

Briseis: An *alokhos* without *eunē*

The phrase *alokhon thumarea* (*Il.9.336*) in Achilles' well-wrought speech rejecting Agamemnon's gift offer has elicited some discussions (Fantuzzi 2012: 108; Griffin 1995: 114). Although some scholars suggest that *alokhon thumarea* refers to Clytemnestra, it is now generally accepted that the phrase refers to Briseis (Clark 1940: 188-89; Fantuzzi 2012: 108). Given that Odysseus uses the same phrase to characterize Penelope (*Od.23.232*), it is possible that Achilles sees Briseis more than a *geras*. The combination of *thumarēs*, dear to heart, and *alokhos*, literally bed-mate, may allude to his erotic attachment to and his love of Briseis when the Penelope parallel may reinforce this sentiment; however, Fantuzzi has pointed out the uncertainty of such a reading (Fantuzzi 2012: 99). In this paper I argue that although Achilles' use of *alokhon thumarea* might suggest a certain degree of Briseis' sexual appeal, in the epic she is portrayed more as a *geras*. My discussion of the phrase *alokhon thumarea* focuses on two aspects, a) the ambiguity of the word *thumarēs* based on a comparison with a similar expression *arsantes kata thumon* (*Il.1.136*), and b) the difference between *lekhos* and *eunē* in the Homeric marital and erotic context. I shall show that the lack of *eunē* along with the ambiguous *thumarēs* undermines the love and erotic feelings of Achilles towards Briseis.

As *LSJ* suggests, *alokhos* is related to *lekhos*, which shares a similar meaning with *eunē*, namely bed or couch. The word *lekhos* originally refers to bed-frame, but *eunē* refers to a ready-made bed with mattresses and bed-cloth (Kaimio 2002: 98). Thus a *lekhos*-mate might not be the same as an *eunē*-mate. Moreover, *eunē* is sometimes associated with marriage and sexual activities (Laser 1968: 3; Kaimio 2002: 98). While Penelope is closely associated with her *eunē*, which she uses as a token to prove Odysseus's identity (*Od.23.225*), I shall show that words related to *lekhos* are used more often to describe Briseis. Therefore, although in his speech

Achilles refers to Briseis as a *alokhos thumarēs*, the omission of *eunē* suggests that Briseis is more likely to be regarded as a *geras* than a wife. The phrase *alokhos thumarēs* may indicate Achilles' sophisticated rhetorics more than his emotions.

Bibliography

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