

Jean-Paul Sartre

Black Orpheus

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PRÉSENCE AFRICAINE

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What would you expect to find, when the muzzle that has silenced the voices of black men is removed? That they would thunder your praise? When these heads that our fathers have forced to the very ground are risen, do you expect to read adoration in their eyes? Here, in this anthology, are black men standing, black men who examine us; and I want you to feel, as I, the sensation of being seen. For the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen. It was a seeing pure and uncomplicated; the light of his eyes drew all things from their primeval darkness. The whiteness of his skin was a further aspect of vision, a light condensed. The white man, white because he was man, white like the day, white as truth is white, white like virtue, lighted like a torch all creation; he unfolded the essence, secret and white, of existence. Today, these black men have fixed their gaze upon us and our gaze is thrown back in our

WHITE =
truth
virtue

eyes; black torches, in their turn, light the world
and our white heads are only small lanterns
balanced in the wind. A black poet, with never a
thought of us, whispers to his beloved:

Woman nude, woman black
Dressed in your color which is life

Woman nude, woman obscure
Ripe fruit of the firm flesh, dark ecstasy of
[the black wine.

and our whiteness appears to us a strange pale
varnish which stops sour skin from breathing, a
white underclothing worn at the elbows and knees,
under which, if we would dare, we would find the
true human flesh, flesh the color of the black
wine. We would fain believe ourselves the
indispensables of the world, the sun of its harvests,
the moon of its tides: we are only the beasts of its
fauna. Not even the beasts:

These gentlemen from the city
gentlemen of propriety
Who know no more to dance
by the light of the moon
Who know no more to walk on the
flesh of their feet
Who know no more to tell the tales of
their fathers...

Europeans of an ancient divine right, already we
are feeling our dignity crumble under the gaze of
the Americans and the Soviets; already Europe
was finding herself a mere geographical accident,
almost an island which Asia pushes out to sea. At
least we were hoping to retrieve a little of our
grandeur in the domesticated eyes of the Africans.
But there are no more domesticated eyes; these
are eyes savage and free which gaze in judgment
upon our country.

Here is a black man, wandering

*"to the end of
the eternity of their boulevards
with their legions of cops..."*

And here another who cries to his brothers:

*"Alas! Alas! the spider Europe stirs
her fingers and her phalanx of ships..."*

And here

*"the sly silence of this European
[night..."*

where

*"...there is nothing which time does not
[dishonor."*

A Negro writes:

Seeing everything suddenly anew through black
eyes ⇒ realization of white
evil.

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BLACK ORPHEUS

*"Montparnasse and Paris, Europe and its endless
torments, they will haunt us at times as memories,
and at times as a deep malaise..."*

and suddenly France appears strange to our eyes.
It is no more than a memory, a malaise, a white
fog which weighs upon a gay people, a backward
tormented country where man does not know the
joy of living. It has diverted to the North, it
takes anchor at Kamtchatka, whereas it is the sun
which is essential, the sun of the tropics and the
sea "liced with islands" and the roses of Ilangue
and the lilies of Iarive and the volcanoes of Mar-
tinique. Being is black, being is of fire, we are
accidental and remote; we have to justify for
ourselves our customs, our techniques, our "under-
cooked" paleness, our verdigris vegetation. By this
steady and corrosive gaze, we are picked to the
bone:

*"Listen to the white world
horribly tired from its immense effort
its rebel articulations crackle under the hard stars,
its stiff blue steel piercing the mystic flesh
listen to its great victories trumpeting its defeat
listen to the grandiose excuses for its sorry fall
Pity for our conquerors, omniscient and naïve."*

Thus we and our victories are done, our stomachs
in the air, our entrails visible to the world. Thus

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is our secret downfall. If we wish to escape this
fate which closes in upon us, we can no longer
count upon the privilege of our race, of our color,
of our techniques. We shall be able to rejoin the
human hegemony only in tearing off our white
underclothing and in attempting simply to be men.

If, however, these poems give us shame, it is not
with that conscious purpose; they have not been
written for us. All those, colonist and accomplice,
who open this book, will have the sensation of
reading as though over another's shoulder, words
that were not intended for them. It is to black
men that these black poets address themselves; it
is for them that they speak of black men. Their
poetry is neither satirical nor imprecatory. It is
a taking conscience. "So", you may say, "of what
interest it is to us if it is not a documentary title?
We cannot enter into it". I should like thus to
show by what route one finds access to this world
of ebony, and that this poetry which first appears
racial is ultimately a song of everyone of us and
for everyone of us. In a word, I address myself
here to white men, to whom I wish to explain that
which black men know already: why it is necessary
through a poetic experience that the black man in
his present situation must first take conscience of
himself and, inversely, why Negro poetry in the
French language is, in our times, the sole great
revolutionary poetry.

If the white proletariat rarely uses the language

blacksmithing
for blacks

of poetry to speak of his sufferings, of his anger, or of the pride he has in himself, it is not by accident. It is not that I believe that the workers are less gifted than our "sons of family"; this gift, this galvanic grace, loses all significance when one purports to decide that it is more widespread in one class than in another. Nor is it that the rigor of labor exhausts the faculty of song; the toil of the slaves was harder still, and the songs of the slaves are famous. It is necessary thus to recognize that it is the present circumstances of the class struggle which turn the worker from poetic expression. Oppressed by technical forces, he wishes to be technician; because he knows that these technical forces will be the instrument of his liberation. If he must be able some day to control and direct vast enterprises, he knows that it will come about only through an economic and scientific knowledge. He has of that which the poets have named Nature a profound and practical knowledge, but which comes to him more through his hands than through his eyes. Nature is for him Matter, a passive resistance, a taciturn and inert opposition which he works with his tools. And Matter does not sing. At the same time, the present phase of the class struggle demands of him a continuous and positive line of action: political calculation, an exact foresight, discipline, organization of the masses. To dream here would be treason. Rationalism, materialism, positivism: these great

*WHY WORKERS/BLACKS HAVE NOT
TURNED ENMASSE TO POETRY-*

themes of his daily battle are the least propitious for the spontaneous creation of poetic myths. The last among these myths, the famous "grand evening", has fallen back before the necessities of the struggle. It must attend to the most pressing: win this position, that position, force a rise in wages, decide this strike of solidarity, this protest against the war in Indo China. It is this efficiency alone which counts. Without doubt, the oppressed class must first take conscience of itself. But this taking conscience is exactly the opposite of a redescending into one's self; it has to do here with a recognition in and by action of the objective situation of the proletariat, a situation determined by the varying circumstances of production and distribution. United by an oppression which weighs upon all, by a common struggle, the worker scarcely knows the interior contradictions which fertilize a work of art but which, on the other hand, tend to vitiate action.

Self knowledge is, for them, to place themselves in rapport with the powerful forces which surround them; it is to determine the exact place they occupy in their class and the function they exercise in the Party. Even the language they employ is barren of that gay reverie, of that constant, animated unconformity, of that passing fancy which create the poetic Word. In their industrial role they employ technical and precisely determined terms. Parain has shown that the language

of revolutionary parties is pragmatic; it serves to transmit orders, words of command, of information; if it loses its vigor the Party defeats itself. This all tends toward a more and more rigorous elimination of the subject, whereas it is imperative that poetry remain in some respect subjective. Thus the proletariat has not achieved a poetry completely social in taking its sources in subjectivity, social precisely to the extent of its subjectivity, establishing itself upon a failure of the language, and yet as exalting and commonly understood as the most precise words of command or as the "Workers of the world, unite" which one reads at the gates of Soviet Russia. It is because of this that the poetry of the future revolution has remained in the hands of the young well-intentioned bourgeois who draw their inspiration from their psychological contradictions, in the antinomy of their ideal and their class, in the uncertainty of the old bourgeois language.

The Negro, like the white worker, is a victim of the capitalistic structure of our society, and he discovers a solidarity of interests beyond the nuances of skin color with certain classes of Europeans oppressed as he. Such a solidarity incites him to plan a society without privilege where the pigmentation of the skin will be treated as a simple accident. But, if the oppression is a common one, it is patterned after historical and geographical conditions. The black man is a

victim of it, inasmuch as he is black, in his role as colonized native or as a deported African. And since he is oppressed in his race and because of it, it is first of his race that it is necessary for him to take conscience. He must compel those who, during the centuries, have vainly attempted, because he was a Negro, to reduce him to the status of the beast to recognize him as a man. Now here, it is not escape, nor trickery, nor "crossing the line" that he can consider. A Jew, white among white men, can deny that he is a Jew, can declare himself a man among men. The Negro cannot deny that he is Negro nor claim for himself this abstract uncolored humanity. He is black. Thus he is held to authenticity. Insulted, enslaved, he redresses himself; he accepts the word "Negro" which is hurled at him as an epithet, and revendicates himself, in pride, as black in the face of white.

The ultimate unity which will draw together all the oppressed in the same combat must be preceded in the colonies by that which I shall name the moment of separation or of negativity. This antiracist racism is the sole road which can lead to the abolition of the differences of race. How could it be otherwise? Can black men count on the aid of the white proletariat, distant, distracted by its own struggles, before they have united and organized themselves on their own soil? And, besides, is not a thorough job of analysis necessary

to perceive the profound identity of interests under the manifest difference of conditions? Despite himself, the white worker profits a little from colonization; as low as his level of life is, without colonization it would be lower still. In any case he is less cynically exploited than the day worker of Dakar and of Saint-Louis. And then the technical equipment and industrialization of the European countries make it possible to think in terms of the immediate application of socialistic measures; viewed from the Senegal or from the Congo, socialism appears primarily as a beautiful dream. For the black peasants to realize that it is the necessary end of their immediate and local claims, it is first necessary that they learn to express these claims in common, that they think of themselves as black men.

But this taking conscience differs in nature from that which marxism attempts to waken in the white worker. The consciousness of class of the European worker is based upon the nature of profit and loss, upon the present status of the ownership of the tools of labor, in brief, upon the objective characteristics of the *situation* of the proletarian. But since the "interested" contempt which the white worker displays for the Negro—and which has no counterpart in the attitude of the bourgeois vis-à-vis the working class—pierces him to the depth of his heart, it is necessary that the Negro oppose to it a more just view of black *subjectivity*. Thus

THINKING
FIRST AS BLACK
MEN.

the consciousness of race is primarily based upon the black soul, or rather, since the term recurs often in this anthology, on a certain quality common to the thoughts and to the behavior of Negroes and which is called *negritude*. Now, in establishing racial concepts, there are only two ways to proceed: one causes to pass into the objective realm certain subjective characteristics; or, on the other hand, one tries to interiorize behavior objectively disclosed. Thus the Negro who vindicates his *negritude* in a revolutionary movement places himself, then and there, upon the terrain of Reflection, whether he wishes to rediscover in himself certain objective traits growing out of African civilizations, or hopes to find the black Essence in the wells of his soul. Thus subjectivity, the rapport of himself with himself, source of all poetry, which the worker has been compelled to reject, appears again. The black who calls his brothers of color to take conscience of themselves seeks to present to them a model image of their *negritude* and will plunge into his soul to extricate this image which he is seeking. He wishes to be at the same time a beacon and a mirror. The first revolutionary will be the apostle of the black soul, the herald who will tear this *negritude* from himself to offer it to the world, a demi-prophet, a demi-advocate, in brief a poet in the precise sense of the word "vates". Black poetry has nothing in common with the effusions of the

heart; it is functional, it answers a need which exactly defines it. Leaf through an anthology of the white poetry of today; you will find one hundred different subjects according to the mood and the concern of the poet, according to his condition and his country. In this which I present you there is but one subject which all try to treat, with more or less success. From Haiti to Cayenne, a sole idea—to make manifest the black soul. Negro poetry is evangelic, it comes bearing glad tidings—negritude is found again.

However, this negritude which they seek in the abysmal depths does not fall of itself under the regard of the soul. In the soul nothing is given. The herald of the black soul has passed through the white schools. He has learned the iron law which refuses to the oppressed all the arms which he does not himself steal from the oppressor. It is from the shock of the white culture that his negritude has passed from immediate existence to the state of reflection. But by the same token he has more or less ceased to live it. In choosing to see that which he is, he has split himself in two, he no longer coincides with himself. And reciprocally, it was because he was already exiled from himself that there was this duty to declare himself. He begins thus by exile; the exile of his body offers a striking example of the exile of his heart. He is most of the time in Europe, in the midst of its gray crowds; he dreams of Port-au-Prince,

of Haiti. But this is not enough; in Port-au-Prince he was already in exile. The slavers have torn his fathers from Africa and have dispersed them. And all the poems of this book (except those written in Africa) will offer us the same mystic geography. We have one hemisphere with three concentric circles. At the periphery stretches the land of exile, colorless Europe. Next comes the dazzling circle of the Indies and of childhood, which dance the round in circling Africa. And then Africa, the last circle, navel of the world, pole of all black poetry; Africa, dazzling, incendiary, oily as the serpent's skin; Africa of the fire and the rain, torrid and suffocating, phantom Africa, vacillating as a flame, between being and non-being, more true than the "eternal boulevards and their legions of cops", but yet remote, disintegrating Europe by its black invisible lines; Africa beyond reach, *imaginary* continent. The extraordinary opportunity of Negro poetry is that the concerns of the indigenous colonials readily find evident magnificent symbols which it suffices to meditate and to deepen incessantly: exile, slavery, the couple-Europe and Africa, and the great manichean division of the world into black and white. This ancestral bodily exile images the other exile. The black soul is an Africa from which the Negro is exiled in the midst of the cold buildings of the white culture and the white techniques. Negritude, present, and at the same time hidden, haunts him. He brushes him-

self with her silken wings, she throbs eagerly, pervading him as his deepest memory and his most imperative need, as his infancy shrouded and betrayed, the infancy of his race, the call of his land, as the swarming of instincts and the indivisible simplicity of Nature, as the pure legacy of his ancestors and as the Ethic which must integrate his truncated life. But let him turn upon her to look her in the face—she vanishes in smoke, the walls of the white culture raise themselves between her and him, its science, its words, its customs:

*"Give me back my black dolls that I may play
[with them*

*the simple games of my instinct
to rest in the shadow of its laws
to recover my courage
my boldness
to feel myself myself
a new self of the self I was yesterday
yesterday
without complication
yesterday
when came the hour or uprooting...
they have stolen the land which was mine"*

He must indeed breach the walls of the culture-prison, and he must indeed, one day, return to Africa. Thus, with the apostles of negritude, indissolubly fused are the theme of the return

to the native land and that of the redescend into the bursting Hell of the black soul. It is in the nature of a systematic quest, a divestment and an asceticism which accompanies a continuous effort toward penetration. And I shall name this poetry "orphanic" because this untiring descent of the Negro into himself causes me to think of Orpheus going to reclaim Eurydice from Pluto.

Thus by exceptional poetic fortune, it is an abandoning himself to trances, in rolling himself upon the ground as one possessed in search of himself, in singing his anger, his regrets, or his hatreds, in demonstrating his wounds, his life torn between "civilization" and his ancient black roots; in brief, it is in expressing himself the most lyrically that the black poet attains most surely to great group poetry. In speaking only of himself, he speaks for all Negroes. It is when he seems smothered by the serpents of our culture that he shows himself the most revolutionary, because he seeks to tear off systematically his European acquisition and this demolition symbolizes in spirit the great taking arms of the future by which the blacks will destroy their chains. A sole example suffices to clarify this last remark.

For the most part ethnic minorities in the nineteenth century, at the same time that they fought for their independence, passionately attempted to resuscitate their national languages. To call oneself Irish or Hungarian, it is necessary without

ORPHIC
POETRY

doubt to belong to a collectivity which enjoys a large economic and political autonomy; but to be Irish, it is also necessary to *think* Irish, which means above all, to think *in* Irish. The specific traits of a Society correspond exactly to the untranslatable locutions of its language. Now that which dangerously threatens to curb the effort of the Negro to reject our tutelage is that the apostles of the new negritude are constrained to edit their gospel in French. Dispersed by the slave trade to the four corners of the earth, the blacks have no language common to them all; to incite the oppressed to unite they must have recourse to the words of the oppressor. It is the French language which will furnish the black singer the largest audience among the blacks, at least within the limits of French colonization. It is in this language, pale like the flesh of the chicken, pale and cold as our gods, and of which Mallarmé said, "it is the neutral language 'par excellence', since its genius requires an attenuation of all colors too vibrant or variegated"; it is in this language, for them half dead, that Damas, Diop, Laleau, Rabearivelo pour the fire of their skies and of their hearts. Only through it can they communicate; like the scholars of the sixteenth century who understood each other only in Latin, the blacks rediscover themselves only on the terrain full of the traps which white men have set for them. The colonist rises between the colonials to be the

eternal mediator; he is there, always there, even though absent, in the most secret councils. And since words derive from ideas, when the Negro declares in French that he rejects French culture, he takes in one hand that which he has pushed aside with the other. He brands himself with the thinking apparatus of the enemy as with an embossment. This alone would not matter, but by the same token, this syntax and this vocabulary, forged in another time, in thousands of places, to answer to other needs and to designate other objects, are inadequate to provide him the means to speak of himself, of his cares or of his hopes. The French language and thought are analytical. What would happen if the black genius should be preeminently synthetic? The rather ugly term of "negritude" is one of the only black contributions to our dictionary. But if this "negritude" is a definable concept, or at least describable, it ought to subsume other concepts more elementary and corresponding to the immediate gifts of the Negro consciousness. Where are the words which permit their designation? Thus one comprehends the complaint of the Haitian poet:

*"This beleagured heart
Alien to my language and to my dress
And on which bite like a brace*

*The borrowed sentiments and customs of
[Europe;*

Mine is the agony

And an unutterable despair

In breaking with the cold words of France

This pulsing heart of the Senegal."

It is not true, however, that the Negro expresses himself in a "foreign" tongue, since he is taught French from his earliest years, and since he is perfectly at ease in it when he thinks as technician, as a scholar or as a politician. It is necessary rather to speak of the slight but constant unhedging which separates that which he says, when he speaks of himself, from that which he wishes to say. It seems to him that some boreal spirit steals his ideas from him, that it softly twists them to signify more or less that which it wishes, that the white words drink up his thought as the sand drinks blood. Let himself suddenly catch himself up, let him draw back in recoil, and behold—the white words stretch out *in front of him*, strange and unfamiliar, incomplete symbols and objects in halves. It is impossible for him to express his negritude with words of precision which efficiently strike the mark at every blow. He can scarcely express negritude *in prose*. Yet it is common knowledge that this feeling of failure before the language when considered as a means of direct expression is at the source of all poetic experience.

The reaction of the *speaker* before this failure

of prose is in effect that which Bataille names the holocaust of words. Insofar as we can believe that a pre-established harmony rules the correspondence of the Word and of Being, we employ words without seeing them, with a blind confidence. They are like sensory organs, like the mouth and the hands, open windows to the world. Upon the first failure, this babel falls outside of us; we see the system in its entirety, it is no more than an upset and deranged mechanism whose great arms still gesture grotesquely in space. We see immediately the folly of the enterprise of speech. We understand that language is, in essence, prose; and prose, in essence, failure. Being raises itself before us as a tower of silence, and if we still wish to capture it, it can only be through silence, "to evoke, in a purposeful shadow the silent object by words always allusive, never direct, reducing themselves to a necessary equal silence". No one has more ably said that poetry is a necromantic attempt to induce being in and by the vibratory disappearance of the word. In improving upon his verbal impotence, in rendering words mad, the poet makes us suspect that beyond this clamor which cancels itself by itself, there are enormous densities of silence; and since we cannot silence ourselves, it is necessary to create a silence with language. From Mallarmé to the Surrealists, the profound aim of French poetry appears to me to have been this auto-destruction of the language.

The poem is an obscure room where the words collide against each other in rounds, mad. Colliding in the air, they reciprocally ignite each other with their fire and fall in flames.

It is in this perspective that it is necessary to place the effort of the "black apostles". To the ruse of the colonist, they answer by an inverse and similar ruse; since the oppressor is present even in the language they speak, they will speak this language to destroy it. The European poet of today attempts to dehumanize words in order to return them to nature; the black herald is seeking to degallicize them, he smashes them together, he breaks their customary associations, he couples them by force:

*"with little steps of rain of caterpillars
with little steps of draughts of milk
with little steps of roller bearings
with little steps of earthquakes
the sweet potatoes march in the sun with
[great strides
of gaps of stars".*

It is only when they have disgorged their whiteness that he adopts them, making of this language in ruins a superlanguage solemn and sacred, in brief, Poetry. Only through this Poetry can the blacks of Tananarive and of Cayenne, the blacks of Port-au-Prince and of Saint-Louis communicate with each other without witnesses. And since French lacks terms and concepts to

define negritude, since negritude is silence, to evoke it they employ "words always allusive, never direct, reducing themselves to an equal silence." Short circuits of speech—and there behind the flaming fall of words we perceive a huge idol, black and mute. It is not only the aim of the Negro thus to camouflage himself which appears to me poetic; it is also his own fashion of utilizing the means of expression at his disposal. His situation incites it; even before he dreams of singing, the light of white words reflects upon him, polarizes itself and alters. No aspect of this is more apparent than in the use he makes of the two coupled terms "black-white" which simultaneously cloak the great cosmic division "day and night" and the human conflict of colonist and colonial. But it is an hierarchic coupling; in passing it to the Negro, the instructor gives him in addition a hundred habits of language which consecrate the priority of white over black. The Negro will learn to say "white as the snow" to express innocence, to speak of the blackness of a look, of a soul, of a crime. Let him open his mouth and he condemns himself, except inasmuch as he sets himself to destroy the hierarchy. And if he destroys it in French, he poetizes already; let one imagine the strange savor which terms such as "the blackness of innocence" or the "shadows of virtue" would have for us. It is this

which we taste throughout the pages of this book,
and when we read, for example:

*"Your breasts of black satin, full and
[glistening...*

*this white smile
of eyes
in the darkness of your face
rousing in me tonight
the deaf rhythms...
with which our sisters
black and nude
far in the land of Guinea
intoxicate themselves
and make rise in me tonight
the heavy twilight of my passion
because
the soul of the black country where the
[ancients sleep
lives and speaks
this night
in the restless power the sweep of your
[curving loins..."*

Throughout this poem black is a color, better still a light; its soft and diffuse radiance dissolves our habitual patterns; the black country where the ancients sleep is not a shadowy hell—it is a land of sun and fire. But in another sense, the priority ascribed to white over black expresses not merely the alleged superiority of the colonist to the native; more profoundly it expresses the

universal adoration of the day and our nocturnal terrors which are also universal. In this sense, the blacks re-establish this hierarchy which they were but recently destroying. They scarcely would wish to be poets of the night, that is to say of vain revolt and despair. They announce the dawn, they salute:

"The brilliant dawn of a new day"

At a stroke, black finds again, under their pen, its sense of inauspicious omen.

"Negro, black like grief"

Cries one of them and another:

"Deliver me from the night of my blood"

Thus the word black finds itself to contain at the same time all the bad and all the good; it holds an almost unbearable tension between the two contradictory classifications: the solar hierarchy and the racial hierarchy. From it comes a poetry as extraordinary as those self-destructive objects which come from the hands of Duchamp and the surrealists. There is a secret blackness of the white, a secret whiteness of the black, a fixed flickering of being and non-being which nowhere, perhaps, is translated so happily as in the poem of Césaire:

*"My great wounded statue a rock at the forehead
my great flesh inattentive to the day with grains
without pity my great flesh of night with grain of
day." The poet will go still farther; he writes:*

"Our faces beautiful as the true operative power of negation."

Behind this abstract eloquence which evokes Lautreamont, one perceives the most strenuous and most artful effort to give a meaning to the blackness of skin and to realize the poetic synthesis of the two faces of the night. When David Diop says of the Negro that he is "black like grief", he presents black as pure absence of light. But Césaire develops and deepens the image; night is no more absence, it is denial. Black is not color, it is the destruction of this borrowed sheen which falls from the white sun. The revolutionary Negro is negation because he wishes himself a divestment pure; in order to construct his Truth, he must first destroy that of others. These black faces, these nocturnal memories that haunt our times embody the dark task of the Negativity which patiently corrodes concepts. Thus by a reversal of position, which curiously recalls that of the humiliated and insulted Negro when he vindicates himself as a "bad nigger", it is the negation of the shadows that establishes their value. Liberty is the color of the night.

Destruction, auto-da-fe of the language, magical symbolism, ambivalence of concepts, all of modern poetry is there under its negative aspect. But it is not a gratuitous game. The situation of the black, his original "laceration", the alienation

which a foreign intellect imposes upon him under the name of assimilation, place him under the obligation to regain his existentialist integrity as a Negro or, if one prefers, the original purity of his existence, by a progressive ascent, beyond the world of discourse. Negritude, as liberty, is the basic concept and the point of departure; the task is to cause it to pass from the immediate to the mediate, to develop its theme. It is thus for the black to die of the white world to be reborn of the black soul, as the platonic philosopher dies of the body to be reborn of the truth. This dialectic and mystic return to origins necessarily implies a method. But this method does not present itself as a neat packet of rules for the direction of the spirit. It is one with him who applies it. It is the dialectic law of successive transformations which will lead the Negro to coincidence with himself in negritude. It is not something for him to *know*, nor to tear from himself in ecstasy but to discover and at the same time to become that which it is.

To this original simplicity of being there are two converging roads of access; the one objective the other subjective. The poets of pure anthology employ at times the one, at times the other, sometimes the two together. There exists in effect an objective negritude which expresses itself in the customs, the arts, the songs and the dances of the African populations. The poet as a spiritual exercise submits himself to the fascination of primitive

rhythms, and allows his thought to run in the traditional forms of black poetry. Many of the poems assembled here are designated tom-toms, because they borrow from the nocturnal drums a percussion rhythm, sometimes subdued and regular, sometimes throbbing and torrential. The poetic act is then a dance of the soul; the poet turns like a dervish until he expires, he has installed in himself the times of his ancestors, he feels himself to flow away in spasmodic pulsations, and it is in this rhythmic flowing away that he hopes to refind himself. I would say that he seeks to cause himself to be possessed by the negritude of his people; he hopes that the echoes of his tom-tom will awaken the immemorial instincts which sleep in him. One will have the impression upon leafing through this anthology that the tom-tom tends to become a genre of black poetry, as the sonnet or the ode were of ours. Other poets among them inspire themselves as Rabemanjara, in royal proclamations; others go to the popular of the *hain-tenys*. The calm center of this maelstrom of rhythms, of songs, of cries, is, in its majestic naivete, the poetry of Birago Diop. It alone is in repose because it speaks directly from the tribal story-tellers and in the same oral tradition. Almost all the other attempts have a quality of strain and of desperation because they seek to make of folkloric poetry more than in essence emanates from it. But remote as he may be from

Romantic?

the "black country where the ancients sleep", the black is closer than we to the great epoch in which as Mallarmé says, "the word creates the Gods." It is almost impossible for our poets to realign themselves with popular tradition. Ten centuries of erudite poetry separate them from it. And, further, the folkloric inspiration is dried up; at most we could merely contrive a sterile facsimile. The blacks of Africa, to the contrary, are still in the great period of mythical fecundity, and the black poets of the French language are not amusing themselves with these myths as we are doing with our songs. They yield to their hypnotic spell in order that, upon the words of incantation, negritude, magnificently evoked, should surge forth. This is why I name magic or charm this method of objective poetry.

again over-
arched aspect
of Fr. poetry

Césaire has chosen to the contrary, to re-enter into himself backwards. Since this Eurydice will vanish in smoke if the black Orpheus turns toward her, he will descend the royal road of his soul with his back turned to the bottom of the grotto; he will descend beneath words and meanings—"to think of you I have placed all words at the mount of piety"—beneath daily activities and the plan of the "restitution" beneath even the first reefs of revolt, the back turned, the eyes closed, to touch his feet finally in the black water of dreams and of desire, and to let himself drown in it. Then desire and dream will surge forth in

a tidal roar, making words dance like wreckage, and will hurl them shattered on the shore.

"The words surpass themselves. It is indeed toward a sky and a land whose height and depth cannot be troubled. It is made of the old geography. Yet now there emerges at a certain level an area curiously breathable. At the gaseous level of the solid and the liquid organism, white and black, night and day."

One recognizes the old surrealist method (because automatic writing, as mysticism, is a method; it supposes an apprenticeship, exercises a plan of progress). It is necessary to plunge under the superficial crust of reality, of common sense, of reasonableness, in order to touch the bottom of the soul and to awaken the immemorial powers of desire. Of desire which makes man a rejection of all and a love of all; of desire, radical negation of natural laws and of the possible, the call for miracles; of desire, which by its mad cosmic energy replunges man into the boiling bosom of Nature and raises him at the same time over nature by the affirmation of his Right to dissatisfaction. Césaire, however, is not the first Negro to set out upon this path. Before him, Etienne Lero had founded *Legitimate Defense*. "More than a review, says Senghor, *Legitimate Defense* was a cultural movement. Beginning with a marxian analysis of the society of the West Indies, it discovered in the Carribean the descen-

dants of the Negro-African slaves held for three centuries in the stultifying condition of the proletariat. He affirmed that only surrealism could deliver them from their taboos and express them in their integrity."

SURREALISM

But precisely if one approaches Lero by way of Césaire, he cannot fail to be struck by their dissimilarities; and the comparison enables us to measure the abyss which separates the white surrealist from its utilization by a revolutionary black. Lero was the forerunner; he conceived the exploitation of surrealism as a "miraculous weapon" and an instrument of reconnaissance, a sort of radar which is sent down to probe the abysmal deeps. But his poems are the exercises of a student, they remain rigid imitations, they fail "to surpass themselves", indeed to the contrary they close in upon themselves;

"The ancient hair

Sticks to the branches the bottom of the
[empty seas

Where your body is only a memory

Where the spring grows fingernails

The spiral of your smile thrown far

Upon the houses which we do not want..."

In "The spiral of your smile", and in "The spring which grows fingernails" we recognize the preciousity and the freedom of the surrealist image, the constant process of throwing a bridge between two terms the farthest distant hoping without too

much confidence that this "toss of the dice" will reveal some hidden aspect of being. Neither in this poem nor in the others do I feel that Lero claims the liberation of the black; all the more does he promulgate the formal liberation of the imagination; in this completely abstract game, no alliance of words even remotely evokes Africa. Remove these poems from the anthology, hide the name of their author, and I defy anyone, black or white, not to attribute them to a European collaborator of the *Surrealist Revolution* or of the *Minotaure*. Because it is the aim of surrealism to recover, beyond race and condition, beyond class, behind the conflagration of language, the silent dazzling shadows which no more oppose themselves to anything, not even to the day, because the day and the night and all opposites finally are dissolved and absorbed in them. Thus one could speak of an impassivity, of an impersonality of the surrealist poet, as there is an impassivity and an impersonality of Parnassus.

A poem of Césaire, to the contrary, bursts and turns on itself as a fuse, as bursting suns which turn and explode in new suns, in a perpetual surpassing. It is not a question of meeting in a calm unity of opposites but rather a forced coupling, into a single sex, of black in its opposition to white. This dense mass of words, hurled into the air like rocks by a volcano is the negritude which arrays itself against Europe

and colonization. That which Césaire destroys is not all culture, it is the white culture; that which he conjures forth is not the desire of all, it is the revolutionary aspirations of the oppressed Negro; that which he touches in the depths of his being is not the soul, it is a certain form of humanity concrete and well determined. One can speak here of an automatic writing which is at the same time engaged and even directed; not that there is the intervention of reflection, but because the words and the images continually express the same torrid obsession. At the bottom of his soul, the white surrealist finds release; at the bottom of his soul, Césaire finds the fixed inflexibility of vindication and of resentment. The words of Lero range themselves softly, easily, by a relaxation of logical threads, around large and vague themes; the words of Césaire are compressed, one against the other, and cemented by his furious passion. Between comparisons the most audacious, between terms the most remote, runs a secret thread of hate and of hope. Compare, for example, "the spiral of your smile thrown in the distance", which is a product of the free play of the imagination and an invitation to reverie, with

*"and the mines of radium buried
in the abyss of my innocence
will leap in grains
in the manger of the birds*

*and the table of stars
will be the common name of firewood
collected through the alluvions of the chanting
[veins of night]*

where the "disjecta membra" of vocabulary organize themselves to express a black "Poetic Art".

Or let one read

*"Our faces beautiful as the true operative
power of negation."*

And read further:

*"The seas liced islands crackling under fingers
of roses bolt of flame and my body untouched
by the thunderbolt."*

Here is the apotheosis of the lice of black grief jumping among the hairs of the water, "islands" in the ray of light, crackling under the finger of a celestial delousing, the dawn with fingers of rose, this dawn of the Greek and Mediterranean culture, torn by a black thief from the sacred Homeric poems, and whose delicate princess fingernails are suddenly subjected in slavery by a Toussaint Louverture to press and burst the triumphant parasites of the Negro sea; the dawn which suddenly rebels and transforms itself, pours the fire as the savage weapon of the whites, a bolt of flame, weapon of scholars, weapon of the executioners, and blasts with her white fire the great black Titan who lifts himself intact, eternal, to rise to the assault of Europe and the Heavens. In Césaire the great surrealist tradition is achiev-

ed, takes its definite sense, and destroys itself. Surrealism, European poetic movement, is stolen from the Europeans by a black who turns it against them and assigns it a rigorously prescribed function. I have remarked elsewhere how the proletariat completely closes itself to his reason destroying poetry. In Europe, surrealism, rejected by those who could have transfused it into their blood, languishes and expires. But at the moment it loses contact with the Revolution, here in the West Indies, it is grafted to another branch of the universal Revolution; here it unfolds itself into an enormous and sombre flower. The originality of Césaire is to have cast his direct and powerful concern for the Negro, for the oppressed and for the militant into the world of the most destructive, the freest and the most metaphysical poetry at a time when Eluard and Aragon were failing to give political content to their verse. And finally, that which tears itself from Césaire as a cry of grief, of love and of hate, is the *négritude-object*. Here further, he follows the surrealist tradition which desires that the poem *objectivize*. The words of Césaire do not describe négritude, they do not designate it, they do not copy it from outside as a painter does of a model; they make it; they compose it under our eyes. Henceforth it is a thing which one can observe and learn; the subjective method which he has chosen joins the subjective method of which we

have spoken above; he thrusts the black soul outside of him at the moment when others try to interiorize it. The final result is the same in the two cases. Negritude, it is this distant tomtom in the nocturnal streets of Dakar, it is the voodoo cries of a Haitian worshipper which slide to the edge of the precipice, it is the Congo mask. But it is also this poem of Césaire, slaving, sobbing glazed, writhing in the dust like a severed worm. This double spasm of absorption and excretion beats the rhythm of the black heart in all the pages of this collection.

And what then, at present is this negritude, sole concern of these poets, the sole subject of this book? We must first reply that a white does not know how to discuss the subject, since he has not had the subjective experience and since the European tongues lack the words which would permit its proper description. I would therefore leave it to the reader to find it within the pages of this anthology and to form of it such an opinion as he deems proper. But this introduction would be incomplete if, after having indicated that the quest for the black Grail figures in its original intention, and that in its most authentic techniques synthesizes revolutionary aspirations with poetic concern, I should fail to demonstrate that this complex notion is, at its core, Poetry pure. I shall confine myself, therefore, to examining these poems objectively as a collection of testimonials

and to taking account of some of its principal themes. "That which constitutes", says Senghor, "the negritude of a poem is less the theme than the style, the emotional fervor which gives life to the words, which converts the words in speech."

One could not better warn us that negritude is not a state, nor a definite group of vices and virtues, of intellectual and moral qualities, but a certain affective attitude in regard to the world. Psychology has renounced since the beginning of the century, the great scholastic distinctions. We no more believe the states of the soul divide themselves into volitions and actions, ideas and perceptions, and into blind sentiments and passivities. We know that a sentiment is a definite manner of living our rapport with the world which surrounds us and that it comprises a certain comprehension of our universe. It is a tension of the soul, a choice of itself and of its neighbor, a fashion to surpass the brute given facts of experience; in brief, a *project*, completely similar to a voluntary act. Negritude, to employ the language of Heidegger, is being-in-the-world of the Negro.

Here further is what Césaire tells us of it:

*"My negritude is not a rock, its deafness hurled
[against the clamor of the day
My negritude is not a film of dead water on the
[dead eye of the earth
My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral*

*It plunges into the red flesh of the earth
it plunges into the burning flesh of the sky
It pierces the opaque prostration by its upright
[patience.]*

Negritude is pictured in these beautiful lines as an act more than as a disposition. But this act is an *interior* determination; it is not concerned with taking the goods of this world into its hands and transforming them; it has to do with existing in the milieu of the world. The relation with the universe remains an appropriation. But this appropriation is not technique. For the white, to possess is to transform. Certainly, the white worker works with instruments he does not own. But, at least, his techniques are his. If it is true that the major inventions of European industry are due to a personnel which recruits itself, above all, from the middle classes, at least the *trade* of the carpenter, of the joiner, of the lather seems to them a veritable patrimony, although the orientation of a gigantic capitalistic production tends to rob them of their "joy in work". But as for the black worker, it is not enough to say that he works with borrowed instruments; the techniques also are borrowed.

Césaire calls his black brothers :

*"Those who have invented neither powder
[nor the compas
Those who have tamed neither gas nor
[electricity*

*Those who have explored neither the seas
[nor the skies..."]*

But this proud claim of non-technicalness reverses the situation; that which might appear to be a deficiency becomes a positive source of riches. A technical rapport with Nature reveals it as a quantity pure, inert, foreign; it dies. By his proud refusal to become "homo faber", the Negro restores life to it. It is as though, in the couple "man-nature", the passivity of one of the terms necessarily entails the activeness of the other. Truly speaking, negritude is not a passivity, since it "pierces the flesh of the sky and of the earth"; it is a "patience", a patience which appears as an active imitation of passivity. The action of the Negro is first action upon himself. The black stands up and immobilizes himself as a charmer of birds, and the charmed objects come to perch on the branches of this false tree. It has indeed to do with a conjuring world, but through a magic by silence and repose. In concerning himself first with Nature, the white loses himself in losing it; in concerning himself first with himself, the Negro proposes to gain Nature in gaining himself.

*"They abandon themselves, possessed, to the
essence of all things, ignoring surfaces but
possessed by the movement of all things.
heedless, taking no account, but playing the game
of the world*

*truly the elder sons of the world
porous to every breath of the world
flesh of the flesh of the world throbbing with the
very movement of the world."*

Upon reading this poem, one cannot help but think of the famous distinction which Bergson established between intelligence and intuition. And Césaire properly calls us :

"Conquerors omniscient and naive"

Of technique, the white knows all. But this merely scratches the surface of things, it is unaware of the substance, of the life within. Negritude, to the contrary, is a comprehension through sympathy. The secret of the black is that the sources of his existence and the roots of Being are identical.

If one wishes a social interpretation of this metaphysic, we would say that an agricultural poetry opposes itself here to an engineer's prose. In one sense it is not true that the black disposes of every technique; the rapport of a group of human beings, whatever it is, with the exterior world is always technique of one manner or another. And inversely, I shall say that Césaire is unjust: the airplane of Saint Exupéry which folds up the earth like a rug underneath him is also an organ of unveiling. But the black is first of all a peasant. Agricultural technique is "upright patience"; it creates confidence in life, it waits. To plant is to impregnate the earth;

thereafter, one must remain immobile, to watch. "Each atom of silence is an opportunity for a ripe fruit." Each instant brings one hundred times more than man had given, whereas the worker fails to find in the manufactured product even that which he had put into it. Man grows in time with his wheat; from minute to minute he surpasses and gilds himself. At watch before this fragile ripening belly, he intervenes only to protect it. The ripe wheat is a microcosm because in order to grow the concourse of the sun and the rains and the wind were necessary; an ear of wheat is a result at the same time the most natural and the most improbable. Techniques have contaminated the white worker, but the black remains the great male of the earth, the sperm of the world. His existence — it is the great vegetal patience; his work — it is the repetition from year to year of the sacred coitus. He creates and is fertile because he creates. The sexual pantheism of these poets is without doubt that which will first strike the reader. To labor, to plant, to eat, is to make love with nature. It is thus that they rejoin the dances and he phallic rites of the African Negroes.

*"Oho! Congo, recumbent in her bed of forest,
[queen of captive Africa*

Let the phallic mountains raise high her flag
writes Senghor. And:

I know that you are woman by my belly."

*"nom I shall remount the soft belly of the dunes
and the glowing thighs of the day."*

and Rabearivelo:

*"the blood of the earth, the sweat of the rock
and the sperm of the wind"*

and Labeau:

"Under the sky the conical drum laments

It is the soul of the black

Heavy spasms of man in passion, viscous

[sobs of love

Violating the calm of night."

We are here, far from the chaste and asexual intuition of Bergson. It no more concerns being in sympathy with life, but being in love with all its forms. For the white technician, God is primarily engineer. Jupiter gives order to chaos and prescribes laws for it; the Christian God conceives the world by his understanding and realizes it by his will. The rapport of the creature with the creator is never carnal, except for certain mystics whom the Church holds in great suspicion. And further, mystic eroticism has nothing in common with fecundity; it is a completely passive waiting upon a sterile penetration. We are moulded from clay, statues shaped by the divine sculptor. If the manufactured objects which surround us could found a cult to their creators, they would adore us, without doubt, as we adore the Omnipotent. For our black poets, to the contrary, being comes from non-being as a rising

phallus. Creation is an enormous and perpetual coition; the world is flesh and son of the flesh. On the sea and in the sky, on the stands, on the rocks, in the wind, the Negro rediscovers the velvetness of the human skin; he is "flesh of the flesh of the world"; he is "porous to its every breath", to all its pollen. He is by turn the female of Nature and its male; and when he makes love with a woman of his race, the sex act seems to him the celebration of the Mystery of being. This spermatoc religion is like a tension of the soul balancing two complementary tendencies; the dynamic emotion of being a rising phallus, and that softer, more patient and feminine, of being a plant which grows. Thus negritude, in its most profound origin, is androgyny.

"Behold yourself

Erect and naked

Shaft you are and you remember

But you are in reality the child of this

[fecund shadow

Which feeds of the milk of the moon

Then you slowly shape yourself into a rod

on this low wall entwined by the dreams

[of flowers

and the perfume of the idle summer."

*"To believe, to feel the roots push at your feet
and run*

*and twist themselves as parting serpents toward
some subterranean source."*

(RABEARIVELO).

And Césaire:

*"Weary mother, leafless mother, you are a
flowering tree of the tropics,*

And you bear only husks

*You are a callebasse tree and you are only a
stockpile of bowls."*

This profound unity of vegetal and sexual symbols is certainly the greatest originality of the poetry of the Negro, especially at an epoch when, as Michel Carrouges has shown, the majority of the images of the white poets tend toward a mineralization of the human. Césaire, to the contrary, vegetalizes, animalizes sea and sky and stone. More exactly, his poetry is a perpetual coupling of women and men metamorphosed into men. Thus, the black stands witness to the natural Eros; he manifests it and incarnates it; if one wishes to find a term of comparison in European poetry, he must return to Lucretius, the peasant poet who celebrates Venus, the mother god, in the times when Rome was not yet much more than a great agricultural market. In our day, I see only Lawrence to have had a cosmic sense of sexuality. And, further, this sense in him remains extremely literary.

But, although negritude would seem at bottom this immobile out-flowing mergence of phallic

erection and of vegetal growth, it cannot be exhausted with this sole poetic theme. There is another motif which runs like a great artery through this collection.

*"Those who have invented neither powder nor
[compass...
they know in its last far corner the low, twisted
[country of pain."*

To the absurd utilitarian agitation of the white the black opposes the long authenticity of his suffering; because it has had the horrible privilège to know the last depths of misery, the black race is a race elected. And, although, these poems are from beginning to end anti-christian, one could, from this point of view, name negritude a Passion. The black represents himself in his own eyes as the man who has taken upon himself all human misery and who suffers for all, even for the white.

*"The trumpet of Armtroug at judgement day
will be the interpreter of the sufferings of man."*

(PAUL NIGER).

Let us observe at once that this is by no means a suffering of resignation. I was speaking recently of Bergson and Lucretius; I am presently tempted to cite the great adversary of Christianity Nietzsche and his "dionysism." As the dianysian poet, the Negro seeks to penetrate beneath the brilliant phantasies of the day and encounters, a thousand feet under the apolinian surface, the inexpressible suffering which is the universal essence

of man. If one wished to systematize, one would say that the black merges into all of Nature inasmuch as he is sexual sympathy with Life, and that he vindicates himself as Man inasmuch as he is the Passion of suffering in revolt. One will feel the fundamental unity of this double movement if one reflects upon the relation more and more direct that psychiatrists establish between anguish and sexual desire. From it there is one sole, proud surging forth, which can also aptly be called a desire, which plunges its roots into suffering; or, we may say, a suffering which drives itself like a sword through a vast cosmic desire. This "erect patience" which Césaire evokes is of an identical insurgence, a vegetal growth, patient in the face of suffering. It resides in the very muscles of the Negro, it sustains the black porter who mounts the Niger for hundreds of miles under a crushing sun with a burden of fifty pounds balanced on his head. But if, in a certain sense, one can assimilate the fecundity of Nature to a proliferation of misery, in another sense, and this also is dionysian, this fecundity, surpasses by its exuberance the misery, drowns it in its creative abundance which is poetry, love and dance. Perhaps it is necessary in order to understand this indissoluble unity of suffering, of eros, and of joy, to have seen the Negroes of Harlem dance frenetically to the rhythm of the blues, which are the most desolate songs of the human race. It is

the rhythm, in effect, which cements these multiple aspects of the black soul; it is that which communicates its nietzschean lightness to these heavy dionysian intuitions; it is the rhythm in the tomtom, in jazz, in the throbbing of these poems, which expresses the temporal aspects of the Negro existence. And when a black poet prophesies to his brothers a better future, it is in the form of a rhythm that he speaks of their deliverance;

"What?

a rhythm

a wave in the night through the forests,
[nothing—or a reborn soul

a drum

a chant

the power

the surging

an intense vibration which slowly in the
[shuddering marrow

brings down an old flagging body,

seize it by the waist

and pierces it

and turns it

and lives again its mounting fury in the

[hands

in the loins

in the thighs

and in the quickening womb

But it is necessary to go still further. This

fundamental experience of suffering is ambiguous, and it is thus that the black conscience is on the way to becoming historic. Whatever may be, in effect, the intolerable iniquity of his present condition, it is not that to which the Negro first refers when he proclaims that he has touched the bottom of human misery. He has the horrible benefit of having known servitude. Among these poets, the majority of whom were born between 1900 and 1918, slavery, abolished a half century earlier, remains the most vivid of memories:

*"I have no today
that has not known my yesterday,
its great eyes wide in hatred and in shame
Yet lives my stupidity of old
the charred corpse
the toe with its burnt back
the dead flesh
the brand
the red iron
the arms broken under the unleashed
[whip...]"*

writes Damas, poet of Guyane. And Brierre, the Haitian:

*"Oftent like myself you feel the stiffness
Awaken after the murderous centuries
And in your felsh the ancient would to
[bleed...]"*

It is during the centuries of slavery that the black drank the bitter cup to the dregs, and

slavery is a fact of the past which neither our authors nor their fathers have known. But it is also an enormous nightmare from which even the youngest among them are not certain they have awakened. From one end of the earth to the other, the blacks, separated by the language, the politics and the history of their colonizers, have in common a collective memory. This phenomenon is not, however, astonishing if it is recalled that the French peasants of 1789, still knew the panic terrors whose origin went back to the Hundred Years War. Thus when the black turns upon his fundamental experience, it immediately reveals itself in two dimensions: it is simultaneously the intuitive grasp of the human condition and the still fresh memory of an historic past. I think here of Pascal who indefatigably repeated that man was an irrational *composite* of metaphysic and of history, inexplicable in his grandeur if he truly comes from clay, inexplicable in his misery if he is still that which God made him; and that it is imperative, to understand him, to return to the *irreducible* fact of the fall. It is in the same sense that Cesaire calls his race the "fallen race". And in a certain sense I see well enough the rapprochement one can make of a black conscience with a Christian conscience; the iron law of slavery evokes that of the Old Testament, which relates the consequences of the original sin. The abolition of slavery recalls that other historic fact;

the Redemption. The kindly paternalism of the white man after 1848, and that of the white God after the Passion resemble. Except, however, the inexpressible sin which the black uncovers in the wells of his memory is not properly his own, it is that of the white; the first fact of the history of the Negro is indeed a sin, but the black is an innocent victim. Thus his conception of suffering radically opposes itself to the white mortification. If these poems are for the most part so violently anti-Christian, it is that the religion of the whites appears to the Negro, more clearly even than to the European proletariat, as a mystification; it wishes to make him share the responsibility for a crime of which he is the victim. The rapes, the massacres, the violations and the tortures which have reddened the African continent, Christianity wishes to persuade the Negro to see as a legitimate chastisement and as deserved tests of his worthiness. You may say then that it proclaims in return the equality of all men before God. Before God, yes. I was reading in *Esprit* only yesterday these lines of a correspondent from Madagascar:

"I am as convinced as you that the soul of a Madagascan is as valuable as the soul of a white... Exactly as the soul of a child is as valuable before God as the soul of his father. However, Monsieur le Directeur, you do not permit your automobile, if you have one, to be driven by your children."

One cannot more elegantly reconcile Christianity and colonialism. Against these sophisms, the black, by the simple deepening of his memory of his former slavery, affirms that suffering is the common lot of men and that it is not the less unmerited by them. He rejects with horror the Christian apathy, the morose voluptuousness, the masochistic humility and all the one-sided invitations to resignation. He lives the absurd fact of suffering in its purity, in its injustice and in its gratuitousness; and he thereby discovers this truth unrecognized or masked by Christianity: suffering carries within itself its own refusal; it is in essence refusal to suffer; it is the face of the shadow of negativity, it opens itself toward revolt and toward liberty. At a blow, the Negro historicizes himself to the measure by which the intuition of suffering confers upon him a collective part and assigns to him an objective in the future. Until recently he was still a pure present upwelling of immemorial instincts, pure manifestation of a universal and eternal fecundity. But now he hails his brothers of color in a completely different language:

*"Negro herald of revolt
you know the roads of the world
since you were sold in Guinea"*

And

*"Five centuries have seen you with weapons
[in your hands]*

*and you have taught the races exploiting you
the passion of liberty."*

Already there is a black *Epic*; first the golden age of Africa, then the era of the dispersion and of captivity, then the awakening of conscience, the dark and heroic times of the great revolts, of Toussaint Louverture and the black heroes, then the *fact* of the abolition of slavery "unforgettable metamorphosis", says Césaire—then the struggle for the definitive liberation.

*"You await the approaching call
the inevitable mobilization
because war for you has known only the truce
because there is no land where your blood
[has not flowed
nor tongue in which your color has not been
[insulted*

*You smile, Black Boy,
you sing,
you dance,
you cradle the generations
which rise every hour upon the fronts of
[labor and of pain
which will rise tomorrow to the assault of
[fortresses
toward the bastions of the future
to write in every tongue
upon the clear page of every sky
the declaration of your rights defiled
for these five centuries..."*

Strange and decisive divergence: the *race* has transmuted itself into historicity: the Present black explodes and temporalizes himself; Negritude inserts itself with its Past and its Future in the universal History; it is no more a *state*, neither even an existential attitude; it is a Becoming. The black contribution in the evolution of Humanity is no more a flavor, a taste, a rhythm, an authenticity, a cluster of primitive instincts; it is a dated enterprise, a patient construction, a future. It was in the name of ethnic qualities that the Black was recently claiming his place in the sun; at present, it is upon his mission that he bases his right to life, and this mission, exactly as that of the proletariat, comes to him from his historic situation. Because he has, more than all others the sense of revolt and the love of liberty. And because he is the most oppressed, it is the liberation of all that he necessarily pursues when he labors for his own deliverance:

*"Black harbinger of hope
You know all the songs of the world
Since those of the immemorial shipyards of
[the Nile."*

But can we, even after this, believe in the interior homogeneity of Negritude? And how shall we define what it is? Now it is a lost innocence which had existence only in a distant past, and now a hope which will realize itself only

in the bosom of the City of the Future. Now it contracts itself in an instant of pantheistic fusion with Nature, and now it is an existential attitude and now an objective group of Negro-African traditions. Is it discovered or is it created? But it is black men themselves, who are collaborating in this project. Senghor, in the notices with which he has prefaced the work of each poet, seems to distinguish degrees in Negritude. Does he, as preliminary spokesman for his brothers of color, invite them to *make* themselves more negro, or rather, by a sort of poetic psycho-analysis, does he unveil them to reveal that which they *are*? Is it necessity or liberty? Is it that, for the authentic Negro, his directions flow from his essence as consequences flow from a principle; or rather, is one a Negro as the faithful of a religion is a believer, that is, in fear and trembling, in anguish, in perpetual remorse never to be enough that which one wishes to be? Is it a datum of fact or is it a value? The object of an empirical intuition or a moral concept? Is it a conquest by reflection? Or does reflection poison it? Is it authentic only when it is unreflected and immediate? Is there a systematic *explanation* of the black soul or a platonic Archetype which one can approach indefinitely without ever attaining it? Is it for the blacks, as for our engineers' common sense, the most available thing in the world? Or does it descend upon certain ones as grace, and

pick out its chosen? Without doubt, it will be answered it is at once all this and many other things as well. And I would agree. As all anthropological notions, Negritude is an iridescence of being and the duty to be; it makes you and you make it. It is oath and passion simultaneously. But there is something more serious. The Negro, as we have said, creates an anti-racist racism. He does not at all wish to dominate the world; he wishes the abolition of racial privileges wherever they are found; he affirms his solidarity with the oppressed of all colors. At a blow the subjective, existential, ethnic notion of Negritude "passes" as Hegel would say, into the objective, positive, exact notion of the *proletariat*. "For Césaire," says Senghor, "the 'White' symbolizes capital as the Negro, labor... Among the black men of his race, it is the struggle of the world proletariat which he sings." And, without doubt, it is not by hazard that the most ardent of the apostles of Negritude are at the same time militant Marxists. But this serves only to prevent the notion of race from being cross cut by that of class; the one is concrete and particular, the other is universal and abstract; the one resorts to that which Jaseprs names comprehension and the other to intellection; the first is the product of a psycho-biological syncretism and the other is a methodical construction emerging from experience. In fact, Negritude

appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Negritude as antithetical value is the moment of the negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without racism. Thus Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal. At the moment the black Orpheus most directly embraces this Eurydice, he feels her vanish from between his arms. It is a poem of Jacques Romain, a black communist, which gives this new ambiguity its most moving testimony:

*"Africa I guard your memory Africâ
you are in me
as the shaft is in the wound
as the guardian fetish in the center of the
[village
make of me the stone of your sling
of my mouth the lips of your sores
of my knees the broken columns of your
[humiliation
and yet
I wish to be only of your race
fellow workers of every land."*

With what sadness he holds for yet a moment that which he has decided to abandon! With

what pride in *man* he prepares to cast off, for other men, his pride in the Negro! He who says that although Africa is in him "as the shaft in the wound" nonetheless he wishes to be only of the tortured conscience. A step more and Negritude would disappear completely—that which was the ancestral and mysterious boiling of black blood, the Negro himself in fact, would be recognized as a geographical accident, the inconsistent product of a universal determinism:

*"Is it this climate sweep space
which creates the clan the tribe the nation
the skin the race of the gods
our inexorable dissimilarity?"*

But the poet does not altogether have the courage fully to come to grips with this rational view of the racial concept; one sees that he limits himself to asking. Beneath his will toward union pierces a bitter regret. Strange road; offended, humiliated the blacks probe to the most profound depths to find again their most secret pride, and when they have finally discovered it they find themselves inwardly torn over its possession. By supreme generosity they abandon it, as Philoctetes abandoned to Neoptolemus his bow and arrows. Thus the rebel Césaire uncovers in the wells of his soul the secret of his revolt, he is of a royal race:

*"it is true there is something in you which could
never submit, an anger, a desire, a sadness, an*

impatience, indeed a scorn, a violence yes, your veins carry gold-not mud, pride-not servitude. King you have been King of old."

But he immediately repels this temptation:

"A Law is what I cover with a chain without beakage until the confluence of fire which volatilizes me which purifies me fires me a prism of amalgamed gold... I shall perish. But one. Intact."

It is perhaps this ultimate nudity of man which has torn from him the white tinsel which masks his black breast-plate and which at present undoes and thrusts aside this breast-plate itself; it is perhaps this nudity without color which best symbolizes Negritude. Because Negritude is not a state, it is pure surpassing of itself; it is love. It is at the moment that it renounces itself that it finds itself; it is at the moment it consents to lose that it has won. From the man of color and from him alone can it be asked to renounce pride in his color. It is he who marches on a ridge between the past particularism which he has just climbed and the future universalism which will be the twilight of his Negritude; it is he who lives particularism to the end to find thereby the dawn of the universal. And without doubt, the white worker also takes conscience of his class to deny it, since he wishes the advent of a society without class. But there is something more; the definition of class is objective, it sums up only the conditions of the workers' alienation. Whereas for the Negro,

it is at the bottom of his heart that he finds race and it his heart which he must tear. Thus Negritude is dialectic; it is not only nor primarily the unfolding of atavistic instincts; it represents the surpassing of a fixed situation by a free conscience. Myth dolorous and full of hope, Negritude, born of Evil and pregnant of a future Good, and living as a woman who is born to die and who senses her own death even in the richest moments of her life, it is an uneasy repose, an explosive stability, a pride which renounces itself, an absolute which knows itself to be transitory. Because in the same time that it is prophet of its birth and of its agony, it remains the existential attitude chosen by free men and lived *absolutely*, to the dregs. Because it is this tension between a nostalgic Past into which the black no more completely enters and a future where it will give way to new values, Negritude fashions itself in a tragic beauty which finds expression only in Poetry. Because it is a living unity, dialectic of so many opposites, because it is a Complex, rebel to analysis, it is only the multiple unity of a song and the flashing beauty of the Poem, which Breton names a "fixed exploding", which can manifest it. Because all attempts to conceptualize its different aspects would necessarily end in demonstrating their relativity, whereas it is lived in the absolute by the royal conscience, and because the poem is an absolute, it is poetry

only which will permit the unconditional aspect of this attitude to be fixed. Because it is a subjectivity which inscribes itself in the objective, Negritude must take body in a poem, that is to say in a subjectivity-object. Because it is an Archetype and a Value, it will find its most transparent symbol in esthetic values. Because it is a call and a gift, it can make itself heard and can offer itself only by means of the work of art which is a call for the liberty of the onlooker and a generosity supreme. Negritude is the content of the poem; it is the poem as thing of the world, mysterious and open, indecipherable and suggestive; it is the poet himself. It is necessary to go still farther. Negritude, triumph of Narcissism and suicide of Narcissus, tension of the soul outside of its culture, words and every psychic fact, luminous night of non-knowledge, deliberate choice of the impossible and of that which Bataille names the "torture", intuitive acceptance of the world and rejection of the world in the name of the "law of the heart", double contradictory postulation, exacting recantation, an expanding generosity, negritude is, in its essence, poetry. Upon this one occasion at least, the most authentic revolutionary program and the purest poetry derive from the same source.

And if the sacrifice one day is consummated, what will happen? What will happen if the

black, shedding his negritude to the profit of the Revolution wishes to be considered only as a proletariat? What will happen if he no more allows himself to be defined except by his objective condition; if he obliges himself, in order to fight against the white capitalism, to assimilate the white techniques? Will the source of Poetry silence itself? Or indeed will the great black river, despite all, color the sea into which it hurls itself? No matter; to each epoch its poetry, for each epoch the circumstances of history elect a nation, a race, a class, to seize again the torch, in creating situations which can express or surpass themselves only through Poetry. At times the poetic elan coincides with the revolutionary elan and at times they diverge. Let us salute today the historic chance which will permit the blacks to

"raise relentlessly the great Negro cry until the foundations of the world shall tremble."