



## **The Poetics of Being Mad and Black: (Psycho)analyzing the *Évolué***

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“the insane awakening”

-Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land* (1939)

### **Introduction**

The Martinican poet, Aimé Fernand David Césaire, passed away on April 17, 2008. Coming eleven years after his death, I look at two works that solidified his literary reputation in the world: *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land* (“*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*”) and *Discourse on Colonialism* (“*Discours sur la colonialisme*”). Aimé Césaire left a legacy in two separate, at times contradictory, fields: politics and literature. Because of this, scholars have long grappled with two Césaires, a literary Césaire and a political Césaire. Although the focus on Césaire's politics has produced fruitful and expansive scholarship, it unfortunately obscures how Césaire engaged with the relationship between psychoanalysis and aesthetics, particularly in his search for a way out of colonial trauma. Therefore, in this article, I move beyond traditional readings of Césaire's inner psychological and political strife to rethink Césaire's critique of psychoanalysis and current postcolonial thought more generally.

In order to do so, I look at Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* and his long poem *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land* along with the two text's conversation with one another and with other critical thinkers. The ultimate goal of the article is twofold: to explore Césaire's psychoanalysis and to engage with his poetics. In the first section, I investigate how, confronted with the fraught history of psychoanalysis' intersections with colonial racism, Aimé Césaire dialogues with other anti-colonial thinkers, such as Suzanne Césaire and Frantz Fanon, about the methodology of psychoanalysis. In this section, I confront colonial archives, the psychology of imperial oppressions, and psychoanalysis' complicity with imperialism. In the second section, I rework Césaire's legacy as president of Martinique and examine the relevance of his psychoanalysis to postcolonial studies, literary criticism, and psychoanalytic debates. In the third section, I analyze Césaire's call for a radical poetics which overcomes the limitations of psychoanalysis at the time.

From this, I propose a new methodology of reading – psychopoetics – to interpret Césaire's long poem, *Notebook*. To better tailor this method to a specifically psychoanalytic and anti-colonial literary object, I draw on Charles Bernheimer, but I also borrow from other thinkers like Shoshanna Felman, Walter Benjamin, Frantz Fanon, Suzanne Césaire, and Paul de Man. I define psychopoetics as a way to examine the act of writing in psychoanalytical and rhetorical terms. Furthermore, I show how psychopoetics locates moments in which madness is made present in language. My reading of *Notebook* engages with this method, showing how it challenges and supports certain postcolonial readings of the text. By reading these two texts—*Discourse* and *Notebook*— together, I delineate the relationship between Césaire's appropriation of psychoanalysis and his exploration of poetic madness.

## Psychoanalyzing the *Évolué*

Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and Frantz Fanon laid the groundwork for analyzing colonialism not strictly as economic, political, and military conquest, but as a completely different kind of conquest: a psychological one. According to the three thinkers, this psychological subjugation left its victims “mad,” envious of “whiteness,” and desperate to be initiated into European powers. Additionally, they share in a tireless effort to deconstruct, either implicitly or explicitly, the history of psychoanalysis's allegiance with colonialism, even as they appropriate and reuse certain psychoanalytic terms. Far from comprehensive, the three thinkers – Suzanne Césaire, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon – and their respective works, represent an important shift in the discipline of psychoanalysis as it reevaluates its entrenched imperial biases and becomes adopted by anti-colonial liberation movements.

In *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, Ranjana Khanna reflects on the anti-colonial version of psychoanalysis that Aimé Césaire along with his wife, Suzanne Césaire, developed. She writes,

In the interwar years, and through the Second World War, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire's journal *Tropiques* offered an ongoing critique of the Vichy regime, and formed a psychoanalysis of political resistance that responded to what they called 'colonial trauma.' The journal offered an interpretation of psychoanalysis quite distinct from Marxist surrealism and existentialism (to which it is often reduced). Suzanne Césaire, and Aimé Césaire, and Rene Menil posed questions concerning how to address the specificities of colonialism through both psychoanalysis and politics (2003, p. 119).

Khanna's comments point to the uniqueness and the current invisibility of the Césaires' psychoanalytic engagements during the interwar years. In her book, Khanna argues that the psychoanalytic “self” and “lack” was constituted through the specifically national-colonial encounters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and that therefore somewhat paradoxically perhaps, psychoanalysis is crucial for understanding postcoloniality and decolonization. Adding to Khanna's findings, I examine how the Césaires's and Fanon's psychoanalysis is imperative for scholars' continual effort to read against imperialism and understand anti-colonial aesthetics.

What Fanon and the Césaires share at their foundation (perhaps because of their overlapping experience as French educated black intellectuals) is a constant wrestling with the question: how does one psychoanalyze the *évolué* and his/her duality of Westernness and Blackness? The double alienation of the Westernized black subject is often directly connected to some sort of madness in Fanon, Suzanne, and Aimé Césaire's writing as they describe the mind of the *évolué* in psychoanalytical terms - “inferiority complex,” “hysteria,” “narcissism,” “nervous condition.”

But first, what is the *évolué*?<sup>1</sup> Even in the three thinkers' exploration of this figure's internal psychology, the Césaires and Fanon were keenly aware that the *évolué*

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The pronoun of the *évolué* is always “he” in the Césaires and Fanon's writings. However, I argue that their analysis of this figure can and should be extended to someone outside of a

was not just a way of being or a social identity but a historical construct and a product of colonialism. In *Tropiques*, Suzanne Césaire explains the forceful exclusion of blacks during the slave regime that led to the colonial construction of the *évolué*. She writes about how on April 30, 1764 some decrees prohibited “blacks” and “coloreds” from the practice of medicine (S. Césaire, 2009, p. 31). On May 9, 1765, other decrees forbade the practice of law clerk; and the famous order of February 9, 1779 strictly prohibited blacks from wearing clothes identical to those of Whites (S. Césaire, 2009, p. 31). After the slaves were freed in 1848, Suzanne Césaire argues that this led to the false and dangerous assumption that assimilation meant freedom. Acquiring French language and culture became the main goal for families to advance in the class structure of Martinique.

This imitation of French ways was encouraged and enforced by French colonial policies in the educational system and recruitment network. It was required that the students of the French colonies take the same exams and study the same materials as their peers in Lyons. Consequently, the history of the plantation economy, of slavery, and of the lived experience of the colonized were erased. The result of this system was that black students were indoctrinated in how to be French so that they could become an *évolué*, a colonized subject who has become more “evolved” or “civilized.” Many *évolués* under colonial rule would later journey to Paris to continue their education. The French government would then offer the most promising students careers as administrators in its overseas empire, turning the colonized into the colonizer. Martinicans had been prominent in this field, since the principal recruiting point for the Caribbean was the Lycee Schoelcher of Fort-de-France, Aimé Césaire and Fanon's alma mater.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon famously analyzes a black individual who is part of this particular historical time and cultural milieu of colonialism—an *évolué*. According to Fanon, his male analysand suffers from an “inferiority complex” as he desires to travel to France, speak French, and be accepted in French society. Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Césaire, and Fanon all attempt to identify the feeling of lack in the *évolué* as a “desire for whiteness.” At the same time, it is important to understand what they were working through and working against. At stake in their mobilization of psychological vocabularies was a complicated entanglement of psychoanalysis with colonial racism. Historically, many of Sigmund Freud's foundational psychoanalytic works, like his mythical epic *Totem and Taboo: Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, conflated “primitive people” with the tableau of a Darwinian pre-modern human and argued that “savages” (like children) have a stronger natural connection with the libido, the Oedipal complex, and the “unconscious.” Working in the same spirit decades later, Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonialism* used psychoanalysis to analyze his infamous “dependency complex” of the colonized. One can see that psychoanalysis's transhistorical and cross-cultural figuration of “civilization” produced a dangerous account of a universal

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strictly male gender. I will, nonetheless, adopt the pronoun “he” to describe the *évolué* throughout the article because of the way these writers refer to the *évolué*.

subjectivity that is premised on the citizen-qua-subject of the white Global North, thereby working to exclude the racialized “Other.”

For Mannoni, this moral investment in the civilizing apparatus of psychological discourses of the West took shape in his theory of a “dependency complex,” which he proposed as the colonized's almost biological need for an external authority to supplement the Madagascan’s inherently dependent nature. Unsurprisingly, Mannoni casts this authority figure as a white Western father in *Prospero and Caliban*:

It is the destiny of the Occidental to face the obligation laid down by the commandment. Thou shalt leave thy father and thy mother. This obligation is incomprehensible to the Madagascan. At a given time in his development, every European discovers in himself the desire... to break the bonds of dependency, to become the equal of his father. The Madagascan, never! He does not experience rivalry with the paternal authority, "manly protest," or Adlerian inferiority-ordeals through which the European must pass and which are like civilized forms... of the initiation rites by which one achieves manhood... (Mannoni, quoted in Césaire 2001, p. 60)

While rejecting Mannoni's “dependency complex,” Césaire adopts the term “inferiority complex” and ingeniously suggests that it is the colonized's own belief in his/her inferiority from which the colonized must be liberated. Césaire refutes Mannoni's diagnostics of the colonized as “dependent” even as he agrees, tentatively, to Mannoni's supposition that there is a psychological disjointedness within the colonized's mind. Yet, importantly Césaire points out Mannoni's inability to understand how certain psychologies could be produced by political and economic structures of oppression. Césaire profusely criticizes Mannoni's psychoanalysis, which he sees as deeply entrenched in its racist preconceptions about the colonized's inferior and dependent culture:

As for M. Mannoni, in view of his book and his observations on the Madagascan soul, he deserves to be taken very seriously. Follow him step by step through the ins and outs of his little conjuring tricks, and he will prove to you as clear as day that colonization is based on psychology, that there are in this world groups of men who, for unknown reasons, suffer from what must be called a dependency complex, that these groups are psychologically made for dependence; that they need dependence, that they crave it, ask for it, demand it; that this is the case with most of the colonized peoples and with the Madagascans in particular. Away with racism! Away with colonialism! They smack too much of barbarism. M. Mannoni has something better: psychoanalysis. Embellished with existentialism, it gives astonishing results: the most down-at-heel clichés are re-soled for you and made good as new; the most absurd prejudices are explained and justified; and, as if by magic, the moon is turned into green cheese. (Césaire, 2001, p.59)

How Césaire argues against Mannoni’s re-articulation of racism and prejudice in his use of psychoanalytic discourse is noteworthy because of his play on language—“the moon turning into green cheese.” Drawing on a fundamental characteristic of surrealism, he celebrates the absurd as political resistance. Even in mobilizing a political contestation

here, Césaire is adopting a kind of poetics characteristic of his negritude aesthetics. This can be seen in the tone and rhythm of his language: an explosive and uncontainable *pathos* of exhaustion from centuries-long dehumanization and colonial trauma in need of expression. Although unabashedly critical of Mannoni, Césaire does not, however, empirically disprove his claims through the discourse of psychoanalysis. This move is significant because it suggests a refusal to speak on Mannoni's terms—that is, a refusal to speak under the rules of psychoanalysis at the time. In doing so, Césaire indicates that psychoanalysis's inclination to find “lack” in individual subjectivity—and, more pressingly, in a whole culture—aligns with a developmental model of mental progress, which goes hand-in-hand with the oppressive logic of social Darwinism and colonial subjugation.

Césaire points out that in order to establish psychoanalysis as a field that is more “enlightened” than other disciplines, it may try to divorce itself from racism on the surface and produce “less racist” neutral explanations of colonial power struggles. This ends up being more destructive than outright racism because it is cloaked in the respectability of the discipline. In this way, Césaire diagnoses the limitation of psychoanalysis as a methodology during decolonization. But where Mannoni's psychoanalysis fails, Césaire moves to surrealist poetic language while also adopting anti-colonial Marxism. Rejecting Mannoni's “dependency complex,” Césaire nevertheless writes about the “inferiority complex” in the colonized and how it came about:

I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys. They dazzle me with the tonnage of cotton or cocoa that has been exported, the acreage that has been planted with olive trees or grapevines. (Césaire, 2001, p.43)

Through Marxism, Césaire explains that the “complex” is not something inherent in the native, the colonized, or the *évolué*; rather, it is based on economic exploitation, indoctrination, education, and enslavement. Combining psychoanalysis and anti-colonial Marxism, Césaire is invested in the liberation of the individual minds as well as the take-down of external hierarchical systems which support the psychology of racism. Echoing Aimé Césaire's Marxist insights, Fanon interprets a black patient's dream of becoming white when he has recently become anxious about his job prospects (Fanon, 2008, p. 80). Fanon, like Aimé Césaire, emphasizes that the black man is not dependent on his nervous condition nor was he born with it. In fact, the blame must be put upon the structure of the society that benefits from this “neurosis” and continues to instill this “neurosis” in the black man.

Suzanne Césaire, on the other hand, writes of mimicry, the imitation and adoption of European ways by the Martinican petite bourgeoisie (S. Césaire, 2012, p.55). As Suzanne Césaire charts it, mimicry leads to a crippling kind of “hysteria” within the black psyche. Mimicry is the absurd desire to mimic one's master or slaveowner. On a cultural level, this mimicry creates a Martinican culture that cannot stand on its own two feet. She adopts the metaphor of genetic corruption—*teratoid aberration*—to explain the colonized's culture in the aftermath of Westernization. In doing so, she puts forth a prophetic observation as current postcolonial states still struggle to depart from the

control of their former imperial states. At the same time, she shows how the problem lies not within these cultures but in the history of imperialism which produced a strong unconscious drive to Westernize. This is, she explains, analogous to hysteria. The decolonizing nation is like a hysteric, it imitates an illness (Western civilization) when in reality it was never sick (S. Césaire, 2012, p. 55). Similar to Fanon and Césaire, she thus combines psychoanalysis and anti-colonial Marxism and argues that *true* decolonization requires a complete restructuring of the mind and that of society as well.

All three writers attempt to make their patient, their reader, and the Martinican bourgeoisie understand that the neurosis, hysteria, or “inferiority complex” that is plaguing them is not a product of his or her own making, an inherent psychology, but a perversity of society, of colonial education, of Westernization, and of capitalistic economic structures. Moreover, in doing so, they rhetorically undo the tautological tendency of psychoanalysis to diagnose an inherent “lack” in the colonized where there is none. In other words, none of the three see their patient's problem as an aberration of the normal healthy psyche, but instead begin to see that the “lack” lies in society, and at times, in the discipline of psychoanalysis itself. In fact, they all arrive at the same conclusion: Western Civilization is the “complex” that the *évolué* has imitated, thus causing him or her to be “mad.” It is important to point out that besides departing from the accepted psychoanalytic language at the time,

Aimé Césaire speaks directly to the mad *évolué*, the colonized subject as opposed to a community of psychoanalysts. His psychoanalytic insights are meant to hold up a mirror against the reader/patient/black individual so that he may see the insanity of desiring to be white. In many ways, Aimé Césaire blurs the distinction between the analyst and the patient in his psychoanalytic observations. Ironically, the “mad” black patient is also the analyst; Aimé Césaire is an *évolué* with a complex. His language departs from Manonni's scientific and objective language, which seeks to pathologize and categorize the “savage” as “mad.” The goal in his critique and appropriation of psychoanalysis is thus twofold: to speak to the “madman” so that he can understand him and speak as the “madman” so that he may be understood by others.

It is important to point out that Aimé Césaire does not cynically end with the patient's “inferiority complex.” To Césaire, reading the *évolué* as only a product or a symptom of the entrenched problems of Western civilization and imperialism destroys the possibility of revolution. If the *évolué* is reduced to his complex, it suggests that the colonized can never break free from oppression. In fact, Césaire is more interested in the cure rather than the diagnosis. Moving away from Manonni's pathologization of the Madagascan, Césaire searches for a way out from imperial psychology in his celebration of surrealist madness. Césaire dismantles racist psychology by working through his colonial trauma, his indoctrination from colonial education, and his alienation from his African roots in his long poem, *Notebook*. He overcomes the many complexes that society has diagnosed in him with an embrace of another form of madness: poetry.

To Fanon and the Césaires, language is therefore crucial to bring to the surface the unconscious civilizing impulse of Westernization. Language is not simply a way to explain or rationalize the psychology of the colonized; rather it offers a way out from the

neurosis of the *évolué*. Turning away from the scientific, academic, and objective language of psychoanalysis, Césaire's locates the way out in the *irrational* language of poetry. In the realm of literature and art in twentieth-century Caribbean and European surrealism, the neurotic man is not excluded or diagnosed, but is hailed as a cause for celebration. Surrealism embraces the artist as madman and as Other.

To the European and Caribbean surrealists, Cartesian “reason” (which governs the organization of categories like “mad” and “sane”) is symptomatic of an oppressive order, of the monarchic, imperialistic, and bourgeois regime. To rebel against this, the surrealists celebrated and embraced unreason and madness in their artistic works. The surrealists' goal was to find a language, a language other than that of reason, which masters and represses madness, and other than that of clinical psychoanalysis, which transforms madness into an object with which no dialogue can be engaged. Such an aspiration goes some way toward explaining why surrealists were fascinated by hysteria, psychosis, neurosis, sexuality, the Oedipus complex, and the unconscious, but largely ambivalent about psychoanalysis as a science or a clinical practice (Rosemont and Kelley, 2009, p. 13). Moving away from the empiricism of psychoanalysis, the surrealists explored madness in art.

Surrealism's obsession with madness as a form of revolution spoke to Césaire's sense of revolt. Césaire played with the idea that poetry is madness as a way to fight against imperialist discourse. Suzanne Césaire writes of what her and her husband's surrealism meant to her: “Here are the poet, the painter, and the artist, presiding over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness” (S. Césaire, 2009, p. 17). In “Poésie et connaissance,” Aimé Césaire writes, “poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge” (Richardson and Fijałkowski, 1996, p. 134). Aimé Césaire explained in an interview with Kelley, poetry helped him to summon up powerful “unconscious forces.” The Césaires were transfixed by poetry's ability to defy scientific and objective language and characterized this power in poetry as madness or the unconscious. For Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, the madness in surrealist poetry is a possible way out from the psychological trauma, Darwinian objectification, and neurosis produced by imperialism. For them, poetic language is where an anti-colonial psychology of being black is articulated. Poetic language is their grand experiment of restructuring the symbolic order and society; it is an attempt to re-imagine a new future.

### **Rethinking Césaire: A Dialogue with Postcolonial and Psychoanalytic Criticism**

Following in the footsteps of *Small Axe's* recent special issue, “Rethinking Césaire” (2015), my reading here likewise seeks to reevaluate Césaire's works by moving away from a discussion of Césaire's overt political allegiance in his legacy as president of Martinique. The collection of works in “Rethinking Césaire” has shown Césaire's writing “as a living legacy, firmly rooted in a specific historical context but revealing different facets of its structure to successive generations as [scholars] seek to understand it in relation to their own preoccupations and challenges” (Prieto, 2015, p. 86-90). Jennifer Wilks investigates Césaire and intersectional feminism and Nick Nesbitt excavates

Césaire and Marxism. Adding to this generative scholarship, I examine Césaire's relationship to psychoanalysis.

I find that Césaire's psychoanalysis has not lost its relevance and, perhaps, should be revisited with urgency, especially in the present moment. For starters, in *Tropiques* and *Discourse*, Césaire used psychoanalysis to resist ideologies that are still prevalent today: Nazism and French imperialism. Furthermore, the groundbreaking questions that he posed are still important to current psychoanalytic debates. Césaire asked critically “to what extent is it productive to explain the colonized and racialized 'Other' through Western-centric psychoanalysis?” and “are the psyches, art, and culture of the oppressed only symptomatic of larger systemic problems?” These culturally and historically specific questions, seemingly narrow in their scope, actually parallel a major paradigm shift in contemporary psychoanalytic theory, seen in methodological reconsiderations like Ann Anlin Cheng's “Psychoanalysis without Symptoms” (2009), in critiques of psychoanalysis's Eurocentrism like *Psychoanalysis & History's* recent special issue “Psychoanalysis and the Middle East: Discourses and Encounters” (2018), and in the broader field of the New Freud Studies, which (taken together) seek to deconstruct the discipline and veer away from reading art and/or culture as rigidly symptomatic.

Moreover, re-reading Césaire reminds scholars of how a decolonized and dynamic psychoanalysis can be fruitful in analyzing aesthetics dealing with both race and gender as shown in the collection of works in “Aesthetic Subjects.” As Gyenge explores in her own contribution to this special issue, Césaire wholeheartedly rejects Enlightenment reason, universalism, empiricism but appropriates psychoanalysis in his works in the same way that Freud eventually departs from the humanist lineage he inherits from philosophical aesthetics. Working in the same aspirations idiom as my own reading of Césaire, Gyenge claims that *Beyond the Pleasure Principles* offers the chance to articulate a different concept of aesthetic subjectivity than ones owed to Enlightenment aesthetics.

Besides the many applications of Césaire's critique of psychoanalysis, I also find that certain problems in traditional Freudian and Mannonian psychoanalysis have crossed over to certain contemporary postcolonial literary criticism of his long poem *Notebook*. There is a tendency in some postcolonial scholarship to either generalize the figure of the *évolué* in a dogmatic and symptomatic way or psychoanalyze negritude's celebration of blackness as a kind of narcissistic complex. The relationship between the literary critic and the speaker of the poem is, at times, akin to the psychoanalyst who holds a superior position to the “madman.” For instance,

Wole Soyinka, prominent Nigerian writer and thinker, identified negritude's poetry of self-contemplation as a negative form of narcissism incapable of breaking free. In “The 'I' as Messiah in Césaire's First *Cahier*,” Malachi McIntosh also examines the *évolué* in *Notebook* and finds that the speaker is imprisoned by his own whiteness. Moreover, leading critics of Aimé Césaire scholarship, Albert James Arnold and Dorris L. Garraway, see the narrator in the opening scene as the typical emigrant intellectual standing in Europe looking down at his homeland - Martinique (Arnold, 1981, p. 155). Both follow the logic that an *évolué* will always be estranged from himself and from his



people. Analyzing the opening scene of the 1939 *Notebook*, McIntosh takes an even more critical stance. He argues that it is simply *impossible* “to situate the degrading depiction [of Antilles] as a criticism of France, slavery or colonialism” (McIntosh, 2012, p. 81). There is an inclination among the critics to diagnose the Westernized black intellectual's desire, valorization, and critique of blackness as complicit with the whiteness that he cannot escape. In short, scholars have (psycho)analyzed the figure of the *évolué* as *only* a symptom of larger systemic problems of society. This not only flattens the nuances of the *évolué* in the poem, but also reduces his poetry to his complex—that is, a desire for whiteness—while further alienating and marginalizing him from himself.

I posit that discussions of Césaire's *Notebook*, and of negritude, have been harmfully affected by this censure of the *évolué*. In “Rereading Aimé Césaire: Negritude as Creolization,” Souleymane Bachir Diagne similarly pushes back against this widespread understanding of negritude as an essentialist theory of identity that has served its purpose. He redirects our focus to Césaire's poetics especially in analyzing its hybridization and creolization. Diagne writes, “the reason Negritude is par excellence poetry is because the goal of poetry is to give back to the individual who is alienated and negated what he calls *Sahardaya*, using the Indian word to mean the 'taste' of what one is, and the sense of a 'reconstituted plenitude’” (Diagne, 2015, p. 128). Adding to Diagne, I argue that turning to Césaire poetics is not only generative to creolization but radically transformative for the field of psychoanalysis and the politics of liberation in general. What Diagne described as “reconstituted plenitude” is what I have identified in Césaire's writing as his unique poetic madness. I argue that this poetic madness like *Sahardaya* invites a plenitude of interpretations for the individual and breaks down any kind of fixed or oppressive identity, such as, the psychological complexes and the racist categorizations of the figure, the *évolué*.

### **Analyzing Césaire's Madness Through Psychopoetics**

The poem that perhaps best explores this dynamic triangulation of neurosis, poetics, and madness is Aime Cesaire's *Notebook of a Return to The Native Land*. The long poem does not only examine the psychotic break of the speaker but also participates experientially in the madness of being black. The speaker comes to the realization that society has instilled in him an “inferiority complex;” through this psychological complex, his external world makes his complicity to a hatred of blackness clear. However, the poem does not end there since the speaker becomes obsessed with a potential way out from his double alienation. Through this obsession, he begins his journey to redefine blackness from something negative to something positive. Césaire's *Notebook* vulgarizes and revitalizes the French language as the speaker simultaneously dismantles what it means to be “civilized” and satirizes what it means to be black. The speaker convicts the atrocity of colonialism by reliving it, yet boldly dreams of freedom and liberation.

In my reading of *Notebook*, I adopt a new framework called “psychopoetics” to further theorize Césaire's anti-colonial psychoanalysis and surrealist poetics. Drawing on Shoshana Felman's work *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis*, I consider how she mobilizes a method of reading that I identify as psychopoetics. This method, first introduced by Charles Bernheimer to analyze Gustave Flaubert and Franz

Kafka, combines psychoanalysis, rhetoric, and poetics to find moments in which the silenced history of madness speaks. Why use this particular framework to understand Césaire? For starters, Césaire is also searching for a way to access the silenced history and interiority of the colonized. Césaire's psychoanalysis attempts to help overcome and bring to consciousness the *évolué's* repressed colonial past through language. Psychopoetics proposes that it is the critics' job to find moments or ways in which art, poetry, and fiction transcend the many pathologies and symptoms produced by colonial structures. Psychopoetics calls for the critic to uncover what is expelled in discourse, erased in history, suppressed in political philosophy by exploring the myriad of voices in what Felman has called "literary madness." Felman explains,

Madness, which is not simply mental illness, not an object, is nothing other than the excess of its *pathos*, a 'lyrical explosion,' a 'torn presence,' it is precisely this capacity for suffering, for emotion, for vertige, for literary fascination. Madness, in other words, is for Foucault *pathos* itself, a metaphor of *pathos*, of the unthought residue of thought. (Felman, 2003, p. 52)

Felman's method of reading for moments where madness speaks is fitting to the projects of *Discourse* and *Notebook* because Césaire utilizes poetic madness to give voice to the colonized. To search for the silenced history of madness, Felman turns to the *pathos* of fiction. In the same way, I read *Discourse* and *Notebook* by focusing on the *pathos* of poetry and analyzing how it undoes the suppression of blackness. Instead of solely focusing on the violent silencing of black interiority in Western discourse, I, adopting Felman's psychopoetics, search for moments in which a poetics of black madness are made present in Césaire's long poem, *Notebook*.

The opening scene of *Notebook* starts with the suppression of Antillean culture and history and the simultaneous unraveling of this silence through its poetics. In the beginning, the speaker describes the physical, emotional, economical, and spiritual devastation that is colonialism. The hidden omniscient speaker says,

At the end of first light, the extreme, deceptive desolate eschar on the wound of the waters; the martyrs who do not bear witness; the flowers of blood that fade and scatter in the empty wind like the cries of babbling parrots; and aged life mendaciously smiling, its lips opened by vacated agonies; an aged poverty rotting under the sun, silently; an aged silence bursting with tepid pustules. (Césaire, 2013, p. 3)

In this passage, Césaire characteristically takes the reader from the concrete, to the metaphorical, and then to the allegorical, which grows obscure the more precisely it is expressed. The language here is marked by excess, an abundance of metaphors that pile on to one another. Yet, the overload of metaphors illustrates the impossibility of meaning. The cacophony of anguished sounds is meaningless and the visceral images of past violence are fragmented. The past is overwhelming, overloaded with stimulus but incomprehensible. Paradoxically, the incredible lyric cadence and visuality of the verses express the inability to hear or see. The recurring motif of "muteness" and "blindness" represents the repression of the Antillean past by colonialism: "the martyrs that do not bear witness." Yet, the speaker gives this "silence" a myriad of voices, smells, emotions, and faces. It is as if the "silence" is energetically waiting to be unleashed, albeit, in a

gruesome way: “an aged silence bursting with tepid pustules.” Here, the voice of Antilles is not expressed in the *logos* of language but is rendered present by its *pathos*, in a metaphorical manner.

As opposed to the dominant reading that sees the beginning of the poem as the “complicit *évolué*” belittling Antilles and its hopeless peoples, I read the introduction as exploring the silenced colonial trauma in the collective unconscious of Martinicans, Caribbeans, and peoples of African descent. The speaker takes the reader to an inert town, Fort-de-France. There are two sets of recurring images, the “throng” and the “morne.” The speaker introduces “this squalling throng so astonishingly detoured from its cry” (Césaire, 2013, p. 3). The throng that does not know how to express itself or assert itself represents the inability to speak, continuing the motif of “silence” in Antilles. The repetition of the morne that does not want to erupt represents impotence, the inability to act: “the morne forgotten, forgetful of exploding.” Both the silence and the inaction indicate the way in which past atrocities are psychologically repressed in a collective group of people.

This question of the collective is something that Khanna, in her writing on Césaire, analyzes by calling attention to the link between “collective trauma” and Césaire’s poetics. Khanna writes, “For Césaire . . . it was necessary to articulate some theory of a collective [unconscious], as the poetry was conceived in terms of a large and fairly abstract group – black people who had gone through something both concrete and vague – ‘colonial trauma’” (Khanna, 2003, p. 126). The place of Fort-de-France is personified as a witness to memories, voices, and emotions that are simultaneously expressed and silenced. The beginning of the poem portrays the collective colonial trauma that is repressed by colonial education, institutions, and discourse. In other words, the traces of the atrocities of imperialism are everywhere in Fort-de-France; yet, they are silenced or forgotten by the people. If a space and a people can forget its history, then Césaire believed that poetry bore the trace. In *Presence Africaine*, Césaire wrote on the “trauma” of colonialism of which poetry expressed:

Victim of the [c]olonial trauma and in search of a new equilibrium, the black man has not yet finished liberating himself. All the dreams, all the desires, all the accumulated rancor, all the formless and repressed hopes of a century of colonialist domination, all that need to come out and when it comes out and express itself and squirts bloodily carrying along without distinction the conscious and the unconscious, lived experience and prophecy, that is called poetry. (Césaire, quoted in Khanna, 2003, p. 3)

According to Césaire, the function of poetry is to express the affect of what he calls “colonial trauma.” Césaire chooses to use the poetic language of personification to describe how colonial trauma becomes unrepressed— “squirting bloodily.” The silence of history speaks through the fictionality and literariness of language and its *pathos*. In other words, what is expelled from discourse still leaves pathetic residue and reverberation and can be accessed through poetic language.

Another way Césaire explores colonial trauma is through ironic humor, a linguistic tool that Paul de Man argues lets one stand in and outside “madness.” In large portions of the poem, the speaker ironizes “blackness” as a way to unrepress the

“inferiority complex” within the speaker. Césaire shows how laughing at the absurdity of Western civilization through irony is part of the psychoanalytic process of bringing into conscious the “civilizing impulse” within the *évolué*. This becomes the tipping point in which the speaker starts to see himself not as cursed, alienated, or neurotic but as radical prophet, madman, and dreamer. The *évolué* says, “[b]y a sudden and beneficent inner revolution I now honor my repugnant ugliness” (Césaire, 2013, p. 25).

Here, I draw on Paul de Man's theory of the “madness” of irony to understand Césaire's many ironic statements. de Man says, “[a]bsolute irony is a consciousness of madness . . . a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language, the ironist invents a form of himself that is mad but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified” (de Man, 1983, p. 214). In the same way, as the speaker uses ironic language, he becomes two split selves, a madman speaking from a place of madness and a sane man reflecting on his madness. There can be two interpretations in any ironic usage of language. In this verse, the speaker either views his negritude (blackness) as repulsive and ironically celebrates it or the speaker ironizes his “ugliness” and celebrates this irony. In other words, the speaker invents a form of himself who does not suffer from an “inferiority complex,” while embracing the *évolué* in him who does.

An explicit gesture that restructures the symbolic order of desire to become like the colonizer is enacted in the text when, the speaker also ironizes his slavish mimicry of Western rhetoric: “By Gad the Whites are great warriors/ hosannah to the master and to the nigger gelder!” (Césaire, 2013, p. 25). The speaker also says, “The Whites Say He is a good nigger, a really good nigger, massa good ole' darkey” (Césaire, 2013, p. 51). On the one hand, the speaker is the “mad” *évolué* who loathes his “blackness” and speaks from the place of Western civilization and racist discourse. As Suzanne Césaire's psychoanalysis showed, the speaker adopts mimicry and copies the white master's language and submits to becoming the desired “black subject” in the eyes of the West. On the other hand, he is also conscious of his “hysteria”— imitation of the West—as he mocks himself. The purpose of these verses is not only to ironize the *évolué* who adopts mimicry, but also to satirize and subvert what he mimics as well, French language and discourse.

Besides the many ironies in the poem, *Notebook* also utilizes countless allegories. Arnold has interpreted *Notebook* as filled with Christian allegory, without necessarily recognizing its irony. He sees the speaker as the Messianic leader of his people. Likewise, McIntosh writes that the poem “actively questions where and how the self-exiled Caribbean intellectual can fit in with his people. The answer it provides is that he should, if not must, lead them as a prophet/Redeemer” (McIntosh, 2012, 79). It is understandable why McIntosh and Arnold would read the speaker as a Christ figure as there are many allegories that seem religious in the poem. It was Angus Fletcher who emphasized that throughout Western literary history, allegory is closely linked to Christianity. Additionally, Césaire's writing suggests that the speaker is a national savior for his people,

I would arrive sleek and young in this land of mine and I would say to this land of mine and I would say to this land whose loam is part of my flesh: 'I have wandered for a long time and I am coming to the deserted hideousness of your sores.' . . . 'My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth'. (Césaire, 2013, p. 17)

However, after this passage, the speaker gradually realizes his own alienation is a consequence of colonial education. In other words, he becomes painstakingly aware of what has been diagnosed in him – a “inferiority complex.” This same strophe that explores his marginality includes the long narrative segment devoted to the old black man near the streetcar. The speaker finally realizes his hypocrisy as he mocks a fellow black man's ugliness (Césaire, 2013, p. 28 -31). He realizes that he cannot speak for his people because tragically he cannot speak at all:

I was hiding behind a stupid vanity  
destiny called me I was hiding behind it  
and suddenly there was man on the ground! His feeble defenses scattered,  
his sacred maxims trampled underfoot, his pedantic rhetoric so much hot air  
through each wound. (Césaire, 2013, p. 33)

The “I” who desires to return to his home and redeem his homeland disappears after the street car scene. What happens is a turn towards an obsession with how to find a way out from his double alienation in his redefinition of “blackness.” The surprising twist in the plot is that returning home as the Messiah to speak for his people is a failed allegory.

*Notebook* does have many allegories, ranging from its repetitive and extended metaphors to its recursive ironic prayers, but these allegories are not necessarily Christian in nature. On my reading, these ritualistic and religious characteristics have more affinity to poetic madness. The section saturated with allegories and repetitions, I argue, is the “insanity” foreshadowed in the beginning of the poem:

At the end of first light, on this very fragile earth thickness exceeded in a humiliating way by its grandiose future – the volcanoes will explode, the naked water will bear away the ripe sun stains and nothing will be left but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds – the beach of dreams and the insane awakening. (Césaire, 2013, 3)

Near the end of the poem, the speaker's language breaks down and the *évolué* embraces his poetic madness and reaches his peak insanity. Here, Césaire plays with the idea that allegories have often been identified in psychoanalysis as a kind of madness. Freud drew analogies between three kinds of neurosis and three kinds of non-neurotic activity: between obsessions and religious ritual, between paranoia and philosophy, and between hysteria and mimetic art (Freud, 1990, p. 73). Fletcher similarly draws a parallel between allegory and the madness of obsession and compulsion. Indeed, reading the multiplicity of allegories in the end as poetic madness is a more suitable than Christian religiosity as Césaire satirizes Christianity in many other parts of the poem. Césaire thus creates a mad obsession of allegories. Poetic madness becomes for Césaire a myriad of allegories that subvert one another.

But first, the person “I” is not the allegorical hero. What is allegorized repetitively is, instead, negritude and the slaves on the ship. By allegorizing negritude, Césaire

destroys the idea of “blackness” as object and non-being and brings forth “blackness” as an abstraction that invites and frustrates interpretation. Fletcher, Bernheimer, and Walter Benjamin describe the twentieth-century allegory that departs from a theory of knowledge, naïve mimetic representation, and reductive generic definitions. Benjamin goes on to describe allegory as something that reminds human beings of their limitations, their differences from the material world. Joseph Hillis Miller explains, “allegory reveals the eternal disjunction between the inscribed sign and its material embodiment” (Miller, 1981, p. 365). In the same way, the poem reminds the reader the great distance between what “negritude” signifies and what “negritude” really is as the speaker says,

my negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor of the day  
my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's dead eye  
my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral  
It takes root in the red flesh of the soil  
it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky  
it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience. (Césaire, 2013, p. 37)

As the reader can see in this quote, negritude is not a “symbol” where representation and meaning coincide. It cannot be pinned down nor can it be defined. Negritude is an allegory that expands the gap between meaning and representation. Previously, the poem's allegory was the speaker himself; now the allegorical “negritude” is both within and outside of himself. Negritude is no longer a silent stone (object) or a blind eye (non-being) but uncontrollable movements. Negritude goes against both exclusion and inclusion by “taking root” and “breaking through.”

In its use of language to reimagine a new future, the poem completely rejects the colonial allegory of the *évolué* who comes back to enlighten his people and in doing so, makes an anti-assimilation stance against the civilizing project and colonial education. The poem also wholeheartedly embraces the obsessive madness of the *évolué* as he overflows with suffering and emotion and dreams of unreal things. The failed allegory of the *évolué* is replaced by the true allegorical protagonists in the poem: the unnamed slaves who revolted against their masters on the slave ship. In strophes 103 -105, the speaker details the horrors inflicted upon the slaves of the Middle Passage. In strophe 107- 108, the word “*debout*” (“standing”) appear seventeen times as the slaves rebel.

Most historical accounts of slave revolts were erased by colonial history or categorized as insubordination. Their deeds, the aftermath, and their names were buried and silenced. Therefore, the speaker fictionalizes the outcome of a rebellion and describes the moment at which the slaves find themselves alone, facing the technology of navigation. In the end, the speaker is possessed by mad delusions; he imagines the interiority of those slaves which he could not possibly have access to. Through the allegory of these slaves, the poem expresses the *pathos* of the silenced history of slave rebellions through the fictionality of language. In the end, the vertical posture of these slaves completely abolishes the prostrate and repressed “collective unconscious” posited in the beginning of the poem.

After the slave-ship sequence, there appears a Dove that draws the reader to an uncanny end in the 1939 version of *Notebook*:

rise, Dove

rise

rise

rise

I follow you who are imprinted on my ancestral white cornea Rise sky  
licker

And the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown

It is there I will no fish

the malevolent tongue of the night in its still verticity. (Césaire, 2013, p.  
56-57)

Reading these last few lines, McIntosh writes, “Does this not return us to the idea of blackness being some kind of lack—the ‘old negritude’?” (McIntosh, 2012, p. 90). McIntosh's questioning reflects the deep ambivalence and distrust of the figure *évolué* because of what has been diagnosed in him—a psychological “lack,” “inferiority” or “dependency.” This perspective relies heavily on the symptomatic reading of art and undercuts the poetic madness that Césaire is trying to celebrate in this last passage.

In the end of the poem, I read the white cornea and black hole as a surrealist Salvador Dali image of an eye. This image of the eye supplants the blindness and inability to see in the opening scene. Furthermore, the image of the eye is superimposed with the image of a tongue. The tongue sticks out of the black pupil. The image of the tongue overcomes the muteness and the silence in the beginning of the poem. The last sentence “the malevolent tongue of the night in its still verticity!” have kept critics confused. Césaire said that he made the word *verrition* up by borrowing from the Latin verb *verri*, which means to sweep, to scrape a surface (Césaire, 1995: 148-149). The ending describes “*la langue*” (a tongue or a language) that is “still,” but somehow also moves by stirring-up a surface. In other words, this is a language that “disturbs” and “uncover” a floor or a foundation on which to stand, yet is paradoxically stable and unyielding.

As such, “*la langue*” is not any type of language but a particular kind of language. I find that this kind of language scraps and stirs up the “unconscious.” It is a kind of language that unrepresents the “colonial trauma” within the “collective unconscious.” *La langue* ushers in the “insane awakening” of liberation foreshadowed in the beginning of the poem. These last sentences imagine a new discourse that does not violently or actively categorize, connote, or rationalize like scientific language or Mannonian psychoanalytic language. Instead, greatness is achieved through its “stillness” of power. In the end, blackness as an abyss is turned into a deep wellspring of madness – the obsession of infinite meanings and interpretations. Blackness as absence becomes poetically full of potential and the place where the speaker will “fish” for his inspirations.

## Conclusion

In the opening scene of *Notebook*, the impossibility of interpretation and of meaning confronts the reader as one is thrown into a meaningless world in breach of its fauna and flora. The reader is presented with a modern wasteland where Antilles has been silenced by colonialism. In the beginning, the poetics seek to represent the inexpressible, as the lyrical cadence and surplus of signification seek to portray the “silence” of Antilles. Although the landscape of Antilles is marked by a lack of meaning, “silence” still speaks in a masochistic and gruesome way through the *pathos* of its metaphors. Aimé Césaire's psychoanalytic insights of “colonial trauma” and the “collective unconscious” fittingly explain the tension of the “incommunicable” in the beginning of the poem. The “silence” and “muteness” represent the erasure and repression of colonial atrocities through ideologies and institutions. At the same time, all the repression from a century of colonialist domination needs to manifest and express itself through an awakening of poetic madness.

During Césaire's long literary career, he also wrote many political essays alongside his art. In one such writing, Césaire pointed out that psychoanalysis is intertwined with imperial ideologies. Césaire rightly observed in *Discourse* that Octave Mannoni looked down on the Madagascan for his inability to interpret his colonial subjugation. In doing so, Mannoni formulated a psychoanalytic theory of the colonized's “dependency complex.” The Madagascan, it is argued, should realize that he should break free from his dependent nature. He has desired to serve the white man even though he will never be white. In making this reproach, Mannoni's viewpoint is moralistic and prescriptive, guiding a community of psychoanalysts to the self-awareness that the deluded and dependent Madagascan lacks.

As Césaire pointed out, these psychoanalytic observations seem descriptive but are, in fact, evaluative, further objectifying the Madagascan, the colonized, and the *évolué* as inferior. This serves as an important lesson for current scholars working in the discipline of psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies. When our readings of *Notebook* become diagnostic, it no longer does justice to the poetics that seeks to find a way out for the alienated *évolué*. When we (psycho)analyze the *évolué* as only symptomatic of the ills of society, the radical revolution dreamed up by the poem is obscured. To hold a superior position as a critic in relationship to the speaker of *Notebook* is similarly problematic as the arm-chair psychoanalyst, who, at times, treats the analysand, the colonized, the madman as inferior.

This colonial power dynamic in traditional Freudian and Mannonian psychoanalysis is extensively criticized and deconstructed in the psychoanalytic observations of Suzanne Césaire, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon. Departing from Mannoni's psychoanalysis, Césaire's psychoanalysis moved away from a language distinguished by its control, position of mastery, and domination over the primitive, the savage, the black individual. Césaire searched for a new status of discourse in poetics to undo both exclusion and inclusion in madness, which would obliterate the line of demarcation and opposition between subject and object, savage and civilized, reason and



unreason. Aimé Césaire was interested in a poetics of madness and used it to explore colonial trauma, the silenced history of colonialism and black interiority.

In conclusion, Césaire saw in Western discourse that black psyche and experiences have either been relegated to “non-being” or reduced to a “pathology.” Therefore, Césaire's psychoanalytic and poetic language sought to express instead of rationalize the madness of the *évolué*. I find that reading through the lens of psychopoetics, Césaire's goal is more justly expressed. It is, in fact, in *Notebook* and *Discourse's* pathos, irony, personification, metaphors and allegory that an anti-colonial psychology of being black is made present.

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