 1991.125, 132–34.

passage to adulthood, as in the Athenian ritual of the Oschophoria.[76] The fact that the cross-dressing episode on the island of Scyros takes place during the adolescence of Achilles seems to explain its greater palatability to our sources, some of the very same authors who were squeamish about the idea of a fully adult Herakles in drag. The narrative of Achilles on the island of Scyros retains this initiatory structure and significance in most of its retellings: the emphasis in the different accounts is on the sexual initiation of the adolescent Achilles, who learns to express erotic desire (often violently) while in the company of pubescent girls, and on the integrity of Achilles' young manhood, so strong as it matures that it inevitably breaks free of any feminine bonds. This pattern of transition from boy to man-hero is paradoxically marked by a reversal of gender categories, through the wearing of female clothing, that cloaks Achilles' virility, like a concealed danger, until it is ready to emerge with new-found power.[77]

Since the ancient sources on the hero's early life are more faithful about recording the episode, the details vary only slightly. The goddess Thetis discovers that her young son Achilles is fated to fight and die in the Trojan War. So she takes him from his tutor, the centaur Chiron, to the island of Scyros, and asks the king, Lycomedes, to hide him among the maidens of his court. Thetis has already disguised the boy in her clothing and tells Lycomedes that s/he is Achilles' sister, in some sources named Pyrrha.[78] How does Thetis get Achilles to accede to such a ruse? Achilles has seen and fallen in love with Lycomedes' daughter, the beautiful Deidamia: most of the accounts focus on the hero's desire for the girl in order to explain his motivation for the female costume, a disguise that only heightens his masculine sexual power by letting him appear harmless. Achilles and Deidamia become lovers, and a son is born in secret. Meanwhile, the Greek leaders have heard of the young hero raised in

76 See Vidal-Naquet 1986.114–17 on the Oschophoria and other initiation rites involving transvestism. For the parallel of the ephebic Theseus wearing a long robe (Pausanias 1.19.1), see Loraux 1990.34.

77 Fredrick 1995.281 notes that the Pompeian images of mythological boundary crossing, including those of Achilles on Scyros, "feature a veil or masquerade whose violation marks the critical moment."

78 For example, Hyginus (*Fabulae* 96) tells how the Scyrian maidens named him Pyrrha "because he had tawny hair and, in Greek, a redhead is called *pyrrhos*."

Chiron's lair and decide that Achilles must join the expedition to Troy. On a tip, Odysseus/Ulysses leads the search party to Scyros, where he and Diomedes set a trap for our cross-dressed hero. The Greek chiefs set out gifts for the Scyrian maidens, often described as bacchic implements, *thyrsoi* and tambourines and yellow dresses, symbols of the worship of the effeminate god of wine, Bacchus.[79] Among the gifts, Odysseus places a recently bloodied spear and a brilliant shield to attract the hidden masculine valor of Achilles. At the moment the youth sees the armor, Odysseus has one of his men sound a trumpet blast: as if wakened from hypnosis by the noise, Achilles leaps forward and grabs the weapons, proving that his genetically-encoded male lust for battle and glory has superseded his softer desire for all things feminine.[80] After the stay inside the female cocoon of Scyros, the hero, reborn and newly-masculinized, is ready for war. The story suggests both the unstable nature of the transvestite and the cross-category progress of initiation: from female to male, from dresses to armor, from the cunning agency of Thetis to the superior trick of Odysseus, from the delicate company of the daughters of Lycomedes to the hero's rightful place among the warriors of Greece. The cross-dressed male, once divested of his disguise, Ferris argues, "gets to step back into a patriarchal world that supports and elevates him for his maleness."[81] Achilles can now fulfill his destiny.

Although Homer never mentions the sojourn on Scyros, the story seems to have been known in the fifth century as there are a few fragments of a play called the *Scyrians* by Euripides and Sophocles wrote a tragedy with the same title.[82] From the Hellenistic period, a fragment survives from a shepherd mime attributed to Bion of Smyrna, probably written in the late second or early first century b.c.[83] Myrson, one of the shepherds, asks the other, Lycidas, to sing the tale of Achilles and Deidamia, "that sweet and

79 See especially Statius' account in the *Achilleid* (1.849–50); and compare the bacchic ambience of "festive" inversion present in Ovid's tale of Hercules and Omphale in the *Fasti* (2.313–18).

80 Vidal-Naquet 1986.116 says Achilles is "unable to control himself at the sight of a weapon."

81 Ferris 1993.13.

82 On the love story in Euripides' *Scyrioi* (fr. 682–86 Nauck), see Lesky 1983.240; that the Sophoclean play probably dealt with Odysseus' mission to take Neoptolemos to Troy, see Lesky 1983.186.

83 For the eroticism in Bion's verse, see Halperin 1983.130–31.

enviable Scyrian love-story" (Σκύριον ὦ Λυκίδα ζαλώμενον ἀδὺν ἔρωτα, 5). From the beginning, the mime emphasizes the erotic agency of Achilles (the goddess Thetis is never mentioned) in seeking to initiate a sexual encounter with Deidamia. The hero purposefully uses his feminine disguise to enter the girls' group undetected and to seduce the Scyrian maiden ("he falsified his form," ἐψεύσατο μορφάν, 7). We might compare the role of Euripides' cross-dressed kinsman, Mnesilochos, moving among the women celebrating the all-female festival in Aristophanes' comic play *Thesmophoriazusae*, where the tragedian plots to infiltrate the women's ranks with the goal of defusing their power.[84] Similarly, in Bion's verse, Achilles has the specific objective of amatory conquest in mind when he performs his transvestite deception on Scyros (15–17):

> λάνθανε δ᾽ ἐν κώραις Λυκομηδίσι μοῦνος Ἀχιλλεύς,
> εἴρια δ᾽ ἀνθ᾽ ὅπλων ἐδιδάσκετο, καὶ χερὶ λευκᾷ
> παρθενικὸν κόπον εἶχεν, ἐφαίνετο δ᾽ ἠΰτε κώρα·
>
> Achilles alone hid among the daughters of Lycomedes,
> and instead of weapons he learned wools, and with pale hand
> he did girlish work, and he looked just like a girl.

Bion describes in detail the visual paradox implicit in the fairy-tale beauty of the boy in his veil (καλύπτρᾳ, 20): his hands are girlishly white (χερὶ λευκᾷ, 16), blush flowers on his snow-white cheeks (ἄνθος χιονέαις πόρφυρε παρηίσι, 18–19), and he walks "the walk of a girl" (τὸ βάδισμα παρθενικῆς ἐβάδιζε, 19–20).[85] Yet underneath the feminine guise he has a "man's spirit" and a "man's sexual desire" (θυμὸν δ᾽ ἀνέρος εἶχε, καὶ ἀνέρος εἶχεν ἔρωτα, 21). It is this growing masculine impulse that drives Achilles to pursue Deidamia with persistent attentions from sunup to sundown (22–26) and even to cajole her into going to bed with him "in a shared sleep" (κοινὸν ἐς ὕπνον, 26). Although the mime breaks off during Achilles' speech (after line 31), the fragment reveals how the

84 See Zeitlin 1996b.378–86 for an analysis of the transvestism in this play as the male characters' tool for exercising mastery over the women.

85 Achilles' pretty appearance here is reminiscent of descriptions of the *pais kalos* in Greek erotic poetry; on the feminine beauty of the boy as object of sexual desire, see Cantarella 1992.16, 37–41.

young hero begins to obtain sexual power by the pretense of innocuousness and how the gender reversal highlights this process of transition to and acquisition of dominance. There is little doubt but that the young hero will attain his goal of sexual conquest by means of his temporary transvestism.

Later accounts not only emphasize the successful outcome of the episode of gender inversion on Scyros, but also the irrepressible development of Achilles' manhood within the context of such a unique challenge to the definition of his masculinity. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (13.162–70), Ulysses enumerates the reasons why he, instead of Ajax, should receive the armor of the hero Achilles, now dead at Troy. Ulysses argues it was he who lured the cross-dressed youth (*virgineos habitus*, 167) with a shield and spear during the stratagem of gifts on Scyros and his words incited Achilles' masculine aggression to emerge from its feminine bonds ("I sent the brave man to do brave deeds," *fortemque ad fortia misi*, 170). Just as Ulysses' trick of discovery matched the cunning of Thetis' act of concealment (*fallacia*, 164), he thinks he should receive Achilles' armor as compensation for those first symbolic weapons he gave to the newly inaugurated hero.[86] Apollodorus, in the narrative of events on Scyros in his *Library of Greek Mythology* (3.13.8),[87] also notes the decisive role of Odysseus in undoing the guile of Thetis. His description suggests that it took a man to elicit the warrior manhood of Achilles hidden in his mother's clothing (κρύψασα ἐσθῆτι γυναικείᾳ). The mythographer records Achilles' success in fathering a son while in transvestite disguise (γίνεται παῖς Πύρρος) and adds some interesting new details to the story: Achilles was nine years old when he went to Scyros (ἐνναετής) and, instead of an array of presents, Odysseus used the blast of a trumpet to unmask the hero (σάλπιγγι). The trumpet blast also figures prominently in Hyginus' account (*Fabulae* 96), where Ulysses' ruse of the gifts (*munera feminea*) manipulates the horn-blast to great effect (*tubicinem iussit canere*). The noise signals the birth of the warrior, like the shout of the goddess Athena bursting from the head of Zeus, as it impels Achilles to strip off his dress (*vestem muliebrem dilaniavit*) and stimulates his manly desire for battle. The image of Odysseus/Ulysses as a "midwife" presiding over the boy Achilles' second birth as a man is prominent in all these texts, emphasizing the initiation

86 For the idea of adult men presiding over the "rebirth" of adolescent boys in puberty rituals and tests of manhood, see Gilmore 1990.12–14.

87 Apollodorus also mentions the story of the young god Dionysus being raised as a girl (3.4.3).

theme through the trope of temporary transvestism. Each of these accounts demonstrates the ritual pattern of inversion and the blurring of sexual boundaries in which a cycle is represented from its beginning in immature boyhood, through a moment of female performance,[88] to its definition and fulfillment in mature masculinity.

The development of the young hero's virility takes on the distinct contours of violence in Ovid's treatment of the myth in the *Ars Amatoria* (1.681–704).[89] In his role as *praeceptor amoris*, Ovid assures his audience that women enjoy it when sexual force is used on them (*grata est vis ista puellis*, 673), even when they say "no"; and to illustrate his lesson about what women really want, Ovid employs the mythological *exemplum* of Achilles' rape of Deidamia on the island of Scyros (*fabula nota quidem*, 681). At his mother's request, Achilles has disguised himself as a girl (*veste virum longa dissimulatus erat*, 690), and Ovid, playing the role of Ulysses the unveiler, urges him to drop the wool-work (*quid tibi cum calathis?* 693) and pick up his spear (*Pelias hasta*, 696). And this is precisely what our hero in drag does (697–98):[90]

> Forte erat in thalamo virgo regalis eodem;
> Haec illum stupro comperit esse virum.
>
> By chance the royal maiden was in the same bedroom;
> by rape she discovered that he was a man.

By the act of rape (*stupro*, 698), Achilles verifies his manhood, which was temporarily concealed and therefore rendered seemingly harmless by the feminine attire. As Richlin points out, "When we want to know the gender of the adolescent hero dressed in women's clothing, the signifier of his maleness is his ability to commit rape."[91] Ovid portrays the critical moment of passage, which the Romans even celebrated in their wall

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88 Garber 1992.84–92 discusses the notion of the "changeling boy" as a transitional figure of fantasy, who, like the transvestite, "mark[s] the space of representation itself."

89 On this passage in the context of other Ovidian representations of rape, see Richlin 1992.168–79.

90 For the *double entendre* of weapon brandishing before a sexual encounter, compare the scene in *Odyssey* 10 where Odysseus draws his sword against Kirke (321–22), who, evidently impressed, promptly invites the hero to "put your sword in the sheath and come to bed" (333–34).

91 Richlin 1992.169.

decoration,[92] when any vestige of immaturity or femininity is torn away from Achilles and he imposes his masculine sexual vigor on the unsuspecting princess. Deidamia herself validates the use of physical force in the hero's transition across the gender threshold when she begs Achilles to stay with her (701–04), thus proving the *praeceptor's* thesis that she, like all women, wanted it all along (*voluit vinci viribus illa tamen*, 700). Achilles' manhood, spear and all, is made manifest.

The most complete extant source for Achilles' early life is the *Achilleid* of Statius, whose death in a.d. 96 interrupted his work after he had finished only one book of his epic: the surviving first book, however, narrates the events in the court of Lycomedes.[93] Although the *Achilleid* is unfinished, we can get an idea of Statius' poetic style and authorial motivation by looking at his earlier epic, the *Thebaid*. Some critics have argued that Statius deploys the story of internecine warfare and fratricide at Thebes as an allegory for Roman civil conflict in all its futility and that, through his ambivalent treatment of the Theban brothers' war, where there are no winners, Statius intends to impair rather than assert the power of epic poetry to create absolutes, that sense of certainty and closure usually claimed by epic narrative.[94] As Frederick Ahl has suggested, "Statius constantly undermines fixed boundaries and definitions."[95] One example of Statius' interest in the blurring of absolute categories is his representation of the queen Hypsipyle in *Thebaid* 5, "the innocent ruler of a guilty people," who is compelled to negotiate a pretense of shared culpability for the murder of the Lemnian menfolk: through her dangerous disguise of guilt, worn to calm the rage of her island subjects, she maintains her power and even her life.[96] Perhaps it is this impulse to explore the space between dissolved boundaries that leads Statius to an investigation of the cross-

92 Fredrick 1995.280–81.

93 See Vessey 1986.3007–08 for the incompletion of the epic, the "supposed simplicity" of its style, and the foreshadowing in Book 1 of later events in Achilles' life.

94 On the theme of civil war, see Ahl 1986.2812–49; on the poet's program of simultaneously presenting and diluting reality, see Ahl 1986.2885–86: "The absolutes Statius introduces are more regularly undermined than reinforced as the epic evolves."

95 Ahl 1986.2898.

96 On Hypsipyle, see Ahl 1986.2886–88. Compare also Statius' portrayal of Bacchus in *Thebaid* 7 (146–226), where the god pretends "feminine" weakness in his plea to Jupiter to spare his birthplace Thebes, hiding his true warlike propensities. See Ahl 1986.2849–50: "The gods, like men, adopt poses and attitudes to suit their purposes at a given time; often these poses mask real strengths or real weaknesses."

dressed Achilles' search for his gender identity in the extant first book of the *Achilleid*.

Statius' account grants a prominent role to Thetis and highlights her fear for her son as the main motivation for concealing him on Scyros (25–26). She knows the Greek chiefs will seek out the young hero Achilles and that he will want to join the expedition to Troy (37–38). So when Thetis goes to fetch Achilles from his guardian, the centaur Chiron, she lies, concealing her secret plan to veil the boy in a woman's dress (*molles habitus*, 142). The scene focuses on the goddess' easy duplicity (she easily lies to both Chiron and Achilles) as well as her smothering love for her son. Driven by her fear (*gelidus pallor*, 158), Thetis will enfold him in her own clothing and remake him into a daughter. Yet when the boy Achilles appears, he is already being described in terms of indefinite gender outline: his pale skin blushes (*niveo natat ignis in ore purpureus*, 161–62), his hair shines like gold (*fulvoque nitet coma gratior auro*, 162), and he looks just like his mother (*plurima vultu mater inest*, 164–65). Statius' erotic vocabulary depicting Achilles' youthful beauty recalls Bion's description of the boy-hero's almost feminine charms.[97] But Achilles' heroic passion is even now developing its famous explosive proportions as he grasps his mother in a fierce embrace (*gravis amplexu*, 173). Then Thetis kidnaps her sleeping son in the dark (198), where the stealth of the nighttime journey suggests the liminal/supernatural quality of their destination. Achilles awakes in confusion on Scyros to find his mother ready to dress him in her clothes (*habitus meos*, 260), and she reassures him by alluding to the example of Hercules in Lydia (260–61), whose manliness was not diminished by his transvestism.[98] She promises him the disguise is temporary (*parumper*, 270) and will guarantee his safety (*tuta tegmina*, 270–71), yet Achilles is too ashamed even to look at it, as his mother notices (*pudet hoc mitescere cultu?* 272). Thus the boy at first resists identification with his mother and

97 Unlike the hirsute Hercules, the boy Achilles is the right age to be found physically attractive by most Roman males. For a discussion of the "romantic" (i.e., Hellenized) love for free-born boys at Rome in the late Republic and the Principate, see Cantarella 1992.120–41; on the praise of the *puer*'s delicate beauty in the poets, especially Tibullus, see Cantarella 1992.128–34.

98 Thetis also mentions two cross-dressed gods in her argument *a fortiori*: Bacchus (262–63), to whom Achilles is compared later in Book 1 (615–18); and Jupiter (263), whose rape of Callisto while disguised as the virgin Diana (as told by Ovid *Met*. 2.401–95) foreshadows the transvestite Achilles' sexual conquest of Deidamia.

resists the lure of the boundary-blurring, feminine transition that will negotiate the crossing to his heroic male autonomy.

It is the influence of another female that assures the boundary will be crossed. Achilles catches sight of the daughters of Lycomedes celebrating on the beach (285–89) and is immediately struck by an intense physical desire for the most beautiful among them, Deidamia (301–06). While the poet describes in detail the sexual bloom of the girls ripe for erotic experience (290–92), it is the appearance of the "queen of the chorus" (*regina chori*, 295–96) that outshines all the rest. Deidamia's loveliness is described in terms strikingly similar to those used of Achilles' own beauty (161–62), as the colors red and gold intermingle in a glow around her (*roseo flammatur purpura vultu*, 297). Then, in a simile tense with transvestite ambiguity, Deidamia is compared to the goddess Minerva stripped of her masculine armor (299–300). In this description, Statius posits a mirroring between Deidamia and Achilles and suggests the young hero's identification of himself, through the resemblance he sees in Deidamia, as the object of desire. What Achilles really wants at this moment, the poet hints, is to love himself.[99] And Thetis seizes the opportunity provided by her son's blushing confusion, persuading him to achieve his goal while disguised in female dress. Achilles, already practicing his coy demeanor (*ambiguum . . . cogique volentem*, 325), accepts the feminine garb and his mother's loving ministrations (323–31) in his erotic longing for Deidamia. Lycomedes is deceived into thinking the "new girl" is Achilles' sister, and the Scyrian maidens, described as "birds of Idalium" (*Idaliae volucres*, 372), excitedly admit "her" into their circle of ritual intimacy: the image of the birds (perhaps doves) from the Cyprian city sacred to Venus, goddess of sexual love, creates an aura of eroticism into which Achilles now enters. The cross-dressed hero pursues Deidamia strenuously, eager to reach the reward for his artifice ("too tightly he is stuck to her side, but she doesn't avoid him," *nimius lateri non evitantis inhaeret*, 570). Even as she begins to suspect the secret of his true sex, because of the persistence of his attentions to her (560–76), she contributes to the ruse by training Achilles to be more feminine in his bearing (*modestius*, 580), and showing how to spin wool more carefully (581–

99 Achilles "drank new fire into his bones" (*novum bibit ossibus ignem*, 303); compare Ovid's Narcissus drinking at the pool where he falls in love with his own beautiful reflection (*Met*. 3.413–36).

83).[100] Deidamia unknowingly takes on the defensive, almost maternal role of the absent Thetis, and she enacts the protective power of the female disguise itself, even as she does not allow Achilles to reveal his "real" identity (*prohibetque fateri*, 587). Statius suggests in a simile of Jupiter's pursuit of Juno (588–91) that Deidamia enjoys their closeness but is anxious about his sexual passion.

As in Ovid's account in the *Ars Amatoria*, Deidamia is the first to discover Achilles' "true" maleness through the sexual aggression she feared. Statius locates this initial, pivotal moment of Achilles' unmasking as a man and his rape of Deidamia during a ritual of Bacchus, god of ecstasy and inversion, from which men are strictly forbidden (593–674).[101] The poet shows us an increasingly reckless Achilles as he prepares to join the women, careless of the violation he is about to perpetrate (*tacitus sibi risit Achilles*, 602). The hero adds another layer of drag, donning the maenad costume for the bacchic rite, yet his male boldness starts to penetrate even this double disguise (*et sexus pariter decet et mendacia matris*, 605). Vessey argues, "If he was not a man, he would not make such a splendid (if counterfeit) woman."[102] Now Achilles, at the peak of his deception, is even more beautiful than Deidamia, whom he has "conquered" (*vincitur*, 608). Then Statius describes Achilles' bacchant array (609–18):

> ut vero et tereti demisit nebrida collo
> errantesque sinus hedera collegit et alte
> cinxit purpureis flaventia tempora vittis
> vibravitque gravi redimitum missile dextra,
> attonito stat turba metu sacrisque relictis
> illum ambire libet pronosque attollere vultus.
> talis, ubi ad Thebas vultumque animumque remisit
> Euhius et patrio satiavit pectora luxu,
> serta comis mitramque levat thyrsumque virentem
> armat et hostiles invisit fortior Indos.

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100 Note again the correspondence between the working of cloth as the quintessential feminine endeavor and the danger of discovery for the cross-dressed male (Herakles, Huck Finn) engaged in this activity: the transvestite is represented as trying to produce the very means of his deception (clothing), even as he seeks to maintain the ruse.

101 On this scene of bacchic festivities, where Achilles "takes his pleasure by force," and its atmosphere of heightened paradoxicality, see Vessey 1986.3009–13.

102 Vessey 1986.3012.

> But when he draped the fawnskin from his smooth neck
> and gathered the errant folds with ivy and high upon
> his blond temples he bound the purple ribbons
> and he shook the wreathed thyrsos with heavy hand,
> the crowd stood struck with awe, and they would have left
> the sacred rite to surround him and lift their bowed heads.
> Just as Bacchus, when at Thebes he has restored his spirit
> and sated his soul with the luxury of his fatherland,
> removes wreath and headband from his hair, arms
> the green thyrsos, and now stronger, attacks the Indian foe.

We might contrast Achilles' transvestism here with the bacchant array forced upon Pentheus by the rejected god in Euripides' play, the *Bacchae*. Achilles is here empowered by his cross-dressing and experiences a release of his masculine sexual energy, while the king of Thebes, not quite hero enough to survive the dangers of blurred boundaries, is emasculated, made vulnerable to and finally destroyed by the forces of femininity.[103] In psychological terms, the episode of transvestism will allow Achilles to enjoy identification with and then separate successfully from the mother, while poor Pentheus' attempt at union causes him to suffer total dissolution by the mother (literally, as his mother Agave tears him to pieces).[104] Moreover, Achilles is now identified with Bacchus and is represented as having the strength of the god himself. As Statius depicts the young hero in female garb, he is chiastically compared to the effeminate Bacchus (615–16) taking up armor for war. The god's softness and indulgence in *luxus* (616) are deceptive markers of his nature, which can also be warlike, just as Achilles' temporary feminine drag hides the warrior underneath.[105] Like the god, Achilles is invigorated by his changed gear and impelled to attain his goal. On that sultry night of celebration, driven by the desire to "be a man" and feel a man's aggressive passion (*teque marem . . . amore probaris*, 639),

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103 On the vulnerability of the figure of the feminized Pentheus and his failure to assert his masculine authority, see Zeitlin 1996a.355–56. On the contrast between the image of the transvestite Pentheus being torn apart by maenads, "an open reversal," and other images that only temporarily confuse sexual categories, such as Achilles' cross-dressed rape of Deidamia, see Fredrick 1995.280.

104 See Gilmore 1990.28–29 for the post-Freudian perspective of manhood as a struggle against the desire to reunite with the mother, the bliss of "regression fantasy."

105 Compare *Thebaid* 7, where Statius also explores the hidden power of Bacchus. Vessey 1986.3014 thinks the allusion to the Theban god's warlike nature here in *Achilleid* 1 sounds "an ominous note" in a passage of otherwise "Ovidian levity."

the boy Achilles achieves the first part of his manhood, sexual maturity, by his rape of Deidamia (*vi potitur votis*, 642). The poet fixes the moment of transition to Achilles' masculine reality by calling it a "true embrace" (*veros amplexus*, 642–43). Achilles says he endured the disguise for Deidamia's love (*cessi te propter*, 653–54), and he promises to protect his new lover and bring her glory as the mother of his child (659–60). Here are more transformative reversals, as the concealed son in need of defending becomes the guardian husband and father, and the princess, for love of Achilles, now must hide both the rape and her pregnancy (668–73).

So when the Greeks arrive on the island to find Achilles, the hero is ready to be found (675–885). Although the cunning of Ulysses is great, Achilles' desire to be known as a man and win a warrior's fame is even greater, and Ulysses realizes the youth will come of his own accord (*ultro*, 720). Lycomedes holds a banquet during which the shrewd Ulysses observes the hidden boy's boldness, a sure sign of his maleness, behind his veil (*nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris*, 765). After a rousing speech by the Ithacan (784–802), Achilles almost declares himself, but Deidamia restrains him, again taking the role of protector, but her wish is of course defeated (802–05). Deidamia fails in her attempt to hold Achilles back because, having been penetrated by him once, she is an incomplete (read: female) barrier he will easily break through again. The next day, the maidens present an intricate bacchic dance for the enjoyment of the visitors (819–34), and the still cross-dressed Achilles is obvious in his refusal to keep step (837–38):

> tunc molles gressus, tunc aspernatur amictus
> plus solito rumpitque choros et plurima turbat.
>
> Then more than ever he scorns the soft steps, he scorns
> the dress and breaks the dance and causes a big
> disturbance.

The poet now compares Achilles' rejection of the maenadic experience to Pentheus' doomed refusal of the god (839–40), but we know Achilles has already succeeded where the Theban failed in that he recovers and reasserts his male integrity while Pentheus utterly loses his.[106] As the

106 Statius' foreboding reference here to Agave and "sorrowful Thebes" (*tristes Thebae*, 840) may suggest Thetis' knowledge that Achilles' rebirth to his warrior status will ultimately lead to his early death at Troy.

girls play with the gifts of bacchic implements (848–50), Achilles' true male nature is attracted to the bloody weapons and he seizes them with a shout (851–56), disregarding the female chain of security that has hitherto bound him, both his mother's warnings and his lover's care (856–57). Statius allows us to see a mere trace of the feminine experience and the blurring of boundaries in Achilles' delicate and excited reaction to seeing himself, like Narcissus, in his newly masculinized identity, reflected in the mirror of the shield's brightness ("he shivered and blushed all at once," *horruit erubuitque simul*, 866). The epiphany of the warrior Achilles continues as the moment of conversion, of separation from the female, is marked by almost supernatural occurrences. The robes magically fall from his body (*intactae cecidere a pectore vestes*, 878), the armor is too small for his heroic might (879), and he grows in stature, larger even than his manly initiator, Ulysses (880). That night in bed together as man and wife openly for the first and last time, Achilles tries to soothe Deidamia's fears by swearing to return to her and their son after the war in Troy is over (956–59). But as the wind sweeps his oath away, never to be fulfilled (*inrita ventosae rapiebant verba procellae*, 960), the poet seems to suggest that, having asserted himself as a lover and as a warrior, Achilles' transformation from boy to man is now complete.

We have seen how Greek and Roman authors represented the super-masculinized body of the hero as an especially charged venue for the narrative layering of feminine disguise. The representation of the cross-dressed hero provided a means of interrogating the way gender differentiation was constructed and experienced in the social and political environment of these two cultures. Herakles and Achilles, the paradigms of Greek heroic masculinity, figure prominently in these stories of transvestite role-reversal primarily to highlight a safe and successful passage to another stage of the hero's career; also, particularly in the Roman texts, the hero's negotiation of the space between the masculine and the feminine helps to create and define the reality of gender polarities. The young Achilles experiences the female costume in the familiar ritual initiation from adolescence to warrior manhood, while the labor-worn Herakles endures his period of cross-dressed servitude to mark the change in his status before his final trial of deification. Each hero crosses the border to an exotic, highly eroticized, female location, the posh Lydian palace of Omphale or Deidamia's court of girls on Scyros, where he enjoys a heightening of his sexual powers and produces a boy infant, symbol of his undiminished male physical capacity. After acknowledging the instability of the landscape

between the poles of power and powerlessness, these texts provide the most compelling source of pleasure for their audience by relocating the protagonists into secure positions of masculine dominance. Thus the narrative pattern seeks to portray heroes of canonical, conspicuous masculinity such as Herakles and Achilles, who are perceived as strong enough to survive the dangers of sex-role manipulation. Neither Herakles nor Achilles, then, is "just a boy in a dress." When the hero returns to the world of men, having moved across the dangerous boundaries of male and female, he embodies the masculine concept of civic and cultural renewal through the process of inversion: indeed, he is even more effective as a man for having made the cross-country trip. These stories, with their bawdy humor, sex play, and glamorous *couture*, not only disrupt and confuse the categories of gender for the delight of their audience, but, in representing such transactions, these stories also establish the constructive power of gender categories and so reinforce the sexual hierarchies they evince.

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