

# AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

MARTINIQUE (1913–2008)

LANGUAGE: FRENCH

## CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU PAYS NATAL (FRAGMENT)

ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, sa surdité ruée  
contre la clameur du jour

ma négritude n'est pas une taie d'eau morte sur  
l'œil mort de la terre

ma négritude n'est ni une tour ni une cathédrale

elle plonge dans la chair rouge du sol

elle plonge dans la chair ardente du ciel

elle troue l'accablement opaque de sa droite  
patience.



Aimé Césaire was a poet, author, and politician born in Martinique, an island in the Caribbean. Césaire is considered the father of an ideological and literary movement called *Négritude*. Developed by French-speaking black intellectuals, writers, and politicians who were living in France during the 1930s, the *Négritude* movement found solidarity in a common black identity and rejected French colonial racism. Throughout his life Césaire wrote about Caribbean life and culture, always critical of French cultural dominance and colonization.

TRANSLATOR'S GLOSSARY		
WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
ardente (adj.)	on fire	burning, fiery, blazing, sweltering, scorching
au (prep. + art.)	approaching or reaching a particular condition	to the, of the
cahier (n.)	a bound book of paper for writing notes and ideas; a word or phrase used to describe a thing or express a concept, especially in a particular kind of language	notebook, journal, terms, conditions, stipulations, provisos, particulars
cathédrale (n.)	the principal church of a diocese, with which the bishop is officially associated	cathedral
chair (n.)	soft substance consisting of muscle and fat that is found between the skin and bones of an animal or a human	flesh, meat, sinews
ciel (n.)	the region of the atmosphere and outer space seen from the earth	sky, upper atmosphere, blue yonder, heavens
clameur (n.)	a loud and confused noise, especially that of people shouting vehemently	clamor, racket, uproar, roaring, racket
contre (prep.)	in opposition to	against, resistant to, contrary to
d'eau (prep. + n.)	part of or related to the transparent liquid that is the basic fluid of living organisms	of water
d'un (prep. + indef. art.)	expressing the relationship between a particular part and a whole	of a
dans (prep.)	describes the physical state of being surrounded by something else	into, within
de (prep.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of
droite (adj.)	extending or moving in one direction only; positioned so as to be level, upright, or symmetrical	straight, direct, straightforward, honest, unwavering, unswerving, level
du (prep. + art.)	expressing the relationship between a part and a whole	of the

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
elle (pron.)	third person pronoun used to refer to a thing previously mentioned or easily identified	it
fragment (n.)	isolated or incomplete part of something	fragment, excerpt
jour (n.)	period of twenty-four hours of time, measured from one midnight to the next, corresponding to a rotation of the earth on its axis	day, twenty-four hours
l'accablement (n.)	a state of low spirits caused by loss of hope or courage	dejection, despondency, discouragement, desolation, disheartenment
l'œil (n.)	each of a pair of globular organs in the head through which people and vertebrate animals see	the eye
la (art.)	person or thing already mentioned	the
ma (pron.)	associated with the speaker	my
mort / morte (adj.)	no longer alive	dead, deceased, lifeless, departed, stagnant, still
n'est ni (v. + conj.)	not the one nor the other of two people or things; not either as determiner	is neither
n'est pas (v.)	third person singular of verb <i>to be</i> in the negative form	is not, isn't
natal (adj.)	associated with a place by birth	native, original, first, of birth
négritude (n.)	the quality or fact of being of black African origin; affirmation and consciousness of the value of black or African culture, heritage, and identity	negritude
ni (conj.)	not either as determiner	neither, nor
opaque (adj.)	not able to be seen through	opaque, cloudy, murky, hazy, gloomy, foggy, nontransparent
patience (n.)	capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset	patience, persistence, perseverance, endurance, tenacity, staying power

WORD	DEFINITION	POSSIBLE SYNONYMS
pays (n.)	a nation with its own government, occupying a particular territory	country, homeland, native land, nation
pierre (n.)	hard, solid, nonmetallic mineral matter	stone, rock, boulder, pebble
plonge (v.)	from the verb <i>plonger</i> , meaning "to submerge one's entirety into some other substance"	plunges, dips, dives, immerses itself, submerges itself
retour (n.)	the act of coming or going back to a person, place, or state of being	return, going back, homecoming, restoration, recovery, repossession
rouge (adj.)	one of the three primary colors	red, crimson
ruée (adj.)	from the verb <i>ruer</i> , meaning "to move with urgent haste"	rushed, hurled, hurtled, dashed, bolted, hastened
sa (adj.)	associated with or belonging to a thing previously mentioned	its
sol (n.)	the star at the center of our galaxy that creates light and warmth	sun
sur (prep.)	physically in contact with and supported by	on
surdité (n.)	the complete lack or impairment of the ability to hear	deafness
taie (n.)	a particular place or point not able to be seen through; an encasement	opaque spot, nontransparent, filmy spot, hazy spot, case, slip
terre (n.)	the upper layer of earth in which plants grow; it typically consists of a mixture of organic remains, clay, and rock particles	earth, land, shore, ground, terrain
tour (n.)	a tall narrow building, often part of a church or castle	tower, steeple, turret, belfry
troue (v.)	from the verb <i>trouer</i> , meaning "to make a hole in"	pierces, breaks through, penetrates
une (indef. art.)	used when referring to a specific thing	a, an, one

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## PHRASE BY PHRASE

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elle trouve l'accablement opaque de sa droite patience.

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## REFLECTING AND FINDING MEANING

Group Member Names:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Pick a scribe for the group, and work together to answer the questions.

What are the best parts of this translation, and why do you think they are good?

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What elements of the original poem did you lose in the translation? What did you manage to keep?

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Did you achieve something new with your translation, and if so, does it make sense in the poem or not?

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