The Wife of Achilles

Thus far, no interpretation has provided an adequate significance to Achilles’ last lines in the Iliad (24.675-676):

αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς εὗδε μυχῷ κλισίης ἐυπήκτου·
tῷ δὲ Βρισηῒς παρελέξατο καλλιπάρηος.1

Achilles slept in the innermost of the well-built hut
and with him slept beautiful-cheeked Briseis.

Yet, these two lines express a subtle tragedy in Achilles’ story. By depicting a domestic setting parallel to an earlier scene in Book 9, these two lines convey Achilles’ tragic isolation by expressing his desire for marriage while emphasizing his inability to ever live a happy domestic life at home with a bride.2

The domestic setting of this scene has multiple parallels throughout Homer, and has a direct mirror in Book 9:

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1 All Greek text is from Monro and Allen’s OCT, third edition. All translations are my own.
2 To see the importance of marriage in regard to Achilles, it should be noted that the idealized city on Achilles’ shield depicts a wedding celebration (9.492-496). Alden (2000, 55) discusses the significance of the parallel narratives on the shield, such as the blood price image that is parallel with Ajax’s speech in Book 9, but he does not discuss the significance of the wedding scene in regard to Achilles. Nagy (2003, 72-87) also discusses how this juridical scene “lays the conceptual foundations for the beginnings of the polis”, but does not discuss the wedding image. Atchity (1978, 185) likewise notes that the images of two cities on the shield “recalls Homer’s own story”, but does not connect the significance of the marriage scene to Achilles. Furthermore, such marital themes are prominent in the Iliad, such as between Helen and Paris or between Andromache and Hector most notably at 6.369-502.
αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεὺς εὗδε μυχῷ κλισίης εὐπήκτου
τῷ δ᾽ ἄρα παρκατέλεκτο γυνή, τὴν Λεσβόθεν ἦγε,
Φόρβαντος θυγάτηρ, Διομήδη καλλιπάρηος. (9.663-665)

Achilles slept in the innermost of the well-built hut:
with him a woman slept on the bed, whom he had taken from Lesbos,
the daughter of Phorbas, Diomede of the beautiful cheeks.

The main action of the scene, Achilles going to sleep, incorporates two
images, the bed and the woman he sleeps with, παρκατέλεκτο γυνή, with the
bed implied in the verb. There are multiple Homeric scenes that share a sim-
ilar typology, concluding the scene and incorporating the same two images
of the bed and the woman. At the end of Book 1, Zeus and Hera share such
a scene:

Ζεὺς δὲ πρὸς ὃν λέχος ἤϊ᾽ Ὀλύμπιος ἀστεροπητῆς,
ἔνθα πάρος κοιμᾶθ᾽ ὅτε μιν γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἱκάνοι·
ἔνθα καθεῦδ᾽ ἀναβάς, παρὰ δὲ χρυσόθρονος Ἡρη. (1.609-611)

Olympian Zeus the lightning-hurler went to his bed,
where he slept until sweet sleep came to him:
where having gone up he slept next to golden-throned Hera.

This scene adheres to the typology, concluding the section and containing the
same two images of the bed and the woman. The thematic conflict at the end
of Book 1 concerns the domestic struggles of Zeus' household, reinforcing that
the typology relates to domestic themes. Paris and Helen also share such a
scene together:

"Ἡ ῥα, καὶ ἄρχε λέχος δὲ κιών· ἄμα δ᾽ εἶπετ ἄκοιτις,
Τὼ μὲν ἄρ᾽ ἐν τρητοῖσι κατεύνασθεν λεχέσσιν. (3.447-448)

Then he led the way, going to the bed, and his wife followed.
Then they went to sleep in their perforated beds.

The thematic conflict of the preceding scene is domestic and the typology is
the same, concluding its section and incorporating the same two images of the
bed and the woman. When Phoinix recounts the story of Meleager, the hero
and his wife are also seen lying together in bed: κεῖτο παρὰ μνηστῇ ἀλόχω, καλὴ