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THE NEGRITUDE POETS AND THEIR CRITICS: A
LITERARY ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
EDUCATION.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT
GREENSBORO, ED.D., 1978

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THE NEGRITUDE POETS AND THEIR CRITICS: A
LITERARY ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

by
Georgie Blanche Latimer

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Greensboro

1978

Approved by


Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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This study was designed to define and to analyze the work of four negritude poets, Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, in relation to the literary assessment by their critics and potential implications for education. It proceeded to consider and to develop the interrelation of four broad areas: first, the traditional and changing place and role of literature in the school and college curriculum; second, the ontological and literary qualities of poetic negritude and its relation to the literature curriculum; third, the reaction of African and Western critics to negritude as a literary movement; and fourth, an assessment of negritude poetry and its historical reality and essential realism by responding to the poetry and by reacting to views of its critics.

A review of materials related to theory and practice in the literature program revealed that the traditional place and role of literature at all levels of the curriculum are recognized as means of providing intellectual and affective content of literary experiences. Literature is also a means of providing student-teacher interaction with a variety of genre from which the student develops a theoretical understanding and literary appreciation of literature in general. However, literary theorists stand firm on their belief that the consequential position of the changing role of literature is inherent in its function and restrictive in its selection of content for the curriculum. They maintain that current changes in student population and world view

have altered the school curriculum and the educational process. Both of these changes have affected tradition in the selection of literature. Literary images, the theorists maintain, are indispensable to the basic human process of world comprehension and self definition. This study concluded that there is an urgent need for greater consideration of literary selections for the curriculum that provide personal and cultural identity for all students, especially the black student.

This study was based on the assumption that the historical development of the Language Arts Program in the American education system predicated a logical place for the inclusion of literature such as African and Afro-American literature in the school curriculum. This would also include non-African higher studies where French and English language and literature are taught to English-speaking non-African students. This view argues literary merit and a viable contribution of negritude poetry to the English curriculum.

The orientation of negritude as related to the four parts of this study was the result of two specific forces. One force was the influence of the Negro Renaissance movement in America. The other force was "the mind of the assimilated African in French-speaking territories and the literary awakening associated with the political awakening."

Negritude poetry, defined by Senghor as "the sum of the cultural values of the black world as they are expressed in the life, the institutions and the works of Negroes" expresses cross-cultural and universal values as historical fact and as Black specificity. The negritude poets saw these two positions, referred to as situational

and essential negritude, as highly significant. Both accounted for the themes, rhythm, imagery, symbolism, style and language that gave the poetry its distinct uniqueness. Both provided a basis for understanding what negritude is in terms of African and Afro-American literature. What negritude brings to the curriculum, the writers and critics alike concurred, was to be ascertained by the critical analysis and discussion of the poets and their poetry.

A major concern of the study was to ascertain an established attitude of African and Western critics regarding the negritude poets. A review of critical literature of negritude showed that negritude was not without merit. It had the attention of writers and critics of African literature more than any other concept to the extent that it was accepted as a literary standard, in spite of some disparate views. Criticism ultimately became for the writer and critic a common concern for "What constituted African literature?" and "By what standards should African literature be judged?" Both writer and critic, once sharply divided on these questions, reached a consensus that the same high standards of literary criticism for both African and European writings should be used. Literary assessment, the African writer and critic contended, should be based on two major assumptions: one, that there is a traditional set of literary standards to which all critics must adhere; two, that literary criticism must take account of the cultural context in which the works were written.

Analysis and discussion of the major areas of negritude poetry in this dissertation suggested that it does have literary and cultural merit for the literature curriculum.

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DEDICATION

To Larkin Augustus Latimer and Estelle Lomax Latimer, my late parents, for their great spirit and sustaining love.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The literary movement of negritude was conceived and interpreted in works of art to express the essence of Blackness, its talents, worth, and its contribution to world culture. It grew out of the concept of a Negro Renaissance, a new cultural and literary awareness of the black man's search for his black identity. It sought human dignity and respect for the black man as a part of world civilization. Of interest to this study were the varied questions, answers, and discussions that the conditions and the term negritude raised for the poets as they related their identity to Africa's past. It had relevance for their critics as they related the African past to modern literature. On the other hand, basic to the question of supplementing a traditional liberal arts curriculum with the inclusion of black literature is the challenge that a course in negritude poetry offers. It can be an integral force in curriculum revision and educational enrichment. Ultimately it can reach a universal audience. Courses in black literature continue to be an issue on many college campuses. Nevertheless, negritude poetry can provide the experiences to strengthen a liberal arts curriculum. The inclusion of negritude poetry in the literature program, however, demands a clear distinction of educational goals and a close look at the

changes that have occurred in student population and in world view. Both have altered the college curriculum and the value and role of education. Inclusion of negritude poetry in the school curriculum represents a part of a changing social context and the intellectual climate in which it took place not solely in substance or subject matter, but also in a special literary approach, method, and style. In other terms, it is a sense of communion, the gift of imagination, the gift of rhythm that is unique to the black race. Further, it disputes the continuum on which the traditional curriculum places the masterpieces of world literature by offering literary balance and exposure to a broader cultural heritage. The student must be given the opportunity to go directly to the source, the world of those who have experienced the same universe as himself but in a different way, to examine and to see that these divergent views do convert into a whole no matter how ephemeral the connection might seem at first. He must be allowed to experience the literary beauty and quality of negritude poetry in its totality and thereby determine its application to the idea of an aesthetic rationality and reality contributing to world literature. Thus, it is the intent of this study to examine negritude in terms of its literary content and its implications for the literature curriculum.

Definition of Terms

The concept of negritude and the effects of the literary movement that it engendered are complex and difficult to assess. The term negritude has many definitions and many meanings. It expresses many feelings and operates at different levels of expression through varying styles and techniques from poet to poet and place to place. No one

definition is more pronounced than any other. The literary definition of negritude is intricately woven into the fabric of its ideology. Some varying aspects of its use have defined it poetically. It has been defined to mean an effective instrument for liberation. It has been defined as an attitude. It has been defined as negation, independence, and self-affirmation. It has been defined as style. It has been defined as the rhythm and incantation which allows access to the truth of essentials. These literary definitions of negritude and other fundamental traits of the poets were used to study the merits of their poetry.

Langston Hughes of the United States, Leon Damas of French Guiana, Leopold Senghor of Dakar, Senegal, and Aimé Césaire of Martinique are acclaimed to be the undisputed literary apostles of the concept of Negro-ness and its values which Césaire labeled "negritude." Each of these poets expressed in his poetry the uniqueness of his historical condition and cultural tradition. Each declared the necessity for ideologies and systems that truly reflected the peculiarities of his own situation. This, of course, led to a renewed interest in the African past, which was and continues to be long, vigorous, distinguished, and viable.

The relationship of this past to what is, in fact, the real Africa of modern African and Afro-American art is often distorted. Distinctions are not always clear between what is historical and political, and what is aesthetic and literary. Any effort to extricate one from the other is an unrealistic undertaking. The historical, the political, the aesthetic, and the literary are so closely related that

they are as one voice speaking for Africa and mankind. Thus the voice of the negritude poets is never a total effort of expressing oneself about black consciousness. It is always a commitment to a collective goal of all black people for recognition and freedom in the society of the world.

Assumption

The basic assumption of the study was that negritude poetry has merit, for it has achieved national and international attention and has been recognized as constituting a literary standard.

Thus the study proceeded in the firm belief that critical standards may be inferred from the explicit critical statements of the critics themselves. On this assumption, an examination and analysis of the critics and their work constituted a frame of reference for determining the dimension of their knowledge and understanding of the poetry.

The second procedure, then, was to identify and read the critical literature relating to the African and Afro-American writers of negritude and to black literature in general available to the study. Reaction to the African and Western critics constituted the basis for assessing the literary value and for determining the place that the poetic literature of negritude may claim in the syllabus of schools and universities.

A major interest of this study was to discover the judgment that African and western critics had for the negritude poets, Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Leopold Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, and their poetry. Equally important were the implications that their judgment of the poetry might have for its inclusion in the school curriculum.

The critics' judgment of the negritude poetry was received and presented on the assumption that no prejudicial barrier to confidence was present. Further, it was assumed that the literary criticism was based on legitimate literary standards of poetic creativity. Thus, the criticism took into consideration the relationship of negritude poetry to its oral or traditional heritage as well as to modern literary theory. Inherent in this position are what constitutes a literary standard and who could be a critic of negritude poetry.

In searching for the criteria to judge African and Afro-American literature, it was assumed by the writer that the critical assessment of the negritude poets was not based on segregation, conquest, and/or degradation. It was assumed further that the literary criticism was based on legitimate literary standards making distinction between propaganda and true, authentic poetic creativity.

Emphasis on the poetic nature and quality of the poetry was based on the literary characteristics and technical elements to which all poetry subscribes. Also apparent in the study is the basic requirement that critics have knowledge and understanding of the Afro-American and African culture in terms of time and place. The application of western concepts of literary standards by the critics must include this point of view. Jean-Paul Sartre has said:

We are all increasingly interested in the relations between literature and society. This is natural. Literature is a social act; it is one man addressing other men to tell them about themselves, either as individuals with their separate hopes and fears or as members of some group with common aspirations and disappointments. And its medium, language, is a social product. To write, therefore, commits one to

social relations. And the interest in the relations between literature and society has a long tradition, going back at least to the time when Plato showed the poets to the gates of his well-organized and ideal city.¹

Three questions growing out of this position for Sartre were "How does literature influence society?" "What is the influence of a society upon its literature?" and "What ought to be the relations between the writer and his society, his readers?"² The implications of the questions are the attempts of Westerners to understand and evaluate the negritude literature for the most part on the literary texts themselves. Nancy Schmidt said

. . . it is hoped that students of comparative literature and literary critics will realize that meaningful cross-cultural literary criticism cannot be conducted on the basis of Western literary standards even if the literature is written in a Western language. By trying to apply Western standards to literature which is not wholly within the Western tradition, judgments become inconsistent and criticisms become naive or wholly incorrect. . . .

Until more is learned about aesthetic standards and the histories of both oral and written literatures in non-western societies, there can be no basis for a valid cross-cultural literary criticism. It must consider literature primarily in the context of the culture in which it is created and secondarily in terms of the critic's own culture.³

Although some critics, Kesteloot, Armstrong, Shelton, and others, might agree with this position, still others do not. Among the latter

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, "Why Write," Critical Theory Since Plato, Hazard Adams, ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), pp. 1058-1068.

²Ibid.

³Nancy Schmidt, "Nigeria: Poetry and Fiction for the Average Man," Africa Report, vol. 10, no. 8 (August 1965), pp. 39-41.

are some African writers. Instead of undergirding a positive view of evaluating negritude literature, Schmidt's stand raised other questions about aesthetic and critical historical standards by which some Africans judge their literature.

Fundamental to criticism of African literature, in particular, is the opinion of Abiola Irele, an African writer himself. He made the distinction between what is called "traditional" African literature and "modern" African literature. He claimed that the distinction is useful because of the separate characteristics regarding content and form and because of the marked difference of the African experience.

Irele stated that the large issues of these distinctions constitute problems involved in the criticism of African literature. He emphasized the distinction to point up the vital role that African literature plays in African society and to emphasize its central position in African contemporary existence. He emphasized it also to indicate the importance of relating this new literary expression to Africa in a clear and meaningful way to the African situation. This was specifically true of the African people themselves and of their total experience. To Irele, it was in this particular respect that a criticism defining the function and purpose adequate to modern African literature can emerge.⁴

Also taken into consideration was the role of language in the syllabus in which the French language and literature are taught to English speaking non-African and non-Afro-American students. An

⁴Abiola Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature," Perspectives in African Literature, Christopher Heywood, ed. (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), pp. 9-24.

objective point of view can dispel the view that non-Africans and non-Blacks cannot understand the soul of an African and black writer. The question is neither academic nor theoretical, but primordial. The non-African or non-Black, not having his cultural roots in Africa, can fully appreciate the artistic and literary qualities of the work of the black writers even though the aesthetic concepts may be different from his own. There is a responsibility on the part of the African and Afro-American and the non-Black in resolving these points of view.

The frequent objection made by black writers and their apologists about the impossibility of a non-Black's fully appreciating their emotion, their passion, and their commitment, is a disservice to the creativity of the writer. The reader, no matter who he is, if he is capable of understanding the writer's point of view, has no need to live all the things that he feels deeply in any literature, Greek, Spanish, Russian or that of black people. The study, therefore, postulated that this objection is negligible and does not exclude the non-Black a priori from the readers of the poetry of negritude.

The presence of a certain universality of aesthetics characterizing negritude poetry based on truth, or rather on certain truths that are applicable to any culture, serves to dispel this objection. The artistic and literary qualities of the works of these writers, such as their use of protest and self-awareness, combine to create a mutuality of strength and validity. Their characteristic metaphors and nuances of language, idioms, tone, mood, rhythm, symbols, and imagery, their total artistic gesture bring to the literary experience in the school curriculum another cultural artistic dimension transcending nationality.

Scope of the Study

Five important literary events set the parameters of this study. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's, as it is now assessed, rose to a climax in 1930 and by 1969 had become a symbol of the awakening awareness to Blacks everywhere. Prior to this period, in fact in the 1920's, Alain Locke made clear in The New Negro that the term "New Negro" grew out of the Negro experiences of World War I and the influence of industrialism. The term referred to more than the writers then active in the Negro Renaissance. It included the Negro masses and especially the young. "For the younger generation," Locke wrote in 1925, "is vibrant with a new psychology."⁵ Basically what Locke was relating to was a renewal of "self-respect" and "self-confidence."

The Negro Renaissance represented for the black writer the flowering of this spirit in literature. For him, the creative-critical process was the compulsion to assess his culture and its values that simultaneously resulted in his work of art. His art symbolized cultural values, and it also created and shaped them. The basic concept operating here for the writer was the critical method of the relationship between literature and culture and the function of both in the formation and development of the human personality. As Robert Bone has written, "The Negro Renaissance was essentially a period of self-discovery, marked by sudden growth of interest in things Negro including

⁵Alain Locke, ed. The New Negro (New York: Yale University Press, 1925), p. 3. In this volume Locke also explores in his essay, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," the vital connection between the African artistic idiom and that of the American Negro.

the natural creative art, primitive African art, jazz, Negro singing, and the entrance of the blues in American music."⁶ Of central importance to the Negro Renaissance was its emphasis on folk culture.

The emphasis of this study on the poetry of Langston Hughes does not deny in the least that many other poets played a major role in initiating the "new" attitude in Negro poetry. Included were the talents and friendship of poets such as Claude McKay and Sterling Brown. Crystal Eastman and Max Eastman, editor of The Liberator, also influenced the Renaissance movement and aided in publicizing the new poetry. Claude McKay's poem, "If We Must Die" expressed the attitude of the Negro as early as 1919. It reads:

If we must die, let it not be like dogs
 Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot
 While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
 Making their mock at our accursed lot.
 If we must die, O let us nobly die,
 So that our precious blood may not be shed in vain;
 then even the monsters we defy
 Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

 What though before us lies the open grave?
 Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying but fighting back!⁷

This poem of the Negro Renaissance is McKay's expressed effort to accept Sterling Brown's precept that black writers should try to create a sense of race pride through their literary work.

⁶Robert A. Bone, The Negro Novel in America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 62.

⁷Claude McKay, "If We Must Die," The Liberator (July 1919), pp. 20-21. Winston Churchill referred to this poem in a speech during World War II, see Ulli Beier, ed. Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing from Black Orpheus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 76-77.

Langston Hughes became the literary spokesman of the Negro Renaissance and challenged the whole notion of the American Negro school of poetry. He alternated the use of the American folk experience and the ancestral African experience in his poetry. This attitude is significant in that it declares an equal insistence upon the black man's being an African and an American, and his right to participate fully in American life. The distinctiveness that Hughes brought to the poetry of black writers at the time of the Negro Renaissance was the literary quality relating to the inexhaustible riches of his own verbal creations in blues, work-song, jazz-lyric, spiritual, sermon, and everyday speech. Gerald Moore pointed out that

Hughes taught the poetry of his people to respect the short line, the abrupt and jerky rhythm, the trumpet-like swoop or plunge towards a delayed rhyme. He was a man who delighted in experiment and who, significantly, remained prolific when other Harlem poets fell virtually silent after 1930.⁸

Hughes eulogized the black race in his poetry. However, after reading Hughes's Collected Poems, Baldwin recognized universality in them. Baldwin said

He was able to create a literature which, while being authentically Negro, also demonstrated the ever-lasting potential, or temptation of the human race.⁹

The new awareness expressed in the black literature of the Negro Renaissance, by Hughes in particular, was felt in France by a few African French writers. It constituted a legacy that contained the

⁸Gerald Moore, "Poetry in the Harlem Renaissance," C. W. E. Bigsby, ed., The Black American Writer: Poetry and Drama (Deland, Florida: E. O. Painter Printing Company, 1969), p. 73.

⁹Richard K. Barksdale, Langston Hughes: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977), p. 104.

seeds of the totality of black Africa's cultural value. Their idea of black awareness or "negritude" expressed "the cultural patrimony, the values and above all civilization."¹⁰

The second literary parameter of the study was 1934, the beginning of the Neo-Negre or Negre-Nouveau movement begun by Senghor, Damas, and Césaire which borrowed its name from its American Negro predecessors. The orientation of Neo-Nègre or Nègre-Nouveau paralleled the orientation of the Negro Renaissance in America in that it, too, had an imprecise beginning. The French-African movement initiated by other African-French writers such as Paul Claudel, Jacques Maritain, Étienne Léro, and Jules Monnerat prior to 1934 helped to lay the foundation for the new movement later guided by Damas, Senghor and Césaire. The idea of the movement for cultural cross-sharing grew out of the desire to promote the black race through poetry, music, and the other arts.¹¹ The primary objective, among others, was to provide a forum for the new ideologies. Senghor said

. . .our aim is to give the intelligensia of the black race and their adherents an official organ in which to publish their artistic, literary, and scientific work, and to study and to popularize by means of the press, books, lectures, courses, all that concerns Negro Civilization and the natural riches of Africa, thrice sacred to the black race.¹²

Additionally, two publications were significant to the development of the Writers' Congress for the Defense of Culture. One was Légitime

¹⁰Irving L. Markovitz, Leopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), p. 51.

¹¹Lilyan Kesteloot, "Black Students in Paris and the Harlem Renaissance," Black Writers in French (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 72-73.

¹²Jacques Louis Hymans, Leopold Sédar Senghor: An Intellectual Biography (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), p. 36.

Défense (1928-1932) formed under the direction of Étienne Léro and other young West Indian students in Paris. Its importance was reflected in the writer's manifesto and in its content and audience during its short life. Senghor recognized and recounted the impact of Légitime Défense on the Movement. He said:

It had a far reaching audience beyond the West Indies to Africa itself. It presented completely and coherently all the ideas which would grow into the French-speaking black cultural renaissance: a critique of rationalism, the need to regain an original personality, the rejection of an art subservient to European standards, revolt against colonial capitalism.¹³

The other publication was L'Étudiant Noir (1934). It expressed the black writers' belief in the priority of culture rather than politics. Its chief purpose was to reunite elite Negroes of French nationality with their history, traditions, and language which express their soul. It sought to end the tribal system that divided them into separate groups. All writers regardless of geographical location would become simply students.¹⁴ This primal emphasis on culture constituted for these poets a first step towards ending the cultural alienation of the Negro. Through their poems they hoped to work for Africa and the black man. In essence, the poets' mission was first and foremost, redemption.

Two major literary events during the year 1947-1948 formed the third literary parameter important to this study. The publication of the first landmark in French-African poetry was Leopold Senghor's classical Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue

¹³Ibid., pp. 15-21.

¹⁴Ibid.

française (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948). Edris Makward said that outside Senghor's Chants d'ombre (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1945) and Leon Damas' anthology, Poètes d'Expression Française, the Senghor anthology is the first major anthology to indicate that serious poetry was being written by enough Africans and poets of African descent, and in such quantity as "to make continual ignorance or denial of it increasingly difficult for those who might attempt to take this position."¹⁵

Anthologie came soon after the war which had profoundly changed relationships between Europe and the third world. It coincided with the first steps in the process of decolonization that would occupy the next twenty years.¹⁶ It had a marked effect not only as a declaration but also as a demonstration of the black man's determination to define his own cultural position and struggle to achieve independence.

The other important literary event of this period was the first issue of the journal Présence Africaine. Its editor described its main purpose to be "a means to define the African's creativity and to hasten the African's integration into the world. Abiose Nicol, an African critic, believed the publication played an important part in the literary renaissance of West Africa. He said,

It provided an opportunity for the world to see the work of young African writers and poets. It played an active mid-wife role in Negritude. . . . In its completeness-- sponsorship, editorship, publication, library and bookshop--

¹⁵Edris Markward, "Negritude and the New African Novel," Ibadan 22 (June 1966):39.

¹⁶Ibid.

Presence Africaine shows the essential apparatus required to bring the African mind directly to the notice of the public without foreign intervention at any point.¹⁷

Presence Africaine took the position that a total commitment to cultural aims was untenable. The revolutionary aspect at the heart of negritude diminished some of its literary characteristics. It was divided on the political and cultural aspects of the literature. Its philosophical attitude was that any political influence must be confined to the definitive qualities of politics used by the Afro-American and African writers. Its position favored the cultural more than the political interests of the negritude writers. Its publication served a wide audience in that it was not limited to any one language. It continues to provide a forum for American, African and British writers today.

The fourth literary parameter significant to this study was created by two literary conferences. They were the First and Second Congresses of Black Writers and Artists organized in 1956 and 1959 by the Society of African Culture. They convened in Rome and Paris respectively. They brought together black intellectuals from the whole world. A major theme of the Congress was the originality of the African Negro cultures. The artistic and literary aspect of the theme confirmed that the black man does have another history than that ascribed by the colonial regime. The writers and artists at that time affirmed the validity of other myths and different qualities of sensibility from the Westerner. They acknowledged their distinct means of expression, which they felt,

¹⁷Lilyan Kesteloot, Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution (Washington, D. C.: Black Orpheus Press, 1972), pp. 32-33.

urgently needed to be freed from European constraints.¹⁸ The First Congress also considered three basic literary and artistic ranges of African literature. They affected the development of negritude poetry. The writers and critics at the conference agreed that the poetry should be an expression of reality and that it must provide the opportunity for one to become aware of oneself so that he may challenge established ideas.¹⁹

The liberation of the people in this way through literature bears rather closely on certain points of education. In this direction both Congresses expressed the hope that African Negro authors would differentiate themselves further to show their concept of national realities in terms of the variety of their cultures.

A significant advocacy agreed upon at the Congresses was the teaching of vernacular languages and choosing one of them as a vehicular language for all of Africa.

It was at the Second Congress that the black writers agreed on the cultural responsibility of all black writers. Their literary role to direct and shed light upon the rise of their people could best be used, they agreed, for the poetic creation of beauty, for expressions of the pain and joys of their people, for an exploration of the infinite riches of their long-lost patrimony and for the sharing of all this with each other, the writer and his audience.

The caveat given to the black African writers by Jacques Robemananjara was direct and positive. He said,

¹⁸Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 312.

¹⁹Ibid.

The poet's solidarity with his people is no freely chosen thing; it is the very foundation of his poetry and ensures its one opportunity for greatness and beauty.²⁰

It is in these contexts and in the words of Césaire that the poets expressed their responsibility to their people. Césaire's view was

We must protect their reconquered freedom. May it be known: In joining our efforts to those for liberation of the colonized peoples, in fighting for the dignity of our peoples, their truth and their recognition, in the end it is for the whole world, we fight, to free it from tyranny, hate, and fanaticism.²¹

The black African writers wished to give meaning to the present through poetic creations.

The fifth and final literary parameter is the First World Festival of Negro Arts, sponsored by the Republic of Senegal. It was held at Dakar University in 1966. The Society of African Culture organized The First World Festival of Negro Arts. At this conference black intellectuals came from many parts of the world for the express purpose of demonstrating to the world the Negro's contribution to world culture, not only in Africa but also wherever the Negro has gone and effected a significant change. The Festival was the realization of a dream conceived by Senghor, Césaire and Alioune Diop, director of Présence Africaine as early as 1948. At the Dakar Conference in 1963, Senghor projected a definition of negritude not as racialism but simply the sum of civilized values of the black world, not past values but the values of true culture. Senghor said this definition constituted the spirit of Negro-African civilization, which is rooted in the land and in the heart

²⁰Ibid., p. 344.

²¹Ibid.

of the black man. This definition also attempted to stretch out toward the world of men and things the desire to understand negritude, unify it and give expression to it. Senghor was pleased with the emphasis on culture and civilization discussed at the Dakar Conference of 1963. He was confident that it would prevail at the Dakar World Festival of Negro Art later in 1966. It was his hope to clear up the misapprehension surrounding Negro art and literature as being reactionary or revolutionary. Such an attitude confused the issue. His position was clear. He said,

All culture is revolutionary in the sense that, in the world of time and space, it means man's integration in the world, and the world's integration in Man. But Negro art does not consist in the sentiment-idee; it consists in the expression of the sentiment-idee.²²

Senghor saw this position expressed in all national art and literature through their integral humanism. Speaking directly of Negro art and literature as in part consisting in the expression of the "sentiment-idee," Senghor pointed out that they were works of beauty in that they were a re-discovery of the old virtues of ancient Negro art. He saw them as living pictures expressed in rhythm and song. They were not a monologue but a dialogue to Senghor. They were not teaching but tension, not distance but a loving presence in his estimation. Hence, he felt that understanding comes through the rhythmic image. He concluded at this point that

All Negro art is like music: as in a symphony, the image links together the complementary themes, like figures linked in a rhythmic dance, a dance of love. The soul's nourishment

²²Leopold Sédar Senghor, "The Dakar Conference Opening Address," African Literature and The Universities, Gerald Moore, ed. (Dakar: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. 15.

is the primordial rhythm of our Mother Earth which regularly brings like and like together and fills us with the joy of the eternal.²³

It is in this sense that Senghor saw every true revolution as a return to one's origins which restores to man his vital needs, those pre-existent images, those primordial rhythms, that he saw as a possibility through negritude. Thus, he proclaimed this concept in his opening address to the First World Festival of Negro Arts. He said,

An undertaking much more revolutionary than the exploration of the cosmos: the elaboration of a new humanism which this time will include the totality of humanity on the totality of our planet.²⁴

This was a universal undertaking. It was more than a literary consciousness on the part of black writers. "In a word," Senghor said, "if we assume the terrible responsibility of organizing and conducting this Festival, it is for the defense and illustration of negritude."²⁵ To him, part of the essence of negritude lies in its forms, or rather in the spirit that inspires those forms. This was seen as the participation in it of the man and the artist, the man and the world, the subject and the object. He felt further that its literary identification was achieved by an analogous or symbolic image, "expressed in song and movement, the spirit of the form of embrace, a mingling through love, of the 'thee and the me.'" This undertaking showed an effort to give evidence of creativity and influence rather than to encourage influence in the arts themselves in the manner of the early twentieth century. Mercer Cook pointed out that it was Senghor's hope that

²³Ibid., p. 16.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

through realization and appreciation of the values of negritude, of the spirit of negritude, that is, the spirit behind the creative arts of the black world, the west will come to resolve the conflict between human nature and civilization as well as between human beings.²⁶

Thus, it was through an understanding of Africa that Senghor hoped western man would rediscover himself.

Significance of the Study

Despite the truth and practicality of negritude, it raised questions for educators and critics. These are the questions needing answers: What is the place of "literature" in the literary experience of negritude? Have black writers distorted reality to serve their own cause? Have they exaggerated the "misfortunes" of the black race, or were they the loyal witness of these "misfortunes"? It is hoped that this study will provide valid answers to these questions and the poets' aggressive quest for full and complete meeting of all men of good will.

The resonance of these pronouncements and questions extended in many directions and their peculiar echoes are to be found in many situations, poetic and non-poetic. However, without some understanding of the historical importance of the policy of assimilation from which the negritude poet sought escape to examine his own culture with a fresh vision and a "new" understanding, it is impossible to see any shape in the poetic events from the African and Afro-American surroundings.

²⁶Jacob Drachler, African Heritage: An Anthology of Black African Personality and Culture (London: Colliete Macmillan Ltd., 1964), p. 279.

Gerald Moore pointed out that "black consciousness is recognition not only of being black but also of being non-white and of being utterly rejected by a hostile white society."²⁷ This society, he stated, "was quite prepared to forgive him his color just so long as he would clothe it decently in the culture, religion, and manner of a Western civilization."²⁸ This perplexing situation raised for the black man phenomenal questions. Was this not in effect an approach to force upon him the significance of being non-white? Had his color really no more significance than this? Was he not, after all, a black man existing in his own rich, if ruined world, rather than a non-white entering on sufferance into another?

These questions do not suggest that only race and color are the distinguishing factors in African and Afro-American life and literature but that racial attitudes certainly constitute an integral means for identifying a group.

In an attempt to answer these questions in a broad literary context, one finds that a particular and poignant interchange between cultures, African and Afro-American, emerged that established a mutual yet complicated relationship. This is seen in a definitive sense that the "making of history" can be seen as a controlled conscious effort totally outside itself; whereas art is in a sense simply a conscious effort. There is, then, the acceptance or rejection of the phrase

²⁷Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, eds., Modern Poetry from America (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin African Library Press, 1965), pp. 15-16.

²⁸Austin J. Shelton, ed. The African Assertion: A Critical Anthology of African Literature (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1968), pp. 1-2.

"history for history's sake" which is largely rejected by African artists. It is in these specific stances that the artistic relationship of the African past has relevance for the present African and Afro-American in the realm of the arts.

Especially in poetry, the gesture of negritude was simultaneously an expressive one of rejection and assertion. It was not absence, but refusal in society. It is reflective of the intellect and emotions surrounding the manners and ways of life. In no way does it alter its cardinal significance in the development of modern African and Afro-American poetry. In fact, it is an exaltation of self-identity through its poetry.

The negritude movement gave direct literary access and form to an idea. The theme, imagery, and rhythm of the idea became a heritage of the Afro-American and African search for their identity and their African roots.

Although the nexus of negritude for the Afro-American had an imprecise beginning because of its historical orientation with Africa, it is evident that a literary balance did exist between the pre-colonial and colonial African period and the prolonged period of slavery and disenfranchisement of the Afro-American prior to the twentieth century in America. The slave memoirs and oratory of Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and other black proponents of the abolitionist movement sowed the seeds for gaining long denied "freedom" and "equality" later to be expressed in the poetry of black writers.

Not only did Hughes become a symbol of the Black Renaissance of the 1920's in America, but by 1969 the Black Renaissance of the 1920's had

become a symbol of awakening awareness to Blacks everywhere. The poets were concerned with removing the systems of prejudice and alienation that existed between the black and white cultures. At the same time they wished to maintain their black identity. Senghor expressed this concern in these words, "assimilate but not be assimilated." The establishment of black identity meant the rejection of white Western values and the affirmation of Negro-African counter-values.

Poetry was a medium used to express these revolutionary ideas. The poetry in turn became revolutionary in its style, structure and content. It provided freedom for the poet as he rejected American and European models, and developed new ones. The poets achieved a reversal of values by introducing Negrism and African traditions into the poetic art form. They interpreted the American folk and African oral traditions not only as exotic and primitive, but also as specific cultures which they must search for and rediscover. The aim was to capture the Afro-American and African realities, the feeling for life.

Significance of the Harlem Renaissance

Arna Bontemps said that the Harlem Renaissance became the touchstone for Negro artists who put together poetry and prose that transmitted the mood and pride in Blackness and a conviction that black is beautiful. Among the Negro artists drawn to Harlem in the early 1920's was Langston Hughes. Bontemps called Langston Hughes the "happy

prince" whose time had come.²⁹ Since poetry was first to catch the beat of the new happening in Harlem, Hughes's new style of poetry was effective.

Hughes published an article entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" in The Nation in 1921, which launched his literary career. It continued after his death in 1967 with the publication of several posthumous books. In all his works it is evident that Hughes was heir to a tripartite tradition made up of the situational reality of black people, the extended range of black folk creation, and the exploratory precedents of other black writers. It was they who laid the foundation of what is most central and living in African-American writing. All of these writers and more were the originators of the concept of Negritude in everything but name.

Samuel Allen writing in "Negritude and Its Relevance for the American Negro Writer" pointed out that a "transcendence of spiritual dimension of the African experience and the American experience exists between the American Negro poet and the African poet of negritude."³⁰ Probably this is so because negritude was a means for the poet to penetrate without apology to the deepest levels of his creative concern. Each poet sought his inspiration in terms of what life in his society had meant to him. Each expressed it in whatever type of poetry was suitable to him, forgetting for the time being the necessity of an

²⁹Arna Bontemps, "The Black Renaissance of the Twenties," Black World vol. 20 (August 1972), pp. 5-9. See also Arna Bontemps's assessment of Hughes in his article "The Harlem Renaissance," in the Saturday Review 33 (March 22, 1947), pp. 12-13, 44.

³⁰Samuel Allen, The American Negro Writer and His Roots (New York: American Society of African Culture, 1960), pp. 8-20.

American or European literary mainstream. Only the emphasis upon the development of his own identity in that experience enabled him to make ultimately his fullest contribution to the whole, within or without the notion of western literary traditions.

As the African poets sought new models for their poetry they found inspiration in the American poets of the Negro Renaissance. Langston Hughes made the greatest impact of all the poets on their efforts to write about the African personality and culture. He had visited with them during their Paris school days, and he had attended literary conferences in Africa on several occasions. Damas acknowledged the help of the black movement in America. He said,

It is a fact of dramatic consequence that negritude was not conceived by Africans in the motherland but by those influenced by the spirituals, blues, and jazz of blacks in the United States of America.³¹

Damas had a great passion for Langston Hughes. He found in Hughes's poetry a message of strength and the confidence of a man who had faith in his people's destiny. Hughes's integrity gave Damas's negritude special meaning that time and time again is reflected in his poetry. Hughes's poetry brought to African writing "a communion of blood, soul, and soil." Damas commented on Hughes's influence. He said "it exists in black people as much in Paris as in Dakar and beyond."³² From 1921 Hughes influenced the thoughts and hopes of all French-speaking Negroes who came together to prepare for the Negritude movement.

³¹Kesteloot, "The Black Students in Paris and the Harlem Renaissance," Black Writers in French, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

³²Ibid.

Leopold Senghor credited the birth of the Harlem Renaissance and the "New Negro" as the impetus for negritude for the African poets. He also referred to Langston Hughes's manifesto as a particular instance.

It reads:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain free within ourselves.³³

This was the profound force for Hughes. The pioneers of negritude, Senghor, Damas, and Césaire determined to follow it. For Senghor, it meant democracy quickened by the sense of communion and brotherhood between men. It meant for Césaire the simple realization of the fact of being black, the acceptance of this fact, and of its cultural and historical consequences. For Damas, it meant freedom from colonialism and a moving away from what he called "tracing-paper" poetry.

The view of life that Hughes's poetry awakened in Senghor, Damas, and Césaire was a diametrically different and separate sense of reality from the black man's previous cultural identity. It was an opposite view of the artificial reality perceived and presented through the European system of Colonialism or Neo-Colonialism.

Hughes returned to the African writers the high esteem in which they held him as a leader and a poet. Hughes profoundly and

³³Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Nation, (June 1926).

conclusively paid homage to the African sense of dedication and pride in the African experience as means of finding the real self. He wrote,

My interest in native African writing began when I was asked by the editors of Drum, a Johannesburg magazine for non-white readers, to become one of the judges of a short story contest for indigenous South African writers. Some of the work that came to me contained pages which moved, surprised, and quite delighted me. I determined to see how much more writing of interest was being produced by black Africans.³⁴

The result of this interest was the publication of an anthology of African writing, poetry and prose. Hughes spoke of it in this way,

No collection of African material, no matter how personal its selection, can fail to reflect massive conflicts going on today. [1960]. When I first began to gather this material, the term negritude, currently popular with African writers, especially poets influenced by Senghor, had not come into common use. But there was in most of the writing that reached me, an accent Africaness-blackness, if you will, not unlike the racial consciousness found in the work of American Negro writers a quarter of a century ago.³⁵

Hughes compared the distinctiveness found in the African's and Harlem writer's search for identity:

The Harlem writers of that period, [1930's] however, had to search for their folk roots. The African writer has these roots right at hand. He is no outside observer. His tribal marks are sometimes still on his very skin. And although some of the writers here assembled are colored, in the mixed blood-sense in which this term is used abroad, they are all Negro in the sense in which the word Negro is used in America.³⁶

³⁴Langston Hughes, An African Treasury, Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems by Black Africans (New York: Pyramid Books, 1961), p. 9.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³⁶Ibid., p. 11.

Hughes commented on the sense of personal dignity in the writings that came to him out of Africa, from Senegal in the north, Kenya in the east, to Cape Town in the south. He said,

There runs a pride of race which the long years of colonialism could not erase. This pride extends to a deep appreciation and understanding of folk life which mission schooling or European education did not diminish. It is a pride in country, which underlies everything that is thought and spoken south of the Sahara today.³⁷

In clarifying more acutely this kind of African pride in country, Hughes said,

It is an African pride, with a character all its own, which owes allegiance neither to West nor East but to its newly emerging self. Perhaps the phrase that best sums up this swelling pride and fierce insistence of individual identity is the "African personality."³⁸

Summary

Where literature is concerned, it can be postulated that identities of passion have produced and will continue to produce, writings from the Negro diaspora that will be significantly related in theme, subject matter, and style. However, the implications of an African past on the present negritude poetry of Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Leopold Senghor, and Aimé Césaire encompass an intelligent discussion of a comparative definition of these contemporary literatures by peoples of African descent in Africa and in the rest of the western world. Since negritude is often taken to mean the re-evaluation of African and Negro values, their critics are in a position to demand attention to technical matters relating to the development of a literary tradition

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

distinct to that of the West. This task is rooted in what the past, as content should mean to the African and Afro-American writer in the present.

On the American scene, Ralph Ellison expressed serious reservations about whether or not there exists some universal African-derived common-denominator culture of black people. Other writers such as Saunders Redding, Alain Locke, and Samuel Allen concurred that negritude was expressive of the realization that in the final analysis a literature feeds on both reality and dreams, on what society is and longs to be.³⁹ They felt also that a literature cannot for long subsist on African materials as its subject, if such materials are not assimilated into the warp and woof of the fabric of the society for which such literature is meant.

The reactions of African writers have been divided on the question of negritude and of standards for evaluating the works of black writers. They represented not only an appraisal of the literary success of negritude but also the reactionary feelings of many of the English-speaking opponents of negritude. Some writers showed indifference to the major concept of African culture and metaphysic. One significant response came from Ezekiel Mphahlele, a south African poet. He acknowledged that Janheinz Jahn accused him of debunking negritude poetry because he rejected negritude's ideology. Mphahlele said the distance between the individual voice and the communal voice

³⁹Wole Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," The Writer in Modern Africa, ed. Per Wästberg (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969), pp. 21-37.

diminished the cause in the poetry that could promote an ideology. He based his position on negritude on this thesis. He said, "I have never rejected the historical relevance of negritude, . . . what I do say is that modern African problems require solutions for which negritude in its traditional sense is too simple an answer."⁴⁰ As a literary creed he felt it produced poetry that did not tell the whole truth about Africa or even falsified in part present-day realities.

Frantz Fanon, unlike Mphahlele, saw the historical process rather than the ideology of negritude as disproving its claim to speak for and on behalf of all Blacks, because of the distinctly different concrete problems encountered by Blacks in America and in Africa. He saw negritude as the intellectual pastime of the governing elite, Senghor, Damas, Césaire, and others. However, as a literary movement, Fanon said its influence was felt both in literature and in scholarly works.⁴¹

Other African writers including Wole Soyinka and James Ngugi expressed skepticism toward negritude similar to the English-speaking writers. They said they wished to create and be judged by universal standards of art, to draw freely on whatever inspiration and models they choose. To them Soyinka said

Negritude has suggested a romantization of Africa, an aesthetic restriction to some doubtful universal black style, an emphasis on the traditional African literary

⁴⁰Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 80.

⁴¹Frantz Fanon, "Peau Noire Masques Blancs," Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature, ed. G. R. Couthard (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 60.

forms; . . . a limitation of the artistic vision to that which flatters, that which protests, that which has social or political usefulness, rather than to an individual search for truth.⁴²

Other events and reactions of critics for and against the varying dimensions of the negritude movement and the literary value of its poetry accounted also for its ultimate effect. As Sartre put it twenty-five years ago, "This poetry, which at first appears so racial, is ultimately the song of every one of us and for every one of us."⁴³

The corollary of these views is the position the negritude poets took in expressing their thoughts and feelings about society. The negritude poetry was a part of a pronounced literary movement in which the talents of the poets, as creators, utilized the universal qualities inherent in the belief in the primacy of life and the essence of black people. Through their use of language, images, rhythm, and rhetoric they searched for truth and justice. Perhaps, these literary qualities were overshadowed at times by the emphasis on the consequent loss of cultural identity and the reality of neo-colonialism. The poets were concerned with the goal of removing the system of prejudice and alienation between black and white cultures that stifled the black man's identity. For them negritude was a means of establishing a bond of human dignity and respect for mankind. Thus the poets are considered as individualist and universalists. These considerations gave a heightened dimension to this undertaking that required specific literary definitions.

⁴²Soyinka, "The Writer in a Modern African State," p. 35.

⁴³Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphee Noire," quoted in Ulli Beier, Introduction to African Literature, op. cit.

Significant also was the concept of literary criticism practiced by the African and Western critics. Their judgment of the poetry helped to point up the relevance for the school curriculum. This was important, for studies and theories on the literature curriculum revealed it to be limited to selections unrelated to all its student population. Negritude poetry could serve to diminish the need for black models in the literary selections.

It is in this context that this study researched and defined the literary nature and characteristics of the negritude poetry of Langston Hughes, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Leon Damas, and Aimé Césaire. Each poet, his poetry and the critics' reaction to the concept of negritude will be presented separately to add focus to the individuality of the poet and his poetry.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Background

Literature claims a significant role in the school program. The nature and characteristics of its content logically envision a distinct entity. However, the societal concept of education prescribes an inseparable relationship with the school curriculum. Further, the literature curriculum shares a common origin with the general curriculum in American schools and colleges. Both were inherent in the general concept of education in the American common school.¹ The Founding Fathers felt that a relationship existed between a culture and the education it provided for its youths. This was traditionally referred to as the American heritage. A part of the traditionally American heritage is the idea that education is the key to preparing people for responsible citizenship.² At a later time, Ewald B. Nyquist concurred with this belief. He felt that the greatest need at all levels of education is to create the kind of pervasive and effective education for a political community that the Founding Fathers knew to be absolutely

¹Lawrence A. Cremin, The American Common School: An Historic Concept (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), pp. vii-viii.

²Stephen M. Corey, foreword of George S. Counts, Education and American Civilization (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952), pp. v-vi.

essential for this nation.³ This kind of education would bring to fruition such cherished ideals as freedom, equality, and justice.

The commitment of the school to provide means for transmitting these ideals to its youth was also a commitment to society, a commitment society has refused to let the school forget. In trying to meet this responsibility, the school curricula have met with controversy. Examination of their development can shed some light on the interrelatedness of their place and role in the education process.

The creation of an effective educational climate and program proved to be a complex matter. The creation was influenced by the fact that modern America is a nation of varied people; varied modes of living; technological and scientific inventions; and a new synthesis of the values inherent in the Hebraic-Christian ethics. All of these forces have not only influenced the American way of life; they have also influenced the development of the curriculum at every point in time.⁴ Thus, it is equally important, Taba stated, "to consider what is known about individuals as persons and their needs for self-development and self-fulfillment, for education must be both vital to national life and essential to individual development."⁵

This point of view imposed a dilemma upon schools and colleges charged with the development of a democratic way of life for the student.

³Ewald B. Nyquist, "The American 'No-Fault' Morality," Phi Delta Kappan 58 (November 1976):275.

⁴George S. Counts, op. cit., pp. 220-222.

⁵Hilda Taba, Curriculum Development, Theory and Practice (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. 194. See also William Van Til, ed., Curriculum Quest for Relevance (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971).

The schools and colleges were committed to provide means for the student to develop civic responsibility, creativity, and economic self-sufficiency, or self-actualization. Taba felt they could be satisfied only if individuals acquired certain knowledge, skills, techniques, and attitudes, inherent in curriculum context.⁶

In spite of the unanimity regarding the function of education, divided opinions persisted about the precise nature of this function. The curriculum consistently had serious attacks from its critics. It was not unusual for these attacks to refer implicitly or explicitly to John Dewey, the great philosopher who synthesized the ideas of Pestalozzi and Froebel with his own concept that children would learn best if they were encouraged to become involved in their own education.⁷ His famous dictum "learning by doing," the basis for his educational creed, caused much controversy. Dewey's proposed individualism in a child-centered school was charged with having created a complex situation for educators whose task it is to develop an educational program in a pluralistic society.⁸ The voice from the political right spoke of the demise of the liberal public education. Simultaneously the voice from the political left, depending on where each critic stood, spoke of the demise of the conservative public education.⁹

⁶Ibid., p. 196.

⁷John Dewey: "The Child and the Curriculum." In Martin Dworkin ed., Dewey on Education (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 35.

⁸R. Freeman Butts, "Once Again the Question for Liberal Public Education: Whose Twilight?" The Fourth George S. Counts Lecture, Presented at Southern Illinois University, January 29, 1976, Phi Delta Kappan (September 1976):5-10.

⁹Ibid., p. 6.

A number of contemporary educators and curriculum theorists appeared to take a distinct point of view of the two extremes. The liberal George S. Counts felt that "to be progressively progressive Progressive Education cannot put its trust in a child-centered school."¹⁰ To the contrary he proposed that education must emancipate itself from the upper middle-class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, and come to grips with life in all its stark reality with the community. His prophetic position and challenge were based on his explicit acceptance of the point of view of the conclusions and recommendations of the American Historical Association Commission on the Social Studies:

Counts stated that

In the years and decades immediately ahead, the American people will be called upon to undertake arduous, hazardous, and crucial tasks of social reconstruction . . . in making decisions concerning the incidence of economic and political power, the distribution of wealth and income, the relation of classes, races, and nationalities, and the ends for which men and women are to live. . . .¹¹

These views of Counts were interpreted by Butts to mean that the American people must choose whether the great tradition of democracy was to pass away with the individualistic economy to which it has been linked historically or was it to undergo the transformation necessary for survival in an age of close economic interdependence.¹²

¹⁰George S. Counts, "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive," Dare the School Build A New Social Order as reported in the Phi Delta Kappan 58 (September 1976):4-5.

¹¹Ibid., p. 6.

¹²R. Freeman Butts, op. cit., p. 5.

On the other hand, the voice of the new conservative as heard through Robert Nisbet projected the political community as representative of "the whole fabric of rights, liberties, participations, and protections" and called for values of social and cultural pluralism through traditional pluralism.¹³

Central to these positions were the diverse views of the radicals, such as Katz, who at times used the metaphor of the conservatives in describing the current view of the public school curriculum as "instruments of capitalist oppression on behalf of the privileged upper classes."¹⁴ Katz advocated that "schools should be stripped of their value teaching and be reduced to the three R's."¹⁵ This was his position on the renewed interest in the pedagogical movement of the "teaching of values" advocated by Lawrence Kohlberg at Harvard.¹⁶

The voices of some reformers of the curriculum proclaimed that career-centered education and learner-centered innovation were not the most pressing educational need. They did not see community-based experiences and non-compulsory attendance policy as significant criteria for reform.¹⁷ The critics advocated a full-scaled reorientation as the

¹³Robert Nisbet, "The Twilight of Authority," Phi Delta Kappan 58 (September 1976):6.

¹⁴R. Freeman Butts, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁵Michael Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 271.

¹⁶Lawrence Kohlberg and Rochell Mayer, "Development As the Aim of Education," Harvard Educational Review 4 (November 1972):449-494. Kohlberg's theory of moral development is based on six stages in which the teacher and the learner are faced with direct moral decisions in open discussions.

¹⁷Robert Nisbet, op. cit., p. 8.

most basic reform to education's civic task.¹⁸ This would constitute a realistic way of strengthening and improving the democratically political community. At the same time it would allow the development of a liberal education and civic morality for its students.¹⁹

There were many current suggestions and questions for maintaining, improving, and expanding the quality of the curriculum at the secondary and higher education levels for the mass of the populations. They were contingent upon the crucial concern that plagued the education theorists of the 1960's regarding the "academically talented" as well as those who were less talented.²⁰ These views generated reactions from many sources. The distinguishing principles set forth, in part, in the recommendations by the National Education Association known as the Educational Policies Commission was that "the nation now raises its sights to make available at least two years of further education, aimed primarily at intellectual growth, for all high school graduates."²¹ This was so, while in the United States Report of the Organization for Economic Corporation and Development, Dr. Conant projected that "the next generation of Americans will experience the first fully developed system of universal higher education."²² Both of these views tried to answer

¹⁸Michael Katz, op. cit., p. 313.

¹⁹Ewald Nyquist, op. cit., p. 278.

²⁰M. M. Chambers, Freedom and Repression in Higher Education (Bloomington: The Bloomcraft Press, 1965), p. 13.

²¹Universal Opportunity for Education Beyond the High School (Washington: Educational Policies Commission, 1964), p. 36.

²²James B. Conant, U. S. Report of the Organization for Economic Corporation and Development. Higher Education and the Demand for Scientific Manpower in the United States (Washington: Educational Policies Commission, 1963), p. 101.

questions of basic concern. If, at the same time, they also implied the perennial question of "the few versus the many," the optimistic answer probably was to be found in the statement of John W. Gardner, "We shall provide improved and expanded higher education for the few and the many."²³ The answer might be found also in Eris F. Goldman's interpretation that "it could be that the American society is headed toward a stage in which the millions will not only produce but have sufficient education and sophistication to preclude an abyss between them and the upper cultivated group."²⁴

These many differing views expressed the freedom and responsibility that accounted for the difference between superiority and mediocrity in all types of education beyond the high school. However, the point on which theorists and critics did agree was that quality education for the masses required considerable changes in the curriculum. This position was not new for educators. Cubberly stated as early as the turn of the twentieth century that

change is the inevitable accompaniments of schools which are the defense and support of a progressive democratic society . . . a deliberate and thorough consciousness of educational past with all its lessons for the present and future will reveal the stable relations that exists between the school organization and social conditions.²⁵

His views coincided with the views of others in the present century that all education contains a large element of inevitable imposition

²³John W. Gardner, "Higher Education for the Masses," The New York Times Book Review, 29 November 1964, p. 10.

²⁴Eris F. Goldman, "Higher Education for the Masses," The New York Times Book Review, 29 November 1964, p. 12.

²⁵Ellwood P. Cubberly, Changing Conceptions of Education (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), p. viii.

requiring change.²⁶ The existence and evolution of school and society depend upon establishing a mutual relationship.²⁷ Acceptance of these views enables citizens and educators to become the decision-makers and shaper of their own lives and futures. Their implications for the literature program and for what this study attempts to reveal have merit in a clarification of the term literature. Considerations leading toward a definition of literature included not only classic schema for distinguishing ways of seeing and teaching literature; they also included a definition in terms of its place and role in the school curriculum. A discussion on the polemics of literature will serve as a means of delineating these two categories.

The Polemics of Literature: Toward a Definition

Classic definitions of literature by eminent writers and critics have emerged with consideration of two major approaches. The first consideration was the mimetic theory of Aristotle and the philosophical theory of Plato; the second consideration was the canon of traditional and modern, or "new" criticism. The essence and function of literature based on these approaches became its basic schema. Philip Sidney based his definition of literature on Aristotle's concept of mimesis. He said "Poesy is an art of imitation." That is to say "a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth" . . . "a speaking picture with this end, to teach and delight."²⁸

²⁶R. Freeman Butts, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁷George S. Counts, Education and the American Civilization, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

²⁸Philip Sidney, The Defense of Poesy, Albert S. Cook, ed., (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1890).

Other writers such as Tolstoy defined literature as art, stating that "art is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings indispensable for the life and progress toward well-being of individuals and of humanity."²⁹ Malraux defined art as "the means by which the raw material of human experience becomes style."³⁰ Contributing to these definitions was Cleanth Brooks' seeing literature as being "ultimately metaphorical and symbolic."³¹

Other writers and critics defined literature in terms of its ameliorating qualities and as schema for modern criticism. As ameliorating quality, it was seen as possessing humanizing values and a bonding effect between different classes in society. It was also seen as containing opportunities for sustaining tradition with the living and as containing elements for effecting the "proper purgation of the emotions."³²

The schema of literature was seen as being in no sense different in reality from the rest of the world. In this context it was seen as being a way to educate in a way no other discipline can by bringing

²⁹Holley Duffield and Manuel Bilsky, Tolstoy and the Critics: Literature and Aesthetics (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), p. 22.

³⁰Albert Murray, The Hero and the Blues (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1973), p. 65.

³¹Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critics," The Kenyan Review, 13 (1951):72-81.

³²F. R. Leavis, English Literature in Our Times and the University (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), Introduction, p. 12.

together intelligence and sensitivity.³³ Crucial to both kinds of definitions were James' discovery of the "stream of conscious technique," Freud's and Jung's concept of "individual consciousness," and Eliot's idea of "objective correlative" and "the vanished mind."

On the other hand the role of literature in education by virtue of its critical standards exacts a critical definition. Through whatever concept, the Authoritarian, the Progressive, the Academic, or the Humanitarian, literature has occupied at all times a fundamental position in the American educative process. Its primary aim envisioned the development within the student of an understanding of the nature and function of the language and literature.³⁴ Currently curriculum theorists place significant emphasis on both the aesthetic and utilitarian values of the literary experience.³⁵ They seek ultimately a transfer of these understandings to the student's life and to the society of which he is a part.

In the context of the classic and esoteric definitions of literature, Hamburger and Miller expressed positive educational considerations for literature. Hamburger attributed to literature sustaining ameliorative qualities. She placed it in the traditional division of literature

³³I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism (London: Kegan Paul, French, Truber, 1935), pp. 17-78. See also Raymond Williams' Culture and Society 1780-1950 (New York: Anchor Books, 1960). Especially interesting is the chapter on "Mass Civilization and Minority Culture."

³⁴Mary E. Fowler, "Literature: Appreciation, Insights, and Values," Teaching Language, Composition and Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), pp. 217-238.

³⁵Mildred A. Dawson et al., Guiding Language Learning 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), pp. 95-96.

as art. Here she saw it as "the process of creative shaping in a logical system in the realm of aesthetics."³⁶ Miller complemented this view and placed the literature program at the center of the curriculum. In this position, he considered it as constituting "a virile literary program." He felt it should embrace a broad range of works including those that rub against the grain of society to books of a great variety of values and vision.³⁷ Thus, making it a "microcosm of genuine democracy to educate for excellence."³⁸

These typical assertions about literature presented a variety of definitions of what literature is and what literature does. They are somewhat controversial and enigmatic. They have met with opposition at various points in time from their critics. Nevertheless, some advocates of literature programs have seen relevance for each in teaching and in interpreting literary genre.

These critical discussions of the educational theorists point up the interrelationship and historical consequences of these issues for the literature curriculum in the education program.

The Traditional Role of Literature in Education

The historical development of the literature curriculum centered around the nature of its content and the method of teaching it to the

³⁶Kate Hamburger, "The Concept and Objectives of Logic and Literature," The Logic of Literature (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 1.

³⁷James E. Miller, Jr., "Literature in the Revitalized Curriculum," Teaching English in Today's High Schools, eds., Dwight L. Burton and John S. Simmons (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), pp. 16-21.

³⁸Ibid.

student. Influences of the grammar schools of England and the American Latin Grammar schools lingered far into the nineteenth century.³⁹ The classical languages and literature of the Harvard curriculum added to the complexity of what content and approach should characterize the literature program.⁴⁰ Most significant has been the impact of the English classics on the instruction of grammar and literature at all times and at all levels of the curricula. In an effort to improve the teaching of English, the National Council of Teachers of English sponsored research which resulted in two major publications of the curriculum commission.⁴¹ Each sought a natural, democratic and just way in which content, approaches, methodology, technique, and evaluation of the "new" English curriculum could be improved.⁴²

One approach was the approved books by English authors as models. This study indicates that the classics did not meet the needs of all students. Thus, there was a strong need for the inclusion of world literature in the school curriculum. The curriculum was further restricted by the unyielding requirements of the college entrance examinations. All of the concerns generated interest in further research and in the detailed content of the two NCTE publications.

³⁹William H. Evans and Jerry L. Walker, New Trends in the Teaching of English in Secondary Schools (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, Educational Series, 1966), p. 2.

⁴⁰Charles C. Fries, et al., The Teaching of Literature (New York: Silver Burdett and Company, 1926), p. 19.

⁴¹An Experience Curriculum in English, A Report of a Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English, W. Wilbur Hatfield, Chairman (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935).

⁴²Conducting Experiences in English, A Report of a Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English, Angela M. Broening, Chairman (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1939).

The four research projects that made a difference in the structuring of the "new" English curriculum were also representative of the nature and scope of the research undertaken. They were

1. The Crow Study which concerned itself with attitudes, feelings, and interests behind literary choice rather than comprehension-demanded value judgment on seventy-five classics was a "means for the realization of social ends."⁴³
2. The Irion Research factors which affected comprehension of literature at the ninth grade level reached the following conclusion: (a) that literary comprehension correlates "to a considerable degree" with intelligence and with reading comprehension; (b) that it is very hazardous to assume that ninth grade students can comprehend the usual literary diet by simply reading.⁴⁴
3. The Hosis study which aimed at an effective effort to reform the English curriculum stressed relating items of knowledge to the experience of adolescents.⁴⁵
4. The Mary Crowell Burch research which reached these conclusions states that
 - a. Much of the present course of study in high schools is suited to the ability of about 25 percent of the members of each class
 - b. Some method must be used to determine the difficulty value for a given group of any piece of literature which is being considered for a place in the course of study
 - c. The relation of the level of difficulty of the selection to the range in the difficulty of

⁴³Charles S. Crow, Evaluation of English Literature in the High School, Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education, No. 141 (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1924), p. 7.

⁴⁴Theodore W. H. Irion, Comprehension Difficulties of Ninth Grade Students in the Study of Literature, Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education, No. 189 (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1925), pp. 71-72.

⁴⁵U. S. Bureau of Education, Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools, Bulletin No. 2, Compiled by James Fleming Hosis (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1917).

satisfying reading is an important factor determining its inclusion in the course if it is to lead to a voluntary choosing of material of the same sort and development of reading interest.⁴⁶

The chief aim of An Experience Curriculum in English was to provide self-directed experiences through the language arts for the student.⁴⁷ The chief aim of Conducting Experiences in English was directed toward aiding the teacher. It provided concrete models of an experienced-centered curriculum for adjusting the English program to the new philosophy of literature.⁴⁸

Each presented to all English teachers the need for change in the curriculum. Each indicated the serious problem and responsibility placed upon the English curriculum theorists in terms of "what" should be taught and "how" it should be taught.

Augmenting these publications was the Basic Aim Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English, which attempted to set several directions in literature selections and instruction.⁴⁹ Three directions agreed upon were that literature should be drawn from all ages to develop a keen sense of permanent social values, that American literature should receive more emphasis than the literature from all other

⁴⁶Mary Crowell Burch, "Determination of a Content of the Course in Literature of a Suitable Difficulty for Junior and Senior High School Students," Genetic Psychology Monographs IV (August-September 1928): 288-289.

⁴⁷An Experience Curriculum in English, W. Wilbur Hatfield, Chairman, Preface, p. ix.

⁴⁸Conducting Experiences in English, Angela Broening, Chairman, pp. vi-vii.

⁴⁹Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Englemann, Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool (Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 59.

nations and that literature from all periods in history and from all nations should be taught.⁵⁰

Louise Rosenblatt, endorsing the "choice of books" view said that a teacher's choice of books must have relevance to the general emotional level of his students and to the possible point of stress in their particular home or community."⁵¹ She made the point that

No matter what the form, poem, novel, drama, biography, essay, literature makes alive and comprehensible to us the myriad ways in which human beings meet the infinite possibilities that life offers . . . and that once the student has overcome the language barrier, a classic can present experiences and ideas highly relevant to the student's own experiences.⁵²

This view and the endorsement of other leaders were significant in giving authoritative direction to reform in the curriculum. Dora V. Smith's position was that "differences in the philosophy of education and the aims of instruction for pupils of differing abilities should be the basis of renewed attack upon the problem of reading."⁵³ In this regard, Lou LaBrant suggested techniques and standards of measuring growth in reading.⁵⁴ The implications were that teachers take a realistic and objective look at the all time honored selections. Further, teachers should select and use the kind of acceptable

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 46.

⁵¹Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1938), pp. 6-7.

⁵²Ibid., p. 7.

⁵³Dora V. Smith, Evaluating Instruction in Secondary School English (Chicago: A Publication of the National Teachers of English, English Monograph No. 11, 1941), p. 58.

⁵⁴Lou LaBrant, An Evaluation of a Free Reading Program in Grades 10, 11, and 12, Ohio State University Studies, Contributions in Education, No. 4 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1939), p. 68.

transition literature mentioned by such leaders as Smith, LaBrant, and Rosenblatt. A major implication was that teachers should teach all literature related to the needs and capacities of adolescents in a way that would bring out its greatest potentials for the students taught. These educators were in accord with educators of former times who related the study of literature to the problems in the world. Kitzhaber shared this view. However, he and other critics challenged the current relevance of the literature program to current student needs. Kitzhaber saw language and literature as interrelated. As such, they should be given special attention. He suggested that language be taught to satisfy the student's curiosity about it and its function. As for the teaching of literature, he suggested that it should provide the means of introducing the student to his cultural heritage. This would be a means of opening before him endless pleasures of seeing the world through the eyes of others.⁵⁵ Friedenberg agreed with Kitzhaber's pragmatic view. He interpreted the role of the literature curriculum in philosophical terms. To achieve this concept it should provide for the student a realistic environment and experiences that incorporate the current world view. The school, in his opinion, fell short of this objective. He acknowledged

The school exists fundamentally to provide the young people of a community . . . with a fairly tough and firmly fixed philosophical apparatus for making a certain kind of sense out of their lives and communicating with other people who may be assumed to have basically similar apparatus.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Albert R. Kitzhaber, "Rethinking: A Prerequisite to Reform," College English XXIV (March 1963):470-472.

⁵⁶Edgar Friedenberg, The Vanishing Adolescent (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), p. 162.

His critical reaction to this aim was that the school lacked the apparatus to achieve its goal. As a solution to the problem he suggested "the development of strategies for survival in the midst of the rapid, unceasing, changes in the microsmic and macrosmic world."⁵⁷

Dwayne Huebner agreed in part both with Friedenbergr and Kitzhaber. His faith in the school and the potential of the curriculum evoked in him a positive view. Agreeing that strategies for survival suggested by Friedenbergr could be developed, he saw no need for the school curriculum-makers to reject the past as they sought means of coping with the present. The major aspect of his suggestion was a synthesis of the past and the present. To him those concerned with structuring the curriculum should "act in the present but create out of the past richness of the past and the potentials of the future."⁵⁸ The results could be two-fold, "the fulfillment and enrichment of the student's personality" and 'a fulfillment of the needs of the 'new' social order."⁵⁹ The Huebner proposal was centered on the problems of youths and broad issues that draw upon the academic disciplines of science, social science, and the humanities. It aimed to help students see the relevance of the intellectual resources of their total culture for their own lives as productive workers, as citizens, and as individuals.⁶⁰ In its totality the proposal was comprehensive. It took into account the relationships among the various fields of inquiry, knowledge, and disciplines.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 164.

⁵⁸Dwayne Huebner, (ed.), A Reassessment of the Curriculum (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), p.v.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

These theorists generated increased interest in refining the literature curriculum to the point of accountability for all its students. In the 1950's and 1960's accountability expressly meant a greater responsibility for the minority student. Specifically, society was still charging the schools to develop competent, well-informed, and articulate citizens within the student body. The resourcefulness and determination of the schools to meet this challenge were reminiscent of the faith expressed by Mann and Counts. These eminent educators never doubted the efficacy of the schools in facing any problem. Mann was confident that the school could pass onto the student the "manners and spirit of a people."⁶¹ Count's faith was evident in a statement made in the early thirties. He said

Through its concrete program of education, a nation must give conscious or unconscious answers to every important question of theory and the practical responses of society, rooted in the folkways and mores of the population.⁶²

The theoretical views about the influence of heredity and environment on a student's ability to learn were factors, consciously or unconsciously, affecting a viable literature curriculum. In seeking a solution to this problem, educators and theorists had to consider cultural barriers and existing literary traditions. Both made the solutions they sought in trying to remove the differences and to produce a single curriculum for the mass of students more difficult.

Nevertheless, they directed their attention to developing a curriculum that included western and non-western literary selections. They

⁶¹As recorded in George S. Counts, The American Road to Culture: A Social Interpretation of Education in the United States (New York: The John Day Company, 1930), p. 5.

⁶²Ibid.

considered teaching methods to ensure learning and meaning for students at all levels of society. Still, educators questioned the matter of excellence in teaching the mass of students.⁶³ The response from English educators was based on an assumption about the nature of English. They stated that "English is not merely a group of skills underlying the rest of the school's curriculum. It has a subject matter of its own."⁶⁴ They felt that teachers and researchers experimenting with new methods should be mindful of this view.

Glatthorn and others perceived problems in pedagogical definitions of teaching techniques. They questioned the validity of some established educational practices.⁶⁵ An example of this criticism was an attack on the position of many English teachers who accepted Jerome S. Bruner's challenge for the "structural approach to teaching."⁶⁶ Bruner's theory was not shared by such educational theorists as James Macdonald. He questioned the progress (or disaster) of curriculum reform of educators who accepted uncritically the structural approach. Especially was he

⁶³Lewis B. Mayhew and Patrick J. Ford, Changing the Curriculum (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1971), p. 2.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 2-4. See also, Robert M. Gagne, ed., Learning and Individual Differences, A Symposium of the Learning Research and Development Center (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1967).

⁶⁵Allan Glatthorn, "Continuing Change is Needed," Controversies in Education, Dwight W. Allen and Jeffrey C. Hecht, eds. (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1974), pp. 103-109. See also Committee of the American Studies Association, the College English Association, the Modern Language Association and the National Council of Teachers of English, The Basic Issues in the Teaching of English, William H. Evans and Jerry L. Walker, eds., (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1966), p. 32.

⁶⁶Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

concerned that this was done apparently without taking into consideration the historical comprehension of the curriculum up to and including the present century.⁶⁷ In support of his views, Macdonald referred to Whitehead's thesis that stated

Our only data as to the physical world are our sensible perceptions. We must not slip into the fallacy of assuming that we are comparing a given world with given perceptions of it. The principal is, in some general sense of the term, a deluded concept. Our problem is, in fact, to fit the world to our perceptions, and not our perceptions to the world.⁶⁸

In this context, Macdonald suggested a solution to the problem of world perception in these terms

The present concern for the discipline, its structure and modes of inquiry resides in the broader and deeper meaning that culture and personal knowledge bring to meaning, and other phenomena of language.⁶⁹

He insisted that gaining knowledge was not quite a simple matter of mastering man's statement about reality. He felt that gaining knowledge was more than a well-organized concept.

Obviously the theoretical views of the studies and research about how students learn remained controversial. Some theorists contended that they offered little or no real solutions to the problems. In this connection they were uncertain also about the results of the literature.

⁶⁷James B. Macdonald, "Language, Meaning, and Motivation," Language and Meaning (Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1966), p. 2.

⁶⁸Alfred North Whitehead, Aims of Education, A Mentor Book (New York: The New American Library, 1949), pp. 157-158.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

curriculum. What the curriculum planners had aimed at was the development of a well-rounded student. They interpreted a well-rounded student as

One who had knowledge and understanding of the nature and characteristics of the English language. One who was able to respond to general fields of knowledge in discriminate and articulate standard English. One who had a breadth and depth of knowledge about man and his behavior through real and vicarious experiences. One who could make intelligent distinctions between the myth and the reality of his life and life around him in the current concept of democracy.⁷⁰

These ideals reflected a concept of a culture but they were, as Macdonald pointed out, unrealistic for many students in the light of existing social conditions and situations. The expectation of teachers to accomplish these goals with all their students was in the estimation of some critics an impossibility.⁷¹

Education of the masses assumed new dimensions in the 1960's. The new direction it took called for a change in curriculum content, especially literature and methods of instruction. The traditional role of the literature program no longer met the needs of all its students. Educators recognized this need and a responsibility for designing a literature program that would provide also for the needs of minority students. The crux of the problem was in achieving this goal without jeopardizing high standards of education.

The significance of these concerns and attitudes about the minority student was the basis for some of the studies and projects discussed

⁷⁰Phillip H. Phenix, "Curriculum and the Analysis of Language," Language and Meaning, James B. Macdonald, ed., op. cit., pp. 27-44.

⁷¹Alfred Kazin, "We See from the Periphery, Not the Center: Reflections on Literature in an Age of Crisis," World Literature Today (Spring 1977), p. 193.

earlier in this study. It seems apparent that The Language and Use Project and the Humanities Project were inseparable in their intent and belief about language learning and the significance of literature. The two projects addressed directly the problems of communication skills and interpretive skills of the minority student. Their approach to the idea of language and of transmitting knowledge was in keeping with the views of Macdonald, Stace, and Wittgenstein as discussed in this study. These projects were concerned as many black educators are about the idea of labeling and extending the language of some minority students as black English. These projects and black educators reject the idea of black English and the exclusion of literary selection pertaining to black culture as academically unsound and undemocratic.

Some additional critics were concerned about the lack of relevancy in the traditional literature curriculum for meeting the needs of the minority student, especially the black student. The classic position of the literature program as an essential force for psychic survival and of moral education is not disputed. However, as such it seems to lack literary selections that meet the personal and cultural needs of all students.

A viable way of incorporating the minority experience into the traditional literature curriculum is through a broader inclusion of literature by black writers. Literature of the black experience such as negritude poetry in particular could serve a number of purposes for the black student and other students as well. As a part of the literature curriculum, it could assure a continuation of interests meaningful to the Blacks, his cultural heritage. The inclusion of negritude poetry allows

the student an opportunity to find wholeness and fulfillment in his own personal being. Some critics feel this is true even if the problem of getting fulfillment is in terms of one's personal struggle to fulfill his own potential. It is also true, even if the fulfillment is through one's struggle to achieve harmony with others. The minority student needs both but in a climate which helps him identify his culture's worth to the whole of civilization.

The Changing Role of Literature in Education

Ambivalent attitudes and conflicting views of theorists and critics about the education of the masses, educators agreed, were accountable, in part, for the changing role of literature in education. They questioned the "old" versus the "new" concept of the literature curriculum. This included the function and method of imparting knowledge to the student. All those concerned with education concurred that research was a valid means for moving toward the more useful questions and answers needed for educational reform.⁷² Critics of the literature curriculum felt that it was caught up between two great cultural syntheses, the "old" and the "new."⁷³ The inevitable adjustment and change the critics advocated did not mean complete abandonment of educational progress made up to the present time. What was being

⁷²Richard W. Burns and Gary D. Brooks, "Research and the Reform Movement," Curriculum Design in a Changing Society (Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1920), p. 226.

⁷³B. Othanel Smith, "Social Perspectives as the Basic Orientation of the Curriculum," Toward Improved Curriculum Theory (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 3.

suggested was to bring the literature curriculum more in line with the exigencies of current society.

This suggestion required consideration of the changing student population and the changing world view. This in turn meant a reevaluation of the classic role literature had played in the school program. It also meant an adjustment of teaching techniques for students with social and academic deficiencies.⁷⁴

In the generally diverse climate of discussion in the late fifties and early sixties about the teaching of literature, there was a transfer of interest from the spiritual to the social areas of the student's experiences. In this regard, the interest of teachers of English and their critics generated a more precise look at fields of knowledge, logic, and ethics in education. Their current search for solutions to their problems of teaching and learning led them in several directions.

These educators and critics reconsidered as a point of departure, the two most recent developments in English and literature--the "new" language teaching and the interdisciplinary approach to literature.⁷⁵ These considerations, in turn, led them to examine five major studies. One was the Cambridge Scholars Report. Its chief concern was to promote the critical study of English literature at the highest level of

⁷⁴Lawrence Kohlberg and Rochelle Mayer, op. cit., pp. 460-461.

⁷⁵Margaret Mathieson, "Changing Views of the 'Good' English Teacher," The Preachers of Culture (Tatowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p. 162.

the educational system.⁷⁶ This view projected a sense of "mission and obligation to all levels of education and society, as well as to the furtherance of knowledge, and 'faith in the savings effects of literature.'"⁷⁷ A second view was The Newbolt Report. Its chief anxieties centered around the linking of English studies with the classics and other disciplines.⁷⁸ On the other hand the basic assumption of another project, the Language in Use Project, was that language should have the central role in the development of the student as a social being.⁷⁹

Out of the first three Reports emerged two schools of thought about education of the masses via the English language and literature curriculum. Both were pertinent to educators and critics concerned with the need for change of the curricula in the school program. One school of thought centered around education for the gifted with exclusive concentration of elite culture in the schools. These reports, especially the Cambridge Scholars Report, made a strong indictment of the modern industrial environment as worsening in cultural quality.⁸⁰ Further they insisted upon the values of great literature to the disparagement of commercial culture.

Reactions to the positions of these reports were expressed by a group known as the "New Left" in education. Unlike the elitest school

⁷⁶Margaret Mathieson, "Socio-Linguistics: English and Social Justice," The Preachers of Culture, op. cit., p. 143.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 140.

⁸⁰Ibid.

of thought, this group argued that the "great literature was not only inappropriate but also inaccessible to the majority of our students whose time has come."⁸¹ This position was in keeping with the third project, the Humanities Project. The reaction of the New Left to its major assumptions about English language teaching was very much like the view of the Language in Use Project. Implicit in the reaction was a concern especially for the minority student's capacity for survival in the present status of society. Research studies reveal considerable bitterness about the persistence of folk-language in the schools. There was anxiety about its power to perpetuate the self-fulfilling prophecy about working-class children's inability to profit from school.⁸²

These progressive ideas advanced the theory that a "changed approach to learning could reform a wide range of attitudes and behavior."⁸³ Recommendations growing out of these ideas reinforced the central commitment of educators to reform instruction and to create an atmosphere for learning for all students. Nevertheless, the search for answers and directions was measured against the criteria of the remote versus the immediate approaches. It implied an understanding logical and ethical principles as a central aim of education.

The views of men like Stace and Wittgenstein provided a resource for possible and legitimate answers. Both men established an ultimate

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²M. A. K. Halliday, A. McIntosh and P. Strevens, The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching (London: Longman, 1964), p. 103.

⁸³Ibid., p. 107.

relationship between the fields of philosophy and psychology and the learning process regarding knowledge and language. What educators found useful in Stace was the essence of his basic philosophy. It developed the critical idea that "each individual thinker must necessarily base his own philosophy in terms of his own individual experiences."⁸⁴ Stace's philosophy advanced two fundamental ideas relevant to this part of this study. He felt that "knowledge actually exists only as a number of psychic experiences in the mind while philosophy, in general abstractions, only exists in the philosophical thought of individual thinkers" and "we can only interpret the experiences of others when they are communicated to us by translating them in terms of our experience."⁸⁵ In essence, Stace interpreted all knowledge as being indirect and derivative.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein offered (to the inquiry of language) basically three major ideas. Using two polemic points of view of philosophy as a base, he stated that "all languages have one and the same logic and epistemology and their limits are those of the world."⁸⁶ "All our actual languages," he stated, "must conform as far as practically possible in order to serve their fundamental purpose of being a medium of knowledge."⁸⁷ In fact, Wittgenstein felt that the life of the mind was simply language. He expressed this in his dictum,

⁸⁴W. T. Stace, The Theory of Knowledge and Existence (Westwood: Greenwood Press Publishing Company, 1970), p. 14.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶G. E. M. Anscomb, An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1959), p. 167.

⁸⁷Alexander Maslow, A Study in Wittgenstein's Tractatus (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. xiv.

"the limit of my language means the limit of my world."⁸⁸ The views of Stace and Wittgenstein respond to inquiries about how language works.

Educators considered these theoretical views not only as reality permeating the historical concept of knowledge and language but also as safeguards in the reassessment of teaching the language arts in the contemporary world.

A representative view of the new approach to learning in America was expressed by Nell Keddie. Her viewpoint on "the sociology of knowledge" corresponds to the American position on "the perspective of cultural relativism." She felt that "the insistence upon literacy is peculiar to education and not to the life of the worlds of the learner . . . in most other contexts of their lives."⁸⁹ In this context, Mathieson interpreted Keddie's concept of societies as

products of completing definitions and claims to cognitive and moral legitimacy rather than integrated around a core of absolute values. As a basis for acceptance or rejection of working class culture, especially the Black American culture.⁹⁰

Lerner's interest in the totality of the student's individual life regardless of his learning capability reflected a philosophy of William James. He saw James' "tough-minded-tender-minded" concept as a means of synthesizing revolutionary changes in society with available resources. He felt that James' "tough-minded" did not imply being tough, rather, it meant seeing the social realities." On the other

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Nell Keddie, "Classroom Knowledge," Knowledge and Control, M. F. D. Young, ed. (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1971), p. 154.

⁹⁰Mathieson, p. 146.

hand, "tender-minded" meant seeing pictures of realities inside one's own head.⁹¹ He suggested that this sense of the "tough-minded" social-reality principle both in the world and within ourselves become an integral part in curriculum building.⁹² Lerner seemed convinced as Conant was that "you cannot teach a student, if he comes from a sub-culture-family, neighborhood, or ethnic community in which the life of the mind is not valued."⁹³ He suggested that the curriculum expose students to the substratum that cuts across the isolated national experiences. He put it this way:

The problem of viability in our world is to break down isolation of the national mind without rejecting the value of the national culture, one in which we not only build the personality into the culture and the culture into the personality but build cultures of various countries into each other and into the minds and personality of the young people of each country.⁹⁴

This rationale and the generally assumed concept that effective ways of teaching and learning can be derived from philosophical and psychological theories of learning, thinking, or both, seemingly provided the answers educators needed and sought to fulfill their role as teacher-learner facilitators. B Othanel Smith suggested that an understanding of the diverse phenomena surrounding these types of theories, the teaching conditions, and the ideas and principles involved are the

⁹¹Max Lerner, "Society and the Curriculum," A Reassessment of the Curriculum, Dwayne Huebner, ed. (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), p. 69.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 79.

keys needed for educators to move from the theory to practical application.⁹⁵ Yet it was the philosophical attempt to explain the perception of the world of reality and the world of appearance that caused educators to turn their attention away from "the idea of knowledge as being representative and reproductive to their seeing it as itself-productive and creative."⁹⁶

What appeared on the surface to be a scientific solution to the problem of "mass education" was in actuality the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Efforts to explore the nature of the conceptual systems as a means of ordering experiences in teaching the skills of the English language for students had similar implications for effecting an improved and up-to-date content of the literature curriculum. The literary theorists and practitioners attempted to meet the changing needs and interests of the students as they affected the literature program. For the most part, this required a reassessment of the classic masterpieces in relation to contemporary literary works. In spite of the New Left Report about the "inappropriateness" and "inaccessibility" of great literature for our minority students, many English teachers were reluctant to give up the inclusion of the "classic" or "masterpieces" without serious deliberations. They felt, as Fairlie, that the classics represented the greatest prose and poetry of our civilization.⁹⁷ They

⁹⁵B. Othanel Smith and O. Meux, A Study of the Logic of Teaching (Chicago: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1970), p. 1.

⁹⁶S. Morris Engel, Wittgenstein's Doctrine of the Tyranny of Language (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1971), p. 139.

⁹⁷Henry Fairlie, "Classics In Literature Elude Today's Young Readers," The Washington Post-Outlook (Sunday, July 31, 1977), Page 2, Section 8.

saw the classics as providing "stability and certainty," a sense of connection with another world and another time.⁹⁸ As literature of the humanistic tradition, it was considered as a conscious transmission of a culture from generation to generation in the tradition of "eternal truths."⁹⁹

On the other hand, a group of educators considered the changing role of literature from a broader perspective of global society. In estimating the educational needs of the future, they listed five major trends that most likely would affect changes in the school curriculum. They were identified as automation, urbanization and its concomitants, communication, breakthroughs in biology, and breakdowns in religion and ethical and moral concepts.¹⁰⁰ The pertinence and significance of these trends to this study were the interrelatedness of two societal issues emerging from these trends and the clear call for change in the literature curriculum. The two issues were The Search for Human Identity and International Understanding.¹⁰¹ Behind these considerations were the convictions that "the schools and colleges had a

⁹⁸Max Bogart, "Literature and the Humanistic Ideal," Educational Leadership, (January 1963):230-233.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Clifford F. S. Bebell, "Implications for Education of Prospective Changes in Society," Emerging Designs for Education, No. 2, Edgar L. Morphet and Charles O. Ryan, eds. (New York: Citation Press, 1968), p. 4. See also "Prospective Changes in Society by 1980," Emerging Designs for Education, No. 1, Edgar L. Morphet and Charles O. Ryan, eds. (New York: Citation Press, 1968).

¹⁰¹Ibid. See also, "Preparing Educators to Meet Emerging Needs," Emerging Designs for Education, No. 7, Edgar L. Morphet and David L. Jesser, eds., (New York: Citation Press, 1968).

challenge to aid everyone in self-understanding and improvement of the human condition," and "the 'new' man must have a morality to match his mentality."¹⁰² Unlike educators who advocated a continuation of the classics as representative of "eternal truths"; these educators called for literature that set reflected collective social goals. In contrast to factual or neutral content they felt that social and moral content also provided desirable literary experiences.¹⁰³ All this meant, according to the critics, that a new kind of content should dominate the literature curriculum in the transition period. It should be a content involving the character of the learner. It should touch the very core of his personal structure and should arouse his deepest feelings and sentiments.¹⁰⁴ These educators were not denying the stress of factual content. They felt it would be used to strengthen the moral ideas.

The moral and ethical concern of educators for the literature curriculum gave impetus to the study of world culture on a broader yet more specific plane. Two advocates of the inter-cultural approach to literature that have direct consequence for this study were John C. Barnes and Robert J. Clements. Barnes' views dealt with the interdisciplinary approach to content. He felt that tradition and unrealistic departmentalized learning had formed abstract barriers at all levels of

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³R. Bruce Raup, et. al. Improvement of Practical Intelligence (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) quoted in B. Othanel Smith, Toward Improved Curriculum Theory, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

learning.¹⁰⁵ He suggested coordinating the curriculum to relate one subject with another, one culture with another. This approach made possible a coming together, as Barnes stated, "of the cultures of the Middle East, African literature, Latin American culture and world history that reach beyond artificial lines."¹⁰⁶ In reaction to current concepts of theory and content, Barnes pointed out, of the first concern, that "there is now more concern with concepts rather than the memorization of facts." Of the second, "there is more concern about man's relationship to his fellow man and to his universe."¹⁰⁷ He spoke directly to the inclusion of world literature in the literature curriculum to achieve these purposes. In the context of developing interest in world literature and cultural exchange, Barnes expressed a positive view about African literature. He stated,

Although African literature in English is more difficult to find, I strongly recommend the same approach (as just stated) in teaching the cultures of Africa . . . in our school systems, including colleges and universities, throughout the United States.¹⁰⁸

Clements also recognized world literature in general should play a meaningful role in the literature program. Like Barnes, he was also enthusiastic about the place and role of African literature (about which this study is chiefly concerned) in the school program. He pronounced the imminence of world literature as "a well-defined

¹⁰⁵James C. Barnes, "A Novel Approach to Cultural Learning," Inter Culture News 1 (September 1975):1.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 5.

carefully constructed discipline."¹⁰⁹ He was optimistic in predicting that "this discipline consistently defined and ethically presented, will before long become part of the school curricula."¹¹⁰ His view like that of René Wellek's expressed diversity of cultural enrichment for the students and teachers. Both saw the litterature universelle's becoming at last an academic reality as a legitimate aspiration. The importance of all these views for the literature planners was that they underscored the mounting interest of educators and critics of the English program for world literature as a legitimate discipline for study. It envisioned a study of literature from the maximum geographical areas where major authors are located.

As a means of bringing to the student the diversity of cultural enrichment which he and Wellek believed world literature possessed, Clements also advocated the interdisciplinary approach. This would make possible points of contact and assimilation by the use of theme, form, and movement.¹¹¹ In this way the literature of differing cultures could be studied in a comparative approach. Thus, instead of amalgamation, the diversity and individuality of black literature could be maintained. Of course, this would include the mystic, generic, and other homogeneities inexplicably present and peculiar to black literature.

Perhaps the greatest problem concerning the inclusion of Afro-American and African literature in the literature curriculum is

¹⁰⁹Robert J. Clements, "World Literature Tomorrow," World Literature Today, (Spring 1977):181.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

related to its merit and language. Critics and educators based their response to the question of merit on evidence of its literary and cultural values. Robert Clements recognized the literary contribution African literature can make to world literature. He disagreed with the critics who said "Les litteratures Africaines et polynesiennes occuperont d'autres chercheurs."¹¹² His response to the legitimacy and merit of African literature was based on the premise about world literature: "l'histoire universelle de la litterature n'est pas l'histoire de la litterature universelle."¹¹³ He was forthright in pointing out the distinct qualities of African literature. He wrote

Black African literature is of course the most visibly lacking component in the plans for World Literature. However, its major oral tradition of myths, poetry and folktales, with its novels, derivative in form but local in character, could play a useful role in world literature classes. Any course on myths or oral literature could hardly exclude Africa. In the area of oral poetry Africa contributes odes of praise, oracles, incantations, dialogue, folktales, bestiaries and of course political polemics.¹¹⁴

Not only did Clements exhalt the role that African literature can play in the literature curriculum, but he also acknowledged African literature worthy for theses written for the degrees in world literature.¹¹⁵

In addition, the question raised by critics and educators that African literature would pose a major language problem proved to be of

¹¹²Ibid., p. 182.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

little difficulty. Perhaps the more than four hundred different tribal languages spoken in Africa were the primal cause for concern. Writers close to African and Afro-American literature and to the negritude movement in particular explained that for the time being French and English would be the unifying means of communication. Two American poets concurred. Langston Hughes said that although the themes and concerns of the African poets were based on the African heritage, the literature was written in French and English. Samuel Allen in defining the negritude movement as "representative Negro-African poetic endeavors for his race, a normal self-pride," pointed out that the leaders, poets included, with their European schooling and syncretic tendencies do not use the Black native language; they used French and English.¹¹⁶ Marie Collins explained in her anthology Black Poets in French that French and English are the chief languages of communication.¹¹⁷ Further one of the chief literary magazines, Présence Africaine is printed in French and English.

The inevitable problem that the literature curriculum makers faced in their attempt to include a wider range of ethnic literature in the syllabus was intensified by a lack of texts and source materials. As a solution to this problem Fritz Stritch, an eminently recognized critic and scholar of world literature, pointed out that many of the books

¹¹⁶Samuel W. Allen, "The Black Poet's Search for Identity," quoted in Jacob Drachler, ed., African Heritage (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1964), pp. 189-190.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

recommended for translation and printing from Asia, Africa, and the uncommitted nations had received international recognition based on their enduring values.

As texts and materials pertinent to this study Stritch recommended these sources: UNESCO's Registry of translations in its Index Translationum, England's Booksellers, Books in Print, Books Abroad, Texts in World Literature and available translations of these texts where the French language applies.¹¹⁸

Summary

The major concerns of this dissertation as developed in Chapter II dealt with the early historical characteristics of the school curriculum. In this context, the traditional and changing place and role of literature in the school program was illuminated. Investigative research, reports, and projects identified the strengths and weaknesses of the literature program. All of them projected in specific ways the need for change in the content and in the technique for teaching today's youth. From these findings three distinct categories were representative of the forces that affected modification in the current literature curriculum. Each with its separate concerns constituted desirable educational practices in the subject matter area. The first category was the changes that have occurred in the student population. The second category was the changes that have occurred in the world view. The third category was the perennial goal and objective of English educators and theorists to provide the literature suitable for effective education of

¹¹⁸Clements, p. 182.

the student. All of the findings and discussions challenged or defended the traditional literature curriculum's use of classic masterpieces. All raised questions about the envisioned wider inclusion of world literature. All reacted to the pedagogy of meeting the needs of students from diverse social and economic backgrounds. There was the realization that, if literature as a subject matter field was to contribute to general education, it must teach all students its distinct and broad body of knowledge. It must do this, if it were to live up to its challenge with other fields of knowledge.

In conjunction with exploration of fields of knowledge, the philosophy and psychology of teaching and learning, English educators and theorists were aware of practical and scientific approaches for consideration. It was revealed that the problem of mass education seemed to defy any one or even combination of several ways of transmitting knowledge. The answer to questions was not to be found in a simple solution such as a changed curriculum of content and teaching strategies alone. In spite of responses to the challenge via traditionally educational experiences and/or suggested ideas for change, no unchallenged solution was affected. However, a factor of special interest to this study was the substantial interest in world literature in the changing place and role of literature in the educative process. This special concern revealed directly that Afro-American and African literature has a role to fulfill, if the needs of all students are to be met. It encompasses Count's belief that "education must emancipate

itself from the upper middle-class, face squarely and courageously every social issue, and come to grips with life in all its stark reality with the community.¹¹⁹

Chapter III deals with the progressive views of educators and critics on Afro-American and African literature, specifically negritude poetry and its relevance for the school curriculum. For the sake of authenticity and specificity the basic parameters of Chapter III are the historical orientation of the term negritude, examination of the poetry written by Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire from 1930 to 1948, and the reactions of credible American, European and African writers and critics to negritude and to literature in general to 1966.

¹¹⁹George S. Counts, "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive," op. cit., p. 4-5.

CHAPTER III

NEGRIUDE POETRY

The Poetic Characteristics of Negritude

It is important to know that the concept of negritude literature is not without merit. Writers and critics of Black awareness literature of the 1930's in America and of African literature of the 1940's generally accepted it as a critical standard.¹ As a subject it is controversial in that its need and function are considered by some to be imprecise. As an historical fact, negritude is both a protest and a positive assertion of Afro-American and African weltanschauung. As a literary movement, negritude is the fusion of the whole of civilized values with a surreal way of looking at the world of the black man. As with literature of any culture, negritude literature reflects the culture of society and events that give substance, shape, and understanding of the society it represents. Without question, then, understanding the societal forces of that society is vital to appreciating that society's literature. One of Senghor's definitions of negritude is "the sum of the cultural values of the black world as they are expressed in the life,

¹Gilbert Ilbondo, "Modern Literature in French-speaking Africa," trans. Madeline Hurel and Henri Evans, Ibadan, No. 19 (June 1964):30.

the institutions, and the works of Negroes."² The themes, a unified concept of Negro-African culture, reveal negritude as a coherent system of values and a distinctive mode of expression. Hudgkin said this is Senghor's "philosophy of life forces seen through an existential ontology."³ All elements accounted for the qualities of rhythm, imagery, symbolism, and language in the poetry that give it its distinct uniqueness.

The nexus of negritude as it related to the four poets of this study is best considered through two specific forces. One force was the influence and contribution of the Negro Renaissance movement in America of the 1920's and 1930's. It created an atmosphere and consciousness of "solidarity of the Black world and its universalizing living values." The other force of equal importance was "the mind of the assimilated African writer in the French-speaking territories."⁴ It was the impetus for the literary and political awakening for these African writers.

The general elements of negritude are more distinctly defined in the poetry of Langston Hughes in America; Leon Damas of Guadeloupe, French West Indies; Leopold Senghor of Senegal, West Africa; and Aimé Césaire of Martinique, French West Indies. These four poets were the

²O. R. Dathrone, "Negritude As Tract," The Black Mind: A History of African Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p. 308.

³Thomas L. Hudgkin, "The African Renaissance," African Heritage, Jacob Drachler, ed., (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1964), p. 279.

⁴Clive Wake, "The Political and Cultural Revolution," Protest and Conflict in African Literature, Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Monro, eds., (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1969), p. 44.

apostles and guardians of the concept of negritude. They sought the formulation of pride in blackness based on a sense of a shared cultural inheritance. Edward Jones pointed out that it was the African poets in Paris in 1934 who used the term phrased by Césaire as "a turning point in their way of thinking about their blackness, des Nègre, 'things black,' their negritude."⁵ These French African poets acknowledged their indebtedness to black American poets of the 1920's. Thereupon they renounced the indifferent French ambience and brought into being the concept of negritude for black French-speaking Africans and West Indian writers. They chose Senghor as their leader.

These perspectives were the bases for the many and varied definitions of negritude. Senghor is credited with giving it the best one: "le patrimoine culturel, les valeurs et surtout l'èspit de la civilisation Negro-Africaine" ("the cultural patrimony, the values, and especially the spirit of black-African civilization").⁶ At another time he defined it as "l'ensemble des values et des civilisations noires" ("the sum total of black values and civilizations").⁷ Nonetheless, it was the Manifesto of Langston Hughes in the 1920's that became the rallying cry and set the tone for all the definitions of negritude. It reads:

We young Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If

⁵Edward A. Jones, Voices of Negritude (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: The Judson Press, 1971), pp. 13-18.

⁶Jacques Louis Hymans, "The Debt to Africanist Scholars," Leopold Sédar Senghor, An Intellectual Biography (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1971), pp. 13-18.

⁷Ibid.

the white folk seem pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. Ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know them, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.⁸

The ambivalent attitude in the Manifesto revealed an act of emancipation from the Anglo-American poetic tradition. The salient importance of Hughes was his insistence on relating the written poetry of the black American to the inexhaustible riches of his own verbal creations in blues, worksong, jazz-lyric, spiritual, sermon, and everyday speech. Two aspects of the manifesto tell a great deal about Langston Hughes, the man and poet. The phrase "free within ourselves" is expressive of his unequivocally independent nature, a strong belief in himself and in his work; it was not arrogance as some critics some times assessed it to be. It was a confident presence of a creative egotism.⁹ Both the Manifesto and Hughes himself engendered definitions in the literary elements. The literary concept of the term combined technically linguistic expertise, poetic sensitivity and social commentary to reflect universal subjects, themes, and brotherhood.

Each of the poets of this paper accepted this basic literary concept. Each expressed his negritude and his reactions to it in accordance with his personal experiences and in terms of his philosophy

⁸Therman B. O'Daniel, Langston Hughes: Black Genius A Critical Evaluation (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 19.

⁹Gerald Moore, "Poetry in the Harlem Renaissance," The Black American Writer: Poetry and Drama, vol. 2, C. W. E. Bigsby, ed. (DeLand, Florida: E. O. Painter Company, 1969), pp. 73-74.

of human relations. Each poet will be discussed separately in the context of his definition of negritude as he saw it. Jones referred to negritude as

The totality of the black experience, including the poverty, suffering, humiliation, and injustice which have gone into it.¹⁰

All of the definitions combine to form the basis for revealing the scope and significance of the poetic expression of negritude of the 1920's-1940's. They serve also as a basis for developing an understanding and appreciation for its literary creativity.

The Merits of Negritude Poetry for the Curriculum

Langston Hughes

Many epithets have been given to describe Langston Hughes the man and the poet. Mphahlele, the notable south African poet, described Hughes as "a man with a boundless zest for life" and "an irrepressible sense of humor."¹¹ He felt that to meet Hughes was to come face to face with the essence of human goodness. Later, when Hughes was sixty-five, Meltzer saw him as of "no particular age."

He was simply himself, the kind of man who must have been there always for all of us who needs someone like him. He would last, if anything in life would. It was a quiet durability he had, like some element deep in the earth that powerful pressures had not fractured or scarred, but had made into a glowing diamond.¹²

¹⁰Jones, Voices of Negritude, op. cit., p. 117.

¹¹Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Langston Hughes," Introduction to African Literature, ed. Ulli Beier (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967), pp. 69-75.

¹²Milton Meltzer, Langston Hughes: A Biography (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), p. xiii.

Examination of Hughes's literary career from 1921 to and after his death in 1967 revealed him as a versatile and creative American writer (and traveler) of the twentieth century. It is his mastery of a multiplicity of forms, poetry, short story, novel, history, play, song, musical comedy, opera, translation (works in Spanish and French) and correspondent in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, that accounts for his versatility.¹³ This chapter is concerned with all the poets. For it is poetry more so than any of the more extended literary forms that became for Blacks in America and Black French-speaking intellectuals in Africa a powerfully emotional and aesthetic outlet.

Of himself Hughes said, "I am a Negro: / Black as the night is black, / Black like the depths of my Africa.." Of his art he said, "Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pull."¹⁴ Though he was speaking of himself he was also speaking of every Negro's "soul world." Both expressions grew out of the many and varied experiences of his life in America and travels outside of it. His poetry illuminates views of love and distrust.

Both the man and his art are inseparable; aspects of Hughes' personal life account for the attitude and style expressed in his verse. Hughes believed that good writing comes out of your own life. He said

You start at home, with what you know best--your own family,
your neighborhood, your city. You have to learn to be

¹³0. Daniel, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

¹⁴Langston Hughes, The Big Sea: An Autobiography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), p. 335.

yourself, natural and undeceived as to who you are, calmly and surely you.¹⁵

All of Hughes's life the fact of his Negroess aroused a desire in him to challenge those from the other side of the color line who rejected it. As a consequence, his poetry deals very closely with the Negro situation, oppression, rejection, rootlessness. Even so his style was not pessimistic. It was expressive of a muted voice of protest. It was casual with a sense of fun in a lighthearted vein, skimming the surface of things, presenting the externals of a situation to suggest the inner meaning to the reader, never posing as a thinker. Yet, Hughes was very much aware of the deep totality of the situation. Whatever the element of the theme or the style, O'Daniel pointed out that there was always the abundant and reinforced sense of satire.¹⁶

The poetry of Hughes asserted two things of particular literary significance. One was the new direction of Negro poetry in America as stated in the "Manifesto." The other was the purpose of his poetry. It was to interpret and comment on Negro life and its relations to the problem of democracy. He recounts this relationship with his people in these terms:

Usually poets have their fingers on the emotional pulse of their people, of their homeland. Traditionally, poets are lyric historians. From the days of the bards and the troubadours, the songs of the poets were not only songs,

¹⁵Langston Hughes, I Wonder As I Wander: An Autobiography (New York: Rhinehart, 1956), p. 78.

¹⁶O'Daniel, op. cit., p. 15.

but often records of the most moving events, the deepest thoughts and the most profound emotional currents of their times.¹⁷

In spite of the literary artistry of Langston Hughes there remains a dearth of literary criticism of him in major literary compilations. It is a discredit to literary history. Emanuel recounted that the exclusion of Hughes's stories from college anthologies and from the thorough attention of scholars is as indefensible as the exclusion of his poems.¹⁸ However, his world-wide praise and fame are reflected in the reception of his audience, in his influence on other writers at home and abroad, and in his own conviction that, as a poet of the people, his work would endure. A cursory view of major events in his life will reveal the roots of racial awareness that shape the style and constitute the content of his poetry. His experiences developed within an understanding of the universality of human problems and racial militancy.

Langston Hughes was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri. He spent a frustrating and nomadic existence living in first one place, then another, in Buffalo, Cleveland, Lawrence, Kansas City, and Topeka, Kansas, Mexico City and Toluca, Mexico, Colorado Springs and Lincoln, Illinois.¹⁹ Many accounts of his life report that out of these situations and experiences came an amusing essay. It is expressive of Hughes's humor and lighthearted attitude that characterized his poetry.

¹⁷James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 68.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 170-171.

¹⁹Charlemae H. Rollins, Black Troubadour: Langston Hughes (New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1970), pp. 17-20.

He recorded it himself in The Big Sea, an autobiography of his life. It is entitled "Ten Thousand Beds." He said,

Often I hear a person say, "I can't sleep in a strange bed." Such a person I regard with wonder and amazement slightly tinged with envy. . . . At a most conservative estimate, I figure I have slept in ten thousand beds.

As a child I was often boarded out, sent to stay with relatives, foster-relatives or friends of the family. And my family itself was always moving--so quite early in life I got used to a variety of beds from the deep feather beds of the country to the studio couches of the town, from camp cots to my uncle's barber chair in Kansas City. If strange beds had been given to upsetting me, I would have lost many a good night's sleep in my life.²⁰

His family, his education, his travels, and his contact with many people filled his life with adventure, diversity and honors. All constitute his poetry.

His Family

His lineage is characterized by militancy, distinction, and pride. He traced his roots to England, to Kentucky, to Ohio, to North Carolina and to Kansas. From his father, James Nathaniel Hughes and his mother, Carrie Mercer Langston, come a richly mixed set of ancestors for Langston Hughes.

Hughes liked to talk about his great uncle John Mercer Langston, one of the most distinguished Negroes of the Reconstruction period. He was a member of the United States Congress, the first president of Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia, and one of the founders of Howard University in Washington, D. C. He described his great-uncle

²⁰Daniel, op. cit., p. 5.

as owning and riding to Congress in a sleek black rubber-tired carriage drawn by two snow-white, high-stepping horses with a coachman in livery sitting on the box.²¹ Hughes recounted equally as graphically the influence of the immediate members of his family on his life and literary career.

Hughes wrote in The Big Sea of his father as "small, tough with tremendous energy." He saw him in other ways as being "different from anybody I had ever known." "He was interested only in making money, interested in making money to keep."²² It was difficult for a Negro to make money in the United States and because he was denied the opportunity to take the bar examination Hughes's father left the family while Langston was still a baby. He moved to Cuba then to Mexico where he practiced law. His experiences embittered him toward people, his family (because they remained in the United States and not with him) and, perhaps, himself. Hughes came to dislike him for these and other reasons. Yet, it was while he was with his father that three seemingly uneventful things happened to him that would shape the rest of his life and career. Hughes often said that he wrote best when he was lonely or unhappy. It was in this state of mind while thinking of his father's hatred of Negroes and his hatred of his father that Hughes composed his first major poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." During his summer visits Hughes spent a great deal of time learning Spanish from his father and friends and German from his father's housekeeper

²¹Rollins, op. cit., p. 89.

²²Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, op. cit., p. 54.

and wife. His knowledge of both languages enabled him to read the Spanish masterpieces and later to translate them into English. A third event that was most meaningful to Hughes at the time was the decision of his father to send him to Columbia University rather than to Switzerland. It was the last event that made it possible for Hughes to realize his dream "to see Harlem."²³

Life with his mother was less colorful than with his father. Nevertheless, it helped to shape his personality and his love for books, music, and the theater. It also taught him racial pride and a regard for people. His mother moved frequently in search of a better job. Thus living with her was unsettling but not without great value for him. Unlike his father, his mother shared her time with him. She taught him the value of survival. She demonstrated the strength of character. He recalled her insisting that he attend the segregated Harrison Street school nearer him than the one to which he was assigned blocks away. He said of his mother, "she was always ready to do battle for the rights of a free people."²⁴ From this school experience, he learned not to hate people. He wrote that most people are generally good in every race and in every country.²⁵ His mother shared her love of literature and the theater with him. She took him to plays and concerts. In books (many of which he and his mother read together) Hughes "found the happy solutions" that he did not always find in real life.

²³Ibid., p. 62.

²⁴Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵Ibid.

Hughes lived with his grandmother when he was not living with his mother. Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston was a free-issue from North Carolina. Several things about her impressed Hughes: She was "a proud woman who would never beg or borrow anything from anybody;" she read the Bible and The Crisis magazine to him; and she told him stories in which "life moved heroically toward an end." The significant things about the stories were that "nobody cried." The characters worked, schemed, or fought, but no crying." The stories taught him the uselessness of crying about anything. Living with the Reeds after his grandmother's death taught him to love both Christians and non-Christians equally well.²⁶

His Education

Education was important to the Langstons and the Hughes. Hughes's maternal grandmother graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio. His mother attended the University of Kansas. His father was a lawyer and his maternal uncle was dean of the law school at Howard University. Hughes's education beginning at Harrison Street School in Cleveland and ending at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania was documented by various experiences. All of them helped to shape his feelings about life, people, and his literary career. His year at Columbia University and the years at Lincoln University for men of color were years of racial awakening and fermentation. He writes in The Big Sea that during his senior year at Lincoln several experiences had phenomenal effect on his writing career. Through a school survey he conducted on the peculiar color line of Lincoln, he attacked the policy of hiring no black

²⁶Ibid., p. 17.

faculty. Another was his meeting with his benefactors, Joel and Amy Spingarn, and with Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason who became his patron. They launched his literary career.²⁷

Hughes stated:

Until I went to Lincoln, I had always worked at other things mostly menial . Those things were ended now. I would have to make my own living again--so I determined to make it writing. I did. Shortly poetry became bread. Prose shelter and raiment. Words turned into songs, plays, scenarios, articles, and stories. Literature is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my nets and pulled. I am still pulling.²⁸

The totality of Hughes's life, his family, his travels to such places as Cuba, Haiti, China, Japan, Russia, and Africa, his interracial world of intellectuals, and artists created within him a broad social concern not devoted solely to American Negroes. He developed a cosmopolitan view about social problems. He said,

My interests had broadened from Harlem and the American Negro to include an interest in all colored people of the world, in fact, in all the people of the world as I related to them and they to me.²⁹

His middle-class family heritage distinguished him from the lower-class Negro. The family militancy, pride, independence, and life style developed within him an ambivalent attitude toward the middle-class and the lower class Negro. Hughes's interest gravitated toward the Negro lower class. He became the spokesman for the mass of working people. He described their joys and their sorrows and their hopes and their

²⁷Ibid., pp. 217-218. Lincoln University was founded in 1854 by a white Presbyterian minister for "men of color."

²⁸Ibid., p. 173.

²⁹Emanuel, op. cit., p. 127.

disappointments. He described these people, up today down tomorrow, as determined and not to be wholly beaten as they reached for "the brass ring" of life. He wrote about them, not in a tone of bitterness, but in a most exuberant sense of humor and mild satire. Emanuel said his poetry "indicates the major stylistic and thematic emphases of racial vehemence and romantic lyricism."³⁰

The works of several writers, DuBois's passionate prose, Dunbar's poetic tone and rhythm, the lyricism of Amy Lowell and the unrhymed style of Whitman, Vachel Lindsay, Sandburg, and Edgar Lee Masters, influenced Hughes as he wrote about and in the Negro-folk tradition. All of these experiences, personal and literary, helped to shape the structure and develop the essence of his poetry. They served as a literary context for evaluating his poetry in the total structure of literature.

His Poetry

Three hundred years in the deepest South
 But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.
 God put a dream like steel in my soul

"The Negro Mother"

Langston Hughes's literary career began in 1921 with the publication of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in The Crisis, the official NAACP's journal. His poetry bears out two things in particular: the advice of Mary McLeod Bethune that people need poetry, and the comment of Margaret Larkin that "Hughes is doing for the Negro race what Burns did for the Scotch, squeezing out the beauty and rich warmth of a noble people into

³⁰Ibid., p. 39.

enduring poetry."³¹ His poetry is a testament of his varied personal experiences and his exploration of the Negro condition and the Negro soul. It is also a reflection of a historic period of time and the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. Many salient descriptions pinpoint the literary consequences of the Harlem that became the mecca for the Negro and the Harlem that Hughes knew. Some of these descriptions were the voices of men who experienced the literary and social Harlem.

The Harlem Renaissance was a historical and cultural phenomenon. Many forces created the atmosphere in which it developed. The most significant force was the urbanization of the American society. It affected changes in assumptions and habits of life that transformed both black and white Americans into new people. Beneath the symbols were the facts about the urbanization of the Negro.³² The "New Negro" was the result of World War I and the Negro-migration from the South. The migrated-Negro became urban while the "Old Negro" remained rural in the deep south. The historical fact is that both urban and rural Negroes were

³¹Margaret Larkin, "A Poet of the People: A Review," Opportunity V (March 1927):84-85. Note: The Harlem Renaissance is merely a convenient fictional term. There is no actual year or decade forming a line of demarcation between the old and the new. The qualities of life that characterized the new Negro of the 1920's can be found at earlier times and the characteristics of the old Negro persisted long after World War I. The Harlem intellectuals and writers in the 1920's and 1930's were not the precursors of the concept of self-respect and "black is beautiful" expressed in black life and literature. However, a dramatic change for the black man did occur and Harlem was the focal point at that moment in time.

³²Nathan Irvin Huggins, Voices From The Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 5-6. See also Alain Locke, The New Negro (New York: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 3-16 and Gilbert Osofsky, Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto Negro, New York, 1890-1930 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963).

exploited. The difference was partially a matter of kind. In the north it was the illusion of independence; in the south it was the reality of dependence. The conscious reality in place and time was social, economic, and political repression. It generated, especially in Harlem, a sense of black awareness and black solidarity. These consequences fermented into the symbolic Harlem Renaissance. It found form in the concept of the "New Negro" which defined for him new terms, new leadership and new motivations. The intellectuals and writers voiced the factual moment through the concreteness of literature, music, and art. Their work dealt with the deep emotional forces that it expressed for those who saw them as an important moment in time in their past. These forces demanded a personal recounting of events and experiences in a collective literary sense.

Harlem as fact and symbol influenced the poetry of Hughes in many ways. It dealt specifically with controversial moral, social, and political issues. Both affected the quality and range of his literary philosophy and compositions. Hughes expressed the facts, symbols, and the varying and shifting faces of Harlem through his own voice and the voice of millions of blacks throughout the world, in America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. As a spokesman he said,

I speak in the name of the black millions.
 Let all others keep silent a moment.
 I have this word to bring,
 This thing to say
 This song to sing³³

³³Langston Hughes, "Brown America in Jail: Kilby," Opportunity 10 (June 1932):174.

His poetry dealt with the realistic life of the lower class Negro. It rejected the middle class traditional Negro life qualified by the white culture. Popular images of Harlem during the twenties reflected very distinct points of view. To the upperclass Black, Harlem represented a distinguished community of the elite who resided in gracious brownstones that had doormen and elevator service and neighborhoods with broad streets. The working class lived in apartments that were decent and more tolerable than the crowded tenements and narrow streets of the older Black district, called the Tenderloin. Then there was the image of the white thrill seekers of the Jazz Age. They saw Harlem as the world of exotic primitives, cabarets, buffet flats, rent parties, bootleg liquor, prostitutes, and jazz, a never-ending whirl of laughter and good times.³⁴

Hughes defined the essence of realistic life poetically in terms of black cultural heritage and African roots. He felt that the true beauty and strength of the black race could be found between the patronizing attitude of the Middle class American Negro and the hypocrisy of the white society. He affirmed his faith in Negro values and art in his essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain":

These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. And when the artist chooses to touch

³⁴James F. Smith, Jr., "Primitives and Saviors: Cultural Images of Blacks in the 1920's," Minority Voices: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Arts, vol. I, No. 1 (Spring 1977), p. 54.

on the relations between Negroes and whites in this country with their innumerable overtones and undertones, surely, for literature . . . he can give to it his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor.³⁵

The artistic literary technique of Hughes's poetry is expressed through varying themes, imagery, symbols, rhythm, diction, and language which constituted his style. These elements provided a medium for expressing the racial spirit from within rather than from without in a wide range of subjects and scope of treatments.

Hughes's themes based on the Negro conditions in America dealt with the search for identity, the distinctive self in history or African culture, the celebration of the beauty of black people, and the folk content of black men and women. The Negro's search for his identity alternated between his feeling of alienation (prejudice) in America and the dimension of his ancestral heritage. Hughes expressed this dilemma in a variety of poetic elements. One of these was a deep voice of hope and aspiration for acceptance in American society. In "I, Too, Sing America" in The Weary Blues collection, Hughes wrote,

I, too sing America.
I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes.
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I'll sit at the table. . . .
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed.³⁶

³⁵Huggins, op. cit., pp. 306-307.

³⁶Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927).

The sense of prejudice pervades the poem; yet, there is also a sense of self-confidence and militancy. In another poem, "The White Ones," he expressed the feeling of despair, "I do not hate you . . . / yet why do you torture me, / o, white strong ones, / why do you torture me?"³⁷ Hughes does not evade the reality of the situation of the black man in white America. In "Esthete in Harlem," he expressed this view:

Strange,
That in this nigger place
I should meet life face to face;
When, for years, I had been seeking
Life in places gentler speaking. . . .³⁸

Rejection and exploitation of the Negro by white America stimulated in the Negro a real desire for freedom and a rejection of the white world. At a point in Hughes's poetry, this desire crystallized into an interest in the Negro's African heritage and culture. The image of Africa had been intensified for him by the influences of DuBois and the Schomburg Collection depicting the true life and history of Africa. He glorified Africa poetically in "Danse Africaine,"

The low beating of the tom-toms
The low beating of the tom-toms
slow . . . slow
Low . . . slow
Stirs your blood.
Dance!

The idyllic and exotic Africa is described in "Nude Young Dancer,"

What jungle tree have you slept under,
Midnight dancer of the jazzy hour?
What great forest has hung its perfume

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Langston Hughes, Selected Poems (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1959).

³⁹Ibid. Also printed in The Crisis (1922).

Like a sweet veil about your bower.

 Dark brown girl of the swaying hips
 What star-white moon has been your lover.⁴⁰

In a more somber and philosophical mood, Hughes was nostalgic about his African heritage in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," (1921). He recalled,

I've known rivers:
 I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of
 human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went
 down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom
 turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
 Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like rivers.⁴¹

Hughes used rivers as an edifying link between the black man's collective soul and the collective depths of all the rivers of history.

⁴⁰Ibid. The Schomburg Collection was established by Author A. Schomburg in the 135th Street Branch Library in New York City in 1905. It is one of the most important centers in the world for the study of Negro life and history. Its aim is to collect, preserve and organize a sound record of Negro history. The literature is international in scope, comprehensive in its coverage of Negro activity wherever people of African descent have lived.

⁴¹Ibid. Also published in The Crisis Magazine, XXVII (1921), p. 71.

It established also a link between the black American and Africa, his "romantic motherland."⁴²

The myth of Africa as a symbol and life in Harlem as a reality were alternating themes of Hughes's poetry. However, it was his insistence upon his American-ness that characterized and established continuity with the concept of black identity and awareness. Much of his poetry developed the theme, "the distinctive self." More strongly than any other poet of the Negro Renaissance, Hughes conveyed the quality of confidence, joy and hope of the New Negro in Harlem. Hughes expressed this confidence in, "Negro,"

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depth of my Africa

I've been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:

Under my hands the pyramids arose
.....

I've been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs
I made ragtime. . . .⁴³

⁴²Langston Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," African Forum, I (Spring, 1966):11-20. Hughes wrote, "to us negritude was an unknown word, but certainly pride of heritage and consciousness of race was ingrained in us." Nevertheless, Leopold Senghor and other African and West Indian writers have insisted that Langston Hughes was one of the fathers of the Negritude Movement. He said that Hughes's poetry evidence negritude in that he was the most spontaneous as a poet and the blackest in expression. He was the most Negro. The songs of Hughes are pure, spontaneous and simple.

⁴³Hughes, The Weary Blues, op. cit., p. 19. First appeared in The Crisis, 29 (1922), p. 113.

Hughes did not use the term negritude, but for over forty years he emphasized the theme that Black is beautiful. He encouraged black people, as in "Negro," to be proud of their identity. His poetry revealed the mixture of gaiety, joy, and melancholy in the Harlem he loved. In a poem, "Dream Variation" he gives voice to this joy and hope.

To fling my arms wide
 In some place of the sun,
 To whirl and to dance
 Till the bright day is done.
 Then rest at cool evening
 Beneath a tall tree
 While night comes gently
 Black like me.
 That is my dream.⁴⁴

Hope and promise of the individual and collective self in spite of the terrible lynchings and race riots that took place in America after World War I, are the themes respectively in "It's An Earth Song,"

It's an earth song--
 And I've been waiting long for an earth song--
 It's a spring song--
 And I've been waiting long for a spring song.
 Strong as the shoots of a new plant
 Strong as the bursting of new buds
 Strong as the coming of the first child from it's mother's
 womb.
 It's an earth song,
 A body-song,
 A spring song--. . .⁴⁵

Neither of these poems, "To Fling My Arms," and "It's An Earth Song," denies any of the socio-political reality of the period nor do

⁴⁴Langston Hughes, The Dream Keeper and Other Poems (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932).

⁴⁵Ibid.

they express simply the reality of the moment of ecstasy. They are expressive of human desire, hope, and joy that life is capable of offering.

It is in the poem, "Dreams" that Hughes expressed the steadfast hopefulness of the Negro people, despite the incredible inhumanity directed toward them. It begins,

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.⁴⁶

The dream motif in Hughes's poetry is symbolic in the vision of the black man. It is a compelling image in the absence of adequate concrete images. He believed that without vision the people "cannot fly." "For people," he said, "live in terms of images which represent the fundamental concepts embodied in life's beliefs and processes!"⁴⁷ Hughes's view is in keeping with Murray's idea that there is a basic human need of all people for a symbolic concept. Murray sees the writer or poet as a means of providing for his audience in his work or poetry these basic needs. He pointed them out as being

The personification of the hope of mankind.

The formulation of that which is a possibility and a probability.

⁴⁶Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951).

⁴⁷Albert Murray, The Hero and the Blues (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1960), pp. 91-92. Mr. Murray is a Paul Anthony Brick Lecturer on various aspects of the science of ethics.

A prediction and even a promise.

A warning as well as an inspiration.⁴⁸

The imagery of Hughes's poetry, like his themes, projects pictures of an everchanging Harlem. He said of the changing mood and the colorful people of Harlem,

I love the color of their language; and, being a Harlemite myself, their problems and interests are my problems and interests." "I didn't come here to Harlem to get away from my people. I came here because there's more of 'em . . . I love my people."⁴⁹

In this context the imagery in his poetry is warm, and personal in a collective sense, a fusion of Hughes and others on Harlem. Unlike the other negritude poets, Senghor, Damas, and Césaire, Hughes rarely allowed himself to indulge in personal poetry. This poetic view accounts for his technique of moving from simple objectivity to complete subjectivity in his poetry. The pictures of Harlem at varying periods in time were both tragic and comic. They symbolized the black man's basic attitudes, desires, and his emotions. As a result, the pictures were vignettes, fleeting glimpses of life. One glimpse was the celebration of the particular black beauty based on his theme of black awareness in "To The Black Beloved," and "My People." In the poem "My People," he described this attitude,

The night is beautiful
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful
So the eyes of my people

⁴⁸Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, op. cit., p. 21.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.⁵⁰

Hughes explained his use of soul as meaning,

A sort of synthesis of the essence of the Negro folk arts, particularly the old music and its flavor, expressed in contemporary ways but so clearly and emotionally colored with the old, that it gives a distinctly 'Negro' flavor to today's material in music, painting, writing, or merely in personal attitudes and conversation. Others than blacks may feel but fail to understand as something to which only 'soul-brothers' born to the tradition can fully react in whatever form it occurs.⁵¹

In a less solemn voice he speaks of a personal friendship with a beautiful young girl whose beauty as equated with ancient Egypt is timeless and regal. He called her "Susanna Jones."

When Susanna Jones wears red
Her face is like an Ancient cameo

Turned brown by the ages.

Come with a blast of trumpets, Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from sometime-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.

Blow trumpets, Jesus!⁵²

Of a very personal relationship with a young black girl that began and ended during Hughes's early Paris days is a love lyric, "The Breath of a Rose." It reads

Love is like dew
On lilacs at dawn:
Comes the swift sun
And the dew is gone

⁵⁰Langston Hughes, "My People," The Crisis, 29 (1922), p. 72.

⁵¹Meltzer, op. cit., p. 255.

⁵²Hughes, "Susanna Jones," The Crisis, 30 (1923), p. 174.

Love is like starlight

 Starlight that dies
 When day is born⁵³

In "Harlem Sweeties," Hughes described black beauty in imagery of varying color tones, warmth, and sensuousness,

Brown sugar lassie,
 Caramel treat,
 Honey-gold baby
 Sweet enough to eat.⁵⁴

Hughes was not concerned with the concept of color in terms of hue-tones. His use of color was his recognition of essential and historical reality.

Hughes resented the stereotype image of the Negro as lazy, care-free, contented, unthinking, and unmindful of the serious realities of life. In "The Jester," he gives a sympathetic understanding of the Negro's plight,

Tears are my laughter.
 Laughter is my pain.
 Cry at my grinning mouth,
 If you will.
 Laugh at my sorrow's reign.
 I am the Black Jester,
 The dumb clown of the world,
 The booted fool of silly men.
 Once I was wise.
 Shall I be wise again?⁵⁵

The poem is one of social protest. It symbolizes pain and suffering, frustration and despair, growing out of injustice and rejection. Beneath rejection is an underlying sorrow. In such a situation

⁵³Langston Hughes, The Big Sea, op. cit., p. 170.

⁵⁴Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues, op. cit. Also in The Crisis, (1921).

⁵⁵Langston Hughes, "The Jester," Opportunity, no. 3 (1925), p. 53.

compensatory laughter, a projection of gaiety and exuberance, was for the Negro a shield. It was the means of a degrading survival, a holding on to some degree of self-respect and pride. Albert Murray believed that, in such a situation the victim is,

The representative man who pits himself against nature in the raw, which of course is also nature-in-the absurd, thus making him also a buffoon in a farce, a minstrel clown cutting capers which somehow coordinates, a whiteface or blackface fool whose outlandish and silly statements somehow make sense out of its nonsense. In any case it is against some inhuman element that the victim contends the atrocities inherent in the nature of things.⁵⁶

Hughes was aware of the black people's, "his people's," feeling of exclusion, disaffection, alienation, disillusionment, detachment, and dissatisfaction. George Kent pointed out that Hughes had an instinctive . . . , sense of the folk acceptance of the contradictory as something to be borne. Harlem was not all gaiety; it was also weariness.⁵⁷

Another aspect of the concept of black acceptance of the human condition is the quality of his endurance, his soulful nature, his integrity. Hughes, ever the optimist, pointed out in the poem, "Mother to Son," the strength of character to confront life, to acknowledge, and to proceed in spite of, and even in terms of the barriers inherent in the human condition. It becomes a device for making the best of a bad situation. The poem reads,

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it.

⁵⁶Albert Murray, op. cit., p. 31.

⁵⁷George Kent, "Langston Hughes and the Afro-American Folk and Cultural Tradition," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, op. cit., pp. 183-210.

And splinters,
 And boards torn up,
 And places with no carpet on the floor--
 Bare.
 But all the time
 I've been a climbin' on,
 And reachin' landin's,
 And turning corners,
 And sometimes goin' in the dark
 Where there ain't been no light.
 So boy, don't you turn back.
 Don't you set down on the steps
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
 Don't you fall now--
 For I've still goin', honey.
 I've still climbin',
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.⁵⁸

The imagery is more statement than symbolism. It is more in the sense of analogy. "life" is not analogous to "crystal stair." "Life" has been a stair with "tacks" and "splinters." The metaphors carry the full meaning of a life of rugged endurance. Hughes's metaphors here as in Not Without Laughter convey a sense of standing erect upon the earth by means of a quiet deep relationship to something more than this world. It was the folk-sense of making something out of oneself. This view is similar to Senghor's concept of "life forces." However, with Hughes his poetic imagery projected frustration and despair of a people lost in the complexities of a society of which he should have been an integral part. His imagery also projected an appeal for change.

The themes and imagery of Hughes's poetry express the various moods, attitudes, and dreams of the folk culture. They account also for the corresponding rhythm that qualify his poetry. In speaking of his poem "Border Line," Hughes expressed this idea:

⁵⁸Langston Hughes, "Mother to Son," The Crisis, 107 (1922), p. 87.

What a poem says is therefore so much of a piece with the way it is said that form and content are one, like a circle whose shape is itself and whose self is its shape, and could be no other way than to be what it is.⁵⁹

His ability to enter into and express the folk language and nuances resulted from the close contact he had living with the people of Harlem. It brought a historical and essential presence to his use of the folk-idiom.

The distinctive tradition in music, song, and popular speech developed by the black man in America over a long period of time impressed Hughes. He wrote two books, Famous Negro Musicians (1955) and The First Book of Jazz (1955) that illustrate this interest. Unlike other poets of Harlem who attempted to record the pain of their lives in the European traditional idiom, Hughes experimented with new forms, blending music and speech in the idiom of the people--creating a distinct rhythm. The importance was that the written poetry of the black American was intricately a part of Hughes's seemingly inexhaustible riches of his own verbal creation in blues, jazz-lyrics, everyday speech. They were based on sermons and spirituals of the slave period.

The "dream" folk-people of his dream poetry became the Blues People. Hughes clarified the distinction between the Negro folk song and the spiritual as,

The Blues, unlike the Spirituals have a strict poetic pattern: one line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes, but very seldom, it is omitted. The mood of the Blues is almost always despondency, over family, love, money but when they are sung, people laugh.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Meltzer, op. cit., p. 249.

⁶⁰Emanuel, op. cit., p. 138.

The Weary Blues, a collection of folk portraits of a piano-playing Harlem man, demonstrate this poetic form,

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
 Down in Lenox Avenue the other night
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
 He did a lazy sway.
 He did a lazy sway.
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.⁶¹

The poem expresses the "left alone-lone-some" mood. It does not use the blues form except the word references. The subtly syncopated rhythm in an innate musical sense is jazz in words. Listen,

I got the Weary Blues
 And I cant be satisfied
 Got the Weary Blues
 And cant be satisfied
 I ain't happy no mo'
 And I wish that I had died.⁶²

Hughes's blues and jazz poems overlapped. They are characterized by the short line, the abrupt and jerky rhythm, the trumpet sound and delayed rhythm. He achieved this kind of rhythm in "Song for a Banjo Dance," and "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 A.M.)." Both poems portray a Harlem cabaret and images of night life in Harlem. The jazz tempo exists in this setting, and as a verse to be sung, intoned to the musical background. In his blues poem, "Song for a Banjo Dance," these elements begin with,

Shake your brown feet, honey,
 Shake your brown feet, chile,

⁶¹Hughes, The Weary Blues, op. cit.

⁶²Ibid.

Shake 'em swift and wil'-
 Get way back, honey,
 Do that low-down step.
 Walk on over, darling
 Now come out
 With your left.⁶³

They end with the themes of world-weariness and romantic troubles. Both elements are fused to create the mood and the rhythm,

Weary, Weary
 Early, early in de morn.
 I'se so weary
 I wish I'd never been born.⁶⁴

Hughes's aim to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz and blues is achieved by blending melody of the music with images of the dance, the brown girl dancer's rhythmic movement in an atmosphere of the vibrant cabaret.

In his poem, "A Negro Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret," he achieved all of the basic elements of the blues and of jazz. It reads,

Jazz band!
 You know that tune
 That laughs and cries at the same time . . .
 You've got seven languages to speak in.⁶⁵

The literary quality of Hughes's blues and jazz poetry is exemplified in the mood, the antiphonal sounds, the diction, and the rhythm. He expressed these poetic elements in all his poetry through satire using Negro humor, ridicule, irony, and wit. Much of the meaning is direct and beyond the limits of language.

⁶³Hughes, "Song For a Banjo Dance," The Weary Blues, op. cit.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Richard Barksdale, Langston Hughes: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977), pp. 79-80. See Hughes's poem "Afraid" which reads, "We cry among the skyscrapers / as our ancestors / cried among the palms in Africa / Because we are alone. . . ."

His further comments on blues, jazz, humor and the spirituals sought to explain his use of these elements in his poetry. Of the blues he defined them as: "city songs rising from the crowded streets of big towns," the songs "you sing alone," unlike spirituals which are group songs. The blues are also folk songs born out of heartache. Unlike spirituals which are escape songs the blues are "today songs, here-and-now, broke-and-broken hearted songs."⁶⁶

Of jazz he commented,

Jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile.⁶⁷

Hughes pointed out in The Big Sea in responding to "what's so funny about being black? And in white America?" that

Colored people are always laughing at some wry Jim Crow incident or absurd nuance of the color line. If Negroes took all the white world's boorishness to heart and wept over it as profoundly as our serious writers do, we would have been dead long ago.⁶⁸

In The Book of Negro Humor which he edited (1966), Hughes made these statements about Negro humor,

The race problem in America is serious business, I admit. But must it always be written about seriously. . . . I would like to see some writers of both races write about our problem with black tongue in white check or vice versa. Sometimes I try.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Nathan Huggins, op. cit., p. 308.

⁶⁸Hughes, The Big Sea, op. cit., p. 247.

⁶⁹Meltzer, op. cit., p. 247.

He felt that the complicated and bitter racial climate might distort the intended cheerful and ironic humor he used in his poetry. Even so, he saw Negro humor as a weapon, too, of value against one's adversary. This did not diminish his use of it as elements of satire, such as ridicule, a painful expression and impression used to surmount evil; irony, a bitter denunciation of black-white relationship, used to express intent through words and laughter; and wit, a means of out-smarting the white man. This was a part of the creative process of the folk-idiom in which he used Negro humor as a regenerative process, an unconscious therapy by putting it into his poetry. He said, "Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air, and you."⁷⁰ It certainly was a part of the elements constituting the content and rhythm in his poetry.

With the French speaking African poets of negritude, Damas, Senghor, and Césaire, Hughes envisioned for America as they did for Africa a better understanding and acceptance for the Negro. His poems of protest, not unlike Senghor's, were more like those of Damas and Césaire at times. They emanated from hurt and denial. He substituted the alienation with black pride in the black heritage. In "Litany," as in his other religious poems, he expressed his concern for the troubled and the lowly

Gather up
 In the arms of your pity
 The sick, the depraved,
 The desperate, the tired,
 All the scum
 Of our weary city

⁷⁰Ibid.

Gather up
 In the arms of your pity.

 In the arms of your love--
 Those who expect. . . . 71

In the poem "Notes on Commercial Theater," he reflected on the Negro situation in America,

You've taken my blues and gone--
 You sing 'em on Broadway . . .
 And you fixed 'em
 So they don't sound like me . . .
 You also took my spirituals and gone. 72

Hughes saw in America the land of promise for the Negro. In the poem, "Montage of a Dream Deferred," he considered the consequences of the broken promise. He asked

What happens to a dream deferred?
 Does it dry up
 like a raisin in the sun?

 Or does it explode? 73

Nevertheless, Hughes expressed optimism, a generalized optimism not so much in democracy or America or a specifically stated program or system. It was simply hope,

In some lands
 Dark night
 And cold steel
 Prevail--
 But the dream
 Will come back,
 And the song
 Break
 Its jail

71 Hughes, "Litany," Selected Poems, op. cit.

72 Hughes, "Notes," Selected Poems, op. cit.

73 Hughes, "Montage," Selected Poems, op. cit.

The past has been a mint
 Of blood and sorrow.
 That must not be
 True of tomorrow.⁷⁴

Hughes wanted to break down distinctions in which racism fermented. The poem, "Freedom Plow," expressed confidence in inevitable progress for the Negro in America,

America,
 Land created in common, dream nourished in common
 Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!
 If the house is not yet finished, don't be discouraged,
 builder!
 If the fight is not yet won, don't be weary soldier!
 The plan and the pattern is here,
 Woven from the beginning into the warp and woof of
 America.⁷⁵

In this context he challenged America to be what it stood for in its beginning, freedom. In an essay, "My America," Hughes expressed his feelings of desires for America,

This is my land America. Naturally, I love it--it is home and I am vitally concerned about its mores, its democracy, and its well-being. We know it is within our black people's power to help in its further change toward a finer and better democracy. We want to make it real, complete, workable, not only for ourselves--the fifteen million dark ones--but for all Americans all over the land.⁷⁶

The poem, "Let America Be America Again," a long patriotic poem with proletarian overtones expressed Hughes's belief in the fulfillment of the American dream, the spiritual and emotional renewal once promised for all of its citizens,

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Donald B. Gibson, "The Good Black Poet and the Good Gray Poet: The Poetry of Hughes and Whitman," Langston Hughes: Black Genius, op. cit., p. 68.

⁷⁶Ibid.

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
 Let it be that great strong land of love
 Where never kings connive or tyrants scheme
 That any man be crushed by one above. . . .

Oh yes,
 I say it plain
 America never was America to me
 And yet I swear this oath--
 America will be!⁷⁷

In the firm belief of the African negritude poets who envisioned a greater world of freedom, love, and brotherhood, Hughes held fast to this view. He moved beyond the folk, himself, and America to encourage men universally to know and love democracy. One of his many poems about democracy and the value of freedom and equality is "I Dream a World,"

I dream a world where all
 Will know sweet freedom's way
 Where greed no longer saps the soul,
 Nor avarice blights our day.
 A world I dream where black or white,
 Whatever race you be.
 Will share the bounties of the earth
 And every man is free . . .⁷⁸

The language of Langston Hughes's poetry is the language of his concept of negritude. It was a glorification of the Negro-folk, his own soul, world and his identity in American society. It embraced a world view outside itself for universal freedom, love, and brotherhood for all men. Hughes felt that writing honestly about the black man on Lenox Avenue, people around the world might recognize him as being one of them. This is the philosophy that characterized his negritude.

⁷⁷First published in Esquire, July 1936 and presumably written not long before that, as it was Hughes's practice to publish his poems quickly.

⁷⁸Rollings, op. cit., p. 123.

Leon Gontran Damas

Leon Gontran Damas is distinguished among the Caribbean and French-speaking African writers as a pioneer, along with Leopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, of the concept of negritude. The publication of his volume, Pigments was the first collection of poems in French by a Caribbean poet to praise the color of the black man's skin. It brought him prestige as a poet and recognition among his peers and his critics.

Robert Desnos has described Damas in terms of the literary quality of his poetry and his personal influence on the negritude movement. In the introduction to Damas's Pigments, Desnos wrote:

His name is Damas. He is a Negro. . . . He insists on his Negro-ness and on his condition as a Negro. With Damas, there is no question of his subject matter or how he treats it, of the sharpness of his blade or the status of his soul.⁷⁹

Of his poetry, Desnos wrote:

They do honor, these poems, to the whole immense native proletariat of our colonies French . These poems are . . . also song of friendship offered in the name of his whole race.⁸⁰

Another critic, O. R. Dathrone, spoke of Damas in terms of Damas's personal definition of negritude. He quoted Damas as saying

Whether these writers come from the islands, Africa, or Madagascar, they had the same goal, the rehabilitation of the black man, the affirmation of his equality and the affirmation of the African personality.⁸¹

⁷⁹Ellen Conroy Kennedy, The Negritude Poets (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 41.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹O. R. Dathrone, The Black Mind: A History of African Literature (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p. 315.

Damas was more of a literary man than a man of politics. Nevertheless, he received distinctions in both areas. Like Leopold S. Senghor and Aimé Césaire, Damas was drawn into political involvement through the ideas they stood for in their writings, and not necessarily by personal inclination. This situation was true with Damas more than with Senghor and Césaire. Even so, Damas returned to his native land, French Guyana after serving meritoriously with the French Armed forces during World War II. For this service he received several decorations. He was highly received by his country, and was appointed to serve it in various capacities. He was deputy to the National Assembly in Paris from French Guiana in 1948. He filled cultural missions for his country. One was his being the Guianan representative to the Conference on Cultural Affairs in Haiti in 1951-1952. It was sponsored by the Guianan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was honored for his contribution to the Conference on Cultural Affairs in French West Africa under the auspices of the Alliance Française.⁸²

At an earlier time, however, it was his interest in the phenomenon of transplanted black culture that was of major importance to Damas and the service of his country. It was also important for his literary career. He was sponsored in 1934 while he was still in Paris by the Musée d'Ethnographie to study the Bosh, a Guianan tribe descended from a run away slave. From this mission Damas produced an essay, Retour de Guyane, (Return to Guiana, 1938).⁸³ In it Damas expressed his

⁸²Norman R. Shapiro, ed. and trans. Negritude: Black Poetry from Africa and the Caribbean (New York: October House, Inc., 1970), p. 224.

⁸³Ibid.

disappointment with the imposition of French culture at the expense of traditional black values. Even though he was not personally interested in politics, he was outstanding in the areas of his service. Unlike Senghor and Césaire he left politics and returned to his literary career.

Despite the pioneering spirit of negritude engendered by Damas, critics pointed out that his poetic creations have not equaled the poetry of Senghor and Césaire, nor have they been equally consistent.

Kesteloot in defense of Damas said

We do not reproach him for this. He is infinitely fascinating, and his poetry is effective to such an extent that it aroused an entire people to the discovery of its "negritude." No one has yet replaced the author of Pigments.⁸⁴

Unlike Senghor and Césaire, Kesteloot pointed out, Damas "definitely did not have a bent for amplification." Perhaps, of the three, this is why Damas's star paled before the more dazzling works of his successors, Senghor, Césaire and others.⁸⁵ However, in his relation to Senghor and Césaire, Damas has been seen as an iconoclast and a catalyst. They built their poetry, in part, upon his poetic vision.

Damas considered himself, as Senghor and Césaire did of themselves, the spokesman of his people and to his people. In Pigments he spoke directly to the Senegalese. However, the poems inspired and gave confidence to writers throughout the Ivory Coast because of the passionate feelings it expressed for the black race. Pigments presented a new

⁸⁴Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 158. Quoted from an interview with Damas, June 1959.

⁸⁵Ibid.

idiom which all Africans could understand. Dialect proved to be no barrier. It was the impetus the black poets of Paris in 1934 needed to break the ties of the French assimilation process.

Pigments was revolutionary. The writers began to feel "black", and to talk "black" despite the language in which they wrote. It reflected the influence of the Harlem Renaissance and Langston Hughes in America on Damas. Both dealt with aspects of the Negro soul. Damas acknowledged that the American Negro's contribution to the black writers in France was not limited only to new ideas. He explained that on the literary level they brought "spontaneity of expression, freedom of rhythm and inner music."⁸⁶ He agreed with Senghor that the Negro Renaissance poets and their poetry was nonsophisticated. Of the poetry both poets concurred

It remains close to song. It is made to be sung or recited and not to be read--thus the importance of rhythm--Negro rhythm--thus the importance of music. All adhere closely to the idea of feeling. The words restored to their original purity keep their paradisiac power.⁸⁷

This analysis often explains the clarity of the text also found in Damas's poetry. It explains the elements of its cosmic rhythm defined by Senghor as "this music, and these pictures of flowing water, rustling leaves, beating wings and blinking stars."⁸⁸

The artistic nature of Pigments transformed the anguish of what came to be known as the colonized personality into a subtle, incisive

⁸⁶Leopold Sédar Senghor, "Three Negro-American Poets," Diogenes, no. 37 (1962), p. 2.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 3.

and ironic style for all of Damas's poetry. It had relevance for the poets whose style it shaped. Césaire more than Senghor was a literary beneficiary of Damas's principle of revolutionary rejection of French writers as models. It must be remembered that Damas unlike Senghor was a marginal poet, uprooted from his native land. French assimilation of culture was far different in Guiana from what it was like in Joal and the entire Ivory Coast of Africa. Damas shared only vicariously in the deep love of the African homeland that Senghor enjoyed. Senghor's recollection of his happy childhood and rich family experiences was denied Damas. This accounted for the differences of emphasis and intent in using the doctrine of negritude in his poetry. Unlike Senghor, who sought to establish a cultural bridge for Africa with France and world civilization, Damas's vision was void of this great humanism; it was more personal except for an ultimate universal brotherhood. From different political and literary perspectives, Damas and his compatriots undertook the necessary human task: freedom and dignity for their people. His writings basically sharp and cryptic, search for a better world through another time and another tradition, the tradition of Africa. They are a protest against the assumption of colonialism and imperialism as they related to the world of the black man. Examination of his childhood experiences in Guiana and his school days in Paris illuminates his loneliness and individualism in the world in which he sought survival.⁸⁹ They accounted for the appeal for the acceptance he makes to his audience.

⁸⁹Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit.

His Family

Damas was born on March 28, 1912, in the capital city of Cayenne, Guyane (French Guiana), near the penal colony of Devil's Island. He belonged to a comfortable middle-class mulatto family that was conscious of its intellectual and social position. Their attitude toward color and culture shaped the life-style of the family and their definition of success, and this attitude gradually became distasteful to Damas. Everything in his childhood and early life was in preparation for a distinguished career. Damas did not hesitate to reveal his disenchantment with his early life because of his parents' bourgeoisie cultural values. He recalled that not only his speech but his entire way of thinking and behaving had been subjected to patterns imitative of the French. He used to envy his "country cousins who spoke Creole and could throw themselves into the noisiest games without being reprimanded."⁹⁰ On the other hand, he was always inculcated patiently with good manners, religion, and the values and prejudices of his mulatto milieu.

His father was a composer of classical music. Of course, music became important for Damas. His parents wanted him to learn to play the violin rather than the guitar because it was more proper. He saw his mother as dominant and supersaturated with ultra white values. Everything about his early life with his parents was depressing and frustrating. He recalled that his childhood portrayed a little boy whose mother was ever vigilant in her demands for the very best and

⁹⁰G. R. Coulthard, Race and Color in Caribbean Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 42-43.

most correct French behavior.⁹¹ This total surrender to French values was humiliation for Damas. It tortured his life and became the essence of his poetry. More than Senghor or Césaire, he felt the French assimilation had robbed him of his total cultural heritage. He recounted that it created within himself a personal feeling of discomfort, rejection, unfulfillment, and an immense dislike for the systematic repression of colonialism that disrupted the moral spirit of the black world. Later in his life, he recorded in Pigment how disturbing his upbringing had been. Despite his material comfort, to a degree, his early life was incomplete. It made his efforts of getting close to Africa and her traditions a more conscious one. It brought to the surface his suppressed African nature.⁹² His total experience resulted in a sharpened personal sensitivity and a defensive nature that are reflected in his poetry.

His Education

After completing primary school in Cayenne, Damas attended a French lycee on the island of Martinique. He welcomed the opportunity to free himself from the dominance of his parents, even temporarily. There was always a rebellious relationship on his part between him and his parents. Nevertheless, they felt positive toward him. They were determined to provide a sound educational foundation for their son's career. Lycée Schoelcher at Fort-de-France in Martinique was an institution where many eminent Martinican men of letters received their early

⁹¹Dathrone, The Black Mind, op. cit., p. 316.

⁹²Kennedy, The Negritude Poets, op. cit., p. 43.

schooling. At Lyceé Schoelcher Damas met two of his distinguished countrymen, René Maran and Félix Éboué. Each came from a common, comfortable middle-class mulatto family background of French Guiana. These older scholars (about twenty-five years his senior) impressed Damas. He contrasted himself to Maran who had a candor and proud sensitive nature and to Éboué who had a sound personal and political friendship, with General Charles deGualle.⁹³ Their lives paralleled Damas's life in that they epitomized the ultimate of French assimilation. They too were later educated in France. The quality that impressed Damas most about these men was their humane and compassionate nature. Damas found these qualities lacking in his parents. Maran and Éboué did not deny their African heritage, nor did they fail to take advantage of the French assimilation in their lives. Damas partially modeled his life on their lives. They helped to develop within Damas the confidence of well-being in his black heritage. Later in Paris they were to influence his poetic style. While at the Lyceé Damas also met another Martinican, Aimé Césaire with whom he would later associate in formulating the concept of negritude.⁹⁴

Damas completed his schooling at the Lyceé and went to Paris in 1934 to continue his higher education. There he studied at Louis-le-Grand and devoted himself at first to law and oriental languages. After two years, however, his own acute racial awareness led him to the study of black culture at the Institute d'Ethnologie and the École Pratique des Hautes Études. His chief aim at this point was to satisfy his hopes

⁹³Ibid., pp. 40-41.

⁹⁴Ibid.

of establishing his original roots. Interest in studying French culture was of no interest to him. His natural interest in the black race and tradition since childhood consumed all of his time. It led him into many possible environments in Paris. His forays into Parisian black society brought him into contact with African artists, American Negro writers, like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and people of every class and condition. His parents thought these activities indicated an indifference to his studies and stopped his allowance. Only a scholarship from black students enabled him to continue his education.⁹⁵

His reduced economic situation was of real value to Damas. He said, "for the first time, in my life I knew real poverty and found myself reduced to working to support myself." These experiences, he said, "gave a special nuance" to his poetry that he developed later in his career.⁹⁶

Two forces in Europe during Damas's university days had meaning for his search for his historical roots, freedom for his people, and his career as a writer. The Dadist and Surrealist movements effected an atmosphere of change in the intellectual and artistic life after the close of World War I. They challenged all traditional values. At the same time, ideology of the Russian Revolution seemed to offer a better life for those whom Frantz Fanon called the "wretched of the earth."⁹⁷ Interest in these forces resulted in Damas's introduction

⁹⁵Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 121.

⁹⁶Kennedy, op. cit., p. 40-42.

⁹⁷Ibid.

to Étienne Léro, another Martinican. Léro was rejecting French cultural assimilation on the grounds that it meant turning one's back on the riches of the Negro heritage and ignoring the misery of the illiterate Caribbean masses.⁹⁸ Léro's rejection was expressed in a manifesto in Légitime Défense reminiscent of the Manifesto of Langston Hughes in America. It endorsed surrealism and the American Negro Renaissance. It called for a literature which would expose the real condition of the Caribbean Blacks. The significance of all these events for Damas was that they brought to fruition all of his childhood hopes of exploring his black heritage. It brought him in contact again with Aimé Césaire, and it caused him to meet Lepold S. Senghor.

Damas was aware of the political and literary implications of these major forces for the black students in Paris. For some it could mean revocation of student visas and scholarship. Additionally, it could mean disgrace for their parents. Damas gathered with other writers such as Léro, Moran, Senghor, and Césaire at the salon of Madam Paulette Nardal to consider a solution to their problem. The result was the adoption of the manifesto of Léro. In essence it called for a total rejection of all of the bourgeoisie conventions imposed by the French culture. This included rejection of humanitarian hypocrisy and the borrowed personality worn by blacks and mulattoes of the West Indian bourgeoisie. These poets refused to be ashamed of whatever they felt about themselves as Blacks.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Shapiro, op. cit., pp. 17-23.

Damas examined his present situation and its consequences for himself and his parents. He realized that despite his upbringing and his education, he was different from the Europeans whom his parents had made him ape. His final decision was not hasty, but it was final. He committed himself to the black student movement known as the Black Cultural Renaissance. It attempted to effect a cultural milieu by forging the past with the present with humanistic goals. Political, ethical, social, and ontological elements became an all-enhancing aesthetic in a historic and racial fusion. This manifesto to which Damas committed himself proposed the absolute reversal of the solidly established hierarchy of values that affected the black man.¹⁰⁰ He turned to poetry to record this historical moment of political and moral redress. His search for poetic expression in keeping with the manifesto led Damas to his friend, Robert Desnos, the French surrealist poet. The result was Damas's adoption of the literary credo: "We accept surrealism without reservations."¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Damas did use surrealism in his poetry with reservations.

Damas joined Senghor and Césaire who were also influenced by the essential belief of the movement. As a result, they became the principal founders of an extension of this renaissance. Their poetic contribution was based on a conviction of Damas which grew out of his work with L'Étudiant Noire.¹⁰² He saw the possibility of all these elements

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 144.

¹⁰²Ibid.

of the manifesto being linked together in a cultural assertion. He believed they could express the continuity and power of the black people of African descent in a cultural aesthetic. These poets became the principal founders of the doctrine that became the ideology of negritude, dedicated to the cultural and universalizing humanism of brotherhood.

Damas's formal education ended in Paris with the development of the negritude movement. He spent much of his time writing and publishing his poetry as early as 1934. His publications dealt with his political as well as his literary theory. His essays, stories, and folk tales also dealt with his concern for negritude. His major publication is still his anthology, Poètes d'Expression Française (1947).¹⁰³ He has ceased now to publish, but he has not ceased to write. Presently he is professor of the African Studies and Research Program at Howard University in Washington, D. C.

His Poetry

Damas's school days in Paris without the financial support of his family were spent in immense poverty among his fellow Blacks. He described these days as the identity crises common to all his black fellows as intellectual and moral tragedy. These experiences coupled with his childhood days in Guyana account for the nature and characteristics of his poetic style.

His poetry has been contrasted with the poetry of Senghor and Césaire as being unsophisticated. Since it is unsophisticated, his

¹⁰³Dathrone, The Black Mind, op. cit., pp. 314-316.

poetry is direct, highly emotional, and at times sarcastically humorous. His humor is by nature Negro humor, a technique of survival.¹⁰⁴ As one of the triumvirs of early negritude which include Leopold Senghor, and Aimé Césaire, the influence of Langston Hughes and other black poets in America (1937) is most evident in the poetry of Damas. Fundamentally his poetry reveals common factors he shared with Senghor and Césaire, the consciousness of color and racial pride, and the birth of solidarity among all blacks, in and outside Africa. Cementing these common factors was the common heritage of oppression, injustices, and suffering resulting from colonialism. For Damas, the answer was negritude: the rejection of all forms and facets of colonialism and acceptance of the African cultural heritage. This meant discovery and exaltation of positive African value. These factors constitute the poetic elements of his poetry.

Damas expressed these common factors of the African heritage in numerous poetic elements as themes, imagery, symbols, rhythm and diction. The themes of Africa, a popular one for the Caribbean poets in 1930, emanated in the poetry of Damas from a community of themes and subjects. They have similar historical and social development and similar ethnic composition. In his poem, "Stance," he speaks of African awareness in broad terms of the mask,

The days themselves
 have taken on the shape
 of those African masks
 to every desecration¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Samuel Allen, "The Black Poet's Search for Identity," African Heritage, ed. Jacob Drachler (London: Collier-Macmillan, Ltd., 1963), p. 191.

¹⁰⁵Leon Damas, Pigments (Paris: Guy Levi Mano, 1937), p. 24.

The African mask is used here by Damas to symbolize the divine detachment, disdain and escape from the visible world. The African masks in traditional African literature enclose a vital force in a tangible form. It is what Senghor has called the "analogy-image," where meaning surpasses symbol. "The object does not mean," he said, "what it represents, but what it suggests, what it creates."¹⁰⁶

Damas's use of the mask-imagery in his poetry represented the adoption of the African spiritual tradition of prayer. The mask is a tangible salute to the African forefathers. The carved ancestral faces are a religious object embodying hope for the African children.

In Pigments, Damas evidenced an exotic reveling in an African mind as he continued in search of his African roots. In the poem, "They Came That Night," he cries out about the European violation of Africa,

how many of ME ME ME
all died
since they came that evening when
tom
tom
rolled from
rhythm
to
rhythm
in frenzy¹⁰⁷

The emphases of the "ME" is a personal identity with Africa in a collective sense of continuity.

An important factor to keep in mind is that Damas's social, political and literary preoccupation of Africa as a theme is a rediscovery of

¹⁰⁶Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 11.

Africa as a second-hand experience. It is what his colleague Senghor described to him first-hand. Nevertheless, in the poem, "Obsession," Damas expressed intimate moods of despair, disgust, and depression not limited to any racial group.

A taste of blood comes
 A taste of blood rises
 Irritates my nose
 eyes
 throat

 acridly vertical
 like
 the pagan obsession
 for incense¹⁰⁸

The use of "blood" in all of Damas's poetry had a reverse meaning. Instead of its meaning as a source of life for Damas it meant death. It helped to create the feeling of defeat and intimate moods of despair in "Obsession" just as it is in "There Are Nights." However, the feeling of depression extends beyond the bounds of race. It becomes a universal feeling of being overwhelmed and of longing for escape. It is reminiscent of the Dada technique with emphasis on the negative elements in nature. Damas used surrealism more than he did dadaism. However, surrealism was not a part of his poetry as it was with Césaire. The poem reads

There are nights with no name
 there are nights with no moon
 when a clammy
 suffocation
 nearly overwhelms me

 when I would have preferred
 to be able no longer to doubt
 a need to escape

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

on nights with no moon
 on nameless nameless nights
 when the sickness sticks within me
 like an Oriental dagger¹⁰⁹

Damas expressed his feeling of negritude as a universal protest against racial injustice and the imposition of the French culture. He did this in a strong thematic and stylistic approach that paralleled that of the surrealists. The search for identity was more than a return to the poet's roots. It was an attempt to obliterate the past, to create a liking for oneself. It was an identity of passion that all black men held in common that became the precise theme in the poetry, not of hate, but of resentment.

Damas expressed his feeling of passion and the condition of Africa as Césaire expressed his feeling of anger in these lines,

But I am an African poet! I feel very deeply the uprooting of my people. . . . I am in fact obsessed with African themes and symbols . . . they are for me symbols of man who is self-rooted, the nostalgia of a lost paradise.¹¹⁰

A noted critic has pointed out that Damas has been compared to Césaire in many ways, but Damas was different from Césaire. His anger has been described as being more quiet, more reflective than Césaire's.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹¹⁰Gerald Moore, "The Politics of Negritude, Frantz Fanon, Leopold Senghor, Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, David Diop and Tchicaya U'Tamsi," Protest and Conflict in African Literature, Cosmos Pieterse and Donald Munro, eds. (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1969), pp. 28-32.

The critic stated that Damas looks back on the centuries and forgives.¹¹¹ The tone of anger disappeared for both poets with the discovery of the true meaning of negritude.

Parallel to his obsession with the African condition was Damas's obsession to rid himself of the humiliation of the French colonial system of assimilation. Rejection of the influences of colonialism also meant for the theoreticians and all practitioners of negritude a simultaneous and continual appraisal of Negro values. It was also a cultural rejection of colonialism and a plea for the universal acceptance of black values in the widest sense. Unlike Senghor and Césaire, with Damas the rejection was total. The dialectics of his rejection began with recollections of his "petit-bourgeoise" family background. In a poem, "Houquet" he described the prejudices of his Creole mother,

Quiet
 Pray have I not told you or not that you must speak French
 the French of France
 the French of French people
 French, French . . .¹¹²

Further in the poem he described his mother's rejection of the Blacks as folks being related to a lower culture,

A banjo
 did you say a banjo
 What do you mean by
 a banjo
 did you honestly say
 a banjo

¹¹¹Dathrone, op. cit., p. 317. Also in Césaire's Cahier and Damas's Poemes Nègres.

¹¹²Leon Damas, "Houquet," Black-Label (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 64.

No, mister-man
 you ought to know that in this house
 we allow
 neither ban
 nor jos
 neither gui
 nor tars
 coloured people don't do that kind of thing.¹¹³

He continued his diatribe with sarcasm and humor in "Hiccups" with, "I gulp down seven drinks of water / several time a day / and all in vain / like the criminal to the crime / my childhood return in a rousing fit of hiccups."¹¹⁴ However, his dilemma in rejecting colonialism and in accepting African values is frustrating. He recognized a past in the disturbed or exploited environment of Africa and Guyana as misdirected currents of history. To him this was a history that might have been. The poem, "Black Dolls" in Pigments the theme of Africa is expressive of this dilemma. It is expressive of a simultaneous uncertainty, a tension between his known background and the difficulty of finding something else to replace it.

Give me back my black dolls
 To disperse the everlasting image
 From which the wind brings misery.
 Merci.

 Give me back my black dolls
 To play the simple games of my instincts

 To recover my courage, my boldness,
 To feel myself myself.
 A new self from the one I was yesterday.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Ibid., p. 25.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Leon Damas, "Black Dolls," Pigments, op. cit., p. 47, 92.

Damas's theme on black women expressed in "Black Dolls" represented traditional trends common in African literature prior to negritude. The reference to women was not disassociated from natural life forces and the political situation of African life. However, the poem's reference to women is revolutionary in the sense of negritude. It is expressive of Damas's praise of black female beauty and his sole preference for women of his own race. He repeated this emotion in "Black Princess": "I sing to you . . . goddess of natural beauty without peer."¹¹⁶ It is a reaction to stratification of society not only in Africa or the Caribbean but throughout the world.

The sense of origin, the coming-in-being of the black race theme dominates the poetry of Damas. It is fused with the geographic landscape of the Caribbean and of Africa to reveal his poetic imagery and symbolism. The elemental and visceral environment of the landscape affected the total daily human black existence, perception, and expressions. It accounted for the central motif and the symbolic meaning of Damas's imagery and metaphors that colored the tone and mood of his poetry. In his poem, "Wages," he gives a personal image and feeling of disgust for his French assimilation.

I feel ridiculous
in their shoes, in their hard collars,
in their monocles and bowler hats.¹¹⁷

The social metaphors are evident in such words as, "their shoes," "hard collars," "their monocles" and "bowler hats." They carry a meaning of misplaced values for Damas.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Leon Damas, "Solde," Black-Label, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

In his poetic collection, Black Label (1956) is a long evocation of the ramification and tension resulting from the African slave trade. The imagery puts into a historical and essential perspective the acute, internal, almost benign suffering of some hundred million people. It reads,

Those whose Fathers sold their sons to the yoke and the
sons in their turn to Mother Earth.
Those whose brothers so amiably gave the chase to their
own brothers
Those who let themselves be caught in this family game.¹¹⁸

Damas's vitriolic passion is not without compassion. He showed this emotion for the slaves in the poem. He continued the verbal imagery in these terms

Those who were caught . . . who said within themselves
it is better to be a red flesh than a dead game . . .
who did not see in Death the salvation of Life . . .
Those who went so submissively . . . their necks
wearing the mayombe yoke.¹¹⁹

In the slaves Damas saw the futility and death of all Blacks. He said

But with their arms folded
Their ears pricked up
Heard one another say and read
The death sentence
To death all the blacks.¹²⁰

To Damas many kinds of slavery still exist. He said,

Those are my memory
Finds still in Exile

¹¹⁸Lilyan Kesteloot, Intellectual Origins of the African Revolution (Washington, D. C.: Black Orpheus Press, 1972), p. 43.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 44.

Seated nowadays on the step of the bamboo hut . . .
Which insults the bright sun of the West Indies
Happy to be slaves forever.¹²¹

For Damas, it is not only a picture of African slave suffering. It is in the proportion of the acute suffering of the Europeans under the dominance of Fascism and Nazism. It is representative of human universal suffering worthy of reflection.

In another poem not quite so different from the one on slavery in Black Label, Damas gave a subtle picture of God's miraculous power in the obsessive and obstinate hunger which his people learned from childhood,

All the days God makes
God makes
Without wine, without bread
Without nothing
But mangoes souskaye
But mangoes souskaye¹²²

Damas's color imagery in "Black Dolls," "Black Princess," and in other poems is a technique of reverse manicheism of which he fears the black man like the Jew has been a victim. It is assertive that black is beautiful, good and legitimate. In "Black Dolls," black is emphasized through repetition of the word black. He expressed this feeling, "Give them back / to me / my black / dolls / black / dolls / black / black / dolls." And in "Black Princess" he expressed an inequity of beauty in praising the black woman,

Princess-Noire
Je te chante et te psalmodie

¹²¹Ibid. The poem has been quoted at length because of the poignant transcendency of universal suffering and the multidimensional quality of the imagery and symbolism.

¹²²Leon Damas, Black-Label, op. cit., p. 22.

D éese de la beaute naturelle et que personne n'egale
 Statuette blanche aux levres rouges
 Non, ta beaute est vraiment trop factice¹²³
 (Black princess, I sing of you and dedicate a psalm to you,
 goddess of natural beauty, without peer.
 White statuette with red lips, no, your beauty is really
 too contrived.)

The poems dispute the hierarchy of color which has been confused with the moral hierarchy of value.

Damas's poetic imagery and symbolism were not all bombastic. There were the lighter tones of humor and mild satire. In reference to his education he said,

My parents insisted that I have a good education. A good education meant following them prudently in their visits to the homes of middle class men, and being straightlaced with people lighter in color than they were. Poetically, he recalled these ideas,

My mother wanted a memorandum son
 If your history lesson is not known
 you will not go to mass on Sunday
 With your Sunday clothes
 This child will be the shame of
 our name
 This child will be our name of God.¹²⁴

Again, the image-analogy in Damas's poems conforms to Senghor's definition of image-parole in the sense that:

There is no need for comparison or metaphors; it is enough to name the things since for the Negro African the word is more than an image; the object does not signify what it represents, but what it suggests.¹²⁵

For Senghor everything is both sign and sense at the same time. The cultural significance of the image becomes an essential meaning.

¹²³Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), p. 195.

¹²⁴Lilyan Kesteloot, Intellectual Origins, op. cit., p. 54.

¹²⁵Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., pp. 87, 89.

An understanding of their use is dependent upon a knowledge of African mythology, oral traditional literature, and the situation in which the imagery is expressed.

Damas's poetry does not always conform to a rhymed pattern, but rhythm is an integral part of his poetic system. It is achieved through the word and its variant uses. It describes the subjective dimensions of the collective black man in a colonized world. Negritude is a variant use of the word that stands for the reversal of the human and social order of the colonialized black world. The process of colonial reversal encompassed alienation, suffering and anticipation. Suffering and rhythm are elements of fulfilling the values of essential man within the African ontology. This, in turn, means freedom and rhythmic celebration and the dance. The dance symbolizes joy for the African. Other elements of the word constituting its meaning is the primary passion of the black man with emotion as its primary impulse. All of the elements "cement the multiple aspects of the black soul." Senghor has described rhythm in a religious sense as being "the ability of perceiving the supernatural in the natural." It is a sense of the transcendental and the active self-abandonment that accompanies it, the self-abandonment of love. All of these elements constitute the basic qualities of Damas's rhythm. In his beautiful poem, "Limbe," the rhythm is characterized by the Negro tom-toms, as he laments his loss of country and culture. The poem reads,

Will they never know the rancor in my heart
 opened to the eye of my distrust too late
 they did away with what was mine
 ways
 days

by the use of typographical innovations. All of these poetic elements are the influence of Senghor and Africa.

Rhythm is achieved in "En File Indienne," by exact and reverse repetitions,

And the wooden shoes
of beasts of burden
beating out
the still uncertain dawn
in Europe
reminds me of
the strange self-sacrifice
of morning trays
brimful
which sway in the Antilles
to the rhythm of the hips
of women walking Indian file
And the strange self-sacrifice
of brimful morning trays
that sway in the Antilles
to the rhythm of the hips
of women walking Indian file
reminds me of
the boots
in Europe
of beasts of burden
beating out
the still uncertain dawn¹²⁸

Damas's style is colored by less exotic words than the ones used by Senghor and Césaire. His words are the common everyday words and Creole terms of the common people. He used them to express his highly charged emotions, sometimes disguised by Negro humor and mild irony not unlike Langston Hughes which is a fusing of his themes, imagery, symbols, diction and rhythm. The most striking aspect of his poetry is its style. He sacrificed melody in order to create a distinct repetitive and insistent rhythm. The melody and rhythm of Damas's poetry show the

¹²⁸Leon Damas, "En File Indienne," Negritude: Black Poetry from Africa and the Caribbean, ed. Norman R. Shapiro, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

influence of Langston Hughes. Like Hughes, his poetry made use of the repetition of key phrases, images, rhythm, and word play, close to the spoken word. His poems were written in a typographical style uncommon in the poetry of Césaire or Senghor. These poetic devices were also similar to the techniques of the French surrealists of the time.

From the language point of view, Damas's poetry is precise and direct. His verse is a veritable series of sharp "pricks" and many times with staccato rhythm to intensify his feeling of alienation and suffering. His poetic language is a commitment to his African past. It is a common denominator he shared, from varying points of view with Senghor and Césaire.

Leopold Sédar Senghor

Leopold Sédar Senghor is well known as president of Senegal, but his talents are not limited to the area of government.

Jean-Paul Sartre has hailed Senghor as "foremost among those black intellectuals who produced "the true revolutionary poetry of our time."¹²⁹ Charles de Gaulle has described him as "un poete senegalais et un ecrivain français en meme temps qu'un chef d'Etat." ("A Senegalese poet and a French writer at the same time he is a head of

¹²⁹Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus" ("Orphee Noir") The Black American Writer, op. cit., pp. 5-40, trans. Samuel W. Allen. "Orphee Noir" appeared originally as the preface to Leopold Sedar Senghor's (Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Negre et Malgache de Langue Française, Paris, 1948). It is a key document in the history of the concept of "Negritude." It has been available in English in an issue of Présence Africaine (Paris, 1951). (In American publication, trans. John MacCombie, in the Massachusetts Review 1969).

state").¹³⁰ Other observers have called Senghor one of Africa's foremost architects of a reinvigorated, dynamic socialism; they have held him responsible for a dramatic cultural and moral break with the values of western civilization and the creation of a new, uniquely African civilization and a system of values. Among these was Mercer Cook, former United States Ambassador to Senegal. He described Senghor's style and scholarship partially in terms of his ability to cite, interpret, and apply passages from:

Heraclitus to Hegel, from Marx to Mauriac, from Engels to Einstein, from Lincoln to Lenin, from François Perraux to Gaston Berger, from Teilhard to Gaëtan Picon that one would hardly expect to hear analyzed at an African political rally. Refusing to "Africanize at a discount," he shuns neither the difficult nor the unpopular. Always the teacher, he has the patience to explain, the intellectual honesty not to oversimplify, and faith that the lesson will be understood.¹³¹

Senghor has earned the highest honors of the greatest universities, cultural societies, and governments of four continents. He has earned the most important political positions and highest esteem for his poetry and cultural achievements.¹³²

Senghor refers to himself in addressing his people as "this humble Serer," and the "trumpet of his people."¹³³ In seeking to achieve or

¹³⁰Christine Garnier and Philippe Ermont, Senegal: The Door to Africa (Paris: Reprint Atheneum Press, 1962), p. 131.

¹³¹Mercer Cook, Introduction to On African Socialism, Leopold Sédar Senghor, translated by Mercer Cook (New York: Frederick A Praeger, 1964), p. x.

¹³²Irving Leonard Markovitz, Leopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), p. 32.

¹³³Ibid.

effect these metaphors, Senghor has been praised for his ideas and censured for his politics.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, he has effected a synthesis between these two ideologies that accounts for his concept of Negritude (the "black is beautiful" doctrine originated in Paris in the thirties with the French-speaking African intellectuals). This doctrine, for Senghor, was the means of stimulating a "new awareness," a "sense of commitment," and a "moral awakening" in all the Senegalese. He saw the apathy as a "lack of moral tension."¹³⁵ Just as Langston Hughes saw himself as the spokesman for his people (the lower-class Negro in America), Senghor expressed a similar view of himself and his people. He has sought to reduce the gulf between the elite and the masses. He has sought to improve all phases of Senegalese life. He described the problem of his people in these terms:

Our cruelest lack (of moral tension) is genuine faith, a true commitment to the service of our country. It is this that I consider the most difficult task among all those that I have undertaken: to instill in my people, in all my people, that taste for work well done, that minimum of honesty, and civic consciousness, that sense of public good without which nothing lasting can be accomplished.¹³⁶

Senghor felt that the doctrine of Negritude, as he wrote for different audiences to fulfill different needs, would serve to help change situations and conditions of his people. The doctrine of Negritude is of such fundamental importance in French African writing that its meaning for Senghor can best be understood by a brief discourse of his life.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Gerald Moore, ed., African Literature and the Universities (West Africa: The Caxton Press, 1965), pp. 13-17. Dakar Conference.

His Family

Leopold Sédar Senghor was born in the small village of the serere tribe of Joal in Senegal on October 9, 1906, to Christian parents, Basil Diogoye and Nyilane Senghor. The serere village, one of the four communes in Senegal, on the coastal plain, is located about seventy miles south of Dakar.¹³⁷ Two factors that were to shape Senghor's life, education, and career, both literary and political, were the tribal heritage of his parents and the penetration of French colonialism in Senegal. Both created for him a confrontation between two ways of life. Each had something to offer the other. In retrospect, Senghor pointed out in his memories some important personality characteristics and predispositions from his total experiences that could be attributed to these two forces. Of the first was his capacity and willingness for hard work and his austere self-discipline. Of the second was his family's relative security, social position, and his deep love for his mother and other relatives.¹³⁸

The Serere, the major ethnic group of the Joal region, abandoned their traditional faith for the Catholic faith of the French colonizer into which Senghor was baptised.¹³⁹ The place of Senghor's birth no doubt contributed significantly to his personal well-being and to his

¹³⁷Sebastian O. Mezu, The Poetry of Leopold Sédar Senghor (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), p. 1. These views are cited in A. C. Brench "The Novelists' Inheritance, Writers from Senegal to Cameroon," French Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 8, 13. See also Judith I. Gleason, "The Styles of Conquerors," This Africa (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), pp. 3-38.

¹³⁸W. A. E. Skurnik, The Foreign Policy of Senegal (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 184-186.

¹³⁹Ibid.

becoming a writer. The majority of the writers, both poets and novelists, with rare exception, come from countries on the coastal plain. Writers from the "vieilles communes" such as the "quatre communes" of Dakar through long tradition of contact with French culture were accorded French citizenship and its benefits. They possessed an ease and assurance which allowed some of them to welcome colonialism with no need to attack it openly. Dakar in Senegal was an exception, for it had a very strong cultural center. It was cosmopolitan which helped to shape his destiny.

The social structure of the Serere and Fulani ethnic groups to which Senghor belonged caused serious tension in his family life. Senghor's father, son of a mandingo trader, made a prosperous and successful living as trader, cattle breeder, land owner, and commercial operator. He was a Serere and a Catholic, a man of the modern world. He gave Senghor pride in his family and in his mandingo name. Senghor's mother belonged to the pagan Fulani ethnic group. This group made their living tending cattle. They were a part of the traditional world. The Serere considered the Fulani their inferiors.¹⁴⁰ The problem for Senghor was that he felt himself a member of his mother's family. He sought out his Uncle Toko to hear stories of animals, of supernatural phenomena, and to learn local customs and beliefs of the peasant and

¹⁴⁰Jacques Louis Hymans, Leopold Sédar Senghor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971), p. 7-8. According to Serere custom, marriage does not imply the foundation of a new family or the acceptance of the wife into the family of the man. The woman continues to belong to her people. She may return to them when she becomes widowed or feels herself offended. Metz, op. cit., p. 1.

commoner.¹⁴¹ In this way, Senghor developed a great love for his mother and her people.

It is felt that these conflicts between Catholic and pagan beliefs; bourgeoisie and peasant instincts; the disparity between father and uncle had immediate and long ranged effect on Senghor's life. The immediate effect was that when Senghor was eight years of age his father sent him away to school. The long range effect was that his happy childhood provided material for his literary and philosophical works.

His Education

A strange and different life began for Senghor in 1914 at the boarding school under the aegis of the Fathers of the Holy Spirit at Ngasobil, six kilometers north of Joal.¹⁴² Along with seventy other students, Senghor began the assimilation of the French culture and a modern way of life at the expense of his native customs and traditions. He studied French textbooks, French writers, and some Wolof, his native language. During his eight years at Ngasobil he lived a spartan life. It consisted of daily physical exercise, abstention of parental visitation for long periods of time, and austere and rigorous discipline. These experiences developed in him self-discipline, austere notions of duty, faithfulness to his ideals and emotional satisfaction only in the esteem of his teachers.¹⁴³ Through all of these experiences the process

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴³Ibid.

or theme of opposites continued to complicate Senghor's life. He reacted to these experiences in these terms:

In fact, my inner feelings were quite early torn between the call of the ancestors and the attraction of Europe, between the requirements of African culture and those of modern life . . . I have always attempted to resolve these conflicts by a "conciliatory agreement" . . . thanks to confession and direction of conscience in my youth, thanks later to the spirit of method taught by my French masters.¹⁴⁴

At a later time, Senghor also credited his teachers with the valuable educational experiences he had at Ngasobil. He also attributed much of his poetic style, the tone of the prayer and the Gregorian chant to their strict discipline.

Senghor continued his education in 1922 at the Libermann Seminary at Dakar, the capitol of French West Africa. Here he studied theology and philosophy. This included readings from St. Thomas of Aquinas. He became a student of Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Christian doctrines. The study of dialectics became basic to Senghor's thought. All of these studies aroused in him a desire to effect a synthesis of pagan and Christian thought into a new philosophy.¹⁴⁵ Senghor developed an ambivalent attitude toward the French colonial schools. Ironically, he criticized them as "civilizing missions" yet he acknowledged that they gave him his own philosophical grounding. He expressed it thus:

Culture consisted in the study of composition and elocution; also in the application of discursive intelligence to the analysis of concepts. It is what I would call a scholastic-rhetoric concept of culture. It loathes what is concrete

¹⁴⁴Armand Guibert, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Poetry of Today, no. 82 (Paris, 1961), p. 22.

¹⁴⁵Hyman, op. cit., p. 12.

and practical, perhaps what is African; what there is of a bourgeoisie or of a utilitarian nature in the spirit of engineering schools.¹⁴⁶

Despite his disillusionment with his position at the Seminary, Senghor retained an "attraction for the intellectual life, deep religious faith and a developed sense of order."¹⁴⁷ He graduated in 1928 from Van Vollenhaven with great honors and continued his education in Paris at Lycée Louis-le-Grand.¹⁴⁸

While at Lycée Louis-le-Grand, Senghor experienced a metamorphosis that dissipated the system or theme of opposites that had frustrated his life since his childhood in Joal.

Two forces developing in America and in Europe helped to change the course of Senghor's life and career. The Black Renaissance, a new current evident in America emphasized the necessity of using the art of the people to explain their feelings. The other was the changing concept of Africa in Europe, especially in Paris, growing out of the influence of the Black Renaissance.¹⁴⁹ Senghor responded to both. He learned more of French, more of French culture and mores. He has admitted:

I am a Frenchman culturally and a man of good will. I only fear the idea of a French absence. I have received the essentials of the intellectual and moral training which today enables me to analyze and overcome problems.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Sebastian O. Mezu, The Poetry of Leopold Sédar Senghor, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁵⁰Hyman, Leopold Sédar Senghor, op. cit., p. 17.

Senghor's studies of French writers such as Baudelaire, Claudel, and Rimbaud were enhanced by his friendship with Georges Pompidou, a classmate and later the Prime Minister of France, and his French masters. Each influenced Senghor's poetry, vocabulary, meter and sentiment. He also met at Lycée-le-Grand other black students, Césaire, Damas, and Paulette Nardal. They faced the insecurity of the white system of values and started to look into themselves, into African "primitive" cultures and civilizations for solutions to the current of racism sweeping Europe.¹⁵¹ Through their heritage of Africa, they sought peace of mind. This in part meant a renunciation of a feeling for things French which they had come to love and respect.

In this frame of mind, Senghor began a long period of soul searching that culminated in the formulation of the ideology of negritude. He found encouragement in the surrealist movement then current in France and the black writers of the Negro Renaissance. While studying at the Sorbonne in 1931, Senghor made an avid search for the values of negritude. He based its evaluation on research and experience. He said that acceptance of an ideological black reality (as expressed in negritude) required the support of historical and scientific fact.¹⁵² His search ended in the development of his philosophy of negritude. To him it was both political and literary. From a political point of view it was a bridge to the colonial establishment; from a literary point of view it was a "defense of the dignity of cultural Blacks." This was the

¹⁵¹Mezu, op cit., p. 7.

¹⁵²Hyman, op. cit., p. 23.

basis for his motto: the defense and celebration of the black civilization. It grew into an ideology for unity, economic development, and cultural growth.¹⁵³

Senghor ended his studies at the Sorbonne in 1938 and began a career as a teacher, politician, and writer. In 1948, he published his theories on culture and new black poetry in an anthology, Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poésie Nègre et Malagche de Langue Française. In the preface to this publication, entitled, Black Orpheus, Sartre stated, "Negritude is in essence, poetry. For once at least, the most authentic revolutionary plan and the most pure poetry come from the same source." "The negritude movement could no longer be ignored."¹⁵⁴ In 1960 Senghor became the president of Senegal.

His Poetry

Senghor's poetic negritude is expressive of his definition of negritude as, "the whole of the black world's cultural values."¹⁵⁵ It is based on the African philosophy of being, life forces, and Senghor's search for what Africa can give to the world. As such, it embraced many personal qualities, experiences, attitudes, and principles commensurate with the poet's entire life. The distinctiveness of Senghor's poetry is enriched by his focus on his own African past, his Serere and Fulani heritage as he reacted to traditional principles of the modern

¹⁵³Metzu, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁵⁴Leopold Sédar Senghor, Anthologie, op. cit., pp. 5-40.

¹⁵⁵Markovitz, op. cit., p. 41.

world and the world of nature around him. Significant among these principles is the feeling of exile and alienation. Senghor expressed these values in a variety of ways.

One way was his use of variations on the theme of Africa. This provided him a dual, yet direct, specific way of pulling back to the source of his "maternal essence." It also provided the literary ideology for his concept of socio-racial direction of Africa. Senghor's dilemma arose from the absence of things African, a personal loneliness, physical and moral. In his first volume of poems, Chants d'Ombre (Songs of the Shadow), he expressed his emotional links with his homeland.

The white eagle of the seas, the eagle of Time
 snatches me beyond the continent.
 I wake up, wondering, like a child in the arms of Koos
 (you call him Pan).
 It is the wild cry of sunrise which makes the earth
 tremble

 And I am born again to the earth that was my mother

 In my memory you were Africa as myself, as the snows of
 Atlas.

 She is indeed the black ancestress, the Bright One with
 violet eyes under her lids of night.¹⁵⁶

Although his allegiance to Africa was visceral, the situation, for Senghor, was also ambivalent. He was as Jules Supervielle pointed out "Bi-Continental," a divided love for his country and his country of adoption. He continued in Chants d'Ombre,

Hear my strange voice singing of you in the shadow

¹⁵⁶John Reed and Clive Wake, eds., French African Verse with English Translations (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd. Press, 1972), pp. 4, 5.

I sing you this song of shadow with a new voice
With the old voice of the childhood of the worlds.¹⁵⁷

The poem is expressive of the anguish of a black man torn between loyalty to a new doctrine of negritude and the irresistible attraction to France and her culture.

Both Chants d'Ombre and Hosties Noires, are collections of poems expressing images of exile and alienation. Hosties Noires contains poems extolling the endurance and virtue of the Senegalese soldier. Ethiopiennes also contains poems that recounts in terms of

Hunger and hatred fermented there in the torpor of one mortal
summer.

And noble warriors were begging for cigarette butts.

We cried out our pain in the night
Not a single voice gave answer.¹⁵⁸

Blair pointed out that Senghor shared a humble feeling of solidarity with his black brothers-in-arm. His dilemma was a bitterness against French oppression and a simultaneous appreciation of the virtues of French cultural tradition. "Prayer for Peace" suggests a Christlike sacrifice of black people,

Yes Lord, forgive France, who expresses the right way so well
and makes her own so deviously,
Who invites me to her table, and tells me to bring my own
bread, who gives to me with her right hand while the
left takes half back again.

Oh Lord, dismiss from my memory the France that is not France,
this mask of pettiness and hate upon the face of France

For I am greatly fond of France.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷Dorothy S. Blair, African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 153.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 154. Other dramatic poems in Ethiopiennes are "Chaka," and "Congo," and love poems.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

The beauty of the poem rests partially in the Biblical tone and style of the Gregorian chant. Basically, its beauty rests in the lyrical nostalgia of a "French assimilie." The poem is an indictment and a reconciliation expressive of a larger humanism. Senghor saw France for what it was and what it had done to the French speaking Africans. Yet, in a devout tone he prayed not only for the salvation of France but for all of Europe.

Hosties Noires (1948) represented a significant point in Senghor's life. He moved away more from his earlier feelings of France. He responded more to the memories of Africa. He was now the committed spokesman of his people, a complex man of two cultures.¹⁶⁰ Senghor once told the French critic Armand Guibert,

The equilibrium you admire in me is an unstable one, difficult to maintain. My inner life was split very early between the call of the ancestors and the call of Europe, between the exigencies of black-African culture and those of modern life. These conflicts are often expressed in my poems. In fact, they are the very crux of them.¹⁶¹

Senghor believes in the universal reconciliation of all men.

¹⁶⁰Leopold Senghor, Hosties Noires, Paris: Senil, 1948 in Reed and Wake, eds., Prose and Poetry (3 Crowns Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 142-155. The psychological effect of World War II was the crystallized resistance of African intellectuals to accept European occupation and culture (except South Africa). The literary awakening of Africa was associated with the political awakening. Both helped to develop a new literature in English and French based on the broader sense of culture, the nature of the society and its artistic expression. In the case of this study, it was negritude for Damas, Senghor, and Césaire. Specifically, for Senghor, the war crystallized his desire to become, "the trumpet of his people and their ambassador." (cf. his poem "Chaka").

¹⁶¹Ellen Conroy Kennedy, op. cit., p. 129.

"Elegy for Midnight " symbolically portrays his complex cultural emotions. It is a denunciation of "summer and the light of Europe."¹⁶²

Summer, splendid summer, nourishing the poet on the milk of
your light,
I who sprouted like spring wheat, drunk from water's greenness
from its streaming greenness of the gold time,
Ah! no longer can I stand the lamplight, your light, your
atomic light disintegrating all my being.¹⁶³

In this elegy, Senghor's poetic theory evokes color imagery in shades of light and darkness. The many words of color-imagery in the poem have various implications. Critics relate Senghor's use of light to recapitulate his life and age; from his youth to the mid-point of his life ("greenness of the gold time . . . the lamplight, your light"). He refers to the spring of life when one grows not only physically but also in ideas. The philosophical reflection of the past in terms of the "light" brings back regrets for things past, events that cannot be relived, that cannot be changed. The tenor of the complete poem is unmistakable inadequacy, monotony, and despair.¹⁶⁴

The poet adopted Césaire's vision central to the negritude philosophy. It included the history and geography of the black man's estate. It linked them inexorably with the essential man of Europe when Césaire forgave and invited to "the final rendezvous of universal conquest." As a committed poet of his people, Senghor invokes his "childhood kingdom" for intense images of traditional Africa. Three poems express

¹⁶²Kofi Awoonor, The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History, Culture, and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 169.

¹⁶³Kennedy, op. cit., p. 144.

¹⁶⁴Mezu, op. cit., pp. 71-74.

the poet's geographic focus on Africa as a sustaining spiritual force that will "nurture the human festival at the rendezvous of all men."¹⁶⁵ "Totem" is a poetic statement of Senghor's painful quest for self identity and for redemption from the influence of the French culture.

I must hide in the intimate depths of my veins
 The ancestors' storm-dark skinned, shot with lightening and
 thunder
 And my guardian animal, I must hide him

 He is my faithful blood and demands fidelity
 Protecting my naked pride against myself and all the
 insolence of lucky races.¹⁶⁶

"Vacation," in Chant d'Ombre in the tone of "Totem," describes the search for identity and connotes a spiritual return to Africa. It encompasses the mythical landscape, the memorials of childhood.

Long absence to my heart
 Three month vacation like the dark corridor of three captive
 terms.
 Even your face which I could not recompose in my mind's
 dark-ringed eye.
 And your silence distant as a fading memory!

 Can I forget the sun's brilliance, the rhythm of the
 world-night day
 And the mad tom-tom of my heart

 I know Paradise is lost--but I have not lost the memory of
 the garden of childhood, full of birds
 When after the arduous rains the harvest comes, and you
 will come back my Beloved.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Kofi Awoonor, The Breast of the Earth: A Survey of the History, Culture, and Literature of Africa South of the Sahara (New York: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 165.

¹⁶⁶Senghor, Prose and Poetry, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 110.

This process of nostalgic remembrance continued in "Beyond Eros,"
 I would tell them, those hands that blindfold my seeing heart.
 The slowness of your hands, the curved gentleness of your
 still caress.
 Egyptian! Surely your long breathing will be my guide.¹⁶⁸

The process became for Senghor for a time the reality itself.

This statement does not deny Senghor's constant awareness of a dynamic tension between the imagined and the real landscape of Africa, a tension at the center through which Africans assert their identity.¹⁶⁹ His return to his native land and the evocation of his childhood constituted a union between the dream process and the imagination. This was the essence of his artistic vision far from art for art's sake, a way to identify the continued existence and landscape of the native land.

The ancestor-theme in Senghor's poetry helped to provide a continuous assurance of the indestructible spirit of man and the presence of the "Vital or Life Force" in everything. In "Joal" the poet used place names from his childhood.

I remember the funeral feasts steaming with the blood of
 fattened herds
 I remember the pagan voices chanting the Tantum Ergo
 I remember the dance of the nubile girls
 The chorus of wrestlers--oh! the final dance
 of the young men . . . and the shrill love-cry
 of the women-Kor Siga.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Rowland Smith, ed., Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1976), p. 71.

¹⁷⁰Leopold Sedar Senghor, Selected Poems, Introduced and Translated by John Reed and Clive Wake, (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1964), p. 6.

The poem uses folk imagery to recall a pleasant memory of Joal, Tantom Ergo, wrestlers, Kor, Siga, all fitting complements. It is usually accompanied by an appropriate instrument which sets the rhythm. This is true in the poem, "Totem," in which the "mad tom-tom" sets the rhythm for the melodic imagery.

The ancestor-theme provided Senghor as it did other African writers the essence for creating the stereotype figures. Several of Senghor's poems celebrate the role of women. The locale of Africa is used to describe the general and the symbolic woman. The black woman in Senghor's poetry is a synthesis of mother and lover. In this way she is equated with the land, giver and receiver. "Femme Noire" and "Nuit de Sine" illustrate some of these positions which Senghor expressed on many levels.¹⁷¹ "Femme Noire," a praise song, characterizes the eternal woman in a generic sense. It is not addressed to any particular woman. It reads,

Naked woman, black woman
Clothed with your color which is life, with your form which
is beauty!
In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your
hands was laid over my eyes. . . .¹⁷²

It is a revolutionary concept within the context of the negritude poets, the glorification of the black woman because of her color and pride in the black race.

Naked woman, black woman,
I sing your beauty that passes, the form that I fix in
the Eternal,

¹⁷¹Dathrone, op. cit., p. 323.

¹⁷²Mezu, op. cit., p. 22.

Before jealous Fate turn you to ashes to feed the roots
of life.¹⁷³

"Nuit de Sine" developed the same essence as in "Femme Noire" and "Congo." However, it takes in more of the landscape, the beauty of the tropical night, the stars, the country side, and human qualities such as warmth. It reads,

Woman, lay on my forehead your perfumed hands, hands softer
than fur
Above the swaying palm trees rustle in the high night breeze
Hardly at all. No lullaby even.
The rhythmic silence cradles us.¹⁷⁴

Senghor used the litany technique in the form and structure in "Femme Noire" and "Nuit de Sine." Both poems used the surrealist ideal, abstractions, in an infinite number of ways, variances, and nuances to celebrate the beauty of the black woman. It also is used to express a certain idea of a black woman in a world of mixed races. The theme of woman in the poetry of Senghor at any level is synonymous with Africa. It may be a personal, intimate song of love (as in "Chants pour Signare"): . . . And I was speechless at the gold enigma of your smile. / A brief twilight fell upon your face by some divine caprice "; filial love of the soldier; (as in "Song of Darkness"): "Woman, light the limpid butter lamp, so around it ancestors can come to chat like parents when their children are in bed."¹⁷⁵

Senghor's poetry reveals the spiritual and emotional aspects of woman as mother, Mother Earth, Mother-Land, and Beloved. In this sense she was the creative force of the universe. Negro-African cosmogony

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Kennedy, op. cit., p. 131.

is conceived in terms of the physical and sensual response one makes to various forces. For Senghor, "sensuality is a legitimate incarnation of Negro-African spirituality authentically expressed in typically concrete, direct images."¹⁷⁶ He developed this concept through the ancestor-image (woman) in "Nuit de Sine." The African woman in this poem archotypically symbolized the omnipresence of death. Lines such as the following are typical of this idea.

It's star time, and dreamily the night leaves her elbows on
 this cloudy hill, draped in long, milky robe.
 Tenderly the rooftops gleam. What are they confiding to
 the stars?
 Let us listen to the Ancients of Elissa. Like us exiled.
 They did not wish to die. . . .
 Let me listen in the smoky hut where friendly souls have
 come to visit,
 Let me breathe the odor of the Dead, let me gather and
 repeat their living voices. . . .¹⁷⁷

Senghor identified African (Senegalese) locality in the poem, but uppermost is the presence of the ancestors and the poet linked together in the present and the past. Though dead the Africans see and hear the dead as living. Their importance is in their immortality. The essence of "Congo" and of "Nuit de Sine" is Senghor's concept of a continuous link between things and the interaction of people and things. Senghor was sensitive to life forces in the visible and the invisible, the animistic and the inanimistic, the material and the spiritual. He expressed these beliefs in these two poems, "Negro Mask," "Prayer to the Masks." First, "Negro Masks."

¹⁷⁶Dathrone, op. cit., p. 320.

¹⁷⁷Senghor, Selected Poems, op. cit., p. 7.

She sleeps and rests on a candor of sand, Kamba Tam sleeps
 Mask face, closed to the ephemeral, eyeless, without . . .
 substance . . .
 O face as God made you even before the memory of the
 ages. . . .¹⁷⁸

Senghor continued the devotion to the mask in "Prayer to the
 Masks." It reads,

Masks! O Masks!
 Black mask red mask you white-and-black masks,
 Masks at the four points the Spirit breathe from,
 I salute you in silence!
 And not you last, lion-headed ancestor,
 You guard this place . . .
 Fix your immutable eyes on your subjugated children.¹⁷⁹

The African masks for the poet, Senghor, have the quality of things
 that are impervious to change, things that persist in spite of the time.
 They are enigmatic and wise. The mask as a symbol for the poet seems
 never to age: it contains the perennial wisdom of the ancestors, the
 fixed and eternity of the dead who nourish the living.

Further, the mask is the symbol for the returned ancestor or the
 incarnated supernatural being who ritually and regularly revisits the
 living, or returns on occasions critical to the life of the people.
 It is a force of social control and a reassurance that the living are
 protected by the gods and the ancestors.

In the poem, "Five Songs for Signore," Senghor pays homage to the
 transcendancy and beauty of the mask in African culture. The poem reads

¹⁷⁸Leopold Sédar Senghor, Selected Poems, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁷⁹Ibid. See also Wilfred Cartey, Whispers from a Continent: The
 Literature of Contemporary Black Africa (New York: Vintage Books,
 Random House, 1969), p. 219.

Masks primordial and pure upon the walls distant yet so
 present!
 Your face, the beauty of a time long past evokes the perfumed
 robes in faded hues,
 Souvenir of a time without a history.¹⁸⁰

Throughout the poem he blends pagan and Christian elements in expressing the African personality as heir to the spiritual tradition of his ancestors. In their ritualistic roles, the masks are aspects of the divinity of man's being, the visible and symbolic link between the dead and the living.

Like every other thing African, in the Senghorian system of values, it is rhythm that dominates the life of the Congo. The rhythm in Senghor's poetry is drawn from his knowledge and instinctive union with the rhythm of the Congo River. As in most societies, the river is considered a source of life; so it is with Senghor. Specifically, the Congo River was the source of a variety of rhythms and images for Senghor. He recalled from his childhood memories his having crossed the river Senegal. He transposed these experiences to the Congo River.¹⁸¹ The pulse of the earth and the flow of the river are the elements of rhythm expressed in these lines,

Ho, Congo, ho! To weave your name into generous rhythms over
 waters, rivers and the whole of memory
 Let me wake the voice of the Koyate Koras!¹⁸²

Though sparse, the alliterative lines in the poem underscore the rhythm,

¹⁸⁰Leopold Sédar Senghor, Selected Poems, op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁸¹Kofi Awoonor, op. cit., p. 167.

¹⁸²Leopold Sédar Senghor, Selected Poems, op. cit., p. 11.

Ring out bells, sing out tongues, beat out oars the dance
of the master of oars.¹⁸³

Diversities of properties and images are associated with the river. They also helped to create beauty, rhythm and musical qualities that characterize the authenticity of Senghor's poetry:

Calm Goddess with your smile that rides the dizzy surges of
your blood
Malarious by your descent, deliver me from the surrection of
my blood.
Drum, drum your drum, from the panther spring, the ant's
strategy.
From the viscious hates rise on the third day from the mud of
the marshes.¹⁸⁴

The scenery is African. The sound, the local color of fauna and flora create a hierarchy of values and musical rhythm. The poem was written to be accompanied with music, three Koras and a belafong. The word was emphasized by Senghor as being ineffective; the rhythm had to be felt. For him it is the rhythm of life itself.

Senghor explained that the force and multivalence of his imager accounted for the musicality of his verse, certain figures of speech and the exoticism of language. He defended his use of French as a poetic medium and expressed his ambition, shared with contemporary black poets, "To be the forerunner, those who show the way for an authentic Negro poetry, which never abandons its intention to be French."¹⁸⁵

The African world is juxtaposed against the world of Europe in Senghor's poetry. As a common feature, it creates the opposition of night and day, of black and white and of rhythm and silence, the center

¹⁸³Ibid.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁸⁵Blair, op. cit., p. 155.

of his concept of negritude. It is in some instances surreal. It was with Senghor as with other black poets a deliberate effort to liberate his verse from the cultural prescription of the colonial west. His long poems, "For Koras and Belafong" and "Return of the Prodigal Son" make clear his "choice" to be black, washed clean of all contagions of civilized men, to identify with the black toiling peasant. They represent the ultimate affirmation of his negritude. Even so, they maintain and manifest paradoxically Senghor's concept of universal reconciliation of all men.

Aimé Césaire

Aimé Césaire is considered as one of the most influential poets of negritude, as well as one of the most active and influential political figures in Martinique. The Belgian writer, Lilyan Kesteloot, one of the notable critics on African literature, gave high praise to the exceptional talents of the Martinican poet in this way:

I do not see in the history of French literature a personality who has so highly integrated such diverse elements as racial consciousness, artistic creation, and political action. I do not see any personality so powerfully unified and at the same time so complex as that of Césaire. And, without doubt, therein resides the secret of the exceptional density of a poet which has, to an extreme degree, taken on itself all the coherence of a man's life.¹⁸⁶

Two noted French writers, André Breton, the surrealist poet, and Petar Guberina, considered an authority on Césaire, described him in relation to his poetic talent. Breton wrote,

A black man it is who masters the French language as no white man can today. A black man it is who guides us today through

¹⁸⁶Lilyan Kesteloot, Aimé Césaire (Paris Editions: Pierre Seghers, 1962), p. 9.

unexplored lands building as he goes the contacts that will make us progress on sparks. A black man it is who embodies not simply the black race but all mankind, it queries and anxieties, its hopes and ecstasies and to whom will remain for me the symbol of dignity.¹⁸⁷

Guberina wrote of Césaire as "a fine product of the very cultural assimilation process." He referred to Cahier as

the sublime poetic creation of a black poet who has mastered European philosophy, the French language, and the multiple meanings of words as few Europeans have."¹⁸⁸ (cf. Breton)

He saw Césaire as, "the poet who puts the virtues of his race at the service of the liberation of the whole world."¹⁸⁹

Césaire expressed his role and the major role of other elites with considerable foresight. He said,

In our present situation we are propagators of souls, multipliers of souls, and most inventors of souls. And I say too that it is the mission of the man of black culture to prepare a good decolonization, not just any kind of decolonization.

For even in the midst of colonial society, it is the man of culture who must shorten his people's apprenticeship in liberty. And the man of culture, whether writer, poet, or artist achieves this for his people because within the colonial situation itself, the creative cultural activity which precedes the concrete collective experience is already in apprenticeship.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ André Breton, "Preface: Un Grand Poète Noir," in Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal, trans. Lionel Abel and Ivan Goll (New York: Brentano's, 1947) quoted in Kesteloot, Black Writers, op. cit., p. 192.

¹⁸⁸ Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un Retour Au Pays Natal (Paris: Preface: Présence Africaine, 1956), p. 37, quoted in Susan Frutkin, Aimé Césaire: Black Between Worlds, Monographs in International Affairs, Center for Advanced International Studies (University of Miami, 1973), p. 15.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Kennedy, op. cit., p. 64.

Césaire has been acclaimed the voice of Negro awareness, of its suffering and its needs. He has won honorable esteem in his native Martinique. In 1945, he was elected to the twin post of deputy to the French National Assembly for Martinique and Mayor of its capital, Fort-de-France. He has been re-elected each term since and is currently the mayor of Fort-de-France. He is the most influential and popular political leader and writer in the French Antilles.¹⁹¹

His concept of negritude and of himself is the basis of his poetic philosophy. He sees negritude as a point of departure in expressing the affirmation that one is black and proud of it. He recognized as Senghor did, the leader's solitude, the dreams for his people and the difficulty of awakening and motivating them. He says of himself,

Make not of me that man of hate, I set myself down in one single race. You know my tyrannical love; you know that it is not out of hate for other races that I demand to dig for this single race; that what I want is for universal hunger for universal thirst.¹⁹²

In the context of himself and negritude is his assumption that the Haitian has something very rare and very specific to offer the world--"the precious reservoirs of poetry, joy and love."¹⁹³ A clearer understanding of his poetry is seen in the light of his family background.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Dathrone, op. cit., p. 65.

¹⁹³Ibid.

His Family

Césaire was born in Martinique in the town of Basse-Pointe June 25, 1913. His family was of a class slightly above the subsistence level. His father was a minor government clerk, and his mother was a dressmaker. Césaire described his early life as being quite the opposite of the "happy antilles," nor did he enjoy the kind of idyllic childhood of Senghor who lived in a white stucco house, who spent many days happily swimming, riding horseback on his father's land of coconut trees or learning of village lore and nature from his ancestors, and who recalled vividly the nights his father spent counting the pile of "gold pieces." Césaire experienced none of these luxuries. For him it was "the shack blistered like a peach tree suffering from blight, and the worn roof, patched with bits of kerosene cans, . . . and the beds of planks from which my race has sprung . . . its mattress of dried banana leaves and rags."¹⁹⁴ He said of this life,

In the early morning another small malodorous house in a very narrow road, a tiny house which shelters in its innards of rotten wood dozens of rats and the turbulence of my six brothers and sisters, a cruel little house whose harshness troubles us each month until payday and my strange father gnawed by one great sorrow, I have never known which, moved by some unpredictable witchcraft to melancholy tenderness or violent rage; and my mother whose legs pedal for our insatiable hunger, pedal day and night, I am even awakened nights by the tireless legs which tread the night and by the noise of a Singer which bites into the soft flesh of the night while my mother pedals, pedals night and day for our hunger.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 161.

¹⁹⁵Susan Frutkin, Aimé Césaire Black Between Worlds (University of Miami: Center for Advanced International Studies Press, 1973), p. 15.

Thus, Césaire spent his childhood in Martinique. Martinique's quiet beauty was for Césaire a paradox. Economically, it functioned as a French monocultural plantation system. Socially, it pressurized two major forces on the native Martiniquais: compulsory French education and assimilation of the French culture on social-racial levels. Politically, Martinique remained as in all other instances, a colony, "poete colonial."¹⁹⁶ Césaire summarized his feelings about his childhood experiences in a single word, "partir." These experiences aroused in him a spirit of rebellion against everything, political and literary.

His Education

Césaire's education was an antithesis of his childhood. He received the best public education made available by the French system. In 1931, he graduated at eighteen from Lyceé Schoelcher in Porte-de-France with a scholarship to study in Paris. He enrolled in the prestigious École Normale Supérieure and received a degree in letters. Césaire completed his education in Paris at the famous Lyceé Louis-le-Grand.¹⁹⁷

Césaire has acknowledged that the most singular and far-reaching event for him during his eight years in Paris was his friendship with fellow student Leopold Sédar Senghor. These two poets of intriguingly different personalities, background, and political beliefs have sustained a forty year friendship. Césaire discovered Africa through Senghor. He said, "I felt an immense assurance that seemed to come from his having

¹⁹⁶Paul Blanchard, Democracy and Empire in the Caribbean (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 51.

¹⁹⁷Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, p. 162.

had a whole continent beneath his feet, traditions, his own language . . . a past of which he had no need to be ashamed."¹⁹⁸ Césaire, joined with Senghor and Damas during their Lycee' Louis-le-Grand days and founded L'Étudiant Noir in 1934, a publication designed to reunite black people who were considered French by law and nationality to their own history, traditions, and languages, the culture which truly expressed their "soul."¹⁹⁹ At the same time Césaire like Damas and Senghor was wholeheartedly involved in pursuing his personal artistic expression through his poetry. The Paris days generated a creative way for Césaire of looking at life in Martinique and at himself. He developed a new feeling of self-respect and a concern for Martinique. His poetry became a medium to arouse in Blacks everywhere an awareness of their African ancestry and the conviction that their common civilization was inherently worthwhile.

His philosophy in this regard was that "there are no people who are not peculiar to the sum of their cultural values; there is no society in which there has not developed a way in which its people relate themselves to the world and to their fellow man."²⁰⁰

Césaire was convinced that the black man has a peculiar emotional outlook on life and a share in a culture that is different from, but not inferior to, that of the white world. What was essential at this point for the black man was to rediscover the truth of his being and

¹⁹⁸Kennedy, op. cit., p. 62.

¹⁹⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 16.

²⁰⁰Frutkin, op. cit., p. 16.

reestablish his own dignity. Negritude for Césaire, Senghor, and Damas was not, as some critics proclaimed, a call for a return to the past. It was, rather, a respect for the past and a new dynamic black attitude toward the future. Césaire's commitment to these causes was to be the spokesman for his people against political and cultural assimilation. For Césaire, this did not mean a rejection of Europe entirely, nor did he separate men into Black and White. He separated men as victims and victimizers; innocent and guilty; prisoners and jailers. He said, "my mouth shall be the mouth of the misfortunates that have no mouth, my voice the liberty of those who have sunk down into the dungeon of despair. . . ."201

The historical connection between Césaire and the other apostles of negritude, Damas and Senghor, was a sharing of the insight into the African heritage. The collective sharing of African values established links between these poets and other Blacks of the literary world. For Césaire in particular, it was a prelude to his first important poetic work, Notebook on Returning Home and the framework of his literary career.

His Poetry

Césaire's poetry is manifestly dominated by the racial theme and by an intimate poetic tone. His personal experiences and emotions are expressed in an embracing collective feeling about life and the black man. These aspects account for the two levels on which his poetry moves: the reflection of a strong personal involvement with social and

²⁰¹Blair, op. cit., p. 148.

political realities and the expression both of a collective and of a personal drama.

His poem, Notebook on Returning Home (Cahier d'un Retour Au Pays Natal), reflects these personal views and sets the most lyrical tone of the negritude literary revolution. It is aesthetic, and it is functional. It is a long rambling highly emotional poem of sixty-six pages. It is significant for the negritude movement in many ways. Appearing in 1939, it was the first publication in which the term negritude was used. The poet made a clear-cut statement of his rejection of European values. He says in the poem,

Let me be he who refuses th. unacceptable
 . . . the bird-clear monument of Refusal.²⁰²

His reaction to European values is a denunciation of his oppressors. He said,

Each one of your footsteps is a conquest
 And a spoilation and a misconstruction and an assassination.²⁰³

He made a powerful and revolutionary appeal to the black man to assert himself. The major themes of the poem are indignation, righteous anger, humiliation, and suffering. Césaire expressed these feelings basically as a denial of humanity for the African, and as a universal hunger of the Black in Cahier:

For his voice sinks in swamps of hunger,
 Nothing but the hunger which can no longer climb to the

²⁰²All quotes of poems are from Cahier, op. cit., p. 36.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 19.

rigging of his voice a heavy and slack hunger
 a hunger buried in the depth of the hunger of this
 starving hill.²⁰⁴

Specifically the themes fall into three categories on which Césaire structured his concept of negritude. They were obsession and identity with the black man and his heritage of slavery; rejection of the white world as the perpetrator of slavery, colonialism, and racism; and confidence in a future of universal fraternity.

The first of these themes is the cornerstone of negritude: the acceptance of being black and that black is beautiful. Through acceptance of one's negritude, Césaire believed that the universal hunger and thirst would be eliminated and the unique race (the black man) would be productive. He interpreted this to mean that "the black race shall produce out of the intimate knowledge of things." He called these things "succulence of fruit." He expressed his view in Cahier,

The birds will sing softly in the sweep
 of salt
 The Congolese lullaby that the jailers
 have taken from me but which the
 very pious sea of cranial boxes
 preserves on its ritual leaves²⁰⁵

Césaire's reasoning was an attempt to create a new insight into his total being, his authentic self. The study of himself revealed a natural and essential quality linking him collectively with the universal world order of man.

For me I have nothing to fear I am before
 Adam I belong neither to the same lion nor to

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰⁵Césaire, Cahier op. cit., p. 44. All quotes are taken from Cahier. The page numbers given are taken from this source.

the same tree I am of another warmth and of another cold
 O'gleams, O dew-drops, O sources. . . .²⁰⁶

The personal theme of rejection and acceptance created a moral dualism that Césaire struggled to reconcile. At one point in Cahier, he said, "I refuse to accept my posturing as authentic glories / And I laugh at my former puerile fantasies." However, the reality of negritude was for Césaire the reality of himself. The virtue of negritude did not encompass destructive pride or the capacity to destroy the world; nor did it encompass the grandiose rebellions Césaire had felt and expressed early in his poetry. It was the opposite. It was the "landscape of pain"; it was ancestral values; it was the capacity to understand the world intuitively, to adapt oneself to it rather than try to dominate it; and it was the contact with cosmic forces, symbols, and myths. Acceptance of these qualities of negritude convinced Césaire of his heritage and gave him the courage to accept the deficiencies of black people. This time in Cahier he accepted his destiny,

I accept . . . I accept . . . entirely without reserve
 my race that no ablution of hyssop and lilies
 could purify my race corroded with stains.²⁰⁷

Césaire expressed the need for renewed strength and determination to face this new destiny. He effected a synthesis of these views in Cahier

. . . we are standing now, my country and I . . .
 For it is not true that the work of man is finished . . .
 . . . the work of man has only just begun . . . and no race
 has the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence or
 strength.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 32.

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 77.

²⁰⁸Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 84.

Césaire's acceptance of himself and his destiny aroused within him also the stark, bleak, and painful reality of his childhood, his homeland, and his past shame and humiliation. In the first movement in Cahier, an evocation of his native land (in prose), Césaire recalled,

. . . a broken-backed street dives into a hollow where it scatters a few huts; an indefatigable road runs at full speed uphill and is at once swallowed by a puddle of houses, and the wooden carcass, which I call "our house," comically perched on small feet of cement, its iron coiffure corrugating in the sun like skin hung up to dry . . . the chairs of spectral straw . . . and the varnished, rapid glimmer of roaches tripping about.²⁰⁹

All of his childhood is not caught up in squalor and sorrow or the sad, melancholic attachment to his family life in Martinique. At one point he said of the city life

This flat city shortly after dawn, exposed, stumbling commonsensically along, inert, breathless beneath its geometric burden of crosses . . . intractable before its fate, . . . incapable of growing according to the essence of this earth . . . ruptured from flora and fauna.²¹⁰

There was Christmas and the preparations and the worryings "that there may not be enough / that this or that is missing / that maybe we'll be bored." Then there was church which he described in Cahier as

Amiably filling up with laughter, whispering, secrets, scandals, declaration of love, happy men and open-hearted buxom girls . . . and the town nothing any longer but a garden of singing . . . and the choruses of alleluia, Kyrie Eleison, Christe Elison, . . . Leison . . . Leison.²¹¹

Césaire always drew Martinique with indelible and graphic accuracy. The historical moment for Césaire came in 1929. It was the turning

²⁰⁹Kennedy, op. cit., p. 68.

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Césaire, Cahier, op. cit., p. 78.

point for him. Parallel to his denunciation of the colonial regime was the effort to disengage himself from hate. In Cahier he said

Sometimes I am seen with vast mental gestures to grab a
 too red cloud, or the rain's caress, or a prelude
 to the wind
 Do not calm yourself unduly:
 I am breaking the waters which girdle me
 with blood... . . .
 It is I alone-
 Who can give tongue at the final anguish
 Who with a straw will sip the first drop of virginal milk.²¹²

Refusal to hate and willingness to forgive created within him the capacity to love. Again, in Cahier,

Make of me a man who terminates . . . who initiates . . . who
 contemplates . . . who sows;
 Make me the executor of these lofty works,

 But in doing so, my heart, preserve me from all hatred
 Make not of me that man of hate
 You know my love to be tyrannical,
 You know that it is not from hate
 For other races
 That I seek to be the plowman
 Of this single race.²¹³

Through his introspection, Césaire fused the history and geography of the black race with the more immediate existential conditions of his own life. For him to accept or to transfer a past was for him to speak against it. To validate his existence was to record for himself and for posterity "a plot of land in the world register," as he expressed in Cahier "no race has a monopoly . . . there is room for all at the rendezvous of conquest."²¹⁴

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Smith, op. cit., p. 32.

Césaire regarded his personal and literary freedom to validate collectively the existence of the black man as a commitment. It became the foundation of his poetry. His poetic vision reflected the influence of his school days in Paris and of the French-speaking Africans, Senghor, Damas and writers from the Caribbean, such as Léro, Price-Mars (as of 1934-1948). It also reflected the position taken by the black writers at the Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1956, Rome, and 1959, Paris). Both advocated writing about the black man's culture in relation to the essential man of Europe. The ultimate focus is the man, human unity not the country or the place.

Martinique finally became a primal source of inspiration for Césaire and for his imagery and creations of black pride, beauty, gentleness, silent love, pain, and joy. In "The Wheel" the imagery is a mockery of pain and suffering in Martinique.

The wheel is the most beautiful discovery of man and the
 only one
 the sun turns
 the earth turns
 your face turns on the axle of your neck when you cry

 the art of suffering sharpened like tree stumps by the
 knives of winter
 your face
 like a village asleep at the bottom of a lake.²¹⁵

In "Magic" a word creates the imagery of tornadoes destroying Martinique. It is also the spiritual destruction of the Martiniquan.

With a thin slice of sky on a hunk of earth
 you beast who hiss into the face of this dead woman

 We were beautiful flesh with the ara's trident

²¹⁵Césaire, "The Wheel," Land Survey from Cahier, op. cit., p. 80.

When the five branched chancellor stare . . . like drops of
fallen milk reinstate a black god low born of their
thunder.²¹⁶

His poetry is a straightforward statement of revolt, but his revolt is also indirect, in which this attitude is given a symbolic meaning. Césaire replaced the violent imagery, the natural source of a rebel, with the images based on the African philosophy of being in the natural world. However, his imagery was unlike that of Senghor. The natural world of Senghor was colored by the beautiful and beneficent qualities of nature seen through the eyes and tales of his uncle Toko Waly.

A valid interpretation of Césaire's imagery and symbolism in Cahier and his lesser poems demands a consideration of two major forces in his life. One was his suffering and humiliation in Martinique. The other was his adoption of the African philosophy of cosmic forces. The concept of suffering and the African philosophy of cosmic forces share a common origin and interpretation. It can be explained through the African myth about the god, Ogun. Ogun stands for a transcendental human but rigidly restorative justice in man's life. The myth interprets life as "a paltry reflection between the generative forces of birth and death." Life becomes inadequate, patronizing, and undignified when the life forces are attacked by or are at odds with the destructive forces in nature. The result is suffering, and suffering destroys the pleasures of human existence.²¹⁷

²¹⁶Césaire, "Magic," Land Survey from Cahier, op. cit., p. 81.

²¹⁷Wole Soyinka, "Through the Mysteries of Ogun to the Origin of Yoruba Tragedy," Myth, Literature and the African World (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 140-160.

Within this frame of reference the African philosophy of cosmic forces and suffering are based on what the Africans call the universal plane of knowing. This knowing in turn makes suffering endurable and restores man's dignity to that expected of all mankind.

This is the essence of Césaire's poetic imagery and symbolism near the end of Cahier,

I live for the flattest part of my soul
 For the dullest part of my flesh.
 Tepid dawning of ancestral warmth and fear
 I tremble now with the common trepidation of our docile blood
 pulsating in the madreporé.
 And these tadpoles within me hatched of my prodigious ancestry!²¹⁸

An example of the imagery and its variation, such as water and fire, were used by Césaire in one of his definitions of negritude. He said, "My negritude is not a speck of dead water on the dead eye of the earth . . . it thrusts itself into the burning flesh of the sky." It is also his affirmation of African humanism. Africa appeared now a total source of strength for Césaire and a restoration of its values. He writes, "The irresistible purity of my hand calls out from afar, from very far / from the hereditary patrimony / for the victories ardour of the acid in the flesh of life."²¹⁹

The revolutionary praise of women in African poetry appeared in Césaire's poetry as it did in the poetry of Damas and Senghor. An example is in the poem, "To Africa,"

²¹⁸Césaire, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

²¹⁹Ibid., p. 68.

And by the spark of Woman through which I seek the road to
bracken ferns and to the Fouta Djallon and by Woman
closing upon a longing unfolding. . . .²²⁰

In this poem Césaire combined his personal symbolism with the image of fertility to express his longing for his origins and for a rebirth to nature.

The cosmic forces of nature served more than one purpose for Césaire's poetic creations. It was the informing source of his mystical imagery and symbolism. It was also the informing source of "a sturdily delirious rhythm" recalling the ritual celebration at sacred festivals of Africa and African culture.²²¹ Perhaps, because Negro-African culture has remained close to nature, its way of life intensifies consciously the rhythmic patterns of natural phenomena and form. On all levels of physical reality, cosmic and human, rhythmic movement is an essential characteristic: the seasonal cycle, day and night, the rhythm of the world, the pulse and heart-beat, the ebb and flow of the tide, and the body rhythm. The African interprets the binary movement which characterizes the life of the universe as rhythmic only because of the repetition of the pattern. He sees the dialect of Life and Death, Beginning and End as rhythmic in that the apparent terminal point is, in reality, regenerative, cyclical and periodic. Rhythm is seen, as an inner dynamism of life forces, as such, it is related to life and expressed in a variety of modes.

²²⁰Césaire, "Cadastre," Cahier, op. cit., p. 50.

²²¹Awoonor, op. cit., p. 165.

Césaire freed himself from the literary tradition of Europe and used the poetic medium appropriate to the impression he wished to create. He was not completely satisfied with verbal pictures. His poetry pulsates with "the rhythm of the verbal dance of a tom-tom. This is especially evident in his poem, "Toussaint Louverture." Césaire's emotion is expressed in a fairly simple rhythmic pattern,

This is mine
a man alone
imprisoned in white
a man alone who defies the white
death
(Toussaint, Toussaint Louverture)²²²

Césaire's use of the tom-tom rhythm corresponded to a phenomena in parts of West and Central Africa where literature is played on drums and certain other musical instruments. This is a form of oral African literature rather than music when the principles of drum language are understood.²²³ The literary significance of drum language is basically linguistic. The translation of drum language into words creates meaning and tone. Musical effects are purely incidental. It is the words themselves that serve as a medium to the human voice to represent poetry. This aspect of African oral literature appealed to Césaire.

This was true regarding the use of language and the corresponding use of the word. The power and the multiplicity of word meaning in his poetry is evidence of the African influence to create images that in turn resulted in rhythm. In his poem "Aux ils de tous vents" (To the Island of the Winds) he interfused his physical presence with the

²²²Césaire, Cahier, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

²²³Ruth Finnegan, "Drum Language and Literature," Oral Literature in Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 481-499.

features of the landscape of Martinique, land, sea, mosquitoes, and birds, in such a way that all help to complete a sustained involvement.

From lands that leap so high yet never high enough to free
 their feet from the miser's clutch of the sea
 bellowing in assault upon their ruined faces
 Hunger of men shared by mosquitoes and thirst for these are
 leaves laid out for a feast of birds

 the birds . . . will tell
 Why it remains encrusted with the blood of my pulsing throat.²²⁴

The absence of punctuation marks and capital letters gives a distinctive quality to Césaire's poetry. This is a poetic process he used so that images, symbolism, and rhythm as in "Aux ils de tous vents" have a continuous flow from the beginning to the end of the poem. Césaire's poetic process of fusing the poetic elements in the poems instinctively fused the history of the black race itself with a deliberate extension of the human race of man. The power of the word and its dialectic use bear the influence of Africa and of the French writers Rimbaud, Mallarmé and Breton.²²⁵ The negritude poets moved away from the use of Da-Daism and in varying degrees turned to the surrealists. However, with Césaire surrealism was simply technique. He was ever conscious of precise images of insults and tortures of the black man. As for the choice and variant use of words, Césaire found the flexibility, adaptability and subtlety of African stories and proverbs to be a literary source not found in ordinary speech. In his poem, "Raving Mad" in the volume, Soleil Con Coupe (1948) words culminate in a surreal way.

²²⁴Césaire, Cahier, op. cit., p. 44.

²²⁵Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 191.

Raving Mad

Greetings to you birds slicing through and scattering the
circle of herons and the genuflexion of their resigned
heads²²⁶

And midway in the Cahier

listen dogfish that guards the accident listen white
dog of the north black serpent of noon there is
still an ocean to cross still a sea to cross

· · · · ·
so that the queen will kiss me

· · · · ·
a mad man to rescue²²⁷

In these two poems the word bird is used as Césaire's messenger of hope and symbol of liberation. Other words used in the context of African proverb such as 'white dog' symbolizes 'hate,' "black serpent" symbolizes "deadly hate," while "white" and "black" are color imagery used in juxtaposition to create reverse meaning, inner tension and rhythm. The word is important for the negritude poets. Césaire discovered that the words in the African proverbs can be used in a simple and straightforward way with drums to avoid the use of speech. In his poems, Césaire often used words whose meaning was inherent in African proverbs. This provide his poetry an air of detachment and an allusive quality of expression.

An interesting and important aspect of Césaire's poetry is its emotional, political, historical, and essential wholeness, for Césaire went beyond his anger; he surpassed it and channeled it toward a higher synthesis. In Cahier he found freedom.

I welcome my future hour when each word each gesture will
liven your face like that of a blond goat

²²⁶Césaire, Cahier, op. cit., p. 89.

²²⁷Ibid.

foraging in the intoxicating vat of my hand.²²⁸

Along with Senghor, Césaire questioned western values, but each hoped for and believed in universal brotherhood. Césaire expressed it differently. The violence in his poetry is a dialectic in negativity. In Cahier are images of renaissance through love, a new found freedom for him, that mitigates images of violence and destruction. In "Millibars of the Storm" he wrote,

Dream let's not yield among the hooves of frenzied horses
a tearful noise groping towards the immense wing of
your eyelid.²²⁹

In another poem, "Chevelure" he alludes to his sentiment in evoking the love of a woman:

And you
abode of my insolence of my tombs of my whirlwinds
Mane bundle of lianas fervent hope of shipwrecks
sleep softly on . . . my embrace my woman
my fortress²³⁰

Césaire never abandoned the use of the French language in his poetry. Although he was sentimental about the use of the dialect of his race, he was a product of colonialism; he was faced with the reality of the situation. He used the language of the colonizer, in spite of its handicaps. Césaire's poetry is expressive of his negritude and the regeneration of mankind. His poetry is the means by which he reveals his basic vision of a world in which man will experience a union through restored nature.

²²⁸Césaire, Cahier, op. cit., p. 88.

²²⁹Césaire, "Cadastre," Cahier, op. cit., p. 90.

²³⁰Césaire, "Chevelure," Cahier, op. cit., p. 91.

CHAPTER IV

NEGRITUDE POETRY: THE CRITICS, THE CURRICULUM

The Validity of Negritude--An Approach
to Literary Criticism

Negritude poetry in America and in Africa has been subjected to the literary touchstones of Western and African critics's sensibilities to and knowledge of its literary value. However, critical theories determining the validity of Negritude poetry in America and in Africa have been developed as basic and authentic criteria. They are worthy contributions within themselves to literature and literary criticism. It is significant for the critics to be aware of the comprehensive nature of the commitment underlying the Negritude movement and the writers who gave shape and substance to its totality.

Several major forces influenced the critical theories of negritude. Foremost was the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's and 1930's in America and the Manifesto of Langston Hughes. Both became a symbol of the awakening awareness to Blacks everywhere. The literature of black awareness in America dealt with the behavior and speech of the lower class Blacks and an interest in the traditional values of Africa. What is basic in this aspect of the literature is that the traditional culture of a people who came in large groups to another continent often survive. So it was with the African slaves. They did not abandon their culture on

board ship during the middle passage. It lived on unnoticed beneath the surface of the American cultural way of life and resurfaced in the poetry of negritude.

The problem that the Harlem Renaissance and the Manifesto created for the critic was the authenticity of the creative work that emerged. It raised the questions: Is it literature or is it folklore? Even so, the problem posed another problem within itself; asking by what standards it is to be judged required a standard definition not necessarily within the limits of traditionally western concepts. It also demanded within the context of the redefined term an explanation of the literary standards by which the quality of the literature would be evaluated.

Another force shaping critical theory was the Neo-Nègre Movement in Paris in 1934. Its primal influence on black culture was the first step toward ending cultural alienation and the beginning of united black solidarity. Undergirding the Neo-Nègre Movement, later to be the Negritude Movement, was the comprehensive commitment and personality of the writers who were to give shape and substance to its solidarity.

The literary implication of the movement led by Senghor, Damas, and Césaire had its beginning in Hughes's Manifesto. For the young African poets in Paris this meant rejection of the European literary models they had learned during their entire student days. They vowed their allegiance to proletarian literature. They adopted Surrealism which had replaced Da-Daism in Paris. This approach allowed the ultimate free style that characterized Negritude poetry. Unlike the poetic

revolution of the Harlem Renaissance, which inspired them, the French-speaking African poets could not divorce direct political elements from the cultural element of their poetry. For them politics was an integral part of their culture.

Two publications, Légitime Défense (1932) and L'Étudiant Noire (1934-40) were the vocal literary organs of the Neo-Nègre Movement. Their aim was to mobilize black poets around negritude and to give concreteness to their purpose of introducing African elements into their poetic art.

A third force was two major literary events in 1947-48. One was the publication of Senghor's anthology of African verse, Anthologie de la Nouvelle Poesie Nègre et Malagache (1948). It reflected the dynamic personality of Senghor and his convictions about the ameliorative essence of the historical and essential negritude.

The other literary event was the publication of Présence Africaine (1947), a magazine extending the position taken by Légitime Défense. It extended and deepened the Neo-Nègre Movement by defining the poetic African creativity.

The fourth force was the convening of two literary conferences, The First and Second Congress of Black Writers in the Sorbonne, Paris, in 1956, and in Rome in 1959. The significance of the Congresses was the convening of black intellectuals from the whole world for the consideration of the works to be representative of black rebirth and freedom. As Césaire stated, the chief aim of the Congress in Rome was to determine the precise and exact definition of the writer's responsibility. The results of both conferences were basically twofold, to dewesternize Negro

culture and to seek freedom for the whole of humanity, and not just themselves alone, through poetic expressions of a global humanism.

A fifth major force was The First and Second World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal, in 1963 and 1966. The Festival convened for the purpose of Africa's self-evaluation of African Art. Senghor defined its purpose as being the "Defense and illustration of Negritude."¹

This study did not attempt to establish the validity of negritude poetry in terms of a pre-conceived validity of aesthetic judgment. Its aim was to consider poetic negritude in light of the critics's judgment based on major critical problems in literature. The literary schema of criticism of Professor M. H. Abrams, in The Mirror and the Lamp provided this basic approach to standards of criticism used in this study.

The critical statements and judgments of the critics, Western, European, and African, relating to the poetic works of Hughes, Damas, Senghor, and Césaire have been presented separately. This method provided undivided focus and clarity to the criticism and the artistry of each poet and his poetry.

The Western Critics of the Negritude
Poet: Langston Hughes

The poetry of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's received literary interest and attention from both white and black critics. Chief among the Harlem poets was Langston Hughes. Critical statements and

¹"The First and Second World Festival of Negro Arts," The Negro Digest (September 1966), p. 5.

judgments point up broad and divergent differences between what the critics have written in praise of and against the literary merits of Hughes. Their critical views revealed the provocative nature of his poetry for dialogue. Two basic facts should be kept in mind about the poet and his poetry. He was writing at a time when a major critical view was that black writers lacked any clearly-defined or steadily-pursued cultural policy. Another basic fact to remember is that Hughes's subject matter was always the same, the struggle of America's black citizens to achieve full citizenship. He did change the method and manner of poetic expression as he moved through varying periods of time in his life in Harlem and in his many travel experiences throughout the world.

Barksdale, a major black literary critic, has suggested that the literary attitude that characterized Hughes's poetic method and manner is traceable in part to three major cultural developments. They affected also all American literary expression in the 1920's. One was the directed sensitivity to the black folk movement and the mode of music that came out of the black experience.² Another cultural development was the distinct blues and jazz mode of folk expression that accompanied the folk movement. The historical and essential significance of these influences on Hughes's poetry are within themselves threefold. They constituted the theme, the rhythm, and the style. With the blues, Hughes combined the spiritual theme that emerged from the hard and harsh experiences during and following slavery. The rhyming scheme a a b a of

²Richard K. Barksdale, Langston Hughes: The Poet and His Critics (Chicago, The American Library Association, 1977), pp. 19-20.

the western European folk ballad was fused with the "call and response" pattern, the falsetto "holla" and the flattened fifth and seventh of the African proverbs and lyrics. All of the elements helped to create Hughes's poetic style.³

Closely allied to the second movement was the third cultural development that affected Hughes's poetry which was his concept of a purifying primitivism. It grew out of the interest in Africa as a political and symbolic motherland. These elements are basic to sound critical judgment.

The diversity of critical statements about Hughes's poetry, especially among his black critics, came from the sophisticated middle-class intellectual writers and from his fellow-writers of the lower-class movement. The differences that existed between these two groups were ideological, based on the concept of black identity and definition.

Hughes's use of the folk idiom in his poetry represented for him a realistic interpretation of Negro life in Harlem. It also represented his critical view of the poet's freedom to write about subjects and in a style of his own choice. He expressed this position in the Manifesto, and in response to a question raised at the Black Writers Debate in the United States in the 1920's, the black writers debated the topic: Why should Negro artists vary from the national artistic norm when Negro artists in other countries have not done so? Hughes's conclusive statement was direct and positive. He said, "an artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he

³Janheinz Jahn, "Blues and Calypso," Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968), pp. 166-180.

might choose." He chose the folk, the "I am a Negro" concept. The historical and aesthetic consequences were the rejection of a variety of values superimposed on the Negro as a result of slavery, and the adoption of black values based on the "black is beautiful" concept. For his poetry this meant several things: the rejection of the bourgeoisie image of the Negro for the life style of the folk; the rejection of the social essence of the spiritual and the Wesleyan hymn harmony for the free verse form of jazz and the Blues; the rejection of the spirit for social inclusion and acceptance for the feeling of alienation and loneliness. However, permeating his poetry were a deep hope and a fervent dream for a universal understanding of brotherhood for men of good will. His concept of poetry became the nucleus of the Harlem school of poetry which developed a schism between Hughes and the bourgeois writers.

The reaction of the writers to Hughes's poetry ranged from bitter denunciation to glorious praise. Some writers and critics found Hughes's poetic theory disturbing in content and form. Some others found it refreshing and innovative. The latter group interpreted its reality in terms of the historical circumstances that shaped its social and psychological environment. The reality was naturalism, color, music, gusto, and a zest for living.

The scholarly W. E. B. DuBois; Benjamin Brawley, the eminent historian; and Countee Cullen, a talented poet, are representative of the middle-class black intellectuals who were severe in their rejection of Hughes's poetry. They found everything about it distasteful and unacceptable. This attitude is understandable in view of the fact that

these writers were promoters of the "talented tenth" idea of culture.⁴ They were interested in writing about the better class of Blacks who were the respectable or genteel Blacks such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals as opposed to porters, waiters and laborers espoused by Hughes in his poetry. The reaction to Hughes's poetry developed a schism between some of the intellectual élite and the writers of the folk tradition.

The realistic theme of the folk in Hughes's poetry disturbed the middle-class black critics most of all. Hughes's image and diction of the Negro in his The Weary Blues provoked radical criticism from W. E. B. DuBois. He resented Hughes's emphasizing the exotic or seamy side of black life. The blues-spirituals combination in the poetry was contradictory to DuBois's approval of the spirituals as colorful and exciting. He was of the opinion that the spirituals brought "anthropomorphic intensity to an often colorless Judeo-Christian religion."⁵ Their music was proof of the enduring creativity of black musicians.

Benjamin Brawley, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Jessie Fauset and George Schuyler stood with DuBois for the genteel "rear guard" of the literature and the cause of integration and assimilation into the main

⁴The phrase "talented tenth" is an informal description of a leadership potential in black America. It was originally used by DuBois in his Souls of Black Folk in 1903. By the 1920's the term "talented tenth" had become synonymous with what was referred to by black people as "smug" respectable brown and beige upper middle-class society. This group of Blacks arrogantly assumed unto themselves the responsibility of leading the rest of black America into an acceptable form of racial integration.

⁵Barksdale, op. cit., p. 61.

stream of American life.⁶ Brawley lamented the romantic temper of the 1920's and the use of Blues and jazz in Hughes's poetry, and in black literature in general. He was careful to pinpoint specific literary and moral effects of these elements on the black man's personal well-being. He listed three major categories in which he found fault with Hughes's poetic style. The first was a lack of any accepted standards whatsoever. The second was the dominant mood, a preference for sordid, unpleasant or forbidden themes. The third was considered by Brawley as a practical effect of the use of the Blues and jazz upon black people. It was seen as causing Blacks to turn away from "any thing that looked like good, honest work in order to loaf and to call oneself an artist."⁷

Georgia D. Johnson advised Hughes to depict only the best aspects of black life, while Jessie Fauset feared a trend might be established counter to what "whites were really interested in learning about the better class of Blacks."⁸

Countee Cullen was one of the first poets to take issue with Hughes's poetic work. Cullen had been impressed with the Victorian arts and poetic style and had tried to imitate them in his poetry. He warned Hughes and other black poets as well to create "truly representative" types. He warned them further about the status of black

⁶Benjamin Brawley, "The Negro Literary Renaissance," The Southern Workman, No. 56 (1927), p. 178. See also W. E. B. DuBois, The Negro (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1937).

⁷Ibid. See also Benjamin Brawley's Negro Genius (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1937).

⁸Ibid. See also Richard Bardolph, The Negro Vanguard (New York: Rhinehart, 1959).

literature regarding the critics. He said,

The Negro has not yet built up a large enough body of sound, healthy race literature to permit him to speculate in 'abortions' and 'aberrations' which other people are all too prone to accept as truly legitimate.⁹

It is interesting to this study to point out that Fauset and Cullen also expressed mixed critical reactions to Hughes's poetry. Cullen raised questions about Hughes's jazz poems in The Weary Blues. However, he acknowledged Hughes as "a poet with whom to reckon, to experience, and here and there . . . to quarrel." In his opinion Hughes's Blues motif lacked discipline. He expressed his view of the jazz poems as being "interlopers in the company of the truly beautiful poems in other sections of the book." In fact he questioned the presence of the jazz poems in that "dignified company, that select and austere circle" of poetic literary expression.¹⁰

The literary consequence of Hughes's use of the total life of the folk in his poetry for these critics was chiefly a matter of a subject matter and the quality of the poetic expression as representative literature.

The writers and supporters of Hughes and the Harlem School of poetry were convinced that they observed literary standards. Furthermore, they believed in the standards of their work, not because they might be in keeping with western critical standards but because their literature had its orientation in a standard concept of literary

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Countee Cullen, "The Negro and American Culture," Opportunity (February 1926).

criticism. Their literature was anchored in the life of a people at a crucial time and place in their lives.¹¹

In the light of these conclusions, critics underscored Hughes's compulsion to assess his culture and its value. One of these critics was Charles S. Johnson. He defended Hughes's use of the blues and jazz idiom. He saw Hughes as one of a "new breed of Negro writers who dared to write about the folk of Negro society, the cabaret singers, dancers, musicians, street walkers, hard luck victims, sinners, and hard working people."¹² Other critics who appreciated the lack of urbanity in Hughes's poetry, also understood its social meaning and implication. Alain Locke recognized and proclaimed Hughes in the same vein as Johnson. To him, the poet was "that kind of rare genius who could strip life to the buff and poetize it." His poetry was described as being more than poetry; it was "vivid, pulsing, creative portraits of Negro folk fables and moods, full of the crying laugh that eases misery."¹³ Other black critics such as Richard Wright, Sterling Brown, and Arthur Davis praised him for his artistic talent. Like Blyden Jackson, they saw him as a serious poet as he dealt with significant social matters in realistic literature of the Negro including blues and jazz.¹⁴

¹¹James F. Smith, Jr., "Primitives and Saviors: Cultural Images of Blacks in the 1920's," Minority Voices: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and the Arts, Elaine D. Woodall, ed., 1 (Spring 1977):53-60.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Alain Locke, "Black Truth and Black Beauty: A Retrospective Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1931," Opportunity XI (January 1933):14-18.

¹⁴Ibid.

Critical thought on Hughes's poetry was not limited solely to black critics. White academic and professional critics, for the most part, found his non-traditional poetry too far removed from formal traditions, and simply chose not to consider it. An interesting exception to this neglect was the French critic, Jean Wagner. Like Emanuel, Wagner credited Hughes's poetry as being an extensive critical assessment for all periods of Hughes's writing career. His criticism appearing in his Les Poetes Nègres des Etats Unis (1962) includes his reactions to Hughes's use of jazz as initially a form of rebellion, "the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world," a kind of mask-wearing. Wagner analyzed Hughes's use of the blues in his poetry as being an expression of a half-world of the black urban ghetto. He acclaimed the jazz and blues poems as an effective technical experiment similar to that of E. E. Cumming's and Guillaume Apollinaire's experiments. In fact, he observed jazz to be Harlem's heartbeat. He said,

The actual substance of jazz is Negro life, especially that of the great black metropolis. Between Harlem's heartbeats and the beat of the rhythm section . . . there are natural affinities.¹⁵

In spite of Wagner's comprehensive profile of Hughes and his poetry, two major critics took issue with the authenticity of his views. Richard Barksdale claimed that Wagner's analysis revealed his inability to comprehend the ramifications and implications of black urban life. He challenged Wagner's reference to jazz as a means of rebellion. Barksdale saw in Hughes's jazz poems more than what Wagner saw. Barksdale saw it

¹⁵As quoted in Barksdale, op. cit., p. 34.

as the substance of life itself, "the rhythm of life / Is a jazz rhythm." Further, Barksdale saw evidences of generalizations in a sense suggestive of bias and misreading of Hughes's poetic role of recording the life of the folk, especially in Wagner's reference to jazz as mask-wearing.

Janheinz Jahn, the German writer and critic, felt that Wagner's critical views of Hughes's poetry lacked an understanding of the ideas and stylistic features of the poet. Both Barksdale and Jahn saw Wagner as verbally overacting to Hughes's poems. Even so Wagner felt that evidences of the weaknesses and strengths of Hughes's poetry did not diminish the intrinsic worth of the poet's achievements. In fact, he professed Hughes to be the most acclaimed poet of the Negro Renaissance.¹⁶

Emanuel's views of Hughes's poetry were not dissimilar to Wagner's. He praised Hughes's use of the free verse form in which he "developed a medley of miscellaneous voices chanting a single theme." He saw this as the poet's experimenting with poetic styles. Emanuel pointed out,

Most Negro and white reviewers approved the blues poems, the revelations of Negro working-class life and the general craftsmanship. They saw Hughes as a modernistic seeker of new verse forms, a potentially major American poet.¹⁷

An interesting and significant critic of the concept of negritude in the poetry of Langston Hughes was Hughes himself. He saw no reason why the ordinary, common black people should not be written about in

¹⁶Janheinz Jahn, op. cit., p. 189.

¹⁷James A. Emanuel, Langston Hughes (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 31.

literature. He justified the orientation toward them in his poetry as reality. He said,

Certainly, I personally knew very few people anywhere who were wholly beautiful and wholly good. Besides, I felt that the masses of one people had as much in their lives to put into books as did those more fortunate ones . . . with some means and ability.¹⁸

Further he recounted,

I knew only the people I had grown up with, and they weren't people whose shoes were always shined, who had been to Harvard, or who had heard of Bach. But they seemed to me good people, too.¹⁹

A major aspect of his critical reaction to his poetry was at the same time in defense of the attack made on Carl Van Vechten. Hughes credited Van Vechten as being one of his chief advocates and sponsors. He responded to Allison Davis's essay in which Davis attacked Van Vechten as a corrupter and chief mover of primitivism in Negro writers including Hughes himself.

In spite of the apparent praise Davis attributed to Hughes, the poet's response was,

Some of the colored critics, evidently thinking I did not know my mind, accused Mr. Van Vechten of having brought about what they felt were various defects of my poetry. But the truth of the matter was that many of my poems had been written before I heard of or met Mr. Van Vechten and they were not included in my Weary Blues, because scarcely any dialect or folk-idioms were included in the Weary Blues. The Blues, spirituals, shouts, and work poems were written while I was dragging bags of wet wash laundry or toting trays at the Wardmen Park Hotel in Washington.²⁰

¹⁸Langston Hughes, The Big Sea: An Autobiography (New York: A. Knopf, 1940), pp. 259-272.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

Hughes's views of his use of the folk as a source for his theme, imagery, rhythm, and diction in his poetry were also a response to all his critics. His response was forthright and simple. He said,

The Negro critics and many of the intellectuals were very sensitive about their race in books. I sympathized deeply with those critics and those intellectuals, and saw clearly the need for some of the kinds of books they wanted. But I did not see how they could expect every Negro author to write such books. So I didn't pay any attention to the critics who railed against the subject matter of my poems, nor did I write them protesting letters.²¹

At the height of the black awareness literature of the Harlem Renaissance, the folk theme in Hughes's poetry achieved national recognition. It earned for Hughes national and international acclaim that he valued the rest of his life. Carl Van Doren observed, "Something has been poured into the stream of native culture which cannot soon cease to tinge it."²² There was the hope that this recognition would help to establish a major literary trend of Afro-American literary criticism to western literary thought. Additionally, there was the hope that a better understanding of the literature would develop based on its reality to Negro life.

The European and African Critics of the Negritude
Poets: Damas, Senghor, and Césaire

The interest of the poets, Damas, Senghor, and Césaire with Africa was more comprehensive than an interest in the oral traditions validating their cultural roots. Their interest included consideration of the

²¹Ibid.

²²Barksdale, op. cit., p. 27.

modern world. They envisioned the past as bridge to present and future understanding and relationship between the black man and the white man. They also conceived of negritude as a means of establishing the credibility of Africa's existence and its contribution to world civilization. This situation is often unclear to European and African writers and poets alike in their literary assessment of negritude literature. However, criticism of the negritude poets and their poetry must take into consideration the non-literary as well as the literary qualities that contributed historically to their development. All these elements interact and illustrate the origin and context of a new attitude and approach to African literature, negritude.

The central concern of negritude for the critic is twofold: its implication for current literary and political conditions in Africa and its impact on establishing criteria to judge its literary merit. The diverse views found a frame of reference for interaction in the positive Senghorian concept of negritude and the negative concept of Soyinka and Mphahlele.

Despite the positive tributes the poets expressed about the traditions of Africa's cultural past, there were poets who were critical of their relevance for Africa's current situation. Some West African French-speaking Africans and English-speaking South African writers were unwavering in their conviction that literature should address itself to the practical reality of the culture in which the African finds himself. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian poet, playwright, and critic, spoke out against any positive values of Negritude. His criticism of Negritude seemed to

have been based on its approach to the cultural theme. Even though the poetic vision in his poetry includes the use of traditional material, Soyinka himself is always present within the tradition, directing the experience and giving it meaning. So he jokingly laughed at and condemned negritude in terms of a tiger. He said he saw no necessity "for a tiger to proclaim his tigritude," so why must an African proclaim his Africanness? Despite Senghor's position that negritude could not be static, but must change with new situations, Soyinka referred to Senghor's statement as poetic utterances, the "philosophical straight-jacket." It was not a meaningful definition of negritude. He said,

the Negritude poets demonstrate that modern poets in French, who are poets first and foremost, may utilize the past but at the same time move toward the exploration of the present and the self.²³

Like Soyinka, Ezekiel Mphahlele considered negritude as "sheer romanticism." He said "often it is mawkish and strikes a pose." Mphahlele was controversial in his position about negritude. His views on negritude were of a political nature. He rejected negritude's ideology not its historical relevance. He said,

I have been accused of debunking negritude. I have often affirmed it for its pioneers who wanted in the early thirties to free themselves of French models as artists and as men. As a literary creed it produces poetry that does not tell the whole truth about Africa or falsifies in part present-day realities.²⁴

²³Ellen Conroy Kennedy, The Negritude Poets (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. xxiii.

²⁴Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Negritude Revisited," The African Image (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 80.

Mphahlele's position on negritude was at times a matter of political practicality and critical criteria for judging literature. He believed the poets should direct their talents to ameliorating current conditions in Africa rather than to writing of her cultural past. As an African living in restricted conditions South of the Sahara, he suggested,

. . . it should serve as a reminder to the apostles of negritude that they would be more profitably occupied if, in addition to preserving African art, they tried to assist the African artist to negotiate his present dilemma with the hostile racialist communities and bring it to a larger world audience.²⁵

Other times he praised negritude further and clarified and affirmed his regard for Senghor and Césaire as great poets. He had no doubt about Senghor's ability to transcend the limitations of responses imposed by negritude on the writer. Of all the negritude poets and in all the poetry of the black world, Mphahlele held Césaire in the highest esteem. He wrote,

I still regard Aimé Césaire especially his Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal, as the greatest synthesis of the individual vision and the public voice of the lyrical and dramatic tones. Its emotional and intellectual range has no parallel.²⁶

Other outstanding poets and writers such as Lewis Nkosi, Chinua Achebe, James Ngugi, and Sebastian Mezu shared basic critical opinion of negritude. Nkosi, a South African critic spoke of negritude in terms of its failure to enlarge the African "sensibility and capacity for sympathy." He feared negritude as a cult or dogma against which works

²⁵Ezekiel Mphahlele, "The Importance of Being Black," New Leader 43, 41 (October 24, 1960):11.

²⁶Mphahlele, "Negritude Revisited," op. cit., p. 81.

by modern artists would have to be tested.²⁷ In the same manner Achebe was critical of the negritude poets' use of French models to recall nostalgically Africa's past. Ngugi, Mezu and the Senegalese critic, Sembene Ousmane saw negritude as dated and lacking a future. Mezu commented, however, that even though negritude was dated, and the time demands thought of another type of poetry, the poet could still record truthfully Africa's traditional past.²⁸

The negritude poets and critics that rallied around Soyinka and Mphahlele had their counterpart in the poets and critics that concurred with the Senghorian poetic vision.

Several of them recognized the essential values and qualities in the oral tradition of Africa. Their views had cultural and historical overtones. For them it was a matter of writing down and saving from oblivion an exclusively oral folklore that otherwise might be lost. Another reason was the need to dispel the notion that Africa had played a simple role in world culture. Bernard Dadié expressed a belief in the didactic and historical values of the tales, proverbs and legends. He saw in them more than his cultural heritage; they revealed to him similarities to those of other countries. It was an answer to the charge that Africans are a people without a literature or culture simply because there was no visible evidence of written records. Dadié compared the

²⁷Lewis Nkosi, Home and Exile (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 105.

²⁸Robert P. Armstrong, "African Literature and European Critics," a paper presented at the 7th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Chicago, October 1964, p. 3. See also Sebastian O. Mezu, The Poetry of Leopold Sédar Senghor (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973).

legends to museums and monuments; as such they held an important place in the daily life of the Africans.²⁹ Ashmadum Ba praised its versatility for literature. He said,

It provides diversity of literary genres, its precise codification, the variety of musical instruments and dances accompanying it--all of which are indicative of the level of development reached by this poetry.³⁰

The African oral literature is credited with containing aspects of wisdom and ethics of all people of African descent that also have importance for the negritude poets and the literature program.

Lilyan Kesteloot pointed out basic characteristics of folklore of African's as a universalizing quality full of distinct poetic qualities. She wrote of it as

. . . drawing its inspiration from a foundation common to all people, sound common sense, which, as, everyone knows, is found throughout the world. It constitutes the literature of the tom-tom which constitutes a language all by itself.³¹

Kesteloot disagreed with the poets that saw the oral tradition of Africa as stifling. In fact she recognized it as naturally poetic. She interpreted this as meaning the composition of its rhythm had a spontaneous relationship with its language. She believed its metaphors and symbols had their being in abstract concepts. All combined in a practically simple expression.

²⁹Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), p. 65.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 356.

Kesteloot illustrated this last reference to imagery through the expression, "Good-evening," in the Doula dialect as "awaindele," meaning "Are you darkening indeed with the day?"³²

Eldred Jones also disagreed with Mphahlele and Soyinka. He did not see the traditional African forms as limiting the artistic vision. He explained that the cultural movement reacted strongly to the assumption that nothing good had ever been or could be produced in Africa. As a result, the poets naturally responded and extolled the values of traditional life. The imagery that emerged was a rural paradise, presided over by ancestral spirits and voices of the praise singers. Like the "talented tenth" in America the negritude poets felt the need to avert their eyes from what was wrong and to concentrate on showing what was good in African society. Their interest in Africa's past freed other writers of the imposition of writing only about Africa's present condition. He said,

The African writer can now, I feel, shake himself free of this indirect limitation and take a total and unembarrassed view of his Africa--the Africa of the present and the past. The resulting picture may be unromantic, it may be disillusioning. The only rule should be that it must reflect the total situation.³³

For the most part English-speaking African critics did not defend negritude. However, several of them have expressed their views of its traditional nature and the literary validity. The distinguished Abiola Irele was one who possessed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding

³²Ibid.

³³Per Wästberg, ed., The Writer in Modern Africa (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1968), pp. 71-84.

of negritude. His dissertation at the Sorbonne developed the topic, Les Origines de la Negritude a la Martinique (1966). He has also written papers on the cultural nature of negritude. First of all, he credited Senghor as being the chief mover of negritude. He was impressed with Senghor's position on negritude as not being a philosophical idea of a Negro essence, but rather a historical phenomenon, a social and cultural movement closely related to African nationalism.³⁴

In another instance he concurred with the inherent nature of negritude in these terms:

This Negro being is rooted in Africa's tradition, unified by a common philosophical concept of culture: a common ontological outlook which governs the African psyche and in which the Negro American can rightly be supposed to share. This total African cosmography is what Senghor calls "the ensemble of African values."³⁵

Irele was convinced of the literary merit and quality of the poetry expressing the African view of the universe. He said,

apart from empirical considerations such as those dictated by racial affinity, there is objective proof of a fundamental African world system, which embraces Bantu, Akan, Yoruba, Kikuyu and Zulu together in one cultural family. This fundamental conception of the world is expressed in languages, music, and art that are related, and that are surely distinguishable from European and Asian, and more profoundly still in the religions of the African peoples. I find nothing to contradict the thesis of a unified African universe.³⁶

³⁴Abiola Irele, "Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism," The Journal of Modern African Studies, III (1965), 321-348.

³⁵Abiola Irele, "A Defense of Negritude," Transition, no. 13 (March-April 1964):10.

³⁶Ibid., p. 11.

Cyprian Ekwenzi's critical reaction to negritude was not dissimilar to Eldred Jones's reference to the function of traditional literature nor to the position taken by Langston Hughes, as expressed in his poetry concerning black awareness. Ekwenzi reacted to its historical significance. Using Soyinka's famous tiger comment as an analogy, he said,

Wole Soyinka has been quoted as saying that 'a Tiger does not shout about its Tigritude.' This may be true when it is not necessary for the Tiger to shout. But it must be remembered that twenty years ago when negritude was first postulated by the Martinique Poet, Aimé Césaire, it was necessary for the blackman to reassure himself of his pride in being black because blackness had become a shameful thing, an undignified state. There was, in fact, a flight from blackness and a yearning for becoming white. Thus negritude served as an affirmation of the African personality, the assertion of the human quality of the blackman.³⁷

Another crucial concern for the African writers centered around the retention or rejection of the French language. The concern was significant because of the socio-historical context of negritude poetry. The mixed traditions of the French culture and the African culture were the factors of the language problem facing the poets. Many studies and statements have been made on the literary significance of the historical relationship between the ex-colonial and his European language. The consequences of the so-called colonization languages were obvious ones that could not be denied or readily rejected by the poets. It was their tool to shape their indigenous culture.

The critical studies and comments of the European and African critics on the problem of the African intellectuals' use of a foreign

³⁷Cyprian Ekwenzi, "African Literature," Transition, no. 83 (December 1964):295.

language were the bases for such questions as: Is it possible to create an authentic Negro literature? Is it possible to create a Negro poetry in a foreign language? The questions received responses from a number of writers and critics.

Janheinz Jahn's position was that the language which the black poet used was unimportant. He felt that the way in which he used it was either specifically Negro or not. In fact he attributed the extraordinary freshness of African poetry to its being written in European languages while disregarding the worlds' meaning and imagery as concepts.³⁸

The well-known study of George Lamming is often referred to in discussions about the French-speaking African's language. Lamming examined the cultural significance of language problems within the context of Shakespeare's colonial archetypes, Caliban and Prospero in The Tempest. He projected the French-speaking African as Caliban and the French colonizer as Prospero. The result: Caliban is Prospero's convert to "civilization," after having been colonized by "language" and excluded by language.³⁹

Two American writers joined the European and African writers and critics in commenting of the effect of an adopted language on the African poets' ability to express their themes and feelings in their poetry. Langston Hughes speaking about the African poets' use of French

³⁸Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing, op. cit., p. 158.

³⁹George Lamming, The Pleasure of Exile (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 109.

felt that it was extremely difficult to be obliged to express one's soul in a learned language [French and English] that is not one's own.⁴⁰

The difficulty of which Hughes spoke was the emotional and cultural tension inherent in the writer's use of the adopted language. For the writer, it was a question of thinking and reasoning in the language he had learned knowing that the merits of his people, moral, spiritual, and psychological, were not readily transposed nor appropriately expressed except in the vernacular language.

Mercer Cook generalized on the literary significance of the tension created out of emotional and cultural ties between the negritude poets and the European languages. He pointed out that the poets used the European literary techniques and related perceptual values in order to postulate African and Anti-European points of view. He referred to the poets' versatility and creativity via surrealism to take the white man's language, dislocate his syntax, recharge his words with new strength and sometimes with new meaning such as the rehabilitation of such terms as Africa, blackness, beauty and peace.⁴¹

Lilyan Kesteloot and Gerald Moore agreed with Jahn that French and English were practical languages for the African poets. Obiajunwa Wali, a Nigerian critic disagreed with them. Wali argued,

The whole uncritical acceptance of French and English
as the inevitable medium for educated African writing

⁴⁰Langston Hughes, "Elite Literature," *Black African Literature*, ed. Jean-Pierre Makouta-Mboukou. Black African Literature: An Introduction (Washington, D. C.: Black Orpheus Press, 1973).

⁴¹Mercer Cook, "African Voices of Protest," The Militant Black Writer in Africa and the United States, eds. Mercer Cook and Stephen E. Henderson (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 52.

is misdirected, and has no chance of advancing African language and culture . . . any true African literature must be written in African languages . . . An African writer who thinks and feels in his own language must write in that language.⁴²

It was Senghor who gave the classic answer to the critics about negritude poetry and its relationship to the French culture. He defended his use of French as being a poetic medium. He expressed his choice of French as being the "forerunner of others who show the way for an authentic Negro poetry which never abandons its intentions to be French."⁴³

Senghor did not advocate the elimination of French nor the substitution of a local language for several reasons. He expressed the utility and aesthetic necessity of French. Senghor frankly acknowledged an absence of choice as the most important reason for the use of French by African writers:

I repeat, we did not choose. It was our situation as a colonized people which imposed the language of the colonizers upon us, or rather their policy of assimilation.⁴⁴

Senghor concluded, however, that if the French-speaking African poets had a choice, they still would have chosen French. This apparent attitude was seen by the critics of negritude and of Senghor himself as a concession in the period of the great African nationalism.

However useful these generalizations may be, they did not reduce the implications for each of the poets of the relationship between

⁴²Obiajunwa Wali, Introduction, African Literature and the Universities, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴³Leopold S. Senghor, "The Opening Address," The Dakar Conference, African Literature and the Universities, op. cit., pp. 13-17

⁴⁴Ibid.

African literature and the emotional instability of language. A precise effect of that relationship was demonstrated in the poet's surreal use of language. It was a communicative device and a total cultural experience. The interesting developments emphasized that the language was not merely technique. It was also the embodiment of the African civilization. In this sense it represented modes of perceptual values within its culture. On the whole, therefore, the familiar tensions resulting from the African poets' use of their European language emphasized the cultural conflict. The inherited language was bound up with the poets' total perception of self and humanity. At the same time it was a means through which the poets emphasized the rejection of the Western values and proclaimed a universal appeal for brotherhood.

American, European, and African poets alike have thus been verifying the extent to which the negritude movement has been of authentic literary importance. The varied reactions of the critics are testimony that it represented a cultural renaissance of phenomenal proportion in many parts of the world. The critical analysis of the negritude poetry in the United States, Europe, and Africa proved it to be a literature committed to changing the traditional norms of thinking and feeling and attitudes toward the black man, creating a new way of seeing and expressing.

What Soyinka, Mphahlele and other Nigerian and South African poets were proclaiming was that they wished to create and to be judged by universal standards of art; to use freely whatever inspiration and models they wished. To them negritude suggested a romantization of Africa, an

aesthetic restriction to an uncertain "universal black style." In short, they felt that the emphasis on the traditional African form limited their artistic vision reducing it to flattery and protest of a social or political usefulness. It hampered the search for truth.⁴⁵

The implications of these critical views make clear the dichotomy of reactions from the African critics. Despite the effect of the political situation on the views of the English-speaking South African critics, and the literary and political stance of the English-speaking West African critics, negritude poetry was not "frivolous" or "romantic" as Mphahlele would have one believe. In whichever language, it was not intended to be art for art's sake. It conformed to M. H. Abrams' definition of criticism. He stated that "a work of art is chiefly a means to an end and an instrument for getting something done, and tends to judge its values according to its success in achieving that aim."⁴⁶ In this context, the literary aspect of negritude fits in as a literary standard within itself.

Negritude Poetry and Implications for Education

The intrinsic, durable, and distinctive qualities of negritude poetry described by the poets and analyzed by the critics serve as an advocacy for its place in non-Afro-American and non-African higher studies. Negritude has come to mean several things to its readers.

⁴⁵Gerald Moore, African Literature and the Universities (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965), p. 5.

⁴⁶M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton Publishers, 1953).

Specifically, to some it reflects the positive and direct influence of ancient and traditional culture which has quite different roots from those of European origin. To some others, it is seen in all its ramifications as being a representative facsimile, a mere extension of French literature. To them, this is valid, since Senghor, Damas, and Césaire and other Negritude poets as well write in French. Still, to the majority negritude poetry means a new literature of the world with its authentic and original genres, themes, and message.

The artistic qualities of negritude poetry using its characteristic theme, love for a suffering humanity, are viable approaches to understanding and developing a universal appreciation of this literature. Both of these qualities, artistic and thematic, merge and create, with Césaire especially, a penetrating expression of emotion. The understanding of the emotions of suffering is a universal and permanent expression of the Negro soul. These three aspects will be explored on a larger scale and in broader terms for consideration of negritude poetry for the school curriculum.

A major contribution of negritude poetry to education is the opportunity it affords the teacher and student to know and appreciate its universal qualities. A study of the oral or traditional content of the African culture brings to the student its historical nature and relationship to a universal society. A classic idea describing the situation in which a culture relates to society is expressed in the concept that the individual is a sustaining and rational being whose chief aim is

freedom in which to think. Alfred Kazin pointed out a commonality existing between literature and people. It is the modern concept of literature and art which he described as "available strategy of the unconscious, the primitive, and the primeval for uniting people in common myths."⁴⁷ This concept and three pertinent conclusions about the nature and force of literature have relevance for the concept and force of negritude poetry as a part of a universal or global society.

Kazin took into consideration Freud's and Jung's thesis that the individual unconscious recapitulates the history of the race. A second consideration was the idea that the primitive mind still survives in the obscurities of the soul. The significance of these two considerations is in Kazin's interpretation of modernism in the historical sense. He referred to T. S. Eliot's view on tradition to substantiate his opinion:

. . . the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence: the historical sense compels a man to write not only with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. . . . He must be aware that the mind of Europe . . . is a development which abandons nothing en route which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer.⁴⁸

Negritude poetry in America and in Africa regarded its historical meaning as a continuation of this kind of modernism and as a reaction to

⁴⁷Alfred Kazin, "We See from the Periphery, not the Center: Reflections on Literature in an Age of Crisis," World Literature Today (Spring 1977):193.

⁴⁸Ibid.

it. As a continuation of modernism, the negritude poets offer to the school curriculum expressions of their search for black identity within the realm of human identity. Some critics feel that both Americans, white and black, and Africans were stripped in the past by Europeans of any claim to being historical people. For the Afro-American it was more intense. It was a need to establish his roots and his history.

The return to source technique of the poets provides for all students, especially the black student, a sense of authentic history of his being in the world of being. Importantly, the poetry is a response of black Americans and Africans to the taunts that the black man had no history. This accusation has prevailed over generations. The poetry was intended to bring a concrete solution to this problem by exploration of the African tradition. Because the black man had been accused of lacking a rich cultural background, the negritude poets set out to establish and distinguish cultural and racial differences existing among races of people. The end result they sought was for mutual understanding. In this direction Senghor seemed quite anxious to point out a fundamental trait of negritude poetry often overlooked or often misinterpreted. He said, "It is remarkable that here [in the works of negritude] anger was never hate nor grimace; that the racial sentiment was anti-racist."⁴⁹ Negritude makes an appeal for human identity. It was an appeal of man to man concerning the great elementary needs of justice, brotherhood, and love.

⁴⁹ Leonard Markovitz, Leopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude (New York: Atheneum Press, 1969), p. 237.

Summary

Chapter IV brought into focus the poets' concern for literary negritude as a means for creating and cementing a universal relationship among people. It also dealt with its role in the literature curriculum.

Two theoretical approaches to race and the search for black identity appealed to the poets. They used the theory of common experience that all peoples of a race or civilization have undergone in the same historical process. In this sense, all people have shared perspectives, customs, and attitudes. Hence significant differences between peoples are seen as only the result of historical and social changes.

The other is the theory of innate differences between people of diverse cultures and races. It recognizes differences existing between peoples, but these differences do not necessarily involve a question of superiority.⁵⁰ In this context negritude poetry brings to the curriculum the concept of synthesis and unity. The poetry opens up for the student an avenue for exploring the authentic roots of culture for a better understanding and mutual respect.

The relationship of Africa's cultural past to modern Afro-American and African literature is complex. Perhaps this is traceable to seeing art as a conscious effort on the part of the negritude poet; contrary to the way in which historians may see history. Cementing the negritude poets' relationship to the cultural past were the forces of politics. Hardly anywhere in the African world is there any part of literature

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 60.

which does not have strong links with politics. Negritude poetry is no exception. In America, it was the imposition and assimilation of the white culture. In Africa and the Caribbean, it was imposition and assimilation of the French culture.

Negritude poetry in this context offers the curriculum means for international understanding of the poet's commitment to his art. Attempts to establish a positive Afro-African identity meant also an attempt to dispel misleading Western generalizations about the black culture. The poets felt misunderstanding in both cultures existed mainly because of a lack of knowledge surrounding the culture. A point to consider for international understanding is that bound up in the identity crisis was the complex struggle for full citizenship in America and for independence and nation-building in Africa. For the English-speaking South African, the struggle was for all three: full-citizenship, freedom, and independence of an apartheid government. These concerns and efforts account for the attitude directed toward the fusion of content, tone, mood, and style used in negritude poetry. They also account for the commitment of these poets to the people as their spokesman. They spoke in a collective voice against the external Western misunderstanding as well as the internal differences in perception by blacks themselves about black culture. The beauty of negritude poetry is that it offers these concerns for international understanding through its aesthetic relevance.

On the purely literary level, negritude poetry has been credited with bringing to the curriculum a new literature of the world. Critical analysis of the poetry revealed the varied poetic characteristics not

found in other ethnic literature. In fact, the literary criticism revealed many isolated judgments of the poetry. When they are taken together, they give a clear picture of the importance of the Afro-American and African literary tradition to the curriculum.

Some of the significant qualities are found in the vernacular poetry which used the "return to source" approach. In the rejuvenation of the past, the poetry creates landscape imagery and a sense of rhythm. Both simultaneously infuse pride and respect for the life style of the people.

Another observation is no evidence of art for art's sake element characterizing the poetry. As a committed literature, the intent is in the collective voice speaking out in the language of black awareness.

Still another literary contribution of the poetry is the diversity of language. Much controversy centers around the African poets' use of French rather than a native dialect or the English language. This situation has been proved to be of no serious consequence. Reputable anthologies provide translations of the collected works of the poets where a translation is needed. On the other hand Senghor's Anthology, Césaire's Cahier, and Damas's Pigments are acclaimed by critics as both excellent sources for studies in the French language and in translations.⁵¹

The use of distinct themes, imagery, rhythm, and diction brings to the literature a poet's quality of ethnic substance and form.

⁵¹Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, op. cit., p. 122.

Commenting further on the distinctive quality of the poets's artistry, critics had this to say, "These writers used other symbols, another rhythm, and have other reactions than French authors do."⁵²

These views dispel the idea that the poetry is trivial, boring, and lacking in substance. Sartre was concerned about its possible rejection without examination of its totality. His advice is pertinent:

Strong in our thousand years of literature, our Villions, our Racines, our Rimbauds, what I particularly fear is that we will look down upon our black friend's poems with charmed indulgence shown by parents for the offspring's birthday compliments. Let us guard against seeing in these products of the mind an homage to French culture. It is quite different. Culture is an instrument; we must not believe that they have chosen ours.⁵³

In Afro-American literature the use of the "folk" affords enrichment to the literature. Especially is this evident through the influence of the musical tenets and compact meaning of the spiritual on the blues and jazz elements in the poetry. Of major importance for all the students is the poetic expression of the universal belief: life is worth living. Much of Langston Hughes's poetry expresses this idea through the integrity and tenacity of the people as they face seemingly insolvable problems.

A very meaningful implication of the negritude poetry for the curriculum also is the theoretical understanding of its literary value as genre. The awareness of what happens between the student and the quality of the poetry makes it possible for him to make a literary

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

judgment of the poetry. Of course, the development of a high level literary appreciation of the genres depends on the students' emotional reading ability and his intellectual maturity. Whatever the level of learning, the essential thing is that the student is provided the experience of a wider sphere in which to understand himself and society as a part of the whole universe.

For such an experience to occur two major points need clarification: the acceptance of the negritude poetry as literature, whether written in French or in English; and recognition of critical standards by which the poetry is to be judged. Both require an understanding of the terms "historical reality" and "essential reality" as they apply to the literature.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane, an eminent African writer and critic in defense of negritude, did not take this position of criticism as a kind of grill to which all present and future work by black artists must be subjected automatically. He recognized it, however, as a decisive moment in the history of the cultural evolution.⁵⁴ As such, to react critically and justly to the Negro aesthetic, students must be aware of the poet's characteristic sensibility or way of approach as with any other poet's work.

Closely related to the student's theoretical understanding of the literary value of the poetry is the poetry's implication for theories of pedagogy. Contemporary educators and curriculum theorists were aware of the need to reconsider not only the content of the literature, but also

⁵⁴Cheikh Hamidou Kane, "The Writers Speak," African Literature and the Universities, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

the technique and approaches as well. They advocated the cross-cultural content of the literature that reflects the character of the learner. They also advocated the cultural approach to teaching the literature. This was in accord with the current concepts of theory and content of such theorists as Barnes and Clements mentioned earlier in this study. The importance of their theories was the advocacy of a specific approach and a broader inclusion of world literature. They were convinced that each contained a concrete and realistic way of removing any barrier to learning at any level. Barnes recommended the interdisciplinary approach as a means of coordinating in a distinct way one subject with another, one culture with another as a system.⁵⁵ The purpose behind this approach was the opportunity to combine a program of literature with other disciplines. He envisioned this being done by combining the study of such courses as sociology, psychology and literature, folklore, anthropology and European literature and the homogeneity of national values.

Complementing these approaches is Clements's theory of teaching literature dealing with world cultures. He proposed the teaching of literature in the context of world literature. He felt that this approach insured the literature as being a well-defined and a carefully constructed discipline. Clements saw in the world literature approach an ideal that required no single nation to give up its individuality.

⁵⁵James C. Barnes, "A Novel Approach to Cultural Learning," Inter Cultural News 1 (September 1975):1-4.

For the negritude poets and other black writers who wished their writing to be judged on merit, not race, this could prove to be a meaningful approach.

Nevertheless, in reference to these and other approaches and techniques of teaching Afro-American and African literature, the black writers and critics had mixed feelings about the approaches and the status of the literature in the curriculum. The problem, as they saw it, was not merely technique. It was also a matter of its distinctiveness as black literature written by black writers. The writers and critics, African and European, considered the total problem of literature at the Dakar Conference in the seminar, "African Literature and the University Curriculum." They agreed, in part, on several issues. Some of them were:

African literature as literature should fall under the discipline of English literature in the university.

It should be taught as English literature, as such, but with its peculiar African background

As an African writer in the field of literature the importance must be inherent in the value of the work and not in anything else such as the colour of the writer.

The same high standards of literary criticism be used for both African and European writings.⁵⁶

Some of these considerations, however, remained unacceptable for some black writers and critics. Whatever negritude poetry in particular can bring to the curriculum, the major importance is the opportunity for the student to explore the nature of life in a larger contemporary world

⁵⁶Moore, African Literature and the Universities, op. cit., pp. 86-88.

of which he is a part. It is in this sense that he should come to know a great deal about the nature of the culture in which he lives and comes to know himself.

While it is important to know the total experience of the poet, it is equally important to read and to study in order to understand his poetry. Knowledge of discipline can be imparted only in this way. It can be an instrument for social change. Equally it offers the whole cultural spectrum of black literature. It is what T. S. Eliot called the historical sense. He said,

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it to the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.⁵⁷

Eliot's historical sense can be applied to other continents and nations as well. The African must come to see the unity of his time and preceding generations of Africans. Likewise the American must have in his bones the literature of all nations which have contributed to the culture of his nation. It is within this description of the historic sense that the negritude poet can merit his place in time.

⁵⁷Kazin, op. cit.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to examine negritude in terms of its literary characteristics and its implications for a literature program. The reactions of the critics are significant in determining the relevance of negritude poetry for the school curriculum. Literary negritude was not unlike any other aesthetic creation of other poets in that it adhered to basic literary standards of evaluation that included its traditional nature. Its most distinctive features for the most part were inherent in the nature of their source, the traditional heritage of Africa. The poets, Hughes, Damas, Senghor, and Césaire, experimented with art forms, themes, imagery and diction peculiar to black awareness. Their poetry was unlike the stereotype models of the imposed cultures. It was new and fresh and real in the sense that it was based on a reappraisal of black cultural values.

Whether the term was "black awareness of the folk" as used by Hughes or "negritude" as used by Damas, Senghor and Césaire, these poets were alike in their certainty of belief and purpose. Their poetry dealt with the pain, alienation, and rejection resulting from human oppression. It also dealt with the search for self identity and

assertativeness. As a result it proclaimed the personal worth of the black man everywhere as a significant part of world civilization.

Literary negritude like the term "negritude" itself is characterized by varying personal experiences and emotions of the poets. It reveals the realistic effects of cultural heritage in the midst of political pressures on the human spirit of the black man. The poetic value of negritude poetry is found in the sensitive development of the cultural themes, the geographic landscapes, imagery, rhythm and diction interpreted in the concept of the African and Afro-American view of life. The philosophical attitude of negritude poetry toward existence and culture was expressed in the plea for understanding and brotherhood. These elements are of most significance not only for this study but for the total well-being of the students and others who read the poetry.

Literature about the black culture in America and Africa has been defined by writers and critics in terms of its geographical characteristics. The common bond of heritage proved to be more than a nostalgic connection with traditional Africa for all black writers everywhere. An ultimate consideration was its historical and essential reality for the black man's roots. As such the temporal and spatial significance of the African heritage accounted for the literary themes of the black writer. It did not, however, insure a homogeneity of the poets' treatment, attitude, style and personality. The negritude poets, Hughes, Damas, Senghor, and Césaire, also demonstrated a personal diversity in expressing black awareness or negritude in their poetry.

The negritude poets followed Senghor's definition and took as their mission the restoration of black values in their truth and

excellence, the awakening of their people to the taste of their being and the spirit by which they were men. This attitude permeated their poetry. An Ibo proverb says, "a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body."¹ The Black writer's mission was to tell the people where the rain began to beat them and to explore in depth the human condition.

The poetry of Langston Hughes, Leon Damas, Leopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire was a declaration of personal freedom and understanding of the black man. It was also an assertion of positive black traditions rooted in African culture. Its impetus was the manifestoes of Langston Hughes and Étienne Léro which defined the role and source of the poet's creative art. Further, the manifestoes created and cemented a common bond of heritage between all poets of negritude especially the poets of this study. The poetry was more than a nostalgic connection with traditional Africa. It was a bridge for a cultural relationship among all men of good will in the civilizations of the world. The relationship it envisioned was inherent in the belief that an intellectual and moral balance between man and his environment was attainable through cultural recognition and interaction. Exploration of the idea of cultural recognition led to the distinctions the poets made between cultural and racial differences. The poetry provided a dialogue between the black poets and the black world for reevaluating the ethnological and artistic creations of the Negro-African civilization.

¹Chinua Achebe, "African Writers on African Writing," Studies in African Literature, ed. G. D. Killam, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 8.

Application of the black awareness theme in the literature proved to be complex for the poets. Delineation of the complexities indicated the primary factors which caused a schism among black writers.

In black America in the thirties being Black and writing about black awareness were not simple matters. The ideology of "I am a Negro" advocated by Langston Hughes and the Harlem School emphasized the folk idiom as representative black culture. Hughes's advocacy was not received well by the middle-class bourgeois intelligensia. This group advocated cultural assimilation as defined in the talented tenth concept of achievement. The literary theory of these two major groups shaped the directions of the literature and influenced the attitude of other writers. The general situation was that a number of writers' works reflected a common subject matter dealing with the total life of middle-class Blacks. Their goal was integration into the mainstream of white America. On the other hand there were a number of writers whose works dealt with the total life of lower class Blacks. Their goal was survival and joie la vie.

In Africa the writers of negritude faced a similar problem with the Nigerian and South African poets who opposed the ideology of negritude. As with the American black writers, the African writers did not achieve consensus on a unified approach for pursuing their goal of black identity. In fact, their personal and literary goals were bound up in political goals. Their struggle was almost exclusively against the dominance and influence of colonialism. This is an important point of observation in that these issues reflect a peculiar and influential system of society. This is seen as peculiar since Blacks in their

native Africa are limited in active participation in society and politics. These major factors accounted for the themes, style and attitude adopted by the writers of negritude poetry which challenged the existing way of life.

The poetry that emerged out of these conditions represented a kind of poetic revolution. It was a completely viable and significant coming together of literary devices, forms, and languages (English and French) used by the poets to express a controlled perception of the "self." It was a certain kind of survival with dignity and self-respect in relation to the external world.

An analysis of the poetry revealed further that its literary qualities were inherent not only in its descriptions and definitions but also in its structure and its content. A study of the themes confirmed this view and revealed negritude as a coherent system of values and a distinctive mode of expression unified by a concept basic to Negro-African culture. The system of values was expressed through two main elements, which Senghor labeled "historical" or "situational" negritude and "essential" negritude. Historical negritude was the fundamental fact, sociological, cultural, or ideological, of being Black in a white world. This aspect of negritude poetry validated it as a product of history. As such its major qualities of being Black motivated the poets. It served two functions in particular. It was a means of expressing the black man's enduring spirit of optimism, hope, and pride in himself in the past and in the future. It was also a means to an end and not the end in itself. Many critics of negritude seemed to overlook this basic aspect of the negritude movement. The

literary consequences of historical negritude were reflected in the freedom of the poets to reject the superimposed literary models of the society that excluded them and to initiate new literary models of black specificity.

The essential theory of negritude was of equal importance to the development of the poetry. It expressed the ideal values of the black man in the white world. The poets realized the necessity for ethnic reality in the poetry to vindicate distortions directed towards it by the society in which they lived. Nevertheless, the essential theory proved to be more controversial than the historical aspect of negritude for the poets. This study revealed that the poets' opposition to negritude was based on their interpretation of the Senghorian concept of "Negro specificity" or "African personality" in the literature. Their interpretation of the term "permanance of racial traits" in the literature as called for in the essential theory disturbed them. They thought it exacerbated their personal experiences of alienation and segregation.² For them this meant limited poetic expression and continued exclusion from the society of which they wished to become an integral part.

The negritude poets saw the need to challenge the position of the poets and the critics. For them the term "Negro specificity" did not imply negative terms. To the contrary it meant freedom and the opportunity for black writers to give a true representation of the black

²Melville J. Herskovits, "The Problem of Stability and Change in Negro-African Culture," Continuity and Change in African Cultures, eds. William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1959), pp. 10-15.

experience in literature. Their interpretation of all terms in the essential theory was a dialectic process. It was a means by which Blacks could examine their own specificity in national and racial terms. This was the reality necessary for creating true poetry. Within these considerations negritude poetry advanced the theory of synthesis and unity of the black man in world society. It explained what Senghor meant when he advised the black man to "assimilate but not to be assimilated."

The study examined the poetry of four chief proponents of literary negritude. They were revealed as artists of a special kind of innovation, negritude. Their poetry was created out of the quality and depth of their poetic vision. It reflected the poets' personal and literary philosophy as men of integrity speaking for the black man wherever he resides. Their function and responsibility as spokesmen varied from culture to culture. The diversity of the poetic expression that emerged from this condition distinguished the contributions of each poet in the development of negritude. Examination of their poetry makes clear these distinctions.

Hughes has been recognized by critics as the leading Afro-American poet of this century. They have recognized him also as a pioneering innovator in the development of a "new" approach to literature by black writers. His pioneering spirit led him to break with the existing themes, diction, and imagery that described the black man in literature. His distinctive self-identifying style in poetry dealt solely with the folk in Harlem during the thirties. It must be remembered the Harlem of which Hughes wrote was both fact and symbol. It was also a place of

promise, a haven for the weary. Here the folk could strive, dream, and hope for a better America for all its people. It was also a place of disillusionment, alienation, and despair. Out of this environment Hughes's poetry expresses their hopes, dreams, and their joys in the many voices of the black folk. It represents his contribution to black awareness or negritude.

In the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes expressed an interest in Africa for himself and other writers as the roots of the black man's cultural heritage. In it he established the historical past of the black people with the beginning and progress of civilization. It is an edifying and reflective poem in which he compared the collective soul of the black man with the ancient rivers of Africa.

From his interest in Africa Hughes extended his interest to express different facets of Negro life. His interest required a broad range of social and political concerns of Harlem folk types. The Weary Blues collection of poetry represented the poet's innovation with music and the free verse form in the folk idiom. His blues form which grew out of the spiritual music contained elements of the painful social pressure of disillusionment which was contrary to the content of hope contained in the spirituals. Hughes described it as music which comes only from a black man's soul. Through the talent of Hughes, the blues content and music brought a new dimension to poetry. It was naturalism reflective of African primitivism. It paved the way for Hughes's interest in jazz. Both forms gave an alternative to the artistic situation in which writers found themselves. Some critics called Hughes's form a revolutionary technique based on folk culture. It

incorporated the use of irony, pathos, and most succinctly black humor not so much as a philosophical concern but as a social and political concern with the human consciousness. Hughes used black humor somewhat as Césaire used surrealism to distort the real meaning. According to some psychological theories of humor, black humor, like all humor, involves a transcendence, a distancing, a sublimation of painful experiences. In the larger sense Hughes used it as a response to the vagaries of the human condition of the black man's existence.

Some critics of the black condition in American life and literature have often mistaken the laughter, the song, the dance of the jig of the black man in distressing situations. They have often interpreted this behavior to mean happiness, a lack of concern and/or lack of awareness of the real condition. Hughes's poetry expressed the comprehensive view of "laughing to keep from crying." His creative artistry was seen to be more of an instinctive, than intellectual sense of the folk acceptance of the contradictory as "something to be borne, climbed on top of, confronted by the shrewd smile, the cynical witticism, the tragi-comic scratch of the head, the howl of laughter" that blacks have not yet learned to separate from the inanities of the minstrel tradition.³

Hughes's poetic innovations provided a form or model by which the poets could express the new racial spirit. Folk themes, imagery and symbols provided nuances and expressions peculiar to the black

³George E. Kent, "Langston Hughes and Afro-American Folk and Cultural Tradition," in Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel, op. cit., p. 184. See also Arthur P. Davis, "Langston Hughes: Cool Poet," in Langston Hughes: Black Genius, ed. Therman B. O'Daniel, op. cit., p. 25.

experiences. They were also capable of providing the poet means to deal with the elements in a serious and lofty voice. Without an indictment of Negro dialect, Hughes found the diction of the folk more flexible and capable of capturing the flavor of the folk expression in the varied conditions of Negro life.

Damas's contribution to negritude goes beyond his helping to pioneer its ideology with Senghor and Césaire. Literary negritude was for him a personal realization of Africa denied him in his youth. His poetic theory was based on the rejection of colonial assimilation and the creation of an African specificity. His efforts to create the African image in his poetry were in a sense paradoxical. In rejecting French models, he adopted new models which were equally European. The difference, however, was in how he used the models. The greatest influence was the African cultural image. However, Africa was a vicarious experience for the poet. The important thing was that he felt deep in his being the African spirit and pride. This shaped his poetry and accounted for his contribution to the negritude movement.

Damas wrote and published fewer poems than other negritude poets but he is recognized as the pioneer of the movement. The publication of his collected poems in Pigments motivated other Blacks throughout the Ivory Coast. They were able to understand and adapt their African identity to their present situation. Further his poetic vision and experience were the base on which Senghor and Césaire developed their poetry. The fact that Damas, Senghor and Césaire came from different parts of the world proved to be an asset in the development of negritude. They inspired each other and added diversity to their poetic works.

Damas had no choice but to use the French language in his poetry. The lack of choice made him more determined to make something new of it. Surrealism was his answer. He used it in a realistic way to express Negro elements and African elements into poetic art. He did not interpret Africa as primitive and exotic. As a matter of fact he reversed the African values as established by Europeans.

Damas's valid contribution of presenting Africa through rhythmic innovations preceded any attempts by Senghor or Césaire to do the same. His rhythmic innovations were based on the dance in the Afro-American fashion. After he mastered the African technique of combining music and the dance as a means of producing rhythm, Damas combined various aspects of Caribbean life to music to create his own special style. His poetry became a combination of song, words, and music which he called dance rhythms. After adopting the African stylistic technique, Damas added repetition and racy Afro-Caribbean dance rhythm as found in his collection, Black Label. He was able to give his poetry the quality of a piece of music which he used functionally rather than descriptively to express negritude. Damas used what Gerald Moore called typographical tricks to clarify his rhythm and to give it visual effect.

Although Damas pioneered negritude, Senghor became its chief spokesman. His poetry has been acclaimed as a "canticle" of love addressed to the soul and to reason. This statement is in accord with the essence of song and sweetness in his poetry. The praise directed to it is testimony of a sense of security and well-being that characterize Senghor himself. He wove into his creative works evidences of his stable family life, his French education, and his love for and faith in

the African cultural heritage. Through the African landscape, he gave the black woman a personal recognition and dignity. Prior to negritude the black woman was always praised and associated with political aspirations. With Senghor she became also a symbol of the life forces in nature, the dignity of black motherhood, and the beauty of black maidens. In fact blackness colored most of his poems.

Concentrating on his style, he insisted the poem is perfect only when it becomes a song, words and music wedded together. His rhythmic words created in poetry images which he called image-analogie. The words needed no explanation. Their meaning was in the African referents. Senghor's imagery included his respect for African ancestors. Through the ancestor-imagery he was able to develop many themes of African life that were informative as well as artistically poetic. The use of the mask was a sustaining force in the life of the individual. It symbolized the presence of the dead among the living.

There was no doubt in Senghor's mind about the fluid nature of negritude as a medium of expression. Other poets and writers such as Markward and Sartre agreed with Senghor that negritude was not static. Senghor made it clear throughout his poetry that differences in people were obvious. There were differences in their ideas, language, philosophies, and religion. He recognized differences in their customs, institutions, literature, and their art. He queried, why should this difference be denied to Africa? Negritude in this sense was expressive of the cultural differences in African life. It was a certain way for Senghor conceiving of life and of living it. He used it in his poetry to express a certain way of relating the presence of

the black man to the world of others. This position of Senghor exerted a pronounced influence on others, poets, writers and critics alike who extolled the virtue of negritude. They expressed the influence in many different ways. Despite the diversity of expression, each writer was concerned in the main with the consequences of colonialism and the historical and essential aspects of the term, "black soul."

Senghor did not see negritude as a bargaining tool for full membership into the human family as some of his critics accused him. For him it was seen as a cultural bridge for brotherhood. His poetry goes beyond the expression of negritude, his belief in Africa. His poetry is Senghor the African that he allows himself to be. Perhaps, this contributes to Senghor's being the first to introduce into French poetry the theme of African customs and manners, myths, celebrations and hero figures, shrines, spirits and animals. As such he set a model for poetry. All in all it was his great humanism that gave enduring quality to his poetry and exalted his ability as a leader. His poetry serves as a mediator and conciliator regarding language and love between peoples of the world.

Césaire shared the position with Damas and Senghor as a leading force in the negritude movement. Like the other poets he made a decisive step forward in developing its poetic concept. Establishing the African image and the use of the French language occupied a great deal of his poetic vision. Getting close to Africa was achieved through his interest in the forces of nature. Césaire was the first to express in his poetry the cosmic connection of all powers in nature and living things.

Césaire needs be recognized for his use of surrealism as a means not an end of expressing the African feeling for and attitude to life. It was important that he expressed the African awareness in a European language. Critics and other writers have considered this to be one of the greatest achievements of Césaire and of negritude. Césaire like other writers expressed the essence of the "black soul" in his poetry.

In rejecting the style and model of the colonial writers, Césaire drew inspiration and sustaining substance from Africa. This situation resulted in epoch-making consequences for his poetry and negritude literature in general. The political and social climate both of protest and conflict of the time and place in which he found himself determined his poetry. His poetry was a social and political commitment. Césaire expressed the whole idea of Africa as authentic literature set out to emphasize the "ordinary Negro" whose stereotyped-grotesqueness is made in the image of a hero.

Damas was the pioneer and chief mover in getting negritude in print and before an audience. Senghor was the chosen leader and levelling force of negritude as ideology. However, it was Césaire who developed a revolutionary style for poetry different from the other poets of negritude. At the outset of his introduction to Africa by Senghor, Césaire's poetry was engagee. It dealt with a combination of themes, the theme of utter anger and the universalizing importance of the black man and his contributions to civilization. His poetry is both the cri de coeur of suffering and the philosophizing of an agonized human being. What is important in the negritude tradition is Césaire's verbal casting off of the physical reality of his situation. In his

negritude-inspired attitude he was able to relieve the painful memory of Martinique through the dialectic progression in Cahier. He transformed himself through poetic metaphors ("make not of me that man of hate") into a universal man of love.

Césaire's style grew out of his use of the word (inverse meaning). His interest in the existential unity of man and nature was expressed through what he called "the magic of the word." In creating his poetic style he combined all these elements in his use of African proverbs and myths. He created semantic shifts in the use of words in a special way. It gave extended meaning and new associations to words in the French poetic language. It was surreal to a point, but in Césaire's poems the words have a firm semantic and syntactical coherence. He often avoids the use of capital letters, punctuation and the traditional poetic line. His line is long and broken up to resemble prose. Unlike Damas and Senghor, Césaire was not interested in creating a deliberate poetic rhythmic pattern, yet rhythm permeates his poetry. Like them his poetic elements of semantic, rhythmical, and thematic concepts connect with each other. They constitute his specific philosophy and attitude toward Africa and his place in the world. His poetry challenges the basis of any philosophy that suggests the qualities of one race are intrinsically superior as compared to those of any other race. To Césaire the idea of racism is primarily a matter of economics. These qualities characterizing his poetry also projected him as the most formidable poet of the Antilles.

Conclusions

Hughes and other Afro-American poets found themselves at the cross-road in the development of literature in the thirties. Their direction was uncertain. They lacked consensus on what subject matter to develop and in what style it should be written. The era of the Harlem Renaissance gave impulse to many movements, but none of the movements exerted influence on the writers over a long period of time. As a result they did not create an acceptable literary style of their own. With Langston Hughes it was a different story. His poetry and poetic style expressed the essence of the black soul as well as the basic aspirations common to men of all races. His poetry went beyond racial contingencies to embrace universal values.

The reactions of the European and African critics to the poetry of the negritude poets, Damas, Senghor and Césaire were generally favorable. Their mixed critical reactions resembled the reception of Langston Hughes in America. The views grew out of the interpretations of negritude as literature as an ideology. Even so, the impact of negritude demanded recognition as a result of its content and style. Its revolutionary nature as a "new" approach to literary expressions created new problems peculiar to African literature. The critics were troubled by the new poetic style which combined the poets's own cultural heritage of the past with the social and political concerns of the present. The oral tradition of Africa provided the geographical landscape that served as the spiritual force, the "return to roots" technique and its ultimate source for expressing the negritude concept of reconciliation. It was Césaire's poetry that set the most lyrical tone of the negritude

literary revolution with nature as an informing source. The oral or traditional literature of the past provided the poetic and mystical imagery, symbolism, ritual-like rhythm, and a unified sensibility derived from the surrealist style. The poetry of Damas represented the social and political tension, as the poetry of Césaire did of colonial assimilation and alienation. The unity of these artistic forms and expressions troubled the critics. The cultural significance of images and motifs in negritude poetry requires of the critic a depth of understanding of the traditions and imaginative literature of the culture of the poet. Tradition is the essential of this poetry.

This is a descriptive situation of the content structure of the negritude poetry. The two complex situations faced by the European and African critics were concerned with their verifying the extent to which the negritude movement had been also a literary success. The situations developed out of what each felt constituted an aesthetic of African literature and a critical criterion in the criticism of African literature. The critical attention given to African literature by European critics is a relatively new activity which started in the late fifties and early sixties. It raised distressing reactions from the African writers and critics. Whether they agreed with the ideology of the negritude movement or not was not the question. What they questioned was the critical criteria by which the European critics felt the African literature should be judged. The European critical presumption was that since this literature was written in European languages, it should be assessed in terms of the traditions of the literature of those languages.

Fundamental to this presumption was the determination of the African writers to create their own literary tradition. The response of the African writers to the European criticism dealt with three levels of the composition of negritude:

The level of ancient African culture which contains a complete literature within itself with diverse genre of folklore.

The level of Negro Revolt often mistakenly associated with anti-white aggressiveness. Negro revolt was, in a reality, a momentary progression when the black man refused from that point on to be despised and bullied on account of his race.

Finally, the literary level which relates the influence of negritude on other writers, whether in a reactionary sense or an extension of its ideology.

These integral elements of negritude, they insisted, must be taken into consideration in developing criteria of criticism. The African writers and critics saw this position as a safeguard against critics of different interests, traditions, and background. They questioned these critics' use of critical standards to serve their particular interests. The African poets were aware of critics who based their reactions to the poetry on ethnocentrically conceived ideas of aesthetic truth. The African writers were skeptical of external criticism from those who presumed an understanding of Africa which they did not have. On these bases, the so-called universal criteria were rejected as a standard for judging the negritude poetry without considering its traditional composition.

The African writers finally agreed on traditional literary standards as criteria for judging African literature with specific consideration of Africa's traditional culture. The writers argued the point that the literature was not western literature. It had its bases or roots

in the African cultural civilization. It was of historical necessity that its oral nature be considered in determining criteria for judging it. The characteristic mode of the African aesthetic perception demands a particular method of appreciation. This includes negritude poetry.

The inclusion of negritude poetry in the school curriculum in the light of this study may be seen in terms of vision, not simply revision. The term "vision" is interpreted as a clarion call for literature by black writers [in this instance negritude] to be considered on its merit as world literature. The poets and their poetry have been acclaimed as being among the most original, poetically beautiful, and educationally challenging for the literature program. As such it qualifies for serious attention in considering its role in the literature program. Its distinctive cultural and literary values go beyond its inclusion in the curriculum as simply "revision" of the traditional literature program, a superficial adjunct of appeasement. It has meaning for a multiethnic audience. Its content, tone and poetic style offer diversity, expansion, and enrichment to the school curriculum in terms of the changing world view.

This study examined the traditional literature curriculum to establish its relevance for students in a changing society and world view. The role of the traditional literature program was clearly defined: to provide intellectual and effective content of literary experiences for the development of well-rounded citizens. However, many problems developed for the educators; the traditional literature program no longer met the needs of all its students. It did not provide adequate and effective content to insure literary experiences with

which the student, especially the black student, could identify. From this realization educators explored theories, conducted studies and developed projects. All of the studies dealt with the integration of intellectual, psychological and sociological aspects of human experience. What they sought was a synthesis among the findings of the studies. The result was a challenge for the curriculum-makers to consider literary selections based more upon cultural pluralism. Specifically this meant the inclusion of more content involving the character of the learner. The popular endorsement was for inter-cultural literature and the interdisciplinary approach to instruction. The curriculum theorists sought to include more literature in terms of global society.

The theorists maintained that literary images are indispensable to the basic human process of world comprehension and self-definition. Negritude poetry presents personal models by which the black student can come to know his ancestry. It is a valid way of identifying the black man's contributions to civilization over a long period of time. Thus, the student is able to see himself and his ancestry as a part of the human race and not a thing apart and separate unto itself.

Negritude poetry is the affirmation of black humanity, but it is not restricted to the black student. It shares with all people, including the white students, the literary images of the black culture, themes, rhythms, symbolism, style, and language which gave it its uniqueness. Additionally, it brings to the literature curriculum an authentic and inalienable Negro personality that deliberately destroys the stereotyped identity given the Negro by the white man. For all students, white and black, it underscores the progressive idea that a

changed approach to learning can reform a wide range of attitudes and behavior. These considerations offer to all students a greater exposure to moral and ethical values of cultures other than their own. Students need to understand and appreciate the contributions of other peoples to universal civilization. The investigation of the poets and poetry of negritude attested to their merit for the literature program.

Negritude poetry defies time. Like poetry of other cultures that represented a historical and aesthetic moment, it qualifies for recognition in the annals of literature. As a movement of ideas, it united a multi-levelled culture and articulated a vision of human values. Its universal appeal for the literature program is evidenced in its approach to other men through poetry. The poems of the poets, Hughes, Damas, Senghor and Césaire, were a peaceful means of restoring the black man to his original stature. It is the intent of the poetry to defend and illustrate the heritage that Africa brings to the world.

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