Césaire's "Cahier": An Aesthetic of Commitment

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In an address to university students in Quebec, in 1972, Aimé Césaire maintained that no culture can survive the experience of colonialism. In such circumstances authentic culture, living and creative, is supplanted by a sub-culture borrowed from others, or rather from the Other, the colonial ruler. The result, for the colonized, is a feeling of immense frustration, of dispossession and lack of identity. Considering the problem of cultural deprivation in relation to his own island of Martinique, Césaire urged the necessity for the modern Caribbean writer to commit himself to an enterprise both literary and socio-political. While creating a new, indigenous culture, he must also restore and rehabilitate the lost past, reconciling an alienated people with racial memories long suppressed. His mission may be summed up as a "récupération de l'être; . . . récupération de l'avoir, rapatriement de l'essentiel et remise en possession d'un héritage contesté ou tombé en désirance".[1]

Césaire's first attempt at this kind of *littérature revalorisante* was in fact made more than forty years ago, and his later works — the esoteric verse, the more accessible plays — have all, in one way or another, reaffirmed the early commitment of the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* In this long poem, which develops almost entirely through image and symbol, Césaire seeks to express the experience of racial and cultural alienation in Martinique. The structure of the poem is determined by recurrent themes designed to show the causes and effects of this alienation: past enslavement, present passivity in a neo-colonial situation which still perpetuates the notion of black inferiority. The poem ends with an exultant vision of defiance, freedom and power:

Et à moi mes danses
mes danses de mauvais nègre
à moi mes danses
la danse brise-carcan
la danse saute-prison
la danse il-est-beau-et-bon-et-légitime-d'être-nègre

A moi mes danses et saute le soleil sur la raquette
de mes mains.[2]

But before this dynamic projection into a future spiritual liberation, the *Cahier* forces upon the reader a harsh realization of present-day conditions in the Caribbean. In portraying these conditions, the poet uses images which not only encapsulate the present but also evoke the long unsung centuries of slavery and suffering.

Césaire is himself the product of that very colonial sub-culture which he deplores, and it is inevitable that the imagery of the *Cahier* should reflect his European education. The opening passage of the poem, for example, where the poet yearns for a lost homeland, has been shown to contain reminiscences of the Greek underworld and the Judaeo-Christian paradise.[3] At the same time, the author's desire to recover the African heritage of Martinique (generally shunned as being synonymous with the humiliations of slavery) leads him to introduce certain images which are specifically African, such as the Senegalese *Kaïlcédrat* and the baobab, trees associated with purification, healing and resurrection.[4] The dominant symbols of the poem, however, reveal the depth of his commitment to the Caribbean. They first evoke the bloodstained past of Martinique — shipwreck, volcanic eruption, canefields, spilt blood, stifled cries, sexual emasculation — and then, in a series of startling reversals, are transfigured to create a Utopian prediction of the future. The present essay seeks to explore this West Indian imagery, which springs from the poet's commitment to his national past and his desire to "faire fructifier un héritage".[5]

The imagery in the early strophes of the *Cahier* gives us the key to the entire thematic structure of the poem. After the opening paragraph, the author offers three poetic statements of his vision of his native land. The first of these concerns the present:

> Au bout du petit matin bourgeonnant d'anses frêles les Antilles qui ont faim, les Antilles grêlées de petite vérole, les Antilles dynamitées d'alcool, échouées dans la boue de cette baie, dans la poussière de cette ville sinistrement échouées. (p. 31)

The poet's starting-point is the image of shipwreck, a universal image of disaster, of the destruction of something which once moved free, beautiful and whole. But as with all of Césaire's central images, there is a particular as well as a universal significance here. The only ship which his ancestors ever saw was

the slave-ship bringing them from Africa to the West Indies, the infamous floating dungeon in which slaves were shackled, often with headroom so low that they had to lie flat, shoulder to shoulder, right round the ship with three more rows laid out down the centre: from four hundred to six hundred slaves in a vessel of only three hundred and twenty tons.[6] This is the ship to be evoked in one of the *Cahier's* flashbacks of racial memory: "J'entends de la cale monter les malédictions enchaînées, les hoquettements des mourants, le bruit d'un qu'on jette à la mer . . . les abois d'une femme en gésine . . . des raclements d'ongles cherchant des gorges . . . des ricanements de fouet . . . des farfouillis de vermine parmi les lassitudes" (pp. 99-101). The ship/shipwreck image, then, is used to recall slavery: and slavery is recalled by Césaire because it is the starting-point of black alienation. Those whose only journeys were uprootings, those who were "domesticated and Christianized" by Europe (p. 111), have learnt to be ashamed of their own past as if they were at fault, and not their masters.

The notion of shipwreck thus extends beyond the initial disaster of enslavement to denote an ongoing experience of failure and defeat. A series of later images spring from the shipwreck metaphor and prolong the allied associations of frailty, hunger and disfigurement which are present in the early strophe: the famished, backward child whose voice is engulfed in the swamps of malnutrition (p. 39), the puddle of ramshackle dwellings which swallows up the mountain track (p. 43); the whole human condition of the survivors of slavery, that "échouage hétéroclite" (p. 39), who must live among the dreadful debris of their early shipwreck (p. 135), their hopes capsized, their lives warped and foundering like the "descentes d'épaves dans les nuits foudroyées" (p. 83). The islands themselves are the slaveships metamorphosed: wrecked vessels, ignominiously, desolately stranded in the mud (p. 31) and bearing the same sorry cargo: "coques démâtées, vieilles plaies, os pourris . . . morts mal racinés, crier amer" (p. 135). Like the island-ships "dynamitées d'alcool", the islanders themselves have been brought to ruin by Europe's greed for the profitable colonial trade in sugar and, later, rum. Five million Africans taken from their native country to work, and die, in the West Indian canefields:[7] Europe's long exploitation of her black slaves is summed up in the bitterly sarcastic phrases "l'odeur-du-nègre, ça-fait-pousser-la-canne" (p. 91) and "ce pays cria pendant des siècles . . . que nous

sommes un fumier ambulant hideusement prometteur de cannes tendres" (p. 99). The canefields, symbolized by their products, bear witness to the brutal endings of past revolts ("et mitraille de barils de rhum génialement arrosant/nos révoltes ignobles", p. 91), and the local form of death may still be defined as total bondage to the distilleries (p. 95). Small wonder, then, that sugar-cane itself becomes a symbol of death in the *Cahier,* where an apparently harmless mention of the plant leads immediately to the ancestral memory of captivity and evocations of suffering, victimization and martyrdom:

> — moi sur une route, enfant, mâchant une racine de canne à sucre
> — traîné homme sur une route sanglante une corde au cou
> — debout au milieu d'un cirque immense, sur mon front noir une couronne de daturas. (p. 79)

In the passage on Toussaint Louverture, hero of the Haitian war of independence who was later betrayed by Napoleon and carried off to die in a lonely cell in the Jura mountains, death, "la mort blanche", is the agent of the European oppressors and is intimately associated with the canefields of Toussaint's slave days: "la mort souffle, folle, dans la cannaie mûre de ses bras" (p. 71). The ripening and harvesting of the cane are the times of maximum danger, the "soir de récolte" (p. 133) another portent of death.

The second of the introductory strophes brings in the image of blood, linked with wounds, anguish, and absence of protest:

> Au bout du petit matin, l'extrême, trompeuse désolée eschare sur la blessure des eaux; les martyrs qui ne témoignent pas; les fleurs du sang qui se fanent et s'éparpillent dans le vent inutile comme des cris de perroquets babillards; une vieille vie menteusement souriante, ses lèvres ouvertes d'angoisses désaffectées; une vieille misère pourrissant sous le soleil, silencieusement; un vieux silence crevant de pustules tièdes, l'affreuse inanité de notre raison d'être. (p. 31)

The shipwrecked hulls have become scabs upon the water, mute evidence of the past wound of slavery; in a later passage the poet will fuse islands and scars in a more explicit metaphor: "Iles cicatrices des eaux/Iles évidences de blessures" (p. 133). The "fleurs du sang" again evoke the centuries of slavery, the days of the branding iron which the *Code noir* prescribed for recaptured runaways ("la fleur de lys qui flue du fer rouge sur le gras de mon épaule", p. 129) and of abortive, mercilessly crushed revolts:

> Que de sang dans ma mémoire! Dans ma mémoire sont les lagunes.

> Elles sont couvertes de têtes de morts. Elles ne sont pas couvertes de nénuphars. (p. 91)

This silent spilling of black blood is to be a major theme of the *Cahier*. The voiceless martyrs, the faded flowers scattered uselessly to the winds, the rictus of a smile, the silently festering pustules, all recall the days when the slave could make no effective protest against the brutality of his owner; when the only sounds were those made by his tormentors:

> O quiètes années de Dieu sur cette motte terraquée!
> et le fouet disputa au bombillement des mouches la rosée sucrée de nos plaies. (p. 145)

And the enforced silence of the past, placed at the outset in ironic juxtaposition with the meaningless cries of parrots, corresponds once more to a present-day reality of apathy and passivity. The blood which was scattered to the winds like the futile cries of birds foreshadows the paradox of modern Martinique, where chattering crowds yet fail to utter any protest at the fact that their living conditions are still little better than those of their slave ancestors: "cette foule criarde si étonnamment passée . . . à côté de son cri de faim, de misère, de révolte, de haine, cette foule si étrangement bavarde et muette" (p. 33). The lack of protest is seen as yet another sign of alienation, and in keeping with the repetitions here of "vieille vie", "vieille misère", "vieux silence", Césaire suggests later in the poem that it is not inertia, but rather exhaustion from the effort to survive the long ordeal of servitude, that explains this mute acceptance:

> Mais qui tourne ma voix? qui écorche
> ma voix? Me fourrant dans la
> gorge mille crocs de bambou. Mille
> pieux d'oursin . . .
> C'est toi poids
> de l'insulte et cent ans de coups
> de fouet. C'est toi cent ans de ma
> patience, cent ans de mes soins
> juste à ne pas mourir. (pp. 81-83)

The image of the stifled cry or sob returns obsessively in the *Cahier*, and undergoes several transmutations. Racial oppression in the American south is suggested by a symbol borrowed from the milieu of black musicians: "trompettes absurdement bouchées" (p. 69). This in turn leads back to the idea of humiliation at the hands of the white race, which forced the negro

of the 1930's to seek distinction through careers which set him apart as an exotic entertainer, rather than establishing him as an equal: "Pour les bonnes bouches la sourdine de nos plaintes enrobées de oua-oua" (p. 93). Thus the possibility of protest is diffused and dissipated: "cette voix qui crie, lentement enrouée, vainement, vainement enrouée" (p. 93). In other passages the absence of protest is equated with sexual passivity or emasculation, of which the very town of Fort-de-France is itself an image:

> Au bout du petit matin, cette ville plate — étalée . . .
> Elle rampe sur les mains sans jamais aucune envie de vriller le ciel d'une stature de protestation. (pp. 49-51)

Life itself is like a sexual cripple or a stagnant river, "torpide dans son lit, sans turgescence ni dépression, incertain de fluer, lamentablement vide" (p. 51); and images of stagnant water are continually associated with apathy, sterility and failure (e.g. p. 67). The hungry silence of the schoolboy is equally portrayed as an incapacity for upward movement ("une faim qui ne sait plus grimper aux agrès de sa voix", p. 39) and mimics that of the passive, inert crowd which takes no part in any movement of free self-expression or self-affirmation (p. 35). The only vertical gesture of the past is that of Toussaint, defiant to the end — "un moricaud vieux dressé contre les eaux du ciel" (p. 69) — but incapable of outwitting his tenacious fate.

In its most startling guise, the stifled cry is likened to the fire within a docile, dormant volcano:

> Au bout du petit matin, l'incendie contenu du morne, comme un sanglot que l'on a bâillonné au bord de son éclatement sanguinaire, en quête d'une ignition qui se dérobe et se méconnaît. (p. 37)

The volcano which fails to gather its forces and erupt is itself a perfect parallel to the crowd evoked earlier, that crowd composed of isolated and evasive individuals too weary and fearful for concerted action, "habile à découvrir le point de désencastration, de fuite, d'esquive" (pp. 33-5). Like the ship and the blood introduced earlier, the volcanic mountain has a particular significance in the context of Caribbean history. The mountains were the only place where runaway slaves could hope to survive; dogs were sent out to track them down, but in the rough terrain the scent of the runaways, or Maroons, was less easily followed. Once they had eluded the dogs, they could survive on the roots, berries, and small game animals which were to be found in the hills. The descendants of the Maroons still live in isolated

mountain pockets throughout the Caribbean, and the original mountain-dwelling runaways represent, in West Indian history, the first black protest movement, the first successful revolt against the condition of slavery. Hence the dormant volcano is a particularly fitting symbol for the absence of black protest: the mountains have forgotten how to erupt, they have forgotten their traditional rôle as harbours of revolutionaries and guardians of freedom.

In the lines quoted above, the stifled sob and the banked fire of the volcano are opposed to the breaking out of blood, which itself symbolizes not only the wounds of the past but also a future movement of revolutionary protest and change. For the main images of the *Cahier* are doubled-edged, and capable of positive and optimistic transformations in keeping with Césaire's hope that "l'imaginaire d'aujourd'hui sera la réalité de demain".[8] As the poem progresses, it moves towards prophecy, a prophecy early suggested in the third of the introductory strophes with its vision of volcanic eruption, of naked waters sweeping away the stains of the past:

> Au bout du petit matin, sur cette plus fragile épaisseur de terre que dépasse de façon humiliante son grandiose avenir — les volcans éclateront, l'eau nue emportera les taches mûres du soleil et il ne restera plus qu'un bouillonnement tiède picoré d'oiseaux marins — la plage des songes et l'insensé réveil. (p. 31)

This passage brings us back once more to the image of the slave-ship, with its polluted decks stained by the blood, vomit and excrement of the shackled slaves, to such an extent that the stench, according to contemporary accounts, could be perceived miles downwind, and the air between decks was so poisoned that many slaves died of this alone.[9] When the image of the slave-ship is taken up for the last time towards the end of the *Cahier,* it is equated with "la vieille négritude" (p. 147), the old way of being black, the way of "le bon nègre à son bon maître" (p. 143), honestly believing in one's own unworthiness, accepting with resignation and even with cheerfulness the idea that one has no power over one's own destiny. This is the old life's ingratiating smile to which Césaire had referred in the second of the introductory strophes. At the end of the poem Césaire expresses his confident belief that these old days are done with, that the slave-ship is finally splitting open, and that the blacks who have been metaphorically lying in chains for centuries are finally rising

up towards freedom. In this passage Césaire deliberately uses the pejorative white term for blacks, "la négraille", in ironic contrast to the sense of liberation and purpose which awaits his fellow countrymen once they have rejected the stereotype which European civilization has imposed upon the negro:

> La négraille aux senteurs d'oignon frit retrouve dans son sang répandu le goût amer de la liberté
> Et elle est debout la négraille
> la négraille assise
> inattendument debout . . .
> debout et non point pauvre folle dans sa liberté et son dénuement maritimes girant en la dérive parfaite . . .
> debout à la barre
> debout à la boussole
> debout à la carte . . .
> debout
> et
> libre
> et le navire lustral s'avancer impavide sur les eaux écroulées. (pp. 147-9)

Here we have the apotheosis of the slave-ship, cleansed of all the horrors and humiliations of slavery, cleansed also of the European slavers who used to be in charge of it. It is now a ship guided by the former slaves, who have already paid in blood the price of this new freedom. The image echoes that of the early strophe where the West Indies were compared to a shipwrecked vessel, a futile scab upon the water. Here, however, the aimless drifting of that early description has been replaced by images of vigour and control, the helm, the compass, the map, the fearless advance, and the water giving way obediently to the superior force of the ship and its sailors. It is an image of the political future of the colony of Martinique, an image of the self-government which Césaire, in 1939, hoped would be established in his native land.

Throughout the *Cahier* there are suggestions that the author is committing himself to a leading rôle in the struggle towards new freedoms, and these suggestions are thematically linked by the recurrence of the ship motif in its positive and prophetic form. Césaire compares his political work to the forging ahead of "une implacable étrave" (p. 91), and later, in a prayer for strength, asks that his head be made "une tête de proue" (p. 121). In one of the most exultant prophetic sections of the poem (pp. 125-7), the

slave-ship is replaced by the proud and vigorous Caribbean canoe which moves stubbornly through the assaults of the waves to dance a triumphant dance as it enters the safety of the harbour; and the poet once more identifies himself with the boat, asking to be granted its strength and tenacity. In another moving transformation, the scarred and shipwrecked islands in the encircling water take on the appearance of a beautiful hull which the poet embraces like a lover, and the "terre larguée à la dérive" (p. 93) is steered out of danger and back to its true path:

Iles annelées, unique carène belle
Et je te caresse de mes mains d'océan. Et je te vire
de mes paroles alizées. Et je te lèche de mes langues d'algues.
Et je te cingle hors-flibuste. (p. 135)

The active caress of the lover is associated with the forces of nature during the whole of the poem. In the non-prophetic passages this sexual vigour, denied to man, is everywhere in the landscape: in the plump breasts of the hills, the upright palm-trees, the rushing waterfalls, the wild sucking of the sea along the windward shores. When "terre" is used to refer not to the political and social entity that is Martinique, but to the physical presence of the land, phallic imagery recurs: "terre tendue terre saoule/terre grand sexe levé vers le soleil" (p. 59), as in the apostrophe to the mountainous island: "mon île non-clôture, sa claire audace debout" (p. 67). These images form part of a careful network in which sexual symbols are associated not only with nature, but with an instinctive art of enjoying life which is regarded in the *Cahier* as the particular talent of the black race. In a passage where reality and prophecy are blended, phallic images are opposed to others such as deaf stone, stagnant water, towers and cathedrals, which are used to denote a cold, sterile quality in European life:

ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée
contre la clameur du jour
ma négritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur
l'oeil mort de la terre
ma négritude n'est ni une tour ni une cathédrale

elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol
elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel
elle troue l'accablement opaque de sa droite patience. (p. 117)

The apparently arbitrary juxtaposition of these images is deceptive; Césaire borrows the style of French surrealism, but adapts it to his own ends. In this passage he is opposing two

concepts of civilization: one, the European idea of technical and material progress; the other, an approach to life based on emotion, instinct and vitality. The very lack of technical progress which normally consigns Africa (and those of African descent) to a position of inferiority and backwardness is here seen instead as a positive advantage, since the material achievements of other races have been accompanied by a history of conquest, exploitation and destructiveness. On the contrary, the African heritage is idealistically viewed as the gift of living in peaceful harmony with nature and man. The image which translates this thought is again charged with sexual undertones: "chair de la chair du monde palpitant du mouvement même du monde!" (p. 119). Although the passage may originally have been inspired by European surrealism with its rejection of rational values and its stress on the instinctive, the original surrealist intention has been altered in keeping with Césaire's racial and political message. Here, as with so many other passages of the *Cahier*, the reader who approaches the words on the page from a purely literary point of view will find himself forced to take into account the author's underlying commitment. The images are not those of a political pamphlet, but if one ignores the political and social context of the work, the dense affliction of those centuries of slavery, the stone deafness of Europe against the clamour of those millions of uprooted Africans, then one has only half the meaning of the images, only half the vision of the poet.

In its prophetic passages, the *Cahier* uses the images of blood and of triumphant sexuality to suggest a transformation of the conditions of black life in the Caribbean. Martinique in its present state[10] is visualized as a body lying passive in the arms of the poet, the blood in its veins hesitating to flow, congealed in its own inert despair (p. 137) — as apathetic as the volcano sapped by its malarial blood (p. 37). And then Césaire sees himself and his country suddenly standing upright hand in hand, crying out in joint protest at Europe's assertion that the white race holds a monopoly on beauty, intelligence and strength. This movement of protest is suggested by the following passage:

> Et voici soudain que force et vie m'assaillent comme un taureau et l'onde de vie circonvient la papille du morne, et voilà toutes les veines et veinules qui s'affairent au sang neuf et l'énorme poumon des cyclones qui respire et le feu thésaurisé des volcans et le gigantesque pouls sismique qui bat maintenant la mesure d'un corps vivant en mon ferme embrasement. (pp. 137-9)

In this passage where blood, volcanic eruption, sexual vitality and aggression are used to suggest violent revolution, Césaire picks up the themes of the opening strophes — the passive, inert, long-suffering islands waiting for a future when the volcanoes will erupt and the cry of revolt will make itself heard. The symbolic value of the eruption of lava is underlined by the adjective "thésaurisé"; the blood which was formerly infected and as sluggish as a swamp (p. 67) now throbs like a drumbeat within the earth ("pouls sismique"), suggesting both sexual desire and dynamic action in which the poet himself participates ("en mon ferme embrasement"). The life-giving forces of nature ("l'onde de vie") pour into the dormant mountain and urge it towards its long withheld "éclatement sanguinaire" (p. 37). Blood, volcano, sexuality and cry of protest had previously been fused in their passive state at the moment of Toussaint's death ("cris debout de terre muette/la splendeur de ce sang n'éclatera-t-elle point?", p. 71); they are now fused at last in their active, explosive aspect.

The same associations are interwoven in other positive and prophetic sections where sexual energy mirrors the assumption of an independent destiny. Images of volcanic eruption and tidal waves intermingle with images of rape and violent birth, while spilt blood is used to suggest death and renaissance simultaneously:

> Je force la membrane vitelline qui me sépare de moi-même,
> Je force les grandes eaux qui me ceinturent de sang. (pp. 87-9)

> Nous forçons de fumantes portes,
> des mots, ah oui, des mots! mais
> des mots de sang frais, des mots qui sont
> des raz-de-marée . . . et des laves. (p. 87)

The association of "mots" with "sang frais" suggests the final liberation of the volcano, whose voice was earlier described as gagged on the brink of a bloody explosion (p. 37). The volcano itself is the only aspect of nature in the poem which may symbolize emasculation and thus reflect the human condition of present-day alienated blacks — "le morne oublié, oublieux de sauter . . . inquiet et docile . . . accroupi . . . seul. . . famélique . . . bâtard" (p. 37). Martinique's Mont Pelée, in the rugged north far from the flatlands of cane, has remained silent since its violent eruption in 1906, an event which left thousands dead and which has now taken on a semi-legendary quality. In the symbolic world

of the *Cahier* this event lies even further off, just as the volcano's second eruption lies ahead in some unknown future which is nonetheless predicted with an absolute certainty of faith:

> et le morne qui depuis des siècles retient son cri au-dedans de lui-même, c'est lui qui à son tour écartèle le silence
> et ce peuple vaillance rebondissante . . .
> et la vie plus impétueuse jaillissant de ce fumier — comme le corossolier imprévu parmi la décomposition des fruits du jacquier! (p. 107)

Here protest and destruction usher in rebirth, and herald renewed access to that sexual energy which mirrors the life force in nature. The unpleasantly scented jackfruit which fall and rot announce the decomposition of "la vieille négritude" which "progressivement se cadavérise" (p. 147). New life springs from the dungheap in the form of the fragrant, evergreen soursop tree, just as the slaves who were the "fumier ambulant" of the canefields will eventually rise up "comme un champ de justes filaos" (p. 155) — with the slender yet sturdy grace of the casuarina, another evergreen whose wind-resistant qualities have made it a symbol of faithfulness. The frequent naming of tropical trees in the *Cahier* forms part of the poem's symbolic structure. Trees have a particular importance for Césaire: in contrast to the restless, shallow activity of Martinique's alienated blacks, trees represent stability, perseverance, the embracing of life, an "enracinement et approfondissement".[11] In their upright growth, trees also suggest the phallic vigour which Césaire uses to symbolize true *négritude.* On the last page of the poem, the field of "justes filaos" embracing the sky modulates into the image of a dove. Attribute of Venus and emblem of lovers' caresses, but also the enduring symbol of peace and harmony, it soars through the sky in a vertical flight which suggests both sexual energy and a movement of purification. The wind that bears the dove aloft is the same that promises the cleansed slave-ship a fortunate landfall on the day of independence, when the poet's race will "aborder aux futurs vergers" (p. 125).

By drawing on images which have strong Caribbean associations, Césaire has ensured that the reader will keep in the forefront of his mind the author's commitment to an indigenous culture and history. Certain symbols are readily identifiable as belonging to the regional past — slaveship and sugar-cane, bleeding wounds, volcanic eruption. The cluster of images based upon the contrast between sexual emasculation and phallic

energy is not regional in the same sense, yet it denotes an awareness, and a bold and positive *revalorisation,* of the white stereotype of the negro slave as a brute beast, and the white fear of black sexuality. Where the images also have a universal significance, it is of interest to note that their archetypal qualities are in keeping with the particular symbolic demands of the *Cahier.* So, for example, the tree or mountain references in the *Cahier* indicate a specific Caribbean topography with its historical associations, yet both function at an archetypal level to suggest phallic strength and a metaphysical striving after power and security.[12] The ship — in the *Cahier* first slave-ship, then joyous canoe, then "navire lustral" — has older and wider associations with both death (the bark of Charon) and protection and salvation (Noah's Ark). Archetypal values such as these serve harmoniously to reinforce the strong personal and socio-political message of the poem, and aid in the creation of a truly West Indian literature which will "prendre en charge le passé, éclairer le présent, débusquer l'avenir".[13]

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FOOTNOTES

1. Aimé Césaire, "Société et littérature dans les Antilles", lecture given at Laval University and reprinted in *Etudes littéraires,* 6 (1973), 9-20. The phrase cited is on p. 18.
2. Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939; rpt. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971), p. 153. All subsequent quotations from the *Cahier* are taken from this edition.
3. See Jean Bernabé, "La Négritude césairienne et l'Occident", in *Négritude africaine, négritude caraïbe,* ed. Jeanne-Lydie Goré (Paris: Université Paris-Nord, 1973), pp. 111-12.
4. See M. a M. Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1975), pp. 149-55.
5. Césaire, interview with Lilyan Kesteloot (1971), reprinted in Lilyan Kesteloot and Barthélemy Kotchy, *Aimé Césaire, l'homme et l'œuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1973), p. 235.
6. See Charlotte and Denis Plimmer, "A Corrupting Commerce", *The British Empire,* No. 4 (London: Time-Life/BBC, 1972), pp. 94-5.
7. An estimated 20 million Africans were sold out of Africa during the three centuries of the European slave trade, a quarter of which was concentrated on the West Indies: see F. R. Augier, S. C. Gordon, D. G. Hall, and M. Reckord, *The Making of the West Indies* (London: Longmans, 1960), p. 67.
8. Césaire, "Société et littérature", p. 19.
9. See, for example, Fray Tomás Mercado's account (1587), cited in Eric Williams, *Documents of West Indian History 1492-1655* (Port-of-Spain: PNM Publishing Co., 1963), p. 160.

10. Césaire still, in the 1970's, sees Martinique as a colony, despite her present official status as a *département* of France: see "Société et littérature", p. 9.
11. Césaire, "Poésie et connaissance", lecture given in Haiti in 1944 and reprinted in Kesteloot and Kotchy, p. 118.
12. On the archetypal symbolism of tree and mountain, see Gilbert Durand, *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Bordas, 1969), pp. 142, 162 and 391.
13. Césaire, "Société et littérature", p. 20.