

DOMINA AT CATULLUS 68, 68:  
MISTRESS OR CHATELAINE?

An old controversy has been revived by the recent proposal of L.P. Wilkinson to resolve this well-known *crux* in favour of V's *dominam*. Wilkinson regards acceptance of Froehlich's *dominae* as a key factor in the currency of the view "that Catullus was the first Roman poet to call his mistress *domina*".<sup>1</sup>) It has also been held that the choice between these readings has important bearing on one's view of the unity or otherwise of poem 68.<sup>2</sup>) Such claims, however, have tended to overestimate the importance of v. 68 in resolving these wider issues raised by the poem. Proponents of both *dominam* and *dominae* can be found on either side of the Unity *vs.* Separation dispute;<sup>3</sup>) and it is by no means the case that only those who read *dominae* take the word to mean 'mistress' in the erotic sense at this place.<sup>4</sup>)

The controversy seems to merit a fresh consideration, on account of the added element of interest it has assumed just lately for quite a different reason. The appearance of Wilkinson's challenge coincides with the publication of Quinn's edition of Catullus in which he adopts *dominae* into his text and admits as a

---

1) "Domina in Catullus 68", *C. R.*, n.s. XX (1970), p. 290. Wilkinson cites F. Klingner in Fondation Hardt, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, 2 (1956), p. 212, and G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London, 1959), p. 122, as examples of this view (cf. also K. Quinn, *The Catullan Revolution* [Melbourne, 1959], pp. 81-2, with note 21).

2) H.W. Prescott, "The Unity of Catullus LXVIII", *T. A. P. A.*, LXXI (1940), pp. 473-500. See especially pp. 488-493.

3) Froehlich, to whom we owe the emendation *dominae*, was in favour of the absolute separation of vv. 1-40 (Prescott, *art. cit.*, p. 473, note 2); Kenneth Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* (London, 1972), accepts *dominae* (pp. 68 and 384) but sees vv. 1-160 as a unity (pp. 373 ff.). Prescott, *art. cit.*, pp. 488 ff. argues strongly for *dominam* to underpin his case for unity; T.E. Kinsey, "Some Problems in Catullus 68", *Latomus*, XXVI (1967), pp. 35-53, argues for separation (pp. 36-38) and for *dominam* (pp. 42-43).

4) R. Ellis, *A Commentary on Catullus* (Oxford, 1876), p. 330, refers to (and rejects) "the interpretation which makes *dominam* Lesbia". Kinsey, *art. cit.*, p. 43, reads *dominam* in the erotic sense, but not as a reference to Lesbia.

possibility the interpretation based upon it which Wilkinson so emphatically rejects.<sup>5)</sup>

Wilkinson's objection to the reading which Quinn has now espoused begins from comments on the line by Fordyce. Their first point is that the symmetry of the balanced *isque ... isque* confirms the expectation that *domum* and *dominam* should be correlatives, as they are at 61, 31: "the house and its chatelaine".<sup>6)</sup> Their second is that the *ad quam* of v. 69 must, with the reading *dominae* at v. 68, refer to the more remote antecedent *domum*, the Latinity of the phrase *domum ... ad quam* in the sense of *domum ... in qua* being, in any case, suspect.<sup>7)</sup>

Their second point loses much of its force in the light of the parallels adduced by Kroll for the occurrence of *ad* in the sense of 'worin',<sup>8)</sup> and by Ellis for relative pronouns having the more remote antecedent.<sup>9)</sup> Their first objection I find even less cogent, for reasons which this note is designed to raise in defence of the reading adopted by Quinn, and recently also by Bardon.<sup>10)</sup>

As far as concerns the structure of v. 68 which Fordyce and Wilkinson invoke, it seems to me no more to warrant the symmetrical direct objects *domum* and *dominam* which they require than it does the symmetry of the indirect objects *nobis* and *dominae* which Froehlich's correction yields. This is not simply to blur the force of the argument of Fordyce and others, nor merely to offer two datives in exchange for their two accusatives. I appreciate that the balance they see in *domum ... dominam* is not just one of syntax, but a subtler one of meaning based on the frequent occurrence of this very correlation.<sup>11)</sup> But it has been pointed out that characteristic of Catullus is a correlation that is scarcely less emphatic, and one peculiarly evident in poem 68,

5) *Catullus: The Poems*, p. 68. Also p. 384: "Perhaps also the first allusion to the concept, constant in Augustan elegy, of the lover as his mistress' slave".

6) C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 351-2.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 351.

8) W. Kroll, *C. Valerius Catullus* (repr. Stuttgart, 1959), p. 228. See especially Seneca, *Controv. excerpta* III, 3: *reliquit me tantum ad paternam domum*.

9) Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 330; his references are to Tacitus, *Annales* I, 74 and Cicero, *pro Archia* 10, 25.

10) H. Bardon, *Catulli carmina*, Collection Latomus, 112 (Brussels, 1970), pp. 180-1.

11) Fordyce, *op. cit.*, p. 242 (commenting on 61, 31) cites examples from Cicero, Ovid and Petronius.

between *domus* and *domina* in the sense not of 'mistress of the home' but precisely of 'beloved of the poet'.<sup>12)</sup>

In view of this I would question whether the reference which both Fordyce and Wilkinson make to 61, 31 (*domum dominam voca*) has particular weight for their case for *dominam* at 68, 68 after all. I believe that Quinn is equally well justified in referring to 61, 31 (as well as to 61, 149-51) in defence of *dominae*, with the comment that "Allius provided, i.e., a house for C. and the woman who thus became its mistress".<sup>13)</sup> It is true that Quinn has just now been taken to task for this comment.<sup>14)</sup> But the comment well suggests the highly probable play on *domina* in the erotic sense and *domina* as the etymological correlative of *domus*.<sup>15)</sup> Furthermore, the attempt at ambivalent description of the girl (Lesbia, surely, despite Kinsey, *art. cit.*, pp. 43-44 to the contrary), as mistress of the poet and mistress of a borrowed house, is by no means without point in the context of this poem - the point being that she was a borrowed mistress:

nec tamen illa mihi dextra deducta paterna  
 fragrantem Assyrio venit odore domum,  
 sed furtiva dedit mira munuscula nocte,  
 ipsius ex ipso dempta viri gremio.      143-5.

---

12) See J.P. Elder, *H.S.C.P.*, LX (1951), pp. 129ff. (It must be noted that Elder cites v. 68 with the reading *dominam* [p. 130]. But his comments there and on v. 156 [p. 131], and, in particular, his clear statement on p. 126 make it certain that he sees it as referring to Lesbia at both places). Cf. my own remarks on the correlation between *domus* and *venusta Sirmio* personified as beloved of the poet in poem 31, *Mnemosyne*, XXIII (1970), pp. 39-41.

13) *Catullus: The Poems*, p. 384; felicitous comment and crossreferences in view of the marriage parallelism in the verses which follow (vv. 70-74) and the marriage imagery of vv. 133-4. In so answering Fordyce and Wilkinson on this point I am also answering the first of the four objections to *dominae* assembled by Kinsey, *art. cit.*, pp. 42-43: "elsewhere (68, 156; 61, 31) Catullus couples *domus* and *domina* in the same case".

14) By Niall Rudd, *J.R.S.*, LXII (1972), p. 213: "Quinn tries to combine both ideas ... Surely this can't be right". But cf. Kinsey, *art. cit.*, p. 43, note 3, who makes precisely the same point as Quinn ("Catullus' *domina* would have acted as an irregular *materfamilias*").

15) The inseparability of *domina* from *domus* in the sense of 'the house and its mistress' is not denied (see especially Prescott, *art. cit.*, pp. 488-490); but that the probability of a play on *domina* in the sense of *amica* was already established by Catullus' time is a reasonable inference from Lucilius, frag. 730 (Marx).

Such ambivalence at v. 68 thus anticipates the pathetically ambivalent vision of the same *domina* later in the poem, where illusion (vv. 131–134) gives way to reality (vv. 135–148).

In the second place, however, I wish to get away from the strictures which Fordyce and Wilkinson jointly impose here, to argue more positively in support of *dominae* at v. 68 from a point of view which has not, as far as I know, been adopted by any of those who have accepted the correction. In my view the symmetry of the line afforded by the reading

isque domum nobis isque dedit dominae

plays an important thematic role at this point in the poem.<sup>16</sup> The balance achieved by the repeated *isque ... isque* in v. 68 (already repeated from v. 67, as Quinn notes *ad loc.*) also strikes a balance between the indirect objects (*nobis* and *dominae*) of *dedit* in a precise and crucial context. This is the couplet in which Catullus begins to unfold the *auxilium* (v. 67) for which he holds himself so much in Allius' debt (vv. 41–44). This balancing of the indirect objects, i.e. the beneficiaries, of Allius' favour lends nice emphasis to the fact that the service rendered by Allius was to both of them equally – Catullus and his *domina*.<sup>17</sup> Such emphasis on the shared nature of the debt to Allius already anticipates the force of *communes* (v. 69), and eliminates the awkwardness that Fordyce saw in the necessity of awaiting an explanation of v. 69 until the appearance of *candida diva* (v. 70) which belongs to the next sentence.<sup>18</sup> Rather is it the case that *candida diva* develops the imagery already implicit in *dominae*.<sup>19</sup>

To extend this line of argument somewhat, the emphasis placed upon the fact that Allius has conferred a favour *jointly*

16) In addition, that is, to its more obvious function of pointing out the ellipsis *isque domum <dedit> nobis isque <domum> dedit dominae*.

17) I offer this point in answer to the second objection tendered by Kinsey, *loc. cit.*: "If *domina* refers to Lesbia, what is the point of emphasising that Allius gave the house to her as well as to Catullus; if the house was given to Catullus, naturally Lesbia could come to it". The second statement is true enough, but not much to the point. The point is: *would* Lesbia have come if the house had *not* been given to Catullus? On Kinsey's own interpretation her appearance on the scene was unexpected enough even when the house was available (*art. cit.*, p. 44).

18) Fordyce, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

19) Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems*, p. 384. The points in the text covered by this footnote and the last seem to me sufficiently to answer Kinsey's third objection, *art. cit.*, p. 42: "A reference to Lesbia in line 68 spoils her dramatic epiphany in line 70".

upon Catullus and Lesbia may be seen to have yet further functions to perform within the economy of the poem. As well as carrying a hint of the marriage parallels soon to be evoked, it adds another dimension to the contrast between Allius' state of celibate sleeplessness at vv. 1-8 and Catullus' assumption v. 155 "that his friend will not be long exposed to the anguish of unrequited love".<sup>20</sup>) By his service done to both the lovers at v. 68, in such a way that he made possible the visit which marked the beginning of their liaison and became their sponsor into the quasi marital state there inaugurated, Allius has *deserved* that assurance of early rescue from his own lovelorn state which is implicit in v. 155.<sup>21</sup>) Reference to this verse leads neatly to Wilkinson's "clinching argument from lines 155 ff." which is the last problem confronting me here.

I cannot agree with Wilkinson's claim that because *lux mea* at v. 160 must be identified with the same at v. 132 (Lesbia in both cases, let us assume), it follows that *domina* at v. 156 must refer to someone else. His further statement, that "the fact that something has dropped out of the line is clearly not significant", I find very surprising. Simply to cite only the two main contenders among the variants which the *deteriores* offer as supplements to the line (*ipsa* after *domus* and *nos* after *qua*) shows what a vast difference could be made to the interpretation of the line by what might have dropped out of it.

If *ipsa* is read, as in Ellis, Mynors' O.C.T., and Fordyce, for example, Wilkinson's "clinching argument" could stand. The *domina* of v. 156 already thus included in Catullus' prayer for happiness (*sitis felices* ... v. 155) could, indeed, hardly be the same person as *lux mea* included in the same prayer at v. 160.<sup>22</sup>)

20) Quinn, *ibid.*, p. 395. My point in this paragraph could be acceptable only to those who accept that vv. 1-40 and 41 ff. belong to the same poem, and that the whole is addressed to the one person. Discussion of, as distinct from allusion to, that question is outside the scope of my present purpose; to that extent the point here made must be deemed illegitimate by any convinced Separatist.

21) See Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-3, for the view that already in the couplet 153-4 "the blessings of which Catullus speaks are those of marriage". Whether it is a real marriage, or a quasi marital relationship like that between himself and Lesbia, that Catullus wishes for Allius makes scant difference to my point.

22) The translation of these lines by Ellis, *The Poems and Fragments of Catullus* (London, 1871), p. 87 (reading *ipsa* at v. 156, and a conjecture of his own at v. 157), makes this clear:

But if the required supplement were *nos*, as seems not at all unlikely in view of the textually secure *nobis* in the corresponding v. 68,<sup>23)</sup> or some other word that allowed the rest of the line after *domus* to constitute an adjectival clause qualifying *domus*,<sup>24)</sup> Wilkinson's "clinging argument" would necessarily fall to the ground. In such a case the prayer for happiness would apply only to the *domus*; it could not extend to the *domina*. There would be no necessity, scarcely even the possibility, for the *lux mea* of v. 160 to be someone other than the *domina* of v. 156. They would be one and the same beloved included as chief among the recipients of Catullus' felicitations for the first time only at v. 160.

What logic prevents a grateful lover in Catullus' happy situation from saying, in effect, at the poem's end: "God bless my helpful friend and the lady-love I wish for him, and the house where my mistress and I began our relationship, (and the man whose introductions made all my good luck begin?), and especially my darling who is so dear to me and whose presence makes life worth living".<sup>25)</sup> In the absence of such logic Wilkinson has made no case for *dominam* in the sense of chatelaine at vv. 68 and 165 beyond the points made earlier by Fordyce which I have discussed above. It remains for me a distinct possibility that Catullus wrote *dominae* at 68, 68 referring to his mistress.<sup>26)</sup>

The University of New England Robert J. Baker  
Armidale, Australia

---

"Joys come plenty to thee, to thy own fair lady together,  
Come to that house of mirth, come to the lady within,  
Joy to the forward friend, our love's first fashioner, Anser,  
Author of all this fair history, founder of all.  
Lastly beyond them, above them, on her more lovely than even  
Life, my lady, for whose life it is happy to be."

23) So Fordyce, *op. cit.*, p. 361; "this line [156] and 68 must go together". See too G. P. Goold, *Phoenix*, 12 (1958), p. 108: "the customary correction *in qua nos* seems reasonably certain."

24) See the clear punctuation of Kroll, *op. cit.*, p. 241, isolating the adjectival clause to which I refer.

25) I believe this paraphrase also answers Kinsey's fourth and last objection to *dominae*, *art. cit.*, p. 43: "If the *domina* is Lesbia, the shape of the epilogue is spoilt: Lesbia, as the *domina*, gets a mention in line 156, is dropped and then taken up again in lines 159-60". This assertion of a spoilt epilogue is essentially a matter of taste.

26) My thanks are due to Mrs Kay Morsley for having read, and commented helpfully upon, a draft of this article.