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Occult(um) Aeaciden: Elisions of gender in Statius' *Achilleid*

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Abstract: In this paper I am discussing some passages in Statius' *Achilleid*, including the opening words of the poem, where some elisions seem to effectively suggest how gender and identity of Achilles become destabilized during his stay on Scyros in women's clothes. The elisions to be discussed affect word endings indicative of the masculine grammatical gender; in some cases, moreover, these endings are not just muted but also replaced, as it were, by their feminine equivalents. I also examine one passage where the masculine endings are emphatically not silenced despite elision; and a pair of passages where tension between the masculine and the feminine is introduced into the text by conjecture rather than by elision.

Keywords: elision, prosody, epic, gender, Statius, *Achilleid*

The 'poetics of elision', i. e. the ways in which this prosodic phenomenon contributes to the experience and interpretation of Roman poetry, is a difficult and problematic subject.[1] Elision as such does not have a meaning in the same way as e. g. metaphor does. It seems to be the exception rather than the rule that a given instance of elision can play a part in literary interpretation, that there is some meaning to be found in the tension between the text as written and as pronounced. Such exceptions have already been discussed. In the opening line of Catullus 68(b) the addressee, named as Allius, is potentially revealed through elision to be Mallius/Manlius, also the addressee of Cat. 68(a) and 61: *non possum reticere, deae, qua m(e) Allius in re / iuverit* ('I cannot keep quiet, goddesses, about

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[1] The most detailed general study is Soubiran 1966; see also Allen 1973, 142–150; Sturtevant/Kent 1915; Cancik-Lindemaier *et al.* 1972; cf. Riggsby 1991 on elision in prose. I am grateful to Balázs Déri, Attila Ferenczi and Ábel Tamás with whom I have discussed this paper in various stages of its development. I also express my gratitude to the anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions.

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how [M]Allius helped me', 68[b].41).[2] Another famous example is Juno's fulmination at the beginning of Vergil's *Aeneid* echoing the opening word of the *Iliad* (μῆνιν) through elision and thus giving further emphasis to the goddess' anger: *men(e) incepto desistere victam* ('am I really defeated and kept from carrying through my plan?', *Aen.* 1.37).[3] Taking one more step beyond discussing individual instances, Jean Soubiran and M. Owen Lee (focusing on Vergil and Catullus) have also collected some typical contexts in which elision might become illustrative of meaning: these include cutting, assimilation, prolongation, passion, deformity, collapse.[4] In more general terms, these are contexts which hint at the blurring or questioning of certain boundaries – just like some word boundaries in the poetic text become blurred when pronounced with elision. To quote the formulation of Llewelyn Morgan, who has focused on the frequency of elision rather than on individual instances as a marker of poetic styles and genres (such as 'low' satire and 'high' epic), the meaning usually expressed by elision is 'an absence of form, order, or definition'.[5]

In this paper, I am going to discuss the possible effects of a certain type which may be called 'gendered elision' – instances when the elided endings, mostly of words belonging to the first and second declensions, are indicative of grammatical gender (*-am/-um, -ae/-ī, -ae/-ō, -ā/-ō*). Frequently, the muted endings are obvious even if someone listens to a recitation and does not see the written text (e. g. *Troian[o] a sanguine*, Verg. *Aen.* 1.19). Sometimes, however, the silencing of gender-specific word endings has the potential to become significant.[6] An obvious context for this in a poetic text is the hiding, questioning, or changing of someone's sexual identity. Accordingly, I have chosen Statius' unfinished *Achilleid* for my case study, a poem in which the (in)stability of gender is a primary issue.[7] On Scyros, it is not only Achilles' biological sex which is concealed temporarily. The hero also changes his behaviour and follows a female, un-heroic, un-manly way of life dominated by weaving, singing, and dancing. Thetis' aim is to keep his son from entering the Greek army and fulfilling his heroic destiny which would cost him his life, but Achilles has quite different reasons for obeying his mother: he joins the company of King Lycomedes' daughters so that he can be close to, and eventually become the lover of, the beautiful Deidamia. For Achilles, the role of the lover might be termed less masculine than that of the hero, and it might threaten with the intrusion of elegy into epic, but it is a male role nevertheless.[8] In such a narrative, the presence of poetic play with grammatical gender (through elision and other means) is only to be expected.

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[2] Feeney 2010, 213, developing an idea by Frank 1914, 69; to Feeney's bibliography of earlier discussions (n. 41) Lowrie 2006, esp. 126–127, might be added.

[3] Spotted by Levitan 1993; Trinacty 2012 discusses the reception and repetition of the Vergilian *mene incepto* in Lucan and Silius. For further examples, see also Knobles 1971 on Cat. 63.37; Tamás 2004 on Catullus 10, 11, 22, 40, 42; Talbot 2007, 43–46 on Horace's Alcaic *carmina;* and Tamás forthcoming, 2020 on some elisions in Ovid's Io-episode (*Met.* 1.651 and 653).

[4] Soubiran 1966, 613–645; Lee 1962.

[5] Morgan 2010, 326–334 (with the quotation on p. 331).

[6] Manipulation of gender-specific word endings through elision may be compared to the more explicit poetic practice of employing nouns in non-standard grammatical genders for a variety of effects such as archaizing or signalling Greek intertextuality, as discussed recently by Corbeill 2015, 41–103; see also Renehan 1998.

[7] Cf. e. g. Rosati 1992, Hinds 2000, Heslin 2005, Barchiesi 2005, McAuley 2016, 345–389.

Some methodological concerns might be raised, of course, regarding the literary interpretation of elisions. The ancient practice(s) of elision cannot be reconstructed perfectly: there are no sound records, obviously, and elision is only rarely indicated in the manuscripts. Moreover, we should not assume that prosodic practice was unified across periods, regions, social classes; it might well have depended on personal taste as well. A poet might have had different ideas about elision than some of his readers or performers at recitals. What we can take for granted, however, is that (1) in view of metrical rules, some prosodic technique must have been at place which allowed to decrease the number of syllables during pronunciation; and (2) some sources testify that the practice of elision followed nowadays (at least in the author's country), i. e. the complete suppression of the affected endings, was also known in antiquity.[9] (3) Even if other techniques were employed which did not result in a complete suppression of endings,[10] words affected by elision were still changed to such an extent that their precise grammatical form had become ambiguous and less clearly audible.

(4) Elision works to some degree differently in performance and reading contexts. In case of performance, the audience does not have access to the written version and must mentally reconstruct it, as it were, by supplying the elided endings in order to make sense of the text. By contrast, if we read a poem metrically, we experience the text in two versions at the same time: we see the unelided word forms, but also hear with our (inner) ears the result of elision. (5) Consequently, there is always a certain tension between the written and the spoken text of Latin poems, the former being characterized by explicitness, the latter by some degree of ambiguity. This tension is, arguably, a very basic and important

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[8] On Achilles' role(s) as a lover in Greek and Roman literature, see Fantuzzi 2012.

[9] Several grammarians quote *mult(um) ill(e) et terris* (V. *Aen.* 1.3) as an example; Pompeius (V, 298 K) even shows the result of elision in the written form: *multille*. On the relevant passages, see Sturtevant/Kent 1915, 142–144.

[10] A frequently cited evidence for such a practice (at least for elision of words ending on *-m*) is Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.40.

constituent of our aesthetic experience even when a given instance of elision is not (or apparently cannot be) incorporated into literary interpretation,[11] but all the more so in cases when an appropriate semantic context may be reflected and amplified in some way by the occurrence of elision.

In the *Achilleid*, to return to the subject of my case study, such a context is provided by Achilles' temporary hiding on Scyros. I will discuss five instances of 'gendered' elision which effectively mirror the masking of Achilles' male identity, then a sixth instance where this identity is not masked *in spite of* such an elision. Finally, I will take a look at two closely related *Achilleid* passages from which gendered elision is absent but, as a result of philological intervention, a tension has nevertheless been produced between masculine and feminine word forms.

1 Prologue: Ovid hiding Achilles

Before discussing the *Achilleid* itself, let us have a look at Ovid, who is an important model for Statius in the *Achilleid*, and is his predecessor also in employing elision to illustrate Achilles' temporary hiding of his masculinity. Already in the *Ars Amatoria*, illustrative word order emphasizes the hero's pretence in the lines summarizing the sojourn on Scyros: *Achilles / veste virum longa dissimulatus erat* ('the fact that Achilles is a man was hidden with long dress', 1.689–690). Just like Achilles' male identity is concealed by the female dress, the word *virum* is enclosed within the expression denoting that dress: *veste … longa*. Then, in the *Metamorphoses*, Ulysses recalls the story during his quarrel with Ajax for the arms of Achilles (*Met.* 13.162–163):

> Praescia venturi genetrix Nereia leti
> dissimulat cultu nat(um), et deceperat omnes …
>
> Foreseeing his inevitable death, the daughter of Nereus made her child unrecognizable with a dress, and she succeeded in tricking everybody …

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[11] Latin elision, in this sense, may be an example of what Gumbrecht 2003 has called 'presence effects': various features (medium, typography, the voice of the performer, the setting for a recital etc.) which, although not interpretable in the strict sense (in contrast to 'meaning effects'), still contribute – although in many cases unconsciously – to our sensory experience of a text. Presence and meaning effects may, of course, interfere with each other, as Gumbrecht himself acknowledges (p. 2).

Everybody – except, of course, the wily Ulysses who discovers the hero. It is conspicuous that the only elision in these lines is precisely the one affecting the word ending of *nat(um),* signalling (in the written text) the masculinity of Thetis' child. Just like the female dress conceals Achilles' sex, the grammatical gender is suppressed when the text is pronounced. This elision also forces us to act like Thetis or Ulysses. If we are listening to a recital, we have to reconstruct the masculine ending just like Ulysses discovered the man concealed by the female dress; if, by contrast, we read Ovid's text obeying the rules of elision, we become the accomplices of Thetis, as it were, in concealing Achilles' identity (then, in turn, the continued presence of the written text may reverse this process of hiding into one of unmasking). The written text, in this sense, with its visual signs seems to represent 'reality' hidden by an unreliable 'pretence' made up by the sounds of the spoken text.

2 Elisions of gender in the *Achilleid*

We can turn now to the *Achilleid* itself. In a way which is unprecedented in Roman epic,[12] the programmatically always important opening word of the poem is elided, and then also the first word of the second line (*Ach.* 1.1–3):

> Magnanim(um) Aeaciden formidatamque Tonanti
> progeni(em) et vetitam patrio succedere caelo,
> diva, refer.
>
> Goddess, tell of great-hearted Aeacides and the offspring frightening the Thunderer and forbidden to succeed to his father's heaven.[13]

The opening adjective (a calque of Greek μεγάθυμος) emphasizes bravery and heroic valour as characteristics of Achilles, well-known from Homer onwards.[14]

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[12] Although not present in the first lines of hexameter epic and didactic poems – not counting *ill(e) ego* in the pre-proem of the *Aeneid* – some elisions can be found in the first lines of subsequent books, either as first words (V. *Aen.* 2, 9, 11; Ov. *Met.* 5; Luc. *BC* 2; VF. *Arg.* 4; St. *Th.* 7; SI. *Pun.* 13) or subsequently (Lucr. *DRN* 3; *Aen.* 3, 5, 6; VF. *Arg.* 2, 6). Nine of these 14 cases, however, contain the insignificant elision of *-que.*

[13] I quote the text of the *Achilleid* according to Dilke 1954; translations are Shackleton Bailey's, with modifications.

[14] Achilles is called μεγάθυμος several times in the *Iliad* (17.214, 18.226, 20.498, 21.153, 23.168 and 19.75, the latter related to the hero's laying aside his μῆνις and thus recalling the opening of the epic); Barchiesi 1996, 49 compares also μεγάλας φρένας Αἰακίδαο (*Il.* 9.184). The hero is called

The elision of the word probably would not be significant in itself. Aeneas, for example, also receives the same epithet four times in the *Aeneid*, twice in the same metrical position and with elision;[15] the Statian choice of the elided epithet may thus signal no more than Achilles being an 'epic successor' of Vergil's hero.[16] On the other hand, the privileged position of *magnanim(um) Aeaciden* at the very beginning of the epic, taken together with the narrative context of *Achilleid* 1, suggests that the elision may, in fact, be of some significance. The heroism conveyed by the opening adjective is the very characteristic which will be questioned, or at least shown to be imperfect, in *Achilleid* 1 during Achilles' stay at Scyros. He will not behave like a true hero throughout the *Achilleid,* and *magnanim(um)* might foreshadow that, if only in retrospect, after reading the only completed book of the epic or at least lines 5–6 of the proem where the story of Achilles' hiding on Scyros is first mentioned (*Scyroque latentem / Dulichia proferre tuba,* 'bringing him forth by Dulichian trump as he hides in Scyros').

Later we can find a couple of elisions in the *Achilleid* which are directly connected to the temporary suspension of Achilles' male identity, and whose significance and interpretability is, in my view, much more obvious than that of the elided opening word. After taking Achilles to Scyros, convincing him to take the female clothes and teaching him how to behave like a girl, Thetis introduces him to King Lycomedes as 'the sister of our Achilles' (*nostri germanam ... Achillis,* 1.350), entrusts him/her to his cares in a short speech (350–362). This is the last step in the youth's concealment, since it is at this moment that Achilles can mingle in the crowd of Lycomedes' daughters. It is also the first test of the cover: will Lycomedes detect that a boy is actually being introduced to him? The cover, at least for the time being, is working perfectly (1.363–365):

> Accedit dictis pater ingenioque parentis
> occult(um) Aeaciden – quis divum fraudibus obstet? –
> accipit.
>
> The father assents to her [i. e. Thetis'] words and accepts Achilles disguised by parental craft – for who could resist divine deceits?

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magnanimus already in Ovid (*nec se magnanimo maledicere sentit Achilli?, Met.* 13.298, spoken by Ulysses). In the *Achilleid*, Tydeus is also *magnanimus* at 1.733 (introduced thus by Ulysses to Lycomedes).

[15] *Magnanim(um) Aenean* at line-beginning in *Aen.* 1.260, 9.204; without elision in 5.17 and 407; cf. also 10.771. See also Barchiesi 1996, 49; Uccellini 2012, *ad Ach.* 1.1–2.

[16] Cf. Ripoll/Soubiran 2008, *ad loc.* and Hardie 1993, 88–119 on succession as a trope of intertextuality in Silver Latin poetry.

Just like in the *Metamorphoses* passage discussed above, elision occurs in a sentence whose subject is Achilles' concealment, and the elided syllable is a masculine ending: *occult(um)*. Statius, however, further develops the Ovidian game. This time, the elided word is precisely the one with the meaning of concealment. This way, a closer metaphoric relationship between story and poetic language is suggested: hiding Achilles, and especially the fact that he is a boy – the text seems to suggest – is like the elision of a gender-specific word ending. It also seems worthwhile to compare line 364 with the above discussed opening line of the *Achilleid*.[17] The metrical situation is the same in both: elision affects the adjective at the beginning of the line, and the second word refers to Achilles in the accusative as *Aeaciden*. In the first line, elision qualified the validity of the adjective *magnanim(um)* as a kind of fixed epithet expressing an essential characteristic of Achilles; now we also get to know what replaces bravery: during his hiding, *occult(um)* instead of *magnanim(um)* may be taken as his 'temporary epithet'.

Three further cases of elision seem to be particularly interesting because they do not just hide a masculine ending, but also replace it, as it were, with a feminine one. The first of them occurs somewhat earlier than *occult(um)*, when Achilles first appears as a character in the poem. Chiron and Thetis are in discussion about the young hero (1.126–158) at the centaur's cave when he suddenly arrives, returning from a hunt: *ill(e) aderat* ('he was there', 159). In his description of Achilles' looks (159–166) the narrator emphasizes the liminality of the young hero: he is between child and adult, man and god, and, most importantly for us here, male and female.[18] Like a maiden, he exhibits 'purple glow on his white face' (*niveo natat ignis in ore purpureus,* 161–162), and 'there is much of his mother in his looks' (*plurima vultu mater inest*, 164–165). This liminality might also be expressed, in advance, through elision which, in this case, merges the gender-specific ending of *ille* with the beginning of *aderat,* the result resembling the feminine form of the same pronoun. The youth who enters is somewhere between being an *ille* (as expected and written on the page) and an *illa* (as the text sounds, thanks to elision).

The other two instances of this type are directly related to the theme of transvestism and metamorphosis. Thetis, trying to persuade his reluctant son to take on the female clothes, cites some examples. Hercules also put on female clothes in the palace of Queen Omphale; Bacchus used to wear feminine clothing himself; Juppiter used to appear in female form to mortal women he was longing for (1.260–263). The final example is that of Caenis, who was born as a girl, but asked to be changed into a man after having been raped by Neptune, and from that time was called Caeneus. According to Thetis (1.264),

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[17] The similarity of the lines is noted by Ripoll/Soubiran 2008, *ad* 1.364.

[18] See Heslin 2005, 181–184. Location, he notes, also expresses the liminality of Achilles: the meeting takes place at the threshold of Chiron's cave (*in limine primo,* 1.119; *in limine*, 171).

> nec magn(um) ambigui fregerunt Caenea sexus
>
> his ambiguous sexes did not break the great Caeneus.

Thetis hints at the ambiguity of biological sex and social gender; but grammatical gender also becomes ambiguous in this line. Vergil and Ovid had already employed incongruous grammatical gender when telling about the transformation(s) of Caenis/Caeneus;[19] but the employment of elision seems to be Statius' innovation. *Magnum* stands in the written text with the masculine ending; this ending disappears, when the poem is recited, through elision and thus the adjective blends with the next word, *ambigui,* whose beginning resembles the feminine accusative ending. The word *magnum* is 'broken' even if Caenis/Caeneus had been not, according to the goddess. The result is a grammatically ambiguous, 'virtually feminine' sound sequence: *magn am … Caenea.*[20] Elision thus repeats Caenis/Caeneus' change of sex in the world of language, but it does so in a direction opposite to what is probably expected. The mythical character changed from woman into man; the elision, by contrast, replaces the masculine with the feminine. The text as pronounced suggests that Caeneus did, in fact, retain something of his former female identity, and may even call our attention to a rhetorical fault in Thetis' reasoning.[21] It may be true that Caenis was not 'broken' by the change of sex – indeed, (s)he became stronger as a man –, but the myth depicts a world in which women suffer violence committed by men; Caenis feels that life after such violence can be continued only by leaving her female identity behind. It would be hard to persuade anyone to choose female life, if only temporarily, by citing the example of Caenis/Caeneus. It is no wonder, then, that Thetis herself fails to persuade: Achilles will agree to put on female clothes only later, after seeing Deidamia.

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[19] The Vergilian Caeneus regains the female body (and the feminine grammatical gender) in the Underworld, but retains the masculine name: *iuvenis quondam, nunc femina, Caeneus … in veterem fato revoluta figuram* (*Aen.* 6.448–449); cf. West 1980, 318; Feldherr 1999, 99–100. In the *Metamorphoses*, Nestor tells none other than Achilles that the masculine Caeneus was born as a woman (*femina natus erat*, 12.175) and, according to some, had turned into a phoenix instead of dying and thus became (grammatically) a feminine bird: *maxime vir quondam, sed avis nunc unica, Caeneu* (*Met.* 12.531); cf. Keith 2000, 85 for another interpretation of how the transformation into bird may be related to Caeneus' original female identity.

[20] Furthermore, the Greek masculine ending *-a* makes the accusative *Caenea* resemble a Latin first declension nominative; as if a Latin equivalent, Caeneus/Caenea (as in Iulius/Iulia), existed for the Greek pair Caeneus/Caenis. This is a gender-bending effect which is, notably, present in the written text as well.

[21] Cf. Gärtner 2004, 10–15 on how the third and fourth examples fail to support the goddess' argument in the strict sense, contributing rather to an intertextual reading of the *Achilleid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. On Thetis' rhetorical ineptitude more generally, see Heslin 2005, 105–137. By contrast, McAuley 2016, 361 emphasizes that Thetis' words reveal her understanding of the full implications of the mythic examples: more than just changes of sex/gender, they undermine the male/female opposition as such.

The same kind of elision can also be interpreted elsewhere as a signal of focalisation. At the turning point of the Scyros episode, the hero rapes Deidamia during a nocturnal feast of Bacchus, exclusive for women. When he begins to describe the feast, the narrator exaggeratingly emphasizes the *female* beauty of Achilles, not his masculinity: on this night he was supposedly even more beautiful than Deidamia (1.606–608). Thus the girls 'are fain to gather round him': *ill(um) ambire libet* (1.614).[22] Thanks to elision, affecting the pronoun *ille* again, two different points of view can be expressed at the same time. We are perfectly aware – especially if we are reading the text and thus seeing *illum* rather than listening to a recital – that the girls are gathering around a boy, but they are not aware of that; they believe Achilles is a girl just like themselves. Their own version of the narrator's comment just quoted would contain the word *illam* instead of *illum,* and it is *ill am* we ourselves say or hear if elision is practiced. The written text thus represents the point of view of the omniscient narrator and the well-informed reader; the text as pronounced represents that of the ignorant girls.

The last elision to be discussed in this paper also occurs in connection with the nocturnal feast and seems to illustrate how Deidamia finds out that her companion is, in fact, a boy. *Ille* is again (for the third time now!) the affected word. Immediately after reporting about Achilles' rape of Deidamia (1.640–648), the narrator – for the first time in the *Achilleid*[23] – directly quotes the hero's words by which he introduces himself to the confused girl (1.649–652):

> … dubiam verbis solatus amicis:
> 'Ill(e) ego — quid trepidas? — genitum quem caerula mater
> paene Iovi silvis nivibusqu(e) inmisit alendum
> Thessalicis. …'

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[22] Cf. 1.264, discussed above: *ambigui* and *ambire* are etymologically related. The equivalence of the feminine accusative singular ending and the sound sequence at the beginning of *ambo* and its cognates is exploited to great effect.

[23] As noted by Heslin 2005, 164; see also 164–166 on Achilles' speech as a travesty of Homeric heroes' boasting introductions on the battlefield.

> He consoled the confused girl with friendly words: 'I am the man – why do you tremble? – whom his sea-green mother almost bore to Jupiter and sent to Thessaly's woods and snows to be reared. ...'

These 'friendly words' sound, in fact, quite insensitive and brutal, especially the question *quid trepidas?* (to be followed a few lines later by *quid defles* and *quid gemis,* 655–656). Achilles' rude rhetoric mirrors the violence of his act. The crude words, however, are also wittingly allusive at the same time: they recall the autobiographic pronouncement *ille ego qui quondam* ... in the pre-proem of the *Aeneid.* I cannot discuss here the fascinating possibilities for intertextual interpretation;[24] I emphasize instead that the pseudo-Vergilian expression contains an elision and is also quoted for that by the grammarian Pompeius (*ille ego* ... *fit illego*, V. 298 K.). The ending of the pronoun is again indicative of gender: *ille ego* and *illa ego* sound the same when pronounced with elision. In most situations, of course, the resulting ambiguity would be only theoretical. People rarely talk to each other in hexameters, and even if they do (whether in real life or in a Latin poem), the addressee usually knows in advance if the speaker is a woman or a man. The case of Achilles and Deidamia on Scyros is, however, more complex. Up to this point in the story, Deidamia must have been convinced that any such speech by her companion were to start with *illa ego;* only the rape she just suffered makes it clear for her that the 'correct' grammatical form is *ille ego*. The tension between the written and the pronounced text, the basis for my interpretation of the earlier elisions in the *Achilleid,* is this time (almost) non-existent. The final sound of *ille* is suppressed, to be sure, but only to be replaced by the same at the beginning of *ego*. The shocking discovery of Achilles' male identity and the end of his masquerading (towards Deidamia, for the time being) is also expressed by this elision which is probably the least conspicuous of those discussed in this paper, but just as suggestive as the others, if one considers the narrative context in which it occurs. The earlier instances of elision affecting *ille* illustrated the ambiguous identity of Achilles (resulting from his liminality at Chiron's cave and then his feminine disguise on Scyros); the rape of Deidamia, by contrast, followed by his *ill(e) ego* speech, marks Achilles' most testosterone-laden moment in the poem. His being an *ille,* his masculine *ego,* cannot be diminished this time even by elision.

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[24] The literature on the pre-proem has been conveniently listed recently by Kayachev 2011, 75 n. 2. The Ovidian chapter of the *ille ego* tradition (on which see Farrell 2004) may be particularly important for the interpretation of the *Achilleid* passage; but, as Feeney 2004, 100 noted, the pseudo-Vergilian lines seem to be directly alluded to later in the *Achilleid* at 1.881–882, again in direct connection with the discovery of Achilles' true identity. There is a further allusion in Achilles' speech to Deidamia which is particularly interesting with regard to grammatical gender (cf. Barchiesi 2005, 59–60 and Heslin 2005, 100–101): *te visa in litore; cessi* (1.653) recalls Aeneas' words to Dido (*invitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi, Aen.* 6.460) which, in turn, infamously recall Catullus' *Coma Berenices* (*invita, o regina, tuo de vertice cessi,* 66.39).

3 Gender-bending and the lack of elision

I would like to finish this paper by examining two *Achilleid* passages which are made conspicuous, in view of the above discussed instances, by the *lack* of some manipulation of grammatical gender. Ulysses, sent by the Greek army along with Diomedes to find Achilles, suspects that the hero is to be found among the daughters of Lycomedes. At this point in the story, then, Achilles is already suspected but not yet exposed. When the princesses, Achilles among them, take part in a banquet hosted by the king, Ulysses studies the figure, face and behaviour of the girls to find out which one is the hero in disguise (1.764–766):

> At tamen erectumque genas oculisque vagantem
> nullaque virginei servantem signa pudoris
> defigit comitiqu(e) obliquo lumine monstrat.
>
> Even so, he marks one with face erect and roving eyes, that observes no mark of maiden modesty, and with a sidelong glance points her out to his companion.

Ulysses then tells about the Greek preparations for the Trojan war, expecting that Achilles will react differently from the real girls and thus betray himself. So it happens (1.794–795):

> Aspicit intentum vigiliqu(e) haec aure trahentem,
> cum paveant aliae demissaque lumina flectant.
>
> He sees one who all attention, drinking in his words with a vigilant ear, while the others are afraid and turn their eyes down and away.

The two passages are very similar regarding the use of adjectives and elision. Both contain present participles whose endings do not discriminate between the masculine and the feminine and thus help maintain the uncertainty inherent in the situation: a person who is *vagans* (764), *servans* (765) or *trahens* (794) might be a man as well as a woman. However, there are also two past participles, *erectum* and *intentum*, with gender-specific endings. The narrator – and in this case, perhaps, we may even think of the author writing or dictating the *Achilleid* – must decide between the masculine and the feminine. The choice influences possible interpretations of focalisation: both *defigit* (766) and *aspicit* (794) emphasize that Ulysses is looking at and interpreting visual signs. By choosing the feminine, the narrator/author can express the point of view of those who suspect nothing, or that of Ulysses as a 'detective' who has only discovered some oddities as of yet, noting that 'one of the girls is behaving strangely'. If the masculine ending is chosen, by contrast, it will expose Achilles by language, expressing the point of view of the omniscient narrator or that of the detective who feels his suspicion to be well-grounded and is confident that he has found the culprit: 'one of them is behaving strangely, and thus cannot be a girl'. The passage under discussion is thus one of those in the *Achilleid* in which elision might be employed to great effect, sustaining the ambiguity of grammatical gender and simultaneously expressing different points of view. This time, however, elision is prevented from happening: the adjectives are followed by the suffix *-que* and the word *vigilique*.

In addition to the author and/or the narrator, there are other persons involved who cannot evade decision here: scribes copying and scholars editing the text. It would not be surprising were the feminine variants of the adjectives in question be found in some of the manuscripts; but all of them contain the masculine forms. The indirect tradition also supports this reading, since Priscian quotes line 794 with *intentum*.[25] Philologists had thus no reason to suspect the transmitted text.[26] In the latest edition of Statius' epics, however, J. B. Hall conjectured the feminine variants *erectamque* (764) and *intentam* (794).[27] The accompanying translation reflects these conjectures: 'but still one *girl* whose head is up … attracts his attention', and 'he is watching a *girl* who is listening intently …' (my italics).[28] Is such a conjecture needed here?[29] It is possible, theoretically, that Statius' text had originally contained the feminine variants, which were later changed into masculine ones on the ground that they refer to Achilles who is, in fact, a man. If such a change occurred very early, it is even conceivable that the former disappeared from all surviving manuscripts (and already from the one used by Priscian) without a trace. On the other hand, the transmitted readings and Hall's conjectures, even if they lead to different interpretations with regard to focalisation, as we have just seen, both result in a text whose meaning is clear and appropriate. Under such circumstances, most philologists (including myself) would probably stick with the transmitted masculine readings.

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[25] *De arte grammatica* 7.65, quoting the *Achilleid* passage as an example of the ablative *vigili*.

[26] Unlike editors of Catullus' poem on the self-castrating Attis, who have proposed feminine conjectures instead of some transmitted masculine readings at 63.42, 45, 88, 89: see Fordyce 1961, *ad* 63.8, cf. Corbeill 2015, 93.

[27] Hall/Ritchie/Edwards 2007, I, 382, 384.

[28] Hall/Ritchie/Edwards 2007, II, 282–283.

[29] The highly conjectural character of this edition is discussed by reviewers: Bérlincourt 2010, Lovatt 2010. In my view, Lovatt 2010, 388 rightly criticizes Hall's hypothesis (Hall/Ritchie/Edwards 2007, I.vi–vii), justifying his frequent conjecturing, that Statius was popular in Flavian Rome because his poetry was easy to understand even on a first hearing at recitations. Apparently, Hall is treating Juv. 7.82–86 too readily as literary historical evidence.

Nevertheless, Hall's conjectures are signs of a very sensitive reading and reveal, in my view, an important aspect of Statius' text: namely, that both the masculine and the feminine forms are possible in the given context. Either the masculine or the feminine reading must be genuine (even if we cannot ultimately prove which one), but neither is 'perfect' in the sense that they cannot grammatically represent the inherent ambiguity of the situation. The present participles in these passages *(vagantem, servantem, trahentem)* can do so through the lack of gender-specific endings; in other passages of the *Achilleid*, as discussed above, elision creates a tension between the written text (indicating gender) and the pronounced text (not indicating, or even misleading about it). In the case of *erectumque/erectamque* and *intentum/intentam*, it is editorial intervention which creates a similar tension in the form of textual variability. In a critical edition, both the masculine and the feminine forms may have their place – one of them in the main text, the other in the *apparatus criticus*. In this sense, Hall's most important contribution to the interpretation of these lines seems to lie not in restoring them to a supposedly better state, but in making the ambiguity of (grammatical) gender visible and allowing future editors of the *Achilleid* to document his feminine conjectures at least as rejected variants.

What makes Hall's editorial intervention even more interesting from the point of view of literary interpretation is that, in this case, the implicit rhetoric underlying the activity of the critic is comparable to the behaviour of a character in the story, namely Ulysses. Both act as 'detectives' who suspect that the 'evidence' they are presented with is misleading and not genuine.[30] Ulysses tries to uncover biological truth: a man, Achilles, is hiding under the female clothes. The truth which Hall seeks is, by contrast, textual: the feminine grammatical forms supposedly replaced by masculine ones in all manuscripts. There is however, an even more significant difference between the two detectives. Both have the chance to find the truth, but only in the case of Ulysses is this truth verifiable in the end. In the fiction, it is an unequivocal fact that the strangely acting girl is, indeed, Achilles; but it will probably never be possible to prove (or refute, we may add) that Statius had originally chosen the conjectured feminine variants. In the case of Hall's textual investigation, there is no way to go beyond the stage of suspicion and incrimination and reach an unappealable verdict.

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[30] On judicial and other metaphors in the rhetoric of textual criticism, see recently Tarrant 2016, 30–48.

4 Conclusion

It would be nearly impossible to compose a poetic text, on any subject, in which all elisions are meaningful and interpretable, or one about Achilles on Scyros in which all 'gendered' elisions can be interpreted directly in connection with the hero's temporary hiding of his masculinity. Even if such texts existed, this mechanical effect would probably make them less interesting as literature. In the above case study, I have only tried to show that in six cases gendered elisions, and in a further passage, the lack of such elisions, can be incorporated into literary interpretation of the *Achilleid*. The examples discussed represent just 1.6 % of all the 375 elisions in the unfinished poem, and 5 % of 119 elisions silencing gender-specific endings.[31] Other readers, of course, might find more (or less) of them to be interpretable. The above discussed elisions, in any case, seem remarkable for functioning as a network rather than just a series of isolated instances. Most of them occur at significant moments in the narrative: at the very first word of the *Achilleid,* at the first appearance of Achilles, at his handover to Lycomedes in women's clothes, and at the beginning of his first speech directly quoted by the narrator. With the exception of 1.264, these elisions affect the first word in a line and can also be grouped as a pair and a trio. *Magnanim(um)* and *occult(um)* are both followed and elided by *Aeaciden* and, most notably, the three elisions of the pronoun *ille* illustrate first the liminality of Achilles, then his disguise on Scyros, and finally his first step in regaining and confirming his masculine identity. It also seems noteworthy that the elisions discussed above all occur in the first half of the unfinished epic, focusing on the ambiguity of Achilles' identity during (and, in some sense, even before) his hiding among the daughters of

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[31] The total of 375 includes 10 cases of prodelision affecting *est*. When collecting instances of 'gendered elisions', I took into account the degree of resulting ambiguity in the first place. Thus, I included adverbs ending on *-um/-o,* which could be adjectives as well (e.g. *tantum, vero;* 10 out of the 119 instances indicated above), and genitive plural *-um* in the first two declensions (coinciding with the masculine/neuter accusative singular; 2 instances, both *deum*). On the other hand, I excluded the standard *-orum/-arum* forms (where gender-specific *o/a* is not affected by elision). The number of elisions in the *Achilleid* is somewhat lower, 33.3 elisions by 100 lines, than in *Thebaid* 1 (39 as counted by Sturtevant/Kent 1915, 152). The most significant differences in the relative frequency of various types of elision are those affecting the enclitic *-que* (*Ach.* 33 %, *Theb.* 1. 28 %) and words ending on vowel+*m* (*Ach.* 19 %, *Theb.* 1. 29 %). The difference is less in case of the remaining types: elision of short vowels (*Ach.* 33 %, *Theb.* 1. 30 %), long vowels (*Ach.* 12 %, *Theb.* 1. 11 %), and prodelision (*Ach.* 3 %, *Theb.* 1. 2 %). The difference in the overall frequency of elisions and of vowel+*m* elisions in these two Statian samples might be important: the lower the number of elisions, the higher the chance that the remaining instances appear to be significant and meaningful for readers.

Lycomedes. Interpretable gendered elisions seem to disappear from the extant text with the discovery of Achilles; in addition to Hall's conjectures, this fact also seems to emphasize the significance of those two passages (with *erectumque* and *intentum*) when gendered elision would be in place but does not actually happen. Thus, if not in Statian poetry or in the *Achilleid* as such (either in its unfinished state or the planned whole), but in its Scyros episode there seems to be, indeed, a 'poetics of elision' at work, which in this particular text adds much to the poetic efforts to suggest the destabilizing of Achilles' gender and identity.

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