Editor's Introduction

Suzanne Césaire *sun-filled fountain*

in those days, it was the time of the parasol of a very beautiful woman
with a body of golden corn and cascading hair
in those days the land was dissident
in those days the center of the sun was not exploding [. . .]
in those days rivers perfumed themselves with incandescence
in those days friendship was a pledge
gem from the sun seized in a bound
in those days the chimera was not clandestine
— AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

In those days, that woman's name was Suzanne Césaire, founder with Aimé Césaire—both at that time teachers at the Fort-de-France Schœlcher High School—along with three teacher friends, René Ménil, Aristide Maugée, and Lucie Thésée, of the cultural review *Tropiques* (1941–1945), for which she wrote seven articles that constitute the body of her work, and that are for the first time published here in a separate volume. *Tropiques* was the most important literary review of the Antilles, in spite of its distribution and publication run limited by circumstances—fourteen slight issues published in Martinique—sometimes censored, subsequently shut down, republished in 1943 up until 1945. Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and René Ménil are three writers whose thought, writing, and action in a lasting way enlighten the perspective of Antilleans upon their present-day situation.

In those days: it was 1941; Suzanne, born in Martinique in August 1915, was twenty-six years old. She would shortly thereafter have four children—and later six in all—with her husband, the poet Aimé Césaire, then twenty-eight years old. They met during their literature studies, and married July 1937 at the city hall of the nine-

teenth arrondissement in Paris, Suzanne dressed in a red tailored suit to underscore the secular, blazing, and amorous dimension of their union, and perhaps also as a symbolic reminder of her maiden name, lost that day: Suzanne Roussi.

In those days, her sun-filled beauty and power, visible in the sparkle of her eyes and the radiance of her hair, also revealed a fragility in her vine-like body, rarely still and never rested. A body given to fertile eruptions but devoured by an inner hell—of serious pleurisy that year—saved by a fourth, regenerative, pregnancy. According to her doctor, the space created in her body for her first daughter, born in 1942, preserved her from the ravage within—"windows of the swamp . . . upon the heavy silence of the night"—for two decades of respite, until the sudden irruption of a brain tumor aggressively fatal to her just as she turned fifty.

In those days, the world was in the midst of a war, and the Lesser Antilles, invisible to Hitler, were far from spared by Pétain. It was "the time of Admiral Robert" in Martinique, "the time of Saurin" in Guadeloupe, eras named for the two governors delegated by the Vichy power. They were organizing a "French occupation," imposing fascist order through rapidly issued decrees of purges, internments, deportations to the Guyanese penal colony, and exactions of every kind against the population with the alliance of certain colonialists and the powerful repressive force of hundreds of French naval riflemen who had taken refuge in the Antilles with the help of gold from the Bank of France. To which situation was added the misery occasioned by the Allies' blockade and quasi-autarchy, during which nothing any longer got through from the outside, neither food nor fuel, neither books nor notebooks.

But far from remaining silently subjected, the Antilles rapidly entered into resistance, in the image of the little Haitian state declaring war against Hitler just before the United States had done, with the keen feeling of participating in an anti-fascist international movement, as the inaugural text of the first issue of *Tropiques* in April 1941 announced:

> it is no longer time to be a parasite upon the world, it is a matter of saving it. It is time to gird one's loins like a valiant man. Wherever we look the shadow is advancing. One after the other the home-fires are going out. The circle of darkness is closing in, among the cries of men and the howling of wild beasts. Yet we are among those who say no to the darkness. We know that the salvation of the world depends upon us also. That the earth needs each and every one of its sons. Even the humblest.

Those times were the time of "dissidence," a term that would be used by the powerful Resistance movement in the Antilles to designate the actions of thousands of Antilleans who escaped by canoe to the neighboring British islands of Dominica and Saint Lucia, to connect with the Allies and representatives of Free France before landing in New Jersey. There the gathered Antillean battalions of Free France (the Free French) embarked on the fight for the liberation of North Africa from Italy, and, ascending the Rhone, until the liberation of Strasbourg. In the Antilles and in Guyana, internal dissent, resistance, and sabotage and demonstrations of misery and of dignity combined with pressure from neighboring Anglo-American allies and with repercussions from certain elements of the Occupation army to lead to liberation in 1943, just two months after the letter of indictment against *Tropiques*.

In those days, it was Suzanne Césaire who brought the articles to Admiral Robert's information services for authorization of their content and to request the necessary paper for printing. The naval lieutenant receiving her acquiesced to the entirety of the quite presentable contents proposed: some sparkling lessons for upper-level classes on Mallarmé, Péguy, Alain, Maeterlinck, Debussy, Lautréamont, favorable to calming the minds of anti-authority students; some exotic presentations on the African soul or on Hinduism; some Cuban or Creole animal tales; some scholarly surveys of tropical plant life and folklore. And especially the omnipresence of poetry, daily bread without labor, and blessed bread for deflect-

ing the censors' attention from behind the masks of abstract formalism, of botanical precision, of surrealist obscurity, and for the "disordering of all the senses," in which only the distracted and the censors themselves could fail to realize the necessity of reading all of these texts between the lines, especially down to the final line, to be wary of the titles and the harmless openings, in effect explosive time bombs, held impassably in check like the Mount Pélée volcano before the explosion of 1902—texts which, produced for yesterday and reread today, impose, like these seven articles do, the evidence of their actuality, and repeat for every political, economic, or cultural oppressor their major precept: "Accommodate me, I am not accommodating you!"

To fully grasp the context of these nocturnal writings, which over a three-year period, and without too many mishaps, slipped under the boundary line guarded by the censors, we should reread at this point the letter of May 10, 1943, banning *Tropiques*.

When Madame requested from me the paper necessary for a new issue of Tropiques, I immediately acquiesced, seeing no objection, quite the contrary, to the publication of a literary review.

I do have, on the contrary, very formal objections to a revolutionary, racial, and sectarian review . . . .

Let us leave aside how shocking it is to see government officials, not only paid by the French state but also having achieved a high level of culture and a first-rank place in society, claim to give the signal for a revolt against a fatherland which has precisely been so very good to them. Let us also leave aside the fact that you are a professor and charged with the mission of educating young people. This in effect does not concern me directly, and let us retain only the fact that you are French.

Excessive centralization is a misfortune from which all French provinces have suffered, coming close to stifling their personality, to substituting it by a conventional and uniform being, to killing art by drying up truth's wellhead. A cold north wind is the symbol of the necessary reaction. I thought I saw in Tropiques the sign of regionalism no less vigorous and every bit as desirable. I admit I was wrong and that you are in pursuit of a completely different objective. [. . .] As for you, you believe in the power of hate, of revolt, and the goal you have set is the free unleashing of every instinct, of every passion. It is a return to barbarism pure and simple. Schœlcher, whom you invoke, would be quite astonished to see his name and words used for the profit of such a cause.

I therefore forbid the publication of this issue of Tropiques, *the manuscript of which you will find here attached.*

This time, the very cultivated and usually very tolerant naval lieutenant Bayle, head of censure, had quite clearly understood everything to do with both their goal and their error in judgment: hoping for the Mistral breeze, he found himself lashed by the cyclone of the Césaires. What follows, in this response composed by Suzanne Césaire on behalf of the editorial team, and as Aimé Césaire noted "without her ever having deigned to seduce the jailers," is what the indicted quite willingly confessed to without appealing their conviction,

Sir,

We are in receipt of your indictment against Tropiques.

"Racists, sectarians, revolutionaries, ingrates and traitors to the fatherland, poisoners of minds," none of these epithets is essentially repugnant to us.

"Poisoners of minds" like Racine, according to the Gentleman of Port-Royal.

"Ingrates and traitors to the dear fatherland," like Zola according to the reactionary press.

"Revolutionaries," like Victor Hugo who wrote the "Castigations"

"Sectarians," passionately like Rimbaud and Lautréamont

"Racists," yes. Racism like that of Toussaint Louverture, Claude McKay and Langston Hughes—against the racism like that of Drumont and Hitler.

As for the rest, expect from us neither a plea, nor vain recriminations, not even debate.

We do not speak the same language.

Signed: Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, Georges Gratiant, Aristide Maugée, René Ménil, Lucie Thésée. Fort-de-France, May 12, 1943.

In those days of deeply entrenched fascism, one could well pay a heavy price for such virulence of provocation. Fortunately, demonstrations and infantry mutinies would point toward the impending denouement of the Occupation, with the victory of dissent two months later, the arrest of Admiral Robert, and the link up with Free France.

One can clearly see in those days, left to themselves, far from attempting to lie forgotten beneath the shadow of their umbrella of paradise, the Antilles lived through a period of great surges of political, social, and cultural dignity. The pride of combating poverty by establishing a subsistence economy and barter system. A bric-a-brac of solidarities in the face of isolation. A legitimate disorder in the face of Pétainist law. A stride forward of internationalist political consciousness in the face of the return of institutional racism (the dismissal of "Black" mayors in favor of handpicked White Creole—*békés*—colonials), while hoping that the defeat of Nazism and the victory of the Allied Forces would lead to the demise of all forms of colonization: colonizers to be dis-alienated in order, according to Suzanne Césaire, to wash away "the stain on the face of France [. . .] of transcending the sordid contemporary antinomies: Whites–Blacks, Europeans–Africans." And at the same time the affirmation of a specificity of identity, which neither the social nor the political up until that point had taken into account: the clear perception of a people standing firmly rooted, what Aimé Césaire was noting in his article "Panorama," published in the reappearance of the review in 1944 after the Liberation:

> the worst mistake would be to believe that the Antilles stripped of all powerful political parties are stripped of will power. We know what we want.

> Freedom. Dignity. Justice. Christmas up in flames.
> One of the elements, the fundamental element of the Antillean malaise, the existence in these islands of a homogeneous block, of a people who for three centuries has searched to express itself and to create [. . .] the Revolution will construct itself in the name of bread, of course, but also in the name of fresh air and of poetry (which amounts to the same thing).

The creative strength of Suzanne Césaire is to have understood very early on the universal dimension at work over three centuries that constructed her Caribbean, the inscription of a history and a geology accommodating to misfortunes as well as to relaxations, to paradises regained as well as to immigrant cataclysms. A geography ultimately rooted in a geology more profound than the arrival of the seasons and a genealogy that recognizes all ancestors without recourse to selective sorting procedures and without the need for roots in order to savor the fruits nor the need of very ancient branches to welcome hummingbirds.

In those days, for Suzanne Césaire it was the most fruitful time of brilliant blossoming, the approximately twenty years covering youthfulness at university, the initial union with Aimé Césaire at the moment of the creation of the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, the Martinique years of creative expression in *Tropiques*, quickly interrupted by their political commitment—Aimé Césaire being simultaneously elected mayor here and deputy representative there, requiring the back and forth, between Paris and Fort-de-France, disruptive of the life of a large family—through the resumption for her of teaching in Paris in order to make ends meet, the "patches of dreams" collapsed, the "sullied foaming wakes," culminating in her decision in 1963 to separate, three years of solitude with no forgetting either for him or for her, "lashed down with heavy hearts," before her swift death in Paris in 1966 and her final return to the soil of her native land.

As with every shooting star, very few people were able to get close to her. But those men and women who did know her well agree on the fundamental importance she had for her entire generation, of which she was the torchbearer, a major inspiration, the mediator of the most profound exchanges. During the '30s and '40s in Paris, she was of that generation of young women conquering the obstacles to freedom and dignity, like their elders the Nardal sisters, who held a musical and literary salon, like her two friends Jenny Alpha, the Martinican actress, and Gerty Archimède, lawyer and great historical figure of Guadeloupe, for which she was the first woman deputy representative in 1945, a position Suzanne Césaire could have taken as well. All three friends luminously beautiful with an inner radiance, bearers naturally of great culture without gloss or glitter, intelligent while distrusting of the strictly cerebral, seductive while refusing to be seductresses, fiancées of Dionysius more than sisters of Eurydice. They took the lead in their dance of ideas and sentiments, choosing more than being chosen, as they would when going dancing with their best male dancer friends, attending the opera or the first Ellington concert, or discussing politics, philosophy, or history over long sleepless nights with their best-friend thinkers of "the holy trinity of Negritude"—Senghor, Césaire, Damas—around favorite subjects: communism, surrealism, poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, Nietzsche and German romanticism, ancient Africa and modern America, without forgetting the place of the love of poetry in poetic creation.

According to her daughters, Suzanne Césaire sang out of tune—without ever denying herself the pleasure of singing—and often. Smoked Royal Navy cigarettes elegantly with a cigarette holder and did not like alcohol, too insufficiently favorable for clear-mindedness and the passion to feel deeply. Adored dancing, contrary to her husband, who in her opinion "had two left feet." Loved to laugh a lot, to keep her hopes up rather than to be polite.

She loved to read outside in nature, for example perhaps Nietzsche and Frobenius, in the sunlight, barefoot, that is to say freely,

unencumbered, alert to the down-to-earth translations of her reading, with self-effacement. For her and her friends heading toward the decolonization of themselves, two authors were essential, affirming like Aimé Césaire: "It is not true that the work of man is finished." One, Frobenius, making known an Africa from well before colonization, bearer of a system of thought about humankind as human-plants, as children, rather than masters, of civilization. The other, Nietzsche, making known a Europe after rationalism which, so as not to die away at night, must combat the far-too-human through the fertile fire of transmutations, creators of identities capable of assuming the multiple through an accommodation of all possibilities. Wherein she showed to her contemporaries concerned with rootedness that their Antillean homeland was the hidden place favorable to the anchoring of such visions and prophecies. As René Ménil would write subsequently in a 1944 issue of *Tropiques*: "Antillean romanticism: cultural movement of the Antillean people seized convulsively with the sentiment of its true life . . . Antillean romanticism resides there and its new conception of Creole beauty."

In poetry she appreciated that the thoroughly rational *system of the fine arts* of Alain—who was her professor—places poetry at the top, although he ignores the loosening of one's control in order to believe in the "release of ideas." Inversely, she celebrated the art of diverting every system in order to reach "*the work hidden in the stains*" through the fertile welcoming of chance and mystery, as in the work of Breton, who had fascinated them during his stay in 1941, in Martinique, en route to exile in New York, as much as she herself had fascinated him: "beautiful as the flame of punch." But she could feel deeply the possible stifling of every creative flame by the poet of mad love's posture as esthete with, she would say, "his Saint-Just side," confined in an elsewhere from true life, without the "total self-effacement" that she postulated for writing to allow itself to be penetrated by "inner turmoil and abandon."

Beyond these analyses and some dated interpretations one

must imagine Suzanne Césaire happy to conquer her plant-woman Antillean-ness, even from the angle of the bygone concept of "Paideuma" (see her essay on Leo Frobenius). Happy to pen her injunctions to write and to love, for herself, for her love, for her people so Dionysian upon their emergence from the hell of slavery, happy to break with "*doudouisme*"—the sappy folkloric literary tradition—and sentimental spinelessness, with great dosages of love and sexual bamboos. Happy to carry into writing the rhythm of her *anima*, her feminine power, between love and humor in synchronicity with the Nietzschean vision in *The Will to Power*: "There are things that the superior man does not know how to do: to laugh, to play, to dance. To laugh is to affirm life in life, even in suffering, even in the complex. To play is to affirm chance, and from chance, inevitability. To dance is to affirm becoming—destiny—and from becoming, being." For her it is not just about anthropology, it is the question of an ethic, the question of an esthetic, it is a matter of describing oneself as a hereditary daughter without will and testament from this humanity who overcame murderous deracination through the sheer willpower of re-rooting. And through the dance, feet bare throughout.

And it is with Aimé Césaire that, for lack of their dancing together, she breathed a fresh air of poetry, attentive and vigilant to the latter's frenzy of writing, despite the anxiety of his having to write the same thing again, to his refusal to compromise over aesthetic constraints, having mastered so well the mechanisms and the techniques of avoidance that on hundreds of occasions before and after the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, and especially during the *Tropiques* years, he had decided to put an end to it all, to stop writing poetry altogether. A serious physical and mental crisis before the writing of the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and their meeting, a vow to write no more afterwards, were fortunately followed by the powerful creativity of the years of dissent upon return to Martinique, with the long poems "High Noon" and "The Thoroughbreds"; with the first theatrical experience, *And the Dogs Were Silent*; with the recasting in three or four versions of the *Notebook*, quite different between '39 and '45. And it is she, without a shred of doubt, with all the power of shared love, who in these two great stages of his poetic life made him understand that he could dare to doubt without ever doubting to create, that he had to dare to create as cannibal from the depths of his selfhood.

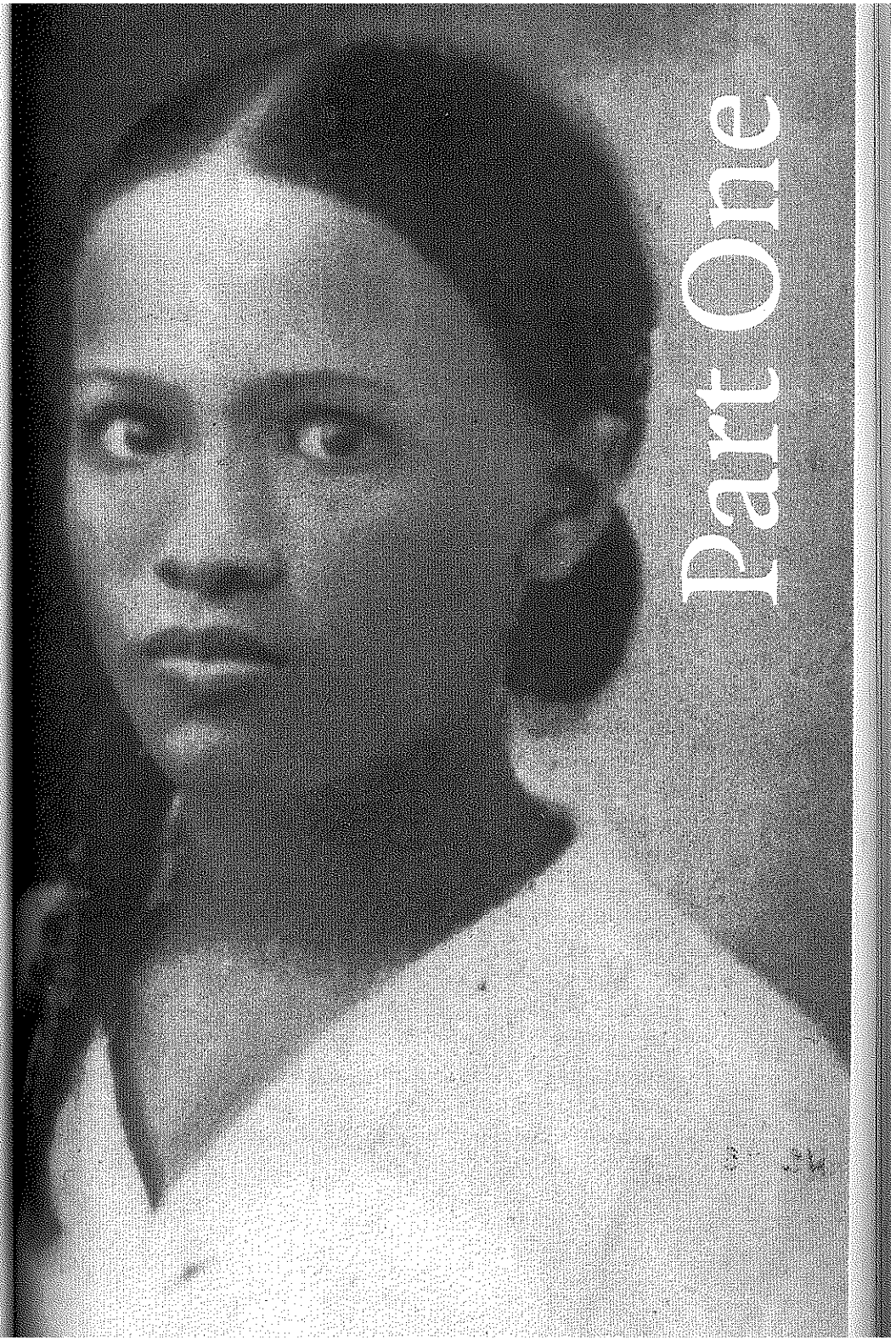
Well then, one says, why not make herself also a poet-bamboo against poetry-*doudou*? Would it be conceivable that the brilliance of one can cause the other to accept living in shadow? Being caught in the trap by "the pattern of unfulfilled desires." Ultimately, perhaps the secret of the silence so soon to come to pass for Suzanne Césaire means that the cannibal fire of her writings could have consumed her being, her face "of white ash and embers," burning up from its capacity for refusal and commitment body and soul, on the path up to where writing can follow no further. There where *the great camouflage* stops in which all fiction, all poetry, all literature bedecks itself. As in her last text of 1945, which soars well beyond the analysis, the denunciation, the injunction to achieve the most beautiful in style, closest to that of poetry, there where true beings make themselves characters, where logical order becomes confused in staging, where the backdrop of nature transmutes itself into the central character, and there where the woman arrives at the feminine of writing, at the end of her final page, in closing her eyes in order to better perceive the inner night of bodies, of hearts, and of language.

Therein lies the fascinating life lesson of Suzanne Césaire, for in spite of her absolute silence after *Tropiques*—outside of a play, *Youma, Dawn of Freedom*, staged with some of the youth of Fort-de-France, and of which no trace has up until now been found—despite all of the "in spite ofs" that scandalously silence women's writing, in spite of so much space left to man in her life as well as in her texts, in spite of the reticence of poets to liberate their muses, she has, in all her articles here presented, rooted her thought not on a marked-out literary territory, a private property of otherness, but in a land

made fertile by all possibilities of writing and a sharp memory. For example, an Africa replanted without nostalgia in the New World and an America assumed, in defiance of all her attributes as woman with "four races and with dozens of bloodlines," and in defiance of all associations. And especially the recognition in her own body, at the heart of the existence her people recovered, reinvented by itself, too overly masked by bourgeois assimilationist decorum, that the Antillean people, whose miracle of calm fervor, turbulent modernity, and such youthful maturity she has powerfully contributed to demonstrating through her far-too-rare writings, remain truly camouflaged behind the deep-down interior of their rebuilt native land.

Yes, in the terrible or reassuring stories invented tirelessly each night for the six children, based on the Creole compost of hunger, trickery, and revolt to be endlessly continued; in the fertile solitude shared with Aimé, each one in oneself for the other; in fervent solidarity toward every true political and poetic commitment without hierarchy, without the pretext of the ivory tower nor compromises of the masses; in the fusion so sensual of bodies into tropical vines and sugary cane in love with the moist embrace of the forests virginal no longer, in the sharp consciousness of a culture of *nurture-by-nature coexistence*, sensitive to the caress of skins soft to the touch, to the offering of breasts that perfume the rivers, in the lucid escort of poets who pass by drunk, blinding themselves with fear that nature will copy them, and in the requirement that esthetics, sensations, and sentiments deeply felt must be tirelessly transmuted into the creation of writing—in all of that is embodied this synthesis of humanity planted, erected into a woman-island of the Antilles: Suzanne Césaire, bright fountain welcoming un-hoped-for "sunfalls of light."

DANIEL MAXIMIN



Part One

Voum rooh oh
so that times of promise will come back
and the bird who knew my name
and the woman who had a thousand names
of fountain of sun and of tears
and her hair of alevin
and her steps my climates
and her eyes my seasons
and the days without harm
and the nights without displeasure
and the stars of confidence
and the wind of complicity
— AIMÉ CÉSAIRE
Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, 1939

Leo Frobenius and the Problem of Civilizations

A fundamental problem is that of civilization. We live it. We celebrate its progress or deplore its decadence. However, what is it in its essence?

Of course at first there are the traditional responses: the humanist response: the work of mankind, done by mankind for mankind; the agnostic response: "a giant organism and we can no more perceive its limits and grandeur than the microbes enclosed in our cells, were they endowed with thought, could perceive the structure and organization of our body."

Those are traditional responses, and then here is a man who knows: historian, archaeologist, ethnologist; indeed one could say: a poet. What is his response? The most extraordinary response possible, the most revolutionary, the weightiest in inferences: No, humankind does not create civilization, no, civilization is not the work of humankind. Quite the contrary, humankind is the instrument of civilization, a simple means of expression of a power which infinitely surpasses his understanding. Man does not act, he is activated, moved by a superior force which pre-dates humanity, a force to be likened to the life force itself, the foundational Paideuma.

And is this Paideuma, creator of civilizations, inaccessible to humankind's understanding? No—humankind truly conscious of its eminent dignity is capable of grasping it, not directly, but its secret is as impenetrable as the secret of the life force itself, but indirectly, in its diverse manifestations throughout humanity. Superior presence, perceptible only to those capable of "seeing in depth."

Let us listen to Frobenius himself: "The Paideuma reveals its specific laws everywhere. Cultures live and die, they are reborn and displace themselves according to particular laws as if humankind

were not there, humankind who is only an instrument the Paideuma force makes use of to reveal itself."

The study of the manifestations of the Paideuma life force constitutes a new science that Frobenius calls the Morphology of Cultures. The Morphology of Cultures is neither primitive history, pre-history, nor modern history. It does not accumulate facts or dates. It is not to be confused with archaeology, nor is it ethnology, or ethnography—No. What it seeks is to study "the organic being" of civilization. Civilization itself conceived of as "a metaphysical entity." What it seeks is to grasp beyond the known limits of civilizations, this secret and formidable force that Frobenius names the Paideuma.

A grandiose conceptualization that embraces human evolution in its entirety; an admirable particularity that wants human beings to learn from the study of all other human beings from all other times. Science that is no longer just enlightened order, clever mastery of facts, but the search for intimate knowledge, of a secret reality revealed in the life-force itself.

This enormous effort interests us doubly, because it throws light upon the human problem, and because Leo Frobenius, in order to realize it, devoted himself to the study of African civilizations, and created for himself, as he asserts, an African soul, ways of thinking and feeling that are specifically African.

This study in greater depth of African civilizations, from numerous voyages of exploration, detailed observations of prehistoric rock pictures throughout the African continent and Europe, from comparative observations of religions, morals, customs, habitat, tools, commonly used utensils among most of the Earth's people, here is the abundant material that buttresses the elaboration of a method and a science that marries cold scientific precision with the beautiful daring inventions of the mind.

Leo Frobenius's analytical method moves in two directions:

1. Study of "forms" and of "places": study of the exterior aspects of civilizations, of their distribution in space. One can thus draw up maps—maps of dwellings on stilts, for example, during a particular period—one can set up diagrams, arrive at statistics.
2. Study of "*substances*": this is what belongs exclusively to Frobenius He says further: "study of the meaning of life"—he says more precisely: "a civilization, in the sense that we are giving this word, is not only the outward appearance of a people, but also the *substance* of an exterior and *internal* community in which all its members participate.

The first consequence of this method is the observation that the Paideuma, due to a phenomenon found in all manifestations of the vital force—the phenomenon of bipolarity—manifests itself literally in two opposite forms: (1) Ethiopian civilization and (2) Hamitic civilization. Ethiopian civilization is tied to the plant, to the vegetative cycle.

It is dreamy, drawn inward upon itself, mystical. The Ethiopian does not seek to understand phenomena—to grasp and dominate facts outside of himself. He lives and lets live, in a life identical to that of the plant, confident in the continuity of life: germinate, grow, flower, bear fruit, and the cycle starts all over again. The lived fact of poetry, felt so profoundly that the Ethiopian is almost never capable of projecting, of expressing outwardly. Also, for the Ethiopian, the notion of the father, of paternal relations, is fundamental. To sum up: "The Ethiopian feeling of life defines itself as a sense of the real and as primitive mysticism." The Hamitic civilization, on the contrary, is tied to the animal, to the conquest of the right to live through violent struggle and conquest. The Hamitic is active, conscious of external occurrences to which he opposes himself and that he must vanquish in order to survive. He never abandons himself freely to things but strives to dominate them by force or by magical practices. He does not have the sense of the continuity of generations, but of individual life. The mother is not required to be faithful to her husband if he is vanquished in battle. She becomes

the wife of the victor. Briefly, "the Hamitic civilization is characterized by the significance of the event and primitive magic."

These two fundamental expressions of the Paideuma can no longer be found except buried deep in the consciousness of the peoples of the so-called higher civilizations of Europe, Asia, and America. On the contrary, in Africa, these forms of civilization can be studied in an almost pure state among so-called primitive populations. There are some among them who survive in their original, spectacular simplicity, human-plant, human-animal.

It suffices to interpret, for example, the strange rites of the forest populations where harvesting becomes a religious act, or still further to recover the original meaning of the cruelties of adolescent initiation rites among most Hamites. The geographic position and the massive form of the African continent have allowed the preservation of, in so to speak complete isolation, the forms of civilizations spontaneously sprung up from the soil; it is here that the alteration, or rather the inevitable evolution, was accomplished more slowly than elsewhere or, one should say, more "in depth," giving rise moreover in certain parts of the African territory to civilizations as brilliant as the Gao Empire at a time when Europe was covered with impenetrable forests and swamps.

From his first voyage to Africa in 1904, Leo Frobenius admired this remnant of a very ancient greatness. He admired "the gestures, the mannerisms, the customs . . . with a meticulous attention to detail, a dignity, and a grace all natural." And he says: "I know no other people of the North who can compare themselves to the primitive peoples in terms of coherence of civilization."

Frobenius's *History of African Civilization* is a vast effort of synthesis toward the understanding of all these very ancient forms of civilization that today appear primitive and frozen in time, whereas in reality, they are very often symbols of an astonishing richness and complexity of spectacular cultures of which we know nothing.

Moreover, to the one who poses the harrowing question of human evolution, the gift of Africa appears invaluable: "Africa does

not mean for us solely an expansion toward the elsewhere, but also a deepening of our knowledge of ourselves."

■

It is thus for Leo Frobenius and his disciples that the comparative study of civilizations is not only the clarification of what it means to be human, but also a glimpse of the future, thanks to the results of the new science. They believe themselves authorized to offer solutions to questions as compelling as these: "the role of the human" and the "drama of the Earth" . . .

In effect Frobenius discovered that the idea of uninterrupted progress, cherished by the nineteenth century, which showed civilization progressing along a single line from primitive barbarism to modern high culture, was a false idea. Humanity does not have a will to achieve perfection. Moreover, it does not create for itself a civilization that aspires to ever-higher levels. It goes forth, on the contrary, motivated by the internal Paideuma, in multiple directions, from one "shock" to the next, just as the vital force goes from mutation to mutation among the diversity of living species. But before specifying this new notion of "shock," it is indispensable that we reveal how the vital force is itself expressed in the Paideuma, creator of civilizations. First of all, the fundamental polarity, sign of life itself, and which we have seen manifested already in the grand Ethiopian–Hamitic opposition: we find it in the details of the life of cultures.

For example, the stars (the moon, Sun, Venus, etc.) find themselves attributed a sex. And the determination of this sexual identity is not arbitrary. It responds to a precise spatial order. The paired stars, twins, brother, sister, lovers reign over particular regions, spread out, according to rules established by card games. Similarly, numbers participate in determining masculine and feminine nature. Thus, the number 4 is tied to space, to movement, to the masculine; the number 3 is tied to time, past, present, future; to the phases of the moon with its birth, its waxing and waning; into repose, into the feminine.

A conjunction charged with meaning, the symbolism of numbers is the reflection itself of the symbolism of the stars, the one and the other the profound expression of the space, time, primitive polarity of the reality of life. Now let us study the psychological process of the "shocks," how the numbers, the stars, the seasons have delivered to humans what Leo Frobenius calls their "essence." How the numbers, the stars, the seasons have determined in plant-man, animal-man a "revolution of the mind," a veritable alteration of his nature that is the distinguishing feature of the "shock."

The phases of the moon, the transit of the sun, the change of the seasons have not been the object of methodical observations on the part of the human who has not sought to draw lessons from these phenomena.

No. Abruptly, man was "shocked" by the essence of these phenomena, by their intimate, secret reality. He was turned upside down by a sudden emotion, urgent and irresistible. Thus the appearance and disappearance of the moon gave rise to the seizure of the concepts of time and death. It is this sudden awareness that is expressed for example in a great number of civilizations by all the rituals tied to the theme of the predetermination of the death of a god. Similarly sunlight illuminating the world gives rise to the grasp of space, of spatial limitation, of delimited order.

When the change of seasons unleashed the sudden awareness of the periodic rhythms of the life and death of nature, a new "sentiment of life" was born. Man became conscious of his individual existence and the problem of his destiny. One can say that at that moment the consciousness of man himself as an isolated reality in the external world was born.

We must not believe that these "seizures, shocks" have been successive stages: plant, animal, star, season have created and changed the nature of the sentiment of life in different places, in different epochs, have truly created and changed civilizations that over here go forth making themselves more profound, over there altering

themselves, elsewhere intermingling further, bound the ones to the others in a more and ever greater complexity.

And as well there is how Leo Frobenius arrives at his vision of the future, for he is authorized to now write: "The history of human civilization is the history of the transformations of the sentiment of life." He can now search to see whether in our time a new sentiment is not manifesting itself, if our sad time is not perhaps the explosion of a new meaning, a new awareness, a new sentiment of life.

It seems that Euro-American man in the nineteenth century has been seized with a veritable madness for science, technology, machines, the result of which has been the creative imperialist thought of the world economy and its encircling of the globe. This veritable madness for power and domination, which turned humanity upside down during catastrophes as horrible as the wars of 1914 and 1939, is the symptom of a new surge of the Paideuma. These are surges we cannot fully comprehend, the real meaning of which still remains hidden. Therein lies the drama of the earth. As for the role of humankind, it is to prepare itself for living this other future, it is to allow itself to be moved by the Real, without losing this sense of sacredness, this sense of conquest, this sense of destiny that is its inestimable and unique heritage.

■

There you have the great message of Leo Frobenius to humankind today. His philosophy goes beyond the schoolish reasoning of his predecessors and of his contemporaries. He gave life and power to sociology. He rediscovers the meaning of cosmogonies and myths lost since the time of Anaxagore and Plato.

And this Philosophy is Poetry, the world recreated, humankind master of a new fate, strengthened by a new experience of life. The fruitfulness of this admirable doctrine is that it poses to each of us the immediate problems from which it is impossible to shy away without cowardice. It is now vital to dare to know oneself, to dare

to confess to oneself what one is, to dare to ask oneself what one wants to be. Here, also, people are born, live, and die. Here also, the entire drama is played out.

"It is time to gird one's loins like a valiant man."

SUZANNE CÉSAIRE
Tropiques no. 1, 1941

Alain and Esthetics

A peculiar fate is that of Emile-Auguste Chartier, known as Alain.

Political scientist, economist, moralist . . .

His politics read as *defeat*, his "economics" read as *crisis*, and in the face of events that monstrously disrupt the world at this time, his doctrine—pills of optimism—can seem to us a parody.

So what?

Well, it will remain nonetheless that this "professor," this philosopher by profession, will have forcefully laid out the problem of art; will have understood the importance of the extraordinary phenomenon that constitutes poetic creation, and will have consigned it to its proper place: first place! First place in a ruinously extravagant world of bankruptcy, and fraud; first place in a world in which the most dismal of games is being played: the hide-and-seek of humankind and with itself.

It is a mind of exceptional logic and clarity. Alain thinks above all about a system of the fine arts.

And foremost there is a methodical analysis of the arts.

What is drawing, painting, architecture, sculpture?

What is music? Poetry?

The history of art, from drawing to poetry, is for Alain the history of a conquest: the conquest of the human over a set of resistant, stubborn yet manageable forces that we call nature.

And here we are, at the threshold of art, the human alone, almost detached from the obstacle. And it is in drawing that we find artistic expression in a face-to-face conversation with itself.

"No effort, no passion to conquer . . . The hand is light, impartial, indifferent as in thinking." Here, hostile nature hardly opposes itself to artistic expression. Once again drawing is finesse, lightness, freedom, and independence.

More filled with pathos, however, is the combat the painter must

The Malaise of a Civilization

If in our legends and short stories, we see suddenly appear a suffering, sensitive, and mocking figure representing our collective self, in ordinary Martinican literary production, we search in vain for the expression of this self.

Why in the past have we been so unconcerned about expressing our ancestral anxiety in a direct manner?

The urgency of this cultural problem escapes only those who are determined to put their hands over their eyes so as not to be disturbed from an artificial peace: and at any cost, even the price of stupidity and death.

As for us, we can feel that our troubling times are going to precipitate the explosion of a ripened fruit, irresistibly called forth by solar fieriness to cast its creative forces to the wind; we can feel on this sun-drenched tranquil land, the formidable, the inescapable pressure of destiny which bathes the entire world in blood in order to give it tomorrow, its new visage.

Let us question life on this island that is ours.

What can we see?

First the geographic position of this strip of land: tropical. Here, we are in the Tropics.

. . . Where the adaptation of an African population has taken place. Imported Blacks had to struggle against the heavy mortality rates of the early stages of slavery, against chronic malnutrition—a reality that persists to this day. And yet one cannot deny that on Martinican soil the colored race produces strong, robust, adaptable men and women of natural elegance and great beauty.

But then, is it not surprising that this people, who over the centuries adapted itself to this land, this authentic Martinican people, is only now beginning to produce authentic works of art? Over the course of the centuries, how is it that there are no viable survivals of the unique styles, for example, of those that flourished so magnificently on African soil? Sculptures, ornate fabrics, paintings, poetry? Let's allow the imbeciles to blame it on the race, on its so-called predisposition to laziness, to thievery, to wickedness.

Let us speak frankly.

If this lack in Black character is not to be explained by the harshness of the tropical climate to which we have adapted, and still less by I don't know what inferiority, it can in fact be explained, believe us, by:

1. the horrific conditions of transplantation onto a foreign soil.

   —We have too soon forgotten the slave ships and the sufferings of our slave forebears. Here forgetfulness is tantamount to cowardice.
2. coerced submission, under pain of the whip and death, to a system of "civilization," to a "style" both even stranger to the new arrivals than the tropical land itself.
3. finally, after the emancipation of people of color, through a collective error concerning our true nature, an error born of this idea, anchored in the deepest part of the popular collective consciousness, from centuries of suffering: "Since the superiority of the colonizers comes to them from a certain life-style, we shall gain strength only by dominating in our turn the technique of this 'style.'"

   Let us stop and measure the far-reaching implications of this gigantic misunderstanding.

■

What is the Martinican fundamentally, intimately, unilaterally? And how does he live?

In providing answers to these questions, we shall see a stunning contradiction appear between the innermost self, with its desires, its impulses, its unconscious forces—and life lived with its necessities, its urgencies, its gravity. A phenomenon of decisive importance for the future of this country.

What is the Martinican?

—A plant-human.

Like a plant, he abandons himself to the rhythm of universal life. There is not the slightest effort to dominate nature. Mediocre farmer. Perhaps. I am not saying that he makes the plant grow: I am saying that he grows, he lives in a plant-like manner. His indolence? that of the vegetal. Do not say "he is lazy," say "he vegetates," and you will speak the truth for two reasons. His favorite phrase: "Let it go." By that, understand that he lets himself be carried along by life, docile, light, un-insistent, non-rebellious—in a friendly way, lovingly. Obstinate moreover as only a plant can be. Independent (independence, autonomy of the plant). Surrender to self, to the seasons, to the moon, to the more-or-less long day. Fruit harvest. And always and everywhere in the slightest manifestations, the primacy of the plant, the plant trampled under foot but still alive, dead but reviving, the plant free, silent, and proud.

Open your eyes—a child is born. To which god should it be entrusted? To the Tree god. Coconut tree or Banana tree, among whose roots the placenta is buried.

Open your ears. According to popular Martinican folklore, the grass that grows on a grave is the living hair of the dead female buried beneath, who is protesting against death. The symbol is always the same: a plant. It is a vital feeling of a life-death community. In short it is the *Ethiopian sentiment of life.**

Consequently the Martinican is typically Ethiopian.** In the depths of his consciousness he is the plant-human, and while identifying oneself with the plant, the desire is to abandon oneself to the rhythm of life.

Is this attitude enough to explain his failure in the world?

No—the Martinican has failed because, unaware of his real nature, he tries to lead a life that is not his own. The gigantic phenomenon of a collective lie, of "pseudomorphosis." And the current state of civilization in the West Indies reveals to us the consequences of this mistake.

Repression, sufferings, sterility.

How, why, in this people, only yesterday slaves, can there be this fatal misunderstanding? By the most natural of processes, by the instinct-for-self-preservation game.

Let us remember that what the slave regime prohibited exceedingly, first and foremost, was the assimilation of the Black into the White world. Some decrees: April 30, 1764, prohibited Blacks and coloreds from the practice of medicine; May 9, 1765, forbade the practice of law clerk; and the famous order of February 9, 1779, strictly prohibited Blacks from wearing clothes identical to those of Whites, and required submission and respect for "all Whites in general," etc., etc.

Let us cite further the decree of January 3, 1788, requiring free men of color "to take out permits to work *anywhere other than in the fields.*" One will understand that from that point forward the fundamental goal of the colored man became assimilation. And with overwhelming force, a disastrous confusion takes place in his mind: *liberation means assimilation.*

At the outset it was a good movement: 1848—the mass of freed Blacks, in a sudden outburst of the formative self, refuse all regular work, in spite of the risk of starvation. However, broken by economic necessity, no longer slaves, but wage earners, Blacks will eventually submit to the new discipline of the hoe and the cutlass.

* Cf. Frobenius and *Tropiques*, no. 1.

**Another argument could be drawn from architecture: the Martinican hut is an exact reproduction (in contrast to the conical roof, roof in the form of a saddle) of the huts of the Beni-Mai people (of the Congo Kasai region), in whom there dominates the "Ethiopian" sentiment of life. Cf. Frobenius, *History of Civilization*, p. 198.

And it is during this period that the repression of the ancestral desire for unrestrained abandon firmly and definitively establishes itself.

It is replaced, especially in the colored middle class, by the unaccustomed desire for competition.

Hence, the drama, evident for those who analyze in depth the collective self of the Martinican people: its unconscious continues to be inhabited by the Ethiopian desire for abandon. However its consciousness, or rather its pre-consciousness, accepts the Hamitic desire for competitiveness. The race for economic fortune, diplomas, unscrupulous social climbing. A struggle shrunken to the standard of being middle class. The pursuit of monkeyshines. Vanity Fair.

The most serious thing is that the desire for imitation—just a short time earlier only a vaguely conscious one since it was a defense mechanism against an oppressive society—has now migrated to the area of fearsome secret forces in the unconscious.

Not one upwardly mobile Martinican will ever admit that he is only engaging in mimicry, so natural, spontaneous, and born of legitimate aspirations does his present situation seem. And, in so doing he will be sincere. He honestly does not KNOW he mimics. He is *unaware* of his true nature, which nonetheless does exist.

In much the same way, *the hysteric* is unaware that he is only *imitating* an illness, but the doctor treating him and curing him of his unhealthy symptoms knows it.

Similarly, the psychoanalyst reveals to us that the effort required of a Martinican in adapting to an unfamiliar life style will not have been without creating a state of pseudo-civilization that one can qualify as *abnormal, of teratoid aberration.*

The current problem is to determine if the Ethiopian attitude that we have discovered as representing the essence itself of the Martinican sentiment of life can be the point of departure for a viable and imposing cultural style.

It is exhilarating to imagine on these tropical shores, finally restored to their inner truth, the long-lasting and fruitful harmony of humankind and soil. Under the sign of plant life.

Here we are called upon to know ourselves finally by ourselves, and here before us are splendors and hopes. Surrealism has given us some of our possibilities. It is up to us to find the others. With its guiding light.

And let me be clear:

It is not at all about a backwards return, a resurrection of an African past that we have learned to know and respect. On the contrary, it is about the mobilization of every living strength brought together upon this earth where race is the result of the most unremitting intermixing; it is about becoming conscious of the incredible store of varied energies until now locked up within us. We must now deploy them to the maximum without deviation, without falsification. Too bad for those who consider us mere dreamers.

The most unsettling reality is our own.

We shall act.

This land, ours, can only be what we want it to be.

SUZANNE CÉSAIRE

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