

The Thematic Value of Female Nomenclature in Andrew Salkey's *The Adventures of Catullus Kelly*

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□ ABSTRACT □

A careful examination of female nomenclature in Andrew Salkey's The Adventures of Catullus Kelly (henceforward abbreviated as ACK) is quite crucial not only to the understanding of the psychological make-up of its protagonist, but also to the understanding of the unfolding of the novel's events. As the following etymological analysis will show, the suggestive names of the English women Catullus has sexual relations with represent various stages in the development of the theme of inter-racial relations in the novel. These names: linguistically articulate Catullus's existential need for revenge or comfort in the form of sex; lexically outline his phallic path to assimilation; psychologically animate his fantasies about his sexual self-image; and diegetically foreshadow his tragic downfall.

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مغزى أسماء النساء في رواية "مغامرات كاتلُس كلي" لأندرو سولكي

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□ الملخص □

تحتاج أسماء النساء في رواية "مغامرات كاتلُس كلي" لأندرو سولكي إلى دراسة دقيقة، لأن لهذه السام أهمية ليس بالنسبة إلى فهم التكوين النفسي لبطلها فحسب، بل لفهم سير أحداث الرواية أيضاً. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أسماء النساء الإنكليزيات اللواتي يقيم معهن كاتلُس علاقات غرامية، لأن هذه الأسماء وحسب ورودها في الرواية، تمثل مراحل متعددة في تطور موضوع التهجين العرقي. فعلى المستوى اللغوي، تُفصح هذه الأسماء عن حاجة كاتلُس الوجودية إلى العزاء، أو إلى الانتقام من مستعمره السابقين عن طريق الجنس؛ وعلى المستوى اللفظي، فهي ترسم المسار الجنسي الذي يتخذه كاتلُس للاندماج في المجتمع الإنكليزي؛ وعلى المستوى السيكولوجي، فتغذي أو هامه عن فحولته؛ بينما على المستوى القصصي فهي تلقي الظلال مسبقاً على نهايته المأساوية.

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Peter Nazareth, one of the few critics to study Salkey, argues that Catullus's quest "has something to do with his desire to end his exile, and to end the exile of the Caribbean man" (342). He also sees, rather mistakenly, the root of Catullus's exile in a statement in the letter Catullus receives from his mother. However, a close look at the text does not bear out either of Nazareth's above arguments; on the contrary, the narrator tells us that the real ambition of Catullus "was to be able to boast one day that he had drunk his way through the five continents. He never did. England, as we shall see, foxed him. London squashed his ambition" (*ACK*, 2). Therefore, whatever anti-colonial cause Catullus espouses during his stay in London, including his brief flirting with *négritude*, is a response devised on the spot to counter and *sublimate* his successive failures in London. In other words, Catullus has no enduring sense of commitment, except toward his sexual fantasies, to make a grand hero of him. This is not to deny that Catullus is on some sort of quest; my disagreement with Nazareth is concerning the origin and nature of the quest. As illustrated by the quote above, London was not supposed to be Catullus's final destination; it was to be just a station along a journey of "long-drawn-out [alcoholic] binges" (*ACK*, 1) spanning over five continents. But within a few days after his arrival in London something happens that fascinates him. Upon the recommendation of Erasmus, Catullus's landlord, compatriot, and former servant in Jamaica, he makes a visit to the office of the White Defence League. As soon as he reaches the office:

A big book, with an off-white dust-jacket and grey lettering, immediately caught his attention. He read the title aloud: 'The Shape of Skulls to Come.' He whispered the author's name: 'Æithelstan Gordon-Venning.' He admired the upper-case diphthong in the forename. It seemed deliberate. It stuck out defiantly. He recalled Æfric . Æthelred, Æthelwod and Ælfhryth, though he wasn't a keen collector of diphthongs. (*ACK*, 10).

Like Mustafa Said, the protagonist of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Catullus's quest begins first with fascination, which immediately veers into pugnacious defiance, and eventually this defiance takes the sexual venue as its primary expression. Catullus sees the diphthong as a fascinating but a personal affront to his humanity as well as his virility, and he wants to overcome it. Because the tantalizing diphthong in the forename appealed to Catullus's sense of phallogentric identity, his failure to own the book, due to

the bigotry of the White Defence League officer, has been internalized as a form of psychological castration. Aside from Catullus's initial failure to understand the English weather, this is Catullus's first major failure. And because of its racial implications, this fiasco becomes an indelible trauma that haunts Catullus every time he fails again. Thus, all of Catullus's subsequent actions are devoted to finding out the identity of Æthelstan Gordon-Venning and learning more about the contents of the book.

This is, then, Catullus's quest, and here is where it begins. That Catullus afterwards feels increasingly like an exile is an outcome and a measure of how far behind he is in achieving his quest. That he seeks sexual pleasure exclusively with white English women is an indication not only of his deliberate attempt to commit the ultimate anathema of miscegenation (feared by white fascists) but also of his devotion to, not distraction from, his original quest. He views his sexual activity with these women as enhancing what he calls his "sense of usufruct." Finding the identity of Æthelstan Gordon-Venning is the end of his quest, while sex with white English women is its means. Giving these women suggestive names is not only an early projection of Catullus's naive fantasies about symbolic triumphs over imperial England, but also an adumbration of his growing, albeit unconscious, fear of being defeated by the very same symbols of Empire.

Claude Levi-Strauss is credited with saying that "one classes someone else when that person's name is given to him. Every Christian name has a conscious or subconscious cultural association which parades the images others form of its bearer, and has an influence on shaping the personality in a positive or negative way" (quoted in Andersen, 13). By extension, one might say that Catullus's ability to project a name onto the women he encounters is part of his fantastic notion of mapping and controlling the reality of his former colonizers. This explains why his month-long relationship with Lilith, who abstains from telling him her name, proves to be the most unsettling for him. After all, Catullus's quest is to find out what is behind the mythical name of Æthelstan Gordon-Venning.

As a matter of fact, name bestowal enters Catullus's adult life as a meaningful token in recognition of his academic success as a translator of the erotic poetry of Gaius Valerius Catullus, the Latin poet from whom the Jamaican Catullus (né Francis Kelly) acquires his nickname. Catullus's ability to manipulate language (by translating the dead poetry of a Latin poet into a live Jamaican dialect) wins him a nickname that indelibly stamps his personality with all its cultural associations. But as we shall see, this language-juggling, which Catullus applies to the English women he sleeps with, turns out to be a game over which he has no actual control. This is

particularly evident when his one attempt to reverse course and return to his original name is thwarted by a domineering English employer, who even goes so far as to make a nonentity out of him. But vainglorious Catullus conceives of himself as a sort of Adam, the prototypical male authorized by God to bestow names on creatures beneath him in rank. Naming is thus a token of privilege and an exercise of power. But just as Adam's authority was defied by Lilith, the first woman he weds, according to rabbinical legend, so would our Jamaican pseudo-Adam be defeated by the British Lilith. She is the embodiment of his quest *and* ruin.

Olga is the first willing sexual prey Catullus encounters. That Salkey chose a prostitute named Olga to be Catullus's first sex partner is not without thematic urgency. But in order to appreciate the full significance of Olga's thematic role, as symbolized by her name, in the unfolding of events, we need to remember that Catullus met her soon after his failure to buy a copy of Æthelstan Gordon-Venning's *The Shape of Skulls to Come*, a mythical racist treatise against miscegenation. An analysis of the etymology of Æthelstan is also in order. Æthelstan is a compound name of two Teutonic words: *cethel* (noble) and *stan* (stone). Æthel, according to Charlotte M. Yonge, was a favorite Anglo-Saxon prefix that was first used by the royal families of Kent and Essex and that continued to be used even after the Norman conquest of England in the eleventh century (409-410).

It is natural then that Salkey makes Æthelstan Gordon-Venning a conscientious representative of the interests of the Anglo-Saxon nobility, a representative who warns this class against the potential extinction of their 'pure race' as a result of miscegenation with Eastern and African blood (*ACK*, 11). The pattern of the events that unfold in the novel also suggests that Catullus's quest is not only to discover the identity of the author of *The Shape of Skulls to Come* but also to pollute the blood of the very race that ostracises him on the basis of his color. The latter point can be better appreciated if the etymology of Olga's name, the first woman he sleeps with, is understood. According to E. G. Withycombe, Olga is originally derived from a Norse word, *helga*, meaning 'holy' (232). Thus, Catullus's sexual conquest of Olga, who herself belongs to the upper class, amounts to being a deliberate act of desecration leveled by Catullus against the Anglo-Saxon xenophobes. That Catullus sleeps with Olga right after he is turned away by the White Defence League, and just a few blocks away from its headquarters, is a structural measure of his desperation to defile, immediately and on the spot, the sanctity of the League's racist ideals. On the other hand, Olga's initiation of a sexual relationship with the then unsuspecting Catullus can also be seen as an early anticlimax to the

hypocrisy and contradiction inherent in the ideology of the White Defence League—as is clear in the duplicitous character and behavior of Æthelstan Gordon-Venning him/herself.

If it is Olga who, as a prostitute, offers Catullus a quick 'fix' to strike back at the fascists by 'desecrating' their most sacred symbol, it is the second woman in Catullus's peripatetic adventures on whom he pins his highest hopes of sexual solace. This woman, who is genuine and too generous in her love, is called Dulcie. As her name indicates (from the Latin *dulce* meaning 'sweet,' 'pleasant,' or 'delightful'), Dulcie is the reincarnation of Catullus's wish-fulfillment and "an earlier important part of the healing art he was seeking" (*ACK*, 126). Through her artistic sensibility, whose earliest expression is a hermaphroditic portrait of herself and Catullus, Dulcie represents a fantasy world that transcends the socio-economic constraints of race and gender. She is Catullus's delightful refuge, and throughout the tumults of his exile in London, Dulcie remains the one and only woman who continues to enhance his sense of "usufruct," as he calls it.

It is rather significant that all the names of the English women Catullus becomes involved with reflect his marginalized status vis-a-vis the social hierarchy of Britain. As such he is seen either as an escapee seeking refuge from white racism or as a wily subversive bent upon defiling its most sacred symbols. Yet the name game, which initially gives Catullus a sense of confidence, soon turns sour. After the ominous encounter with the White Defence League officer, the second major setback in Catullus's London life occurs when he allows a white employer to rename him as *he sees fit*.

Seeing that Martin Selby is adverse to a name like Francis, Catullus's real name, the latter unwittingly gives up his right to choose or keep his name as an identity indicator. Having cautiously and tentatively suggested the alternative Anthony, his second name, without any success, Catullus opines submissively that choosing a name "had ceased to be a personal matter; after all, one's name really belongs to others. A kind of usufruct, he reminded himself" (*ACK*, 98). As such, Martin Selby imposes on Catullus the "atmosphere" name Beano, which is supposed to be derivative and suggestive of coffee beans. Martin justifies this imposition by his concern about the commercial suitability of his employees' names for the cafe's atmosphere. Working a few days at the *Onomatopoeia* cafe gives Catullus—and pun is intended—a *sound* appreciation of Martin's dehumanizing imposition of Beano on him as his ultimate identity tag. Characteristically feeling like a zombie throughout his employment at the *Onomatopoeia*, Catullus discovers that the name Beano is, in a manner of speaking, equally onomatopoeic of his essence as an Atmosphere Man; that

is, as his anagrammatic analyses conclude, *Be an 0*, hence his adamant resolution "not to be an 0" (ACK, 111). Surrendering his right to name himself amounts to a complete self-negation.

As exemplified by his feeling after he is refused a copy of *The Shape of Skulls to Come*, Catullus typically internalizes any racially motivated affront as an erosion of his masculinity. Hence his need to reassert his virility. This goes to explain why Catullus's resolution to regain his erotically charged nickname is literally translated into cuckolding Martin, the cause of his emasculation. The erotically suggestive name of Martin's wife, Philippa, a Greek female name meaning a lover of horses, represents the heights to which Catullus's fantasies soar to regain, however symbolically, his masculine status. Because she is a novelist, Philippa is the only woman who appreciates the erotic potency of Catullus's name. She functions as the concrete fulfillment of his desire to become, or at least be regarded as, a stud. As is his wont, Catullus intensifies his desires to the extent that they begin to look real to him. As such he begins to think of Martin as having been banished from Philippa's bed a long time ago; and as if to reinforce verbally the truth claim of his thought about Martin's supposed impotence, Catullus proclaims his rival as "pound wise, pussy foolish" (ACK, 111). However, Catullus is unaware of Philippa's shrewish nature. Her sexual interest in him is by proxy, by metonymic association with the Latin poet, Gaius Valerius Catullus, and not with him, the black Jamaican shadow. Just as he identifies with black heroes at the moments of his sexual highlights, Philippa, too, can love only a white man. She twice calls him her black reincarnation of the Latin poet (ACK, 100, 108), while she refers to herself as Lesbia, Gaius Valerius Catullus's beloved. In the first instance, she tells him "I adore the *idea* of a Negro reincarnation of Gaius Valerius" (emphasis added; ACK, 100). Thus Catullus was used by Philippa at the very moment he thought he used her to pay Martin back for his emasculating treatment of him. Whatever the case may be, each served a utilitarian purpose for the other.

Catullus's abdication of his right to keep his name (coerced by Martin), and his inflated thinking (encouraged by Philippa) that he is a stud *par excellence* are early signs of how he will gradually lose control over his surroundings. Indeed, from the moment he accepts Martin's imposition of Beano as his identity indicator, Catullus undergoes a process of gradual dehumanization where he is regarded by the women he sleeps with as some sort of sexual beast.

The dehumanization and the loss of control over his surroundings are structurally paralleled by the ominous names of the next set of women

Catullus becomes involved with. Catullus's fourth woman is a librarian named Penelope, a Greek name meaning 'a weaver.' As if to distract his attention from the ominous associations of her name, Penelope, however, tells Catullus that she goes by the hypocoristic Lope. Anxious to show off his bookish learning, Catullus comments rather quizzically: "Like Lope de Vega," and Lope obliges to repeat his guess (*ACK*, 140). Perhaps through the homonymous connection Lope has with the Spanish poet (1562-1635), known for his numerous love affairs, Catullus, who is ever on the prowl for sexual pleasure, was looking for a contractual commitment, a verbal promise of prospective sexual satisfaction from the librarian. Indeed, the contractual nature of their agreement over the issue of homonymity is evident in Lope's ritual repetition of Catullus's statement "Like Lope de Vega." Once again this shows that Catullus negotiates his sexual pursuits, which are themselves a means to an end, through language manipulation.

But from now on, Catullus's processing of verbal or linguistic connections becomes quite superficial. For instance, before he consummates his desire for Penelope, he has two 'literary' clues that should have alerted him to the nasty web the librarian was weaving for him. From Homer's *Odyssey* we know that Penelope is a weaver not only of textural but of political plots as well. Homer's Penelope, who weaves by day and unravels by night the burial robe of her beloved father-in-law, is a skilled craftswoman who manages by all sorts of guiles to put off insolent suitors for twenty years. From Lope de Vega's biography, on the other hand, we know that the poet's lust for poetry is closely linked to his lust for women, and that he was as prolific in his poetic production as he was in his peripatetic sexuality.

Yet it is not until the "mellow-yellow" ritual at the Belsize Square party that Catullus realizes that "Lope was a hard case. The Library was a front. Her anorak was a convincing disguise. Her ugliness was a blind" (*ACK*, 144). Catullus discovers here that Lope is heavily into drugs and other hippie quirks. With her humiliating tricks Lope essentially disabuses Catullus of his mythologizing notions of the existential comforts of sex. With her "Catullus sensed, fearfully, a passage from informed innocence on to devastating experience" (*ACK*, 143). During the party, Catullus becomes increasingly uncomfortable because of his ignorance of the mellow-yellow banana joint. This discomfort is aggravated by the sheer fact that he himself comes from a banana republic. As is his wont, "He visualised the innocent fruit, in its easily peeled skin, without it, creamy, panelled, compact, phallic" (*ACK*, 144). Through this erotic crescendo of free association, Catullus

arrives at the usual stockpile of arms from which he draws comfort and self-confidence.

However, this phallic confidence is ephemeral. Feeling claustrophobic in Lope's book-lined study, "The shelves suddenly became alive, encircling, mesmeric" (ACK, 145). Assaulted from every corner by depressing and humiliating surprises, Catullus's phallic stamina vanishes into a tinge of emasculation. He becomes particularly awed by his discovery that Lope's father is a tycoon scientist-Latinist who owns all five volumes of the awesome *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* by the Venerable Bede. Vis-a-vis this indicator of wealth and learning, Catullus feels his impoverished and emasculated status most poignantly when he fails to recall Wordsworth's poetic rendition in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* of the meeting between Edwin of Northumbria and his noblemen (ACK, 146). We need to recall that Catullus's first traumatic failure in London, which he internalized as emasculation, had also something to do with a book: *The Shape of Skulls to Come*.

When Lope is later joined by another hippie named Portia, Catullus is sweet-talked into getting naked in order to be "initiated" into mellow-yellow. When the initiation begins, lights are turned off and he is ordered to crawl around the dark study in search of his female initiators. For the first time in the novel Catullus's nakedness acquires a sinister tone; here it represents his utter vulnerability, hence his nostalgia for the always effective "available local Kingston masks" (ACK, 148). This is also the first time that Catullus yearns for the gentleness of his compatriot women. The fact that Catullus feels nostalgic for Jamaica and simultaneously recalls his traumatic experience in Greenwich Village is a gauge of his growing alienation in London. With Lope and Portia, Catullus feels out of place and time: "Catullus was Victorian, bemused, out of his native century, useless driftwood" (ACK, 148).

As Catullus deludes himself again that he has the missionary job of a Rastafarian "bringing the light with him [...] for the lost Anglo-Saxon people" (ACK, 149), he is ordered sternly by Lope to "give love" to Portia. Crawling on all fours and feeling humiliated, he resorts to the world of fantasy to devise a plan that will alleviate his pain. In order to sublimate his submission to Lope's order, he fantasizes that Portia "must have been standing in front of Gibbon" (ACK, 151). Thus his preparing to tackle and engage Portia sexually acquires a metaphysical meaning in the literal sense of the word. Thus, in the eyes of Catullus the skirmish with Portia becomes a proxy dialogue with Edward Gibbon, the famous English author of *The History of the Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire*. But Catullus is

entrapped and, try as he might, he has no way of giving the English historiographer of the greatest European empire a piece of his mind.

Catullus is convinced at last that Lope's and Portia's talk of love, peace, and cool is nothing but a charade that does not include him as an active participant in their rituals and hippie quirks. He realizes that he simply serves as an exotic ornament in Lope's quest for what she calls psychedelphia (ACK, 148), and the only compliment he could tease out of Portia is a further suggestion of his dehumanized status. She indifferently tells his flattery-prone ego, "You're trusting, optimistic, easy leader- fodder" (ACK, 155). Given the etymology of Portia's name, her qualification of Catullus as "leader-fodder" needs further qualification in order to highlight what she basically thinks of him. The name Portia is derived from the Latin *porcii*, or breeder of pigs. Yonge says that Shakespeare's canonization of the Italian *Porzia* in *The Merchant of Venice* has caused the name to "become an exceptional fancy name" (152). Given Lope's and Portia's treatment of him, Catullus is reduced to the status of a beast. Indeed, the whole mellow-yellow ritual bespeaks bestiality. Lope is described as "a pure horse" (ACK, 146), while Catullus "moved, a jaguar in the pitch. he was dangerous. He had an animal's job to do" (ACK, 151).

The impact of his disillusionment is devastating. Even Catullus's usual flights back to Dulcie's therapeutic sex and companionship are worth nil after the Belsize Square party: "She [Portia] and Lope had robbed him arrogantly of a substantial portion of the necessary madness which he was coming to cherish" (ACK, 156). The devastating effect of the Belsize Square party on Catullus can be gauged by his cautiously edited report of the episode even to his best confidante, Erasmus. It is further seen in his equally unusual decision not to "record a moment of it in the diary" (ACK, 157) and in his unexpected decision not to go back to teaching at Mr. Mapletoft's school. These two decisions, both entailing a curtailed use of language, are a measure of Catullus's growing introversion, a mental condition paralleled by a proportionate loss of control over his surroundings.

The penultimate woman Catullus becomes involved with is called Lilith. In an obvious reference to the military defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo, Catullus appropriately dubs her as his own "Holborn Waterloo" (ACK, 160) and his "Symbol" (ACK, 161). He applies the latter epithet in lieu of her month-long secrecy about her name, a secrecy that causes Catullus such deep concern that "There were moments when Catullus wondered if she existed" (ACK, 161). Without a name to designate his interlocutor and sex partner, Catullus has no grip, however imaginary, on his surroundings. When she eventually tells him to call her Lilith, he refuses to

take the name seriously because he sees it as "an ill omen" (ACK, 161). He later jogs his literary memory and rolls the following portentous invocations: *"Lilith the Assyrian demon, the vampire, the night monster, the screech owl; Lilith who was dispossessed by Eve; Lilith's vengeance on Adam; Lilith and her bit-part in the Walpurgis-night in Faust"* (emphasis in original; ACK, 162).

Catullus instinctively feels that Lilith is an unusual woman, and that prompts him to make revealing comparisons between her and the other women he has been involved with (ACK, 161). Lilith apparently withheld her name from Catullus in hope that the secrecy would work as a stimulant to his sexual curiosity. Minus the reversal of genders, Christopher P. Andersen confirms this link between secrecy and sexual curiosity when he states that "The emotional tether that connects name and libido is further evidenced by the reluctance of a man to tell a prostitute his first name" (25). Described as "a tall, brooding, blonde nymphomaniac with an elegant flat in Holland Park," Lilith tells Catullus that she "had a predilection for the 'turking potency of jet-black men.'" She is also quoted as indirectly suggesting that "the blacker the lover the deeper the predilection the more passionate the involvement" (ACK, 160). Flattered by this compliment, Catullus is still hopeful that his phallic approach will ultimately produce the healing art he was seeking for his growing loneliness in London; thus the new opportunity provided by Lilith, important for its sheer mathematical value and strategic edge, makes him "eager for the continuing reassurance of his black excellence, which he was given, performance after performance" (ACK, 160).

Little did he know at the time he welcomed these flatteries that "what began as a blissful sexual extravagance" would progressively become "an ugly brutal threat to his coolth" (ACK, 160). Just as sex with Dulcie loses its restorative edge for Catullus after the Belsize Square party, so does it after he becomes involved with Lilith. In fact, Dulcie begs him to "Imagine we're thousands of miles away from here" (ACK, 163), and once again Jamaica with its pristine beaches looms as a safe haven for their romping bodies. However, he could visualize only "Poverty and despair" (ACK, 163). The encounter with Lilith is so devastating to him that it puts an end to his coming to terms with his exile in London, which explains his decision to return to Jamaica before the end of the year (ACK, 164).

But what do we make of the fact that Lilith turns out to be the same as Æthelstan Gordon-Venning? In Jewish mythology, Lilith was Adam's first wife but she was turned into a demon because she had refused to lie beneath Adam during coitus. Although she was threatened with the death of a

hundred of her children a day, she refused to submit to Adam's authority. The destructive forces of lust associated with her name are adumbrated in the derivation of her name from the Hebrew word, *laylah*, or night, as well as in the belief that she haunts the conjugal bed of every couple when they lie together at night (see Patai, 407-408 and 453-469; Goldstein, 23-33).

Likewise, Catullus feels the pinch of Lilith's "sullen insatiateness, her terrible *encore*" (*ACK*, 181) on Christmas Day. True to her name, Lilith is an inscrutable text of dark secrets. Behind the wall-paneling in her small study, Catullus stumbles upon what he has been seeking since he made his visit to the White Defence League: *The Shape of Skulls to Come*. This brings him the devastating realization that Lilith is none other than Aithelstan Gordon-Venning. Although we are not told how Catullus feels about this discovery, it is likely that he felt the absurdity of the pursuit to which he has devoted his entire stay in London and for which he will ultimately pay dearly. Just as the legendary Lilith was Adam's first wife, Æthelstan Gordon-Venning was also Catullus's first and foremost pursuit, and just as Lilith was cast away from Adam's love, so, too, is Æthelstan Gordon-Venning without love. When Erasmus is told who Lilith turns out to be, he pities rather than judges her: "Poor woman. We're all comfortless creatures, country, searchin' for pillow or pos'. Pity she didn't find a better bed o' roses. All the same, any one o' we could've been in her position, like so" (*ACK*, 185). In the same breath, Erasmus asserts that had it not been for deprivation of love, Lilith would not have written *Skulls*.

Catullus's passage from a status of symbolic power into a status of total powerlessness is highlighted by the name of the last woman he becomes involved with. Her name is Tillie, and he meets her at Philippa's. According to Yonge, Tillie is the hypocoristic form of Matilda, which in turn is derived from the Gothic and Saxon *Magan*, having to do with might (422). Although Catullus's relationship with Tillie seems to be the most casual and the least momentous in the unfolding of events, one cannot help associating the conclusion of Catullus's fate to the inherent symbolism of her name. That the last woman Catullus associates with represents might seems to be a natural climax to Catullus's career of gradual powerlessness.

Unlike his compatriot Erasmus, the symbol of an older and more fortunate generation, Catullus could not find the equivalent of Bridget, Erasmus's Irish wife, who is viewed by Catullus as "the finest thing that's happened to race relations in Britain" (*ACK*, 23). As suggested by her name, Bridget functions as a bridge between two races; like his name-sake the Dutch humanist, Erasmus achieves a level of understanding, sympathy, and inter-racial harmony unattained by his younger compatriot. The relationships

Catullus establishes with the English women, as suggested by their names and his own nickname, are doomed to remain at the raw and sexual level.

It should be stressed that Catullus's affiliation to his nominal Latin ancestor is an accident of language; that is, his acquisition of his nickname is occasioned by "his highly original, pomographically illustrated, Kingston dialect translations of certain poems by the Latin poet of the same name" (ACK, 1). Nonetheless, this affiliation is constantly fostered by Catullus's recognition, as translated through his prolific sexual life in London, that it is his special privilege *and* burden to live up to the erotic nuances of his academically endowed name. As a holder of an honors degree in English and with a mastery of Latin, Catullus is academically and psychologically predisposed to cultivate his visible philological pretensions. This is most conspicuous in his meticulous attention to the metaphysical as well as the political potential of language—a potential that informs his postcolonial *Weltanschauung*, which is defined as:

... nothing more than his way of realising his Jamaican dreams in London by looking at people, ideas and things, and naming them in terms of dialect, and also dealing with the observable English realities in West London by relying on his use of Standard English: in short, Catullus's personal two-way philosophical survey of and outlook on his former colonial-imperial world, through language. (ACK, 121)

Language for Catullus, as manifested in the aspect of female nomenclature, becomes a means of digesting the reality of his former colonizers and fitting this linguistically varnished reality into a vocabulary of native resistance. In other words, Catullus's recourse to language can be regarded as a defense mechanism against the prototypical imbalance of power between the colonizer and the colonized. For instance, during his first ride with Olga to her apartment, Catullus is anxious about his uncertain command of the linguistic decorum presumably observed by the English. But when he firmly and confidently tells the driver that he will spend only five pounds worth of time with the prostitute, Catullus "liked the decisive ring of his reply. He felt he had done the London thing. The metropolitan 'clip' was right. He was sure that he had betrayed no trace of Jamaican Creole or the innocence of the village in the sharp assured decision" (ACK,

14). The fact that Catullus feels that he might be taken for a villager, which in reality he is not, is a measure of his inadequacy to deal with the imperial metropolis. Thus, when Olga asks him if she will see him again, and he replies "If I'm in these parts, yes," he immediately "disliked his use of 'these parts' and regretted not editing it closely before uttering it" (ACK, 16). But since he cannot now unsay his peculiarly native expression, and true to his pugnacious, if perversely resilient, nature, Catullus bemoans having nearly forfeited a golden opportunity to capitalize on such seemingly exotic expressions to entice weather-battered English women to his tropical bed (ACK, 16). He learns the benefit of fancying linguistic aspects such as accent, dialectical expressions, etc., as having an aphrodisiac effect on the objects of his attention and on himself. For example, when he is in Olga's apartment, Catullus mentally notes that "Her accent made him sense that she was a highly intelligent free-lance and almost certainly an escapee from a desirable class in the society. Secretly, he knew that he was going to have a thoroughly enjoyable time" (ACK, 15). Indeed, they both have such an enjoyable time that she gives him back his money. Savoring the moment afterwards, Catullus "patted the Jaguar [Olga's car] and narrowed his eyes, arrogantly, heroically, like Othello before the handkerchief (ACK, 17).

Of course, it is not Olga's accent *per se* but Catullus's own fantasy that functions as the aphrodisiac. Because Olga is a member of the upper class, Catullus attaches socio-political significance to his being intimate with what he regards as the symbol of British imperialism; hence, his arrogance and Othello-like dramatic triumphalism. Like Mustafa Said in Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, who utilizes his knowledge of ancient Arab or Islamic history as an auxiliary to his sexual conquests of English women, Catullus also draws on his knowledge of English literature and diverts this knowledge for the purpose of self-advancement in the sexual realm.¹ Whenever he scores a sexual victory against his former colonizers, as represented by their women, he imagines himself as a reincarnation of certain black heroes: Othello, the Shakespearean tragic hero, Sidney Poitier, the American film star, and Shaka, the nineteenth-century South African Zulu warrior. It is worth noting also that until he allowed Martin Selby to rename him as Beano, Catullus had exhibited a remarkable awareness of the political potential of language. Thus, all of his subsequent attempts to rebound, even his resolution not to Be an O, come to nil. Language, as

¹ The nameless protagonist of Dany Lafemere's novel *How to Make Love to a Negro*, is unequivocal about this unscrupulous appropriation of history when he bluntly states that "history hasn't been good to us [black people], but we can always use it as an aphrodisiac" (76).

manifested in the aspect of nomenclature, is no longer the domain of his power.

If such suggestive names as *Dulcie*, *Olga*, and, to a certain extent, *Philippa* are diegetical landmarks representing philological fictions of Catullus's will to power, *Penelope*, *Portia*, *Lilith*, and *Tillie*, on the other hand, are nominal parallels to Catullus's decline. While in the pre-Beano phase Catullus regarded himself as a prelapsarian Jamaican Adam who diligently exercised his nominal privileges over his first three English female subjects, in the postlapsarian phase he became the object on whom *Penelope*, *Portia*, *Lilith*, and *Tillie* exercise the privilege and power of their symbolic names. In other words, what began for Catullus as a prelapsarian sexual bliss, paralleled by the power of naming, eventuated into a postlapsarian spiritual nightmare. The exploiter turns exploited, the would-be colonizer is newly colonized.

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