

Rosenmeyer, P. (2004) "Girls At Play in Archaic Greek Poetry", *AJP* 125, 163-78.

This paper explores the complex meanings of *paizein* and its compound *sumpaizein* used in connection with young girls and/or Eros in archaic Greek poetry. My basic question is whether the verb necessarily implies a knowing eroticism on the part of the character whom it describes, or whether it is the poet's way of inviting the audience to share his knowledge at the expense of the character, a kind of "wink" of complicity. I argue that there are fundamental ambiguities this particular use of *paizein* and that the instability of its semantic field is linked to the liminality of the stage of life to which it commonly refers. When Eros "plays," know we should be on guard, but a young girl's "play" is somewhat more difficult to interpret. In this context, I suggest that Greek poetry can represent the liminality of a girl's sexual status through the physical setting in which the action takes place: the "players" are placed in a natural environment that reflects their stage in life, namely, the moments just before the loss of innocence, and that locus itself is open to divergent interpretations dependent on the sexual "knowledge" of the viewer. The notion "girls at play" thus resists any single interpretation, as the girls' sexual status always contains within it the potential for rapid and drastic change.