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Aimé Césaire : Poetry, First and Foremost

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The multitude of postcolonial readings of the work of Aimé Césaire transforms it more and more into a « political machine » and makes us quickly forget that the attention paid to his discourse was originally caused by the fact that he acquired a certain local, national and international respect due to his capacity to write himself into the field of literary discourse. Above all, Césaire had understood that a poet says what he says by saying it in his own language: « LE REBELLE : j'avais amené ce pays à la connaissance de lui-même, familiarisé cette terre avec ses démons secrets allumé aux cratères d'éléodermes et de cymbales les symphonies d'un enfer inconnu, splendide parasité de nostalgie hautaine. »¹ The critical commentator can always try to eliminate the allegorical dimension of the remarks and find non-figurative equivalences in order to render the discourse into a pragmatic campaigning, which is not what Césaire had wanted to do. Césaire read (and taught) Valéry's work too often to let himself stay silent about the deceptive illusion according to which language was created solely as an instrument of « realist communication ». This is without a doubt the reason for which, on several occasions, when questioned by Françoise Vergès in *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai*, on the questions directly related to his political activity, Césaire returned to poetry: « A vrai dire je ne sais que répondre. C'est dans mes poèmes, les plus obscurs sans doute, que je me découvre et me retrouve [í]. C'est dans ma poésie que se trouvent mes réponses. »² When anthologies include texts on current events, such as the *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Discourse on Colonialism), it is possible to understand what Césaire himself calls « the political »; the parts which are too literary are excluded, that is to say the text on the « harsh animal » which is situated beyond what Césaire himself calls the « journalistic patois » a variation of the « verbose politician » because in questions of postcolonialism, Césaire wants to speak of the « storm » and to do that it becomes necessary to digress, to immerse

oneself in the words of Baudelaire, and in the words of the poet Ducasse: « -Tout en ce monde sue le crime : le journal, la muraille et le visage de l'homme. » C'est du Baudelaire, et Hitler n'était pas né ! Preuve que le mal vient de plus loin. Et Isidore Ducasse, comte de Lautréamont ! A ce sujet, il est grand temps de dissiper l'atmosphère de scandale qui a été créée autour des *Chants de Maldoror*. »³ « It is high time », indeed, for Césaire to enter into the debate on revolt which was first introduced by Camus in « Lautréamont et la banalité »⁴ and in the final version of *L'Homme révolté*,⁵ a debate in which among others, Bataille and Breton participated. Breton's argument against *L'Homme révolté* rests heavily on the fact that for Breton, Camus is incapable of reading poetry, whether Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Lautréamont or surrealist works: « En lisant le -Lautréamont de Camus, tandis que je me demandais -comment cela était possible, je me suis souvenu d'une note anciennement publiée dans la revue *L'Arche* dans laquelle l'auteur de *L'Etranger* confessait son peu de goût pour l'ensemble de la poésie dite moderne où il avouait même se sentir une âme lamartinienne. »⁶ Hence the inability to accurately grasp the meaning of a poetic statement: « Que Camus n'ait pas la moindre conception du lyrisme, ni d'ailleurs de l'humour c'est indéniable et ce ne serait, en somme qu'un demi-mal s'il n'incitait pas ceux qui n'ont pas plus que lui cette conception à s'en tenir au sens littéral de la phrase poétique, par exemple. Il est assez plaisant qu'il en reste au pied de la lettre [...] On imagine jusqu'où doit aller sa consternation lorsque Lautréamont déclare qu'il a -vu une figue manger un âne ! »⁷ In addition to this poetic myopia, this resistance to poetic expression founded on hyperbolic allegory, Breton raises the central question of what type of revolt Camus offers as an alternative. His answer is profoundly pejorative:

Et qu'est-ce que ce fantôme de révolte que Camus s'efforce d'accréditer et derrière quoi il s'abrite : une révolte dans laquelle on aurait introduit la -mesure ? La révolte une fois vidée de son contenu passionnel, que voulez-vous qu'il en reste ? La révolte peut-elle être à la fois elle-même et la maîtrise, la domination parfaite d'elle-même ? Allons donc ! une révolte ainsi châtrée ne saurait plus être que la -sagesse pauvre dont se défend Camus.⁸

Césaire cannot help but end up supporting Breton in this debate at the end of the 50s. The need for the involvement of intellectuals is certainly different yet no less pressing in April of 1941 when Breton and Césaire met. A historic meeting took place and will be remembered on the basis of a common admiration of Lautréamont's work, which at that time was barely known to the surrealists and only briefly studied by Bachelard,⁹ one of the intellectual leaders of the period (1939): « Et soudain ce regard transfigurant, le duvet bleu sur la braise , comme la promesse d'une rédemption qui ne soit plus fallacieuse : vient de passer celui que Césaire et moi tenons pour le plus grand prophète des temps à venir, je dis Isidore Ducasse, comte de Lautréamont [...] »¹⁰ At his first meeting with Breton in 1941, René Ménégoz gave him the first volume of *Tropiques*, the magazine that he had just created with Césaire and of which Breton had appreciated the opening statement « nous sommes de ceux qui disent non à l'ombre » (=we are those who say no to the shadows). The volumes 6-7, published in 1943, were sent to Breton in New York and included an article by Césaire listing nineteen reasons to admire Lautréamont. In Breton's article, « Un grand poète noir » (« A Great Black Poet »), which was given in exchange and subsequently published in the 11th volume of the magazine in May of 1944, Breton gives, for posterity, the story of his meeting with Césaire and, reusing the title Césaire used for his article on Lautréamont, Breton quotes in a fragmentary fashion two of the « entrées » (entrances/beginnings) in Césaire's article:

La poésie de Lautréamont, belle comme un décret d'expropriation í il entasse en jonchées lyriques et pâles ó comme chutent dans la gangrène du soir les doigts de poirier tropical ó les trompettes de mort de comique philosophie qui élèvent à la dignité de merveille d'un univers hiérarchisé, l'homme, pieds, mains et nombril ó gueulés de ponts nus contre le barrage du ciel [2] í Le premier à avoir compris que la poésie commence avec l'excès, la démesure, les recherches frappées d'interdit, dans le grand tam-tam aveugle, jusqu'à l'incompréhensible pluie d'étoiles [11]í ø La parole d' Aimé Césaire, belle comme l'oxygène naissant.¹¹

If in his article on Césaire Breton quotes two passages of Césaire's text which merit the characterization of Daniel Delas, « figures étranges et outrées [...] très lauréatmontienne[s] »¹² plus a pastiche in the second degree from the famous formula of *Poésies II*, « belle commeí »; it is significant that in his argument against Camus, Breton, in fact does not again take up the two aspects of Lautréamont which he had previously noted in his work on Césaire but rather, he uses two new arguments in favor of Lautréamont which are not already mentioned in Césaire's list but were already made explicit in the part on « Sections » of his article published in *Tropiques* in 1943. Section 17 of this article dealt with the question of the fanatic pre-eminence of the image on the « foot of the page »:

Par l'ímage on va à l'ínfini. Lautréamont l'établit en vérité définitive. Epaissement, grossissement de l'idée. Non pas. Mais fusée montée des profondeurs, éclats de ciel, affermissement en tentacules des organes de notre préhension fragile, confiscation de l'ípossible geste primordial frappé de continuité-vie.¹³

Entry 18 touched upon the question of humor which, according to Breton, Camus does not have and therefore cannot recognize in Lautréamont:

Il comprit le premier la bouleversante ódémurgique valeur de l'íhumour. Grâce à d'ínouïs retournements de la logique il créa des dépaysements inassumables, magnétisant les sordidités les plus compactes, apprivoisant l'íhorrible, rendant au pain son goût de soufre, au vin sa nature de jaspe, au pain et au vin, leur nature de miracle. Ce flamel littéraire résolut le délicat problème de la transmutation des métaux.¹⁴

Further strengthened in his certainty after the debates in the early 50s that this combat brought Breton in line against Camus, finding in the poetic style of Ducasse his just and well-appropriated expression of the new evils called « imperialism, » « colonialism », etc., Césaire threw himself into a storm of explanations for the usage of those who didn't know how to read due to a « confined humanism. » First, for philosophers, Sunday politicians, it became

necessary to understand that poetry too, although in its own terms, could talk about historical materialism:

[í] je crois qu'un jour viendra où [í] il sera possible de donner des Chants de Maldoror une interprétation matérialiste et historique qui fera apparaître de cette épopée forcenée un aspect par trop méconnu, celui d'une implacable dénonciation d'une forme très précise de société, telle qu'elle ne pouvait échapper au plus aigu de regards vers l'année 1865.¹⁵

Secondly, the power of the image, with its gift of magnification, is often more powerful in its ability to emphasize and charge, with its power to condemn the literal description that refuses any right to the grotesque or the buffoonery:

Alors [í] on comprendra que l'ennemi dont Lautréamont a fait l'ennemi, le « créateur » anthropophage et décerveleur, le sadique « juché sur un trône formé d'excréments humain et doré », l'hypocrite, le débauché, le fainéant qui « mange le pain des autres » et que l'on retrouve de temps en temps ivre-mort « comme une punaise qui a mâché pendant la nuit trois tonneaux de sang », on comprendra que ce créateur-là, ce n'est pas derrière le nuage qu'il faut aller le chercher, mais que nous avons plus de chance de le trouver dans l'annuaire Desfossés et dans quelque confortable conseil d'administration!¹⁶

The loyalty of Césaire towards Lautréamont was not only for his allegorical, absurd style, and his metaphoric theme; Césaire ignored none of the « mystery » of Lautréamont and of his ambiguous relationship towards good and evil and in 1927 Philippe Soupault published a copy of Ducasse's correspondence with Poulet-Malassis and Darasse;¹⁷ it is in this publication that the confession of the « exchange » can be found.

Thus Césaire is aware that Lautréamont was accused of opportunism, of being an impostor, of having only sung evil in order to provoke a scandal:

J'ai un peu exagéré le diapason pour faire du nouveau dans le sens de cette littérature sublime qui ne chante le désespoir que pour opprimer le lecteur, et lui faire désirer le bien comme remède. Ainsi donc, c'est toujours le bien qu'on chante en somme.¹⁸

Césaire adopted Bataille's position on Ducasse's uninterrupted identity between *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies I et II* :

Il me semble que l'expérience de la poésie, dans la mesure où l'excès de la révolte la porte à l'extrême degré de la négation, devrait confirmer l'identité, en ce point, de *Maldoror* et des *Poésies* : d'un parfait dérèglement et de l'observance scrupuleuse (il est vrai dérisoire, il est vrai ambiguë) de la règle.¹⁹

By accepting the principle of a « poetic revolt » and continuing Ducasse's argument against a « theoretical maliciousness » which is linked to a mere commercial opportunism, Césaire could thus, following the lead of Lautréamont, elaborate a vision of progressive degradation of Occidental society in *Discours sur le colonialisme*, as it seemed to announce the perils of the time, especially the Cold War and the rise in colonial wars:

Il y a une loi de déshumanisation progressive en vertu de quoi désormais, à l'ordre du jour de la bourgeoisie, il n'y a, il ne peut y avoir maintenant que la violence, la corruption, la barbarie. Je n'allais oublier la haine, le mensonge, la suffisance.²⁰

Césaire therefore stayed in line with the poetic action project as proposed by Ducasse in « Chant II » : « Ma poésie ne consistera qu'à attaquer, par tous les moyens l'homme, cette bête fauve, et le Créateur, qui n'aurait pas dû engendrer une telle vermine. »²¹

The majority of Césaire specialists show that the enthusiasm of his years as an activist will, if not completely fade, at least be tempered in order to offer in *Moi, laminaire*²² the anguish of a poetic discourse which is not the cause of great personal success, but rather, having dragged himself through the mud and scoured

the depths of the soul; the return to the horror from whence one was trying to escape, from where one attempted « to leave » in the first pages of the *Cahier*: « Au bout du petit matin, cette ville plate, étalée Et dans cette ville inerte [í] »²³ Césaire, however, does not desert certain poetic localities which are established following his reading of Ducasse ; it would be easy to quote as slogans certain principles of Ducasse's poetic which leave traces in Césaire: « la poésie doit avoir pour but la vérité pratique » ; « Il rapporta le merveilleux de la révolte. Il rêva la transformation physique de l'homme » ; « Il substitue à la dictature de l'objet, la dictature de l'esprit, à la dictature des choses la dictature du mot, à la mystique de la nécessité, la mystique de la gratuité ».

Many passages of the *Cahier* and of Césaire's subsequent works were read negatively as parodies or plagiarized texts of Ducasse. The abundance of metamorphic images, of litanies beginning with « at the end of daybreak (« each night ») effectively can appear as the result of the poetic effects similar to the style of Ducasse, but there is, in Césaire, a dimension which leaves to him a uniqueness of poetic strategy and also leaves his identity as a warrior who has chosen poetry as a weapon untouched because he recognized its cursed status in society at that time:

[í] depuis un siècle bientôt, la poésie a pris un train d'enfer, le train des explosions ; qu'elle ne peut y renoncer sans déchoir ; que notre héritage est de fièvres, de séismes, et que la poésie pour être valable ne doit cesser de revendiquer : de sa voix de corbeau, de cressida, d'orphée, de mort violente.²⁴

While the novel purrs, gentle cat of a peaceful society where the smooth and sweet Goncourt prizes are unfurled, poetry is the accused portion, it muddles about and cultivates infamy, it causes confusion and prophesizes destruction. For Césaire to situate himself in such a location, is to occupy the strategic place from where combat is born. Poetry is his Trojan Horse. Despite his reaction to « little white » (« It's a Black who handles the French language as he is not today a White to use it ») Breton had understood all too well, from the first meeting:

Rien ne peut faire que ce ne soit aux poètes qu'a été dévolu depuis un siècle de faire craquer cette armature qui nous étouffe et il est significatif d'observer que la postérité ne tend à consacrer que ceux qui ont été le plus loin dans cette tâche. Cet après-midi-là, [í], j'éprouvai tout le prix de me sentir en si étroite communion avec l'un d'eux [í]²⁵

In 1941 the volcano goes back to sleep, it was still too early for a *Pelean* poetic discourse, Ducassien monster that some forever blame for its inhumanity and as such they will refuse him the Nobel prize, as he has not yet begun his transformation. It is too early, the monster learns. He is in poetry but he must perfect the handling of his weapons, he must master the art of discourse, domesticate words, sharpen clichés, align phrases and identify targets. There is a bit of Sun Tzu in the poetic preparation of Césaire: everything rests on understanding, perceived from the inside, looking at his opponent's strategy so that he can better use his own weapons against him, that is to say, his own arguments. Césaire reveals this specific kind of training and some believe that this type of practice could have given a false impression about his ability to resist metropolitan cultural assimilation. Thus, Césaire didn't associate himself with Cheick Anta Diop's fight against the Enlightenment as he didn't see how a text on the rights of man could be considered the « dark side » of political humanism in the 18th century:

Peu m'importe qui a écrit le texte de *La Déclaration des droits de l'homme* ; je m'en fiche, elle existe. Les critiques contre son origine occidentale sont simplistes. En quoi cela me gênerait-il ? J'ai toujours été irrité par le sectarisme que j'ai rencontré jusque dans mon propre parti. Il faut s'approprier ce texte et savoir l'interpréter correctement.²⁶

The appropriation of the white discourse and its reinterpretation in the interest of its own struggle is the basis of Césaire's practical poetic. Therefore when Césaire, in *Discours sur le colonialisme*, again offered a Marxist interpretation of a Ducassien « creator » representing Western capitalism, he already understood, he

himself the pirate of the Caribbean, the denunciation of the Metropolitan exploitation of the insular riches pillaged throughout the century and also of the exploitation of indigenous labor accompanied by misery related to racism and slavery. Although the 1950s *Discours sur le colonialisme* was taken up again in 1955, the Marxist-Négritude fusion was still there and Césaire extracted it from the general allegorical denunciation pronounced by Lautréamont :

La bourgeoisie, en tant que classe, est condamnée, qu'on le veuille ou non, à prendre en charge toute la barbarie de l'histoire, les tortures du Moyen-Age comme l'inquisition, la raison d'Etat comme le bellicisme, le racisme comme l'esclavage, bref, tout ce contre quoi elle a protesté et en termes inoubliables, du temps que, classe à l'attaque, elle incarnait le progrès humain.²⁷

That is the fundamental lesson: located in the space that poetry inhabits is where we must use the discourse put at its disposal to create a conversation which will serve to advance the poet's cause. If Ducasse created an everyday monster (« his hero »²⁸) to oppose the « civilization » work of the creator (of French industrial society on the dawn of a nascent capitalism, clarified Césaire) then he, the poet, « clever fellow, » creature of change, of metamorphosis, he will capture the monstrosity and let it serve his interests; everything will begin with « at the end of daybreak » during the confrontation of this work of the creator with the flat, plain city

This practice of Césairienne « piracy » is nowhere more visible than in the passage constantly quoted by Francophone literary anthologies or activist texts for its strong ideological value. In the final version of *Cahier*, the text in the middle of the volume follows up on the paroxysmal prologue of the Ducassian « early morning » mostly added in the version after 1939. This short second part is less shocking and more narrative than the first, and can be understood differently according to a shift in activist sensibilities; however its sense is still immediately grasped, just as with other parts of the volume.

It should be remembered that the scene takes place in a Paris tram; the narrator discovers an old, poor, badly dressed, filthy, black man in his car:

A nigger big as a pongo trying to make himself small on the street-car bench. He was trying to leave behind, on this grimy bench, his gigantic legs and his trembling famished boxer hands. And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose which looked like a drifting peninsula and even his negritude discolored as a result of untiring tawing. And the tawer was Poverty. A big unexpected lop-eared bat whose claw marks in his face had scabbed over into crusty islands.

Césaire describes this character he met as an « ugly, comic Negro. » The narrator hears a white, French women in the compartment mocking this character; by social conformism he sports a « large, knowing smile » adding that he is well aware that there is intelligence in the White world and yet cowardice towards another race.

In his analysis of *Cahier*, Daniel Delas who had already discussed the passage (11-12) by signaling that in the Martinique of Césaire's youth the racial distinctions were such that the non-white citizens who belonged to the « petty bourgeoisie of civil servants » who « lived as whites facing a dirty and smelly Negro, » perfectly describes the importance of the passage as the dramatic setting of Césaire's coming to awareness of his Negritude:

C'est le fameux morceau de bravoure que constitue le face à face du narrateur et du grand nègre comique et laid. Quoique peu représentatif de l'écriture lyrique heurtée du Cahier ce passage « trop » bien travaillé, trop léché pour être honnête est devenu la favori des anthologies scolaires, généralement coupé trop tôt, dès la fin de la description, après ma lâcheté retrouvée. Que ne poursuit-on jusqu'à : « Et mon âme est couchée. Comme cette ville/dans la crasse et dans la boue couchée/ Je réclame pour ma face la louange éclatante du crachat !... » qui dit avec la violence requise le « vrai » sens du texte : l'abaissement des noirs, leur abêtissement n'a rien de pascalien, il est désormais aboutissement, aboutissement de celui qui bout dans la boue, à bout de force, au bout du monde.²⁹

Beyond the Francophone space, in a place of other cultural stakes, Max Dorsinville, in his fundamental work on the definition of black writing in North

America, *Caliban without Prospero*, quotes the same central passage to the *Cahier* in order to note its primary importance into the elaboration of a triumphant ideology of Negritude in French-speaking Caribbean literature. Whereas the commentary noted by Delas offers a perspective on the form and content of the passage and stays true to the fact that we are in the domain of poetry and literature, Dorsinville reads the passage *à la* Fanon, strictly for its ideological content: « As an existential repossession of self takes place through the recognition of his and his people's actual situation, the poet is now able to use *la parole*, the liberating power of the word to augure the liberation of the land. »³⁰

If Césaire's text changes pace here, effectively it's so that the system of intertextual piracy will look to Baudelaire to find the source of this result in order to significantly make the value of the passage more dense. Resorting to a known poetic Baudelarian palimpsest allows Césaire to convey a deeper meaning to his text, which was well understood by Dorsinville: this momentary realization of Negritude which would lead Césaire's text to a final glorification of the status and triumphs of the Black man. But the explanation of the content, Dorsinville argued, did not need poetry to complete this task; a manifesto, a pamphlet or a leaflet would have sufficed. It can be seen that Dorsinville's explanation failed to take into consideration the literary value of the text. However, if this objection had been raised in a different way, the *value* of this literary text with quasi-plagiarized foundations and diverted from another literary text, this *value* would have masterfully enhanced the referential meaning of revolt in the passage and would have added an additional dimension which would have authenticated the writing of Césaire as it would have shown it as a performative effect, as the active reversal of white cultural values. That is exactly what Césaire's writings worked to accomplish and the discursive revolutionary dimension of the work ultimately came through. I will further elucidate this point.

In concentrating the first part of his analysis of the aforementioned passage in the geopolitical framework of Martinique, Delas introduces an element of cultural identification specific to the nature of Césaire's revolt, a dimension properly ignored by Dorsinville who, as it is often the case in analyses of subordinate situations in postcolonial contexts, focuses on the general facts and ignores cultural particularities. When Delas notes that in the Martinique petty bourgeoisie Césaire was used to dissociating himself from the dirty, poor Black

« scarred from smallpox, » a sort of popular pejorative cliché in Caribbean folklore, he makes reference to a cultural aspect which has not escaped Césaire and which complicates a situation concerning identity (racial/social), where a hurried observer would notice only a black-white binary. But the question of Césaire is not merely « am I white? Am I black », there is also the question of « what kind of black am I. » For cultural reasons not limited to Martinique, Césaire also has the choice of claiming to be more than simply black; rather, a « cultivated » black and precisely because education is not a quality which can cast one out of the order of social appearances, Césaire knows that he can appear as not only a black, but a black « dandy. » The question is not incidental. Césaire has said it many times, he didn't appreciate the attitude of the dandies in Fort-de-France, he never aspired to be one of them. Françoise Vergès explains:

Je revois encore ces petits-bourgeois de couleur et, très vite, j'ai été choqué de constater chez eux une tendance fondamentale à singer l'Europe. Ils partageaient les mêmes préjugés que les Européens, ils montraient un snobisme que je trouvais très superficiel et qui m'irritait profondément. [í] Je craignais beaucoup de côtoyer sur le bateau ces spécimens martiniquais qui ne pensaient qu'à s'habiller et à reproduire leur mode de vie mondain à bord : le bal du samedi, la musique, les boîtes de nuit, toutes ses activités très à la mode, et qui me déplaisaient terriblement.³¹

For Césaire, to return home, is a question of choosing to be black, and it must be shown unequivocally that being black does not consist of being a black snob or black dandy, an issue of which Césaire was constantly aware. Isidore Ducasse, here, is of no help; he is a poor, miserable student away from home constantly looking for a few francs from his financial guardian, Monsieur Darasse, so that he could buy paper to write on. He embodied a dandy although he was perfectly incompetent when it came to enjoying himself. On the other hand, Césaire could hardly give a lecture on Baudelaire without having to say something on the complex relationship between the fake « dandyism » and the poet of the «people. » It is thus no surprise if the part in the *Cahier* which situates Césaire's identity with the black race, at the same time, erases the option of dandyism by turning around

the original Baudelairean theme; the « abrupt word » installs Césaire's text doubly against the French culture from whence the intertextual quote was initially pirated: against the valorization of being a « dandy » as found in the French culture as expressed by Baudelaire, and more globally against the values generated by French culture.

At the time Césaire's text was published, every reader of French poetry, condemned by the national education system to the weekly recitation of the great poems of the French language, couldn't help but recognize an intertextual overvaluation in this portion of the text. Césaire's text was taken direct from a poem in Baudelaire's *Fleur du Mal*, « L'Albatros »:

This winged traveler, how weak he becomes and slack!
 He who of late was so beautiful, how comical and ugly!
 Someone teases his beak with a branding iron,
 Another mimics, limping, the crippled flyer.

With the underhanded use of a verbal sequence (« comical and ugly ») which can only be recognized as coming from a « canonic » text of French culture, everything happens as Césaire had wanted, and thus he is able to critique the text and the accompanying issues of « dandyism » and the attitude of *anti-people*.

The poem, « The Albatros, » is usually understood as a glorification by Baudelaire of the unknown genius of his mediocre fellow man; a valorization of the exceptional man, beautiful and glorious when he is in his (privileged) domain of the « blue (sky) »; alas, back to the sad, materialistic world where the rest of humanity moves about, the presence of this exceptional, refined, beautiful, ideal being arouses the vindictive and malicious nature of a petty, unjust and despicable people. Thus, in Baudelaire's « Albatros, » the great Poet of the 19th century, an eminently positive, elegant and cultivated character, becomes the victim of a grotesque, vile and disgusting mob. The degradation of the poet struggling with his audience is grotesquely transformed, a dandy martyr trapped in the hands of the beggars.

Césaire incorporates elements of symbolic construction but builds an argument which reverses that of Baudelaire. What remained of a whining Romanticism could, in Baudelaire, serve to construct the valorization of a

victimization of the exceptional being, the unknown, despised, genius poet, humiliated by the men who had little. Césaire would make a « horrible negro » from the « lounging » negro, from the « comic and ugly negro » he would make a hero, not only by claiming a subordinate status or victimization, but the hero of a community whose pride had been found again, the hero of a resistance, the hero of a revolt who would change the world. The « comic and ugly negro » thus became the third part of the *Cahier*, the « very good negro, free and on his feet, » the one who belonged to the « négraille aux senteurs d'œignons frit, » this name did not leave room for class distinctions, for subtle discrimination between the « dirty and smelly » black and the « black dandy », whereas the Baudelairean poem could still evoke uncertainty among the 19th century Parisians; with Césaire, it's « the négraille » (a homogizing pejorative collective) who is « standing up » and who « finds the bitter taste of freedom ». Explicit and masterful refusal enhances victimization here; it is left to Baudelaire, to French literature and to the whole socio-romantic tradition of suffering. Baudelaire's text, turned upside-down in the one of Césaire, is an act of immediate writing, the very act of rebellion and refusal explicitly claimed in the contrary sentence: « Et nous sommes debout maintenant, mon pays et moi, les cheveux dans le vent, ma main petite maintenant dans son poing énorme [í] »³² Socio-political alienation and literary alienation: both are refused in the work of Césaire. He learned his lessons well, as it was necessary to master the knowledge that the other power possessed, and in an ingenious way, he turned it against his enemy: « At the end of daybreak » beyond the old ocean there is language and in its revolutionary usage, in the depth of words, there is freedom: « pourquoi les mots de la poésie sont-ils des armes miraculeuses? Parce que j'ai pensé que c'est de là que, miraculeusement, devait venir le salut. C'était cela, pour moi, le miracle. »³³

NOTES

¹ Césaire, Aimé. *Et Les Chiens Se Taisaient, Tragédie*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956. acte I.

² Césaire, Aimé. *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai. Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès*. Paris : Albin Michel, 2005. 47.

³ Césaire, Aimé. *Discours sur le colonialisme*. Paris/Dakar : Présence Africaine, 1955. 44.

⁴ Camus, Albert. « Lautréamont Et La Banalité. » *Les Cahiers Du Sud* 307 (1950): 499.

⁵ Camus, Albert. *L'Homme révolté*. Paris : Gallimard, 1951.

⁶ Breton, André. « Dialogue avec Aimé Patri sur *L'Homme révolté*. » [1951], *Œuvres complètes*, t. III, Paris: Gallimard, 1999.1054.

⁷ Ibid., 1049-1050.

⁸ Ibid., 1054.

⁹ Bachelard, Gaston. *Lautréamont*. Paris : Corti, 1939.

¹⁰ Breton, André. « Un grand poète noir » [1943], *Œuvres complètes, op.cit.*, 407.

¹¹ Ibid., 408.

¹² Delas, Daniel. *Aimé Césaire*. Paris : Hachette, 1991. 29.

¹³ Césaire, Aimé. « La poésie de Lautréamont, belle comme un décret d'expropriation ». *Tropiques: 1941-1945: Collection Complète*. Paris: Ed. Jean-Michel Place, 1978.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Césaire, Aimé. *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 45.

¹⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷ Soupault, Philippe. *Œuvres complètes du Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse). Les Chants de Maldoror - Poésies - Correspondance*. Étude, commentaires et notes. Paris : Au Sans Pareil, 1927.

¹⁸ Lautréamont. « Lettre de Ducasse à Poulet-Malassis du 23 octobre 1869 », *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Paris: Laffont, 1980. 800.

¹⁹ Bataille, Georges. *Œuvres Complètes*. Tome XII. Paris : Gallimard, 1988. 152. If Georges Bataille, because of his personal antagonism vis-à-vis André Breton , rejects, as does Camus, Lautréamont's « transgression » towards the banalization of everyday life, nevertheless he salutes the « part intérieure » of Lautréamont's poetic revolt and expresses his full solidarity with a personal itinerary that valorizes the entrenchment on the edge of civil society. On these questions see the article « Lautréamont-Ducasse: At the Edge » by Susan Guerlac in *Yale French Studies* (74, 1988): 117-131.

²⁰ Césaire, Aimé. *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 47.

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- ²¹ Lautréamont. *Les Chants de Maldoror*. Paris : Laffont, 1980. 626.
- ²² Césaire, Aimé. *Moi, Laminare*. Paris : Seuil, 1982.
- ²³ Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Paris/Dakar : Présence Africaine, 1983. 9.
- ²⁴ Césaire, Aimé. *Tropiques* 8-9, 1944.
- ²⁵ Breton, André. « Un grand poète noir » [1943], *Œuvres complètes*, 403.
- ²⁶ Césaire, Aimé. *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai. Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès*, 69.
- ²⁷ Césaire, Aimé. *Discours sur le colonialisme*, 47.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 45.
- ²⁹ Delas, Daniel. *Aimé Césaire*, 36.
- ³⁰ Dorsinville, Max. *Caliban without Prospero*. Erin : Press Porcepic, 1974. 29-30. « Lorsque prend place la repossession existentielle du moi au moment de la prise de conscience du statut objectif de sa situation et de celle de ses semblables, le poète est alors en mesure de mettre en effet la parole, le pouvoir libérateur mis à sa disposition par le monde en anticipation de la libération du territoire qui doit lui faire suite. » [my translation]
- ³¹ Césaire, Aimé. *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai. Entretiens avec Françoise Vergès*, 20-21.
- ³² Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 57.
- ³³ « Entretien Aimé Césaire, Maryse Condé », *Lire*, juin 2004. Reprinted on Philippe Sollers' internet web site, http://www.pileface.com/sollers/article.php3?id_article=635#nb11. Consulted on October 20, 2013.