

## The Night of Initiation: The Many Forms of Existential Angst

During his long progression through the forest of initiation, the neophyte is plunged into a hostile environment which makes him acutely aware of his frailty and helplessness. Beset by his own anxieties and oppressive solitude, without shelter whatsoever, he must spend the night deep within this forest, and is led to the painful realization that he is as afraid of living as of dying.

Similarly, Senghor embarks on a long descent into the European night:

*... in this century of hate and the atom bomb,  
When all power is dust and all force a weakness [...] the Super Powers  
Tremble in the night on their deep bomb silos and tombs ...!*

To begin with, he loses his way in a maze of existential anxieties. From a prison world to a nightmarish universe, his frenzied and bewildered mind is swept along by manifold tribulations, into the depths of despair where the ultimate question emerges: is he witnessing the early signs of the death of Man?

Several tentative responses begin to take shape. First, a withdrawal which is a regression or involution into a cultural ghetto where he is tempted to seek refuge and protection. But there are two others, equally extreme: the alternatives of despair and revolt. And yet, none of these responses is satisfactory: they merely express man's inability to overcome or extirpate anguish and suffering. They lead to an existential dead end. The discovery of the irreversible power of angst is indeed a painful process.

## 1 The Acknowledgment of Anxieties

The exploration of Senghor's world prompts an effort – as an initial response to the images revealing the mutilation of man and the deadlock of civilizations – to decipher the poet's messages. His voice is cruelly cut off by the hard and cold wall of hostile ideologies and by the indifference of averted faces, so that it is thrown back and echoes repeatedly in his poems. These poems convey the oppressive quality of a prison-like world that smothers every vital impulse and stifles the natural unfolding of life. The white man is taken to task:

You who have endured scorn and mockery, polite offenses,  
Discreet slurs and taboos and segregation.  
And you have torn from this too-loving heart  
The ties that bind it to the world's pulse.<sup>2</sup>

Senghor experiences this bewilderment on two levels.

First, in his lucid view of a world that rejects him, one in which he feels alienated from himself and his dreams. His existential anguish reflects deprivation, emptiness, silence, absence, disappointment, exile. The gap between his aspirations and possibilities provides a measure of his powerlessness, which gives rise to feelings of uneasiness and disorientation; these feelings cannot be conveyed, but are interiorized and buried deep within.

And secondly, the alienation is also experienced through the images dredged up by the nightmares overwhelming him. For the dread of foundering, of being crushed or totally ignored, turns into ominous dreams giving shape to primal fears, the very ones which the neophyte must face in learning to master life and take his place in the world.

Throughout Senghor's works we find this rhythm or alternation between the sagacity of consciousness, which leads to an awareness of alienation, and the visceral emotionality of the subconscious, with its images arising from the very depths of the human psyche, its visions of flight and panic, which no amount of rationalization can wholly explain or control.

### Awareness of Alienation

Essentially three series of images bring this alienation to light:

- The *cage*, which holds the poet captive and frustrates his longing for freedom and transcendence.

- The *prison*, where alienated man is confined, whereas he is eager to be fully present to the world.
- The *desert*: from Senghor's earliest poems, it symbolizes the arid rationalism of Western thought. Starting with the publication of *Nocturnes* in 1961, however, this image of the desert replaces that of the prison. The shift seems to coincide precisely with a major political development: in 1960, France's sub-Saharan colonies gained their independence, and Senghor the poet became President of Senegal. In this connection, he grew aware of the significance of "national freedom" in Western parlance.

## The Cage

Scattered throughout his works, every writer leaves clues or keys which enable us, if we know how to find and use them, to unlock one after another the doors leading to the very heart of his inspiration, to the source of his literary creation.

So it is that, in a poem entitled "Ndéssé or Blues", Senghor offers a particularly striking analogical image to express the depth of his anguish. This image is the cage, which becomes something of an obsession with him, and casts its dark shadow in many of his other poems as well. For Senghor's writing is reminiscent of the graphic approach peculiar to those minimalist painters who, somewhere on the canvas, concentrate all their creative energy in one large, intensely coloured spot which spatters over the entire painting, so that all the smaller radiating splashes direct the eye back to the primal impulse, to the generating spot wherein the work and the artist are one. This is also the impression conveyed by Senghor's writings: stark and vivid, the components of his thinking burst forth in specific poems, but the many splinters projected throughout the entire *œuvre* bring us unfailingly back to these seminal poems. As we have seen, the "sharks of the sky" portion of "Princess, your letter" is one of the key poems, illuminating the deadlock of civilizations. At the heart of the poet's vision of himself as a caged bird, "Ndéssé or Blues" is another:

My wings beat and break against the bars of the low sky,  
No ray of sun can pierce the soundless vault of my ennui.<sup>3</sup>

Senghor likens himself to a bird. This rich and fruitful metaphor shows the strength of the poet's longing. To be a bird is to conquer space and enjoy unrestrained vitality, to live without boundaries, to outreach one's original limitations, to answer the call of the open sky and of transcendence. To be a bird means to disregard the laws of gravity, to discover faraway and totally

different places, to join in the cosmic power of the wind, which bathes and penetrates all things, or rather blows through them without ever being captured, for it is the breath of the universe and carries birds from one continent to another. Indeed, birds have always symbolized the flight of the human spirit, particularly when it soars high above the mundane or seeks to probe what lies on the other side of reality.

In this context, nothing could be more destructive of joy than the sight of a caged bird. It is the ultimate antithesis of life and movement, an insult to the bird's beauty and dignity, a denial of its need for freedom to take wing toward the unknown, in striving and gladness.

The distress of the bird in its cage mirrors that of the poet unable to fulfil his vocation, paralysed as he is by the contradiction between his own nature and the existence forced upon him by the Western world, an environment which is the absolute opposite of everything the poet longs for: water, a symbol of life, is frozen into blocks of ice, and the sky is "low" – heavy, threatening, robbed of colour by the enveloping and blinding fog; this forms an almost "soundless vault", under which muted, cavernous and dismal echoes further deepen the weariness of spirit overcoming him.

The same dejection is expressed, with equal intensity, in "Fog"<sup>4</sup>, one of Senghor's earlier poems, written during his first stay in France. It focuses on the absence of warmth and sunlight, on the silence and elusiveness of shadow forms, on the exhalation of the City, whose modern civilization is worshipped, on the "dirty fog" and "cold soot". No longer light and transparent, the air has become grey and dark, thick and damp. It envelops the poet, blurs his vision, cuts him off from life and stifles his inspiration, holding him fast like a caged bird. Worse still, the fog pollutes and corrodes whatever it touches, and though these verbs normally apply to an engine, in this instance it is the poet's lungs that are affected ... Man is looked upon as though he were a machine, and is damaged in the same way ...

The poetic transposition of this suffocating atmosphere is reflected in a smothering of inspiration, in the "weak moan of my dying dreams". Indeed, dreams fade away "when all night long, ha! mists have weighed heavily / On my suffering",<sup>5</sup> and when life is hindered, the mind and spirit reel: "*Now it is noon* and it is evening. I hear distant voices / Draw near in the fog."<sup>6</sup> A dull sameness sets in, differences are blurred (between noon and evening, near and far); thoughts lose their temporal and spatial references, for the concepts of time and space have little relevance in confined areas.

The low sky, fog and mist isolate the poet, impede his vision, imagination and dreams. Everything baffles him in this environment which dulls the senses and cuts man off from life. In "Fog", this painful alienation is depicted in moving and realistic terms, and the description remains a most remarkable and many-faced literary metaphor. Just as the rotation of a kaleidoscope produces constantly shifting patterns, the reading of this poem successively reveals a whole series of connections between the words, and in turn these links conjure up images, each enhancing the intensity of the previous one with which it combines.

For instance, when we read "the pack of my starving [entrails]", the word "pack" resonates so naturally with the qualifier "starving" that a first vision emerges – that of wolves banding together to stalk their prey. But this image is closely interwoven with another, which expresses the poet's condition: "the pack of *my* entrails ..." The last word is thus personalized and leads us to the heart of the inner man, where desires, emotions and life impulses come together in a secret alchemy before bursting forth in overt action or behaviour ... The connecting term "pack" brings an inclusive perception of wild beast and entrails, which gives rise to a syncretic image highlighting the violence and urgency of the released impulses. One might therefore have expected to see the word "howl", which the dynamics of the image seemed to call for. Surprisingly, as in a jazz composition, the tempo is suddenly interrupted by a syncopated beat altering the rhythm: the pack does not howl, but "grows inside me" – which introduces a more subdued mood, one implying domestication. The last few lines bring a kind of decrescendo ("grows ... weak moan"), and the poem ends on a muted note. It is significant that these implicit calls are inaudible, for they remain unexpressed and inexpressible within the poet, like a silent scream.

Senghor's agonizing inner rebellion is as ineffective as the despair of the bird ceaselessly beating its wings against the bars of a cage, which inevitably brings us back to the first image in "Ndéssé or Blues" where, the poet writes, "my wings beat and break against the bars of the low sky". The rhythm of the alliteration emphasizes a stubborn but painful rebellion; the diminuendo indicates an exhaustion of movement.

The theme of the cage emerges in several poems, in words that might seem strange in their context, were it not for the subtle way in which they echo lines in "Ndéssé or Blues", where Senghor reveals a major facet of his sensitivity: the claustrophobia produced in him by anything that limits his vision,

constrains his thinking or hampers his imagination. Exclusion is tantamount to confinement and causes a reaction of oppressive anxiety, absolutely similar to that of the caged bird deprived through human cruelty of the freedom it longs for, a condition the poet experiences in the same way:

Like the village [simpleton], I see the vision, I hear the mode  
And the instrument, but the words like a herd of stumbling buffaloes  
Bump against my teeth and my voice opens on the void.<sup>7</sup>

The similar inability of colonized black Africans to achieve self-determination conjures up another image:

We are small birds fallen from the nest,  
Drooping bodies without hope.  
[...] And here we are trapped in the nets,  
Victims of the cruelty of civilized men...<sup>8</sup>

In "Letter to a Prisoner", loss of freedom is again one of the themes: "[...] Their shame locks you in your cage of solitude."<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, the poet feels ineffectual and paralysed ("*Useless beak*, wingless bird, I slide along your transparent face")<sup>10</sup>, though he longs to be like a bird, no longer earth-bound, no longer subject to the tyranny of events, free to follow his imagination ... As Bachelard wrote, "to imagine is to break away, taking flight toward a new life".<sup>11</sup> But a door has been slammed in Senghor's face, his mouth is like a cage, his words cannot convey their message:

*I've composed a song for you as sweet as murmuring doves*  
At noon [...]  
I wove a song for you and you didn't listen.<sup>12</sup>

Cut off from his dreams, Senghor experiences an excruciating sense of emptiness:

[...] Once again a moaning call,  
But only the cries of mute birds answer me [...]<sup>13</sup>

All these poems bring us back to "Ndéssé or Blues", in which questions are wedged between two languid and nostalgic lines, interrupting their measured rhythm:

No ray of sun can pierce the soundless vault of my ennui.  
What sign to recover? What keys to strike?  
How can I reach the god of long-distance spears?  
The royal summer of the South, down there would arrive  
Too late, yes, and in agonizing September!

The harshness of these questions, bringing not the slightest hint of an answer, reflects the panic of a caged bird no longer hoping for freedom, still beating its wings against the bars. With something of the same desperate persistence, Senghor continues to raise fundamental questions throughout his poems...

A first reading would seem to indicate that this alienation was caused by racism, by the Western world's rejection of Africa, on both the human and cultural levels. From the musical quality of Senghor's poetry, however, there arises a kind of echo, first muted then more insistent, of Baudelaire's "Spleen":

When skies are low and heavy as a lid  
over the mind tormented by disgust ...  
When earth becomes a trickling dungeon where  
Trust like a bat keeps lunging through the air,  
beating tentative wings along the walls ...  
When rain falls straight from unrelenting clouds,  
forging the bars of some enormous jail ...<sup>14</sup>

These shared sources of inspiration show how thinking can converge, and help to erase the artificial boundaries between black Africans and white men. When Senghor's voice and Baudelaire's merge, we hear a message transcending any specific context, be it temporal, spatial or racial. This message expresses a more basic synthesis, relating not just to the poet, but to Man, whose wings are often deliberately broken so that he may learn to walk better, to fit the mould of a confining and repressive society.

And yet, how could one fail to recognize that poetry is an inseparable and essential part of thinking? It is in fact the realm of imagination, of dreams and utopia, of lofty aims and principles, of untrammelled freedom. Every man carries a poet within himself, one whose voice needs to be raised and heard. But our societies stifle the poet in man, thus unbalancing and impoverishing his humanity, each of whose facets tends to become sadly functional and to be justified only through its usefulness. In "Adhésion", this is emphasized by Mackam the storyteller:

My friends, behold the human beings of the future: these mutilated civilized men see with their eyes, walk with their feet, taste with their tongue, digest with their stomach, grasp with their fingers. All their joy is fragmented and limited: their desire, merrymaking, embraces and excitement are all limited, and so is their pathetic, self-conscious folly. Man is already a cemetery of small pleasures, he plays hide-and-seek with his neurotic body and his miserly soul.<sup>15</sup>

Senghor too relates the adolescent frustrations he felt when trying to learn the Western ways: "[...] the springs in the narrow shade of Latin muses, / My so-called angel protectors, were stone wells, *Ngas-o-bil!* / You never quenched my thirsts."<sup>16</sup>

Stone-imprisoned water, symbolizing the human mind fettered by materialism, may slake man's thirst, but hardly promotes dreams, whereas the poet longs to drink deeply the live, free and "bubbling" waters of the "Spring-of-the-Elephants", for they are utterly refreshing and always available, even while escaping downstream. Spring water denotes life itself, ever bursting forth, ever fleeting and new.

Such is the poet's soul. This need to escape and live more fully is one of the basic impulses that stimulate his thinking. This impulse finds expression in the theme of the journey, which plays an important role in Senghor's writings. His yearning to experience everything the world has to offer is boundless: "I am thirsty, so thirsty for [new spaces and other waters]."<sup>17</sup> It is an insistent longing, emphasized by the plural forms ("spaces ... waters") connoting multiplicity and otherness, and suggesting the elusiveness of the sought-after discoveries and rebirths in heightened awareness.

The longing to travel and nostalgia for faraway places are also evident in *Letters in the Season of Hivernage*:

**And I am tired, not weary, alas, just tired of going nowhere  
When the urge to leave tears me apart.<sup>18</sup>**

The wish to set sail, to discover, to launch into action bears witness to the vital energy at work in the depths of Senghor's thinking. It feeds his dreams and his will to overcome all obstacles, to escape confinement, so that (unlike Baudelaire and Verlaine) he never sinks completely into melancholia.

It is true that the images of the cage, City, fog and stone well reflect a painful personal experience, and might inhibit the full spontaneity and exuberance of life, promoting behaviour based on and controlled by self-interest and cold

reason ... But Senghor feels "Like an untamed leopard in its narrow cage",<sup>19</sup> and the references to birds, air and "bubbling" waters give evidence of the poet's determination to seek the wellsprings of life. In his post-Independence writings, the positive symbols emerge triumphant, and Senghor's poetics appear increasingly quickened by a cosmic vocation.

Fully human, Senghor never separates dreams from action. Though he deplores cages for birds or poets, he also notes the quasi-confinement of those men who are victims of their own success, for his familiarity with the Western world allows him to see that a high position can in many cases entail a kind of slavery to overwhelming obligations.

The obsessive image of a prison thus emerges to describe the alienation not just of the black African, but of all men in our highly competitive and hierarchical societies.

### The Prison

It is clear that, in most instances, the images that occur to the human mind reflect underlying feelings and perceptions. Unlike the theme of the cage – fully expressed, in lines amounting to a self-portrait, by the unforgivingly clear-sighted poet – the insistent yet somewhat indefinite image of the prison, both enticing and elusive, comes repeatedly to the fore in Senghor's pre-Independence poems. His gaze is like that of a solitary prisoner observing the details of his cell.

On the basis of selected poems, we propose to review these features of the traditional mental picture associated with the word "prison". We will thus capture the atmosphere of the typical jail, without reaching a specific representation. The term conjures up a dark, humid and unhealthy place, bars on windows, and no view whatsoever of the outside world; it also suggests cold and dirty walls, barbed-wire enclosures, machine guns mounted in watchtowers, and the misery of the poor wretches condemned by other men to the solitude of a non-person.

Prison is generally treated as the shadow clinging to the Black presence. This is sometimes due simply to a possessive adjective denoting dependence: for instance, Senghor connects the darkness of his prison with the "humidity" of his life (rain, fog, slime, oppressive dampness, swamps and steamy forests are major and recurrent features of Senghorian landscapes). Even dead, the Senegalese soldiers are seen merely as prisoners "stretched out by the captive roads [...], lying gloomily on French soil",<sup>20</sup> where they remain "lying under ice and death".<sup>21</sup>

In other poems, the image of the prison emerges clearly, as in "Liberation",<sup>22</sup> which ends by questioning the very meaning of the title: "Now freed from my prison, I miss already / The whole-grain bread and the weary sleepless nights." Yet, throughout the poem, the struggle to break away from both confinement and regret is exceptionally violent:

**The torrents of my blood whistled along the banks of my cell  
During the night and the days more lonely than the night.  
The dams and walls held fast against the treacherous weight,  
Against the hammering; and there I was  
Beating my head in despair like a disturbed child.**

Elsewhere, Senghor admits to remaining "A prisoner of cold, tightly drawn white sheets, / Of fits of anguish entwining me inextricably".<sup>23</sup> But the shadow of the prison is cast even more insidiously through the context of associations, that is, through the presence of connecting words resonating so naturally with the image of the prison that their use is enough for a jail atmosphere to suffuse the poems. For instance, the author dreams "in the narrow penumbra of afternoon".<sup>24</sup> Similarly, he refers to "This vacancy of three months like the dim corridor / Of three captive semesters".<sup>25</sup> He hears afar "a deep wail [...] / [that] rises from the mines, out there, in the far south".<sup>26</sup> He describes "The Enlisted Man's Despair",<sup>27</sup> the title of a poem whose contradictory terms confine the volunteer on two counts, through the irony of his fate and through his inability to become the hero he had chosen to be:

**For two weeks he has been there, turning around, ruminating  
On the new Great Joke [...]  
He has been given a servant's clothes [...]  
And boots for his domesticated free feet.**

By the same token, Senghor shows us the extent to which this confinement sticks to the Black African's skin and arises, as it were, from his presence in the white world. And "from the solitude of my precious – and closely guarded – / Residence, of my black skin", he notices "the void made around my skin".<sup>28</sup>

This isolation leads to a marginal existence: he skirts the edge of things and places, as though separated from them by an invisible barrier denying him contact or access.

This world of silence, absence and darkness precludes knowledge, hinders a sense of self, and even more markedly prevents the poet from achieving the *fullness of being* he longs for. In this environment, grey shadows surround him, and his soul feels "... the crushing / Solitude of big cities".<sup>29</sup> Due to the alienation he suffers, his heart, spirit and entire being are broken and utterly defeated. Rejected by the West, he becomes virtually a prisoner, and expresses this rejection through a variety of life-affirming verbs set in a negative form which impedes and even paralyzes his vital impulses. These verbs (to be, know, breathe, recognize, hear, participate, advance, etc.) essentially suggest expansion of life, and their negation or inactivation is the device chosen by Senghor to denote annihilation.

Assuredly, condemnations of racism and colonialism – both of them incapable, in the words of Rabéarivelo, of "bringing about a synthesis between culture and human relations" – are found in the writings of many black poets and novelists, and an outstanding example is the deeply moving conclusion of Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala*, published in 1964:

... the tragedy affecting our people is that of a man left to his own devices in a world which is not his, a world he did not make, a world where he understands nothing. It is the tragedy of a man without intellectual direction, of a man walking blindly, at night, in some hostile city like New York.<sup>30</sup>

Most African writers simply take note of this state of affairs and go no further; they even show a tendency to cling adamantly to such a view, so that it serves as an unquestioned basis for their thinking, which then develops along vindictive lines, more political than philosophical. In Senghor's works, on the contrary, philosophical thinking takes precedence over a strictly political viewpoint, so that his way of looking at things challenges each one of us. A fresh reading of his poems calls attention to two fundamental problems: the atrophy of our senses, and the need for a continuous renewal in heightened awareness of this world, where insane wars and "empty horror and prison"<sup>31</sup> are still building-blocks for the History of mankind.

One should, of course, remember that many of these poems – and particularly those in *Black Hosts* – were written by Senghor between 1940 and 1942, when he was a prisoner of war in Front Stalag 230. However, the thoughts that captivity inspired in him merge with a fundamental anguish, present throughout his writings, and arising from a perception of the inner emptiness which keeps man from fully embracing life. And while prison was the symbol

of this anguish as long as colonialism prevented the flowering of black African thinking, from the decisive year of Independence (in 1960) the image of the desert replaced that of the prison to symbolize the solitude of the Black African, and indeed of Man.

## The Desert

The desert is frequently mentioned in Senghor's poems, and this is to be expected, since the Sahel forces itself on the awareness of all Africans in the area as a familiar presence, as an uncompromising teacher whose closeness entails many constraints. The local inhabitants must learn to live the desert, to meet its demands, to understand its lessons. They cannot distance themselves from this reality, for a sense of the desert suffuses their thinking. And, as we know, to a Black African an object "does not signify what it represents, but rather what it suggests and creates".<sup>32</sup> So that when he "responds to the *object*, becomes engrossed in it and assimilates it so intimately that he reaches a new state of being in the awareness of the object, then his knowledge is based much more on the analogical images arising from such a vivid experience than on the novelty of his impressions".<sup>33</sup>

This being so, *desert* is probably one of the most fascinatingly open-ended words in Senghor's writings. The profusion of symbols, associations and analogies raised by him in connection with the desert reveals the various facets of his personality as a philosopher-poet and statesman.

In the desert, Senghor sees an image of solar perfection: a shadowless light, an all-consuming purity. It is the remote place where life meets death, where man experiences the aridity and barrenness of a landscape from which he can expect not the slightest concession, where his longings call forth nothing more than a mirage ... And man, facing a solitude from which there is no escape, confronts his own truth; in so doing, he discovers not only his limitations and weaknesses, but also his ultimate resources, the strength he can muster in order to overcome daunting obstacles and stimulate his will to live:

... O Desert, shadeless desert,  
Austere earth, land of purity, cleanse me of all  
My petty desires and the contamination of being civilized.  
Let your intense light wash my face, bathe me in the dry violence  
Of a sandstorm and like the white dromedary, let my nine-day lips  
In nine days be purified of all earthly water, and be silent.<sup>34</sup>

His flesh and mind stamped with the signs and stimuli of the desert, nurtured by its messages, Senghor shows in these lines the deeply Sahelian cast of his inspiration, which is also evident in the originality of various images scattered throughout his writings.

Thus, he mentions in a powerful metaphor "the eternal thirst of my blood in its desert of desires",<sup>35</sup> which emphasizes the close bond between the poet and the desert. Now, although "desire" conveys all the richness and exigency of life – libido, will, hope, curiosity, longing and passion – in this instance, it is limited and offset by the word "desert", with its connotations of unquenchable thirst and constant suffering linked to the vision of dry and silent expanses of land seeming to challenge man's right to live. The effectiveness of this verbal combination arises from the coupling of two antimonic terms made inseparable through an alliteration that is also a play on words. This dual stylistic device highlights in a most unusual way the contradictions basic to "the eternal thirst of my blood".

In "Elegy of Midnight",<sup>36</sup> the same image of the desert emerges again, when Senghor wonders "If that was Hell: the lack of sleep / This desert of the Poet ...", this bare and baring place, which denies man's right to dream.

These quotations show the extent to which the word "desert" has produced an idiom suggestive, rather than descriptive, of an ambiguous landscape where burning light brings clear-sightedness; where aridity breeds awareness of an unyielding environment contrasting desire and possibility; where imagination withers for want of sources of inspiration – a whole complex of related images whose connotative meaning reveals the way in which the Sahelian philosopher-poet looks at the world.

Quite naturally, these images remain operative in Senghor's mind and undergo an analogical shift until they coincide with some of his perceptions of the West. The desert light is then transmuted into the lucidity of a dry and abstract mind callously indifferent to the mystery at the heart of human beings and contemptuous of their passions and anxieties, denying them the right to exist, save in the clarity of a purely functional behaviour. The poet's anguish is expressed in "Suddenly Startled",<sup>37</sup> where he sings of love, absence and suffering, in the crescendo of an emotion reaching its highest pitch before ending with the restrained statement of a basic perception:

**I hover around the hurricane lamp, possessed like a moth,  
Burning the wings of my soul on the siren song of your letters.  
Here I am torn and charred, caught between the fear of death**

And the terror of living. And no book can ease this anguish.  
The spirit is more of a desert than the Sahara.

This barren spirit seeks to overrun the entire world. Senghor likens it to the desert wind, the harmattan, with its dual symbolism of purity and death. This wind from the East "bites all flesh, burning everything impure". It seeks to reach the essence of beings and things ... In the process, however, it dries out everything, so there remains

Nothing but the bitterness of harmattan biting like snake's teeth  
At best, nothing but the rising sand, swirling leaves and straw  
And bullets and wings and bugs into a storm,  
Dead things in [reason's bitter erosion].  
Nothing but the East Wind, drying our throats like empty desert wells.<sup>38</sup>

The last few words convey the sharp drop in mood brought on by images connoting nonexistence (nothing ... nothing ... dead things ... nothing ...), which express the depth of the poet's bewilderment, caused by solitude and grief. Life is totally absent from this picture. Paraphrasing Montaigne's well-known words, we might say that knowledge without love is man's downfall ...

This leads us back to the Enlisted Man<sup>39</sup> gazing upon "the Sudanese plain ... dried out from the East Wind / And the Nordic masters of Time". He sees "nothing but sand, taxes, extra duty, whips", all at once. The harmattan carries what comes from the desert and from the Western world, as though it were a homogeneous mixture. To be sure, we know that this sand-laden desert wind burns face and lungs, and injures the eyes. When taxes, extra duties and whips are added, what are the results? How can one breathe or even live in its fiery breath, so inimical to human beings?

... See our lips without oil  
And full of cracks, beneath the harmattan and the marshland swamps.  
The sap has run dry at its source, the wells are empty ...<sup>40</sup>

The desert also affects Senghor's outlook as a statesman, and his disillusionment, as the President of Senegal, causes him to speak in grim metaphors: "... Liberty [is a desert]"<sup>41</sup> and again

The splendour of such honours resembles a Sahara,  
An immense void, with neither erg nor rocky plateau,  
With no grass, no twinkling eye, no beating heart.<sup>42</sup>

One might assume that great bitterness underlies such images. But might they not arise instead from Senghor's clear-sightedness in abandoning the illusions which continue to fascinate the West, so sensitized to the ideological impact of a "freedom" loudly and constantly invoked throughout the world, yet in many instances somewhat devoid of content? As for the quest for decorations and other distinctions, does it not denote a false value system and an absurd propensity to live for appearances and status? Senghor demystifies these concerns: honours as well as an abstract or formal concept of freedom fail to take reality into account. They are in fact psychological deserts infinitely more dangerous than geographical ones. In Senghor's view, the only absolute reality is the human soul. None can destroy it without by the same token destroying the very meaning of life. It is the true abode of freedom. Society must therefore be built on the basis of the soul's needs: "For the engineers' dams have not satisfied / The thirsty souls in polytechnic villages!"<sup>43</sup>

This reference to "thirsty souls" inevitably suggests certain questions that lie at the very heart of Senghor's thinking, questions raised repeatedly in his works:

- How and why could one forget that "*religion... is the very lifeblood of black African civilization?*"<sup>44</sup>

- And why would one wish to enter "the Sahel of rationalism", whose disastrous effects are pinpointed by Senghor in his July 1953 address to the Fifth Congress of the Senegalese Democratic Bloc:

Need I add that our hunger will be even greater, and that we will run the risk of exhaustion, if we are unwise enough to venture into this desert. Many Africans – who no longer practise their religion or merely go through the motions for electoral campaign purposes – have already lost their soul. This is the fundamental reason for the spread of *nepotism* and corruption in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, throughout Senghor's writings, the ambiguity of the word "desert" is perceptible. No sooner uttered, it shows two distinct faces. The first evokes the outlook of those who inhabit the Sahel and who *understand* the desert. Theirs is a participative knowledge of communion involving introspection, self-discipline and abnegation, as well as a spirituality drawing on the clarity of vision reached through an existence reduced to the barest essentials, a spirituality fed by the contiguity of life and death, by suffering accepted with equanimity, and by a determination to experience and cherish life in spite of

all difficulties. The desert is a place where man discovers the virtues of humility and learns to see himself in the proper perspective.

The other face expresses the absolute and inescapable solitude that develops in the desert of man's arrogance and self-aggrandizement, when his mind refuses, through pride and grandiosity, to acknowledge his natural limitations. He loses himself in an inhospitable wasteland of his own making. This is the desert of rationalism, which brings man back "to your light, *O Civilization!* / And to your brutal [and so] cruel reality".<sup>46</sup>

While the cage and the prison connote the mutilation of man by man, the desert is the inevitable response to human presumption.

And yet, arrogance rules the world. Perhaps more than anyone else, Senghor the statesman is aware of it, as he sees the West attempting to convert Africa to the materialistic and technical rationalism embraced by much of mankind. For the sake of modernism, Africans are urged to make a clean sweep of their traditions, to give up their customary educational approach, their way of looking at the world, their past, their philosophy, their spirituality ... The West refuses to listen to Africa, to learn anything from Africa. Senghor the poet expresses this state of affairs through the confining images of the cage, the prison and the desert, which symbolize the three stages of alienation. But how can one manage to live in such a state of exile from one's own self? As he put it in a speech to the First Biennial International Poetry Symposium held in Knokke in 1952, "exile is less the physical pain of being uprooted from Africa than that of being torn away from oneself. Slavery and colonialism have emptied the black African of his virtues, of his substance, to turn him into an 'assimilated' native, a negative of the white man, a cipher in which appearance has taken the place of being."<sup>47</sup>

Now Senghor is caught in a blind alley, in the silence, emptiness and night of all the betrayals he suffered. These are among the darkest moments, when he is overcome by "the agony of shadows, this passion / For death and light".<sup>48</sup> At such times, he paints a world that excludes him, a world haunted by infernal powers. Is it not true "That Hell is the absence of any gaze?"<sup>49</sup>

He describes a night drawing us toward the hidden depths of existential anguish. His unflinching clear-sightedness is that of a soul scorning evasion and experiencing need, emptiness, silence, absence, unfulfilled dreams, helplessness and exile, all things most difficult to integrate into life, and therefore expressed through spiritual or psychological images.

Here we reach the heart of the initiation night, when the chthonic forces of

life acquire a volcanic violence and release their boiling lava, their nightmarish visions. These forces are those of the "primal fears", welling up at the extreme edge of human experience, at the precise boundary where man faces his inability to overcome the dread which existence itself inspires in him at such excruciating moments.

## Nightmares

In the middle of the night, only nightmares can express the anguish arising from deep within us. Monochrome landscapes of all our fears and sorrows loom up under the thrust of the unconscious and the pressure of emotions and resentments repressed during daylight, when reason holds sway. Darkness releases them, and now they appear before us, startling and challenging.

Are these ultimate manifestations of all that is genuinely human? The last gaze of man over a world where respiration and inspiration bring nothing but pain?

Sleepless nights, O nights of Manhattan!  
Stirring with delusions while car horns blare the empty hours  
And murky streams carry away hygienic loving  
Like rivers overflowing with the corpses of babies.<sup>50</sup>

The poet feels he is suffocating:

*These roads of insomnia, noon roads and the long roads of night!*  
I've been civilized for so long,  
Yet I have not appeased the white God of Sleep.  
I speak his language well, but with such a barbaric accent!  
The shadows are black, the scorpions are the colour of night sand  
And clouds of torpor weigh upon my chest  
Where crakes and underbrush grow.<sup>51</sup>

Senghor shares the neophyte's determination to reach the heart of the forest of initiation, to explore the West in spite of obstacles and rejection, to tear away the veil hiding an alien and hostile world, to accept the dangers inherent in the quest:

We walked through Dyeri, plodding like water buffaloes [...]  
[Now the scorpions were sandy and the chameleons of every hue].  
The monkeys' laughter shook the palaver tree,

And the night like panther skin was streaked with traps.  
A thousand harsh obstacles: each tuft of grass hid an enemy.<sup>52</sup>

In "Song of the Initiate", man's endurance is sorely tested by his own frailty when faced with the surrounding hostility:

I slip on the elephants' footprints on the soapy bridge  
Of her riddles. How can I unravel the ruse of vines,  
Appease the hissing snakes? And once again a wounded call,  
And only an evil siren responds. Once again a moaning call,  
But only the cries of mute birds answer me,  
Like children slaughtered at night, and the flight of red  
Monkeys. The tsetses and humming birds aggravate my anguish,  
And I sweat and tremble from the cold ...<sup>53</sup>

Through their echoing sounds which spread uniformly as though issuing from a single source, the alliterations produce an auditory confusion between the noisy presence of the snakes (connoting the vines of the forest, where initiation traditionally takes place) and that of the evil siren (suggesting Western technology): in both cases there is the same stridency hinting at danger. The impression thus created vividly brings together the neophyte's fears in the forest and the anguish of the African experiencing life in the West.

A spectral analysis of these images arising from the European night – caused by a total lack of understanding – highlights a few key words that reveal the depth of the poet's existential anguish, and also his bewilderment, which provides a measure of his helplessness in a solitary combat against dark, oppressive and elusive forces:

- First of all, there is the subjective perception of things seen by the author. The qualifiers chosen by him (perfidious, cold, watery, soapy, wounded, evil, captive, mute) express distrust, powerlessness and suffering.
- As for the verbs, which provide action, some connote death (fade, lament, slaughter, aggravate, oppress), while others show the subject as victim (I shiver ... I am lost ... I slip ... I sweat and tremble from the cold).
- The creatures mentioned in these poems are also nightmarish: reptiles and scorpions crawl or slither among the words, stealthy and poisonous, quick to bite or sting, and difficult for man to guard against, since most of the time he neither sees nor hears them. Anyone familiar with tropical forests knows how easy and dangerous it is to mistake a snake for a vine. The sinuous

beauty which they share is fascinating, and at the same time repulsive, for they are both strong enough to immobilize, smother or destroy whatever is caught in their coils ... One is reminded of the disarming hypocrisy of some speeches against which Senghor had to defend himself ... There are also chameleons mimicking the surrounding colours, attitudes and opinions, for self-protection, and changing again just as easily, in order to survive all the vicissitudes of life or of politics. They were already a prominent feature of the Paris scene during the war years, when Senghor noticed, in "the boulevard crowds, / Sleepwalkers who have renounced their human identity, / [Deaf chameleons of change]"<sup>54</sup> After the war, he met with more of these masters of camouflage in the French government's corridors of power.

How can one survive the jungle of politics, where so many high principles are proclaimed, only to be subsequently ignored, where promises are followed by procrastination and betrayal? Constantly thwarted impulses, a sensation of treading water, of being bogged down, of skidding on slippery surfaces (treacherous paths, soapy bridges), these are the unpleasant reactions one experiences when dealing with deceit: "*Forgetting all those lies* like sores on suburban fields, / All those betrayals, all those explosions, all this death in the soul."<sup>55</sup> The use of the participle shows the message's ambiguity, for two interpretations emerge, different but simultaneous (one *must* forget... *how* can one forget), which allows us to sense the turmoil of the poet's innermost thinking. Furthermore, since this dilemma is expressed in a single word (forgetting), we come to understand better the statesman-poet's obstinate stand, for in his view there is no need to decide, to choose one mode of action rather than the other, a view which reveals clearly the nature of Senghor's maieutics, that is, of his ability to discover the latent truths he carries deep within himself. This dialectic quality of his thinking is typically African, for "in black Africa [...] everything is ambivalent",<sup>56</sup> whereas European methodology favours rationalization and choice, reached by successive elimination of all solutions other than those based on efficiency, on achievement of the intended purpose. While African thinking is comprehensive and embraces all aspects of a question, Western thinking is normative and proceeds through exclusion, through a simplification of reality.

The road which the Western world shows Africa is fraught with danger, and Senghor's awareness of this danger gives rise to these nightmarish images. They all revolve around a basic obsession: the destruction of traditional black African civilization. Hence the sadness that comes over him when he contemplates his native village, which feeds the roots of his Africanness:

And again the ruin of Dylôr, the manor overgrown  
With cactus and *khakhams*. Inside  
Termites do their treacherous work and reptiles lie about.  
The stormy evenings beat long against the doors.<sup>57</sup>

Such is the ghostly landscape of his childhood. Traditional Africa is falling apart, and the poet's cries are heard:

Deliver me from [...] the ant's elaborate design, [...] the slimy hatreds  
Of the third day oozing out of the swamp mud  
Ha! on everything, from the spongy soil and the White Man's  
Soapy tunes...<sup>58</sup>

Like an underground stream deep within words and images, surfacing in only a few poems, this anguish raises one major question never taken up again elsewhere, in any other form. Its uniqueness and the seriousness with which it is voiced are compelling, and the question indicates a highly significant crossroads in the poet's thinking:

*Why escape on wandering sailboats? My head is a putrid swamp  
Where I mould monotonous bricks. Why escape on the icy  
Wings of migratory birds?*<sup>59</sup>

From these lines, one might gather that Senghor is reconsidering the commitment made during his youth. At that time, he felt "that the best way to prove the worth of black culture was to steal their own weapons from the colonizers",<sup>60</sup> to absorb their culture. Now he seems to ponder the validity of this policy, but leaves the question unanswered. There is nothing here to either establish or disprove the cogency of his initial stand. The uncertainty remains, a challenge that stimulates Senghor's thinking on the difficulty of living as an African while reaching a heightened state of *being* in sharper awareness of the Western world.

The lines express a spreading anxiety reflected by a chaotic landscape of swamps and quagmires that brings forth fears of sinking in quicksand, of suffocation and death. And yet, paradoxically, this anxiety is not morbid. Far from restricting life, it leads to a deeper appreciation of existence since, in order to live fully, one must acknowledge at the outset that anguish and suffering are among the basic realities anchoring man to the world. It is therefore advisable to be prepared for these trials, so as not to be taken unawares. Deliberately facing them strengthens one's inner resources and builds self-mastery.

Anguish is present at all levels in Senghor's works, but never really takes root. Whenever it emerges, appropriate responses develop, and these are fundamentally personal, for the poet faces adversity in the solitude of the initiation night, of the European night.

## 2 Responses to Anguish

The neophyte's first steps in the sacred forest and the African's first contacts with Europe give rise to the same fear of being cut off from the past, of losing the very foundation of one's existence as well as the comfort of a way of life that promotes a sense of security and protects its own integrity. Both the neophyte and the African suddenly face the harsh challenge of an alien and hostile environment where they cannot feel at home. They become wanderers in search of the meaning of life, seekers after the Grail: "So it was," writes Senghor, "that I arrived in Paris on a rainy and cold October morning. I registered at the Sorbonne as a student in the Liberal Arts School. At the end of a week, I was utterly lost."<sup>61</sup> It is no less significant that "I fear" is the first verb in the initial poem of his opening volume ("I fear the crowd of my fellows with such faces of stone").<sup>62</sup>

His instinctive reaction is therefore to turn back, allowing his inner eye and his thinking to dwell once again on the past. He is inevitably torn between contradictory impulses: life beckons through the reality of an alien world, yet the pull of the past draws him away, and he stands apart. This leads, in our view, to a contemplative form of poetry which remains aloof from action, so that involution is the first movement of Senghorian lyricism. A regressive attitude, a reluctance to accept the world in all its creative continuity, offering scant protection, however, against existential angst. The poet sinks into the many forms of sadness bred by this affective deficit, he is swamped by feelings of discouragement and confusion. The emptiness he experiences then leads him to a sudden reaction or change of heart: the desperate need to transmute the mood about to destroy him finally brings an outburst of previously repressed rage. *Black Hosts*, and even more so *Ethiopiennes*, express this attitude of indignant rebellion akin in some respects to that found in the writings of Césaire. Unlike the latter, however, Senghor does not allow his inspiration to be totally carried away by the surge of an aggressivity whose dangers are obvious to him: these include not only the risk of abandoning any attempt at a dialogue with the West, but also that of seeing hatred, which turns man into a monster, distort human thinking.

Violence is then transmuted by a humanism drawing its power from creative

Nature, where man must rediscover the primal and mysterious forces composing and defining him. From an essentially instinctive content to a highly philosophical message, we witness throughout Senghor's writings the development and deepening of one of the main features of his thinking, one of the essential facets of his reflection.

In a gradual progression toward a greater maturity of being, involution, political rebellion and humanistic protest are the three stages of a victory over anguish.

### **Involution**

The first movement, involution, is evident essentially in *Shadow Songs*, Senghor's first collection of poetry. It is a largely unconscious reflex, the quasi-tropism of a sensitivity wounded by a corrosive civilization. The poet takes refuge in his memories, seeking to crouch among them, in spontaneous and quite natural self-defence. In a paper presented at the 1963 Dakar Seminar on French-Speaking African Writers, Janheinz Jahn noted that "when it is impossible to resist a powerful oppressor, regressive behaviour becomes the only weapon. In such a context, this attitude, familiar to psychologists since the research of Freud and Kurt Lewin, takes on its full significance." Jahn was trying to formulate a sociological law acceptable to his rationalism, which both informed and limited his overly Western study of Africa. However, he overlooked the ability of African thinking to invent and transcend. Though his formulation applies to some politicized movements (authenticity, the cultural ghetto of "Black is beautiful") which are above all a rejection of "white culture" – something one might call an anti-choice, having little in common with true freedom – it should be recognized, where Senghor is concerned, that this involution occupies only an instant of his life journey, admittedly an important one since it allowed him to regain courage and confidence and to resist Western violence, but nevertheless a transitory phase, like a halt in a refuge for someone seeking to experience the world.

It should also be remembered that, from 1928 to 1945, circumstances prevented Senghor from returning to Africa more than once, in 1938. These years were therefore a long period of exile, during which he had to nurture his African roots. This explains the intimate mood of *Shadow Songs*, which start with an awareness of absence and deprivation, and end with "Return of the Prodigal Son", a poem celebrating the joy of homecoming, in which "I bring back to life all my earthly virtues",<sup>65</sup> as he put it.

Sensing his own vulnerability, Senghor hesitates to face the destructive anguish which, in spite of himself, invades his perceptions, thinking and presence to the world. His frailty is expressed through prosaic images conveying the banality of everyday life ("I fear ... headaches ... the fragile veins"), and even more clearly through the acknowledgment (in "Porte Dorée") of his uneasiness:

The smallest taxi makes my heart roll and dip  
As if on the swells of the Atlantic.  
Just one cigarette makes me stagger  
Like a sailor on shore leave returning to his ship.  
And I say as awkwardly as the long-ago schoolboy from the bush:  
"Good morning, Miss ... how do you do?"<sup>64</sup>

The deliberate and heavy dullness of the words chosen by Senghor is surprising. It contrasts sharply with the poem's lyrical movement and, without warning or transition, lets us sink into the boredom and lassitude he experiences.

In this light, his favourite places of refuge become understandable, for instance the "glass tower ... this observatory like the outskirts of town"<sup>65</sup> (meaning that it is removed from the City, from life). In the next poem, "Porte Dorée", he writes: "I have chosen to live near the rebuilt walls of my memory, / And from the top of the high ramparts / I remember Joal-of-the-Shades, / The face of the land of my blood." Highly meaningful words, explaining where he elects to remember the past, in a closely guarded haven, away from the noise of the city (high ramparts), a restful spot where he is able to breathe freely, maintain his values, protect and define his own being, and regain his strength.

Bachelard is no doubt right in asserting that "the real world suddenly vanishes when one chooses to live in the house of memory", where one "feels protected", so that "this house is in a manner of speaking a counteruniverse or a universe of opposition".<sup>66</sup> It protects *against* the anxieties of the world, left outside its walls. The poet can then lead a different life: "At least I am consoled each evening by the wandering moods of my double."<sup>67</sup>

In this privileged setting, he dreams and remembers. Not only does the past become present, but the present becomes timeless, with the attendant danger that the passing instant may be seen as permanent. In *Shadow Songs*, Senghor's lyricism is not always immune from this major temptation of the Absolute.

The volume's structure reveals the inner arrangements through which the poet seeks to restore the private space of his African sensitivity in a conflict-free universe.

The first two poems ("In Memoriam" and "Porte Dorée") open a fanciful world: "I contemplate my dreams lost along the streets, / Crouched at the foot of the hills like the guides of my race / On the rivers of the Gambia and the Saloum / And now on the Seine at the foot of these hills."

Then the dreams materialize, the poet is surrounded by his childhood memories. These come together and combine in a kind of immutability outside space and time. Remembrance allows him to recover the foundation of his being, to regain his balance. He finds himself by recapturing an ancestral frame of reference which confirms his identity. Western onslaughts lose their destructive power, they cannot penetrate the citadel, and anguish is left outside the walls. In this sanctuary re-created by him, he carries out traditional African gestures and rituals. In "Letter to a Poet", he writes: "I shall await you under the mahogany tree." And in "Night in Sine", he orders: "Woman, light the clear-oil lamp. Let the Ancestors / Speak around us as parents do when the children are in bed."

These poems, as well as "Joal", "Black Woman", "Black Mask" and "Prayer to the Masks", welcome the memories through an invocatory style expressed from the very first lines by exclamations or imperatives which bring the poet's emotions into resonance with the African presence so ardently invoked and gratefully acknowledged. The poetic idiom then brings comfort and serenity:

**At the bottom of the well of my memory, I touch your face  
And draw water to refresh my long regret.<sup>68</sup>**

Once they have materialized, these presences are in full harmony with his expectations. Scenes of traditional African village life emerge before our eyes: storytellers, a child carried on its mother's back, a villager wearing a *pagne*, the roofs of huts, the closeness of sour and sweet smells, the *dang*, the *griots*, the shout of *Kor Siga*, and in the background the savanna with its clear horizon, the outline of a gazelle, the rhythm of a tom-tom, and the heroic memory of the princes of Mali.

In the last analysis, involution reflects the appeal of whatever proves stable, solid and lasting, as opposed to the fleeting nature of time, space and events, a transitoriness deeply destabilizing to our being. Which explains why, in

these poems, Senghor's attention and thinking are irresistibly drawn to the unchangeable and permanent. In "Black Woman", he celebrates and fixes her beauty "for all eternity". And in "Black Mask", he beholds a face "closed to the ephemeral":

**O face such as God created you before even the memory of time...  
O Beauty, I adore you with my one-stringed eye.**

In "Prayer to the Masks", his longing has been fulfilled: "You exude the immortal air where I inhale / The breath of my Fathers."

All these songs express the search for the Absolute, the determination to commune with the African soul, with the eternal nature of his Africa.

Senghor seeks to recover primal unity. Hence the following lines in "Totem": "... The Ancestor whose stormy skin / Streaks with lightning and thunder. / He is the guardian animal I must hide / ... He is my loyal blood demanding loyalty ..." Hence also the bold eloquence of the epic of his ancestors in "To the Music of Koras and Balaphon": "I myself was the grandfather of my grandfather, / I was his soul and his lineage ..."

The life evoked in these poems is both deep and remote, however. The choice of verbs (to contemplate, remember, await, listen, recollect) denotes a certain distance and inertia of the subject in relation to its remembrance. Particularly in "Joal", Senghor stresses the twin perceptions of presence and distance, and in this respect the poem appears representative of Senghorian lyricism, where dreams join memories kept alive by mutually reinforcing sensory messages that enhance and magnify every image. A state of completeness and fulfilment seems to have been reached, but a secondary rhythm emerges and calls into question the initial harmony. This reflects an ongoing conflict between inspiration and clear-sightedness, a conflict that hampers all efforts to reach the Kingdom of Childhood.

**Joal!  
I remember.**

It is true that mere utterance draws forth a presence. Yet the verb "to remember" clearly indicates that memory brings back something which has actually become intangible. And each stanza begins with the same verb:

**I remember the regal *signare* women under the green shade of verandas ...  
I remember the past glory of Sunset ...**

I remember the funeral feasts steaming with the blood of slaughtered livestock ...  
I remember the pagan voices singing the *Tantum Ergo* ...  
I remember the dance of nubile girls ...

Senghor thus summons to a new presence something already distant, brought back into existence by the utterance of its name – a presence confirmed by the choice of the present participle, a progressive and insistent verb form. In quick succession, various impressions arise, either visual (green shade, glory of Sunset), olfactory (steaming) or auditory (singing). The presence is therefore sensually felt, though recognized from afar.

This verbal repetition gives a new impetus to the sentence and extends it in wider and wider spirals. The poet's gaze broadens until he finally loses sight of what he was attempting to describe, and the poem's rhythm then falters. The last stanza reflects a state of exhaustion through the reiteration of the words "I remember", followed by a series of suspension points whose mute eloquence seems to signify a fraying of memories, or rather an inability to continue summoning them. And the poet then finds himself alone again:

**My head beating the rhythm  
Of such a weary walk through the long days of Europe  
Where sometimes an orphan jazz comes sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.**

However seductive these sheltering memories may be, Senghor refuses to be hemmed in by them. Though he seeks these remembrances – "Here I am trying to forget Europe in the heartland of the Sine"<sup>69</sup> – they are to him merely a halt to recover his strength, for he recognizes as "a dangerously safe tower" this house of dreams where it would be tempting indeed to withdraw from the difficulties besetting any human being at grips with the world. Senghor's personality would not allow him to live the life of a recluse. As far back as 1962, he said to Armand Guibert: "In fact, my inner life was torn very early between the call of my Ancestors and the call of Europe, between the demands of black African culture and the demands of modern life. These conflicts are the crux of my poems, in which they are often reflected."<sup>70</sup>

The dilemma is evident in the structure of *Shadow Songs*, with an alternation of poems on Africa and Europe (among others, "Snow in Paris", "Ndéssé or Blues", "To Death", and "Liberation"), real musical counterpoints which can also be seen as projections of an anguish resisting all attempts at involution.

This dichotomy carries the risk of dulling the mind and paralysing action. But the urgent need to become active, to avoid wasting one's life in the enervating comfort of dreams, now prevails. Just as the neophyte must continue on his way and resist the temptation of turning back, the poet decides "To face the anguish of train depots, the bent wind / Skimming the sidewalks of open-air provincial stations, / The anguish of departure without a warm hand in mine".<sup>71</sup>

The second response to anguish thus takes form, that of defiance, or even rebellion, for a confrontation between Africa and the West could not, at that time, take place without the self-defence of occasional violence.

## Rebellion

The final lines in "Return of the Prodigal Son", the closing poem of *Shadow Songs*, show both a nostalgia for what Senghor sees as indestructible in his Africa and a determination to accept the challenge of Europe:

Ah! to sleep once again in the cool bed of my childhood.  
Ah! to have loving black hands once again tuck me in at night,  
And see once again my mother's white smile.  
Tomorrow I will continue on my way to Europe, to the embassy,  
Already homesick for my black Land.

The European road an African would travel, under the gaze of the "eye of reason", is full of obstacles, which fall in two basic categories.

First he is assaulted by racism in its many guises. This leads, as we have seen, to a quasi-dialectic conflict between Africa and the West. An antinomy inevitably inspiring a passionate spirit of rebellion which expresses the firm resolve of Africans not only to survive, but also to live according to their own lights and maintain their own identity. The earliest manifestation of this rebellion is the struggle against colonialism. Hence the militant tone of the poems published prior to Independence. Progressively intensifying, it is first felt in *Shadow Songs* and gains power in *Black Hosts* and *Ethiopiennes*.

The quasi-dialectic nature of the conflict emerges as Senghor, in presenting an African antithesis, on occasion shows an appreciation of the West. He refers to his white "brothers", praises some of them (for instance in "Nurse Emma Payelleville"), pays homage to General de Gaulle in "To the *Guélowâr*", expresses his friendship for Georges and Claude Pompidou in "Prayer for Peace" and his high regard, in "Letters to the Princess", for the Marquise Daniel de Betteville, the grandmother of his future wife.

Unlike that of Césaire and others, his rebellion against the West is therefore not systematic. It never turns into blind hostility: "Ah! don't say I do not love France ..." and "I want to pray especially for France ... / For I have a great weakness for France."<sup>72</sup> In fact, Senghor's rebellion spreads beyond racial issues and gives his endeavour a much wider scope.

Indeed, and this is the second aspect of the question, the poet and humanist experiences even more deeply the assaults against man in general, regardless of race. As we have seen, Senghor warns against a whole range of mortal dangers to mankind: these are the philosophies, sciences and ideologies of a Western world seeming to have lost sight of the responsibilities inherent in life, which should include the need to cultivate an existential relativism applicable to all mankind.

Rebellion then becomes more fundamental. It targets the blindness of a Western world refusing to recognize its dependence on Nature. Alternately obsessed and disappointed by science, the West is floundering amid a multitude of theories involving either randomness or determinism and expectations of annihilation.

This is where Senghor's impassioned warnings make their most original and fascinating contribution. The images arising from his words emphasize the dual dimension of life and death characteristic of all human actions.

So far, we have viewed Senghor's œuvre essentially as one of *visual poetry*, emphasizing mainly the evocative power of words. We shall now dwell on another facet of his writings, considering his poetry as one of *commitment to action*, in relation to the two sides of his rebellion: a political struggle against colonialism and a purely humanistic rebellion.

### **Political Struggle Against Colonialism**

In "Letter to an African Friend", published in the first issue of *Présence africaine*, Emmanuel Mounier warns against an extreme reaction to racism, one of the ills of colonialism: "Because in the past you have been made overly conscious of your race, it may at times be a hindrance to you; if you turn it into a defiant challenge, it may become an arrogant obsession ... This excessive awareness, and this must be said, could turn into resentment, aggressivity or compensating pain. Everything is then distorted ..."

According to Sartre,<sup>73</sup> this aggressivity is the only effective and appropriate response, for "a black man cannot deny that he is black nor claim for himself an abstract colourless humanity: he is black. And thus forced to be genuine:

insulted and enslaved, he holds his head high, picks up the word 'negro' thrown at him like a stone, asserts that he is black, proudly facing the white man." In his arguments, however, Sartre remains a prisoner of Marxist analysis: he seeks to establish an analogy between racism and class struggle, their common source being an oppressor he identifies with capitalism. In other words, essentially he considers only the politico-economic aspect of the problem, which leads him to assert: "The final unity which will bring together all the oppressed in the same struggle must be preceded in the colonies by an antiracist racism, ... the only way to abolish race-based differences." He later adds that the black man "does not in any way wish to dominate the world: he seeks the abolition of ethnic privileges, whatever their source; he affirms his solidarity with the oppressed of every colour. By the same token, the subjective, existential and ethnic concept of negritude 'shifts, as Hegel has said, into the objective, positive and exact one of proletariat'."

Sartre's reasoning illustrates perfectly the blindness of doctrinaire thinking set in an ideological framework! In the process, he forgets that Africa has a soul, an intense spirituality quite alien to the "sexual pantheism" he ascribes to the poets of the *Anthology*. He writes that "this spermatic religion is like a tension of the soul balancing two complementary tendencies: the dynamic sense of being a phallus in erection and the more muted, patient and feminine feeling of being a growing plant". Which makes us wonder whether his reading of the African poets may not have been profoundly coloured by his own fantasies.

Published in 1948, *Black Orpheus* nevertheless had a major impact on the African intelligentsia, for it must be recognized that, during those years of political struggle for Independence, the Communists and other leftist movements were the only ones really to defend the viewpoint of the Blacks.

Moreover, for many African writers, *Black Orpheus* seemed not only to bring back the experience of the Popular Front which they had intensely shared in 1936, but even more so to conceptualize it. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that this coalition government of the parties of the left, "hailed in the USSR as an example given by the working class 'to the whole international proletariat ... of the way to combat fascism'",<sup>74</sup> had filled the champions of Negritude with enthusiasm. It seemed to open a new era, that of fraternization among all the oppressed of the world. Their union would lead to the "final struggle" for liberation. It seemed that Marx's prophecies were being fulfilled, so that a tremendous hope arose in Senghor, Césaire and a good many of their fellows. In their writings, each in his own way sang the *Internationale*. They were as fervent as explorers discovering a new world.

They remained black men and women, of course, but saw themselves mainly as colonized and oppressed by the "henchmen of capitalism", just like the workers of the whole world. Their struggle had then taken a new turn: temporarily setting aside their blackness, their identity, their cultural distinctiveness, many of them joined international Communism, without necessarily becoming card-carrying members. They were won over by the fascination of historical materialism, which simplified enormously the nature of the conflicts between Africa and the West.

In *Notebooks of a Return to the Home Country*, Césaire declared: "I would be a Jew-man, a Kaffir-man, a Hindu-man from Calcutta, a Harlem-man who doesn't-vote," and "... what I want is for universal hunger, for universal thirst."<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, in "Ebony Wood", an exhortation by the Haitian Jacques Roumain rang out:

White worker of Detroit black peon of Alabama  
innumerable people of the capitalist galley  
destiny sets us shoulder to shoulder  
repudiating the ancient evil spell of the taboos of blood  
we trample under foot the debris of our solitudes  
[...]  
we proclaim the unity of suffering  
and of revolt  
of all peoples on all the surface of the earth<sup>76</sup>

Senghor expresses a similar enthusiasm in "At the Call of the Race of Sheba", which ends with a real profession of revolutionary faith, and he sets in capital letters the hope of seeing "THE CLEAR DAWN OF A NEW DAY".<sup>77</sup>

The poem, written in 1936, bears the indelible mark of the period: "The year 1936 is that of the Popular Front landslide: the day when, for the first time in his life, the Joal native took part in an election and voted for the Communists, although he was a member of the Socialist (SFIO) party."<sup>78</sup> Senghor might even seem to have become an unconditional supporter of Marxism. "An avid reader of Karl Marx, Senghor made him his first intellectual guide. He hailed Marx as the founder of a sociology, or in other words of a renovated humanism adapted to the needs of our time. When the author of *Das Kapital* condemns the exploitation of man by man and the resulting 'alienation', Senghor is inclined, as a colonized African, to see in the promise of a classless society the announcement of a golden age in which racial differences would be abolished."<sup>79</sup>

From this angle, "At the Call of the Race of Sheba" may be seen, in our view, as a crossroads where various strands of a Marxist-leaning political poetry converge and from which they radiate.

This takes place first as a frontal attack against all the manifestations of capitalism identifiable through the unlovely presence of potbellied merchants and bankers arrogantly parading "far from town, / Far from the misery in the native quarters". The poet dreams of "a day decked with noisy light... / For the final assault on the [boards of directors] / Who govern the colony's governors."<sup>80</sup> Here and there also, in his other writings, there is additional evidence of his violent resentment against the colonizing capitalists. Starting with a few words all the more striking since they are unexpected in a poem – which then drifts into politico-economic considerations – the poet's gaze turns to those "traders", "merchants", "bankers", "concession-holders" and others of their ilk. They have invaded Africa, and show up in some of his poems, where their presence is equally unseemly: "The merchants and bankers have banished me from the Nation", and their power is rooted in the "pyramid of peanuts towering above the land", in the "hard wharf, an implacable will upon the sea".<sup>81</sup> This is an impersonal language, evocative of the tyrannical colonial pact through the accompanying qualifiers (dominating, hard, implacable).

Beyond these intrusive presences, a certain picture emerges of France, whose "colonial days bled our dawns".<sup>82</sup>

The essence of Senghor's rebellion is also reflected in "Elegy for Aynina Fall", where the chorus of young men, the future of Africa, raises a twin question:

**Who will lead the attack against the Strongman's forts  
At the East Gate? Who will lead the attack  
Against the ramparts of Money?**<sup>83</sup>

The question is a challenge that Senghor accepts. His answer lies in the absolute consistency between his poems of political commitment and the parts of *Liberté II* dealing with decolonization. All were written during the 1946–1960 period and wage the same struggle for recognition of black values. Read together, they show two very different ways of expressing the same strongly-held views.

*Liberté II*, in which a sense of method and organization is paramount, presents arguments in a rigorously oratorical style and seeks to convince the reader. The poems rely on images conveying in symbolic language the ideas developed through political discourse.

For Senghor had to deal constantly with chameleons, fence-sitters and waverers during his long political career, which started immediately after the Brazzaville Conference, held in February 1944, on the initiative of General de Gaulle, in order to discuss with the governors of the various colonies "the ways of moving the French possessions 'from administrative decentralization to full political status'".<sup>84</sup> Ever since, Senghor tirelessly promoted the African cause, and had to contend repeatedly with the bad faith and/or weakness of the successive governments of the Fourth French Republic, delivering countless speeches until the proclamation of Independence in 1960 and presenting his arguments over and over again. His purpose was to denounce the Colonial Pact – which maintained protected markets – an arrangement that seemed to be rising from its ashes, and to attack the restrictive trading patterns which precluded any significant economic development and doomed any hope of real political autonomy. On 17 June 1954, he declared in a speech before the French National Assembly:

We are told that black Africa is peaceful, that it cheers visiting cabinet ministers and makes no demands. But don't be too hasty or take your wishes for reality. The truth is that black Africa, and I include Madagascar, is full of good will, but that it is beginning to grow tired of broken promises and of the revival – or at least the continuance – of the ... Colonial Pact ... One example among others: the law of 6 February 1952 required the Government to introduce a bill on the powers of the local assemblies by July 1952. We are still waiting for this precious bill!<sup>85</sup>

How many speeches he made during those years! Recorded for the most part in *Liberté II*, they give a clear idea of the countless battles Senghor had to wage in the face of constant delaying tactics, betrayals, sophistry and deception. In the National Assembly, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Conferences of the Senegalese Democratic Bloc, he let fly a long succession of violent attacks against colonialism.<sup>86</sup>

Such is the first facet of his rebellion, clearly influenced by Karl Marx's works. Among the concerns prompted by these writings, one in particular, based on a short quotation from *Treatise on the Question of Free Trade*, seems to have become for him the subject of an intense reflection: it is "capital's freedom to crush the worker", what Senghor in turn calls "the freedom to secede from other men, in a word, man's freedom of alienation ... And we have seen that the full blossoming of personality is possible only through economic liberation, the goal of the 'Communist' revolution."<sup>87</sup> These lines are taken from Senghor's article first published in the March 1948 issue of the *Revue socialiste*.

It is interesting to note that its publication coincided roughly with that of Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, prefaced by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Black Orpheus*. This anthology, as pointed out by Lilyan Kesteloot, "selected the most violent, anguished and 'un-French' poems of black writers, and thus was a real manifesto of the black Revolution against Western oppression, both political and cultural".<sup>88</sup>

It marked the high point of Senghor's rebellion, under the influence of two successive and complementary intellectual currents: first, that of the Popular Front, which brought into focus a Marxist reading of History. And second, that of Sartrian thinking, which owes much to Marx's teaching and was enriched by Hegel's dialectics of freedom. These components formed the basis for Sartre's conceptualization of Negritude as a historical turning point.

The influence of these currents of thought on Senghor is obvious. Nevertheless, and this is one of the fascinating aspects of his spirit of independence, he never allowed himself to be carried away by doctrinaire views, and became neither a Marxist nor an existentialist. He gathered selectively from these systems, but always held them up to the light of African ethics. Which explains why, as early as 1950, he declared that social revolution was neither anarchy nor Communism in the Stalinist sense of the word: "*It is the order of the entire man*, in which the antecedence of *nature* – in other words, of material life – will be acknowledged, but at the same time the primacy of spiritual life – based in Africa on cultural values – will be proclaimed."<sup>89</sup> Henceforth he constantly refrained from seeing his commitments in absolute terms, seeking instead to put them in proper perspective, against the background of the unshakable African faith in the harmony of the world, since "to live, materially and spiritually, Man must fathom this order".<sup>90</sup> Senghor thus saw beyond particular events and developed a philosophy of life, an all-embracing humanism.

In spite of a clear resonance between Césaire and Senghor, any comparison immediately reveals the marked differences in their works. Perhaps the fundamental reason why Senghor moved decisively out of Césaire's orbit should be sought in their contrasting forms of alienation. Owing to circumstances, the history of slavery was Césaire's only memory of his own history as a black man without land or ancestors: "My memory," he wrote, "is encircled with blood. My memory has a belt of corpses!"<sup>91</sup> His alienation was therefore experienced as a blow to the wellspring of his being: he felt uprooted, the past was erased and the future closed, his very presence was challenged. Hence an anguish and bewilderment expressed in the surrealism of his rebellion. This

anguish was projected as an unleashed vital force, belonging nowhere, with no fixed reference point other than the reality of his black skin, to be cast in the face of the world, the only challenge he could muster, the only proof of his existence.

Senghor, on the other hand, remained deeply rooted in his native soil. He was nurtured on the history and traditions of his race, through the teachings of both his maternal uncle Waly Bakhoun and his father, who would recite for him the saga of their ancestors:

My father even claimed that the famous Sira Badral, from whom the *guélowâr* nobility originated, belonged to his family... It is true that the last King of Sine, Koumba Ndofène Diouf, called him *Tokor*, or uncle.<sup>92</sup>

He called my father "Uncle", and they exchanged riddles  
Carried by greyhounds with gold bells;  
Cousins in peace, they exchanged gifts on the shores of the Saloum,  
Ancient skins, bars of salt, gold from Bure, gold from Bundu  
And wise counsel as precious as river horses.<sup>93</sup>

Elsewhere he added: "What is certain, undeniable, is that my father's ancestors were Malinkes from upper Portuguese Guinea."<sup>94</sup>

Senghor had received so much from Africa that his identity as a black man could not be called into question. Hence his racial pride, sense of belonging, ancestor-worship, and determination to promote and pass on his cultural traditions.

Senghor's feeling of alienation thus arises more from an awareness of having no influence over the present state of the world or its future course, of being shunted aside because of his blackness, of having no other option but assimilation, with the attendant loss of a distinct identity and of the African culture. His rebellion finally merges with a resolve to ensure that Africa's ancient civilization be heard and recognized, that it take full part in the shaping of the new world. Senghor's revolt therefore soon takes on a very positive cast, turning into a search for and insistence on a constructive dialogue and sharing with the West.

### Humanistic Rebellion

The shift from an essentially political rebellion to a fundamentally humanistic one may be ascribed to Senghor's rootedness in Negritude. Consequently, as his inherently political commitments gradually turn out to be in conflict with

his traditional cultural values, his attitude evolves, for he cannot at any moment be in contradiction with himself, which is to say with his deeply spiritualistic African civilization.

This choice of his baffled many black intellectuals who had devoted themselves body and soul to Communism in order to carry out their struggle against colonialism. In the process, they had ceased, implicitly or not, to honour and keep alive their black cultural heritage.

Of course, abolition of the colonialist system and recognition of every man's right to a life of freedom and dignity were goals shared by the entire African intelligentsia, by Césaire, Adotevi, Senghor and their followers. But the paths chosen to reach these objectives diverged sharply, or even pointed in opposite directions, since the supporters of Marxism defined man in purely socio-economic terms informed by historical materialism, whereas Senghor stressed above all the countless cultural bonds making man what he is and giving him distinctiveness and stature. In his view, politics or economics provide only a peripheral freedom, indeed necessary, but not sufficient, for "liberty can exist only in the fullness of personality".<sup>95</sup> Senghor therefore very soon parted company with Marxism and its so-called "humanism":

Our mistake has been to fight ... with the weapons of Europe. To battle colonialism, we borrowed the weapons of the European proletariat, which told us that its struggle and ours were waged jointly. Perhaps so, but they were not identical, for our *situations* are not identical ... The European proletariat was kept in a position of dependence as a class aggregate, not as a race or a people. As for us, of course, we were colonized because of our underdevelopment and weakness, but also because we were *Blacks* or Arabo-Berbers, which is to say people of another race or culture. This was the colonizers' basic argument. We were 'primitives' ... In this view, it followed that progress and civilization could originate only in Europe ... As for the alleged solidarity between the European proletariat and a colonized people, a romantic notion spread by Europe, it does not really stand up to close analysis. In actual fact, ... colonization benefited not only the capitalist bourgeoisie, but also the middle class and proletariat of Europe. It allowed the overseas emigration of the poor whites ..., promoted Europe's industrial development and an improvement in the standard of living of the European masses. Let us have the courage to acknowledge that this holds true of Eastern as well as Western Europe. The proof is that Soviet Russia did not grant independence to its Asian and particularly Moslem republics ...

All this is to say that independence of mind, cultural independence, is a prerequisite for other forms of independence, political, economic and social.<sup>96</sup>

So ends a lengthy but significant quotation from a speech given on 16 May 1960, on the occasion of a meeting of the young members of the African Federation Party. Senghor the politician and Senghor the humanist came together here to survey the past activities of the Party and to chart a future course of action. It was a very special moment in Senghor's life, the time when he became President of Senegal, with practically universal support. Other statesmen in history have received exceptional public acclaim, but few managed to prevent power from going to their head. All too often, the authority and prestige of an exalted position, combined with the fawning of sycophants, gradually turn the successful politician into an arrogant autocrat. Senghor, however, when called to the presidency of his country, stressed the primacy of culture, rather than seeking to impose his will. In fact, he became the servant of culture, and, unlike so many of today's leaders, never used it as an instrument of national or personal policy. In this, he remained true to what had always been his line of conduct: "Since the 1930s, more than forty years ago," he said in a speech given in the West Indies in February 1976, "I have always placed culture ahead of politics."<sup>97</sup>

By definition, politics is the organization and exercise of power. Now this power, whatever its form, implies a certain contest or test of strength, a more or less overt wish to master or subjugate the other. The major countries, of both East and West, provide examples of this behaviour, to the extent that political domination involves cultural subjection, injurious to the human spirit, whose potential it impairs. Hence the bitter fruit of the unaccomplished, ranging from discouragement to despair and surrender, from resentment to hatred, with all its dramatic and unpredictable consequences. Hence also the fragility of present-day political and social structures, and the vulnerability of humanistic values.

Senghor the politician became particularly aware of these realities because he is fundamentally a man of culture. This explains the originality of the path he followed: anxious to protect his African culture against Western imperialism, he was at the same time unwilling to disown his black values for the sake of a revolutionary ideology nurtured and seeking justification in confrontational relationships which can only lead to violence and revenge. In connection with his special concern for culture, he wrote that "Nazi racism, its hatred of reason and its monstrous crimes against man ... gradually opened our eyes.

After two years as a prisoner of war, from 1940 to 1942, two years of meditation, I emerged cured. Cured of the ghetto-negritude mentality because I was cured of racism: of pure logic, of linear reason, of cannibalistic passion, and also of abstract reasoning, which is even more cannibalistic." This led, he added, "to a shift in our thinking from ghetto-negritude to 'twentieth-century humanistic negritude' ".<sup>98</sup>

The shift stems from the basic dynamics of Senghor's mind, and more specifically from his determination to resolve what is in his view our world's major and tragic contradiction between on the one hand the power relationships feeding on the hatred and contempt among men and, on the other hand, every man's innate need to love. The latter is the dominant theme in Senghor's dialectics, a theme prominently expressed in any nation's culture, whereas the basis of politics is to be found, as he sees it, in a contest for power.

Now the world is driven, at present, by politics rather than culture. And politics, the art of governing, has become the art of dominating another people by using economic and/or military power, underpinned by a specific ideological structure. Having reached the extreme limits of discursive reasoning, mankind is discovering a dead-end that involves the threat of nuclear annihilation, starvation in some parts of the world, paradoxically accompanied by overproduction in others, desertification and pollution, a situation in which science and technology are betraying mankind.

As a politician, poet and humanist, Senghor *sees* individual man struggling blindly and contending now with the hatred he encounters or propagates, now with despair, which can destroy him utterly ...

Some of Senghor's poems are full of melancholy: "Tell me, who will bring back the memory of life / To the man of gutted hopes?" or "Europe is burying the nation's leaven / And the hope of new races," and "All those betrayals, all those explosions, all this death in the soul" – to quote just a few.<sup>99</sup>

Already in *Shadow Songs*, the poet's deep concern is similarly evident, as he sees his Africa drawn into the wake of the West. In his procedural report to the Second Convention of the Senegalese Democratic Bloc, in April 1950, Senghor denounces "the segments of the Senegalese bourgeoisie that embody nepotism".<sup>100</sup> The same line of thinking is found in his poems: "... the unlubricated scorn / Swelling the bellies of the slaves. / ... Your daughters, I'm told, / Paint their faces like courtesans. / They proclaim free love and lighten the race!"<sup>101</sup> He voices his indignation: "I challenge my blood in this head empty of ideas, in this belly / Abandoned by courageous muscles."<sup>102</sup>

Beyond these few quotations and more deeply, Senghor's anxiety emerges as he sees his Africa yield to the seduction of the West and sink into the despair of the enlisted man who, "attracted by the open space and this vast, hopeless land," where *homo homini lupus*, was unable to hang on to life so as to disprove this aphorism by Plautus, faithfully remembered through the centuries and amply illustrated by history.

Now, if we do not challenge the obstacles which man raises against man, we shall be living in anguish, rage and the attendant deprivation; we shall imagine, accept or even hasten the death of Man. Such seems to be, in Senghor's view, the attitude of many of our contemporaries, who paint themselves into an existential corner or dead-end of their own making. Scattered among his poems, these visions of a dying world beset with nightmares crystallize into a description with Biblical overtones:

... The proud towns spread and whimper  
Beneath a hopeless sky, pierced by poisons and lightning,  
Rivers no longer have a source or resource.  
... Fire! Fire! The burning walls of Chicago. Fire! Fire!  
The burning walls of Gomorrah,  
Moscow on fire. God is the same... for [all] people without a god,  
Who do not [live by the Word].<sup>103</sup>

However, in the heart of the beautiful and inhuman city of New York, that embodiment of the technical powers and materialistic civilizations, Senghor finds a throbbing heart. It is Harlem, black and carnal, "Harlem teeming with sounds and ritual colours / And outrageous smells". And Senghor beseeches New York to receive Harlem's message of life:

New York! I say New York, let black blood flow into your blood.  
Let it wash the rust from your steel joints, like an oil of life.  
Let it give your bridges the curve of hips and supple vines.<sup>104</sup>

Black blood to restore the city's life and undermine the walls of racism and steel ... Black blood, whose secrets of life must be learned; secrets disclosed through the initiatory teaching which opens the way to a transcendence of death, to a re-birth of man.

Senghor takes this path and urges us to follow him and move beyond the "White death" in order to humanize this "age of dichotomy and prejudice, confusion and oversimplification, ideologies without spirit and aesthetics without imagination".<sup>105</sup>