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Making Connections: Teaching Catullus  
Poem 64 (lines 50-253) in the Larger  
Context of the Catullan Corpus and Other  
Latin Poetry

In the majority of Catullus classrooms in the United States the so-called Lesbia poems are likely still to dominate the required Catullan readings (Ancona/Hallett in Skinner 2007 and Garrison in Skinner 2007). Whether in high school or college, Catullus is best known as the young poet full of romantic angst who praises and blames his beloved. (For recognition of this characterization, see Wray 2001, among others). Given this current state of Latin pedagogy, it is no wonder that some instructors approach the teaching of any of the long poems of Catullus (61-68) with less than complete enthusiasm. One way to help combat this situation is to show how connected these longer poems are both to the rest of the Catullan corpus and to other Latin poetry. (Skinner 2003 has drawn recent attention to the “elegiac libellus,” poems 65-116, which includes several of the longer poems). It is my aim in this paper to discuss ways in which Poem 64, 50-253, the bedspread ephrasis, which contains the story of Ariadne and Theseus and her abandonment by him, currently on the Advanced Placement Latin Literature syllabus and easily read as a manageable unit in college classrooms, can be linked with profit to other poems of Catullus (including the so-called Lesbia poems) and to Latin poetry more broadly, including Vergil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and Latin Love Elegy. (Relevant scholarship includes Putnam 1961, Knopp 1976, Gaisser 1995.)

My purpose will be to show how this particular Catullan passage can be connected, with regard to matters of vocabulary, meter, theme, and genre, with other Latin material that students may encounter either in college level or advanced high school level curricula. As any reading specialist will confirm, making connections develops and reinforces reading comprehension. By tracing some of the similarities and differences between this passage from Poem 64 and other standard Latin readings, I hope to make more comprehensible and memorable one selection from a “longer” Catullus poem as well as the selections from other Latin poetry with which it will be juxtaposed.

References:

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