Callirhoe: The Penelopian Helen

The allusion to Homeric epic, especially the *Odyssey*, within the Greek novels is not exactly subtle. The ancient novelist Chariton, for instance, underlines Homeric resonances frequently in his work by directly quoting from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. While these references serve as meta-literary markers of generic affiliation applicable not just to Chariton's text but to the whole genre of which it is a member, they also activate meanings specific to Chariton (Morgan and Harrison 2008: 219). Within the Greek novels, heroes journey around dangerous waters, facing shipwrecks, bandits, slavery, and various sexual temptations until their final reunion with their beloved at the novels' happy endings (Lefteratou 2018: 176).

With regard to Chariton's heroine Callirhoe, I argue that the author introduces epic allusions to both Penelope and Helen in order to prepare his audience to think about how Callirhoe is informed by the two epic heroines as both models and foils. The novel *Callirhoe* tells a tale similar to that of Helen: a beautiful woman has two husbands; her first husband travels east in search of her; a war occurs in which west confronts east; and in the end, the heroine is recovered by her first husband. And yet, while there are many shared plotlines between Helen and Callirhoe, Callirhoe's character aligns more strongly with that of Penelope, the archetypal faithful wife, reunited with her husband after an extended chain of adventures. However, as much as Callirhoe resembles these epic icons at a glance, she deviates quickly from their likenesses due to the decisions she makes while away from home in Miletus.

Scholars such as Konstan (1994) and De Temmerman (2014) have made a point to describe the similarities between Callirhoe and her epic models individually. These discussions center on the ambiguous nature of Chariton's allusions and the ways in which each pulls the character of Callirhoe into question. For example, when discussing Callirhoe's *sōphrosynē* De

Temmerman notes that although Callirhoe, like Helen, marries another man, she remains devoted to Chaereas and ultimately ends up, like Penelope, reunited with her first husband (De Temmerman 2014: 54). While these striking polarities might compel some authors to pick a side and question whether Callirhoe is more of a Penelope or a Helen, I believe Chariton places these parallel contrasts in his novel to show the reader that Callirhoe is part Helen, part Penelope, but also part something entirely different. I go a step further to suggest that it is through their representations of women and allusions to women in epic, tragedy, and elegy that ancient novelists are able to craft a unique literary genre of their own, something that is both like and unlike its predecessors. By creating these parallels between Callirhoe and the epic heroines, Chariton is able to pay homage to Homeric epic while also making clear what some of the characteristics of a novel's heroine and mother should be.

In sum, this paper proves that Chariton utilizes various allusions to Helen and Penelope to create a diverse context for the audience, as they are unsure how Callirhoe will react to various circumstances. In addition, I will prove that Chariton purposefully places Callirhoe in these epic situations in order to emphasize the fact that Callirhoe is a perfect representation of neither Penelope nor Helen but a blending of the two, as well something entirely *novel*.

Bibliography

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