

## NOTES



- In Volume I of Césaire’s *Oeuvres complètes*, a number of runover lines have been set as if they were two or more lines. Césaire has asked us to make corrections in both the English and the French texts.

In our attempt to maintain Césaire’s usual preference for family and genus classifications for botanical words, we have been helped by Elodie Jourdain’s *Le vocabulaire du parler Créole de la Martinique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1956); R. Pinchon’s *Quelques aspects de la nature aux antilles* (Fort-de-France, 1967); and Lafcadio Hearn’s *Two Years in the French West Indies* (New York: Harpers, 1890).

We have not annotated words and phrases here which are discussed in our Introduction.

Page 37: About Empress Josephine’s statue, Hearn writes: “She is standing just in the centre of the Savane [Fort-de-France’s public square], robed in the fashion of the First Empire, with gracious arms and shoulders bare: one hand leans upon a medallion bearing the eagle profile of Napoleon. . . . Seven tall palms stand in a circle around her, lifting their comely heads into the blue glory of the tropic day. . . .” (*Two Years*, p. 66.)

Page 37: the term *morne*, “used throughout the French West Indies to designate certain altitudes of volcanic origin, is justly applied to the majority of Martinican hills, and unjustly sometimes even to its mightiest elevation—Mont Pelée. Mornes usually have beautiful and curious forms: they are most often pyramidal or conoid up to a certain height, but have rounded or truncated summits. Green with the richest vegetation, they rise from valleys and coasts with remarkable abruptness.” (*Two Years*, pp. 254–55.) In Césaire’s time, they were often the hillocks on the outskirts of Martinican towns on which slum areas were located.

Page 45: *mentule*: in this case probably a gallicization of the Latin “mentula” (penis) based on an Indo-European stem designating a stick agitated to produce fire.

Page 45: *jiculi*: according to Césaire, a variation on the word “jiquilite,” a kind of indigo tree, planted in San Salvador in the 19th century.

Page 47: *Jura*: Toussaint L’Ouverture (1743–1803), the Haitian black patriot and martyr, was a self-educated slave who by 1801 was governing the whole island of Haiti. A year later, he was seized by Napoleon-sent forces and returned to France, where he died in a dungeon at Fort-de-Joux in the French Jura.

Page 47: *moricaud* (coon): literally a person with very dark skin, but familiarly and pejoratively used to designate Africans and Arabs.

Page 49: *patyura*: according to Césaire, a variation on “patira,” the name for a peccary found in Paraguay.

Page 51: *marron* (maroon): from “marron,” the French word for a chestnut, whence as adjective, “chestnut-colored.” The secondary meaning, in the West Indies, is a fugitive black slave, or his black descendant. This meaning seems to be influenced by the American Spanish “cimarrón” (wild, unruly, or as noun, runaway slave, maroon), based on the Old Spanish “cimarra” (brushwood), according to Webster. But the Dictionary of the Spanish Academy derives it from “cima,” a mountain-top: such slaves fled to the mountains. Hence “to maroon,” to abandon (someone) on a desolate shore. In the present context, we have avoided the more idiomatic expression, “to pluck the chestnuts from the fire,” because the stress is on the fugitive slave, and furthermore because this meaning is central to Césaire’s poetry. The word recurs in other poems, as *marronne*, *marronneur*, and as a coined verb, *marronner*.

Page 53: *pahouine* (Pahouin): refers to the Pahouin group of Bantu-speaking peoples who inhabit Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, and Equatorial Guinea (800,000 people). Among them are the Pangwe, Fang, Beti, Boulou, Ewondo, and Eton.

Page 59: *rigoises* (quirts): according to Jourdain, the word is also a popular term for a slave whip.

Page 59: *le tracking* (boogie-woogie): probably a play on a phrase that Césaire picked up from the Harlem Renaissance writers. In 1930s Harlem jive, a “track” was a ballroom, and “to truck” meant to jitterbug.

Page 61: *chicote*: in Portuguese, a knotted leather slave whip.

Page 63: *menfenil*: according to Jourdain, the *menfenil* (also known as the *malfini*) is the *Falco sparverious caribaeorum*, or the Caribbean sparrow hawk.

Page 71: *pirogue*: a small vessel with a long narrow hull, two masts, no deck and usually a crew of five, used to transport barrels of tafia. (*Two Years*, p. 133.) The term is used in Africa to indicate any dugout canoe.

Page 73: *lambi* (conch): one of the great spiral shells, used for sounding calls, weighing seven or eight pounds. Rolled like a scroll, fluted and scalloped about the edges, pink-pearled inside—such as are sold in America for mantel-piece ornaments. (*Two Years*, pp. 133–34.)

Page 73: *and the twenty-nine legal blows of the whip*: concerning this line and the 18 lines that follow it, the tortures, the names of the slaveowners who carried them out, the devices they used and, in a few cases, the ways in which the owners were acquitted for their crimes, are all documented in the writings of Victor Schoelcher, the French legislator who was most responsible for pushing the abolition laws through parliament in 1848. Much of the material cited here was reprinted in 1948 in *Esclavage et colonisation* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), a collection of excerpts by Schoelcher edited by Emile Tersen and prefaced by Césaire. One learns about the 29 blows as punishment for menacing foremen, in the chapter “La condition servile.” The same

chapter describes Mahaudière and his doghouse, and details the acquittal of Brafín by Judge Fourniol on charges of mistreating his slaves (private communication from Thomas Hale).

Page 89: *trigonocéphale* (fer-de-lance): see Jourdain, pp. 10–28 for a thorough discussion of the “grande vipère fer-de-lance de la Martinique.”

Page 93: *rhizulent* (rhizulate): a neologism apparently based on the Greek combining form, *rhizo-*, meaning “root.”

Page 109: *batéké*: probably to evoke the Batekes, an important Bantu people of the Congo.

Page 111: *balisier*: a wild plantain found in the forests of Martinique that has an unusually shaped bright red flower. For some people, it is like an open heart, while for others it is like a flame. In another poem, “Spirales,” Césaire links the balisier with the image of a phoenix. Aliko Songolo, in his book *Aimé Césaire: Archétypes et Métaphores* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), suggests that this combination of images evokes the Bachelardian notion of fire as the symbol of desire to change and transcend.

Césaire’s Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (Martinican Progressive Party) adopted the balisier as its symbol sometime after its founding in 1958, and the flower began to appear on the masthead of *Le Progressiste*, the party newspaper, in the late 1960s. Although we do not know what particular connotations the Party attaches to the balisier, the images of the heart (life) and fire (rebirth, change) suggested above are compatible with the conditions under which the PPM was created after Césaire’s break with the French Communist Party in 1956. Today, units of the PPM are called balisiers and carry the name of a local or international hero—for example, the balisier Salvador Allende.

For all of these reasons, we have decided that it would be appropriate to employ the balisier as a symbol throughout this book.

Page 113: *bananier* (plantain): “What we call bananas in the United States are not called bananas in Martinique, but figs. Plantains seem to be called *bananes*.” (*Two Years*, p. 360.)

Page 113: *hougan*: in general, a West Indian sorcerer. In Haitian voodoo, a *houngan* is a combination priest, healer and diviner.

Page 119: *compitales* (Compitalia): in Roman religion the *lares compitales* were the guardians of the crossroads and the junctions of fields, in whose honor were held the *Laralia*, or *Compitalia*.

Page 129: *roxelane*: according to Césaire, this word refers to a river that flowed through Saint-Pierre, the Martinican city destroyed by the eruption of Mont Pelée in 1902. Given the presence of the Roxelane River in the poem, Saint-Pierre refers to the city, not to the saint of the same name.

Page 133: *pitt*: according to Césaire, a Martinican word for the area in which cock fights take place. Jourdain lists it as a Creolization of the English word “pit.”

Page 139: *chamulque* (chamulcus): an ancient Greek crane or windlass.

Page 141: *darne* (dazzled): a word of the Ardennes, meaning “dazzled” or “dizzy,” used twice by Rimbaud in the poems “Accroupissements” and “Les Poètes de Sept Ans.”

Page 143: *tipoyeur*: based on “tipoye,” a crude sedan chair in which blacks carried their white masters in Cameroon. The word could be translated as “sedan chair bearer.”

Page 143: *Kolikombo*: ruler of the world of the dead among the Banda, and a mythical sorcerer figure from René Maran’s *Batouala*, originally published in France in 1921. See pp. 77 and 123–26 of the Beck/Mboukou trans. (Washington, D.C.: Black Orpheus Press, 1972) for information on the Koliko’mbo’s nature and activities.

Page 145: *charrascal* (carrascal): in Spanish, holm-oaks or Corsican pines.

Page 147: *Batouque*: in the first edition of *Les armes miraculeuses*, Césaire footnoted the word as “Brazilian tom-tom rhythm.” According to Arnold, “*Batuque* in Luso-Brazilian is an onomatopoeia for the drumbeat itself.” (*Modernism and Negritude*, p. 128.) Thomas Hale sees it as not only the drum beat, but the dance one performs to the drumbeat (private communication). Césaire employs the second spelling of the word near the end of the poem “The Verb, ‘Marronner.’”

Page 153: *Basse-Pointe Diamant Tartane et Caravelle*: coastal Martinican villages and towns. Césaire himself was born at Basse-Pointe.

Page 153: *carambas*: in Spanish, an interjection, such as “confound it!” or “Hell!”

Page 155: *soukala*: probably based on Suk, a Nilotic people in the Lake Baringo region of Kenya, i.e., “soukala” as the country of the Suks. Like “krumen,” in the poem “Batouque,” it is mysteriously left uncapitalized.

Page 165: *Oricous*: popular name for the great black African vulture.

Page 169: *strom*: according to Davis, “the loan-word ‘maelstrom’ appears here in syncope as ‘strom.’” (“Toward a ‘Non-Vicious Circle,’” p. 139.) According to Césaire, much of the imagery in this poem is a response to the disaster caused by Mont Pelée’s 1902 eruption; therefore our translation of “éclat” as “eruption.”

Page 173: *Aguacero*: in Spanish, a brief sudden shower or downpour.

Page 177: *bille* (speck of coal): Césaire confirmed to Davis (“Toward a ‘Non-Vicious Circle,’” p. 140) that “bille” here is “a fragmentary vocable for ‘escarbille.’”

Page 187: *the Phoronidea would make roads with their tentacles*: Phoronidea are small, marine, wormlike animals, bearing numerous tentacles. Therefore our translation of “queues” as “tentacles.”

Page 187: *the Trichomanes’ crosiers*: Hearn describes Martinican tree-ferns as unrolling in a spiral from the bud and at first as assuming the shape of a crosier. He also notes that some of this species are called “archbishop-trees.” (*Two Years*, p. 111.) It is possible that Césaire’s reference to “bishop” at the beginning of this line is to evoke such a tree-fern, but we have been unable to locate anything called an archbishop-tree.

Page 197: *daba*: a short-handled African hoe.

Page 201: *paraschites*: in ancient Egypt a class of embalmers whose task, while preparing the mummy, was to make a lateral cut with a silex knife into the cadaver in order to extract the viscera.

Page 213: *tapaya*: popular name for an iguana of the *Phrynosoma* genus, comprising the horned toads.

Page 225: *The Light's Judgment*: in early editions of *Soleil cou coupé*, this is the last poem in the collection. For reasons that appear to be erroneous, in the OC the poem is placed as the opening piece in *Corps perdu*. We have taken the liberty of moving it back to its place in *Soleil cou coupé*.

Page 235: *souklyans*: a Dahoman sorcerer who has the ability to leave his skin to carry out his evil tasks. The word appears to be a variation on “soukougnan” or “soukongnan,” all of which appear to be derived from *soukou* = moonless night, and *gnan* = master, i.e., a master of the moonless night, or sorcerer. (*Le vocabulaire du parler Créole*, pp. 167–168.)

Page 267: *rôlés* (forbeten): an archaic French word meaning “beaten.” Our thanks to Professor Lee W. Patterson of the English Department at Johns Hopkins University who suggested the Middle English “forbeten.”

Page 271: *Dalaba . . . Tinkisso*: Dalaba, Pita, Labé, and Mali are all towns on a south-north road which cuts through the Fouta Jallon mountains in central Guinea. The mountains end in the Tamgue range, which may be the reference here to Timbé. The Tinkisso is a tributary of the Niger which has its source in the Fouta Jallon mountains.

Page 275: *For Ina*: Ina is one of Césaire’s daughters who has done extensive work on Caribbean anthropology and folklore. *Présence Africaine*, no. 121–122, 1982, contains her essay, “La triade humaine dans le conte antillais.”

Page 275: *la mangle* (the coastal swamp): while the word “mangle” generally translates as “mangrove fruit,” in this case, according to comments Césaire made in an interview conducted after the publication of *Ferremets* in 1960, the word refers to the swampy coastal fringe of Martinique. Césaire’s response to this part of the interview deserves to be quoted here for it reveals his careful observation of Martinican nature. “I am an Antillean. I want a poetry that is concrete, very Antillean, Martinican. I must name Martinican things, must call them by their names. The cañafistula mentioned in “Spirals” is a tree; it is also called the drumstick tree. It has large yellow leaves and its fruit are those big purplish bluish black pods, used here also as a purgative. The balisier resembles a plantain, but it has a red heart, a red florescence at its center that is really shaped like a heart. The cecropias are shaped like silvery hands, yes, like the interior of a black’s hand. All of these astonishing words are absolutely necessary, they are never gratuitous. . . .” (Hale, *Les Ecrits d’A. C.*, p. 406.)

Page 305: *Statue of Lafcadio Hearn*: the quoted lines in the first stanza appear to come directly from Hearn’s book *Youma* (Alhambra: C. F. Braun and Co., 1951, pp. 151–152). They are shouted by a street medicine man who is trying to sell a potion of tafia, gunpowder, and crushed wasps, to laborers and fishermen.

In the second stanza, Yé and Nanie-Rosette are characters in some of the Martinican folktales that Hearn collected and published. He writes that Yé is the most curious figure in Martinican folklore, “a typical Bitaco—or mountain negro of the lazy kind.” (*Two Years*, p. 401.) The

reference to Yé in the poem comes from a tale in which to get food for his children, Yé clammers up a palm tree and accidentally kills the totem bird.

In another tale, Nanie-Rosette is depicted as a greedy child who spends the night feasting on the Devil's Rock, with the Devil and his entourage dancing about her.

An ajoupa is a Martinican hut made out of branches and leaves.

Page 307: *the bird with feathers*: the last two lines of this poem draw upon the consequences of Yé having killed and shared the totem bird with his family. The enchanted bird revives and demands that the family restore it to its very last feather. Kesteloot and Kotchy comment on the allegorical use of the folk tale in the poem in *A. C. / l'homme et l'oeuvre*, pp. 58–59.

Page 309: *tur-ra-mas*: an Australian boomerang made out of very hard wood.

Page 321: *Cavally Sassandra Bandama*: a series of three rivers which flow south in Ivory Coast into the Atlantic. The Cavally marks the frontier with Liberia.

Page 323: *Pachira*: a variation on “Pachirier,” a tree from Guiana and the West Indies that resembles the horse chestnut tree.

Page 331: *Memorial For Louis Delgrès*: General Magloire Pélage was a Guadeloupan mulatto military leader who overthrew local French rule in 1801. Unlike Toussaint L'Ouverture, however, he took all possible means to demonstrate his loyalty to France, and when Richepanse prepared to invade Basse-Terre, Pélage attempted to get Delgrès to surrender. When handed Pélage's message, Delgrès tore it in pieces and denounced Pélage as a traitor.

Ignace, one of the black leaders at Basse-Terre, surrendered and then proceeded to kill himself. Gobert, the French general to whom he had surrendered, had his head cut off and exposed to view. See Shelby T. McCloy's *The Negro in the French West Indies*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), pp. 106–110. McCloy's account of the death of Ignace, as well as where it took place, differs from Césaire's account of it in the poem.

Page 335: *une fripure de bagasses* (a shred of crushed sugarcane): “fripure” is a neologism formed by Césaire on “friperie,” which in Martinique is the shed in which the sugarcane waits to be taken to the mill. According to Césaire, “fripure” is the residue of crushed sugarcane emptied of its vital juices.

Page 339: *In Memory Of A Black Union Leader*: Albert Cretinoir, who died from natural causes in Martinique in 1952.

Page 341: *quand mai dore en chabin* (when May gilds chabin-like): chabin is the European name for a kind of sheep crossbred by a ewe and a billygoat. Socially, in the West Indies, it refers to a mixed-race offspring.

Page 345: *au carne blanc coeur désinfecté* (in the white heart's tough antiseptic meat): Césaire confirmed our interpretation of this line. “Carne,” a feminine noun, is used as an adjective for an otherwise masculine group of words.

Page 361: *cachaça*: in Spanish, “cachaza” is a kind of rum, or the first froth on cane juice when boiled to make sugar. Exu, elsewhere spelled Eshu, “is one of the names given to the loa who, in

voodoo, and in Brazilian macumba, opens the paths or lifts the barriers between the world of men and the world of spirits.” (Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude* p. 221.)

Page 361: *vatapa*: a Brazilian dish made of manioc meal mixed with fish or meat, and seasoned.

Page 361: *azulejo*: in Spanish, glazed tile painted with various colors or plain white.

Page 363: *Ethiopia* . . . : “Tedj” is a mead drink; “injera” is a pancakelike bread made from corn flour.

“Saint-Guiorguis” is the Bieta Ghiorghis, the monolithic church at Lalibela.

One of the names for the legendary Queen of Sheba is “Belkis Makeba” which in the context of the poem links her with the contemporary singer Miriam Makeba.

The Galla are a southern Ethiopian people.

Page 369: *Boukman*: a black Haitian slave who became the leader of the ferocious revolts at Noé, Clément, Flaville, Gallifet, and Le Normand in 1791.

Page 371: *Dessalines*: Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a lieutenant trained by Toussaint L’Ouverture, who became governor of the South after the 1799 Haitian Revolution. Notorious for his hatred of whites, he commanded the assault in mid-November 1803 on Fort Breda, on Cap Haitien. Vertières was one of the fort’s supporting positions.

Page 371: *Cabritos* . . . *bombaia*: in Spanish, “cabritos” are young goats or kids.

“Cantagallo” is a town in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

“Botafogo” in Portuguese means “fire-spitting,” and is a popular term for a troublemaker.

“Bate” in Portuguese means “beating” or “shaking.”

“Favellas” are shanty slums.

“Bombaia” is a Haitian rallying cry associated with Boukman’s voodoo ceremonies at Bois Cayman on the eve of the 1791 revolts.

Page 371: *moudang*: a variation on the word “Mondongue” or “Moudongue,” an African people living at the Cameroon and Chad borders, or possibly a variant of “Mandingue,” the large family of peoples in central West Africa (Bambara, Malinké, Soninké, Dyula, Wangara, etc.). Hearn comments that in Martinique “moudongue” is a very hard wood from which sticks, with magical power to inflict injury, were made. He adds that a Mondongue slave on a plantation was generally feared by his fellow blacks of other tribes to such an extent that the name became transformed into an adjective to denote anything formidable or terrible. (*Two Years*, p. 173.)

Page 375: *Decebalian*: Decebales was the name given to the King of Dacia. The Dacian Decebales fought the Roman Empire but eventually cooperated with it during the first century A.D. Probably a symbol of the colonization process for Césaire, who uses an adjective derived from the noun.

Page 375: *phlégréennes* (Flegreian): refers to the Campi Flegrei, a volcanic region in Campania, Italy, above the Bay of Naples, with many craters.

Page 385: *porana*: a climbing herb of tropical East Africa, Madagascar, Asia, and Australia, of the Convolvulaceae family.

Page 393: *poui*: a Trinidadian Créole word for the tree *Tabebuia Pallida*, with pink trumpet-shaped flowers.

Page 397: *parakimomène*: probably a misremembered Greek word, *parakinouménos*, a present middle/passive participle, meaning “very disturbed,” or “very agitated.”

Page 397: *couresse*: popular term for the nonvenomous Martinican water snake. When swimming, the *couresse* holds its head out of the water. “Proud as a couresse crossing a river” is a popular saying.

Page 397: *crabe-c'est-ma-faute* (through-my-fault crab): according to Hearn, “a crab having one very small and one very large claw, which latter it carries folded up against its body, so as to have suggested the idea of a penitent striking his bosom, and uttering the sacramental words of the Catholic confession, ‘Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.’ ” (*Two Years*, p. 141.)



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