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0521851459 - The Transvestite Achilles: Gender and Genre in Statius' Achilleid

P. J. Heslin

Excerpt

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# *Opening Nights at the Opera* 1641–1744

Eccoti ò Lettore in questi giorni di Carnevale un'Achille in maschera.

Preface to *L'Achille in Sciro*, Ferrara 1663\*

OVER THE COURSE of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the story of Achilles in Scyros was represented many times on operatic stages across Europe. Given the nature of the young genre, it is not hard to see why this motif was popular.<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the principle, contrast the Elizabethan theater, where the custom of boy actors playing the parts of women lent a certain piquancy to plots in which a female character dressed as a man: thus a boy played a woman playing a man. In Baroque opera, the situation was reversed. The primary roles were almost invariably scored for high voices, which could only be sung by a woman or a man whose secondary sexual characteristics had not developed.<sup>2</sup> In most cases the choice between a female singer and a castrato seems to have been determined by the local availability of singers rather than the pursuit of naturalism.<sup>3</sup> It was not impossible to see the

\* "In these days of Carnival, here is Achilles wearing a mask for you, dear reader." On this text, see below (p 11).

<sup>1</sup> Thus Rosselli (1992: 58).

<sup>2</sup> This was accomplished by cutting the spermatic cords or by orchidectomy before puberty: see Jenkins (1998) on the procedure and physiology, and on the social context, see Rosselli (1988) or more succinctly Rosselli (1992: 32–55).

<sup>3</sup> "In early opera, voices were chosen for their beauty, their potential, their virtuosity, and not for their gender" (Dame, 1994: 149). "Statistically it was the age of the character rather than his or her gender that quite observably determined the choice of tessitura. The rule was, the younger the character, the higher the voice" (Durante, 1998: 386). On this problem, see Durante (1998: 385–8), Covell (1984), and Harris (1989: 110–14). Heller (2003: 18) claims that in seventeenth-century

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role of Mark Antony interpreted by a woman while opposite her Cleopatra was played by a male castrato.<sup>4</sup> Except in the public theaters of the Papal States, where women were often prohibited from appearing on stage and thus castrati were the rule, heroic male roles were commonly interpreted by female singers. Thus in the Naples production of *Achille in Sciro* discussed below (p 38), the two leading ladies, Vittoria Tesi and Anna Peruzzi, are reported to have quarreled over who should play Achilles and who Deidamia.<sup>5</sup>

When the character of Achilles on the island of Scyros was interpreted by a woman, the audience saw a woman playing the role of a man pretending to be a woman. When Achilles was played by a castrato, the unveiling of the “girl” as a “real” man might have forced the observation, despite the accepted conventions of the genre, of a contrast between the fictional character who sheds his ephebic androgyny on Scyros and the singer who cannot. Whatever the casting of Achilles, the situation on stage will have tended to produce for the audience a complex counterpoint of biological sex and social gender. A crude taxonomy divides the librettists who dramatized this story into two groups according to how they comment on this relationship between sex and gender. For some, such as Giulio Strozzi, Ippolito Bentivoglio, and Carlo Capece, the myth of Achilles on Scyros embodies the spirit of Carnival: the greatest hero of antiquity puts on a female disguise to pursue his amorous desires. As we shall see, these libretti tend to portray gender as a masquerade, and they abound in complex erotic schemes and sub-plots. For some later writers, such as Pietro Metastasio and Paolo Rolli, the myth teaches the opposite lesson: gender is not contingent but essential, in that the masculinity of Achilles is a primal force of nature that cannot be concealed, despite the efforts of his divine mother and his own devotion to Deidamia. For these writers, the masculinity of Achilles is an aspect of his heroism, which is in turn a product of his illustrious birth. On this reading of the myth, Achilles is a figure who exemplifies the triumph of a noble nature over unprepossessing circumstance; as we shall see, this interpretation of the story has political ramifications for an age torn apart by successive wars in which disputes over legitimate royal succession barely veiled the raw exercise of power.

In discussing these libretti, I hope to show that this double potential for the myth to encode two diametrically opposed conceptions of masculinity is derived not only from the content of the myth itself, but also from Statius' suggestive manner of treatment. One of the peculiarities of this complex tradition,

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Venetian opera, many of the heroes played by castrati had, like Achilles, a masculinity that was compromised in some way.

<sup>4</sup> Durante (1998: 386).

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, considerations of naturalism were called upon to justify the choice of the taller Tesi for the role of Achilles, but this may have been a specious, post hoc argument invented to pacify Peruzzi: Croce (1947: 166).

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however, is the unwillingness of any of these authors to identify Statius as a source, even when his direct influence is unmistakable. The decline of Statius' reputation as a poet was well under way, and the last of the poets discussed here, Paolo Rolli, seems to be the first not to have known the *Achilleid* at all. This operatic tradition is the swan song of a once well-known classical text whose influence was already on the wane.

### Venice, 1641

The element of masquerade in the Achilles-on-Scyros myth was ideally suited to the carnivalistic context of much early operatic spectacle, and it was in seventeenth-century Venice that the opera and Carnival had come together most perfectly. The first treatment of the Achilles-in-Scyros story for the operatic stage was called *La finta pazza* or “the woman feigning madness.” This work, with a libretto by Giulio Strozzi and music by Francesco Saccati, has been called “the first and possibly the greatest operatic ‘hit’ of the [seventeenth] century. It set the standard for measuring operatic success.”<sup>6</sup> *La finta pazza* inaugurated the Teatro Novissimo in Venice, the world's first purpose-built opera house; it launched the career of the first operatic diva, Anna Renzi; and it started the tradition of the “mad scene” for operatic heroines that eventually produced Lucia di Lammermoor.<sup>7</sup> It travelled all over Italy as the epitome of the new type of Venetian opera, which had been born, not in the salons of Florentine intellectuals or the palaces of Roman nobles, but in the public theaters of Venice. Some of the noteworthy features of this new, mercenary type of operatic production were astonishing stage designs that employed perspective and movable scenery, and extravagantly melodramatic plots that abounded in incident and spectacle.

Statius' version of the story of Achilles on Scyros serves Strozzi as mere scaffolding for a more important sub-plot in which Deidamia feigns madness, a story which has no ancient source.<sup>8</sup> Many early opera plots, despite the genre's claims of kinship with Greek tragedy, were in fact based on mythical love stories familiar from well-known Latin texts, treated very freely: Orpheus from the fourth *Georgic*, Ariadne from Catullus' poem 64, Daphne from the first

6 Rosand (1991: 90). The libretto is available in Della Corte (1958: 333–430).

7 Rosand (1991: 88–98, 110–24); Bianconi and Walker (1975).

8 The origins of this “mad scene” go back to a time when Monteverdi suggested an opera based upon a pastoral poem of Strozzi's. Tomlinson (1983) has demonstrated that this project, called *La finta pazza Licori*, never really got off the ground, but much interest in it has been generated by the surviving letters of Monteverdi, which record his thoughts about how to represent madness in music. There is no ancient connection of the Scyros myth with feigned madness except perhaps via the story of Ulysses feigning madness in an attempt to avoid coming to Troy, which is a kind of draft-dodging double of the Achilles-in-Scyros story, in which feigned madness is substituted for feigned womanhood.

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book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dido from the *Aeneid*, and singing shepherds from the *Eclogues* of Virgil. Likewise, Strozzi's libretto takes the general lineaments of the dramatic situation from a familiar Latin text. The influence of Statius is apparent in the basic details of the plot: the worry of Thetis for her son, the mission of Ulysses and Diomedes to Scyros, and the stratagem of unveiling Achilles by tempting him with a gift of weapons. Strozzi, however, soon goes off in his own direction; with its broad humor, sprawling plot, gratuitous digressions, weak characterization, and emphasis on the theatrical elements of masquerade, travesty, and play-acting, *La finta pazza* is a quintessential early Venetian opera libretto.<sup>9</sup>

After a prologue spoken by the personification of "Quick Thinking" (*Consiglio Improvviso*), the drama opens with a situation derived from the *Achilleid*: Thetis has hidden Achilles on Scyros; Achilles and Deidamia have fallen in love and secretly had a child; Ulysses and Diomedes have arrived to find their quarry. Where Statius does not provide sufficient epic flavor, Strozzi invents it, such as the divine council he contrives between Thetis, Minerva, and Juno (Act 1, Scene 2), which would have allowed the stage designer, Giacomo Torelli, to show off his machinery. In the second and third acts, however, Strozzi abandons the traditional plot entirely. Deidamia, desperate because Achilles seems set to desert her on Scyros with their secret love child, feigns insanity in order to compel recognition of her plight and Achilles' hand in marriage. In the end, the conflict between love and duty is resolved when Deidamia's quick thinking secures the love of the fickle Achilles.

The first act owes to the *Achilleid* its general situation and a few of its details.<sup>10</sup> It concludes with the scene of Achilles' unmasking, which is not the climax of the action in *La finta pazza*, but is rather part of the preliminaries; at this point the Statian story is concluded and Strozzi's own mad-Deidamia plot begins. Ulysses and Diomedes effect the unmasking by bringing a mixture of gifts to Lycomedes and his daughters; as in Statius' *Achilleid*, they include weapons among the flowers and ribbons. They happen to note the incidental preference Achilles, disguised as "Phyllis," shows for weapons rather than the more feminine gifts they bring, and deduce that this is Achilles. What is striking about this is the almost accidental nature of the discovery. In the *Achilleid*, it is a constant struggle for Achilles and Deidamia to contain the hero's native masculinity and to maintain his disguise, and in the end his discovery is in part

9 Kimbell (1991: 121–39). It is not hard to find other examples of cross-dressing in the libretti of the era, such as the disguise of Ottone as Drusilla in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; see Rosand (1991: 121) on *Ercole in Lidia*, and Heller (2003: 178–262) on *La Calisto* and *La Semiramide*. Compare also the transsexual character Hermaphroditus in both Strozzi's *Delia* and Persiani's *Gli amori di Giasone e Isifile*, on which see Rosand (1991: 118f, n 25).

10 For example, Deidamia's suggestion that she might go and fight alongside Achilles at Troy (Act 1, Scene 3, Della Corte, 1958: 355) anticipates her later frenzy (Act 2, Scene 10, Della Corte, 1958: 395f), but also recalls Statius (*Ach.* 1.949–51).

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a result of this essence bursting forth.<sup>11</sup> Strozzi has none of this heroic essentialism; the closest he comes is in a defiant speech of Achilles to Deidamia near the beginning of the drama:

Di spirito guerriero  
l'ardor non si smorza;  
ho grande la forza,  
sublime il pensiero.  
Non può vero valor perder sue tempore,  
in ogni habito Acchille, Acchille è sempre.<sup>12</sup>

The flame of my warrior spirit is not growing dim; my strength is great, and my thoughts are lofty. The keenness of true valor cannot be blunted; in any kind of clothing Achilles is always Achilles.

This declaration serves to emphasize the self-confidence of Achilles' masquerade, which he enjoys fully. He later says:

Dolce cambio di Natura,  
donna in huomo trasformarsi,  
huomo in donna tramutarsi,  
variar nome e figura.  
Non son più Fillide bella,  
son Acchille hoggi tornato:  
quanti invidiano il mio stato,  
per far l'huomo e la donzella?  
Io per me non vedea l'horà,  
di tornar maschio guerriero,  
molti son d'altro parere,  
resterian femmine ogn'horà.<sup>13</sup>

It's a lovely change of nature to transform oneself from a woman into a man, to change from being a man into a woman, to modify one's name and appearance. I am no longer the beautiful Phyllis; I have returned today to being Achilles. How many envy my state, to play the man and the girl? For my own part, I can't wait for the moment that I return to being a male warrior, but many people are of the opposite opinion: they would stay female all the time.

Comfortable in his identity as Achilles, he chooses gender roles to suit the needs of the moment. He has no doubt that he prefers to live as a man, but he is willing and able to live as a girl when his mother's wishes and his own erotic convenience point in that direction. The unmasking of Achilles as a man happens not because he can no longer maintain the pretense of femininity, but because of a simple trick that trumps Achilles' own.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. *Ach.* 1.764–71, 1.835–8.

<sup>12</sup> *La finta pazza*, Act 1, Scene 3 (Della Corte, 1958: 352).

<sup>13</sup> *La finta pazza*, Act 2, Scene 2 (Della Corte, 1958: 379).

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Strozzi's Achilles reflects on his experience not as a matter of disguise, but of transformation: *dolce cambio di Natura*. This metamorphic quality extends to the entire world of the libretto, as Diomedes observes toward its end:

Nell'isola di Sciro  
ogni cosa mi sembra  
cangiato haver natura. Insin le pietre  
nuotono intere, e grandi,  
e s'affondan poi trite e minute:  
le Fanciulle impazziscono, e ritrovano  
nel folleggiar salute.<sup>14</sup>

Everything on the island of Scyros seems to me to have changed its nature.  
Even the large and solid rocks float, while the finest dust sinks. Girls go  
mad and recover their health by means of their madness.

Diomedes captures the spirit of Scyros: by a strange metamorphosis, the ponderous stuff of epic is rendered weightless here.

Achilles describes his experience as a metamorphosis as much as a disguise, and he weighs the pleasure of being a woman against that of being a man. This recalls Ovid's Tiresias, who, not a transvestite but rather a transsexual, transformed himself into a woman and then back into a man, gaining the benefit of experiencing the pleasures of both sexes, and pronouncing on the difference.<sup>15</sup> Achilles' joking reflection on his sexual "transformation" takes on particular poignancy given the nature of the singer who interpreted the role in the Venetian premiere. Achilles was played by "a young castrato of alluring appearance. . . , who combined a warlike spirit with feminine softness such that he seemed an Amazon."<sup>16</sup> As if to make clear the connection between the gender metamorphosis in the drama and the castration of performers in it, Strozzi introduces a eunuch as a character in the drama. He is a singer and a member of Lycomedes' court who entertains the rest of the company, and even makes jokes about his own castration.<sup>17</sup>

*La finta pazza* leaves a great deal to be desired as a depiction of the Achilles-on-Scyros myth, since the final two-thirds of it diverge into the idiosyncratic story of Deidamia's feigned madness. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the ability of the myth to celebrate the sexual masquerade inherent in early opera, depicting gender itself as carnivalesque, both in the pretended femininity of Achilles

14 *La finta pazza*, Act 3, Scene 7 (Della Corte, 1958: 425).

15 Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.323. The *Dizionario dell'opera*, s.v. "Finta pazza" (Baldini and Castoldi, 2002), compares the lines of Achilles quoted above with similar words spoken by the transsexual Hermaphroditus in *Gli amori di Giasone e Isifile*.

16 "un giovanetto castrato. . . , di vago aspetto sì che sembrava un'Amazzone, c'havesse misti i spiriti guerrieri con le delicatezze femminili." From a pamphlet of 1641, *Il cannocchiale per la finta pazza, delineato da M[aiolino] B[isaccioni] C[onte] di G[enova]*, as quoted by Rosand (1991: 415f).

17 On whom see Heller (1998: 574f) and Rosand (1991: 118f).

and in the pretended “female” hysteria of Deidamia. Because of the popularity of Strozzi’s text, many subsequent libretti on the subject are likely to have been influenced by it. As we shall see, some developed the theme of the power of masquerade still further, and some reacted strongly against it. For an example of the latter view, Metastasio’s Achilles excuses himself to Deidamia for the way his disguise comes near to slipping, arguing that “changing one’s nature is too difficult a task.”<sup>18</sup> Those words, *cambio di natura*, seem almost a direct rebuttal to the words of Strozzi quoted above, where Achilles amiably praises the “lovely change of nature” between male and female.

### *Paris, 1645*

Italian opera met with a warm reception across much of Europe, but not everywhere. In France and England particularly, where national chauvinism was most highly developed, the importation of “foreign” musical styles was most controversial. Cardinal Mazarin, an Italian by birth, tried to interest the French court in the opera of his homeland; and a major part of this project was a lavish production of *La finta pazza*. This had been suggested by the arrival in Paris of Giacomo Torelli, the set designer for the original Venetian production. His Parisian version of *La finta pazza* was only the second opera ever staged in France, and it is the first about which substantial details are known.<sup>19</sup> Torelli was granted permission to memorialize his efforts in a publication that was lavishly illustrated with engravings of many of his sets; this document provides much incidental detail about the production.<sup>20</sup> The central position of the set designer in this project demonstrates the importance of spectacle to opera productions of the day. Torelli himself had revolutionized stage design in Venice with a system of counterweights, ropes, and pulleys that allowed smooth and simultaneous changes in scenery.<sup>21</sup>

A great deal of effort went into translating the visual idiom of *La finta pazza* into terms that were flattering to the French court: the island of Scyros was imagined quite improbably as the Ile de la Cité, with the arrival of Ulysses and Diomedes staged against a monumental backdrop that depicted central Paris, including the Louvre and the Pont Neuf.<sup>22</sup> Numerous dances were inserted into the plot to suit the French taste for ballet and to capture the attention

18 “Ma il cambio di natura | È impresa troppo dura”: *Achille in Sciro*, Act 1, Scene 8 (Brunelli, 1953: vol 1, p 764).

19 Punières (1913: 38–77).

20 Strozzi (1645), on which see Bjurström (1961: 134–43, 243–5) and Kirstein (1971: 70f).

21 Kimbell (1991: 129–31).

22 Bjurström (1961: 138) claims that no such visual equation of the island kingdom of Scyros with Venice was present in the original Venetian production, but Rosand (1991: 115) argues plausibly that, while there is no firm evidence, it is probable that Torelli had “portrayed Skyros in the guise of Venice.”



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of the seven-year-old king: at the end of Act I, there was a ballet of four eunuchs, four bears, and four monkeys; at the end of Act 2, a ballet of ostriches, and at the end of the opera, a boat filled with Native Americans arrived, who performed a ballet and then released five live parrots over the audience.<sup>23</sup> The production was politely received, but it did not launch a vogue for Italian opera. Torelli went on to have a very successful career in Paris, where he was known as *le grand sorcier*; he had a lasting influence on French stage design. He remained in France until the death of Mazarin in 1661, an event which put an end to efforts to import Italian opera into France. The subsequent development of an independent national tradition of opera in French was the result of Louis XIV's patronage of Lully, who stepped into the vacuum created by the failure of *opera seria* to establish itself in Paris in the way that it did in other European capitals, where Italian opera and the Achilles-in-Scyros theme continued to thrive.

*Ferrara, 1663*

A few decades after the premiere of *La finta pazza*, an opera called *Achille in Sciro* was performed in Ferrara. It had music by Giovanni Legrenzi, and the authorship of its libretto has been attributed to a Ferrarese aristocrat, the marchese Ippolito Bentivoglio.<sup>24</sup> Since this libretto is not available in a modern edition, it may be useful to summarize very briefly some of the highlights of its plot. Deidamia has sworn a vow of chastity to Diana in order to provide a cover for her secret affair with Achilles, who is disguised as the girl Pyrrha. Lycomedes then looks to secure the succession of his throne by betrothing his second daughter, Cyrene, to a prince of Elis called Polycastes. The problem is that Polycastes falls in love with Achilles in his disguise as Pyrrha and becomes unwilling to marry Cyrene. Achilles rejects Polycastes' advances, but Cyrene nevertheless attempts to kill her rival, Pyrrha, while "she" is sleeping. When the truth comes out, Lycomedes pardons both Cyrene and Polycastes and orders them to be married before sundown.

In the second act, there is a rather contrived misunderstanding on the part of Deidamia, who accuses Achilles of harboring feelings for Cyrene. In the midst of this quarrel, Deidamia nearly tells her father the truth about Pyrrha's identity, but is stopped by Achilles. Ulysses, disguised as a merchant, then discerns the identity of Achilles on account of his lack of interest in the womanly goods he displays. At the blast of a trumpet, all flee except Achilles. When Ulysses addresses him by his proper name, Achilles hesitates to respond, thinking

23 Punières (1913: 73), Bjurström (1961: 136), and Kirstein (1971: 72f).

24 Sartori (1990–4) lists three published editions (nos. 153–5); the text of the libretto as described here refers to the Venetian edition of 1663 (Sartori, no. 154). Bentivoglio was identified as the author of the libretto, which was published anonymously, in the catalogue of operas performed in Venice that was compiled by Bonlini (1979, originally published in 1730: pp 66, 252).



about Deidamia, but eventually yields in the face of Ulysses' mockery, and goes along with him. In the last scene of Act 2, Achilles continues to mope about his beloved and refuses to go on, until Ulysses claims to have a plan that will sort everything out. In Act 3, it is announced to Lycomedes that the disguised "merchant" who has snatched Pyrrha was none other than her brother, Achilles. Lycomedes agrees to pardon Achilles, as long as he returns Pyrrha; meanwhile, Ulysses tells Achilles that their plan is to snatch Deidamia. When Achilles meets Lycomedes, he asks for the hand of his eldest daughter, Deidamia. Lycomedes points to Deidamia's vow of chastity and offers him Cyrene instead, at which Deidamia's jealousy flares up again, and she denounces Achilles. Ulysses engineers a reconciliation between the lovers, but as they prepare to depart, Lycomedes surprises the group. Ulysses stops Achilles as he is about to identify himself, and instead tells Lycomedes that Achilles is really Pyrrha, cross-dressed as a man. When Polycastes, who is not a party to this latest deception, assaults Achilles for being the kidnapper of his beloved Pyrrha, he is disarmed; and he is humiliated when the identity of Pyrrha as a man is finally revealed to him. Polycastes and Cyrene are reconciled, and in the final scene Ulysses explains the truth to Lycomedes, who accepts Achilles as his son-in-law.

The plot is endless and unsatisfying; the first act is mainly concerned with the Polycastes and Cyrene sub-plot, which then all but disappears from the stage. The second and third acts are drawn out with a pointless series of minor reversals. In particular, Deidamia's tiffs and reconciliations with Achilles are implausible in their motivation and seem to be desperate ad hoc inventions by the author. In its sprawling and digressive plot this *Achille in Sciro*, like *La finta pazza*, exemplifies the character of the early opera libretti associated with seventeenth-century Venice. Another such feature they have in common is the contribution of lower-class, servile characters to the sexual comedy.<sup>25</sup> Of the two, Strozzi's libretto is far more charming in its idiosyncrasies. The "reform" libretti that followed these two were, as we shall see, more tightly written and more elevated in tone. The interest of Bentivoglio's text lies in the way it introduces themes that are developed at greater length and with greater consistency by later writers. The most important of these is the idea of the disguised and feminized Achilles as the object of male erotic desire.

Bentivoglio's Achilles is not a heroic figure. Unlike Strozzi's Achilles, a cynical sexual opportunist who attempts to abandon Deidamia, this Achilles remains besotted with her even after his discovery by Ulysses. Like Strozzi's Achilles, however, he is perfectly comfortable in his feminine disguise and does not complain about his fate.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the *Achilleid*, where Deidamia has to restrain the spirited Achilles from revealing himself (1.802–5), this Achilles has to restrain a spirited Deidamia from revealing their secret (Act 2, Scene 14).

<sup>25</sup> See Heller (1998: 575f).

<sup>26</sup> Thus Heller (1998: 575).

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The infatuation of Polycastes highlights Achilles' feminine beauty, even as he angrily tries to ward off this unwelcome attention. The comic nurse, when confronted with the prospect of Pyrrha supposedly cross-dressed as the male Achilles, notes the convenience of playing both sexes in terms similar to those used by Strozzi's Achilles:

Con questa somiglianza  
 Pirra tù puoi pigliarti un gran piacere  
 Nel far l'huomo, e la donna a tuo volere.<sup>27</sup>

Pyrrha, with this likeness you can obtain great pleasure for yourself, playing the man and the woman at your whim.

The feminization of Achilles is presented most starkly in a sequence of scenes in which the sleeping hero is surveyed as a passive sexual object by a stream of people, both male and female. In Act 1, Scene 17, Achilles wanders alone in the royal gardens, where he waits for Deidamia, praising the beauty of the flowers and surroundings. He falls asleep, and when in the next scene Deidamia arrives, she decides to let him sleep and departs off-stage. In the following scene Polycastes arrives and admires the beauty of the sleeping Pyrrha. He praises the beauty of Achilles' lips, but Lycomedes approaches before he can proceed further. Polycastes hides in the bushes and in the next scene Lycomedes likewise remarks on the beauty of the sleeping figure. The king masters his desires with some difficulty and withdraws to avoid temptation. Then in Scene 21, Cyrene arrives and attempts to murder her sleeping rival; at this the others all leap out from where they have been lurking to stop her. The reactions of the four characters who encounter the sleeping Achilles are strongly stereotyped by gender. The two males are provoked to a predatory sexual desire; one woman is kind and considerate while the other is irrationally jealous. Achilles meanwhile plays a stereotypically feminine role: in a passive posture and surrounded by flowers, he is feminized by the gazes that pass over him.

This theme of latent same-sex attraction was Bentivoglio's most important innovation; particularly significant is the first appearance here of Lycomedes as susceptible to the beauty of the disguised Achilles.<sup>28</sup> Bentivoglio's king retains his dignity because he obeys his own "wise counsel" (*saggio consiglio*, Act 1, Scene 20) and flees temptation. As we shall see, in several subsequent versions, Lycomedes does not emerge from this situation so well. There is further homoerotic innuendo provided by the peculiarly close "friendship" between Deidamia and Pyrrha, which is the object of sarcastic comment by the nurse.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Achille in Sciro*, Act 3, Scene 16.

<sup>28</sup> Lycomedes reflects on the charms of Pyrrha in Act 1, Scene 20 and Act 2, Scene 11; and in the final scene he notes that his love has been transformed into paternal affection for his new son-in-law.

<sup>29</sup> Act 1, Scene 4, on which see Heller (1998: 577).