

**AENEAS' EMPIRE AND CÉSAIRE'S EVASION:
BLACK POETICS AS REFUSAL AND REDACTION IN *CAHIER D'UN RETOUR AU
PAYS NATAL***

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Abstract

Generations of colonized subjects have evaded violence enacted against them by colonizers. For Aimé Césaire and Black Martinicians, the *négritude* and surrealism movements were crucial to resisting biostructural assimilation and French colonial rule. Virgil's *Aeneid* was and continues to be a framework for understanding what I call "colonial genetics" and coloniality as a phenomenon, within which Césaire wrote *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, especially since Virgil's poem represents what Thomas Nolden calls "a cultural articulation of colonialism." Virgil's poetic use of dendrology and tree imagery in the *Aeneid* represents the biostructural assimilation of the Latin people into Roman nationhood, employing metaphors of grafting and splicing. This thesis asks, "How does Césaire's surrealist reworking of epic tradition inform a reading of the *Aeneid* and its textual unconscious as surreal? How do both texts critique, question and engage with colonialism?" As an anticolonial author, poet and politician, and trained classicist, Césaire's work constantly contended with language as an imaginative and liberatory space, and he often manipulated the French language in poetry as an act of reclamation, power, and refusal—thus producing a Black poetics. This included both direct and indirect engagement with the colonial genetics presented in the *Aeneid*. I offer a re-reading of these seminal texts to demonstrate how Césaire's engagement with Black poetics as redaction and refusal represents a movement towards self-determination that is illegible to — and unassimilable by — colonial powers. By infiltrating the unconscious, saturated with colonial ideology, Césaire's narrator achieves a poetic return that evades capture.

Keywords: Césaire, the *Aeneid*, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Black poetics, French empire, colonialism, surrealism

Introduction

"I get my bearings and discover myself in my poetry, probably even more so in the most obscure poems... And who else can discover this but you, you who reads and rereads me, who does me the honor of pursuing me for, dare I say, years? My poetry has all my answers. I like poetry, and I reread my own work. I value it. It's where I am "me." Poetry is a form of self-revelation. My poetry certainly contains whatever lies deepest inside myself. Otherwise, this "self" remains unknown to me. I only encounter it in my poetry, in poetic imagery."

As critical readings of Aimé Césaire's body of work continue to gain traction in various disciplines, including literature and poetics, sociology and comparative literature, I hope to offer in this paper an additional framework for understanding Césaire's poetry in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and Virgil's the *Aeneid*. This framework sees both as literature using the surreal to contend with colonial formulations and identity development for colonized subjects. Seen as a kind of index for his political and radical stances, *Cahier* is considered key to understanding his support of the *négritude* movement, surrealism, and decolonization. Césaire's politics shifted greatly over time, and for the sake and scope of this project, I will be focusing only on the period of time in which Césaire wrote *Cahier* and its other published variants, from 1939 to 1956. I draw my analysis from the 1956 *Présence Africaine* edition, which is considered to be the final version and which contains edits and deletions from previous publications of the poem in *Volontés* in 1939 and *Bretano's* in 1947.

I wondered what led Césaire to write *Cahier*, and spend a considerable amount of time revising it both before he published it and well after. I encountered Césaire at a time when I, too, was learning how to decode Latin texts about war and conquest while navigating the dense and complex internal landscape of my identity and body (that is, my physical form and my social

one). I had infinite questions about who I was and wanted to be in the world and how I wanted to be an agent of change, particularly as it relates to my gender, race, and cultural identities. I was amazed at how the imperial and conquest ideologies laid out by many authors of the classics survived centuries of turmoil, and the rise and fall of countless empires soon to inspire colonial projects. I felt this potently when reading Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Despite competing discourses that brought these justifications of conquest into question over time, colonial logics nonetheless dominated the minds of Anglo-American settlers who ravaged the Americas while on the shoulders of Manifest Destiny. Even if not following directly in the *Aeneid*'s footsteps, they invoked the divine right of God or the Gods to genocide, convert, and colonize lands and peoples around the globe— Spanish conquistadors, French universalists, the list goes on and we know it well. I inquired about how my own body and mind had become colonized and made complicit in coloniality and its afterlives through a neoliberal land-grant university like Berkeley. I realized just how much the classics form the basis of Western education and academia, and critiques of the classics and their canonization were large topics of discussion amongst my resistant and insurgent scholars-of-choice. Thus, this paper was born: if writers like Césaire and his contemporaries read the *Aeneid* as students in colonial systems, how could I map their self-explorations, chart their resistances, and reread these canonical tenets of colonialism to unleash new possibilities for my own liberation and my communities? The *Cahier* was not written to be easily understood, and has challenged many readers to decipher its nuanced and complex poetic maneuvers. As such, countless readings could exist, and it is in the act of reading and re-reading that communities of readers can create collective and individual interpretations of such important works. Within this thesis are my own readings and

interpretations, based on my knowledge of Césaire's work, and specifically those I find most provocative and thought-provoking for further study.

In the quote opening this section, Césaire eloquently comments that poetry itself becomes a map whose coordinates guide both writer and reader through a journey of introspection — often unanticipated and driven by unconscious forces. The “self” as we know it is only ever filtered through layers of our ego, our being, our socialization and experiences, such that poetry and other artistic forms are necessary to unearth it. The unconscious and language necessitate each other — without language, the unconscious remains unarticulated, internal, and unintelligible by an other, let alone the self. Imagine the self, Césaire's *soi*, as a seed woven into cloth. It can only be freed when the threads overlapping it are undone one by one. Césaire's awareness that the relationship between reader and poem, which is also reader/author and poem, reveals what Ellen Oliensis may refer to as a textual unconscious — “accessible to interpretation through a decoding of its linguistic traces and effects.” (Friedman 164). As a reader decodes a text, they make the textual unconscious intelligible; this is the necessary undoing of the metaphorical textile encasing the self or *soi*. That is why it is critical that this thesis offers reading of a poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, as an example of a literary movement across the globe that sought to produce a means of liberation for Black diasporic subjects. Some of Césaire's diasporic contemporaries, like Toni Morrison, June Jordan, and James Baldwin, in community with countless other Black, queer, and women writers, believed in the revolutionary potential of writing, language, and the poetic. It did not only represent the possibility of producing a new language, imagining and making tangible utopian societies, or self-determination in a time of deep racial and gendered violence. Writing, particularly poetry,

represented the ability to arrive closer to or return home to a self and, through this, to a diasporic or wider community.

Two words I will use often throughout this paper are *refusal* and *redaction*. In this paper, I read the excerpts from the *Cahier* as moments of Black refusal and redaction through the embodiment of the colonized-illegible intellectual. This is inextricable from the already complicated ways colonized subjects must use language to achieve self-awareness and understanding, and often have no choice but to rely on the “language of the colonizer.” Where, then, and how, does one negotiate themselves and who they are or wish to be? As an expression of a Black poetics, refusal and redaction represent a lineage of evasion engaged by Black colonized subjects in various attempts to escape or interrupt the endless loop of Black violence. Scholars like Caitlin Anasi, an undergraduate at Brown University, study the “Black loop” in the context of social media and film. Where they ask how Black life and violence becomes trapped in an endless loop, rendering Black life and death normal and inevitable, they also study the ways Black queer subjects refuse the Black loop as a means of queer worldmaking. Such scholarship makes me wonder how poets like Césaire refused the cyclical loop of colonial violence against Martinique — he often discussed the historical precarity of Martinique, produced by a combination of natural disaster and French colonial rule. As we know from rigorous study of Césaire’s work and his interviews, Césaire saw his work as an attempt to create “a new language, one capable of communicating the African heritage” (Césaire, 1967 *Poesias* interview). By using a “an Antillean French,” Césaire’s narrator refused to perpetuate the swallowed-tongue-suicide turned language-loss of Black diasporic subjects. As we will see later in this paper, repeated refrains mimicking schoolbook grammar exercises stand parallel to the

repeated conditioning of colonized bodies towards subordination and exploitation. This is Césaire's Black loop.

Redaction is more closely related to the *how* of writing; how does Césaire bring his narrator into being via poetry, how and why is this redactive process importantly surrealist, and how does Césaire produce a new language and thus a new Black being? A literary work implicates legibility at every step of its production and decoding, because writing is the act of making something intelligible and consumable by an Other, even if that Other is the alienated self, or the writer, as when one writes in a journal for example. For Césaire, *Cahier* was a poetic space where the "self," buried under persistent iterations of anti-Black colonial violence, is made public. But Césaire also sought autonomy, a central value of *négritude*, so how might he write himself into a poem without allowing it to be appropriated or exploited? I argue that Césaire's poetic tactics can be read as an attempt to disrupt the legibility of his work, his "self," and his resistance to colonial assimilation.

Edouard Glissant, also Martinician, wrote about poetics of opacity and the right to refuse transparency demanded by colonial oppressors as part of assimilation. The opaque, according to Glissant, is not necessarily the obscure, but rather refers to that which cannot be reduced. Césaire warned against assimilation's threat to create a "universal" identity — Frenchness — that served to effectively erase difference under the guise of unity under a single national identity. This leaves us with the question of how one achieves opacity in the face of growing demands for transparency from oppressors. The demand for opacity forms our societies and our connections with those around us, and yet Glissant insists that irreducible singularities converge and overlap, creating a woven fabric of social communities. The ability of these singularities, in this case Black Martinicians, to achieve interconnectedness while maintaining opacity in the face of

imposing French rule is key. Demands for transparency are akin to the organization of societies by powers or governments to make them legible and thus surveillable, exploitable. But Glissant says,

“Accepting differences does, of course, upset the hierarchy...I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh. But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction.”

So how does this relate to Césaire and the *Cahier*? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines redaction in many ways, although this project operates with the following:

1. *transitive*. To put (writing, text, etc.) in an appropriate form for publication; to edit.
2. *transitive*. To censor (a document) by removing or blacking out certain words or passages prior to publication or release, esp. for legal, security, or confidentiality purposes; to remove or black out (words or information) in this way. Frequently in passive.
3. *transitive*. To bring together or organize (ideas, writings, etc.) into a coherent form; to compile, arrange, or set down in a written document. Also: to put into a particular written form. Usually with prepositions, esp. into, unto. *Obsolete*.

Coloniality as a phenomenon necessitates the creation of some system of oppression and rule, of organization and surveillance, of “appetite and force” that devours Indigenous and Black people, extracts from and exploits the land, and employs the violences of war, biostructural assimilation, and spatial removal (Césaire, *Discourse*). In *Cahier*, the dominant system being critiqued and resisted is colonialism in two forms: France’s assimilation of Martinique, and the settler colonialism in the *Aeneid* considered fundamental to coloniality as an event¹. Césaire wrote in *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonialism serves to decivilize and brutalize the colonizers, bringing them closer to barbarism; there is nothing natural or humanist about colonialism. By way of the required transparency Glissant writes about, colonized societies like Martinique became organized for the sake of remote control and exploitation. Martinique’s distance from France indeed required such a system of surveillance and dependence. James C.

¹ “Settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.” Wolfe

Scott is one scholar who writes about the organization of societies along lines of legibility. He begins his book *Seeing like a State* with the example of forestry. In the time of kings, rulers needed to know how much lumber a portion of forest land could produce while at great distances from the lands within their domain. Bringing together Scott's legibility, Glissant's opacity, and Césaire's surrealist Black poetics, one arrives at the importance of redaction in poetry. The creation of a new language transcends tangible colonial violences in favor of a surreal poetic home(coming). Obscured within a newfound Antillean, Black, diasporic, uncolonized language and textual body, the *soi* is born anew. This self-determinative négritude, this new redaction and bringing into being, is a possible answer to Césaire's question, "Have we ever been responsible for ourselves? We've always been the subjugated, the colonized. This has marked us" (*Conversations*, 19).

One of the most daring aspects of this thesis is my argument that the *Aeneid*, as representative of a larger tradition of epic poetry, also employs aspects of the surreal in producing a collectively imagined Roman origin story. In *Freud's Rome*, Ellen Oliensis applies a psychoanalytic reading to the poetry of Virgil, Catullus, and Ovid. Particularly, Oliensis seeks to identify the effects of a textual unconscious, "'textual,' because not (simply) personal, and also because it is in the very texture of the text, its slips, tics, strange emphases, and stray details, that one discovers it at work" (Oliensis 7). The implication that a text or a culture can maintain an unconscious is not a new one. Jonathan Culler explored the possibility of a literary unconscious at a time when the term was uncommon — his work operated not from the idea of the literary unconscious as representative of the author, but rather, an attempt to read the unconscious of a text itself in its literary elements. Culler cites the work of Fredric Jameson, whose definition of a

political unconscious defined it as an underlying narrative which only reveals itself in “disguised and symbolic forms.”

I further the conversation by asking how the presence of a textual unconscious encourages reading classical works as surrealist in nature and form. Thomas Nolden argues Césaire’s writing in *Cahier* is a reworking of epic tradition that also deals with the homecoming, or non-homecoming, that the heroic figure must go through. Nolden argues that, “Césaire’s hero will, instead, found with his very poem the center of a new literary power that can be understood as a discrepant critique of the epic tradition perceived as a cultural articulation of colonialism.” (Nolden 532). I go further to say Césaire’s methods in *Cahier* use surrealism to rework epic tradition while also developing a poetics of refusal and redaction — that is, of evading, acting, and creating — that does indeed allow a homecoming. The return, here, is to self, to a diasporic nation and community through negritude, or a poetry of redaction and refusal which allows self-determination. Aeneas and his Trojans yearn to mix with the Latin people and establish new empires, and ultimately he experiences the complete homecoming characteristic of an epic. Conversely, the heroic narrator in *Cahier* finds completeness upon accepting their Blackness or *négritude*, a homecoming or return to the global land that collective Black identity creates as a site of being for Black diasporic subjects. If disalienation is the goal of *Cahier*’s narrator, they must refuse assimilation and, I argue, engage in a process of redaction, in refusing to be legible or organisable. There is no final homecoming, at least in the definitive sense. Césaire troubles the trope of the “indeterminate identity of the returning figure, and enveloped in the opacity of dreamworks and surrealism, *Cahier*’s narrator finds home in the redacted Martinique poetic imagery affords (Davis 29). This poetic Martinique cannot be colonized — immortalized in

poetry, beyond time — while real Martinique will forever bear the weight of colonial domination (in Césaire’s view) and thus, in many ways, can never be returned to.

If epic tradition is, in Nolden’s words, a cultural articulation of colonialism, how do various disguised and symbolic forms of colonial ideals appear in the *Aeneid* as exemplary of the textual unconscious? Césaire’s surrealism aims to unleash the unconscious à la Bréton, and as such reworks epic tradition in search and establishment of a new kind of being. This being, this Blackness, is not infiltrated or made or informed by the repressed colonial unconscious which is inoculated into the colonized mind. For Virgil and others of his time, the composition of epic poetry relied on extended and historically relevant metaphors, including tree science, the existence of the Gods and their investment in the mortal realm — all disguised or symbolic forms, as we will see later on. Furthermore, the concurrence of Virgil using tree imagery and dendrology while characters dream, experience prophetic vision, or during scenes of import to establishing Roman history, constellate into a fascinating analysis of the *Aeneid* as surrealist, through the lens of Césaire’s surrealism, and in the shadow of scholars attempting to understand the unconscious in all its expressions.

We know that the *Cahier* is a surrealist political text as demonstrated by Césaire’s political involvements and his greater body of poetry and prose that explored surrealist writing in various ways (Laforgue 2012; Kesteloot; Edwards). The *Cahier* opens with the narrator waking, with the notorious repeated refrain “at the end of daybreak.” While waking and opening one’s eyes signals a coming to consciousness, it also signifies a possibility the narrator is still dreaming, or is somewhere between a sleeping dreamworld and a waking world. This opening immediately signals we are within a surrealist work of poetry. While it is a difficult concept to pin down, for this project I define surrealism as a framework and approach to artistic practice

that values “the unexpected and the uncanny, the disregarded and the unconventional,” and, as defined by Andre Breton in 1924, a “pure psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought. Dictation of thought in the absence of all control exercised by reason, outside of all aesthetic and moral preoccupation.” This makes one see surrealist creations as innate, born from within, bodily and automatic, or impulse-driven. In a sense, surrealism invites one's wildest dreams, a juxtaposition of what we know in our current realities and what we most desire, repress, or hold within us without full awareness. Surrealism as a movement sought to release the unconscious, to let it be heard and represented rather than repressed. Many artists and writers like Ernst, Bréton, Senghor, and Césaire used practices including automatic writing to attempt to unleash their unconscious — automatic writing required being in some waking or hypnotic-trance state. As I've stated above, Virgil writes many of his prophetic and historicized passages in the form of a dream, vision, or, notably, in the personification and coming to life of Aeneas' shield. While Virgil himself may not be writing surrealist prose, how might we read his own redactions and the surreal experiences of his characters as expressions of a textual unconscious that maintains nuanced and conflicting feelings about empire?

Countless classical works, canonized and celebrated for their depictions of empire and imperialism, also operate within a certain kind of surreal realm. While not surrealist works themselves, works in the tradition of epic poetry particularly rely on various mystical tropes, ancient spirituality, or mythology to validate, celebrate, and depict various imperialist victories and pitfalls. One of the most studied pieces of this nature is Virgil's *the Aeneid*, which I've selected to establish the discursive basis on which I'll read various moments in *Cahier*. The gods of *the Aeneid* and the divine world, which drives so much of what occurs in the poem, are

depicted in grandiose, beautiful, and terrifying ways. Images of brutal death, of Dido burning, and Turnus' death in the finale of the poem may have been expected in an epic poem, but they are meant to be emotionally moving and disturbing in how graphic their detail can be, or in how they violate certain natural and divine laws. These grotesque, surreal, images operated as poetic devices for Virgil to show not only what drove the rise of the Roman Empire, but also the destruction of the natural world and its inhabitants in the wake of imperialist conquest. Virgil's poetic use of tree science in the *Aeneid* represents the biostructural assimilation of the Latin people into Roman nationhood. Virgil uses imagery, metaphors, and particularly tree imagery and symbolism, to represent tenets of the Roman society to be born: a combination of Indigenous and Trojan bloodlines, unification under one Roman national identity and one language, and strong in both Latin and Trojan virtues and practices.

I offer a re-reading of these seminal texts to demonstrate how Césaire's engagement with Black poetics as redaction and refusal represents a movement towards self-determination that is illegible to — and unassimilable by — colonial powers. By infiltrating the unconscious saturated with colonial ideology, Césaire's narrator achieves a poetic return or homecoming that evades capture. I focus specifically on the natural world, particularly the presence of literal and metaphorical tree imagery and dendrology, that seeks to do and undo the normativity of colonial violence. The "mutilation" of the natural world in the wake of imperial conquest is as spiritual and psychological as it is physical and social; it leaves colonized subjects alienated from themselves and their lineage. Césaire says this about assimilation in a letter to Monsieur le President in 1976: "it is a question of historical mutilation, so much so that, if the word 'alienation' has a meaning, it is here that it takes on more than anywhere else: a borrowed culture, a personality of borrowing, a repressive behavior with regard to a nature not assumed."

This project contributes to scholarly readings of *Cahier* that rightfully map Césaire's poem onto a long legacy of epic (Davis, Nolden). Césaire's literary experimentation in *Cahier* offers a framework for self-determination in the age of modern colonialism and its impact on colonized subjects' development of self. While current scholarship focuses on *Cahier*'s resonances with Homeric tradition, I am offering a study of the specific poetic devices Césaire employs in response to epic tradition in Virgil's *the Aeneid*. Building on the study of dendrology and tree imagery in *the Aeneid* done by Emily Gowers, I establish the literary and cultural ways colonialism was conflated with and justified by associations with the natural world in order to better read Césaire's engagement with epic tradition as an act of resistance. More specifically, Césaire's references to the natural world and tree imagery, as well as his metaphorical grafting of French and Latin word roots, are direct and intentional appropriations of colonial logics that are criticized in *the Aeneid* as romanticizations and naturalizations of colonial violence. This thesis asks, "How does Césaire's surrealist reworking of epic tradition and colonial genetics inform a reading of the Aeneid and its textual unconscious as surreal? How does Césaire offer a means of disalienation within this surreal, redactive poetic?"

Part 1: Grafting Freedom

*“Je défie le craniomètre. Homo sum etc.
 Et qu'ils servent et trahissent et meurent
 Ainsi soit-il. Ainsi soit-il. C'était écrit dans la forme de leur bassin.”*
 I defy the craniometer. Homo sum etc.
 And they serve and betray and die
 So be it. So be it. It was written in the shape of their pelvis.

Aimé Césaire

“Emancipation est, au contraire, action et creation.”
 Emancipation is, on the contrary, action and creation.

Leon Damas

In this section, I will focus on tree science and imagery in the *Aeneid*, particularly grafting and extirpation, as an expression of colonial genetics. Colonial genetics can be understood as the ways colonizing powers appropriate science and the natural world to justify and render natural colonial violences, including assimilation, racial mixture, and racial hierarchy. Césaire's hero engages in practices of grafting textually and literally, becoming a tree at one point in the poem just as Turnus and Aeneas do in the *Aeneid* (Césaire 7). Some vocabulary important to include the French and Latin appearances of is: tree(s), root(s), stock, seed(s), inoculate, and blood. In my close reading of various analogous scenes in the *Aeneid* and the *Cahier*, I seek to re-read Virgil's iconic poem through the eyes of Césaire and his surrealist aims to demonstrate what Oliensis refers to as a textual unconscious. Through this textual unconscious, one is able to identify how Virgil reinforces and simultaneously troubles the relationship between imperial conquest and “Indigenous” land and people. Surrealism, then, in both poems, functions either to inoculate colonial genetics into the colonized body and mind indefinitely, or to uproot them as a liberatory, self-determining act. If we understand grafting as a metaphor for assimilation, Césaire's hero reuses grafting and extirpation in order to refuse a

French universalism that promotes oneness, reinforcing Césaire's then-stance on *négritude* and decolonization. Césaire's hero, in this redaction, performs a reverse grafting, or extirpation, in order to refuse the "mutilated history" colonial genetics has produced by means of textual and social grafting, splicing, and inoculation in texts like the *Aeneid*. Césaire's use of these ideologies in the *Cahier* reflect a refusal of linguistic, biostructural, and sociocultural assimilation, as well as a refusal of the incessant, inert colonial nonsense produced within and around the colonized body. In this context, redaction becomes most useful when understood as a rendering via writing, and textual editing that engages with the natural world to undo colonial genetics.

This thesis owes a great deal to the inquiries and deep study of Emily Gowers in *Trees and Family Trees in the Aeneid*, in which Gowers provides a vocabulary for analyzing tree imagery and dendrology in the *Aeneid*. I read the work for a Latin class, where I studied Books 6-12 of the *Aeneid* in close detail, and it opened my eyes to a reading of the poetry I had no idea would be so essential. Gowers recounts Virgil's detailed, attentive use of grafting, splicing, and extirpation in the *Georgics*, as well as the obsession with grafting as an image of successful empire following this work and others like it (Ovid, Columella, Calpurnius, and Pliny the Elder, to name a few). What fascinated me was learning that Virgil's grafting passage in the *Georgics* was in fact about real trees and plants, yet its rhetoric and ideology left it open to wide interpretation as representative of imperial projects and successful empires. The grafting section in *Georgics* was part of larger bodies of work drawing critiques against imperial conquest and nation building that violated nature in favor of more natural methods. Grafting, while natural and in line with nature, must be done correctly so as to not violate natural laws. Gowers cites the work of Richard Thomas, who asserts Virgil's grafting leaves the tree unable to recognize itself

as a result of its transformation; this stands even despite the tree's ascension to the sky, healthy and born anew to provide “shade to future generations.” Contrarily, Dustan Lowe’s reading argues that Virgil’s *Georgics* reinforces positive outcomes and possibilities of grafting as it relates not just to nature, but to empire. Throughout the *Aeneid*, as Gowers points out, tree imagery becomes most generally a marker of colonial genetics as it establishes family trees and bloodlines, and at its most specific, an outline for the many ways one can achieve an ideal empire, or violate nature in the process.

With these conflicting readings in mind, I turn now to tree imagery and the expansion of an imperial society in the *Aeneid* through the grafting of Trojan and Latin bloodlines. In Book 8, Tiberinus, god of the River Tiber, shares a prophecy with Aeneas in a dream while he sleeps beneath poplar trees (*populeas inter senior se attollere frondes*). While the presence of a dream does not necessarily mean the work is surreal, these lines employ key elements of surrealist art, particularly what one expects to see in visual art such as paintings and drawings. Elements of fantasy and a metaphysical atmosphere bring Tiberinus to life: already in Aeneas’ subconscious via his dreams, Tiberinus rises from a river as “fine linen cloaked him in a blue-grey mantle, and shadowy reeds hid his hair,” (*eum tenuis glauco velabat amictu / carbasus, et crinis umbrosa tegebat harundo*). Throughout the poem, in his use of metaphor and strong imagery, Virgil also provides representation with photographic precision — describing the color, textures, sounds and smells present in the scene between Tiberinus and Aeneas. Another key detail in this dialogue is when, after sharing the white sow prophecy, Tiberinus, personified as the river (*deinde lacu fluvius se condidit alto / ima petens*), plunges back into the water. At this same moment, Aeneas wakes. This suggests Aeneas’ dream of Tiberinus occurred in a moment of waking, the same site of attempts to produce automatic writing and access the unconscious while in a trance or

hypnotic state. Virgil may not be engaging directly with a surrealist tradition, but his hero Aeneas is experiencing the embodiment of his fate as the “seed” (*sate*) of the Gods through a series of surreal interactions with the divine world and the unseen author, Virgil.

As a trained classicist, Césaire would have seen the resonances between French universalism and Virgil’s assimilation of the Latins and Trojans. Virgil’s Aeneas and his Trojans are following the divine will of the Gods in their conquest and establishment of a new Troy. In Book 12, as Juno and Jupiter decide whether Aeneas or Turnus will win the battle, Juno begs Jupiter to let the Latins keep their name and culture should Aeneas succeed. She asks that they not be forced to be Trojan or adopt their customs. In response, Jupiter says,

'Sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt,
 utque est nomen erit; commixti corpore tantum
 subsident Teuceri. Morem ritusque sacrorum
 adiciam faciamque omnis uno ore Latinos.
 Hinc genus Ausonio mixtum quod sanguine surget,
 supra homines, supra ire deos pietate videbis,
 nec gens ulla tuos aeque celebrabit honores.'

‘Ausonia’s sons will keep their father’s speech and manners,
 as their name is, so it will be: the Trojans shall sink, merged
 into the mass, only. I will add sacred laws and rites,
 and make them all Latins of one tongue.
 From them a race will rise, merged with Ausonian blood,
 that you will see surpass men and gods in virtue,
 no nation will celebrate your rites with as much devotion.’ (834-840)

Juno accepts this response and departs from her cloud, a rather surprising action to those familiar with her stubborn character throughout the poem. In this scene, Virgil “involves himself in repeated acts of extirpation and splicing: performing a backwards act of grafting for Aeneas and Evander, for example, divided now, but once derived from the same *stemma*...” (Gowers 110). He is an active participant in the creation of an imperial history of Rome during a transitional period from Republican poetry and prose. He is redacting or bringing into written

tradition a seed or root for the existence of the Roman empire, its people, and its right to imperial violence and conquest.

Re-coloring and grafting his way through the naturalization of this conquest, Virgil takes pause to subtly show his reader everything is not as it initially seems. Many scholars, including Gowers, cite the cutting of the sacred olive tree in Book 12; the Trojans remove the tree in preparation for battle. Gowers argues the mutilation, grafting, uprooting and chopping of trees in the *Aeneid* marks the extent of Aeneas and the Trojans' destruction of the natural world. Other scenes read as Virgil's critique of empire include Ascanius' slaying of the sacred stag in Book 7 which triggered a battle between the Latins and Trojans, and Dido's ritualistic suicide in Book 4, where she falls upon Aeneas' sword on a burning pyre and curses the Trojans as she dies. Dido and Aeneas' "union" in lines 129-172 of Book 4 was the beginning of death and misery (*ille dies primus leti primusque malorum causa fuit*, 170) for Dido, and despite being ordained by the Gods, Virgil's Jupiter insists that Aeneas and the Trojans are meant to settle and merge with "high Teucrian blood" (*genus alto a sanguine Teucri proderet / ac totum sub leges mitteret orbem*, 231). Thus Aeneas must pursue his destiny and break Dido's heart, and her suicide is inevitable — notably, Virgil does not write of how Dido's curse impacts the Trojans at any other point in the poem. In the wake of settler colonial pursuit, societies and people fall, die, are mutilated, and these violent acts are aspects of empire that Virgil is perhaps suggesting can be learned from, and avoided. In pursuit of divine prophecy, similar to manifest destiny, even the strong queen Dido and the Latins in their connection to the natural world become victims to the destruction deemed inevitable in colonial conquest.

Returning to the dialogue between Juno and Jupiter, in addition to Dido's death in Book 4, blood becomes an important marker of how assimilation as grafting serves to mix bloodlines

and make permanent colonial systems of dominance. This is true throughout the poem. The word *sanguine* appears often alongside Aeneas' epithet, son or seed of the Gods (*nate* or *sate deum*), and throughout passages in *Aeneid* that directly prophesied the future of the Trojan race once their blood becomes mixed with Latin blood, as is their fate. In Book 8 of the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas meets Evander, he says "*Sic genus amborum scindit se sanguine ab uno...*" (142). Literally, this phrase means "Thus both races cleave/divide/stream from one blood." *Sanguine* becomes parallel to a river which branches and divides, like a tree, creating various sprouts or *stemma*. Reading *scindit* as cleave, one imagines the way smaller branches cleave off of trunks and main branches — since we know Virgil is constructing this history, we understand that he is grafting this relationship between Aeneas and Evander, at the same time that he is establishing bloodline or proto-racial mixture as a central aspect of successful empire. This brings newfound meaning to the scene in Book 8 where Tiberinus' rises from and returns to a river to share Ascanius' fate. Underneath the poplar trees, River Tiber flows and his branches reflect the whitened future that awaits Aeneas and the Trojans according to Virgil. In Part 2 of this paper, I elaborate further on this scene and the significance of the white sow as it relates to racialization and re-coloring.

Through processes like grafting and splicing, that is, the blending and mixing of the Latin and Trojan peoples, a new, strengthened Roman blood can arise, that will surpass men and gods in virtue (*genus Ausonio mixtum quod sanguine surget, supra homines, supra ire deos peitate videbis*). *Genus* and *sanguine* as race and blood, respectively, become powerful symbols for Virgil's inscription of Aeneas and a proto-Roman lineage. Tracing the presence of blood both literally and as metaphor in the *Aeneid* alongside moments in the *Cahier* yields insight as to the

ways Césaire reworks these symbols as poetic-cultural articulations of colonialism. Let's take, for example, this moment in the *Cahier*:

Putréfactions monstrueuses de révoltes
 inopérantes,
 marais de sang putrides
 trompettes absurdement bouchées
 Terres rouges, terres sanguines, terres consanguines.

Monstrous putrefaction of revolts
 stymied,
 marshes of putrid blood
 trumpets absurdly muted
 Land red, sanguineous, consanguineous land. (6)

Beginning with some etymology, I focus first on the presence of the words *sanguines* and *consanguines*. Common translation renders the final line as follows in English: “Lands red, sanguineous lands, consanguineous lands.” In Latin, both words are written as in French: *sanguis* or *sanguine* in the ablative as it often appears in the *Aeneid*, and *consanguineo*. The prefix *con-* in both the French and Latin means together or jointly, modifying the word for “blood” in both languages to mean brought together or joined by blood. An important distinction in the meaning of the French *consanguin*: in addition to meaning “by blood,” it can also mean “half-blooded.” A slightly modified translation, then, could read more like “Lands red, blood lands, half-blooded lands.” The *genus mixtum*, the people brought together by blood either in marriage or in battle, become reworked in Césaire’s use of the words *sanguine* and *consanguine*. In his case, the racial mixture and blending of bloodlines is a violent one. It signals the arrival of a colonial force that conquers and devours its colonies by any means necessary. Half-blooded lands can imply the introduction of French and white/Anglo/European blood into Martinique by means of colonialism. This produced racial hierarchies and tensions between lighter-skinned “mulattos,” darker skinned Black Martinicians and the petit bourgeoisie, and the small white landowning

classes descended from slave and plantation owners. This is what made Césaire want to leave Martinique so badly to go to school in Paris, although it was his return from this schooling where he first began drafting the *Cahier*. He heavily criticized the bourgeoisie and more privileged classes in particular of Martinique, hailing from them himself in some ways, as being indoctrinated by the racial hierarchies that France and other colonizers brought to the island. Furthermore, various invasions of Martinique, in addition to the countless deaths suffered by Martinicians throughout various natural disasters in the island's history — notably the 1902 eruption of Mount Pelée — led to the death of hundreds upon thousands of Martinicians, and left the island struggling to regain stability.

As I've underscored, redaction is active — the simultaneous act of making the self known and further obscuring this self as an act of resistance. Emancipation, as Damas says, is an act of action and creation. Assimilation is, contrarily, passive and does not create, but reifies. At the same time that, textually, Césaire's narrator is attempting to move from an inert state in order to wake fully or reach full consciousness through the unconscious, he is also evading the colonial society that Blackens him by producing, or rather inscribing himself in, a kind of Blackness that is his own, not French, or European, or by any means white. Colonial structures produce race as a means of organization and oppression; as such, taking pride in one's Blackness without uprooting the origin of this racial identification reifies these structures. As I discuss in the second section of this paper, Césaire's re-working of processes like tawing acknowledge the whiteness that underlies Black as a racial category versus Black as defined by the Black self that is no longer alienated from itself— which occurs during assimilation, or grafting; Césaire says himself in *Conversations*, “For me, assimilation was alienation, the worst possible thing” (9), because

assimilation alienates the self from itself, making the true inner self unknowable except through poetry or, in this case, redaction, and refusal of the perpetual reifying of colonial subordination.

Throughout *Cahier*, Césaire uses hyphens and dashes, which have been considered characteristic of surrealist poetry as well as symbolic for the ways the *Cahier* is indeed a schoolbook or a documentation of one's learning and training; just as Césaire's hero was trained to silence, he must undo this training by revisiting his notes and his past, or his archives and history. Here, though, I am interested in hyphens as a kind of rhetorical graft. As I discussed, grafting is a key aspect of dendrology and plant science, and the *Aeneid* explicitly contains prophecies that promote racial mixture as a grafting or strengthening of a society, nation, or lineage. Césaire, then, performs a few acts in the following passage:

Partir.

Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-panthères, je serai un homme-juif
 un homme-cafre
 un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta
 un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas

l'homme-famine, l'homme-insulte, l'homme-torture on pouvait à n'importe quel moment
 le saisir le rouer de coups, le tuer — parfaitement le tuer — sans avoir de compte à rendre
 à personne sans avoir d'excuses à présenter à personne
 un homme-juif
 un homme-pogrom
 un chiot
 un mendigot

To go away.

As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jew-man
 a Kaffir-man
 a Hindu-man-from-Calcutta
 a Harlem-man-who-doesn't-vote

the famine-man, the insult-man, the torture man you can grab anytime, beat up, kill — no
 joke, kill — without having to account to anyone, without having to make excuses to
 anyone

a jew-man
 a pogrom-man
 a puppy
 a beggar (4, 5)

He is first creating a kind of oneness or unification of all the ways Black diasporic subjects are reduced, both in language and in practice, to a single abject racial classification. The hyphens connect the strings of reductions just as degradations of Black people scaffold on top of each other, creating a long, seemingly endless past of the “historical mutilation” of Blackness. Césaire is experimenting with the tools once reserved for colonial expansion and legitimization to ask the question, how does one intervene and interrupt cycles of Black colonial violence? How might one take control of how they are made in the world? Refusing to accept natural man-made science of race and colonial dominance, one must first see how absurd and pervasive Black degradation is in colonial systems, and how backwards the colonial logics. What is necessary, what *must have* happened in order to render Black violence nourishing or beneficial to the colonized? Césaire works through this question through the first movement of the poem.

Césaire’s narrator refuses to accept a French colonial bloodline which — although he was born in Martinique — is not his. Martinique and France are only seen as one because of colonialism. Martinicans have some cultural, national, and/or ethnic identity that existed before the arrival of France and other colonizing powers. The various scenes in the *Cahier*, for example, where Césaire engages in degradations of Martinique and its people, partially demonstrate some of the conditions parts of Martinique were in upon the arrival of the French in the 1600s, and throughout various invasions and attempts to colonize the island. As the French ravaged the island and subject it to remote colonial violence and control, Martinicians fought internally about whether to assimilate or seek decolonization and independence otherwise. This repeated spilling, joining and mixing of blood saturates the land, brought together land through colonial

nation-making, and becomes the same site where “I have no right to measure life by my sooty finger span / to reduce myself to this little ellipsoidal nothing trembling four fingers / above the line, I a man, to so overturn creation that / I include myself between latitude and longitude!” (5).

*

Je force la membrane vitelline qui me sépare de moi-même,
 Je force les grandes eaux qui me ceignent de sang
 C'est moi rien que moi
 qui prends langue avec la dernière angoisse
 C'est moi oh, rien que moi
 qui m'assure au chalumeau
 les premières gouttes de lait virginal !

I am forcing the vitelline membrane that separates me from myself
 I am forcing the great waters which girdle me with blood
 I and I alone choose a seat on the last train of the last surge of
 the last tidal wave
 I and I alone
 make contact with the latest anguish
 I and oh, only I
 secure through a straw
 the first drops of virginal milk! (10)

ceux qu'on domestiqua et christianisa
 ceux qu'on inocula d'abâtardissement

those whom they domesticated and Christianized
 those whom they inoculated with degeneracy (13)

The incessant colonial violence that haunts Martinique so vividly in the opening lines of the poem, along with the self-imposed suicide that a colonized subject undergoes when “swallowing their tongue,” that is, swallowing their native language, makes the act of movement towards action (redaction in/as writing) extremely laborious. As scholars like Kesteloot and Baer have studied closely, *Cahier* is written like a schoolbook, harkening back to writing and grammar

exercises, the forcing and training of the hands and body and mouth in learning a colonial language and literature. Images of the shut, stolen, borrowed, and finally opened mouth abound throughout *Cahier*, and other poems such as *Pour saluer le tiers-monde* produce images of hands, open, bruised or cut or bleeding, but holding all nonetheless. All these images represent the bind in which countless Black colonized subjects find themselves, and why breaking free or knowing oneself is so difficult. The chains are not only on our wrists. When assimilation is one of the only ways for Black colonized subjects to achieve autonomy, redaction steps in as a kind of bringing back, a doing through undoing, disalienation by acknowledge the absurdity of the alienation in the first place, and it's strangeness because it is not native to the colonized self — in other words, to be colonized is not a natural state of being.

Rather than let the self be inoculated (*inocula*), one must Césaire, here especially, demonstrates what this bringing back — to the body, to the *before*, can look like. Once born, you cannot literally return to the womb and be reborn. This rebirth must be one of immaculate conception, one that Césaire's heroic figure achieves after a series of internal struggles and reconciliations with his reality. At this point in the poem, surrealism is of utmost importance, as it allows Césaire to enact this rebirth through the image of a baby pushing its way out of the womb. This time, though, there are no external contractions or pressures; the battle is entirely between the narrator and the self, the self at odds, the self which has been shaped and formed into a colonized other against its will, or toppled over, out of its common sense. Césaire's redaction here is a bringing back of language, a reversal of the suicide. Rather than being forced into silence or to swallow the tongue, it is brought back into the mouth, and made one's own again: “no one but me makes contact/takes language with the latest anguish” (10).

Part 2: *Debout et Libre*: Turnus and Césaire's Hero Reimagined

In this section, I hope to expand on some readings I've already offered of the *Aeneid* and the *Cahier* as informed by each other in a surrealist context. Some key questions guiding this section are: How does Césaire's hero mirror the fallen Turnus, offering an alternative ending to the centuries-old tale of the "colonized"? In what ways does Césaire's engagement with redaction as both a doing and an undoing demonstrate an uprooting of colonial genetics and disalienate the self from the inoculated, half-blooded colonized body? I return to Césaire's metaphor on tawing, teasing out the implications it makes of racialization and color as a result of colonial formations that take root in traditions like the *Aeneid*. By refusing the coloring or Blackening that colonial systems of rule produce, Césaire's narrator achieves an internal sense of self that is Blacked out or unknowable by those who enslave him and call him colonized. I also elaborate further on my notion that redaction is twofold: at the same time that one brings the self back into being, into a state of being readable or knowable or perceivable, it is also an act of obscuring.

To redact, metaphorically Black out, is to embrace a kind of pride in Blackness that is freed from colonial inscriptions of the colonized Black body. Obscured within surrealist poetry, Césaire's narrator and Césaire himself refuse to fully reveal the inner workings of the newfound self who, still Black, still on a ship, is *standing and free*. A colonizer, a colonial power, a slave master may view this Black self on the ship and still see a colonized slave. But internally, underneath and between the blacked-out lines, the Black self is on its way home, to a diasporic community within which it is no longer Other, and within which it can find liberation. In redacting and refusing, Césaire's narrator moves from the colonial inertia imposed upon Black

bodies as a means of forcing subordination — as in the Latin root meaning *to drive* and *to lead*, Césaire’s narrator leads himself back to himself, a movement from passivity to activity. This is what Césaire meant in the introductory epigraph about poetry as a means of self-revelation, wherein the act of writing poetry, especially surrealist poetry allows this self-to-self interaction that Césaire feels is necessary to disalienation. He retells the tale of the fallen Turnus with his own literary hero who will overcome the biggest hurdle in self-determination: the alienated self. How might we think of Césaire’s narrator, representing Martinique in the same way Turnus represents Latium, as a tree which represents centuries of colonial violence, grafting, and inoculation, producing a body and branches alienated from its trunk and roots?

Au bout du petit matin, cette ville plate-étalée, trébuchée de son bon sens, *inerte*, essoufflée sous son fardeau géométrique de croix éternellement recommençante, indocile à son sort, muette, contrariée de toutes façons, incapable de croître selon le suc de cette terre, embarrassée, *rognée*, réduite, *en rupture de faune et de flore*. Au bout du petit matin, cette ville plate-étalée ...

At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat, toppled from its common sense, inert, winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross, indocile to its fate, mute, vexed no matter what, incapable of growing with the juice of this earth, self-conscious, clipped, reduced, in breach of fauna and flora. At the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat ... (1)

I would like to draw attention here to the words *plate-étalée*, most commonly translated as “sprawled-flat.” The hyphen produces a textual graft between the words. The presence of the word *inerte* emphasizes the status of this town. One imagines a tree, chopped at its base and fallen over, separated from its roots and unable to get itself upright, “topped from its common sense,” its natural orientation upward. This is a different dilemma, not one in which the tree is uprooted entirely by some phenomenon or great strength. This tree, this town, this Martinique, has been violently cut down by centuries of colonial violence and natural disasters. The word *rognée*, meaning clipped, marks the pruning of a plant in order to prepare it for grafting. Pruning

the House of Priam was necessary in order for Aeneas and his sons to be grafted onto a family tree that would justify their rule of the soon-to-come Roman empire (Gowers).

In the *Aeneid*, Turnus is cut down in his 1:1 battle with Aeneas, foreshadowed by the cutting down of a sacred wild olive tree worshiped by the Latins (*servati ex undis ubi figere dona solebant Laurenti divo et votas suspendere vestes*). The Trojans cut this tree before battle as part of preparing the land for war (*sed stirpem Teucris nullo discrimine sacrum sustulerant, puro ut possent concurrere campo*). Aeneas' blade is lodged in the stump. Although Turnus begs the Gods not to set Aeneas' blade free, Venus comes to his aid and frees the blade from the trunk for him. When Aeneas finally kills Turnus, he lodges his sword in Turnus' belly — trunk — and just like the tree toppled flat, he falls, limbs frozen and weak. Turnus' death represents the fall of the Latin empire as it becomes assimilated into what will be known as Roman statehood, and Aeneas is the hero who has conquered the last thing standing in the way of Trojan rebirth — indigenous resistance. Similar to the many moments where Turnus and Aeneas both are textually transformed into trees (Gowers), Césaire's narrator returns to the natural world and himself becomes a tree in order to rediscover his roots and primal, pre-colonial state:

Qui et quels nous sommes ? Admirable question !

A force de regarder les arbres *je suis devenu un arbre* et mes longs pieds d'arbre ont creusé dans le sol de larges sacs à venin de hautes villes d'ossements

Who and what are we? A most worthy question!

From staring too long at trees I have become a tree and my long tree feet have dug in the ground large venom sacs high cities of bone (7)

While Nolden and other scholars posit that Aeneas and Césaire's heroic figure may be parallels, I wonder here if the true parallel exists between Turnus and Césaire's hero, and if the *Cahier* offers also a retelling of the toppled Turnus who rises, born again and anew. At the end of *Cahier*, we see Césaire's hero “standing unexpectedly...standing and free”. He is still on the

ship, still enslaved, yet he has achieved movement, he has disrupted his inertia. Internally, he has been remade. There may still be “yet another sea to cross,” but the colonized subject is aware of this ship, his position, his body, and thus his power. Unlike the toppled Turnus, this tree stands tall — like a rubber tree, almost-invincible because its cuts and bleeds are necessary to produce sap, blood, and life. The potential of such a parallel is tantalizing. By reworking the prescribed fate of Virgil’s Turnus, Césaire achieves a poetic refusal of a long-lived inscribing of the colonized subject. This would be in line with his politics since he spoke multiple times about the term “colonized” being a designation that was given to or forced upon subjects of colonial regimes, not a natural or innate state of being. Just as Virgil re-tells the story of a past he cannot actually alter but that nonetheless impacts the future of Roman society, Césaire re-imagines the centuries-old tale of the colonized Other that interrupts their continually alienated, oppressed status.

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Et tout l'avait laissé, le laissait. Son nez qui semblait une péninsule en dérade et sa négritude même qui se décolorait sous l'action d'une inlassable mégie. Et le mégissier était là Misère.

And everything had left him, was leaving him. His nose which looked like a drifting peninsula and even his negritude discolored as a result of untiring tawing. And the tawer was Poverty. (12)

The phonetic similarities between *métisser* and *mégissier* are worth teasing out here. This passage comes from the moment when Césaire’s hero, in becoming self-aware, realizes himself alongside other white patrons mocking and ridiculing a Black man on the subway. The phrase “*COMIQUE ET LAID*” earlier in this passage is not only a reference to the poem *The Albatross*, but also implies that the Black man could be graceful and beautiful if only he were in his natural element — flying. Trapped on this bus as the albatross on the deck of a ship surrounded by

sailors, he is incapable of being seen as graceful due to his condition. He is bound up by the beasts of poverty and misery (*Misere*), which has “tawed” (*megissier*) his skin. Tawing is the process by which hide is made into leather, and it often involves a whitening so that the hide can be dyed or colored. Césaire’s advocacy for the *négritude* movement held fast to the importance of developing a self-determined Black self that was connected to the diasporic Black community and its collective struggle. In a sense, Césaire’s pushing back against assimilation and *metissage*, which valued a whitening of nations and erasure of Indigenous and Black phenotypes and culture in order to produce a “stronger nation,” argues for the right of people to declare their color and their status by themselves, for themselves. It argues that we resist the tawing or whitening, and the artificial Blackness with which our skin is dyed. Instead, we bring back (redact), refuse, and return to the self through surrealist poetic dreamworks as an attempt to rediscover our true color and claim it, instead of taking what is given to or forced upon us by colonial, organizing, racializing powers. Césaire’s author refuses the tawing, and by speaking and writing himself into existence, he is able to arrive at a conception of Blackness that is about collective struggle and liberation. This redacted self — Blacked out, beyond and transcending the oppressive racial category — belongs to Césaire’s narrator and him alone. When Césaire’s narrator takes off into the abyss that is the sky in the final lines of the poem, finally freed, standing on the deck, standing and free, he is re-orienting himself towards this natural element that the Black man on the subway could not. For Césaire, Blackness cannot be contained or reduced without being clipped (*rognée*) at the wings. As *au bout du petit matin* wanes until its final invocation in the final movement of the poem, and in its place we see other refrains instead: *Partir* and *cette ville*. The narrator ruminates on what it means to leave, what is necessary to depart from a homeland, from a self or *soi*, and thus to return.

Further, the narrator conflates the progress and movement of *cette ville* with the progress made by the narrator throughout the poem. That is, the possibilities of liberation and self-determination for Martinique are actualized through the single narrative body. Comparatively, Aeneas and Turnus both represent their respective nations and/or communities. If Aeneas were to lose against Turnus, his marriage to Lavinia wouldn't be the only outcome. The Trojan population would effectively lose its sovereignty and oneness, absorbed into Latin culture or, more likely, forced to sail the seas once more in search of new land on which to build a nation. That is why Juno, one of the Trojans' patron gods, begs Saturn to let the Latins keep their language and cultural practices, rather than let them be totally lost in the Roman empire that will come. The word nature comes from the Latin *nasci*, to be born. It forms the basis of other words like innate and native. In returning to the natural world through the body/self, Césaire's narrator revisits the site of a colonial inscription that happened long before his birth. Using Virgil's *Aeneid* as a road map, I would like to return to the white sow passage and the tawing scene. If redaction can simultaneously be a bringing of the self into being via text or writing, while also being a means of obscuring or Blacking out the self, how might one go about mediating who is able to decipher this redaction?

In his prophecy, Tiberinus describes a white sow with a litter of 30 young, also white, sitting under an oak tree (*undam / litoreis ingens inventa sub ilicibus sus / triginta capitum fetus enixa iacebit. / alba, solo recubans, albi circum ubera nati*). This image prophesies the city of Alba which Ascanius will found upon the success of the Trojans. One of countless moments in the *Aeneid* associated with trees and bloodlines, this scientific use of nature to explain the future of Troy / the past of Rome reflects a colonial genetics in which racial mixture, oneness, and assimilation can produce abounding fertility for generations to come, as opposed to the infertility

Virgil claims arises when native trees do not graft or mix with others. The white sow and her white young clearly represent a bountiful future for the Trojan-Latin race and Aeneas' descendants. The subtextual meanings associated with the color white represent not just the potential of grafting different *stocks*, but the unconscious of a colonialism that valorizes "racial" mixture as a kind of purification and strengthening. Later in the *Aeneid*, we anticipate the fall of Turnus and the Latin empire as it becomes assimilated into Roman society. Césaire's tawing metaphor becomes apt in understanding the grafting of the Latin people onto the Trojan *stemma* and the textual whitening associated with this process, akin to the whitening and re-coloring process that organizes Black Martinicians within French racialization; this is a unique parallel in French and Roman "assimilation" as it can and should happen, and how it can be successful.

Existing in a proto-racial historical period, I am not reading this necessarily as the establishment of a racial system of dominance which prioritizes white and fair-skinned people, although we know skin-tone has played a role in social organization and hierarchy for centuries. In fact, this passage is Virgil's version of the historical origin of Alba Longa, meaning long white place/town, a real ancient Latin city in central Italy. Gowers has also pointed out that the white sow sitting beneath a tree is part of the pattern of tree-associated moments in the *Aeneid* that represent the establishment of a new empire. For ancient Romans, whiteness was a color of divinity and purity. Beyond its literary and poetic origins, religious figures often wore white in ceremonies, especially priestesses, and ancient Roman and Greek aesthetics valued white as a symbol of innocence and beauty. While not explicitly about race as a concept, the color of one's skin inevitably became a determinant of your social status — that is, even without such linguistic racial markers, darker skin led to designations of dirtiness, evilness, and otherness. Knowing this,

what we can uncover here is the modification of a cultural community in the service of imperial expansion.

This reading of *the Aeneid* led me to reflect on French universalism and oneness, a highly contested ideology that was celebrated during the French Revolution, and has since come under scrutiny for the ways it neglects racial violence and inequality in France and other Francophone countries. French universalism valued equality between all people at its onset, and has developed to define a moral stance of France that accepts all kinds of people from all walks of life — even despite laws like *Code noir* which severely limited the rights of Black and Indigenous people in France. France was also a key actor in global colonization, as well as eugenics and racial science that sought to prove racial difference was biological. Critiques drawn against this ideology cite the historical mistreatment and precarity of non-white and non-European populations in France, particularly Arab, Berber, Algerian, Black/African, and Jewish people. This is, of course, not an exhaustive list, although it need not be emphasized further that France has a racist history that lives on today.

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Puis je me tournai vers de paradis pour lui et les siens perdus, plus calme que la face d'une femme qui ment, et là, bercé par les effluves d'une pensée jamais lasse je nourrissais le vent, je délaçais les monstres et j'entendais monter de l'autre côté du désastre, un fleuve de tourterelles et de trèfles de la savane que je porte toujours dans mes profondeurs à hauteur inverse du vingtième étage des maisons les plus insolentes et par précaution contre la force putréfiante des ambiances crépusculaires, arpentée nuit et jour d'un sacré soleil vénérien.

Then I turned toward paradises lost for him and his kin, calmer than the face of a woman telling lies, and there, rocked by the flux of a never exhausted thought I nourished the wind, I unlaced the monsters and heard rise, from the other side of disaster, a river of turtledoves and savanna clover which I carry forever in my depths height-deep as the twentieth floor of the most arrogant houses and as a guard against the putrefying force of crepuscular surroundings, surveyed night and day by a cursed venereal sun. (1)

Encased in a series of grotesque images the narrator sees as he wavers between sleeping and waking, lies the unconscious connection he has to the natural world at once. After cursing a cop, he turns and is reminded of his power, of the rivers of turtle doves and savana clover and the wind which surround him but also pierce him and run through him, deeply. In this waking moment, where one can be in touch with the unconscious as well as the conscious, the narrator can access his innate power, and is closest to himself. Throughout the poem, we watch the narrator drift between distance and closeness in relation to his *soi* or self as he branches out and seeks various kinds of movement or shift. This power protects the narrator from “ambiances crépusculaires, arpentée nuit et jour d'un sacré soleil vénérien,” and becomes a shield with which the narrator can redact himself— on the outside, while awake, he may conform and perform, assimilate, but internally a war is being waged already. He becomes Blacked-out, subverting, a subtext hidden beneath tawed-and-dyed Black skin. The *négritude* this hero will later embrace is a formulation all his own, one which he has a right to “keep opaque,” as Glissant might say. Internally, the *soi* is protected from being “arpentée nuit et jour” by colonizing forces, unseeable or unknowable entirely by a colonial power.

Et ne sont pas seulement les bouches qui chantent, mais les mains, mais les pieds, mais les fesses, mais les sexes, et la créature toute entière qui se liquéfie en sons, voix et rythme. Arrivée au sommet de son ascension, la joie crève comme un nuage. Les chants ne s'arrêtent pas, mais ils roulent maintenant inquiets et lourds par les vallées de la peur, les tunnels de l'angoisse et les feux de l'enfer.

And not only to the mouths sing, but the hands, the feet, the buttocks, the genitals, and your entire being liquified into sounds, voices, and rhythm. At the peak of its ascent, joy burst like a cloud. The songs don't stop, but roll now anxious and heavy through the valleys of fear, the tunnels of anguish and the fires of hell. (3)

The Christmas scene is important to my analysis for its representations of a precarious, but true joy that survivors of colonial violence come to embody. For centuries on end, Black colonized subjects and Martinicians in particular were convinced that their subjugation was

innate and natural. This scene of celebration has been closely studied in countless readings of *Cahier* on account of its out-of-placeness in the first movement of the poem, characterized by scenes of struggle and colonial-induced depravity. I am interested in the use of natural imagery to depict the possibility of life and joy to erupt or be born from within a colonized struggle. Particularly, this joy is short-lived — the song becomes anxious, heavy, weighed down. This is not the first time we've encountered the metaphor of being held or weighed down— recall “winded under its geometric weight of an eternally renewed cross” (*essoufflée sous son fardeau géométrique de croix éternellement recommençante*) in reference to *cette ville* the narrator yearns for and simultaneously degrades. This brings us back to the force with which colonialism seeks to make itself natural, by means of grafting or inoculation or otherwise. Re-telling, re-writing, and celebrating a contrary Black aliveness in the midst of such violence was absent in the *Aeneid*, but is present in the *Cahier*, and serves again as a refusal of the colonial genetics that render Black bodies as Other and conquerable. This is the ultimate resistance to colonial power.

Conclusion

To reground in the central argument of this thesis, Césaire's poetic project in *Cahier* challenges and interrupts cycles of colonial violence, using surrealism and Black poetics to re-work epic tradition as a cultural expression of colonialism. This reading allows one of Virgil's the *Aeneid* that sees his own use of surreal epic poetry as critiquing certain aspects of imperialism while endorsing its potential benefits. What I've offered in this thesis are my own readings of Césaire's work, as a poet of color and scholar to a neoliberal institution myself. In addition to the main works I cite by Gowers, Baer and Nolden, amongst others, my reading of Césaire's *Cahier* as not only a re-working on epic tradition in the surreal realm, but also as a specific and intentional demonstration of Black poetics as redaction and refusal. Engaging with core aspects of classic poetic tradition employed by Virgil to construct a history of Rome and Aeneas, like grafting/assimilation, tawing/coloring or racialization, and blood/inoculation as racial mixture, I have offered readings that challenge standing notions of surrealist poetry and art, readings of the *Aeneid* and the *Cahier*, and that are often more speculative and based in my personal experiences. The beauty of works like these is revealed in the various ways my own readings demonstrate not just the textual unconsciousness of the poems, but my own unconscious understandings of colonial formations throughout time and space. I hope that this thesis can offer a basis for other scholars interested in this work of comparing texts from across temporalities, engaging the contemporary and the modern with care and as a way to read and re-read classical works. Particularly given the varied support for global Black liberation movements that rises only when Black death and violence is the focus, it is crucial that works such as this be read as testaments to Black life and Black aliveness in the wake of social death, displacement and dispossession.

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