

Pigments in Translation

by

Alexandra Lillehei
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Content

Introduction	i
They came that night	1
Captation	3
In Memory of G. M.	5
Obsession	7
Neuralgia	9
Enough	11
There are some nights	13
Position	15
The Wind	17
In Indian File	19
While Waiting	21
Hiccups	23
A Tramp Asked Me for Ten Sous	29
Sale	31
Limbé	35
The Negre's Lament	39
So Often	41
S. O. S.	43
For Sure	45
Soon	47
White Night	49
Whitewashed	51
True to the Legend	53
Reminder	55
Shine	57
Good Manners	59
Regard	61
Reality	63
They Knew	65
Some Balls for Roulette	67
On a Postcard	69
Et Cetera	71
Bibliography	75

Introduction

I. French Guyana

Though called French Guyana to distinguish it from other colonies historically named Guyana, the French were not the first Europeans to discover this Caribbean land.¹ Christopher Columbus arrived at the region that would become French Guyana during his voyage in the 15th century.² Other explorers followed, and in 1604 France claimed French Guyana as a colony, incorporating the continental region into its empire. The colony's location on the South American continent allowed the internal border to remain unfixed for many years; it was not until 1900 that the limits of French Guyana were set at the Oyapok River by the cession of tracts of land to Brazil.³ The impreciseness of this border created a land where Europeans, Amerindian natives, slaves, and *marrons* intermixed, without the oceanic constraints of the island colonies.⁴

¹ I am referring to the region as French Guyana, instead of Guayne, Guyana, Guiana, or French Guiana. Léon-Gontran Damas uses "Guyane," the French spelling, and French Guyana is the closest English has while preserving the distinction of French.

² Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane, Suivi de Misère Noire, et autres écrits journalistiques* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 2003), 30.

³ Bridget Jones, "French Guiana," in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, Vol I, ed. A. James Arnold, Julio Rodríguez-Luis, and J. Michael Dash (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 389.

⁴ J. Michael Dash, "Introduction," in *A History of Literature*, ed. A. James Arnold, Julio Rodríguez-Luis, and J. Michael Dash, 311.

French Guyana became mythologized in the European imagination, a “green hell” of a jungle at once El Dorado and a deathtrap for laborers.⁵ The French of the metropole were brought to the colony by these myths, for French Guyana became both a gold mine and a penal colony. The English writers Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Laurence Keymis, who traveled to French Guyana “dans le but de pénétrer jusqu’au lieu de tant de richesses” and recorded their search for El Dorado, propagated the mythification.⁶ This fascination appeared throughout Europe:

À peine le littoral figurait-il sur les cartes du seizième siècle, que, sur la foi de relations de voyages, un bruit se répandit de toutes parts situant sur les bords du lac Périmé, entre l’Orénoque et l’Amazone, une ville aux toits d’or dans laquelle s’était réfugié, avec les derniers de sa tribu, le chef Inca, Manoa Del Dorado.⁷

The myth of El Dorado was realized in the discovery of gold, which drew Europeans to the region.⁸ But French Guyana was not settled in a systematic way despite this influx of colonists, and not many colonists survived long in the landscape of the “green hell.”⁹ Besides the settlers, offenders were brought to the penal colony on *Île du Diable*.¹⁰ The environmental conditions were so severe the colony was described as a graveyard for Europeans in 1763, as few people returned from laboring on the island.¹¹ France continued to use *Île du Diable* as a penal colony until 1951. Of the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁶ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Jean Petot, *L’or de Guyane*, (Paris: Editions Caribéennes, 1986). Referenced in Bridget Jones, “French Guiana,” 391.

⁹ J. Michael Dash, “Introduction,” 311.

¹⁰ The penal colony where Alfred Dreyfus was sent in 1895 by the French military during the Dreyfus Affair.

¹¹ Bridget Jones “French Guiana,” 389.

70000 men shipped to French Guyana by 1951, only 5000 returned at the end of their sentence.¹²

French Guyana was not only detrimental to prisoners, but to slaves as well. The Caribbean had many sugar plantations and slaves were the main source of labor for crop production. As part of the triangle trade of the 18th century, Africans were taken from their continent, brought to French Guyana as slaves to work the land, and became permanent residents. This slavery-induced diaspora experienced a long history of emancipation and reinstitution; the National Assembly abolished slavery in 1789 but Napoleon reinstated it to benefit from the profits of the plantations. It was not until 1848 that the French emancipated their colonies permanently. But emancipation only eliminated slavery and did nothing to eliminate the vast social divides that existed in Caribbean and Guyanese culture; social divides perpetuated by colonial ideals and the racial divide of slavery.¹³ In fact, emancipation may have compounded the issue. Plantation owners brought Indian, Malay, Chinese, and Indochinese workers to French Guyana to take the places of former slaves who had left the plantations after emancipation, further complicating racial relations with the addition of other diasporic peoples.¹⁴

Though brimming with a population of diverse racial ancestry, literature written in the Caribbean during the colonial period attempted to replicate European ideals. Léon-Gontran Damas, one of the founders of the Negritude movement, termed the poetry produced during this period imitative poetry; poetry that

¹² Michel Devèze, *Cayenne; Déportés et Bagnards* (Paris: Julliard, 1965), 277.

¹³ A. James Arnold, prologue to *Modernism and Negritude; the Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire*, ed. A. James Arnold (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 6.

¹⁴ J. Michael Dash, "Introduction," 311.

imitated European cultural and poetic ideals without attempting to express a Caribbean identity.¹⁵ These works ignored race and tried to find commonality in assimilation instead of expressing the reality of France's colonial impact on the Caribbean. Beyond imitative works, the inaccessibility of printing presses to any non-European language was both the product of and perpetuated the colonial and assimilation practices in the Caribbean. Assimilation, with its roots in education and class, produced a cultural elite through access to the French language, which allowed access to literature and publication. The ability to write in French was a means of entrance into French society, and a means of advancing in the Caribbean hierarchy; the uneducated spoke Creole.¹⁶ Those who wanted to write for the Caribbean and not Europe were nonetheless obliged to write in French to be published. And even with access to a press willing to print a non-European language, Creole was a mostly oral language and could not be printed.¹⁷

II. Léon-Gontran Damas

Léon-Gontran Damas was born into this colonial system in Cayenne, French Guyana on March 28, 1912. His father was a *mulatto*, of African and European descent, while his mother was *métissage*, descended from Amerindians and Africans.¹⁸ She died shortly after his birth, and Damas was raised by his father's

¹⁵ "Avec eux, fini le règne de l'imitation, de la décalcomanie!" Léon-Gontran Damas, introduction to *Poètes d'Expression Française [d'Afrique Noire, Madagascar, Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Indochine, Guyane] 1900-1945* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1947), 9.

¹⁶ J. Michael Dash, "Introduction," 311-312.

¹⁷ Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire, the Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 5.

¹⁸ Bridget Jones "Léon Damas," in *Critical Perspectives on Léon-Gontran Damas*, ed. Keith Q. Warner (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), 31.

relative Man-Gabi.¹⁹ Both his mother and adopted mother privileged a European upbringing, encouraging those habits the Guyanese culture regarded as French.²⁰ Their bourgeois attitude and attempt at assimilation would influence Damas' later conception of Negritude.²¹ He entered elementary school in 1919 in Cayenne, and in 1924 was sent to the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, Martinique, where he met Aimé Césaire.

The Lycée Schoelcher was the only secondary school for all of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana until after World War II.²² It was part of a colonial system which enforced social divides for the profit of the French empire, and whose "deliberate policy [was] to limit cultural development."²³ The policy included a restriction of education to primary school, a refusal to create secondary schools, and an indifference to the establishment of cultural institutions such as libraries and print shops.²⁴ The Lycée Schoelcher became the source of colonial administrators; students from oversea territories were recruited to oversee the territories, a cyclical production sustaining the metropole's dominance. Not only was the Lycée the only secondary school and means to university, it was not free for students.²⁵ Those who had already assimilated into the colonial system were the privileged members who could afford to send their children; education produced the figures

¹⁹ Daniel Racine, *Léon-Gontran Damas l'Homme et l'Oeuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), 25.

²⁰ Daniel Racine, "Léon-Gontran Damas: Bibliographical Data," in *Léon-Gontran Damas, 1912-1978: Founder of Negritude, A Memorial Casebook*, ed. Daniel Racine (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1979), 1.

²¹ See "Hiccups" page 23.

²² Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire, the Collected Poetry*, 1.

²³ Jack Corzani "Poetry Before Negritude," 466.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, 86-87.

that would later return and subject the colonies to further rounds of this cycle. It was a means of domination, as Damas wrote in *Retour de Guyane*:

Cette éducation ne comporte ni l'histoire, ni la géographie du Continent Américain où vit l'individu qui la reçoit, ni l'organisation sociale, ni les origines de premiers hommes qui habitèrent la région, encore moins la tragédie d'où naquit la réalité présente.

L'éducation semble n'avoir qu'un but: masquer certaines lacunes mais aussi certaines réalités. Cet enseignement singulier se rapporte invariablement à un pays qui s'appelait la Gaule, aux habitants de ce pays, les Gaulois, à leur héroïsme dans l'espace, à leur incontestable autorité dans le temps, au respect qu'ils méritent, à leur humanité supérieure, à leur conception mystique de la race.²⁶

An idea he returned to in 1971:

The négritude movement at first tried to oppose the absorption the grandsons of the Gauls wanted to inflict on us. They claimed we had the same grandfathers. The textbooks, one must remember, were destined solely for use by the metropolitans. I can distinctly remember that in my class in French Guyana we were more familiar with the names of plants growing in France than those growing at home.²⁷

Damas criticized colonial education for both its lack of Caribbean subject matter and its social exclusivity.²⁸

Students at the Lycée Schoelcher studied for the entrance exam to the French university system, an exam with questions based on France's history and geography. Information about the Caribbean was excluded from the exam and therefore from study, though the Lycée's geography teacher tried to interest the students in the local geographical characteristics of Martinique.²⁹ The education system in the Caribbean propagated issues of identity and race through privileging European ways, a system in which Damas was complicit through his education.

²⁶ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, 85.

²⁷ Léon-Gontran Damas, "La Négritude en question" interview by *Jeune Afrique*, in *Critical Perspectives*, trans. and ed. Keith Q. Warner, 18.

²⁸ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, 88-87.

²⁹ Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire*, I.

Damas did not finish his secondary education in Cayenne, but transferred to the metropole. From 1928 to 1929 Damas continued his studies in Meaux, France. While at school, the principal asked him if he were a *bagnard* since he came from French Guyana. Damas responded “[s]i mon père était bagnard, je serais aussi blanc que vous...la Guyane est le dépôt des bagnards mais la France en est bien la fabrique,” referencing the contradiction in the metropole’s conceptions of its colonies.³⁰ He finished his studies, moved to Paris, and in November 1929 enrolled at the École des Langues Orientales to study Russian and Japanese, while also taking law classes to please his family and sitting in on classes at the Faculté des Lettres. Damas met Léopold Sédar Senghor in 1930 at school, and in 1932 enrolled in the Institut d’Ethnologie de Paris. As he was no longer studying law his parents cut off his allowance, but friends successfully petitioned the governor of Martinique, Félix Eboué, for a scholarship to enable Damas to resume his studies.³¹ Damas continued to study ethnology, attending courses that would influence the creation of Negritude.

Another influence on Negritude, the Etienne Léro led *Légitime Défense*, a Marxist Martinican magazine whose ideals Damas endorsed, was published this same year. In fact, while Damas would later publish the first Negritude text, he credits Léro with influencing the movement.³² *Légitime Défense* took its inspiration from the

³⁰ Daniel Racine, *Léon-Gontran Damas*, 26.

³¹ Daniel Racine, “Leon Gontran Damas and Africa,” in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Keith Q. Warner, 51.

³² Damas discusses Léro’s “domine” of this phase of poetry and his influence on Negritude in to *Poésie d’Expression Française*, where he spends over half of his introduction discussing Léro. Léon-Gontran Damas, introduction to *Poètes d’Expression Française*, 11-16.

Harlem Renaissance, a movement with direct influence on the individual members of the Negritude movement and the movement itself.³³

It was in Paris that the *trois pères* of Negritude, Damas, Césaire, and Senghor, met as a group for the first time with other members of the African diaspora. This group of student intellectuals, uprooted from the Caribbean by France for their intellectual gifts and destined to become the next administrators of the colonial system, formed a community in Paris that celebrated their common African ancestry. Negritude grew out of their rejection of bourgeois assimilation practices and a determination to not view Africa as cultureless nor African culture as inferior to European culture. As a movement, it repudiated Eurocentric ideals and found commonality and culture in African descent.

Negritude has its roots in ethnology. While in Paris, Damas' studies at the Institut d'Ethnologie exposed him to ethnographers who were the product of the European fascination with racial difference and cultural otherness of the 1920s and 1930s.³⁴ These theorists, such as Leo Frobenius and Maurice Delafoss were influential in the creation of the movement, writing about the European invention of the French colonizing term *nègre*.³⁵ All three of the *pères* read at least Frobenius, according to Léopold Sédar Senghor, and had memorized sections of his work, an

³³ A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 27-29.

³⁴ J. Michael Dash, "Before and Beyond Negritude," in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, ed. A. James Arnold, Julio Rodríguez-Luis, and J. Michael, 537.

³⁵ *Histoire de la civilisation Africaine* and *Les Nègres* respectively. "The title *Les Nègres* gave a new respectability to a noun that in the French West Indies had had the intentionally offensive connotation of nigger." A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude*, 36.

anthropology of the African.³⁶ The Negritude movement is indebted to the texts of these ethnographers who saw in Africans a natural essence.³⁷

While Negritude rejected the negative aspects of these ethnographic theories, the movement developed from their idea of Africans as inherently, essentially, other. It expressed a belief in this difference and a rejection of the European as superior: African culture was the equal of but not equivalent to European culture. Negritude's objective was to reclaim the history of Africa and to form a new identity in the redefinition of the pejorative term *nègre*.

As the community of the Parisians African diaspora formulated Negritude, Damas started publishing work. Five poems were first released in the review *Esprit* in April 1934.³⁸ These publications coincided with the creation of *L'Étudiant Noir* in 1935, a magazine modeled on Léro's *Légitime Défense*.³⁹ *L'Étudiant Noir* provided an outlet for expression for all students of African descent in Paris and through distribution created unity in the diaspora.⁴⁰ The magazine was "intended to bring together students from Africa and those from the West Indies and was...a matrix for the concept of negritude."⁴¹ Only released a few times, *L'Étudiant Noir* folded in

³⁶ "I still have before me, in my possession, the copy of *Histoire de la civilisation Africaine* on the third page of which Césaire wrote: 'décembre 1936'...We knew by heart Chapter II of the first book of the *History* entitled, "What does Africa Mean to Us?", a chapter adorned with lapidary phrases such as this: 'The idea of the 'barbarous Negro' is a European invention, which in turn dominated Europe until the beginning of this century.'" *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁷ J. Michael Dash, "Before and Beyond Negritude," 537.

³⁸ "Un Clochard M'a Demandé Dix Sous," "Solde," "La Complainte du Nègre," "Réalité," "Cayenne". Four would later be included in the collection *Pigments*, the first of Damas' work to be published outside of the pages of a *revue*. See pages 29, 31, 39, 63. Daniel Racine, *Léon-Gontran Damas l'Homme et l'Oeuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), 29.

³⁹ Daniel Racine, *Léon-Gontran Damas*, 29.

⁴⁰ Daniel Racine, "Leon Gontran Damas and Africa," 51.

⁴¹ Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire*, 2.

1936 due “to poor sales and political pressure.”⁴² Though it did not endure, the review brought together the figures who would create Negritude and was an early expression of the movement.

After *L'Étudiant Noir* ended, Damas published *Pigments*, his first collection of poetry, in 1937 in an edition of 500 with a preface by Robert Desnos. Desnos' preface situated Damas as an integral figure in the emerging movement centered around the commonality of African ancestry. Damas claimed that *Pigments* was the source of the Negritude movement and inspired Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*:

Oui, et je vais vous dire un chose que je révèle rarement. Césaire...est venu me trouver dans ma chambre d'étudiant pour me lire son texte. J'étais encore couché, c'était un matin, très tôt. Je l'entends encore: 'Tu me diras dans quelle mesure j'ai été influence par toi.' J'ai été tellement surpris par la beauté de ce poème que je n'ai rien dit. Mais il est certain qu'il a subi à certains endroits mon influence.⁴³

At the very least, *Pigments* was the first text to be published out of the Negritude movement.

The collection had influence beyond literary production. After being translated into several African languages, *Pigment's* revolutionary potential was actualized in the Baoulé of the Cote d'Ivoire's refusal to serve in the French army against Germany in 1939, provoked by the collection's language.⁴⁴ In the metropole, *Pigments* was seized and suppressed in France by *Le Front Populaire* in 1939 for “atteint à la sûreté intérieure de l'Etat.”⁴⁵ The retroactive banning led to a raid at

⁴² A. James Arnold, prologue to *Modernism and Negritude*, 9.

⁴³ Keith Q. Warner, introduction to *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Keith Q. Warner, 7.

⁴⁴ Daniel Racine, “Leon Gontran Damas and Africa,” 54.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

Damas apartment, where police searched for further copies of the collection.⁴⁶

Pigments was a manifesto that launched a movement, though Damas did not use the term *négritude* in his poetry.

Damas' next publication was his 1938 ethnographic study of French Guyana, *Retour de Guyane*, which proved no less contentious than *Pigments*. 1500 copies were published following its excerption in magazines. A critique of the fiscally corrupt bureaucracy and the pedagogic abuse of colonialism in French Guyana, the essays were considered so incendiary that the Guyanese government immediately purchased 1000 texts and burned them to prevent their dissemination.⁴⁷

After Damas' work was banned and burned, Césaire published *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, the second seminal Negritude text, in a 1939 issue of *Volontés*. This poem contained the first published use of the neologism *négritude* and is considered the foundational text of the movement.⁴⁸ World War II interrupted Negritude's literary production. Mobilized and unable to return to Paris during Germany's occupation, Damas joined the French resistance. At the end of the war he received the Franco-British Cross of Merit and the Commemorative Medal of Liberation for his services.⁴⁹ In 1947 Damas edited an anthology of Negritude poetry, *Poètes Noirs d'Expression Française*, followed by a collection called *Poèmes nègres sur des airs Africains* in 1948.

⁴⁶ Keith Q. Warner, introduction to *Critical Perspectives*, 6.

⁴⁷ Daniel Racine, "Léon-Gontran Damas: Bibliographical Data," 5.

⁴⁸ There is some contention over this fact. Several scholars have claimed this is the first published use of the term, others claim it first appeared in an issue of *L'Étudiant Noir*. It was most likely first published in *Notebook*. See A. James Arnold, prologue to *Modernism and Negritude*, 9. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire*, 5. for discussion.

⁴⁹ Daniel Racine, "Léon-Gontran Damas: Bibliographical Data," 8.

Damas became a political figure in French Guyana during the end of the 1940s. The colony became an overseas department of France in 1946, and in 1948 the Socialist party elected Damas a député. It was as a député that Damas visited Africa for the first time in 1950, as a delegate for the French National Assembly. He was sent to the Côte d'Ivoire to report on the events of 1949. This report, Rapport No. 11348, was published in 1965 and is "referred to today as the bible of the African Democratic Republic Party."⁵⁰ Damas served as French Guyana's representative until his defeat in the election of 1952. While a député, Damas married Isabelle Victoire Vécilia Achille in 1949 and divorced her four years later.

During the 1950s and 1960s Damas traveled around the world attending conferences and publishing poetry. His next collection, *Graffiti*, came out in 1952. *Black Label*, a long poem that Damas considered his best work, followed in 1956.⁵¹ *Névralgies*, his penultimate collection, was published a decade later. After marrying Marietta Campos in 1967, Damas moved with her to the United States in 1970, where he taught at Georgetown University. Later, Damas transferred to Howard University where he became a professor of African Literature. He was subsequently appointed Acting Director of the African Studies and Research Program from July 1975 to July 1976. In 1977 his last collection of poetry *Mine de Rien* was published. Damas continued to teach at Howard University though March 15, 1977, when he was admitted to the George Washington University hospital for the removal of a tongue sarcoma. His health deteriorated, and on July 5, 1977 he returned to the

⁵⁰ Daniel Racine, "Leon Gontran Damas and Africa," 56.

⁵¹ "I think my best book is *Black-Label. Pigments* was a manifesto of the movement, but the plain explanation of *Pigments* can be found in *Black-Label* and in *Retour de Guyane*." Léon-Gontran Damas, "Négritude Revisited – An Interview with Léon Damas," *Manna*, in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Keith Q. Warner, 25.

hospital with a ruptured aneurism. On December 20th of the same year, Damas returned to the hospital with pneumonia, where the doctors discovered throat cancer. He stayed at the hospital for the next month until his death on January 22, 1978, at the age of 66. His body was brought back to French Guyana and buried.

III. Methodology

Translation begins with reading the source text, the text to be translated. The meaning gleaned during the initial read-through guides a translator through the lingual complexities of transference from source text to target text. After gaining an understanding of the work, the writing process begins with a translation between languages on the word-to-word scale, while allowing meaning to influence choices of semantics.

Literal, or word-to-word, translations fail primarily for two reasons: they do not transfer “meaning” from the source language or do not consider the syntactical and grammatical changes necessary to translate into the target language. These failings can result in a stilted, encumbered text that does not attempt to accurately translate the work as a whole, but instead relies on the lexical definitions of each word. This is especially true in poetry, which conveys a larger “meaning” than the words themselves literally denote or may lack narrative continuity. A word-to-word rendering of a source text can lose information, especially in the case of idiomatic expressions or “meaning” carrying language. A faithful translation contains the “meaning” of the source text while referring to the source language in its target language.

Faithfulness is preserved in Lawrence Venuti's Freidrich Schleiermacher-derived concept of a foreignizing translation. This method brings the reader to the author by preserving an element of foreignness from the source text. It acknowledges the target text as a translation and does not aim for complete transparency or autonomy. Foreignization is contrasted with the domestication of a text. In a domestic translation the source text is translated in a transparent and fluid style to minimize any foreignness and to create the illusion the source text was originally written in the target language. Venuti claims this mode is inherently colonial, for it reflects a belief in the superiority of the target language and its culture.⁵² It is a betrayal to produce a translation that is divorced from its source; the balance must be kept between foreignization and autonomy.⁵³

I employed a foreignizing mode of translation, which acknowledged the source text, to bring the reader to Léon-Gontran Damas' text without attempting to present the poems as if they had originally been written in English. To this end I preserved French words in the poems in an effort to foreignize, to acknowledge their source text and source language. I hope my translations reflect the source poems and acknowledge my role as translator, and through this my judgments and word histories that cannot fail to shade "meaning." My purpose was to translate *Pigments* as faithfully as possible. There may be a few moments of inspiration, but in the totality of this work I strove to bring across the original genius of Damas with as little interference as possible. I translated literally while allowing lexical subjectivity

⁵² Lawrence Venuti, "Local Contingencies: Translation and National Identities," in *Nation, Language, and The Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 187-189.

⁵³ This theory is the result of COL 355 "Translation: Theory and Practice" a class I took in the Fall of 2010 at Wesleyan University with Professor Joseph Fitzpatrick.

and the understanding of “meaning” to dictate the necessary breaks from the literalness of the phrase. As well thought out and referenced as a choice may be, it is still a choice of translation. I will necessarily privilege a translation that supports my reading of *Pigments*, but one that relies on the source. This contributes to a faithful translation, the acknowledgment that translation that has taken place.

Pigments is a manifesto of Damas’ Negritude. The theme of complicity in assimilation and Damas’ style embody through language the representation of the experience of the colonized mind and body. These motifs and techniques express not only Damas’ conception of Negritude but narrate the experience of the colonized speaker. Through this collection Damas created a Negritude for the Caribbean in the elevation of Africa and the rejection of the colonizing metropole, a Negritude that must be preserved through translation.

The speaker of this collection struggles with assimilation. For though he views it as an unwanted force, it has infiltrated his subconscious and cannot be expunged. The speaker tries to uproot assimilation but his indoctrination “from the cradle”⁵⁴ cannot be erased through desire. Subconscious or buried as it may be, the colonial force is part of him and will return. Assimilation is present in Damas’ poetry and its presence must be preserved in translation. In “There are some nights,”⁵⁵ the speaker experiences nausea, a physical expression of a mental debilitation; he lies awake at night suffocating on the “bitter odor of blood,” on the colonization that has permeated the very atmosphere as it “jet[s] / from every muted trumpet.” There is no escape; an unwanted culture has “anchor[ed] itself in” the body, and nothing can

⁵⁴ See “Whitewashed” page 51

⁵⁵ See page 13.

remove it. The malaise is a remainder of Damas' childhood, of assimilation as the means of advancement, of cultural assimilation of the mind anchored in the body. It is a physical expression of a mental condition, the body's expression of the mind's assimilation into colonialism. The colonial system has left an unforgettable mark in the speaker's subconscious and body.

The colonized figures reject assimilating tendencies in "Hiccups,"⁵⁶ a poem that chronicles the childhood indoctrination of a colonized body. The speaker encounters the return of his childhood in a hiccup, an involuntary and unwanted bodily response. The colonizers have invaded his mind and body; assimilatory practices return against his will from the returning habits of his mind and body. During his childhood, the speaker was taught the means of advancing in society by imitating the manners and mannerisms of the metropole, by rejecting the Negritude of a banjo in favor of the European violin. The instruments represent the colonized and colonizers and the former's further division into *negre* and *mulatto*. A culmination in "the *mulattos* do not do that / so leave it to the *negres*" emphasizes the divide between the assimilation privileged *mulatto* and the denigrated *negre*. These poems are a response to the invasive and unalterable aspects of assimilation and colonization, and the speaker's anger and disgust at their presence in him, in his body that manifests these subconscious betrayals. In "True to the Legend,"⁵⁷ the speaker remembers his native landscape, "mornes," but has distorted himself to imitate the European ideal. He forces himself into the clothing of the metropole while his body recalls the freedom of his historic culture. The juxtaposition of the

⁵⁶ See page 23.

⁵⁷ See page 53.

sentiment expressed through the clothing choices favors the morne country of the Caribbean over European strictures. The subconscious expression of assimilation is a reality with which the speaker struggles, and must be preserved in a translation.

Languages break differently and allow for different phrasal and syntactical formations. Thus the structure of the French lines is impossible to translate with complete faithfulness into the English language. In “Rappel,” the exclamation of “Et flûte” refers both to an instrument and to a colloquial exclamation.⁵⁸ The phrase’s position, coming directly after a critique of France, lends itself to being understood as “damn.” But the following line brings “flûte” back to the instrument, a “reed flute.” This language points to the complications and oppressions of colonialism and empire. For the reed flute of the western imagination is not the flute that plays on the mornes “while the good negre / stretches out on his pallet ten to fifteen Factory hours.” I found it impossible to capture the dual meanings of “damn” and “flute” in English and decided to preserve “flute,” I could not translate the two distinctly, as repetition is an integral stylistic element in *Pigments*.

Damas uses repetition to express his understanding of colonization. He repeats an introductory word, usually an article or a preposition, at the start of a series of lines. The repetitions are tied into the drumbeat, the backbone return of a tempo, and count off against the colonizer as well as marking time. “The Negre’s Lament” and “Et Cetera”⁵⁹ utilize this technique, where the beat is invoked through the repetition of *de*. “The Negre’s Lament” lists the implements of bodily subjugation of slavery: “of blows of gnarled cord / of bodies charred / of toes to back charred /

⁵⁸ See “Reminder” page 55.

⁵⁹ See pages 39 and 71.

of...” And “Et Cetera” lists the human categories of a European war: “of maimed / of burned / of gangrened / of...” The use of repetition pounds out the negativity, the multitudes of betrayals, inflicted upon the colonized by slavery, colonialism, and assimilation. With percussive prepositions the speaker reinforces the losses enacted upon the body and the subconscious, beat out by a drum. It highlights the repetition of assimilation, body and mind, and the history out of which colonialism was born.

Damas’ style is unique among Negritude poets. He is considered the “purest” poet,⁶⁰ because his poetry evokes African rhythms and jazz.⁶¹ Stylistically, it expresses the assimilated body, and the refuge and future in the syncopation of African rhythms found in the jazz-like refrains and lines. Damas was heavily influenced by Jazz and its African roots.⁶²

Damas employs a colloquial vocabulary to express his thematics, and employs racial stereotypes as well as *mots de la rue*. In “Regard,” the speaker makes “false Chinese eyes.”⁶³ The discomfort felt at reading those lines is purposeful, purposeful in the same manner as using “negre” to speak of a group, and must be preserved in translation. The use of racial stereotypes and derogatory language forces the reader to confront the roots of those ideas, not just the history of negre but that of other

⁶⁰ “Damas is concise, syncopated, ironical, and probably the most jazz-inspired... To the extent that he is the least European, he is sometimes considered as the purest in their ranks.” A. James Arnold, “Negritude, Then and Now,” in *A History of Literature*, ed. A. James Arnold, Julio Rodriguez-Luis, and J. Michael Dash, 482.

⁶¹ I want to state I have very little training in music and no jazz training at all. So I cannot verify the validity of this claim, nor I can I translate any specificities of jazz beyond the surface and subconscious recognition of certain phrases and the recognizable improvisational standards in some poems. This is a weakness of my translation, but I strove to translate the rhythm of Damas that appears in the source text.

⁶² “On aura remarque dans presque tous les textes reproduites dans ce livre, la musique des poèmes de Damas tissés d’allitérations et d’assonances, comme en Afrique noire” “des poètes nègres francophones de ma génération, Damas est, sans conteste, celui qui...a illustre le mieux le rythme nègre que viola!” Daniel Racine, *Léon-Gontran*, 11, 13.

⁶³ See page 61.

oppressed groups as well. The poet wants to evoke the same discomfort he feels at assimilation through language and poetry, and brings the reader to understand the constraint of ingrained meaning, and the fight against that which has been indoctrinated since birth. Employing a term with a derogatory history multiple times in a work allows the term to achieve new meaning for the reader through the estrangement and reengagement precipitated by the iterations. Negritude is not limited to a particular category of race, but, while based in Africanness, allows for the possibility of other races.

I found it difficult to translate the French words relating to Negritude, race, and geography, culturally specific terms. The struggle was between wanting to translate literally and culturally and understanding that the movement engendered in many of these words the cultural meanings they took on through the course of the twentieth century. After attempting to translate, I found the best recourse was in leaving the words untranslated with an explanation in the introduction; the loss of their cultural specificity was too great in an English rendering.

“Nègre” is the essential first word. Literally translated *nègre* is a variant of black, which is itself best translated by the French *noir*. The problems of transferring *nègre*'s meaning are twofold. Firstly, *nègre* is a culturally specific word and relies on other racial terms in French for its meaning. And these terms were categorically specific:

before the Second World War the French had three words to designate individuals or things belonging to the black race. The most euphemistic was ‘Noir’ (noun or adjective). The most derogatory was ‘négro.’ In between, on a sort of neutral and objective ground was the word ‘nègre,’ used both as a noun or as an adjective (as in ‘l’art nègre’)...For the general public, ‘noir’ and ‘nègre’ may well have been interchangeable, but the very civilized and very

complexed Antilleans considered themselves as ‘Noirs,’ the ‘nègres’ being on that distant continent, Africa.⁶⁴

The culturally specific categories of French racial terminology defy a faithful translation. And *Pigments* contains other terms for people of African descent, “Limbé” refers to “poupées noirs,” translated as “black dolls.”⁶⁵ *Noir*’s inclusion as an identifying noun in *Pigments* prohibits the translation of *nègre* as “black.” Nor does English have a loanword for *nègre*, like “mulatto,” borrowed from the romance languages’ *mulâtre*. Thus, in the Caribbean *nègre* had a pejorative connotation that most closely translates into English with the word “nigger,” a derogatory word in its English context. But “nigger” rests in the American cultural conception of the United States’ racial history, not the Caribbean or the French empire’s racial relationship to its colonies.⁶⁶

The second difficult in translating *nègre* was its reference to the movement. Negritude comes from the French *négritude*, a neologism adopted into English. Aimé Césaire coined the term in *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal*, and its roots are in the term *nègre*.⁶⁷ To divorce the term for the movement from the self-identifying noun that Damas uses divorces any prior knowledge of the movement from this word, and renders it merely pejorative, though reclamatory. An English reader of this text should be able to grasp the connection between the noun with which Damas refers to the African-Caribbean body, culture, and history in his poetry and the name of the movement itself, the connection between *Negritude* and *nègre*. By not translating

⁶⁴ Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, introduction to *Aimé Césaire*, 27.

⁶⁵ See page 35.

⁶⁶ A. James Arnold, prologue to *Modernism and Negritude*, 5-6.

⁶⁷ A variation on *nègre* was first used in *L’Étudiant Noir*, *nègreries*, but it was not until the publication of *Notebook* in 1939 that the neologism *Negritude* was first used. Léon-Gontran Damas, “Entretien Avec Léon-Gontran Damas (Washington, mai 1977),” Daniel Racine, in *Léon-Gontran Damas*, 193-194.

nègre, a translator deemphasizes the derogatory cultural meaning of *nègre* but acknowledging the roots of Negritude in it. A reader who does not know French may not understand the connection between “nigger” and “Negritude,” as they are not obviously related. And even readers who know French may miss the association between the two words in translation. Because of these issues, I chose to leave *nègre* untranslated to contain this connection by addressing the issue in this introduction, thus connecting a derogatory, nigger-like meaning to “negre” and “Negritude.”

Other translators have not been consistent in their translations of individual poems from *Pigments*. In Norman Shapiro’s “S. O. S.,” *nègre* is translated as both “nigger” and “black.”⁶⁸ For her translation of the same poem, Marie Collins translated *nègre* as “Negro.”⁶⁹ Ellen Conroy Kennedy chose “black” in her translations.⁷⁰ This disagreement of terms shows the extent to which *nègre* can be translated, and the difficulty of translation presented by in this word. There is no consistent precedent for translating *nègre* in the extant compilations.

There are two other words that have not been adopted into the English lexicon and which I left untranslated. These words are *marronnage* and *morne*.⁷¹ *Marronnage* emerged in the French language to describe slaves who had run away in the Caribbean, *marrons*, and formed their own communities.⁷² Instead of translating *marronnage* as “runaway community,” I decided to leave it untranslated. Translating

⁶⁸ Norman Shapiro, *Négritude: Black Poetry from Africa and the Caribbean* (New York: October House, 1970), 49.

⁶⁹ Marie Collins, *Black Poets in French* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 17.

⁷⁰ “Hiccups,” Ellen Conroy Kennedy, *The Negritude Poets: An Anthology of Translations from the French* (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 50.

⁷¹ See “Shine” page 57, “True to the Legend” page 53, “So Often” page 41.

⁷² Aimé Césaire, “Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,” in *Aimé Césaire*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, 402.

marronnage as a “runaway community” is inaccurate because of the cultural differences between the American and Caribbean slavery systems. In the American system, a runaway slave evokes the Underground Railroad and efforts to reach the freedom of the North. In the Caribbean, the geography prevented this kind of escape, so *marronnage* refers to the phenomenon of small communities of runaway slaves who banded together in an attempt to survive both the geographical circumstances and the colonizing forces that sought, and mostly succeeded through development, to subdue and reclaim these people.⁷³ In French Guyana, *marronnage* refers to small camps of runaway slaves in the jungle along the border.⁷⁴ This history of independence and community is not encompassed in “runaway communities.” *Morne* is equally geographically specific, but it refers to a particular land formation.⁷⁵ A “morne” is a basalt based “round hill or small mountain” in the Caribbean, a geographic characteristic foreign to Europe.⁷⁶ Given the specificity of these words and Negritude’s ties to place and place’s relationship to history, I thought it important to leave these words in their original language.

While dealing with the inherent destructive and generative properties of translation, I became too aware of the truth of *traduttore traditore*, the Italian expression that suggests “to translate is to betray.” It is necessarily a violent act to cleave a target text from a source text, and while the target text should remain foreignizing and recall the source, a truly faithful translation is impossible to achieve.

⁷³ Bridget Jones, “French Guiana,” 389.

⁷⁴ Léon-Gontran Damas, *Retour de Guyane*, 26-27.

⁷⁵ There is a precedent for not translating *morne*, in Eshleman and Smith’s translation of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Aimé Césaire, “Notebook,” 34-85.

⁷⁶ Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “morne, n.2,” November 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu:7790/view/Entry/122283?rskey=v16hlL&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 19, 2011).

What I found instead is that the most faithful translation translates the words and meanings of the source text, but preserves some aspect of its foreignness. For the value of a translation is in the importation of knowledge and ideas from other cultures, aided by loanwords and neologisms.

Pigments

ce n'est pas une joie pour moi de présenter L.-G. Damas, le poète nègre qui est fier d'être nègre, c'est un honneur à l'intégrité humaine que je revendique; et je le remercie amicalement du fond du cœur

Robert Goffin, preface to the 1962 edition of *Pigments*.

THEY CAME THAT NIGHT

For Léopold-Sedar Senghor

They came that night when the
tom

tom

rolled from

rhythm

to

rhythm

the frenzy

of eyes

the frenzy of hands

the frenzy

of statues' feet

SINCE

how many of ME ME ME

have died

since they came that night when the

tom

tom

rolled from

rhythm

to

rhythm

the frenzy

of eyes

the frenzy

of hands

the frenzy

of statues' feet

ILS SONT VENUS CE SOIR

Pour Léopold-Sedar Senghor

Ils sont venus ce soir où le

tam

tam

roulait de

rythme

en

rythme

la frénésie

des yeux

la frénésie des mains

la frénésie

des pieds de statues

DEPUIS

combien de MOI MOI MOI

sont morts

depuis qu'ils sont venus ce soir où le

tam

tam

roulait de

rythme

en

rythme

la frénésie

des yeux

la frénésie

des mains

la frénésie

des pieds de statues

CAPTATION

The frail perfume
of the woman who brushes past me
on her path of indifference
brings me back to the morning of our error

New furrow
of elusive mute incantations
in the pursuit of a semblance of dream
resonates
 sadness of a day that does not stop being
only a little more weary
the death knell
of our dream

The exorcised flesh
carves
 crumbles
 and eats
the memory
revived
standing
at every semblance of dream

And in my bed of enthusiasm
wet like you
the woman with frail perfume
who brushed past me
on her path of indifference
answered me
in a grand noise of sated senses

CAPTATION

Le parfum frôle
de la femme qui me frôle
dans son chemin d'indifférence
me remet au matin de notre erreur

Sillon nouveau
d'incantations fugitives muettes
à la poursuite d'un semblant de rêve
résonne
 tristesse d'un jour qui n'en finit d'être
à peine plus las
le glas
de notre rêve

La chair exorcisée
entame
 émiette
 et mange
le souvenir
ravivé
debout
de tout semblant de rêve

Et dans mon lit d'enthousiasme
mouillée comme toi
la femme au parfum frôle
qui m'a frôlé
dans son chemin d'indifférence
m'a répondu
dans un grand bruit de sens repus

IN MEMORY OF G. M.

Leaning on yesterday's unsatisfied desire
from where the sporadically stubborn incense came to us
the tide was low
every flight of flamingoes without importance
and the voice of the lighthouse miles away
stronger
than the twilight fire
of the mangroves

For a long time
for a long time your hands will shout to break with all calculation
with the hours
these hours by the end of which
we were
two pressed lemons

Against the exaggeration
of the sand's servility
of the Cove's almond trees
of the mosquitoes
of the cane toads
of the fireflies who did not understand
the demonstration
I gave years of efforts
of the vertical thickness
of all the Eiffel Towers

À LA MÉMOIRE DE G. M.

Accoudés au désir de la veille insatisfait
d'où nous venait l'encens sporadiquement têtue
la marée était basse
tout vol de flamants sans importance
et la voix du phare à des milles
plus forte
que l'incendie crépusculaire
des palétuviers

Longtemps
longtemps tes mains s'époumonneront à rompre avec tout calcul
avec les heures
ces heures au bout desquelles
nous étions
deux citrons pressés

Contre l'exagération
de la servilité du sable
des amandiers de l'Anse
des moustiques
des crapauds-bœufs
des lucioles qui ne comprenaient pas
la démonstration
j'ai donné des années d'efforts
de l'épaisseur verticale
de toutes les Tours Eiffel

OBSSESSION

A taste of blood comes to me
a taste of blood rises in me
irritates my nose
my throat
my eyes

A taste of blood comes to me
a taste of blood fills me
my nose
my throat
my eyes

a taste of blood comes to me
acridly vertical
like
the pagan obsession
of censers

OBSSESSION

Un goût de sang me vient
un goût de sang me monte
m'irrite le nez
la gorge
les yeux

Un goût de sang me vient
un goût de sang m'emplit
le nez
la gorge
les yeux

un goût de sang me vient
âcrement vertical
pareil
à l'obsession païenne
des encensoirs

NEURALGIA

Neuralgia of a running faucet
fills the pitcher of my concierge
that a rainbow inhales

Close the neuralgia of the running faucet
fills the pitcher of my concierge
that a rainbow inhales

Remove from the running faucet
the pitcher of my concierge
that a rainbow inhales

Or cut from the hand to the elbow
the rainbow that inhales
the pitcher of my concierge
that the neuralgia
of a running faucet fills

NÉVRALGIE

Névralgie d'un robinet qui coule
emplit le broc de ma concierge
qu'un arc-en-ciel aspire

Fermez la névralgie du robinet qui coule
emplit le broc de ma concierge
qu'un arc-en-ciel aspire

Enlevez du robinet qui coule
le broc de ma concierge
qu'un arc-en-ciel aspire

Ou coupez de la main jusqu'au coude
l'arc-en-ciel qui aspire
le broc de ma concierge
qu'emplit la névralgie
d'un robinet qui coule

ENOUGH

Enough of blues
of piano hammering
of muted trumpet
of madness stamping its feet
to the satisfaction of rhythm

Enough of sessions of so much swing
around the rings
annoyed
by shouts of wildcats

Enough of leaving
of licking
of bootlicking
and
of an attitude
of hyperassimilateds

Enough for an instant
of an easy-going life
and of desires
and of needs
and of selfishnesses
of individuals.

TRÊVE

Trêve de blues
de martèlements de piano
de trompette bouchée
de folie claquant des pieds
à la satisfaction du rythme

Trêve de séances à tant le swing
autour de rings
qu'énervent
des cris de fauves

Trêve de lâchage
de léchage
de lèche
et
d'une attitude
d'hyperassimilés

Trêve un instant
d'une vie de bon enfant
et de désirs
et de besoins
et d'égoïsmes
particuliers.

THERE ARE SOME NIGHTS

For Alejo Carpentier

There are some nameless nights
there are some moonless nights
when up to the point of clammy
suffocation
the acrid odor of blood
overcomes me
jetting
from every muted trumpet

Some nameless nights
some moonless nights
the pain that inhabits me
oppresses me
the pain that inhabits me
suffocates me

Nameless nights
moonless nights
when I would have liked
to be able to no longer doubt
so nauseously obsessed am I
by a need to escape

Nameless
moonless
moonless
nameless
moonless nights
nameless nameless
when disgust anchors itself in me
as deep as a beautiful Malay's dagger.

IL EST DES NUITS

Pour Alejo Carpentier

Il est des nuits sans nom
il est des nuits sans lune
où jusqu'à l'asphyxie
moite
me prend
l'âcre odeur de sang
jaillissant
de toute trompette bouchée

Des nuits sans nom
des nuits sans lune
la peine qui m'habite
m'opresse
la peine qui m'habite
m'étouffe

Nuits sans nom
nuits sans lune
où j'aurais voulu
pouvoir ne plus douter
tant m'obsède d'écoeurement
un besoin d'évasion

Sans nom
sans lune
sans lune
sans nom
nuits sans lune
sans nom sans nom
où le dégoût s'ancre en moi
aussi profondément qu'un beau poignard malais.

POSITION

For J. D.

The days themselves
have taken the shape
of African masks
indifferent
to any profanation
of quicklime
that a piano
flatters
repeating the old tune
of sighing moonlight
any size
in the shrubbery
gondolas
et cetera

POSITION

Pour J. D.

Les jours eux-mêmes
ont pris la forme
des masques africains
indifférents
à toute profanation
de chaux vive
qu'encense
un piano
répétant la rengaine
d'un clair de lune à soupirs
tout format
dans les halliers
gondoles
et cætera

THE WIND

For Henriette and Jean-Louis Baghio'o

On the ocean

black night

I awoke

enamored

without grasping anything

of all that the wind told

on the ocean

black night

Either the wind repeats its lesson for tomorrow

or the wind sings of buried treasures

or the wind says its evening prayers

or the wind is a cell of madmen

on the ocean

black night

while a boat treads the foam

and goes

goes its slutty way.

on the ocean

black night

LE VENT

Pour Henriette et Jean-Louis Baghio'o

Sur l'océan

nuit noire

je me suis réveillé

épris

sans jamais rien saisir

de tout ce que racontait le vent

sur l'océan

nuit noire

Ou bien le vent repasse sa leçon du lendemain

ou bien le vent chante des trésors enfouis

ou bien le vent fait sa prière du soir

ou bien le vent est une cellule de fous

sur l'océan

nuit noire

pendant qu'un bateau foule l'écume

et va

va son destin de roulure.

sur l'océan

nuit noire

IN INDIAN FILE

And the hooves
of the beasts of burden
that hammer out in Europe
the still uncertain dawn
remind me
of the strange self-denial
of full
early morning trays
that give rhythm in the Antilles
to the hips of the women bearers
in Indian file

And the strange self-denial
of full
early morning trays
that give rhythm in the Antilles
to the hips of the women bearers
in Indian file
remind me
of the hooves
of the beasts of burden
that hammer out in Europe
the still uncertain dawn

EN FILE INDIENNE

Et les sabots
des bêtes de somme
qui martèlent en Europe
l'aube indécise encore
me rappellent
l'abnégation étrange
des trays¹ matineux
repus
qui rythment aux Antilles
les hanches des porteuses
en file indienne

Et l'abnégation étrange
des trays matineux
repus
qui rythment aux Antilles
les hanches des porteuses
en file indienne
me rappellent
les sabots
des bêtes de somme
qui martèlent en Europe
l'aube indécise encore

¹ Terme anglais passé dans le langage créole et gardant le même sens : plateau à légumes, à gâteaux, en bois, de forme rectangulaire, à bords très relevés.

WHILE WAITING

Axles shout their fatigue at white gloves
that do not give a damn
in so many winks
by ambulance
from red lips
and so on

Before arriving at the cylindrical smokes
at the rave antennas
and
epileptic coos
first
bindings of a virgin wisdom
and then and then
a napkin
that sponges toes
shaped
like barley sugar

Another cop to fill the ear
of a head-ache for the unemployed
bellies that
the International swells
without metronome

Story of a third floor
the young bride finally grabbed hold
of a dog
in the need to open up to someone

And the thug whistles the latest
without speaking of the scruples of waking
three hours late.

DANS SON ATTENTE

Des essieux crient leur fatigue à des gants blancs
qui s'en balancent
à tant d'oeillardes
par ambulance
de lèvres rouges
et la suite

Avant d'arriver aux fumées cylindriques
aux antennes à javas
et
roucoulements d'épileptiques
d'abord
des reliures d'une sagesse de puceaux
et puis et puis
une serviette
qui éponge des orteils
en forme
de sucre d'orge

Encore un flic pour remplir l'oreille
d'un casse-tête à chômeurs
ventres que gonfle
l'internationale
sans métronome

Histoire d'un troisième étage
la jeune mariée enfin s'est emparée
d'un chien
dans le besoin de s'ouvrir à quelqu'un

Et le voyou siffle la nouveauté
sans parler des scrupules d'un réveil
avec trois heures de retard.

HICCUPS

For Vashti and Mercer Cook

And in vain I swallow seven gulps of water
three to four times a day
my childhood returns to me
in a shaking hiccup
my instinct
like the cop the thug

Disaster
tell me about the disaster
tell me about it

My mother wanting a son with good table manners
Hands on the table
bread is not cut
bread is broken
bread is not wasted
bread of God
bread of the sweat of your Father's brow
bread of bread

A bone is eaten deliberately and discreetly
a stomach should be polite
and no polite stomach
burps
a fork is not a toothpick
do not blow your nose
openly
in public
and then sit up straight
a well brought-up nose
does not wipe a plate clean

And then and then
and then in the name of the Father
of the Son
of the Holy Ghost
at the end of every meal

And then and then
and then disaster
tell me about the disaster
tell me about it

My mother wanting a noteworthy son

If you do not learn your history lesson
you will not go to mass
Sunday
in your Sunday best

This child will be the disgrace of our name
this child will be our in the name of God

Shut up
Did I or did I not tell you that you must speak French
the French of France
the French of the French
the French French

Disaster
tell me about the disaster
tell me about it

My Mother wanting a son
his mother's son

You did not greet the neighbor
your dirty shoes again
and do not let me catch you in the street
on the grass or the Savannah
in the shadow of the War Memorial
playing
hanging out with So-and-So
with So-and-So who was never baptized

Disaster
tell me about the disaster
tell me about it

My Mother wanting a son very do
very re
very mi
very fa
very sol
very la
very si
very do
re-mi-fa
sol-la-si
do

I hear that once again you did not go
to your vi-o-lin lesson
A banjo
did you say a banjo
what did you say
a banjo
you really said
a banjo
No sir
 you must learn that we do not allow in our home
neither ban
nor jo
nor gui
nor tar
the *mulattos* do not do that
leave it to the *negres*

HOQUET

Pour Vashti et Mercer Cook

Et j'ai beau avaler sept gorgées d'eau
trois à quatre fois par vingt-quatre heures
me revient mon enfance
dans un hoquet secouant
mon instinct
tel le flic le voyou

Désastre
parlez- moi du désastre
parlez-m'en

Ma mère voulant un fils très bonnes manières à table
Les mains sur la table
le pain ne se coupe pas
le pain se rompt
le pain ne se gaspille pas
le pain de Dieu
le pain de la sueur du front de votre Père
le pain du pain

Un os se mange avec mesure et discrétion
un estomac doit être sociable
et tout estomac sociable
se passe de rots
une fourchette n'est pas un cure-dent
défense de se moucher
au su
au vu de tout le monde
et puis tenez-vous droit
un nez bien élevé
ne balaye pas l'assiette

Et puis et puis
Et puis au nom du Père
 du fils
 du Saint-Esprit
à la fin de chaque repas

Et puis et puis
et puis désastre
parlez-moi du désastre
parlez-m'en

Ma mère voulant d'un fils mémorandum

Si votre leçon d'histoire n'est pas sue
vous n'irez pas à la messe
dimanche
avec vos effets des dimanche

Cet enfant sera la honte de notre nom
cet enfant sera notre nom de Dieu

Taisez-vous
Vous ai-je ou non dit qu'il vous fallait parler français
le français de France
le français du français
le français français

Désastre
parlez-moi du désastre
parlez-m'en

Ma Mère voulant d'un fils
fils de sa mère

Vous n'avez pas salué voisine
encore vos chaussures de sales
et que je vous y reprenne dans la rue
sur l'herbe ou la Savane
à l'ombre du Monument aux Morts
à jouer
à vous ébattre avec Untel
avec Untel qui n'a pas reçu le baptême

Désastre
parlez-moi du désastre
parlez-m'en

Ma Mère voulant un fils très do
très ré
très mi
très fa
très sol
très la
très si
très do
ré-mi-fa
sol-la-si
do

Il m'est revenu que vous n'étiez encore pas
à votre leçon de vi-o-lon
Un banjo
vous dites un banjo
comment dites-vous
un banjo
vous dites bien
un banjo
Non monsieur
vous saurez qu'on ne souffre chez nous
ni ban
ni jo
ni gui
ni tare
les *mulâtres* ne font pas ça
laissez donc ça aux *nègres*

A TRAMP ASKED ME FOR TEN SOUS

Me too one fine day I took out
my tramp
rags

Me too
with eyes that hold out
a hand
I pimped
for the whore of poverty

Me too I was hungry in this goddamned country
me too I believed I could
ask for ten sous
out of pity for my hollow
belly

Me too
to the end of the eternity of their
cop boulevards
how many nights did I have to
get lost
me too
with hollow eyes

Me too
I was hungry with hollow eyes
me too I believed
I could ask for ten sous
with hollow
belly
eyes
until the day when I was
fed up
with seeing them mock
my tramp rags
and laugh
at seeing a negre
with hollow belly eyes

UN CLOCHARD M'A DEMANDÉ DIX SOUS

Moi aussi un beau jour j'ai sorti
mes hardes
de clochard

Moi aussi
avec des yeux qui tendent
la main
j'ai soutenu
la putain de misère

Moi aussi j'ai eu faim dans ce sacré foutu pays
moi aussi j'ai cru pouvoir
demander dix sous
par pitié pour mon ventre
creux

Moi aussi
jusqu'au bout de l'éternité de leurs
boulevards à flics
combien de nuits ai-je dû
m'en aller
moi aussi
les yeux creux

Moi aussi
j'ai eu faim les yeux creux
moi aussi j'ai cru
pouvoir demander dix sous
les yeux
le ventre
creux
jusqu'au jour où j'en ai eu
marre
de les voir se gausser
de mes hardes de clochard
et se régaler
de voir un nègre
les yeux ventre creux

SALE

For Aimé Césaire

I feel ridiculous
in their shoes
in their tuxedo
in their dress shirt
in their collar
in their monocle
in their bowler hat

I feel ridiculous
with my toes that were not made
to sweat from morning to evening's undressing
with swaddling that weakens my limbs
and lifts from my body its loincloth beauty

I feel ridiculous
with my neck a smokestack
with these headaches that stop
every time I greet someone

I feel ridiculous
in their drawing rooms
in their ways
in their bows
in their multiple need for monkey-antics

I feel ridiculous
with all they talk about
until they serve you in the afternoon
a little warm water
and some rheumy cakes

I feel ridiculous
with the theories they season
to the taste of their needs
of their passions
of their instincts open at night
like a doormat

I feel ridiculous
among them accomplice
among them pimp
among them cut-throat
hands frightfully red
with the blood of their ci-vi-li-za-tion

SOLDE

Pour Aimé Césaire

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
dans leurs souliers
dans leur smoking
dans leur plastron
dans leur faux-col
dans leur monocle
dans leur melon

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
avec mes orteils qui ne sont pas faits
pour transpirer du matin jusqu'au soir qui déshabille
avec l'emballage qui m'affaiblit les membres
et enlève à mon corps sa beauté de cache-sexe

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
avec mon cou en cheminée d'usine
avec ces maux de tête qui cessent
chaque fois que je salue quelqu'un

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
dans leurs salons
dans leurs manières
dans leurs courbettes
dans leur multiple besoin de singeries

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
avec tout ce qu'ils racontent
jusqu'à ce qu'ils vous servent l'après-midi
un peu d'eau chaude
et des gâteaux enrhumés

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
avec les théories qu'ils assaisonnent
au goût de leurs besoins
de leurs passions
de leurs instincts ouverts la nuit
en forme de paillason

J'ai l'impression d'être ridicule
parmi eux complice
parmi eux souteneur
parmi eux égorgéur
les mains effroyablement rouges
du sang de leur ci-vi-li-sa-tion

Limbé²

For Robert Romain

Give me back my black dolls
so they dispel
the image of pale whores
merchants of love who stroll back and forth
on the boulevard of my ennui

Give me back my black dolls
so they dispel
the eternal image
the hallucinatory image
of stacked large-assed puppets
whose miserable mercy
the wind carries to the nose

Give me the illusion I will no longer have to satisfy
the sprawling need
of mercies snoring
beneath the world's unconscious disdain

Give me back my black dolls
so that I can play with them
the naïve games of my instinct
which has remained in the shadow of its laws
my courage recovered
my audacity
I become myself once again
myself once more
out of what I was Yesterday
yesterday
 without complexity
 yesterday
when the hour of uprooting came

² *Limbé* is a Creole word meaning "spleen" or "blues." Lilyan Kesteloot, "Léon Damas: *Pigments*," in *Black Writers in French*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 131.

Will they ever know this rancor in my heart
Opened to the eye of my mistrust too late
they stole the space that was mine
the custom
the days
the life
the song
the rhythm
the effort
the path
the water
the huts
the smoke gray earth
the wisdom
the words
the discussion
the elders
the cadence
the hands
the tempo
the hands
the stampings of feet
the ground

Give me back my black dolls
my black dolls
black dolls
black
 black

Limbé

Pour Robert Romain

Rendez-les moi mes poupées noires
qu'elles dissipent
l'image des catins blêmes
marchands d'amour qui s'en vont viennent
sur le boulevard de mon ennui

Rendez-les moi mes poupées noires
qu'elles dissipent
l'image sempiternelle
l'image hallucinante
des fantoches empilés féssus
dont le vent porte au nez
la misère miséricorde

Donnez-moi l'illusion que je n'aurai plus à contenter
le besoin étale
de miséricordes ronflant
sous l'inconscient dédain du monde

Rendez-les moi mes poupées noires
que je joue avec elles
les jeux naïfs de mon instinct
resté à l'ombre de ses lois
recouvrés mon courage
mon audace
redevenu moi-même
nouveau moi-même
de ce que Hier j'étais
hier
 sans complexité
 hier
quand est venue l'heure du déracinement

Le sauront-ils jamais cette rancune de mon cœur
À l'œil de ma méfiance ouvert trop tard
ils ont cambriolé l'espace qui était mien
la coutume
les jours
la vie
la chanson
le rythme
l'effort
le sentier
l'eau
la case
la terre enfumée grise
la sagesse
les mots
les palabres
les vieux
la cadence
les mains
la mesure
les mains
les piétinements
le sol

Rendez-les moi mes poupées noires
mes poupées noires
poupées noires
noires
noires

THE NEGRE'S LAMENT

For Robert Goffin

They gave it back to me
life
more heavy and weary

My todays gaze upon my yesterdays
with large eyes that roll with rancor
with shame

The days inexorably
sad
have never stopped being
in memory
of what was
my truncated life

Still lasts
my stupor
from the past
of blows of gnarled cord
of bodies charred
of toe to back charred
of dead flesh
of brands
of red-hot iron
of broken arms
under the whip that unleashes itself
under the whip that leads on the plantation
and makes the sugar refinery drink the blood of my blood of blood
and the pipe of the foreman show off to the sky.

LA COMPLAINTE DU NÈGRE

Pour Robert Goffin

Ils me l'ont rendue
la vie
plus lourde et lasse

Mes aujourd'hui ont chacun sur mon jadis
de gros yeux qui roulent de rancoeur
de honte

Les jours inexorablement
tristes
jamais n'ont cessé d'être
à la mémoire
de ce que fut
ma vie tronquée

Va encore
mon hébétude
du temps jadis
de coups de corde noueux
de corps calcinés
de l'orteil au dos calcinés
de chair morte
de tisons
de fer rouge
de bras brisés
sous le fouet qui se déchaîne
sous le fouet qui fait marcher la plantation
et s'abreuver de sang de mon sang de sang la sucrerie
et la bouffarde du commandeur crâner au ciel.

SO OFTEN

So often my sense of race frightens me
like a dog barking in the night
at some
approaching death
I always feel ready to foam with rage
against what surrounds me
against what prevents me
from ever being
a man

And nothing
nothing could calm my hate as much
as a beautiful pool
of blood
made
by these sharp cutlasses
that strip bare
the mornes of rum

SI SOUVENT

Si souvent mon sentiment de race m'effraie
autant qu'un chien aboyant la nuit
une mort prochaine
quelconque
je me sens prêt à écumer toujours de rage
contre ce qui m'entoure
contre ce qui m'empêche
à jamais d'être
un homme

Et rien
rien ne saurait autant calmer ma haine
qu'une belle mare
de sang
faite
de ces coutelas tranchants
qui mettent à nu
les mornes à rhum

S. O. S.

At that moment only
will you all understand
when they get the idea
soon they will get that idea
to want to gobble themselves up some negre
like Hitler
gobbling up Jews
seven fascist days
out of
seven

At that moment only
will you all understand
when their superiority
will stretch itself out
from one end to the other of their boulevards
and then
you will see them
truly they do whatever they want
no longer content to laugh with an uneasy index finger
when a negre goes by
but
coldly beat up
but
coldly take down
but
coldly lay out
but coldly
beat up
take down
lay out
and
cut off the sex of the negres
to make them into candles for their churches

S. O. S.

À ce moment-là seul
comprendrez-vous donc tous
quand leur viendra l'idée
bientôt cette idée leur viendra
de vouloir vous en bouffer du nègre
à la manière d'Hitler
bouffant du juif
sept jours fascistes
sur
sept

À ce moment-là seul
comprendrez-vous donc tous
quand leur supériorité
s'étalera
d'un bout à l'autre de leurs boulevards
et qu'alors
vous les verrez
vraiment tout se permettre
ne plus se contenter de rire avec l'index inquiet
de voir passer un nègre
mais
froidement matraquer
mais
froidement descendre
mais
froidement étendre
mais froidement
matraquer
descendre
étendre
et
couper leur sexe aux nègres
pour en faire des bougies pour leurs églises

FOR SURE

For sure I will be
fed up
without even waiting
for things
to take on
the air
of a ripe camembert

So
I will put my foot in it
or simply
my hand on the collar
of everything that pisses me off in large print
colonization
civilization
assimilation
and the rest

Meanwhile
you will often hear me
slam the door

POUR SÛR

Pour sûr j'en aurai
marre
sans même attendre
qu'elles prennent
les choses
l'allure
d'un camembert bien fait

Alors
je vous mettrai les pieds dans le plat
ou bien tout simplement
la main au collet
de tout ce qui m'emmerde en gros caractères
colonisation
civilisation
assimilation
et la suite

En attendant
vous m'entendrez souvent
claquer la porte

SOON

Soon

I will not only have danced

soon

I will not only have sung

soon

I will not only have rubbed

soon

I will not only have soaked

soon

I will not only have danced

sung

rubbed

soaked

rubbed

sung

danced

Soon

BIENTÔT

Bientôt

je n'aurai pas que dansé

bientôt

je n'aurai pas que chanté

bientôt

je n'aurai pas que frotté

bientôt

je n'aurai pas que trempé

bientôt

je n'aurai pas que dansé

chanté

frotté

trempé

frotté

chanté

dansé

Bientôt

WHITE NIGHT

For Sonia and Georges Gavarry

My friends I waltzed
waltzed like my ancestors
the Gauls
never waltzed
to the point that my blood
still beats
to the Viennese

My friends I waltzed
waltzed my whole childhood
wandering on
some blue Danube
white Danube
red Danube
green Danube
pink Danube
white Danube
red
green
pink
whichever

My friends I waltzed
waltzed
madly waltzed
to the point that often
often
I thought I had my hand around the waist
of uncle Gobineau
or of cousin Hitler
or of a good Aryan that gums his old age
on some park bench

NUIT BLANCHE

Pour Sonia et Georges Gavarry

Mes amis j'ai valsé
valsé comme
jamais mes ancêtres
les Gaulois
au point que j'ai le sang
qui tourne encore
à la viennoise

Mes amis j'ai valsé
valsé toute mon enfance
vagabondant sur
quelque Danube bleu
Danube blanc
Danube rouge
Danube vert
Danube rose
Danube blanc
rouge
vert
rose
au choix

Mes amis j'ai valsé
valsé
follement valsé
au point que souvent
souvent
j'ai cru tenir la taille
de tonton Gobineau
ou de cousin Hitler
ou de bon aryen qui mâchonne sa vieillesse
sur quelque banc de square

WHITEWASHED

For Christiane and Alioune Diop

Can it be that they dare
call me whitewashed
when everything in me
aspires only to be negre
like my Africa
that they have robbed

Whitewashed

Abominable insult
which they will pay dearly for
when my Africa
that they have robbed
wishes for peace peace nothing but
peace

Whitewashed

My hatred grows in the fringes
of their villainy
in the fringes
of the gun shots
in the fringes
of the rolling shots
of slave ships
of the reeking cargos of cruel slavery

Whitewashed

My hatred grows in the fringes
of the culture
in the fringes
of the theories
in the fringes of the gossip
they thought they had to stuff me with in the cradle
when everything in me aspires to be nothing but negre
like my Africa that they have robbed

BLANCHI

Pour Christiane et Alioune Diop

Se peut-il donc qu'ils osent
me traiter de blanchi
alors que tout en moi
aspire à n'être que nègre
autant que mon Afrique
qu'ils ont cambriolée

Blanchi

Abominable injure
qu'ils me paieront fort cher
quand mon Afrique
qu'ils ont cambriolée
voudra la paix la paix rien que
la paix

Blanchi

Ma haine grossit en marge
de leur scélératesse
en marge
des coups de fusil
en marge
des coups de roulis
des négriers
des cargaisons fétides de l'esclavage cruel

Blanchi

Ma haine grossit en marge
de la culture
en marge
des théories
en marge des bavardages
dont on a cru devoir me bourrer au berceau
alors que tout en moi aspire à n'être que nègre
autant que mon Afrique qu'ils ont cambriolée

TRUE TO THE LEGEND

Hair that I smooth
that I resmooth
that shines
now that it costs me
to have it kinky

In a long woolen shell
my neck disappears
my hand gets worked up
and my toes remember
the warm exhalation of mornes

And my being frozen

And gas lamps
make sadder still
these nights at the end of which
westernly
my shadow advances
true to my legend
of monkey-man

PAREILLE À LA LÉGENDE

Des cheveux que je lisse
que je relisse
qui reluisent
maintenant qu'il m'en coûte
de les avoir crépus

Dans une longue carapace de laine
mon cou s'engouffre
la main s'énerve
et mes orteils se rappellent
la chaude exhalaison des mornes

Et mon être frigorifié

Et becs de gaz
qui rendent plus tristes
ces nuits au bout desquelles
occidentalement
avance mon ombre
pareille à ma légende
d'homme-singe

REMINDER

For Richard Danglemont

There are some things
of which I was able not to lose
all memory

And bullying in bamboo
for every fallen mango
during the indigestion
of every bite of the history of France

And flute

Reed flute
playing slaves' airs on the mornes
while in the savannahs
oxen ruminant wisely
while around
zombies lurk
while the Factory owners
ejaculate
while the good negre
lays down on his pallet ten to fifteen Factory hours

RAPPEL

Pour Richard Danglemont

Il est des choses
dont j'ai pu n'avoir pas perdu
tout souvenir

Et brimades en bambou
pour toute mangue tombée
durant l'indigestion
de tout morceau d'histoire de France

Et flûte

Flûte de roseau
jouant sur les mornes des airs d'esclaves
pendant qu'aux savanes
des bœufs sagement ruminent
pendant qu'autour
des zombies rôdent
pendant qu'ils éjaculent
les patrons d'Usine
pendant que le bon nègre
allonge sur son grabat dix à quinze heures d'Usine

SHINE

For Louis Armstrong

With some others
from nearby
with some others
only a few
I have guarded until now
on the roof of my hut
the conical ancestral faith

And the automatic arrogance
of masks
of quicklime masks
never was able to remove anything ever
from a more hideous past
standing upright
at the four corners of my life

And my face shines with the horrors of the past
and my frightful laugh is made to repel the specter of greyhounds tracking the
marronnage

and my voice that sings for them
is gentle to ravish
the sad soul
of their por-

no-
gra-
phy

And my heart keeps watch
and my dream which feeds itself on the noise of their
de-

gen-
er-
ation

is stronger than their brandished
clubs of filth

SHINE

Pour Louis Armstrong

Avec d'autres
des alentours
avec d'autres
quelques rares
j'ai au toit de ma case
jusqu'ici gardé
l'ancestrale foi conique

Et l'arrogance automatique
des masques
des masques de chaux vive
jamais n'est parvenue à rien enlever jamais
d'un passé plus hideux
debout
aux quatre angles de ma vie

Et mon visage brille aux horreurs du passé
et mon rire effroyable est fait pour repousser le spectre des lévriers traquant le
marronnage

et mon voix qui pour eux chante
est douce à ravir
l'âme triste
de leur por-
no-
gra-
phie

Et veille mon cour
et mon rêve qui se nourrit du bruit de leur
dé-
gé-
né-
rescence
est plus fort que leurs gourdins d'immondices
brandis

GOOD MANNERS

For Etienne Zabulon

No one yawns at home
like they yawn at their home
with
a hand over the mouth

I want to yawn without la-di-da
my body crooked
in the perfumes that torment the life
that I made for myself
from their winter dog muzzle
from their sun that could
not even
warm
the coconut water that was gurgling
in my belly when I woke up

Let me yawn
hand
there
on my heart
at the obsession of everything on which
in a single day I
turned my back

SAVOIR-VIVRE

Pour Etienne Zabulon

On ne bâille pas chez moi
comme ils bâillent chez eux
avec
la main sur la bouche

Je veux bâiller sans tralalas
le corps recroquevillé
dans les parfums qui tourmentent la vie
que je me suis faite
de leur museau de chien d'hiver
de leur soleil qui ne pourrait
pas même
tiédir
l'eau de coco qui faisait glouglou
dans mon ventre au réveil

Laissez-moi bâiller
la main
là
sur le cœur
à l'obsession de tout ce à quoi
j'ai en un jour un seul
tourné le dos

REGARD

For Jacques Howleti

When later on
when later on my eyes
my eyes will narrow

When later on
when later on I will have
false Chinese eyes

When later on
when later on
everything will have left me
everything will have left me even theory
even fallen theory

When later on
when later on
down will slide
down will slide the stick
that supports the old bodies

Will you buy me
will you buy me say
some flowers
whatever
so that to the corner bistro
so that to the corner bistro
I can go
revive the hearth
of a large glass of Bordeaux

REGARD

Pour Jacques Howleti

Quand sur le tard
quand sur le tard mes yeux
mes yeux se brideront

Quand sur le tard
quand sur le tard j'aurai
de faux yeux de Chinois

Quand sur le tard
quand sur le tard
tout m'aura laissé
tout m'aura laissé jusqu'à la théorie
jusqu'à la théorie choir

Quand sur le tard
quand sur le tard
suivra la pente
suivra la pente le bâton
qui soutient les vieux corps

M'achèterez-vous
m'achèterez-vous dites
des fleurs
que sais-je
pour qu'au bistrot de l'angle
pour qu'au bistrot de l'angle
j'aïlle
ranimer l'âtre
d'un grand verre de bordeaux

REALITY

To have up to now done nothing
destroyed
built
dared
in the manner
of the Jew
of the Yellow Man
for the organized mass escape
from inferiority

In vain I search for
the hollow of a shoulder
where I can hide my face
my shame
of
the
Re
al
i
ty.

RÉALITÉ

De n'avoir jusqu'ici rien fait
détruit
bâti
osé
à la manière
du Juif
du Jaune
pour l'évasion organisée en masse
de l'infériorité

C'est en vain que je cherche
le creux d'une épaule
où cacher mon visage
ma honte
de
 la
 Ré
 a
 li
 té.

THEY KNEW

They knew so well how to
knew so well how to do things
things
that one day we screwed everything
we screwed everything up ourselves
screwed everything up ourselves completely

That they should have known so well how to
known so well how to do things
things
that one day we should have screwed everything
we should have screwed everything up ourselves
screwed everything up ourselves completely

Though it would not take much
though not much
much
for finally in one day everything to go
everything to go
to go
according to our own race
our own race

Though it would not take much
though not much
not much
not much

ILS ONT

Ils ont si bien su faire
si bien su faire les choses
les choses
qu'un jour nous avons tout
nous avons tout foutu de nous-mêmes
tout foutu de nous-mêmes en l'air

Qu'ils aient si bien su faire
si bien su faire les choses
les choses
qu'un jour nous ayons tout foutu
nous ayons tout foutu de nous-mêmes
tout foutu de nous-mêmes en l'air

Il ne faudrait pourtant pas grand'chose
pourtant pas grand'chose
grand'chose
pour qu'en un jour enfin tout aille
tout aille
aille
dans le sens de notre race à nous
de notre race à nous

Il ne faudrait pourtant pas grand'chose
pourtant pas grand'chose
pas grand'chose
pas grand'chose

SOME BALLS FOR ROULETTE

For nothing but the functioning
of cannon
shell
bullet factories
the war
it
it will come soon
to get drunk again to the Marseillaise
of smoking flesh

And every Creusot
will work nights
at ready ovens

And all the Schneiders
will fill up their pockets with balls
for Roulette
thanks to the new functioning
of cannon
shell
bullet factories
the war has come
to get drunk again on the Marseillaise
of smoking flesh

DES BILLES POUR LA ROULETTE

Rien que pour le fonctionnement
d'usines à canons
obus
balles
la guerre
elle
elle va bientôt venir
s'enivrer encore à la marseillaise
de chair fumante

Et chaque Creusot
travaillera des nuits
des fours à bloc

Et tous les Schneiders
s'empliront les poches de billes
pour la roulette
grâce au fonctionnement nouveau
d'usines à canons
obus
balles
venue la guerre
s'enivrer encore à la marseillaise
de chair fumante

ON A POSTCARD

Let every nook cranny of France
be
a War Memorial

Let the white childhood
grow in their memorable shadow
living brainwash
of a revenge to be taken

Let the German imbecile
swear he will skin a Frenchman
and make the skin
into robes

The French imbecile
swear he will skin a German
and make the skin into robes

Let be all patriotic élan
for dark beer
for Pernod fils
but what good dynamite
will blow up the night
the monuments like mushrooms
which also grow
at home

SUR UNE CARTE POSTALE

Passe pour chaque coin recoin de France
d'être
un Monument aux Morts

Passe pour l'enfance blanche
de grandir dans leur ombre mémorable
vivant bourrage de crâne
d'une revanche à prendre

Passe pour le crétin d'Allemand
de se promettre d'avoir la peau du Français
et d'en faire
des sauts de lits

Pour le crétin de Français
de se promettre d'avoir la peau de l'Allemand
et d'en faire des sauts de lit

Passe pour tout élan patriotique
à la bière brune
au pernod fils
mais quelle bonne dynamite
fera sauter la nuit
les monuments comme champignons
qui poussent aussi
chez moi

ET CETERA

*Facing the German menace, the
Senegalese veteran combatants deliver
a cablegram of unwavering
commitment. (The Newspapers.)*

To Veteran Senegalese Combatants
to Future Senegalese Combatants
to all that Senegal can birth
of future veteran Senegalese combatants
of future veteran what-did-I-get-mixed-up-in
of future veteran mercenaries
of pensioned
of tasseled
of decorated
of wretched
of gravely wounded
of maimed
of burned
of gangrened
of face wrecked
of arm amputated
of intoxicated
and so on and so forth
et cetera future veterans

Me
I say to them shit
and some other things too

Me I ask them
to put away the
machetes
the fits of sadism
the feeling
the sensation
of dirtiness
of atrocities yet to be done

Me I ask them
to say nothing of the need that they feel
to pillage
to rob
to rape
to defile again the ancient banks
of the Rhine

Me I ask them
to begin by invading Senegal

Me I ask them
to fucking make peace with the "Germans"

ET CAETERA

*Devant la menace allemande, les
Anciens Combattants Sénégalais
adressent un câblogramme d'indéfectible
attachement. (Les Journaux.)*

Aux Anciens Combattants Sénégalais
aux Futurs Combattants Sénégalais
à tout ce que le Sénégal peut accoucher
de combattants sénégalais futurs anciens
de quoi-je-me-mêle futurs anciens
de mercenaires futurs anciens
de pensionnés
de galonnés
de décorés
de décavés
de grands blessés
de mutilés
de calcinés
de gangrenés
de gueules cassés
de bras coupés
d'intoxiqués
et patati et patata
et cætera futurs anciens

Moi
je leur dis merde
et d'autres choses encore

Moi je leur demande
de remiser les
coupe-coupe
les accès de sadisme
le sentiment
la sensation
de saletés
de malpropretés à faire

Moi je leur demande
de taire le besoin qu'ils ressentent
de piller
de voler
de violer
de souiller à nouveau les bords antiques
du Rhin

Moi je leur demande
de commencer par envahir le Sénégal

Moi je leur demande
de foutre aux « Boches » la paix

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