



LISTEN
to
AFRICA

A Call from L S Senghor

Josiane Nespoulous-Neuville

Translated by Pierre de Fontnouvelle

LISTEN
TO
AFRICA

Listen to Africa

Edited by
J. N. ...



to those who ...
to those who ...
to those who ...

Justine Neveu, ...

*...
...*

To André, my husband

To Pierre, with all my gratitude for his translation

To our children, Nathalie and Patrick

LISTEN to AFRICA

A Call from L S Senghor



Josiane Nespoulous-Neuville

*Translated from the French
by Pierre de Fontnouvelle*

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May Africans remain faithful to their cultural heritage, their traditions, their ancestral humanism, as a sound foundation for the African Renaissance

May Western man be willing to recognize, respect and learn from African wisdom and culture

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Foreword

In an age of frequently strident and uncompromising cultural ethnocentricity, it is inspiring to come upon a thinker and poet of Léopold Senghor's stature who remains absolutely true to the essence of his heritage and at the same time selectively open to the best in another culture. Not that he found the reconciliation and integration of seemingly incompatible but ultimately complementary elements easy to achieve. On the contrary, the process was the result of a long and anguishing personal odyssey, in the crucible of alienation and rebirth. Through the dialectics of Negritude and Western civilization, and on the bedrock of the initiatory experience, lived as both reality and metaphor, Senghor gradually evolved a highly original, and indeed idiosyncratic, approach which enabled him to preserve and cherish the ethos of his African roots without either rejecting Western culture out of hand or being swamped by it. This approach is clearly reflected in the richness and diversity of his poetic inspiration.

Ours is an increasingly interdependent world in all areas of human endeavour. To paraphrase John Donne, no culture "is an island, entire of itself", none can flourish, or even survive for long, without a kind of enriching cross-pollination, for cultural isolation inevitably breeds stagnation and decline. In this light, Senghor's own accomplishment in transcending differences, building on the creative tension between disparate inputs and rejecting cultural confrontation or exclusiveness carries a powerful message and has universal value.

Publication of this English version of Josiane Nespoulous-Neuville's probing and exceptionally perceptive essay therefore appears most timely, and may provide a useful contribution to the thorough consideration of a topic crucial to the future of our societies.

Pierre de Fontnouvelle

Foreword

Léopold Sédar Senghor: the Man and the Author

A man of many parts, Léopold Sédar Senghor recalls that he has often been asked which achievements, in his life as a statesman, educator and poet, are the closest to his heart, which he would be the least willing to give up. He has consistently answered that his poems are unquestionably what matters most to him.¹

We are therefore called upon to approach Senghor essentially as a poet. But there are two contrasting ways of entering the world of poetry:

- Either the reader refuses to be led off course by a mode of thinking alien to his own; he seeks a familiar atmosphere, a congruence between the text and his mental and cultural habits, an immersion yielding a needed affirmation or identification of self. He asks the poem to lead him to a comforting experience, to an awareness of the patterns of his own dreams.

If we were able to observe this reader more closely, we would see that he lives parsimoniously, unable to escape his concepts and reactions, avoiding any change from his usual surroundings, obsessed with the fear of alienation. Upon glancing at Senghor's *Poems*, he would hurriedly put them aside, claiming that they are too difficult to understand. An unfortunate response, but hardly a surprising one, since this poetry is not for those who feel comfortable within their limitations.

- Or else the reader allows himself to be flooded with the poetic idiom to the point of losing his own boundaries, so as to be immersed in a limit-

less world where words regain their ability to be experienced as fluid and multivalent images speaking to *all our senses*, by which we mean all our vital powers: sensuality, imagination, intellect and spirituality.² Our premise rules out the traditional dualistic view which contrasts the senses – as a system receiving sensations and producing impressions dependent on the frailties or ambiguities of the passing moment and of our libido – with intelligence based on rational reflection, assumed to be the only path to Truth, itself seen in this view as synonymous with scientific knowledge. Our approach also excludes Sensualism, a basically materialistic doctrine holding that all knowledge derives from sensations. Indeed, it seems to us that either one of these attitudes prevents man from jointly experiencing all the facets of his being, and therefore from reaching the fullness of his potential. Our position leads us toward “globalism”, which in Senghor’s view is the African way of knowledge:

The Black’s senses are open to all contacts, and even to the slightest stimulus. He feels before seeing, he reacts immediately to contact with an object, to the aura emitted by the invisible. He gains knowledge of the object through his exceptional ability to experience emotion. The White European keeps the object at a distance, looks at it, analyses and kills it – or at least masters the object – for utilitarian purposes. The Black African senses the object, follows its emanations and contours, then assimilates it in an act of love, so as to attain a deeper level of knowledge [...]; beyond the visible, the Black’s *embracing reason* grasps the object’s underlying reality so as to reach the meaning beyond the sign.³

This kind of living poetical experience therefore requires a twofold exercise in inner discipline and self-denial:

- In a first phase, the reader must give up his defences against the affective inflow, abandon the sadly insulating armour of a personality built around a coercive axis of coherence which allows only ideas deemed reasonable – implying that they are clearly “understandable” – to emerge from the inchoate depths.

Indeed, he must accept the overthrow of reason and experience, the bewilderment brought on by what may be sensed without being understood, for the unexplainable is an important part of our universe ... To deny the fact is to forgo living our human condition to the fullest.

- It follows that the second form of conditioning requires man to develop all his perceptive faculties in unison, so as to experience in his life the mystery of the unknown and commune with the world.

The poetic endeavour is an active contemplation, and thus leads to a broadening of the self through the magic of imagery. Guided by the poet, the reader allows himself to be literally fascinated by the rush of images, by their ambiguity or ambivalence as both objects and symbols, by their polytonal reverberations. They speak to his senses, which conjure up new images, and these in turn suggest other perceptions. The continuous interplay between being and matter provides a hint of the essential harmony between man and the universe.

L S Senghor's writings are intended for precisely such a reader, one who accepts to undergo a *new birth* in the awareness of both the immanence and transcendence of all things.

For Senghor is quintessentially the poet of freedom, that is to say of faithfulness and commitment to life. His intent is to lead us, beyond the superficial appearance of the concrete world, beyond the realm of facts and events, to the wellspring of being. In his footsteps we must probe the depth of things and beings, share in their mystery and transformations through incantation and symbolism, which allow us to approach their surreality. We must consider the manifold meanings of Senghor's perceptions and share the restless surge of this thoughts and emotions. Above all, let us not raise a shield of rationality to protect or justify a gaze arbitrarily averted from the dazzling exuberance of the Universe. It behoves us to avoid anything that limits our vision and to live intensely our inclusion in the world, to resume the quest for the Grail. We must strive to recapture the primeval unity, the state of harmony and plenitude, which Senghor calls the Kingdom of Childhood.

Kingdom of Childhood! Land of splendour, a cultural heritage preciously received in the bosom of his family, deep in the Serer country:

Until 1913, animism was the environment in which I lived. My uncle Waly attended to my moral and religious education ... I was a thorough animist. My entire intellectual, moral and religious world was animistic, and this left a deep imprint on me. Which is why in my poems I frequently refer to the Kingdom of Childhood. It was a realm of innocence and happiness: there was no separation between

the Living and the Dead, between reality and make-believe, between present, past and future.⁴

And Senghor added: "During those seven years, I had lived happily in a world of kindness and beauty, dignity and freedom."

It was a protected childhood, where life values emerged full-blown, as a living experience:

**Tokó'Waly, my uncle, do you remember those nights long ago
When my head weighed upon your patient back?
When taking me by the hand, your hand led me through storms
And signs?
[...]
You, Tokó'Waly, you can hear beyond hearing,
And you explain to me the signs spoken by the Ancestors
In constellations as serene as the sea ...⁵**

His was a trusting childhood, lived to the full, with no break between intelligence and sensitivity, between the revelations and the love of life. A childhood of exploration, pervaded with a sense of wonder at each new life-enhancing discovery:

**Paradise my African childhood [...]
And you, Springs of Kam-Dyamé, when at noon I drank
Your mystical waters from the hollow of my hands, surrounded
By my naked and sleek playmates adorned with flowers from the bush!
The shepherd's flute modulated the herd's slow pace,
And when it hushed in its shadow, drumbeats
From the haunting salt flats sounded the march of the Dead.⁶**

These were highly formative years, and Senghor often refers to them: "My childhood has exerted a strong influence on me, not only on a cultural level, but also politically."⁷

His father then decided to send him to the "White School": "I left my mother and took leave of the Kingdom of Childhood."

Nevertheless, the experience of this Kingdom remained fully alive within him, providing him with memories which were to be both an inner refuge and a stimulus helping to guide his endeavors in an alien world. He was left

with an unfinished dream, and had glimpsed a paradise to which he longed to give substance. In 1979 he said to Mohamed Aziza: "I place this Kingdom not only in the beginning of my life, but also at its end. In a wider sense, I would say that the ultimate purpose of human activity is to re-establish the Kingdom of Childhood."⁸

This quest endows both his life and his works with a remarkable unity: "My deeper personality," he wrote, "was in fact shaped in the womb of my family [...]. Because of this family education, I became deeply rooted in the virtues of Negritude."⁹

To Senghor, the term Negritude covers "the whole complex of the Black world's cultural values, as expressed in the Blacks' life, institutions and works",¹⁰ as he himself lived and experienced them from his earliest youth. These values reveal to him an initial vision of the Kingdom of Childhood, and the vision haunted him, for it contained the seeds of a humanism which he was impelled to rediscover and bring to life.

At an early stage, however, Senghor received a Western education, since at the age of seven he was sent to a school run by the missionary Fathers. Their method was "to introduce progressively a Catholic turn of mind in the Kingdom of Childhood [...]. It was a dual education, both secular and religious, in French and Wolof."¹¹ No discontinuity was involved, no surrender of one way of thinking in favour of the other, "because the two worlds were religious worlds, in which spiritual values were upheld".¹² Since he was still a small child, the two cultural inputs coexisted instead of combining: "The spirits of animism and the catholic God, with his Angels and Saints, were on good terms in my mind."¹³

This initial harmony was quickly threatened, however, when in 1922 he was admitted to the Libermann seminary school in Dakar; the course of study sought "to make us into black-skinned Frenchmen". His educator, Fr. Lalouse, was honestly convinced that Africans were a cultural cipher, that they had great potential but could not claim to be civilized. Senghor was deeply hurt by Fr. Lalouse's assumption that, although "we Black Africans were indeed God's creatures" and "had the same natural aptitudes as other races," it was necessary "to raise us, through methodical work, to the level of White men." Senghor questioned this opinion:

I had the impression that Fr. Lalouse's thesis was unsound, that we too had a true civilization, and indeed a fine one. I remembered the

Kingdom of Childhood in my father's house [...]. In this villa – in the Roman sense of the word – there was an order based on a way of life and, in the final analysis, an admirable harmony. I felt that this denoted a great civilization, and above all a fine one, but I did not yet have arguments to support my view, except once again for the experience of my childhood. At that point I perceived that the best way to prove the value of Black culture was to use the colonizers' own weapons, and to be an even better student.¹⁴

The four years (1922–1926) spent in the Libermann school seem to have played a determining role in Senghor's cultural choices. Although a mere adolescent, he refused to be locked into a dilemma whose terms, he felt, were invalidated by the White man's ignorance and preconceptions. This dilemma rested on the following axiom: there is only one path to knowledge; now Western civilization, through its scientific discoveries, has reached an advanced knowledge of the world and of men; therefore, this civilization is *the* one and only way to attain knowledge, a conclusion that *ipso facto* rules out the validity of any Black African culture, to which Western civilization denies any similarity. The major premise of this axiom satisfies the "longing for oneness" emphasized by Jean Hamburger,¹⁵ a powerful and ever-present impulse in the spirit of Western logic. Hence the whole structure of negative and *a priori* judgments on which Europeans were wont to base their assumptions of "superiority" (... but is this not still the case?).

Senghor rejects this whole line of reasoning: "When I questioned the postulate of a *tabula rasa*, which holds that there is no such thing as a Black African culture, I did so by remembering my father's and uncle's lessons."¹⁶ And this rejection was to become one of the strongest incentives of Senghor's thinking, so much so that one might well describe his life work as a response, ceaselessly reshaped and deepened, to the offensive challenge raised by the West.

Having chosen, during his adolescence, to acquire a thorough knowledge of Western thought, without disowning any of the values of Black humanism, Senghor decided to pursue his university education in France, where he arrived in 1928. No other Black intellectual seems to have lived this cultural dualism as completely as he did.

He was involved in such a wide range of activities and causes that one could have thought he was French. He passed his *agrégation* examination and in

1935 started teaching in French lycées. He also joined various groups. Some were literary, such as the Saturday gatherings in the home of Robert Desnos, and the *Esprit* inner circle. Others were political: after the 1936 events (social and political unrest which gave rise to the *Front populaire*), he became a militant in the French Socialist Party (SFIO), and supported the experimental Workers' Schools of the popular culture movement, teaching French and literature several times a week.

Called up in 1939 as a private in the Third Colonial Infantry Regiment, he became a prisoner of war and was released only in 1942, on medical grounds. In 1948, he joined the Revolutionary Democratic Gathering, a small group of intellectuals founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and David Rousset. Pursuing his political career within the French government, he served in 1955–1956 as Secretary of State in the Office of the Premier under Edgar Faure, then in 1959 as Minister-Counselor under General de Gaulle. In 1957 he married for the second time, and his new wife, Colette Hubert, is French. He remained deeply attached to the French language as a widely shared means of intellectual communication, and in the years following the proclamation of Senegal's independence, he founded with Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba the Association of French-Speaking States (*Francophonie*). It should be added that all his poems and essays are written in French.

In 1983 Senghor was elected to the Académie Française. He is highly eclectic, and enjoys reading various Greek and Latin authors, including Vergil, Pindar and Plato, in the original text.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the first International Francophone University, inaugurated in September 1990 in Alexandria (Egypt), has been named after Léopold Sédar Senghor.

Nevertheless, and in spite of his immersion in Western culture, he was known to be above all else a Black African, through both his political and literary commitments. Connected as early as 1931 with Paulette Nadal's group gathered around the *Revue du Monde noir*, a co-founder with Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas of the *Mouvement de la Négritude*, a contributor to the review *L'Étudiant noir* in 1934, and later a member of the elder Diop's circle, which was to evolve into *Présence africaine*, Senghor proposed to open a new path for man:

As for us, our concern, since the 1932–1934 years, our one and only concern, has been to assume this Négritude by expressing it through

our lives, and hence to gain a deeper understanding of its significance. The aim being to offer Negritude to the world as a cornerstone in the building of the *Universal Civilization*, which will be, if it develops at all, the joint achievement of all races, of all the different civilizations.¹⁷

In 1945, he was given a professorship in African languages and civilizations at the *Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outremer*. Once elected a Deputy for Senegal, he became extremely active in stirring up public opinion against colonialism, and his main speeches were reprinted in *Liberté II*. In 1948 he started a paper, *Condition humaine*, and asserted in the second issue that "assimilation is an illusion".

Upon his country's independence in 1960 he was elected President of the Senegalese Republic, and remained Chief of State until 1980, when he decided to retire.

Senghor chose to experience Western culture as an African and to study Africa from a Western viewpoint. He tirelessly compares the characteristics and attributes of the two value systems. Far from rejecting one in favour of the other, he holds that "we are fortunate to be at the historical crossroads of the two civilizations which stand in the sharpest possible contrast and which, this being the case, most naturally *complement* one another".¹⁸ His mind approaches and probes every topic in the joint light of both cultures, and this activity is one of the most distinctive traits of his thinking. The cultural complementarity which he emphasizes inevitably leads him to identify a fundamental requirement, that of cultural crossbreeding. The metaphor he gave, in a 1958 article, fully illustrates his life choice: "Like the palm tree, its roots reach down to the humus of tradition, while in the sun its head breathes in the air of the contemporary world."¹⁹

For man must breathe in the winds from every continent. This conviction constantly informs his intellectual endeavours since, as he points out, "there are *several* civilizations, not just *one*. Rather, if indeed there exists but one human civilization, it is dialectical, with each continent, each race, each people displaying a particular and irreplaceable aspect of that civilization."²⁰

Every culture must both be fertilized by the other ones and ensure their fertilization. To live is to give and receive continuously:

One cannot bury oneself in the past nor prolong the present, for stagnation is certain death. Cultural stagnation and racial purity, like

economic self-sufficiency, are dormant waters. In order to live and grow, a people requires nourishment just as an individual needs to absorb and assimilate, in a reciprocal process, precisely those external nutrients which are lacking in the body social.²¹

In *Poésie de l'action*, looking back over his works and activities, Senghor explains what he means by crossbreeding. After pointing out that "anthropology and history prove all great civilizations are the result of biological and cultural crossbreeding", he adds:

... in order to crossbreed, [...] one must first exist separately. Which is why we say that everyone must be a hybrid in his own way. Everyone must take root in the values of his race, of his continent, of his nation so as to truly *exist*, then must open to other continents, other races, other nations in order to flourish and blossom. In short, association requires being. But to *be more*, one has to open to the Other.²²

To promote a humanism based on cultural crossbreeding in a world of violence, racism and coercive ideologies is certainly an enormous undertaking, but such is the lifework he chose. To achieve his purpose, he allowed himself to be guided by his African spirituality, which leads "living man to acknowledge the world's unity and to work toward its fulfilment. Therefore, his duty is of course to strengthen his personal life, but also to bring about an enhancement of *being* in other men."²³

The West shows an increasing tendency to neglect metaphysics, so much so that it now seems to blur the distinction between having and being, and to order its thinking on the basis of the power relationships of possession and knowledge (there is a strong inclination to have in order to know and to know in order to have). African philosophy, on the other hand, since it centres on the idea of a vital force, remains concerned primarily with being, and more particularly with the relationships involving confrontation, participation and communion. In this philosophy, life expresses the dialectics of being and knowledge. Such is, as a matter of fact, the content of the initiatory education which traditionally shapes the Black African soul.

This initiation is a customary educational approach, both pragmatic and mystical, in which knowledge is proposed or offered, rather than bestowed; it must be won by undergoing physical and emotional trials that establish whether the neophyte is ready to receive the proffered teaching. Initiation, a life-long process, includes various successive levels. In a first phase, the novice must gain awareness of who he is. At the same time, he must learn to

accept corresponding responsibilities. Subsequently, in various stages and to different degrees according to his abilities, he discovers the "links between the earth and the universe, the creature and the Creator".²⁴

This teaching aims at a dual knowledge, both existential (presence to the world) and ontological (transcendence). Its purpose is to overcome everything which could impede the discovery of the essential nature of *being* or prevent its full development. The process therefore involves a deliberate exposure to physical and psychological pain, which must be mastered, instead of being allowed to control man. The teaching is presented in veiled terms, so that each postulant may acquire whatever knowledge his abilities make accessible to him.

The first initiation takes place during adolescence and includes three stages:

- Separation: the neophyte leaves his family and enters the sacred forest, a consecrated place forbidden at any other time.
- The night of initiation: it is spent in the forest, without any shelter, in fear of evil spirits and wild beasts.
- The initiatory teaching: the youth undergoes a "death to the self" through physical pain (including that of circumcision) and emotional pain. This suffering causes him to become more aware of the difficulties inherent in being and of the obstacles to be overcome before he can throw off his own impediments: arrogance, selfishness, and a number of secondary characteristics (cowardice, vanity, etc.). These tests are intended to develop the applicant's courage and willpower, and at the same time they rid him of specific fears he may experience in facing the vicissitudes of life. Finally, by being submissive and docile as required, he is in a position to receive the teaching made available to him.

The "death" he has suffered is followed by "rebirth" to a new life: the young man is given a new name, and leaves the forest to return to his village, where celebrations are held to welcome him home.

The sacred and secret nature of the initiation ritual precludes a thorough study of the teaching's precise content. Nevertheless, knowing that initiation has been the customary education received, transmitted and lived in a spirit of reverence for ancestral traditions, we must acknowledge that, even if in some parts of Africa the rituals are no longer followed, at least the spirit of this instruction continues to be the cultural underpinning of Black civilization. We may therefore assess initiation through its effects, that is, the behaviour and modes of thinking that it has shaped and nurtured.

And it is precisely Senghor's assertion that his entire thinking is rooted in Black African tradition which has led us to initiation, as the very source of that tradition.

Our study of initiation makes us recognize that Senghor's life journey, as reflected in his poetic works, closely parallels the initiatory process.

This awareness gives us a new insight into the structure of his work, and indeed of his thinking. In his search for the significance of *being*, Senghor follows a path which faithfully mirrors the various stages of initiation.

- The first stage is the trial of separation. The neophyte's state of mind when he enters the forest is similar to Senghor's upon his arrival in Europe (in 1928). Both discover a hostile environment full of spirits, long periods of silence, and equally disturbing mysteries. Both feel like outsiders in an alien and threatening world whose language they cannot understand.

The first part of this essay will therefore discuss the walls or obstacles facing man and challenging him. The confrontation is all the more painful since it signals a break with the Kingdom of Childhood left behind the poet and the neophyte. Both harbour a deep nostalgia for this kingdom they had entered as children, a realm in full harmony with the cultural traditions of their fathers. In it they had lived happy and carefree. When this blessed state of grace is torn asunder, they are forced to venture forth into the paths of knowledge, which sorely test them as responsible human beings.

- The second stage brings the first major trial, the anguish of a night of initiation which the adolescent spends, without any protection, in the heart of the forest. Senghor experienced the same dread, in a benighted Europe echoing with cries of war, hatred and contempt.

With no possibility of escape, both of them come to grips with the existential agony of darkness. Paralyzing fears bear down on them, and they desperately seek strength deep down within themselves ... There they become fully conscious of their basic helplessness as individuals. The personal answers they grope for to escape or exorcize their fears come up against an existential dead-end, raising the ultimate temptation of despair, the horrible prospect of life in a ghetto.

Realizing at last that he cannot resolve his daunting existential difficulties solely by his own resources, the neophyte is now ready to enter the sacred hut in order to receive the traditional teaching. As for Senghor, he accepts

the necessary submissiveness involved in the "Return of the Prodigal Son".²⁵

- The third stage is that of the initiatory teaching itself. Presence and transcendence are experienced through the rituals of death and rebirth, and lead to an awareness of the dimensions of life. This is an immersion in the invigorating wellsprings of Negritude. It is also the emergence of the West's Christ-given values.

This last stage opens the way to a new fullness of being in keeping with a world where the values of the Kingdom of Childhood are rediscovered and justify the hope of a universal civilization.

It should be emphasized, however, that our analysis cannot be made to coincide with a mere chronological division of Senghor's works. The three stages we have identified do not constitute a linear progression. Instead, they provide a ternary beat, as it were, which shapes the poet's thinking. It is clear that each of the themes (obstacles, anguish, transcendence) derives implicitly from the other two, and at the same time summons them into being again, to an ever more fundamental degree. For in Senghor's view no gaze is self limiting, nothing is its own end, every thought is but a stage toward ever wider and deeper dimensions which emphasize the interrelationship of all things.

Undoubtedly, the initial theme (obstacles) is at the root of his commitment, which shows an unforgiving awareness of the barriers raised against the Blacks. Very soon, however, his gaze widens, in his subsequent writings, to take in the mutilations inflicted on Man by a society which confines him with its ideologies and diminishes him through analysis and abstraction. So that a second reading of his first collection of poems, *Shadow Songs* – and one could take other examples – leads to a deeper understanding of the message. No longer do these poems concern only Senghor or a homesick African lonely and alienated in the West, but indeed man as such, that is, every one of us, living the tragedy of rationalistic restriction and atrophy of the heart. And the distress of the African in Europe is also the distress of Western man.

This wider focus brings to light the identification of the African – as cultural model – with Man, who ideally seeks to develop and experience fully his sensual, intellectual and spiritual potential in accordance with the necessary bonds of kinship which link him with all mankind, the cosmos and God.

Now Man is offered in sacrifice on the altar of violence, of intolerance, and of the various ideologies governing our societies.

As Senghor contemplates mankind in the process of self-destruction, he is forcefully reminded of all the values of Negritude. Shouts of anguish and revolt echo forth in powerful waves from all his poems. He calls out to us and now demands that we heed Africa's answers to our predicament, that we learn another way of life ... He cries out in grief, but refuses to despair, so that his first movement is also a counterpoint felt throughout his works, just as shadows and pain are inseparable from life. Because he questions the reader and insists on a dialogue, he ceaselessly amplifies the poetic movement, and at the same time posits a belief in the possibility that all obstacles may be overcome.

The basis of this faith pervades all his poems as a resolve to bring to the world's attention the values of Negritude, in which the poet finds both refuge and serenity. Involved here is an important distancing or stepping back. It allows a reflection on the bewilderment of a *being* at grips with existence. It leads to an assessment of the West's solutions in relation to those offered by African culture, which goes back a thousand years or more.

A trail-blazing poet, Senghor leaves no stone unturned, overthrows all the obstacles that crop up throughout life, and examines them in the light of African wisdom and philosophy. He provides us with one enchantment after another and offers a completely new way of looking at our tribulations, which in itself helps to put things in a proper perspective and to see beyond the immediate

And transcendence, the third theme, expresses man's longing to move beyond his limitations, to leap over the walls hemming him in, to plumb his own hidden depths and integrate the many facets of his being, and finally to claim the basic freedom to love.

Through its artificial rules and ideologies, today's world denies man this freedom, so that any search for transcendence conjures up the shadow of yet another wall. The poetic thrust then gains new momentum like a widening spiral. For every new insight into the nature and dynamics of *being* opens new issues, and every new question is a search for an answer providing an expansion of being and leading toward a distant goal of enduring harmony. This typically African sense of the dialogue is thus evident in the very fabric of Senghor's works.

The three themes develop in unison and reinforce each other, gradually disclosing Senghor's ultimate search for a "reconciling agreement", which alone can enhance our being, and therefore our humanness, within a *Universal Civilization*.

The *Major Elegies*, a series of poems written in his middle years, proclaim the attainment of that reconciliation, for all the themes and endeavours focused on by the poet, statesman and philosopher come together here and express the fulfilment of the initiatory quest.

An initiator after being himself initiated, Senghor invites us to enter his universe and to decipher the messages of a humanism produced by cultural crossbreeding and bringing together into a harmonious whole all the cultural contributions of our societies.

Let us therefore follow him, as neophytes, into the depths of the initiatory forest.