

Hebe and Liminality in Catullus 68
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Many recent treatments of the Heracles exemplum in Catullus 68B have been offered, pointing out its problematic connection with the rest of the poem and to the poet in particular. Vandiver has shown how Heracles and his funeral pyre make more than one appearance in 68A-B, yet she sees the hero's death/apotheosis and marriage to Hebe as "bleaker, since in it Heracles serves as a foil" to Laodamia (and also the poet), "whose thwarted passion for her incomplete marriage led to her actual death, not to any apotheosis."¹ Steiner has also turned her attention to the Heracles exemplum and its use in 68B to discuss notions of immortality. Yet again, when talk turns to the marriage of Heracles and Hebe, the subject of focus is the hero's immortality contrasted with Catullus' frustrated romance with Lesbia.²

In this paper, I will argue that the focus on Heracles only as a direct comparison with Catullus and the overall themes of 68A and 68B misses a far more applicable comparison: that of the poet with Hebe, whose maidenhood in 68B.116 is on the verge of ending with her pending nuptials. I intend, as others, to connect this mythological exemplum to the wider scope of the poem, most notably the poet's discussion of his youth at 68A.15-18, where an *anaphora* seems to connect the reader to the later exemplum. This, coupled with a study of the treatment of Hebe in Archaic and Hellenistic poetry and a reticence among some to accept the account of her marriage to Heracles as legitimate, adds weight to 68B.116 (*Hebe nec longa virginitate foret*) that is largely overlooked: i.e., a liminality that illuminates themes of youth, death and marriage that punctuate the remainder of the poem. Youth, the maiden goddess, to whom Roman boys were said to pay tribute when they reached manhood,³ will not be long with her maidenhood, the defining characteristic of youth. Coupled with 68A.15-18, where Catullus recollects donning the *toga virilis* and spending his youth in pleasure, the Hebe line deserves greater focus than it has yet received.

¹ Vandiver, Elizabeth, 2000. "Hot Springs, Cool Rivers, and Hidden Fires: Heracles in Catullus." *CP* 95:151-159.

² Steiner, Deborah. 2004. "Catullan Excavations: Pindar's 'Olympian' 10 and Catullus 68." *HSCP* 102:275-297.

³ *Dion. Hal.* 4.15.5