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Students of 20th-century literature have long pondered the odd fact that writers from the outlands of English-speaking culture—Missouri (T. S. Eliot), Idaho (Ezra Pound), and Ireland (W. B. Yeats)—have come to dominate our sense of the mainstream of British poetry. Modern French verse evinces a similar conversion of the liminal into the central: Aimé Césaire, a black man from the Caribbean island of Martinique, is recognized as one of the major Franco-phone poets of our time. Most of his poetry was made available to the English-only audience in *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, translated by Annette Smith, professor of French at Caltech, and Clayton Eshleman, a contemporary poet and professor of English at Eastern Michigan University (and formerly lecturer in creative writing at Caltech). That standard and highly regarded work, published in 1983, is complemented by this new volume from the same two translators. It contains Césaire's *And the Dogs Were Silent*, written in the 1940s and not previously translated, and *i, laminaria . . .*, first published in French in 1982. To these major works are added a fine critical introduction to Césaire's thought and poetry by A. James Arnold, and Arnold's translation of Césaire's essay, "Poetry and Knowledge," a major statement of his antiscientific views. With

these many facets, the volume will be a crucial resource for Césaire scholars and an introduction to both his early and later poetry for the more general audience.

Any consideration of Césaire's poetics cannot ignore his political convictions, for the two have interacted in complex ways throughout his career. He was one of the founders of the negritude movement, an attempt on the part of French-speaking black intellectuals to overcome the hegemony of French culture over their own lives and regain contact with their African roots. *And the Dogs Were Silent*, a verse drama with chorus, is deeply inscribed with the attempt to prepare for political revolution through cultural transformation. In contrast, *i, laminaria . . .* seems less explicitly political and more engrossed in the workings of its verbal nuances. Yet I think it would be wrong to take these changes over the course of some 40 years as an indication that Césaire has abandoned his earlier convictions. The negritude movement was inextricably involved in linguistic issues. Although its initial goal of turning completely away from French and adopting African tongues for the black community proved impractical, the desire to recapture the spirit of African cultures embedded in their languages remains largely intact in Césaire's later poetry. Although his

macumba word

the word is the father of the saints
the word is the mother of the saints
with the word *couresse* one can cross a river swarming with
caïmans
sometimes i trace a word in the dirt
with a fresh word one can cross the desert in a single day
there are swim-stick words for pushing away sharks
there are iguana words
there are subtle words those are stick-insect words
there are shadow words that awake sparking with anger
there are Shango words
sometimes i even sneak a swim on the back of a dolphin
word

mot-macumba

le mot est père des saints
le mot est mère des saints
avec le mot *couresse* on peut traverser un fleuve peuplé de
caïmans
il m'arrive de dessiner un mot sur le sol
avec un mot frais on peut traverser le désert d'une journée
il y a des mots bâton-de-nage pour écarter les squales
il y a des mots iguanes
il y a des mots subtils ce sont des mots phasmes
il y a des mots d'ombre avec des réveils en colère d'étincelles
il y a des mots Shango
il m'arrive de nager de ruse sur le dos d'un mot dauphin

work shares with surrealism its fracturing of discursive conventions, the poetry of *i, laminaria . . .* is in many ways a continuation of Césaire's politics within language. Similarly, the antirationalism of "Poetry and Knowledge" is best appreciated as cultural protest, not philosophical speculation.

A single poem, above, from the *i, laminaria . . .* anthology of brief lyrics can serve as an epitome of Césaire's talent and interest in the politics of language. The word *Shango* immediately indicates the poem's self-contextualization in African cultures of the Americas, for it is the name of a minor deity, or *Orisha*, in Macumba, a religion among the blacks of Brazil. But the Orishas of the western hemisphere have their origin in Nigeria, thus carrying Césaire and his readers on a journey through a displaced black culture to its African inheritance. Further, the Orishas of Nigeria are often aligned (through a kind of cross-cultural extension of biblical parallelism) with Christian saints, thereby suggesting a connection with the "saints" of the first two lines. This expansive religious syncretism even reaches back to ancient Greece in the final line: the speaking "i" of the lyric compares his own mode of poetic travel to the poet Arion's journey on the back of a dolphin in classical myth.

Operating behind these mythic excursions is a more profound linguistic point in every line of the poem—the desire to return to a more primitive medium of exchange, one in which the words are not arbitrary signs of an alienated world of things, but rather a language in which the words are motivated and motivating symbols that are one with the reality they render intelligible and are capable of empowering speakers with the triumph of subjectivity over objectivity. This is the magic dimension of discourse lost to modern, western culture, as so many poets who define that modernity have indicated. Césaire's political and cultural critique has led him to nothing less than the desire to return to the origins of all languages, and thus all cultures. With the potent words of this original language, one can engender holiness, but also, in a more physical embodiment, cross rivers, seas, and deserts as surely as did Moses and the Israelites.

Smith and Eshleman wisely present the lyrics of *i, laminaria . . .* in parallel French and English texts. Césaire uses wordplay as much as cross-cultural allusion, and many crucial puns cannot be translated. The French word for dolphin, "*dauphin*," also means the eldest son of the king of France, a suggestion that such "dolphin word[s]" carry the authority of a royal edict. Thanks to

French-English cognates, however, a few significant puns remain in both versions. For example, "*laminaria*" (*laminare*, a species of seaweed) puns on "laminare"—a layering of languages and cultures—and perhaps also on "liminal"—the home of seaweed, on the margin between sea and land, as well as Césaire's own position between France and Africa. The parallel format also helps the translators negotiate that perilous path between a deadening literalism and a creativity swerving far from the original. Their approach is conservative, but not without its own verve and rhythms evoking rather than imitating the original. The incantatory beat of Césaire's "*il y a des mots*" in "macumba word" cannot be fully captured in English, which normally requires the placement of adjectives before, rather than after, nouns, but the translators' repeated "there are" at least calls attention to the pattern and directs even the non-French speaker to glance at the original and appreciate its richness. Lovers of poetry, whether long familiar with Césaire or hearing this major voice for the first time, owe much to Smith and Eshleman for their care, their craft, and their willingness to allow Césaire to speak through their own "*mots subtils*."

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