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LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY IN MARTINIQUE  
RENÉ MARAN, AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, FRANTZ FANON\*

by F.A. Irele\*\*

The Afro-American has three horizons -- firstly, that of his immediate American universe; secondly, that provided by the silhouette of Europe, which lies historically and culturally behind America, and of which, as Paul Valéry observed<sup>1</sup>, America itself is an extension, and thirdly, that represented by Africa, the source of his racial origin. It is within this triangular framework of references and responses that his social and emotional life has been taking place in the course of his American existence.

This specific European dimension, is perhaps even more sharply outlined in the awareness of the black Caribbean. Britain and France having retained political control for centuries in the West Indies, having shaped directly the history of large areas in this part of the American continent for so long a time, it is only natural that the cultural history of the West Indies, particularly of the French-speaking and the English-speaking parts, should in fact have been dominated by the idea of Europe as the live source of ideas and of values. At the same time, the idea of Africa, even in the negative form it often took, formed part of the consciousness of the Caribbean and intruded upon his social as well as moral vision, keeping alive for him the three poles of awareness that I have outlined above.

It is within this scheme that I would like to examine the development of a new current of social consciousness in Martinique in the 20th century, tracing its course in

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## ARTICLES

### 2.

the writings of the three outstanding writers that the island has produced so far; namely, Rene Maran, Aime Césaire, and Frantz Fanon. For it seems to me that what characterises the evolution of the ideological awareness that runs in a single progressive course through the writings of these three men is the role played by the opposition between Europe and Africa, with the West Indies in the middle, not only as antithetical terms in the system of social symbols that govern the West Indian collective consciousness, but indeed as social and political realities, as concrete references within the contemporary world order. Furthermore, this evolution has involved a clear shift from the simple expression of attitudes towards an elaboration of ideas, culminating, with Fanon, in the formulation of a World view.

It would be well to begin our discussion by recalling briefly the history of the association of Martinique with France, as well as the social and cultural consequences of this association, as a preliminary background to our discussion. Martinique was discovered by Columbus in 1502, and occupied by France in 1635, and has remained French, with hardly any interruption, ever since. The introduction of the black man into the island dates also from this latter date, and indeed, the political and social history of Martinique has been determined largely by his presence. The three most significant periods of this history can be marked off with reference to him -- the slave period which ended with the emancipation of 1848, the colonial period which runs from this date to 1946, when Martinique was integrated into the French nation; and the present period, which can therefore be termed "the citizen period." Viewed externally then, the history of Martinique can be summed up as that of the progressive promotion of the black man on the island.

The social and cultural corollary to this development can also be summed up in the well worn word: assimilation. It is however on this score that the history of Martinique shows an internal contradiction.

Without going into details, I should only like to point out that because this assimilation took place in a typical colonial context, it created the familiar tensions that one has come to associate with the cultural and ideological situation in colonial societies. The racial ideology which, though unofficial, came to underline and to sanction the objective socio-economic division of Martinican society -- white upper class, mulatto middle class, black lower class -- also acquired a cultural significance insofar as a certain cultural differentiation existed between these three social categories, a differentiation accounted for, as far as the lower class was concerned, by the African element in the way of life of the black population.<sup>2</sup> One significance of this situation, in the context of assimilation in Martinique, is that social symbols crystallised around this objective factor, posing Europe and white culture as synonymous and as the ideal, and Africa and black culture as the negative term of this ideal.

The unilateral character of French assimilation could not but complicate this situation. The social sanction of French culture, inherent in the political ascendancy of the French people, put a pressure upon the black man in Martinique not simply to follow a positive course towards assimilation, but to accompany the process with the negative gesture of the denial of his African antecedents. The social symbols that governed collective life in Martinique were thus wholly weighted against the black man, and the purely social factors of his collective life combined with the cultural in what amounted to his negation by the dominating racial ideology of Martinican society. This process of negation was founded ultimately on an idea of Africa.

If I insist here on this ideological factor rather than on the purely social and economic aspects of the colonial situation in Martinique, it is because of the special importance which it took here, due to the very fact that the official policy practised by the French was one of equality, and so the real conflict in the

French-speaking Caribbean situation lay less on the socio-economic than on the racial level. And in this connection, the negative significance given to Africa contributed to the mental distress of the Antillean in such a way as to emphasise the racial question as his most dramatic problem.

Africa was a troubling presence in the mind and in the imagination of the average Antillean. It represented for him a synonym for savagery, as opposed to the civilisation of Europe, the image of blackness which contradicted his dream of total whiteness.<sup>3</sup> For having accepted the norms proposed by his own society and taken as the only valid measure of his humanity the degree of his approximation to the white ideal, he could not escape the fact of his own blackness. His own body remained for him, in an immediate and overwhelming manner, a constant reminder of the global accusation directed against him by his own society. Perhaps nowhere more than in the French Caribbean was the inclination to self denial as strongly accentuated in the collective attitudes that ruled social life among black people in America. The peculiar form then that colonial alienation took in Martinique, as in the French Caribbean generally, was that the black man lived in a state of permanent dissociation from the social symbols which formed the framework of his social existence and of his emotional life.

The state of alienation, it is said, does not present a problem to the individual until it has permeated to the consciousness, until it is extended from the plane of pure reality to that of felt experience. The situation I have summarised for Martinique was in fact accepted, to the extent that the average Antillean took care to distinguish himself from the African, and came to look upon himself as a Frenchman, whatever his colour. This attitude was justified insofar as the culture that he received was in fact French. However, the energetic refusal of Africa which usually accompanied the Martinican's affirmation of his Frenchness, introduced a problematic factor into this affirmation; it indicated

clearly to the Antillean his moral dependence upon the French and consequently his incompleteness, so to speak, as a human being. It created in his psyche an incompleteness of self identification which tended to engender in him a feeling of being somehow "abnormal", and fostered the kind of tensions that Fanon has described in his book Black Skins White Masks.<sup>4</sup>

The prevailing overt attitude remained however one of total acceptance of "white" values. This attitude is reflected in the kind of imaginative writing produced in Martinique before the appearance in 1921 of René Maran's first novel, Batouala. Before Maran, literary expression conformed in its themes and formal patterns to the French norm. Its tone was dictated exclusively by the prevailing fashion in Paris, its sentiments largely determined by the attitudes of the average Frenchman towards the Antilles. The Caribbean scene features in this literature, particularly in the poetry, as a decorative element, never as a human scene. The French West Indian writer contributed mainly to the Parnassian taste for the exotic, without ever feeling the need to assert any form of individuality. In the years between the end of the 19th Century and the 1st World War, Martinique experienced something of a literary renaissance,<sup>5</sup> but produced nothing more than a literature of acquiescence and of what one might call the exterior regard.<sup>6</sup>

René Maran brought a new development into the outlook of Martinican writing, in an indirect but decisive way. It is worth remarking that Maran began his literary career as a symbolist poet, albeit at the decadent stage. Born in 1887 in Martinique of Guyanese parents, Maran did not really get to know his native land and his experience of the colonial situation was to be made in Africa itself. He was taken to France at the age of four and apart from occasional journeys to Central Africa where his father was a colonial officer, spent all his youth in France. He attended College at Bordeaux, and grew up in his education, in his attitudes and in his tastes a Frenchman. His French beginnings in

literature were therefore, despite the colour of his skin, perfectly natural. He published 2 volumes of poetry in the intimate vein of the later symbolists in his early years, and came to be considered a promising regionalist poet, who blended a feeling for landscape with a rare psychological insight. These are qualities which were later to be given forceful expression in his African novels. When it is considered, however, that his 2nd volume of poems, entitled La Vie intérieure (1912) was composed almost entirely in Central Africa, where by 1910, Maran had taken up a post in the French Colonial administration, the cleavage between the subtle and evanescent inner life to which he gave expression in this volume, and the harsh glare of the African scene which he was later to document in Batouala, cannot but strike one as being in every way absolute.

Maran's direct experience of Africa was to change the course of his literary pre-occupations and to transform to a considerable extent his own social and human awareness. His correspondence during this period conveys the changes that this experience began to effect in his outlook, and which were to wrench him away from the immaterial vision of his symbolist verse and impel him towards the mindful confrontation with human beings and with events which produced Batouala.

The sensitive nature which his lonely youth in France had bred in him did not prepare him for the shock of life in colonial Africa, and it is perhaps because of this that it made such a profound impression upon him. But apart from the immediate psychological impact which his experience had upon him, the fact of his blackness came to have a special significance for him in Africa. Maran does not seem to have been oblivious of this fact even in France, for in a letter to one of his friends, written in connection with an obscure love affair, he leaves us in no doubt as to what the fact of his blackness meant to him:

"And then I am Negro. These five words carry with them all the maledictions, because whatever I do, I remain, secretly, infinitely sensitive".<sup>7</sup>

He may have, as a result, felt a distance separating him from his French colleagues and thereby acquired that measure of detachment necessary to cast an objective and critical eye upon the colonial system. Moreover, the irony of his own position as a black man administering other black men does not seem to have escaped him, and in one of his letters the inevitable feeling of his racial identity that this ironical situation inspired in him is given clear expression. He writes:

"Here, with a French heart, I sense that I am on the soil of my ancestors, ancestors that I reject because I do not share either their primitive mentality or their tastes, but who are nevertheless my ancestors".<sup>8</sup>

Maran's ambivalent attitude towards his African origins implied however a minimum of identification and indicates that his situation was that of a marginal man, placed at the sensitive center of a conflictual situation. At any rate Maran had precise ideas about what he wanted his novel to do, for it is clear from his correspondence that he conceived it with a critical intent. He spent seven years of careful labour upon it and though he was pre-occupied with the problem of style in its elaboration, this pre-occupation was in fact largely motivated by his concern to render his expression adequate for the purpose which he attached to the work. Without a doubt, this purpose was to give a testimony of the colonial situation, as he clearly indicates in his correspondence.

Referring to a chapter he was preparing to compose, in one of his letters he writes:

"I shall bring together in it almost all the grievances that these primitive races are accustomed to formulate against Europeans. I will need to animate the customs and the dances that I describe in it; finally, employing a manner which delights me, I shall bind together, imperceptibly and with a knot which at first sight appears loose, the plot to the whole of the folk-



lore, the movement and the satires."<sup>9</sup>

Further on, in the same letter, he writes:  
"I am not dealing in exotism in the manner of  
L ... (reference obscure) or of Loti. The descriptive passage, no more than the others, are not  
imagined."<sup>10</sup>

In considering the work itself, the same ambiguity that we have noted in Maran's attitude can be discerned in the picture of Africa which he presents. His image is consciously tainted by the prejudices of the European, and this is demonstrated by the main plot of the work which revolves around the theme of sexual jealousy and expresses this theme in terms of an almost animal sensuality.

In an obvious sense and from the purely documentary point of view, the novel presents an overall picture of African life which is negative. Yet a close examination of the work, of its levels of meaning, of its narrative technique and of its symbolic structure reveals the profound identification which Maran had achieved within his own sensibility with Africa, an organic sympathy with African life and people which belies the conscious detachment of Maran's realism.

The first quality that strikes one in this respect is the poetic intensity of Maran's descriptive passages. The whole work itself can be taken as one long-prosepoem in which the African scene is invested with an unaccustomed symbolic power, as in this evocation of sunset:

"Then broad streaks of crimson spread out across space. Decreasing in hue, from shade to shade, from transparency to transparency, these streaks began to lose their way in the immensity of the sky. And in their turn, these shades and transparencies faded until they were no more. The undefinable silence which had watched over the agony and the death of the sun extended over all the lands.

"A poignant melancholy moved among the stars appearing in the horizon. The hot lands exhale mists, and the humid scents of the night get on the move. Dew weighs down the forest. One would almost think that the feeble odor of the wild mint hums in the wind with the beetle and the hairy insects ...."

"Like a canoe brushing its way through watery shrubs -- how it glides evenly through the clouds -- behold Ipeu the moon, all white, appearing.

"She is already six nights old".<sup>11</sup>

I quote this passage at some length, even in my inadequate translation, because such poetry had not before been expended upon the African landscape. It reveals a new feeling of passionate communion with the African scene which we also find in Maran's evocation of the people, such indeed, that even when he intrudes the prejudices he inherited from his French background into this evocation, they give ground before the compelling sincerity of his poetic insight into the communal life of his Africans.

Consider, for example, another extract:

"Dancing and singing are all our life. We dance in honour of the moon, or to celebrate Lolo the sun. We dance on account of everything, on account of nothing, for the joy of it. We dance the dance of the water of the earth and of the water of the sky, the dance of fire, the dance of the wind, the dance of the ant, the dance of the elephant, the dance of the trees, the dance of the leaves, the dance of the stars, the dance of the earth and of what lies within ..."<sup>12</sup>

What a passage like this communicates takes us beyond the simple report of a fact but rather into the sharing of a distinct and especial feeling of life. The immediate and intuitive coincidence of Maran's

sensibility with his African subject that these passages reveal also explains his almost total re-organisation of the narrative scheme and resources of his novel along new lines which take the direction of the imaginative tradition of Africa itself. The very stylistic traits of the novel participate in its African atmosphere. In his dialogue, he recasts the French language in order to make it capture the very tone and the feel of speech of his African characters. Thus half a century before Achebe, the African proverb had made its appearance in a novel written in a European language.

What is more, the very structure and movement of Maran's prose capture for us those elements in the oral tradition of Africa which give it its distinctive flavour. It is a style full of those insistent repetitions, of words and sonal values weaving a pattern of refrains and of alliterations through his narrative, and which we can now recognise as deriving from those elements which compose the essence of the oral tradition of Africa.

Maran could not have achieved these effects unless he had listened with an unusually attentive ear to African speech. In one remarkable passage which indicates how well and closely Maran had observed his Africans to the point of identification, he brings together these distinctive features to recreate the distinctive rhetorical manner of the African countryside and to lend dramatic tension to his narrative.<sup>13</sup>

Batouala, suspecting Bissibi'ngui of designs on his wife Yassigui'ndja, invites his rival to an isolated part of the forest with the intention of killing him. The latter suspects what is in store for him, and prepares himself mentally to give blow for blow. The encounter between the two men takes place in an ominous atmosphere. But as they meet, they greet each other in proverbs and carry on their conversation in allusive speech. They then recount the fables, in which each man conveys his individual sentiment, the folktales expanding on the proverbs, elaborating in figurative language their

purport. The two men fence with each other in words in this way until Batouala, unable to restrain himself any longer, makes a pointed statement that uncovers starkly the dread issue that divides the two men.

We have then, in Batouala, something far in advance of exotism, something more than a mere outside representation of a foreign atmosphere, but an evocation that goes a long way towards restituting the inner quality of life in a specific human universe. Maran not only portrayed Africa in his novel, but by integrating into the whole design of the work such elements as would break through the confines of an externally contrived representation, takes his readers further into the intimate recesses of African experience.

This, more than the explicit anti-colonial passages, makes Maran an innovator in modern African literature, and indeed, the creator of the modern African novel. He pointed the way by this single work, by its demonstrative value, to those African writers in French who came after him, by achieving a reconversion of the European language to render immediate the atmosphere of Africa. Furthermore, within this scheme of his novel, Maran also created an African, for the first time in French literary history, as a true tragic figure, endowed with an authentic imaginative life. Maran impresses his hero upon our feelings and, indeed, upon our intelligence. The African thus comes alive as a hero, that is, as a man with feeling, with his passions, and above all, with his own manner of apprehending the world.

Batouala also establishes a direct relationship between the lives of his African characters and the colonial situation, between the external framework of African life at a precise historical moment and the destiny of individuals involved in it. It is from this perspective that the novel performs the social function which its author claimed for it in the preface he added to the second edition, published after the work had obtained the Prix Goncourt in 1921. We know that Maran,

after the storm provoked by his novel, was dismissed from the colonial service and withdrew into stoic retirement. His writings afterwards indicate that he was agitated by a personal conflict of loyalties. On the one hand, he continued to express his attachment to France and its culture by cultivating a delicate prose, with a dedication reminiscent of Flaubert, and to the French empire by writing four volumes on its heroes and builders. On the other hand, he also cultivated his African vein in a stream of animal and symbolic novels, the most remarkable of which is Le livre de la brousse (1934). In particular, he poured his personal conflicts into an autobiographical novel, Un homme pareil aux autres (1947).

Maran never 'committed' himself politically, but the true import of his career, especially when viewed against his background, resided in the fact that a West Indian, utterly assimilated to French culture, had been confronted with the contradiction of his position and had begun to move towards a view of things outside and beyond the French scheme of values. The critical intelligence which underlies Batouala, as well as the imaginative sympathy which he achieved in his novels with the African continent -- and which implied a positive valorisation of the continent -- indicate a reflective consciousness which was bound to affect the vision of the West Indian in his double relation to Europe and to Africa. For Maran had written out of a frame of mind which was not simply moral or liberal, but denoted a sense of concern and involvement, limited perhaps in scope and intensity, but nonetheless real.

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This sense of involvement implicit in Maran's work becomes explicit in the work of Aimé Césaire, who was to give a definite figure to the hesitant social vision of his predecessor. In the great poem

by Césaire, his first work, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (1939) the contained indignation of Maran explodes into open revolt, and into a new determination. With Césaire, moral concern is transformed into passionate commitment.

Césaire's literary work, especially when considered in conjunction with his political activities, represents more than the expression of an attitude or a symbolic gesture, but rather a privileged form of action -- that is, poetic action whose direction is the activation of the mind of the West Indian and whose purpose is the total transformation of his mode of insertion in the world order. Césaire inscribes his poetry within a historical vision and ascribes to it a function -- that of formulating for the West Indian a new form of historical existence.

That Césaire was brought to embrace his vocation as a poet of the black consciousness is due not only to his temperament but also to a combination of factors which converged upon him, at a precise moment in history, to determine this vocation for him. Between Maran and Césaire lies a development which gathered force during the inter-war years, and which favoured the emergence of a new current of feeling and of ideas in the French Caribbean. The atmosphere of spiritual distress that settled upon Europe after the carnage of the First World War, and the background of economic difficulties and political tension determined an intellectual climate in which the old ideas and values that appeared to have sustained European Civilisation began to be called into question. The Surrealist movement is the natural child of those times. The confrontation between Fascism and Communism which began to split Europe, and the general moral unease that pervaded the European continent left an impression on black intellectuals in Europe: Europe had been shown to be frail and vulnerable. In America, the Negro Renaissance expressed in literature the new mood of affirmation that was spreading through the black

population, and in Haiti, the Indigenist movement, led by Dr. Price-Mars, had begun to question the primacy of European values in the collective expression of black men whose historical and racial antecedents -- and consequently, cultural and spiritual essence -- derived more from Africa than from Europe. And of course, the protest theme, in relation to the racial problem, which was the keynote of all this literature brought home to the French Caribbean the fact of the colonial problem on his island.

It was in Martinique that the immediate follow-up to Maran's gesture was to come, in the form of Etienne Lero's manifesto, Légitime défense, which appeared in 1932 in Paris. Lero attacked the lack of relevance of the accepted literature of Martinique:

"A foreigner would look in vain in this literature for an original or profound accent, for the sensual and colourful imagination of the black man, for an echo of the resentment as well as the aspiration of an oppressed people."<sup>14</sup>

Etienne Lero died shortly after, and it was upon Césaire that his mantle came to fall. Césaire, who was a student in Paris at the time, had met Leopold Senghor, also a student and together, they had discovered, each for himself, a new meaning of Africa. For Césaire, Africa meant self recognition as a West Indian, because it illuminated a whole new dimension of himself which had been obscured; it meant seeing himself anew and aright.

The result is Cahier d'un retour au pays natal. The poem cannot, I think, be fully comprehended except in its Caribbean context, that is within the triple frame of reference with which I began this discussion. The dialectic which informs the poet's mental and spiritual progression as it unfolds in the poem is furnished by that historical arrangement which has placed the West Indian in a simultaneous relationship with Europe, America and Africa, constituting them into his poles of social and moral awareness. And it

is to set right the lopsidedness of this arrangement that Aimé Césaire sets out on the voyage of self discovery of which Cahier is an account.

For Cahier recounts a quest -- it reveals itself indeed as the epic of a singular consciousness. It retraces for us the exploration of the tortured landscape of the West Indian mind in an exceptional act of introspection, as well as its movement towards a sense of direction and purpose, its tormented groping towards a sense of fulfilment.

At the beginning of the poem, Césaire unfolds for us a panorama of the incoherence and futility of his native island, enstranged from itself and condemned to a sterile inauthenticity:

"At the end of the dawn, the city --  
flat, sprawled, tripped up by its common sense, inert, winded under the geometric weight of its eternally renewed cross, at odds with its fate, mute, baffled, unable to circulate the pith of this ground, embarrassed, lopped, reduced, cut off from fauna and flora."15

The material squalor of Martinique, conveyed in graphic images of physical degradation, is then seen as being only the outward sign of the moral desolation which has made a waste land of the collective consciousness of its inhabitants and drawn a shroud over their spiritual life:

"At the end of the dawn, the great motionless night, the stars more dead than a perforated balafon."16

But it is less in anger than with a motion of love that Césaire descends into this hell in quest of redemption for himself and for his people:



"To flee. My heart was full of generous hopes. To flee... I should arrive lithe and young in this country of mine and I should say to this land whose mud is flesh of my flesh: 'I wandered for a long time and I am returning to the deserted foulness of your wounds'. I should come back to this land of mine and say to it: 'Embrace me without fear... If all I can do is speak, at least I shall speak for you'".<sup>17</sup>

Césaire's identification, in a total fusion of body and soul with the tragic fate of his people, has a quality of religious dedication, and his commitment widens his "open consciousness", defining for him the total area of his passion:

"Mine, these few thousand death-bearers who circle in the gourd of an isle, and mine, too, the archipelago bent like the anxious desire for self negation as if with maternal concern for the most frail slenderness separating the two Americas; and the womb which spills towards Europe the good liquor of the Gulf Streams, and one of the two incandescent slopes between which the Equator funambulates towards Africa. And my unfenced island, its bold flesh upright at the stern of this Polynesia; and right before it, Guadeloupe slit in two at the dorsal line, and quite as miserable as ourselves; Haiti, where Negritude stood up for the first time and swore by its humanity; and the droll little tall of Florida where a Negro is being lynched, and Africa caterpillaring gigantically

up to the Spanish foot of Europe,  
its nakedness where death cuts a  
wide swath.<sup>18</sup>

Here is the racial consciousness taken form,  
amid the far flung abjection to which Europe has  
reduced the black man, and rising to the surface  
of the West Indian consciousness. It is Europe that  
now wears a sinister mask:

"In leaving Europe wracked with cries  
and silent currents of despair, in  
leaving Europe which timorously re-  
covers itself and, proud, overestimates  
itself. I claim this egotism beautiful  
and adventurous and my labour reminds me  
of an implacable prow."

The very movement of rejection and of revolt to  
which these words bring us in the logical progression  
of Césaire's spiritual adventure initiates in its turn  
a new motion towards self affirmation, for which Césaire  
invented the word "Negritude" in the well known pass-  
age of his poem:

"My Negritude is not a stone, its  
deafness thrown against clamour of  
the day, my Negritude is not a speck  
of dead water on the dead eye of the  
earth, my Negritude is neither a tower  
nor a cathedral. It thrusts into the  
red flesh of the soil, it thrusts into  
the warm flesh of the sky, it digs under  
the opaque dejection of its rightful  
patience."<sup>20</sup>

It is at this point where we watch the resurgence  
of the poet's consciousness that the dialectic of Césaire's  
poem reveals itself most distinctly. The poet has passed  
through a succession of phases that are like a purgation,

each phase involving a metamorphosis of the self, and leading to the definition a new being. The poem becomes the dramatic exteriorisation of a mental rite of passage, by which the poet gains access to a higher level of experience both of himself and of the world. The dominant theme here, as in all Césaire's poetry, is that of a perpetual movement of the self, realising ever more fully its integration into a more substantial whole, in other words an intensification of being. The imagery here also presents us with a symbolic representation of totality, the poet himself planted at the live center of a whole universe of vital responses, so that when he comes to celebrate his race, it is in terms of a spirituality that draws its energy from a full, organic and intense cosmic participation:

"truly the elder sons of the world  
porous to all the breath of the world  
fraternal space of all the breath of the world  
bed without drain of all the waters in the  
world spark of the sacred fire of the world  
flesh of the flesh of the world  
panting with the very movement of the world  
Tepid dawn of ancestral virtues  
Blood! Blood! All our blood stirred by the  
male heart of the sun  
Those who know the feminine nature of the  
moon's oily flesh  
the reconciled exultation of the antelope  
and the star those whose survival moves in  
the germination of grass  
Eia! perfect circle of the world and close  
concordance!"<sup>21</sup>

Césaire's negritude then, is not only a personal but also a collective vision, a vision of the race founded upon a novel apprehension of the meaning of Africa, which serves as the mediating symbol of a new consciousness. Africa has, in an immediate way, a

polemical significance -- the contestation of the colonial hierarchy of values implies the glorification of Africa, the constitution of a counter myth, a wilful act, in the two senses of the word, whose purpose as Césaire puts it, is "the invention of souls."<sup>22</sup>

This relative and negative aspect of Negritude explains its excessive romanticism, its exaggerated emphasis, its irrationalism even. But these were not without their positive side. If we consider the African myth in the work of Césaire from the Caribbean perspective, it is easy to recognise the fact that Africa signified for him a means of mental liberation, as well as a symbol of spiritual salvation.

For the Martinican wallowing in a quagmire of self refusal, Africa offered self acceptance. The African past came as a historical justification for his claim to a plenitude of being -- it gave a positive dimension to his historicity by extending his awareness beyond the demoralising past of slavery. It also permitted him to recover his authenticity through the recognition of his cultural attachment to Africa. By breaking the vicious circle of inhibitions set up in the Caribbean mind, it restored him to his wholeness.

The African myth also has another significance for Césaire as the source of his poetic values and the foundation of his poetic vision. Césaire's African vision is situated within the Surrealist philosophy, which can be summed up as a quest for a fresh mode of experience and of knowledge. Poetry becomes a vital act, which creates a structure of apprehension of a mystic, as opposed to a rational kind. The spirituality of Africa appeared to Césaire therefore not only as a personal heritage, but also as an ultimate sanction for his poetic aspiration towards the primary and the elemental. Africa, in a word, is a symbol which serves as a transcendental reference for the poetic vision of Aimé Césaire.

The African sentiment of Césaire animates then his messianic vision. His experience of Africa is imaginative and symbolic, but it has an active purpose. The poet assumes the role of a prophet, leading his people towards a new world of social experience and human awareness, towards a new order of existence and of being:

"Now I know the sense of the ordeal:  
my country is the 'night lance' of  
my Bambara ancestors."

"And I seek for my country not hearts  
of dates, but hearts of men who beat  
the virile blood to enter the cities  
of silver by the great trapezoid  
door." ...23

When Césaire's work is considered in its entire range, the distinctive fact that specifies it can be seen to be social commitment expressing and realising itself in imaginative terms. There is at work in it the will to bring the black man's consciousness to a total coincidence with its historical determination and thus to illuminate it. Césaire's negritude, romantic, passionate, exacerbated even, reveals itself in this light as no more than the deliberate and lucid assumption by the black man of his destiny.

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In this respect, Césaire struck a completely new note in the literature of Martinique and created a new mode of vision and of expression, the significant aspect of which is the pre-occupation that we find henceforth in the work of a whole new generation of writers with the situation of the black man in the French Caribbean and in the world. Novelists such as Juminer

and Zobel, poets such as Glissant and Desportes belong to this generation who began to work in what I'd like to term "the heritage of Césaire."<sup>24</sup> Frantz Fanon, in his own way, belongs to this heritage. Although not a creative writer, the new climate of thinking and of sentiment initiated by Césaire in Martinique is behind his work, which can thus be seen to have issued directly out of the efforts of Césaire. One has only to point to the frequent references to Césaire in Peau noire masques blancs to realise that Fanon's point of departure is the final position of Césaire.

But even with this first work, the emphasis as well as the perspective of Fanon show a difference. This difference can be accounted for, I think, by two factors. The first is that Fanon was a rationalist, expressing himself in dialectical terms, as opposed to Césaire working in images and symbols. Fanon was casting a clinical eye in fact on the whole complex of emotions and attitudes that constituted the new racial awareness of his countrymen. Secondly, Fanon belongs to a later generation than Césaire, with a wider perspective for viewing things. In this connection, his experience in Algeria was to have a direct bearing upon his outlook.

An additional factor is the fact that the specifically intellectual structure of his thought was moulded by the peculiar current of the European tradition that has produced what one might call "the revolutionary intellect", represented in modern times by Marx and Engels, Sorel, Lenin and Sartre. Their influence in various ways led him to elaborate a personal conception of man which he directed towards a new purpose in relation to the black man and to the Third World.

The stages of Fanon's intellectual development can now be briefly outlined. His point of departure, as I have remarked, is negritude. His first book is

an examination of the black man's condition in the context of the colonial situation in the French Caribbean, and in its wider implications. What Fanon attempts here is no less than a phenomenology of Negro existence. He examines in them the nature of this existence and the various modes of response of the black man to his condition. The reciprocal character of the black man's relation to the white man, who has created him for his use, thus determines these responses so that, in Fanon's view, they constitute no more than a defensive reaction. Fanon's view of Negritude is that it is enclosed within the vicious racial circle initiated by the white man, a compensatory movement generated by the black man's inferiority complex vis-a-vis the white man. He suggests that this is altogether inadequate, and that the real answer to the black man's dilemma is to break the circle by stepping out of it entirely, by revindicating his humanity not as black man, which only reinforces his alienation, but simply as a man. The final peroration in his book illustrates very well his point of view.

"I as a man of color want only this:  
That the tool never possesses the man.  
That the enslavement of man by man  
cease forever. That is, of one by  
another. That it be possible for me  
to discover and to love man wherever  
he may be."<sup>25</sup>

It is an abstract humanity, however, that Fanon proposes at the end of this study. But what Fanon wanted to stress was the point that the colonial situation was an economic rather than a racial system in essence, that the black man was not oppressed as a black man per se, but in his position as belonging to an economic category. This view is obviously an overstatement, but we can understand it to mean that Fanon was seeing, behind and beneath the racial cloak of the colonial situation, the master-slave relationship on

which it was founded. And his purpose is not simply to oppose the master, but the world of master and slave, as Albert Camus has put it.<sup>26</sup>

I do not think myself that Fanon was rejecting Negritude outright. He was too perceptive to throw the baby out with the bath water. But he was disconcerted by the vague formulation that it began to receive in the writings of Senghor, while admiring the will that animated the movement, as exemplified in the poetry of his countryman, Césaire. More than anything else he wanted to see in it an original content, perhaps even, at this stage, a clear social as opposed to a mere mystic content -- an empirical significance, in a word.

At any rate, his Algerian experience was to give unity and definition to his ideas. In 1952, at the age of 26, Fanon was sent to Algeria, to serve at the French hospital at Blida, as a psychiatrist. The parallel of Fanon's career in the French service with that of Maran is difficult not to make. Like Maran before him, Fanon was brought face to face with the colonial situation, in a new sphere of its effects -- the disruption of the psychic life of its victims. His defection to the Algerian rebellion and his subsequent role as the theoretician of the revolutionary thinking of Algerian nationalism reflect, more than his sensitive reaction to the brutal character of the colonial reality, his thirst for a meaningful commitment, through action, to a new image of man.

Fanon's analysis of the colonial situation is inscribed within this humanistic perspective. More concretely, he saw colonialism as the elevation of one set of men at the expense of another set. In the same measure that the colonial master extends his human dimension -- through economic advantage and the moral satisfaction that he derives from it -- in that same measure is the colonised slave impoverished in body and soul, depersonalised, reduced in his human stature and even nature. Colonial rule tends to drive a wedge between colonised native and his normal adherence to his essential humanity. This is the situation as perceived by Fanon which Sartre in the very first sentence



of his preface to Damnés sums up in these words:

"Not so very long ago, the earth  
numbered 2,000 million inhabitants:  
500 million men, and 1,500 million  
natives."<sup>27</sup>

The sharp division between the two categories of individuals that constitute colonial society assumes a moral significance from this point of view. Colonialism is an assault, maintained by force, upon the consciousness of the native.

Fanon's pre-occupations in the two books that issued out of his Algerian experience revolve around this problem. As a psychologist, he is concerned, I think, primarily with the subjective states of the colonised peoples. In L'An V de la révolution algérienne,<sup>28</sup> he presents a sociological account of the transformations in Algerian society through the changes in social attitudes that are brought about by the necessity of the revolution. Objects acquire new meanings, human relations are modified, new values are created as the Algerians adjust their minds to the revolutionary situation. The structural modifications that he describes take place first in the collective consciousness before they are given objective form. In this sense, Fanon's sociology is of the idealist type.

It is from this point of view that we need to view the discussion of violence in the colonial situation with which he opens his last book, Damnés. We can summarise his thought by saying that, for him, violence is a form of psychic therapy which he prescribes, in a literal sense, to cure the sickness brought into the mind of colonised man by his situation. Inasmuch as the coloniser uses constant force on his victim, he sows in the mind of the latter the seeds of a murderous will which takes root and spreads its poisonous growth, warping and cramping it. Colonial alienation is the introduction here of a sick body into the collective consciousness of the natives. The

colonised native is thus a pathological case; in the circumstances, therefore, the only remedy is that the colonised masses take up arms against their overlords in order to recreate themselves as men. The emphasis then is upon the creative role of violence, which dilates the cramped muscles and restores the normal correspondence between the body and the soul in the colonised native.

The rest of Fanon's thesis is devoted to an examination of the political and social implication of this fundamental idea. I cannot render an adequate account of Fanon's political thought in this survey, and I would like simply to limit myself to pointing out what appears to me to be of significance in it, in relation to my general theme, before passing on to some general conclusions.

First, Fanon minimises the racial factor in favour of the socio-economic, which cuts across ethnic categories. His comments on the national bourgeoisie in the colonial and newly independent countries and his view of the disinherited peasants of the rural areas as the only authentic revolutionary group is intended to bring home the fact that the issue at stake is that of privilege and advantage, not race. And precisely because of this standpoint, he discounts an alliance between the masses of the underdeveloped countries and the proletariat of the advanced nations, who enjoy the material fruit of the colonial set-up and therefore have an interest in its maintenance. Hence the class struggle acquires in his thinking a new dimension, indeed a universal character, in which the third world is opposed to the advanced nations. It is therefore with some justification that Fanon has come to be accepted as a theoretician of the third world, although only brief allusions are made in his work to the entity.

It is this determination to go beyond the appearance to the reality, from the contingent to the essential, that accounts for his final criticism of negritude, which was his starting point. Its all --

embracing character is belied by the sociological realities, because the condition of black peoples takes on varied and dissimilar forms. More important still, he came to see it as the ideology of the new native ruling class in the post-colonial period, which in its emphasis on the immaterial tended to become in turn an alienating philosophy, insofar as it could not lead on to social action. He came therefore to restore the relative character of the movement, already pointed out by Sartre and against which he himself had protested,<sup>29</sup> but now in a different direction -- the social transformation of the emerging countries. It is in this sense that I consider his thinking to be not so much a break with negritude as a transcending of the movement.

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We have then in the work of these three dominating figures in the literary and intellectual history of Martinique a distinct progression. The development that strikes one when their writings are seen within the historical perspective that I have attempted here to establish for them is the manner in which the social consciousness that they reveal is transformed and extended from one writer to another, its progressive amplification.

Rene Maran has been hailed by Senghor as a precursor of the Negritude movement,<sup>30</sup> and rightly so, if one is to judge by his influence. His first novel is a protest against colonial rule, and served as an initial inspiration for the literature of revolt of the French-speaking black writers, although it did not open out to them in an explicit or distinct way the racial perspective of their movement. It was the work of a liberal humanist. More significant for the influence which Maran was to exercise is the imaginative

sympathy with Africa which he achieved as an artist, as opposed to the intellectual understanding of the liberal. If we compare his African novels to those of Joyce Cary, for instance, this distinction becomes clear, as the validity of Senghor's designation of Maran as the forerunner of a movement he himself and Aime Cesaire have come to incarnate.

For the African vision is at the heart of the affirmation of racial identity that we associate with Aime Cesaire, for whom the black world appears to be not only a community of suffering and of interests, but also a community of values. And in the kind of mystic entity that his poetry celebrates, Africa, the original motherland of all black people, appears as the ultimate source of warmth and life.

Frantz Fanon however, while remaining in the same current of development, takes us from this high point and leads us towards another. He too had a racial sentiment, and even a vision of the race, but one that becomes bred to a new awareness, that of the entire humanity of the under-privileged. There is thus in his work not only a widening of the sociological perspectives of the racial consciousness that was passed on to him, but also in a fundamental sense, a refinement of vision, in his manner of giving this consciousness a new relevance with reference to the Third World.

Thus the development that we observe in the evolution of literary and ideological expression by natives of Martinique has a qualitative aspect. This is not without significance in another important respect. We can observe also in this evolution the movement from collective feeling to the creation of social ideas. Artistic expression is seen to provide the first significant indication of a self-consciousness on the part of the blacks -- of a collective affective state -- which later crystallises, as it were, into self-awareness. This in turn finds intellectual projection in ideology. In the particular case of the Negritude movement, of which the developments summarised here

constitute an important sector, it is of interest to note the divergent directions which the intellectual activity of the French-speaking black writers has taken, as represented on the one hand by the conservative social philosophy of Leopold Sedar Senghor,<sup>31</sup> and the revolutionary socialism of Fanon on the other. Both stem from the same original source, and they have a certain unity in the sense that they both represent the outward movement of the black subjectivity towards the objective reality of social factors.

Finally, with relation to our general theme, we might consider the significance of Africa itself as a focus of feeling and of ideas, and indeed of action, for the Martinicans. Their case stands out in the long run as a particular illustration of a more general Afro-American phenomenon. It forms part of a recurrent and consistent pattern of responses that seems today to have become established as an historical cycle. Maran, Césaire, and Fanon belong then to the gallery of figures peopled by other Afro-Americans such as Blyden, Du Bois, Garvey, and in our own day, Malcolm X, who have turned to Africa in quest of a meaning for the collective experience of the black man in the modern age.

We know that this phenomenon of the emotional and intellectual "return to Africa" by the Afro-American is the result of a reaction to the American experience, or in a wider framework, the Western experience. It also bears traces of a certain atavism, although in the case of the intellectuals, an atavism of a positive kind, comparable indeed to the return to the European source by other Americans such as Henry James and T.S. Eliot, and in a sense more relevant than theirs, in its effective contribution to the historical and moral resurgence of the African motherland. But the ultimate significance of the phenomenon for Africa seems to me to reside elsewhere.

For when the contribution of these exiled sons of Africa is taken together with that of the Western educated Africans in the development of modern African consciousness<sup>32</sup> it will be seen that in fact the actual spiritual transformation of Africa has been effected through the agency of black men. The entry of Africa into the modern era, though made inevitable by the encounter with Western ideas and technology, was made possible historically by the action of her own children, both immediate and remote. Ideology in the black world has a fundamental unity in that it was called into being by the encounter and the resultant clash, between Europe and Africa, and in response to the sociological consequences, in their varied forms, of this historical fact. And out of this global response has been evolved the new mental universe of the modern African.

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