

CHAPTER TWO
NÉGRITUDE AND ITS ENEMIES

by

W. Jeanpierre

I had intended to speak initially of *négritude*, its development and significance. But instead I will speak of the justification of *négritude*. The purpose of this conference, as I understand it, is to consider the teaching of African literature in the respective universities throughout Africa as well as the practical ways and means of implementing this type of artistic creation into the syllabuses of the various language departments.

In view of this initiative, I should like to sound a note of warning and state from the very beginning that here and now is the time and place for some very honest talking. I want immediately to point out to those individuals in positions of power, and by that I mean those department heads who are to decide which African or Afro-descendant authors are to be studied, that they are in the spotlight. They are in the spotlight because upon their shoulders lies a grave responsibility. This responsibility is grave because they are committed or should be committed first and foremost to the teaching of Africans in Africa. They are in a position to condition and orientate young African minds. And I submit that this is of the utmost moment and importance. Personally I would view with the strongest suspicion any department head regardless of the talent of the African authors in question who might attempt to ignore or to lightly pass over the militant and aggressive leading figures of *négritude*. *Négritude* cannot and shall not either be wished or willed out of existence because *négritude* is historically justifiable. And by this I mean more precisely that aspect of *négritude* which unmercifully but rightly attacks, exposes and rends asunder the political and cultural colonialism which the West has imposed upon the black race throughout the world with the view towards psychologically alienating its members from themselves.

Therefore, in the second and most difficult phase of the fight for liberation, the economic phase, that is to say, any attempt to culturally balkanise Africans, or Africa rather, by creating a class of Africans who in the name of some ill-defined humanity, who in the name of insincere appeals to a common "human condition" which ought to transcend *négritude* and which leads them to vehemently attack *négritude* must be squarely quoted. How is it possible for any reasonably intelligent, exploited, humiliated and honest African or Afro-descendant artist not to at least admit the *raison d'être* of

négritude? I, as an Afro-American, know how deeply *négritude* verbalises on the intellectual as well as on the emotional plane the deepest aspirations that lie smouldering in our hearts. I know within the deepest recesses of my interior that the aggressive and militant aspects of *négritude* which certain elements would fain try to discredit, represent the initial face of our historical moment of truth.

American Negroes live in the world's most affluent society. They enjoy a higher standard of living than any conglomerate of black people that could be found anywhere. This standard even surpasses that of many white people living outside of the United States of America. But despite this, they are not happy, and why are they not happy? Not just because of the crass racism which inflicts itself upon their every living moment. But more fundamentally because the racism to which they are subjected has never allowed them to create fully. Their values have always been ignored. Nonetheless, their jazz creations and other contributions all have an African heat and intensity despite being cut off for more than 300 years from the ancestral homes. This is also the reason for which the struggle for full integration into the American way of life must not be achieved at the expense or abandonment of their particular uniqueness as Afro-Americans. *Négritude* has helped us immensely in our struggle for self-definition. It has enabled us to discover from whence we came and who we are. We did not know these all-important answers before its advent upon the world scene. Our struggle for justice in America had been waged in accordance with standards not of our making. Today because we have discovered our *négritude*, we are setting the standards. And this is why James Meredith, for example, is able to commonly work among the hate-twisted faces of the students of the University of Mississippi. He knows who he is and this is our *négritude* in action.

We must therefore be alert to any strategy which seeks to neutralise this militancy or to lull the African mind to sleep. We must expose all phoney appeals to the brotherhood of man as long as those making the appeals are not actively participating against the neo-colonialistic cultural offensive which is seeking to recapture Africa. We must also appreciate for what it is worth the claim made that only African artists of real literary merit should be studied. Certainly the highest of standards should be the impartial yardstick. But I submit that our unfavoured so-called aggressive artists meet the most rigid of these criteria and must not be sacrificed upon the altar of cold-war imperialism because of their uncompromising stand.

At this point I am reminded of an interview I had with a department head who claimed to include in the syllabus books written by African artists. For this current academic year only one work by an authentic African author *The African Child (l'Enfant Noir)* of Camara Laye

is being read, as well as the five short stories of Doris Lessing, a white Rhodesian writer. For the academic year of 1964 nothing is envisaged, and for 1965 only Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in addition to the same short stories of Doris Lessing are being contemplated. I do realize of course that the translation of French works into English does present something of a problem. But I was somehow shocked when this department supposed that the elder generation of West African and French-West-Indian writers suffered from an inferiority complex because they had not succeeded to the paradise promised them. But to the contrary, the young Africans know who they are, so they must be protected against bad influences. Now I shall not stand here before you and repeat the well-known basic factors which gave impetus to the *négritude* movement.

Enough has already been written and said about the disastrous effects of racism and colonialism upon those of African descent. We know that assimilation or integration really means in effect "disregard your culture, your values and accept mine, because yours are inferior". We know that assimilation was not offered insincerely in the first place but rather as the donkey-and-cart technique for the benefit of those who pull the strings. We know that one could never, nor should one ever want to assimilate a culture based on alienation from self. And we refuse to accept the judgement of those who would have us believe, though never having lived the experience of being black, that *négritude* represents a reverse type of racism, undistinguishable from the obnoxious brand put into motion by Western European colonialism. These armchair hypocrites are still acting out a condescending form of paternalism by presuming to tell us what we should think or how we should act. We totally reject those African writers who in the name of artistic integrity or because they declare themselves as being a part of two different worlds attack and treat *négritude* with scorn. Our answer to Mr. Mphahlele's query as to how long our poets will continue to bellow like goats in the throes of labour is this: our artists and poets will continue to hammer home the message until the very structure which mangles their souls has been consigned to hell. A writer is not just an artist. He is also a citizen of his country and he belongs to the time in which he is living. While he cannot be expected to create according to command, he must certainly love his people and manifest his solidarity with them in their struggle for total liberation. When you are discriminated against in South Africa, Mr. Mphahlele, or anywhere else, it is not because of artistic integrity, nor because of having been formed by two conflicting worlds, it is solely and only because you are an African. In conclusion, let it be noted that I do not wish to imply that *négritude* cannot be honestly and legitimately criticized. But I do suggest that the nature and the

intent of the criticism must be carefully assessed. One might observe that present day events have gone beyond, in a certain sense, the scope of *négritude*. One might ask to what degree is *négritude* politically fulfilling the contemporary needs of the people in those African countries which are presently independent; these are legitimate questions. But to those who criticize, hate or fear *négritude* for other reasons I reply: face this problem frontally, admit its justification historically, condemn the institutions and practices which triggered it into motion and do not try to ignore or discredit its leading figures. Divest yourself of sterile opposition, for whether one likes or not, *négritude* is here to stay.

A REPLY

by

Ezekiel Mphahlele

Yesterday I was personally attacked by someone because of my views against *négritude*. He charged me, in effect, with hindering or frustrating the protest literature of *négritude*, its mission. If I had not exiled myself from South Africa five years ago, after having lived for thirty-seven years in the South African nightmare, I should either have shrivelled up in my bitterness, or have been imprisoned for treason. My books have been banned in South Africa under a law that forbids the circulation of literature that is regarded as "objectionable, undesirable or obscene". So you see what things I have been called in my life; my body itches from the number of labels that have been stuck on me! As for what I really am, and my place in the African revolution, I shall let my writings speak for me.

We in South Africa have for the last 300 years of oppression been engaged in a bloody struggle against white supremacy—to assert our *human* and not African dignity. This latter we have always taken for granted. During these three centuries, we the Africans have been creating an urban culture out of the very condition of insecurity, exile and agony. We have done this by integrating Africa and the West. Listen to our music, see our dancing and read our literature both in the indigenous and English languages. The bits of what the white ruling class calls "Bantu culture" that we are being told to "return to" are being used by that class to oppress us, to justify the Transkei and other Bantustans. And yet there still survive the toughest elements of African humanism which keep us together and supply the moral force which we need in a life that rejects us.

If you notice the two segregated sections of a town like Brazzaville, Congo, you cannot fail to see the sterile and purposeless life of the whites in their self-imposed ghetto as distinct from the vibrant and vigorous life of the black community. The blacks have reconciled the Western and African in them, while the whites refuse to surrender to their influence. This is symbolic of the South African situation. The only cultural vitality there is to be seen among the Africans: they have not been *uplifted* by a Western culture but rather they have reconciled the two in themselves. This is the sense in which I feel superior to the white man who refuses to be liberated by me as an African. So, anyone who imagines that we in South Africa are just helpless, grovelling and down-trodden creatures of two worlds who have been waiting for the "messiah" of *négritude*, does not know a thing about what is going on in our country. My detractor, as an

American Negro who would like to teach us how to feel African, cites the entry of James Meredith into the University as symbolic of the triumph of the Negro's *négritude* in Mississippi. Are we really to believe that the U.S. Federal Army went to Mississippi to make it possible for Meredith to sing the blues or gospel songs? Surely his entry is to be seen as part of the Negro's campaign to be integrated socially and politically in the American population; to assert his human dignity. Of course, I am quite aware of certain—and luckily there are few—non-African blacks and whites who came crawling on their bellies into this Continent as it were, prepared to be messengers or lackeys of some of us, prepared to eat the dust under our feet in self-abasement, in an attempt to identify with Africa. Such people are prompted to do this out of a guilt complex whereby they seek to bear the sins of past colonisers who, they imagine, we associate them with. Elsewhere I have warned against this ugly self-abasement because it prevents the "patient" from criticizing adversely anything the African says or writes, ripe, raw and rotten. I fully agree with James Baldwin when he says in a brilliant and most moving essay in a recent issue of *The New Yorker* (17 Nov. 1962), that the negro must solve his problem inside America, not by a romantic identification with Africa. I appreciate also his remark that the Negro refuses to be integrated "into a burning house", i.e. the American social and political life that is sadly misguided, in which whites do not believe in death. And yet he also says that white and black in the U.S. need each other badly, that the white American needs to be liberated from himself but can only do this when he has liberated the Negro. After this, integration must come. Although he appreciates the Black Muslims, he foresees that one day he may have to fight them because they are such a menace.

Now to *négritude* itself. Who is so stupid as to deny the historical fact of *négritude* as both a protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values? All this is valid. What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by it romanticizes Africa—as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness. I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent Continent. I am a violent person, and proud of it because it is often a healthy human state of mind; someday I'm going to plunder, rape, set things on fire; I'm going to cut someone's throat; I'm going to subvert a government; I'm going to organise a *coup d'état*; yes, I'm going to oppress my own people; I'm going to hunt down the rich fat black men who bully the small, weak black men and destroy them; I'm going to become a capitalist, and woe to all who cross my path or who want to be my servants or *chauffeurs* and so on; I'm going to lead a breakway church—there is money in it; I'm going to attack the black bourgeoisie while I cultivate a garden, rear dogs

and parrots; listen to jazz and classics, read "culture" and so on. Yes, I'm also going to organise a strike. Don't you know that sometimes I kill to the rhythm of drums and cut the sinews of a baby to cure it of paralysis? . . . This is only a dramatisation of what Africa can do and is doing. The image of Africa consists of all these and others. And *négritude* poetry pretends that they do not constitute the image and leaves them out. So we are told only half—often even a falsified half—of the story of Africa. Sheer romanticism that fails to see the large landscape of the personality of the African makes bad poetry. The omission of these elements of a continent in turmoil reflects a defective poetic vision. The greatest poetry of Loépol Sédar Senghor is that which portrays in himself the meeting point of Europe and Africa. This is the most realistic and honest and meaningful symbol of Africa, an ambivalent continent searching for equilibrium. This synthesis of Europe and Africa does not necessarily reject the negro-ness of the African.

What have we to say about "benevolent dictatorship"; chauvinists, peasants who find that they have to change a way of life they have cherished for centuries and have to live in the twentieth century? Let me italicize again: an image of Africa that glosses over or dismisses these things is not a faithfully-conceived one; it restricts our emotional and intellectual response. An image of Africa that only glorifies our ancestors and celebrates our "purity" and "innocence" is an image of a continent lying in state. When I asked at the Accra Congress of Africanists last December how long our poets are going to continue to bleat like goats in the act of giving birth, I was suggesting that Ghanaian poets should start looking inward, into themselves. Now I am being accused of encouraging "artistic purity" by asking writers to cease protesting against a colonial boss that has left their country. What is "artistic purity"? Am I being asked to lay the ghost of *l'art pour l'art*? Surely meaningful art has social significance or relevance and this very fact implies social criticism—protest in the broadest sense of the word. Gorky, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens and so on did this, but they were no less Russian or English; certain they were much more committed than *négritude* poets. They took in the whole man. Camara Laye's *Le Regard du Roi*, Ferdinand Oyono's *Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille* and Mongo Beti's *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* are not bullied by *négritude*. They are concerned in portraying the black-white encounter, and they do this, notwithstanding, with a devastating poetic sense of irony unmatched by any that one sees in the English novel by Africans (there are some fascinating works in the three main Bantu languages in South Africa which are of the same standard). I am suggesting here that we as writers need to be emancipated from ourselves. *Négritude*, while a valuable slogan politically, can, because

its apostles have set it up as a principle of art, amount to self-enslavement—*autocolonisation*, to quote a French writer speaking of African politics and economics. We should not allow ourselves to be bullied at gun-point into producing literature that is supposed to contain a *négritude* theme and style. For now we are told, also, that there is *un style négro-africain*, and that therefore we have to sloganize and write to a march. We are told that *négritude* is less a matter of theme than style. We must strive to visualise the whole man, not merely the things that are meant to flatter the Negro's ego. Let it not be forgotten, too, that *négritude* has an overlap of 19th century European protest against machines and canons. In the place of the cuckoo, the nightingale, the daffodil, Africa has been dragged to the altar of Europe. *Négritude* men should not pretend that this is an entirely African concept.

Several of us, as a result of the physical and mental agony we have been going through in South Africa, have rejected Christianity or any other religion as a cure for human ills. But if I wrote a poem or novel expressly to preach against religion without seeing the irony of the good and the bad done in the name of religion; if I omitted the irony of Christians and educated Africans who still revere ancestral spirits, and several other ironies and paradoxes, then it would not be a lasting work of art. I think that a writer who is too sure about his rejection of the use of a god can be as overbearing as the one who is too sure of his need for the existence of a god, like Browning. I say, then, that *négritude* can go on as a socio-political slogan, but that it has no right to set itself up as a standard of literary performance; there I refuse to go along. I refuse to be put in a Negro file—for sociologists to come and examine me. Art unifies even while it distinguishes men; and I regard it as an insult to the African for anyone to suggest that because we write independently on different themes in divers modes and styles all over Africa, therefore we are ripe victims of balkanization. But then I speak as a simple practising writer, not as a politician or a philosopher, or a non-African Africanist who is looking for categories and theories for a doctorate thesis. I refuse to be put in a dossier. And yet I am no less committed to the African revolution, to the South African freedom fight. The South African, East African and English-speaking West African do not worry over *négritude* because they have never lost the essence of their negro-ness. Again, let *négritude* make the theme of literature if people want to use it. But we must remember that literature springs from an individual's experience, and in its effort to take in the whole man, it also tries to see far ahead, to project a prophetic vision, such as the writer is capable of, based on contemporary experience. It must at least set in motion vibrations in us that will continue even after we have read it, prompting us to continue inquiring

into its meaning. If African culture is worth anything at all, it should not require myths to prop it up. These thoughts are not new at all. I have come to them after physical and mental agony. And it is, of course, not my monopoly either. It is the price Africa has to pay. And if you thought that the end of colonialism was the end of the agony, then it is time to wake up.

The fear that university teachers who distrust *négritude* or reject it as a principle of art may exclude from the syllabus literature inspired by this school, does not do justice to them. And the suggestion that they have a grave responsibility when they decide which African authors have to be taught is insulting to their intelligence. Why should they feel more responsible than they have been in the teaching of French? Is African writing in French not French literature? I am sure university teachers can be trusted to distinguish literature from a sociological or anthropological document that masquerades as literature! They can examine actual texts, can't they? Why should *la littérature engagée* be so spoiled as to want to be judged by different standards from those that have been tested by tradition?

We acknowledge that *négritude* as a socio-political concept defines the mind of the assimilated African in French-speaking territories. The British never set out to assimilate their colonial subjects. They hate to see people come out of their culture to emulate them (the British). They like the exotic African, not the one who tries to speak, walk and eat like them. They love Africans in museum cases, so they left much of African culture intact. But literature and art are too big for *négritude*, and it had better be left as a historical phase.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOLITUDE OF CHEIKH KANE

Solitude as the Theme of "Aventure Ambiguë"

by Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1)

by

Madame Jeanne-Lydic Gore

"Parce qu'elle a eu l'horrible privilège de toucher le fond du malheure, la race noire est une race élue . . . On pourrait de ce point de vue nommer la *négritude* une Passion. Le noir, conscient de soi se représente à ses propres yeux comme l'homme qui a pris sur soi toute la douleur et qui souffre pour tous, même pour le blanc." But this passion, as well as bringing him closer to Nature, brings him closer also to his fellow-men. In that wonderful work *l'Orphée Noir*, Sartre says, quoting Nietzsche: "Comme le poète dionysique, le Nègre cherche à pénétrer sous les phantasmes brillants du jour et rencontre à mille pieds sous la surface Appollonienne la souffrance inexpiable qui est l'essence universelle de l'homme." (2)

No reader of Léopold Senghor or Aimé Césaire can fail to be struck by the way the black man is, for them, an integral part of Nature. Poetry, suffering, love or revolt—for them, all alike are the expression of a single way of being in which the solitude of the individual has as little opportunity to show itself as a plant has of growing alone in the tropical forest. The coloured man's tragic musing singing the royal origins of his race, does not invalidate this concept. His experience is that of a whole people, a whole human family, not of an individual. Even when recalling his childhood and adolescence, Senghor sees them as valuable because typical. The exaltation of those evenings at Dylor—"cette lumière d'outre ciel des nuits claires sur la terre douce"—owes something to:

Ces hommes, divers de traits, de costumes, de langues; mais au fond des yeux la même mélodie de souffrance à l'ombre des longs cils fiévreux: Le Cafre, le Kabyle, le Somali, le Maure, le Pân, le Fou, le Bambara, le Bobo, le Mandiogo. . . (3)

The experience, then, is a collective one and the black poet a prophet sent to lead his people out of slavery, on whose lips seem ever to be the words of the psalm: "When Israel came out of Egypt . . ." Hence the warmth, the depth and resonance of his voice. In their own way, both Césaire and Senghor belong to the ranks of the Magi. They sing the deliverance of their homeland, the return of their brothers from exile and the wonder of their origins.

CAMARA LAYE: *The soul of Africa in Guinea*. I feel I must begin by thanking the organisers of this historic colloquy arranged by the Faculty of Letters of Dakar University. It has given us an opportunity of seeing our colleagues again, and now that I find myself once again on Senegalese soil, I reflect with pleasure that it was here in Dakar that most of the generation which is now guiding with such skill the destinies of a large part of the African continent received its education.

This most valuable meeting will certainly enable the members of the teaching profession in Africa to make the best possible use of the books that have appeared on Africa, besides perhaps giving writers on the subject a clearer insight into the part they themselves can play.

Although we are only here as observers, we thought it our duty to contribute a short paper which we have entitled *The soul of Africa in Guinea*; the soul, that is, of all of us whose home is Guinea. But I quickly found that the best way to treat the subject would be to talk about myself—to go back, I mean, to my own childhood memories and tell you how and why I came to make a book of them. I hope you will forgive me if I break with convention by continuing to talk in the first person.

When I was living in Paris, far away from Guinea where I was born, far away from my parents, leading for the most part a very solitary life that had already lasted for several years, my thoughts would often go back to my own country and my family. Then, one day, it occurred to me that although my recollections were then still fresh in my mind, they would be bound to fade in time, even if they could never—how could they? be effaced altogether. So I started writing them down. I was living alone, in a poorly-furnished student's room, and I wrote as if in a dream. I remembered and I wrote for pleasure, and it was a very great pleasure indeed and one of which I never tired.

I can still remember those evenings, long winter evenings mostly, evenings which could have been unbearably gloomy but which I found all too short. And yet they followed days which were also long and, during much of the time, devoted to unending work so that often, when I got home to my little hotel at the Porte d'Orléans, at the other end of Paris, I was feeling worn out. I am talking about a time when I had to interrupt my studies because there was no more money and I was desperately trying to earn enough to start them again. I had a job as a workman at Simca's and after finishing there I used to go on to evening classes at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers. The days never seemed to end, and it was cold, and I seemed to have no physical or mental energy left.

But then seated at my little table lit by one miserable lamp—why is it that hotel bedrooms always have lamps that seem to grudge one

even the minimum of light?—I would sit down to write and, in my thoughts, I was back again with my friends and family, beside our great river, the Niger. That was all I needed. I felt inexpressibly happy and I no longer felt alone. I felt as though I was with my father and mother, as though we were talking to each other. I felt their warmth all round me once more. And the light over my head, shining on my table and onto the sheets of paper I was covering with my hurried scrawl, was no longer a wretched little electric bulb but the sun in Guinea, that implacable African sun whose rays I could feel.

My pen could not go fast enough. Memories jostled each other; they came so fast that my pen sometimes stopped abruptly because I did not know which recollection to take first. I wanted to take them all at once. And sometimes it stopped because my father or my mother were actually there in front of me and I saw them again as on the day I said goodbye to them, when I literally tore myself away from them to take the plane for Paris, and because I could see the tears in their eyes. I had to stop writing; my own eyes would be full of tears and I would have a lump in my throat, but I was not unhappy. How could I be unhappy? I was with my own family, sitting in my own home, walking the roads of my native country.

And then I would begin to write again and feel again that indescribable pleasure of writing as I dreamt. When at last I went to bed, midnight would have struck hours before and I would fall asleep, my spirit a thousand miles away from Paris.

I have said that, at that time, I was only thinking of myself and my own enjoyment; that I was writing merely for pleasure and in order to feel less alone. It is true that I had then no idea of publishing a line of what I wrote. How should I have had? My ambition was a very different one—to finish my studies. My intention was to become a trained technician and go home to Africa for good. I had no idea at the time that my scribbled pages would ever be taken out of the drawer where I kept them, except for me to read over to myself in order to call up again in all their freshness, before my tired eyes, the recollections that time had faded.

Besides, all I had written, all I had dreamed, did not by any means make a book. What I had produced was a huge mass of paper covered with notes scribbled down without either order or method; recollections I had jotted down as they occurred to me in the arbitrary way that such things do. It would have required the most indulgent critic to see in this confusion the product of any kind of art. In any case, does one write one's memoirs before one reaches the end of one's life, before one is really old?

All the same, that is what finally I did, but it was almost by accident. As usual, it was all the result of a conversation. I had been enjoying

myself, recalling my memories of Africa.

"Why don't you write your memoirs?" said the friend I was with.

"I am writing them", said I.

"Well, why don't you publish them? What are you waiting for?"

As to what I was waiting for, I think I was waiting for a good deal. I could not see myself offering a publisher this great wad of papers which were beginning to overflow the drawer I kept them in. What on earth would he have done with them? They were material for a book—so now what was I to do? If only, I said to myself, I had gone in for literature instead of engineering. But no; I had deliberately chosen machinery and blueprints and mathematics.

But once it had been suggested to me, the idea took root. I found myself digging into the drawer and pulling out first one sheet and then another. I thought that if I sorted them out, perhaps I could put one chapter together. That would not commit me to anything except, possibly, a disappointment. So I set to work and when the chapter was finally written, I showed it to my friend.

"All you need do now is go on", he said.

He picked up a pencil and began jotting down rapid notes in the margin.

"You've read Flaubert?"

"Yes", said I.

"What?"

"*Salambô*."

"I was afraid so. It is a book you will kindly never open again. It is pure cardboard. Read the *Education Sentimentale*. Flaubert never did anything better in his life than that book. It is written with his own blood. What you want to do is study the way Flaubert uses his tenses, how he changes from one to the other, and then do the same."

"What, the same as Flaubert?"

"Why not? This chapter's good; any publisher would take it as it stands. But why not make it better still?"

I thought he was just being polite. It was only when I got into touch with the reader of a publishing firm and, instead of kicking me out as I expected, he told me to hurry up and finish the book, that I really took a decision. And that, of course, was the beginning of all kinds of difficulties.

Should I go into them? Perhaps I should. First, there was having to write it out; then I had to decide what to put in and what to leave out when there was so much to choose from; then there was the need of keeping up the tone set in the first chapter, of maintaining the right balance . . . You will have guessed what the trouble was. So far, I had been writing purely for pleasure; I had yet to learn that when one is no longer writing for oneself, writing becomes a labour.

I might never have completed the task if, as the book grew, I had not found that I was drawing a picture of my native Guinea which was certainly quite unlike the picture she would be presenting to the world within a few years and different, too, from the one she was presenting already. The civilisation of this part of Eternal Africa goes back a very long way. There is good reason to believe that from the earliest times relations existed between the centre of Africa and Carthage, the great empires of Egypt, the Mediterranean and many other places. We know now, with almost complete certainty, that it was an extremely highly developed civilisation which reached its greatest point of development in the 14th century. Later it declined to some extent, but it never disappeared and there was a re-flowering in the time of the Samorian Empire. Since then, and during the colonial period, it has remained dormant but alive.

What was yesterday the dominant characteristic of this civilisation? I think it was its Mystery. Looking back to Africa from Europe, it was the mystery of my country that struck me first. That does not mean that I found no mystery in Europe, but that I felt its presence more strongly in Africa. Had I lived in the country in Europe, no doubt I should have had a greater sense of Europe's mystery, but I lived in a town, and a town moreover into which the echoes of the country had long ago ceased to penetrate. And whatever mysterious aspects there may have been to Paris, the mystery was insubstantial compared with the profound mystery of Africa. So I decided to exclude all memories that were not directly connected with that mystery.

I soon found, however, that I was not confining myself to this angle and even, as I went on, that I was getting further and further away from it. It still remained a very important element but other elements were also creeping in, although they were not exactly new elements. They had also demanded to be admitted as well and, without realising it, I had admitted them. In any case, I should have had no choice because, in Guinea, the mystery of Africa is not absolute. My own life had held a large share of mystery but it had also held an element of "mystification" or false mystery and there were some mysteries that were so only in appearance. If I wanted to present a true picture—and I was determined to do so in all respects—I could not omit the element of "mystification" or the mysteries that were only appearance.

Life in Africa, I discovered, was not always opening onto mystery although it was impregnated with mystery in all its parts. It seems to me that our life, the life of the Africans of Guinea which cannot differ so very greatly from that of other Africans, more often opens on to love. I am talking now of the love which unites us so closely to each other; the love that made our families and tribes—our very

large tribes—into those compact groups which made our country villages so friendly, so peaceable and so united. I am talking of the love that even extended to the background against which our lives were lived, the immense Guinea plain, the savannah, that most beautiful of all savannahs, our great river, everything that lived on that level plain and in that mighty river, everything that flew in the sky; love for the trees and crops, but also for the spirits that watched over them; love for the animals but also for our totems; love for living men but also for our ancestors; love for the heavens but also for God.

It was through that love that we remained within the mystery, and even when love seemed to be directing our life away from the mystery, that was and could only be an appearance, for there is no mystery in the absence of beings and things, any more than the mystery can be clearly or intimately apprehended without at least a beginning of love for beings and things, without some kind of almost mystical union with them.

Yesterday, in Africa, we were nearer to beings and things, and that for reasons which are not at all mysterious. Perhaps it was only because our life was less busy and we ourselves less distracted. We were shielded by having fewer artificial elements in our lives, fewer facilities. Our towns cut us off less from the country. We lived like the men of the Middle Ages, knowing nothing or almost nothing of this mechanical age, the age Europe and America are passing through.

Do not, however, on any account confuse—as is only too often done—this mechanical age with civilisation itself. Civilisation is something quite different. It is not to be confused with machinery and still less with bombs and inter-planetary missiles. Civilisation, European, American, Asian, and our own, existed long before mechanical progress, though that does not mean that Africa refuses progress. On the contrary, she longs for it; but she regards it as merely an accessory to real civilisation.

Man's body has its needs, but so has his soul and the soul, after all, comes before the body, however little the two can be separated and however little the body is to be despised.

In large towns, the accumulation of mechanical aids can easily smother the soul which is, as it were, borne down by all kinds of progress which are not its concern but the effects of which it can rarely escape. But the soul knows what is happening, it feels its chains and seeks by every means to shake them off. Some of the ways it tries are as odd I feel sure, as any to be found in our old beliefs that yesterday so surprised the European rationalists.

We must, however, be careful not to mistake the nature of their rationalism, which exists far more in their speech than in their thought. When we look at what is best and most genuine in Europe, it is not

machinery that we see but books, paintings, architecture; what our ears hear is not the humming of machinery but the sound of the orchestras. What is truly deep and genuine in Europe is the message of her writers and artists, her scientists, moralists, musicians and revolutionaries. That is Europe's soul and the message is not one of rationalism. It is a message coming from the soul and nowhere else. That is true, despite the signs of rationalism to be discerned in the so-called abstract works of certain artists and musicians in Europe today; signs, moreover, which it would be hard to discern in any of her writers, because while the abstract can creep into painting and music, in literature it is revealed for what it is—complete emptiness.

You will be wondering what all this digression has been leading up to. It has simply been leading us back again to the mystery which is indissolubly linked to the soul, the invisible which without the soul could not exist in us. It has brought us back to that union between heaven and earth which we share with all civilisations and from which they all take their rise.

When writing my childhood memories I wanted them to lead me on to the ineffable, to the minute and patient search for the ineffable which is the concern of us all—the search which directs us beyond the surroundings of this mechanical age, which ties us all to the same destiny, the destiny of all human beings, none of whom are more than travellers in this world. Although my ambition far out-ran my powers, that was what I was trying to do when I decided that my book should relate all the mystery inherent in my childhood memories.

In the past, in the great over-grown village of Kouroussa in Upper Guinea, there is no doubt that the air, water, earth and savannahs were, really and truly, inhabited by genii, who had to be propitiated by prayers and sacrifices. There really were people who could bewitch you, and there were formulas for averting the ill effects of their charms. There were innumerable amulets that could be worn for protection. There were tellers of hidden things; there were healers some of whom really effected cures. All these things really did exist, surprised as our children and grandchildren will be to learn it. All these things were current yesterday in Africa and they greatly astonished the Europeans although they then possessed their own mysteries which, though they were different, should nevertheless have taught them to accept the existence of ours.

Everything I wrote down, everything I remembered, was a really true picture.

And why should it not be true?

Is there nothing to the world except what we can see at a casual glance?

Does not the true reality of the world consist precisely in what

cannot be seen at a glance?

Is life everything?

Is death nothing?

Has life nothing behind it?

Does death finish everything?

Is death at the end of everything?

Think what a life would be that was to be finished by death! Think what a vast swindle our life and all its activity would be! Is such a swindle conceivable?

I refuse to believe it. Our soul refuses to believe it. And so, it is in all the rest that I prefer to believe, however surprising it may seem to us when we happen to think of it in our worse moments, when we are no longer ourselves, when our soul ceases to vibrate, and our whole being becomes sluggish, or is animated by some unreasoning or over-reasoning logic.

My whole being cries out for wonders, for prodigies, and when I recognise their presence I know that it is the better part of myself awakening, my whole self.

The visible world shrinks suddenly before my eyes; I watch it dwindling into what it is, a dream and yet not quite a dream. But the sign, the sign of what exists beyond, of what is higher, infinitely higher, than the sign which itself is only appearance, is nothing, nothing that can satisfy . . . I see the invisible rise up and confound our poor little reason which can only claim so tiny a place; I see the inexplicable elevated once more to its seat which is supreme above all.

At last I see the soul! . . . I recognise the soul!

And I know that there are more things, many more things, in heaven than those we are aware of on earth.

But I see I cannot speak of mystery without speaking also of sculpture, African sculpture, examples of which are to be found today in all the principal museums of the world and which served yesterday, even more fully than African literature, to reveal the extraordinary deep sympathies hidden in the heart of the African.

Let me begin by reminding you that, confronted with African sculpture which had not yet won a place in the history of art but whose influence had suddenly spread like a tidal wave, yesterday's artists, who have now become the great artists of today, had no other thought than of the new plastic forms to which it had introduced them. These they seized on avidly for their experiments, because they offered the possibility of all kinds of new tricks and new combinations. But what the discovery of African sculpture did not lead them to was any increase in spirituality. That is why, looking back to thirty or forty years ago and the experiments artists were carrying out at that time, the effects of which have in large measure persisted to the present day,

we find nothing but a new form, a new style, neither better nor worse than its predecessors.

When I was going to primary school in Kouroussa, about 1940 or 1941, after school was over I used to enjoy going into my father's workshop and finding him, adze in hand, chipping away at the wood. There was something I always used to find curious and that I did not understand until years later. My father did not copy the model in front of him; he transposed it. Sometimes this process of transposition went so far that something abstract crept into his work. By that, I do not mean abstract to the point of disguising the subject but I mean something not introduced intentionally and that consequently bore no relation to what is now known in Europe as abstract painting or abstract sculpture. It only appeared occasionally in my father's work and seemed more like expressionism pressed to its furthest limits, even uncertain perhaps what those limits were.

Crouched over his carving, my father transposed from his model without any calculation. He left his heart to speak as it felt, with the result that he would alter the appearance of the original, thus first drawing attention to, and accentuating the expression, the spirituality, which in its turn led to other alterations, in the actual shape this time, designed to balance and complete the original one.

I think it may be worth while to pause for a moment over these alterations. As I have said, they were not made without cause, they were needed to achieve a certain given spiritual expression. You will ask, if they were not made without cause and were not just a trick, how is it that they are ordered in such masterly fashion in all our carvings from Africa? Why are the planes and volumes in African sculpture so much better balanced than in any other? Why do they remind us of variations on a given theme? Why is the rhythm—at last we have reached the word—why is the rhythm so infinitely more arresting than in any other type of sculpture?

Here, we have reached one of the most important aspects of the African soul. As the President of Senegal himself reminded us here yesterday, it is rhythm—the love of it and the gift of it—that enables us to play the tom-toms instinctively, without ever having been taught, that prevents us from ever hearing those drums without wanting to dance, which makes us all born musicians and born dancers. But I am not going to do more than touch on that subject; for there is too much that I could say on it.

Again, perhaps, you will ask what was the use of the little figure that would shape itself under my father's adze . . . what good was it at that time? Well, yesterday—I am talking of the years 1940 to 1941—the head, the little figure, the animal carved by my father, everything that our various metal workers made, was inseparable from

the mystery; it was directly connected with the cult, with magic. It was a time when the Smith-sculptor was also a priest and the art he practised was far more than that of a simple craftsman because it involved working with fire throughout, to smelt the ore and to work the metal. The weapons he produced were able to wound not only because they were sharp and well-tempered, but because the Power to cut and wound had been given them. The hoe of the peasant was not simply the tool with which he turned the earth; it was the tool that ordered the earth and the harvest. It was a time when the art of the smith far outstripped the other arts, was more noble than they, was indeed a noble art, the art of the first of the magicians, an art which in truth called for greater knowledge and skill than the rest.

In our society it is likely that the smith was, in fact, the first specialised craftsman. The knowledge called for, the number of operations through which the ore must pass before it can be transformed into a weapon or farm implement, all mean specialisation. And once a smith's skill was recognised, naturally it was to him one went when one wanted something carved—not a simple bowl that anyone can make for himself, but statues of one's ancestors, including the furthest back of all, the totem, or masks for ritual dances; all the cultural objects, in short, that his powers allowed him to consecrate.

If the smith has never ceased to possess those powers, it must nevertheless be admitted that they have become generally much weakened and that this has been inevitable in a society whose own civilisation has been confronted with a whole series of new ideas. Nor is it that the notion of mystery has disappeared; it is that the mystery itself is no longer to be found in the same place. It has emigrated.

I realised this myself one day in 1956, after I had come back to Africa for good, when I went to see my father in Upper Guinea. I remember my astonishment at finding him that day once again whittling away at a piece of wood, and how I tried to guess what the block of wood was destined to become as I listened to the quick, regular strokes of his tool. But I had need of all my patience before I knew whether I had guessed right. The wood was so hard it was like marble and the work took a long time to complete. And yet there was little mystery about it. It was merely the head of an African woman which at last emerged almost unexpectedly from the wood. Suddenly, in the mass I perceived an outline and understood what it was that was growing out of it. The mystery, in fact, ended there. It was not a very mysterious mystery. It was the reply to a riddle I had set myself.

And what about my father? What was he seeking as he shaped and hollowed the wood? Reality. He was seeking to be true; as true as it is possible to be. His search for truth and reality was tempered only

by his search for ideal beauty and, as a corollary, for the creation of a type of universal beauty. So that, of this woman's face, he had made the most beautiful woman's face and consequently an idealised face which summed up all faces; a universal type.

You will see at once that this is a search for reality of a somewhat special kind as it does not admit the representation of ugliness which would fight against the idealism.

But what a difference between the form that emerged in 1940 or 1941 and the form that emerged in 1956! By the time Guinea had been declared independent in 1958, what a distance had been traversed and what a gulf separated the present from the past! What trouble preceded the opening of the new era!

Through Colonisation, French civilisation has taught us a language that we shall carefully preserve. But there is also much it has taken away from our own civilisation.

Under the guidance of our President, His Excellency Sekou Touré, the first thing we did, after independence, was to take hold of ourselves again. Very quickly, we picked up again our own music, our own literature, our own sculpture; all, that is to say, that was most deeply implanted in us and that had been slumbering during the sixty years of our colonisation. That is our new soul.