

2004

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Recommended Citation

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Dawn Fulton

CAJOU'S REASON: MICHÈLE LACROSIL AND POST-WAR INTELLECTUAL LIBERALISM

Les choses que l'on taît sont-elles moins pernicieuses?

Michèle Lacrosil, *Cajou*

Cajou, the eponymous heroine of Michèle Lacrosil's second novel, seems to represent the very embodiment of racism. In her eyes the world is strictly divided along color lines, between a superior white race and an inferior black one. The child of an interracial marriage, Cajou inevitably turns this vision of the world upon herself, convinced she is doomed to failure because of her black ancestry. Lacrosil published *Cajou* in 1961, thus introducing the self-hating heroine to her public against the backdrop of an ever more visible rise to power in the former French colonies of Africa. It is not surprising that the work was subject to a considerable amount of criticism in this context, and indeed the extent of Cajou's self-degradation is such that it may be tempting to join contemporary readers, as well as subsequent critics, in characterizing the novel as the portrait of a madwoman. But to do so would be to risk being simplistic or even dismissive, and would obscure an important component of Lacrosil's narrative: that its formal composition as a series of first-person journal entries articulates not only a tortured investigation of the self, but a penetrating look outward at the society that surrounds Cajou. Closer examination of this critical undercurrent suggests that Cajou's acquaintances and colleagues label her discourse as neurotic not only because it is racist but more importantly because it exposes fundamental problems in their own discourse of social equality. Through this tragic heroine Lacrosil mounts a subtle and unexpected critique of the paradoxes that underlie certain strains of self-proclaimed liberalism in post-war Paris, and suggests further that Cajou's condition may in fact be symptomatic of her contemporary experience of *négritude*.

Michèle Lacrosil published only three novels before effectively disappearing from public view at the end of the 1960s, but her brief œuvre reveals a writer intent on exposing the painful realities of race relations in her native Guadeloupe and in metropolitan France. Her unwavering gaze on the damaging effects of colonialism is most distinctive in its portrayal of the individual subject, alienated and eventually destroyed by contemporary social conditions. In her first novel, *Sapotille et le serin d'argile* (1960), the young heroine recalls a series of traumatic encounters with the French colonial system dur-

ing her school days and early adulthood in Guadeloupe. Most striking of these are repeated efforts to exclude and belittle her as one of only a few black students in an elite boarding school run by nuns. Sapotille chronicles these experiences while on board a ship bound for the metropole, thus laying the groundwork for the incisive look at Parisian society engaged in *Cajou*. In *De-main Jab-Herma* (1967), Lacrosil shifts from the introspective journal format of her first two novels to a third-person narrative. Here the focus is no longer the female self but a complex network of political and economic struggles amongst a group of men at a sugar factory in Guadeloupe. Threaded through this panoramic narrative, however, is the secondary but no less devastating portrait of the self-hating mulatto Cragget, whose sense of inferiority ultimately destroys him. Like *Cajou*'s, his story plays out thematically the consequences of the formative experiences traced in Lacrosil's first novel, and points to the same tragic conclusion. Training her eye in turn on the educational system in Guadeloupe, metropolitan intellectual circles, and the complexities of an island economy, Lacrosil thus reiterates her call to attention to the destructive internalization of racism as one of the most lasting and urgent legacies of French colonialism.

Cajou is certainly the most dramatic and sustained of these portraits, and as such has also received the most stringent criticism. *Cajou* is read primarily as a post-war Mayotte Capécia, as someone who fits a little too closely Fanon's by now infamous profile of the self-hating black woman attempting to erase her race through a relationship with a white man. Because of the reverence *Cajou* expresses for the Nordic features, eyes, and hair of her male companion (as well as those of her mother and other female friends), she is seen as a damaging example of the "lactification complex" Fanon elaborated in *Peau noire, masques blancs* less than ten years before the publication of *Cajou*. While certainly Fanon's work on this subject has come under considerable scrutiny since then, and while critics such as Isabelle Gros, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, and Clarisse Zimra have come to the defense of both *Cajou* and Lacrosil,¹ most readers persist in characterizing *Cajou*'s attitude as a psychological disorder. Madness is the primary explanation, perhaps the only explanation, for this character, even for the sympathetic reader. At the far end of this critical spectrum are the readings of Robert P. Smith, Jr. and Merle Hodge, who extend the perception of *Cajou*'s psychological complex to the novelist herself: Lacrosil, according to this assessment, shares her protagonist's neurosis, since only from an equally afflicted mind could come such a disturbing character.²

1. On the links between *Cajou* and Mayotte Capécia, see Corzani 252, Ojo-Ade 27–29, Paravisini-Gebert 66–72, and Zimra's "Patterns of Liberation in Contemporary Women Writers" 105–106. Along with Zimra's article, Rey Chow's analysis of Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* in "The Politics of Admittance" also provides a more nuanced reading of the situation of the black woman.

2. Note simply the title of Robert P. Smith, Jr.'s article, "Michèle Lacrosil: Novelist with a Color Complex," or Merle Hodge's comment that "Lacrosil, despite this brave

Indeed, the depth of Cajou's internalized racism seems to give ample evidence for an evaluation of madness: her narrative is shot through with references to failure, ugliness, and inferiority, a self-degradation constantly aligned with the character's black ancestry. Since her father died when she was a young child, Cajou's only genealogical point of reference is her mother, but her sense of racial inferiority is such that she sees this parentage as impossible, and spends her childhood plagued by the conviction that her mother will disappear. She expresses a similar desperate idealization of several white friends, and finally of her colleague Germain, describing the perfection she sees in their physical features and turning to the mirror to deplore her own. "Je ne me suis jamais aimée," she writes, "Je déteste tout ce qui vient de moi, sauf la rigueur avec laquelle je me juge. Adolescente, j'acceptais mal de devoir, toute ma vie, — conscience lucide, physique ingrat, — me contenter de mon être" (29). Her allegiance to this "rigor" of self-judgment has a paralyzing effect on her choices: convinced that failure is inevitable, she refuses the promotion offered to her in the chemistry laboratory where she works, refuses Germain's proposal of marriage, and ultimately, it seems, rejects her own life, announcing in the final pages of her journal her intended suicide.

Above all Cajou expresses a profound sense of alienation. Unable to find anyone who will even begin to listen to her vision of the world, she realizes that the image she sees of herself in the mirror each night is hers alone, certain to remain unacknowledged by the outside world. She first apprehends this distance between herself and others at an early age, in a defining moment that appears in the opening pages of the novel:

J'allume et je traverse le vestibule. A l'autre bout du couloir, dans la glace, une ombre bouge. Elle me fascine; je la rejoins. Les humiliations de la journée sont là, dans le miroir. Je les regarde. Je les revis chaque soir, à cause de ma chemise de nuit. Elle est blanche. Sur moi, le blanc paraît sale. Je m'en suis aperçue dès l'âge de dix ans. Maman ne voulait pas en convenir:
—Tu te fais des idées, ma bestiole. (11)

Her mother turns a blind eye to her daughter's distress and buys her mauve nightgowns, telling her that they are flattering on her. So while Cajou stands before the mirror and sees only ugliness and humiliation, her mother looks at the same image and insists that she sees a beautiful young girl. As Cajou grows older, friends and colleagues repeat this disconcerting experience, their flattery and admiration for her looks and intellect only reinforcing her sense of alienation.

Cajou becomes not surprisingly fascinated by her reflected image, because there she finds her only reliable sense of reality; an added dimension of her ap-

effort to transcend her own psychology and vision of the world, has remained painfully true to herself, the complex-ridden self revealed in her two earlier novels" (400).

parent madness is thus the narcissistic quality of her condition. She herself refers to a childhood obsession with this figure: "Pendant toute une année, j'ai été Narcisse à rebours: Narcisse honteux de soi et déplorant son reflet" (64). For her the fixation on the self is a gesture of hatred instead of love. Indeed, Cajou suggests here not only a reversal of the classical Narcissus, but a modification of Fanon's *Narcisse noir*, a figure who turns inward to refuse the racism in the gaze of the other: "Je suis Narcisse et je veux lire dans les yeux de l'autre une image de moi qui me satisfasse" (Fanon 172). Although her relationship to the other echoes this dynamic, Cajou's "Narcisse à rebours" recoils instead at the *absence* of racism in the other, turning to the mirror to reaffirm the identity the exterior world is attempting to erase. To her mind the protestations and compliments of her friends and colleagues represent a false reappropriation of this image, an illusion created to correspond to their own vision of the world.

These acquaintances are, appropriately enough, the source of the novel's most explicit references to insanity. For as their repeated attempts to convince Cajou of her merits are met with ever more determined refusals, their conclusion is, inevitably, that she is mad. Even in the foundational passage cited above, Cajou's mother uses a reference to delusion in order to negate her daughter's point of view. Unable to convince Cajou that she is "making things up," she finally takes her to a psychiatrist, whose efforts seem to have no effect. Cajou's interactions with others are fraught with tension and inevitably circle back to the question of her self-image, on which subject Cajou has no shortage of pointed observations. Suggestions of insanity thus become a strategic response for those close to her: telling her that she is illogical, irrational, or deluded is the only way they can close the argument and put an end to her "neurotic" narrative.

It is difficult to overlook the particular resonance of these evocations of madness in the context of French Caribbean literature. For centuries, the remote islands of the Antilles figured in the Western imagination as a site of mental and spiritual aberrance, a land of mystery, libertinage, and disorder. It is therefore not surprising that recent theoretical texts from the region have taken up this geographical association with madness in order to both exploit and reinterpret it. Edouard Glissant's *Le Discours antillais* evokes madness ("la déraison") as a state of mind particular to the Caribbean, an intellectual stance that can redefine otherwise familiar reference points and give way to a new way of thinking beyond the limits of the rational. Here the category of madness is not rejected but recuperated, revalued as a way of elaborating a new logic that will put into question the very concept of reason.³ Maryse Condé also sug-

3. This thematic is also central in Glissant's novel *La Case du commandeur*, which juxtaposes newspaper articles on mental health in the Antilles and the fictive account of a young woman's insanity. J. Michael Dash has pointed to the recuperative strategy of madness in this novel: "Where order leads inexorably towards political absurdity and cultural extinction, insanity becomes a kind of restorative counter-order" (127).

gests the possibility of reclaiming Caribbean madness: in *La Parole des femmes*, for example, she evokes madness as a space of refuge, a means of self-protection against the losses and suffering of reality.⁴ The common impulse that joins these two quite disparate writers is a widespread one in this context: appropriating madness is a strategy, a refusal of the normative discourse of the other and a means of resisting colonial power.⁵ The previously marginalized space thus becomes a site for new forms of expression and liberation, putting into question the priority and the “reason” of the dominant narrative.

On a discursive level, it would certainly not be difficult to include Cajou’s narrative in this tradition, particularly given the genre Lacrosil chose for the novel: since Cajou’s story is written in the form of a journal, the narrative voice is hers alone, and her perspective takes precedence over any other. As disturbing and irredeemable as the racist discourse released by this perspective may be, the novel nonetheless provides a creative space for an otherwise marginalized member of society. As Isabelle Gros has aptly proposed, writing for Cajou is an act of self-liberation,⁶ allowing her to articulate the thoughts that are constantly being suppressed by those around her, to pursue the logic that has no means of expression elsewhere. With each thought, each sentence, Cajou affirms a categorical denial of the criteria that negate her vision of the world and define her as mad. Lacrosil thus uses the narrative to reverse the poles of opposition between sanity and insanity: the discourse of Cajou’s social world is rejected and her own discourse asserts its reason.

My interest in this gesture of creative expression, however, lies less in the self-affirmation it affords than in the social critique that emerges from it. For although the journal format tends to draw the reader’s attention inward to the personal psyche of the protagonist, it is important to note that Cajou also expresses a gaze outward onto her social circumstance. The novel’s opening

4. “Quand il n’y a plus d’espoir, que les morts s’entassent, que ceux qui ont pu fuir l’ont fait, le seul refuge pour ceux qui restent, c’est la folie. Elle protège. A son ombre, on peut continuer d’exister et partant, de tenir tête ‘aux diables’” (105). It should be noted that in Condé’s literary texts the evocation of madness is considerably less optimistic, but that novels such as *Moi, Tituba sorcière . . . noire de Salem* or *La Migration des cœurs* nonetheless question the category of madness itself. On this topic see Françoise DuRivage’s article on *La Migration des cœurs*.

5. Ann Elizabeth Willey notes the Foucauldian link between madness and the sea to emphasize the importance of the slave trade in the consideration of a Caribbean madness. Zimra proposes that “madness has, of course, been the constant temptation in the Caribbean universe, both as theme (an object of discourse) and as textual strategy (subject of discourse)” (“Négritude in the Feminine Mode” 71). See also Judith Miller’s article on Caribbean theatre, where she envisions Ina Césaire’s *Mémoires d’isles* as a rewriting of European models of feminine madness, a rewriting that “implants the energy of nonconformity” (228).

6. See Gros, “Michèle Lacrosil: La Libération par l’écriture ou comment vomir le dégoût de soi.”

words, "J'allume," not only announce the first-person perspective, but also suggest that this assertion will bring clarity, that by documenting her thoughts Cajou will unveil a world thus far hidden from view. As readers we see the post-war Parisian intellectuals of this world as they appear to her: they are the enviable members of a privileged race whose social circle excludes her. Their liberal politics, envisioning the disappearance of Cajou's self-hatred in a society free of racial discrimination, are not taken for granted but are rather subject to constant interrogation. By articulating an outsider's voice, Lacrosil presents these members of society as objects whose discourse is not necessarily sanctioned, whose "reason" may be contingent, and thus urges the reader to look more closely at the logic that characterizes the particular brand of liberalism that Cajou confronts.

In many respects there is nothing suspect about the attitude of Cajou's mother, friends, and colleagues. They react with profound distress at Cajou's professions of inferiority, and not surprisingly their first instinct is to attempt to change her self-image. These efforts to convince her of her worth are couched in an ideology of social equality, and appear motivated primarily by an interest in Cajou's well-being. As their attempts to change her are repeatedly thwarted, however, concern turns to frustration or even anger, and these heated interactions suggest a more problematic tension in their position. Indeed, if we look again at their characterization of Cajou's condition as madness, Lacrosil's discursive reversal shows us that this diagnosis allows them to reject her perspective unilaterally, and even serves as a solution to their dilemma. Each time they read her statements as evidence of insanity, they are exempted from justifying their point of view, since they can simply discard hers as irrational. The instinct on the part of friends and colleagues to call Cajou mad in fact suggests that what characterizes their impulse is less the desire to flatter and support her than the urgent need to silence her.

At first glance this silencing of Cajou appears justified; in attempting to construct an egalitarian social system, it seems natural to want to eradicate so blatant an example of racist discourse. But as Cajou's liberated voice reveals, her narrative of self-hatred is only part of what is being suppressed by others. At the heart of her condition is the real and direct experience of racism; it is because she has been subjected to the bigotry represented by others that such experiences have subsequently manifested themselves as internalized racism. Lacrosil in fact insists upon this transition from outer world to inner psyche in the closing pages of the novel, when Cajou reflects upon a childhood moment, kept secret for years, that fundamentally shaped the person she was to become:

Une gifle de vent mouillé me rend, intact, le souvenir de l'affront que je n'ai avoué à personne : une femme, il y a longtemps, m'a craché à la figure. Son mépris, je le sens, vivra encore quand je serai morte. (232)

For Cajou, this memory is not a phantasm, but a foundational signal of her place in society, and the memory will indeed remain "intact" in that no subsequent experience will change this definitive moment of humiliation.

It is thus highly revealing that the people close to Cajou have no interest in acknowledging such experiences, and instead attempt to rewrite them as delusional. Their reactions to Cajou suggest an unsettling conflation between racist discourse and *accounts* of racist events, as if both kinds of narrative were in equal need of suppression. In a conversation with her Parisian friend Marjolaine, Cajou speaks in an uncharacteristically long rush of detail about the various instances of racism she encounters in her daily life as a black woman in Paris. "Les gens me regardent comme si je venais de choir d'une autre planète," she tells Marjolaine, and attempts to point out how her experience differs fundamentally from any white person's: "Le gros épicier chauve m'a demandé deux fois déjà ce que je faisais à Paris. Est-ce qu'on te pose des questions pareilles, à toi, Marjolaine?" (124). Instead of answering her questions directly, however, her friend presents a reinterpretation of each event, creating a beatific world where racism does not exist, and where everyone Cajou encounters is simply concerned for her well-being. Once again Marjolaine persistently uses references to Cajou's mental health in order to silence her: "Tu déraisonnes," "c'est malsain," "tu ne guériras pas toute seule" (124). Cajou finally gives up, calling this failed exchange "un dialogue de sourds" (124). In her journal, however, she reconstructs the imaginary conclusion of this conversation, using the act of writing to finally give free reign to her thoughts and reduce Marjolaine in her turn to silence.

On an even more problematic level, Cajou's acquaintances are equally unwilling to acknowledge that race might be a factor in any positive treatment Cajou receives, particularly in her professional life. While Cajou's conviction of inferiority does not allow her to believe her work has any merit, she protests not only the praise of her supervisors, but the attitude of condescension and concealed surprise with which they remark upon the high quality of her research. She is certain that no other member of the laboratory would receive the same reaction for the same level of work, and this disparity prevents her from believing that any evaluation of her performance could possibly be objective. The promotion offered her thus becomes a trap, a lie impossible to accept without participating in the delusion of a race-blind society. Germain, however, is baffled by Cajou's stubborn refusal to take the new position, and insists on the objectivity of her colleagues: "C'est insensé. Nous avons des titres équivalents. Un diplôme en vaut un autre" (18). Like Marjolaine, Germain dismisses Cajou's vision as insane and replaces it with a world where she is treated exactly as everyone else is, where she need never even consider her race a relevant aspect of her being. But in Cajou's eyes this world is an impossibility, as is consequently any knowledge of the true merit of her work.

This conflict between Cajou and Germain reveals a second important consequence of the liberalism embraced by the heroine's friends and colleagues. For in order to deny the experience of racism, Germain, Marjolaine, and oth-

ers must essentially effect an erasure of the past: they must deny the history that is the source of contemporary racism in France, and enact a parallel denial of any event that marks Cajou's difference. For Cajou, however, it is precisely this past that keeps her from playing on an equal field with her colleagues. In the laboratory, for example, she sees Germain's legitimacy as clearly defined by the fact that his grandfather and great-grandfather both worked there before him, whereas her own past is connected to a very different context: "Mes ascendants, eux, étaient des esclaves" (27). Having lost her physical link to this context upon the death of her father, Cajou insists all the more forcefully on the spiritual connection she feels to her Guadeloupean ancestors. She claims even to have experienced their history herself: "Des siècles de tristesse pèsent sur mes épaules; j'ai l'âme d'une vieille" (174). Since the reality of this past is a fundamental part of Cajou's vision of the world, Lacrosil suggests here that the liberalist discourse of her friends depends in great part on a selective view of history. In order to maintain the lack of any difference between their experiences and Cajou's, in order to overlook contemporary racism, they must also in a sense forget slavery.

Memory is thus of capital importance to Cajou, and is closely tied to the question of her mental health. Indeed, she presents a temporal frustration to Germain, for example, who thinks she is reliving events from her childhood in Guadeloupe, events that could not possibly take place in enlightened Paris: "Ouvre les yeux : c'est Paris autour de toi ... Tu prêtes à tout le monde les réactions des gens de là-bas ... Pour l'amour du ciel, cesse de raisonner et d'agir comme si tu habitais encore outre-mer" (213). Germain's vision of a non-racist Parisian society represents the present and the future, and in his mind Cajou's refusal to agree with this vision can only indicate a neurosis. The heroine's psychiatrist also characterizes her connection to the past as a hindrance to her mental health, and suggests that she suppress all mention of her ancestry:

Le psychiatre recommanda d'éviter toute allusion à mon père, aux migrations de ses ancêtres esclaves et aux questions raciales. Je songe aux orchidées des forêts tropicales dont les racines, descendues des hautes branches des acomas, restent suspendues entre ciel et terre. Elles flottent; elles cherchent; elles ignorent la stabilité du sol; moi, je ne sais presque rien de mes origines. (41)

The erasure of the past thus has painful consequences for Cajou, and only reinforces her sense of alienation. Society's attempts to "cure" her by cutting her off from the past may well allow them to present a more convincing image of a present and a future unmarked by racial difference, but the consequence for Cajou is unbearable. Accepting the improved self-image proposed by her friends would be an ontological threat:

Ma conscience, que j'estimais, dépendait de mon physique; ... me rêver autre, c'était la condamner. Ma laideur lui était aussi néces-

saire que la nuit l'est au jour. Le "miracle" de la transformation de mon aspect eût signifié la destruction de ma conscience et contenu un germe de mort. (30)

Cajou's sense of self is thus so entangled with the discourse rejected as irrational by society that to subscribe to a vision of social equality would mean her own destruction.

The heroine's unrelenting attention to race and difference can thus be seen as a means of recuperating her identity in a context where only certain aspects of her existence are acknowledged. As aberrant as they may seem, her repeated references to racial inferiority are in part a survival strategy, a way of preserving the memory of slavery, thus repairing the severed link to her lost father and Guadeloupean ancestry. In a society that seeks to erase the events of the past and deny the existence of racism in the present, her perspective serves as a constant reminder, the only remaining evidence of this disturbing reality. Through Cajou's voice, Lacrosil points out the conundrum faced by those who wish to change her: that they cannot maintain the notion of a non-discriminatory world and at the same time acknowledge that world's heritage of colonialism and slavery. The vision of society they propose cannot account for the experience of racial prejudice at all, past or present. Their instinct to silence Cajou, then, is not simply an objection to the racism she represents, but an effort to suppress any perspective that might reveal their own ideological inconsistencies. As such, Cajou's narrative seems to protest, the insistence on a color-blind society free of historical responsibility engenders its own form of madness.

To mount this critique at a moment when the *négritude* movement, bolstered by independence victories in Africa, is continuing to assert its importance in the intellectual world of Paris is a striking move on the part of Lacrosil. While she does not refer explicitly to *négritude* in the novel, and while attempts to define the movement are themselves fraught with conflict, her eponymous heroine would seem nonetheless to represent the very discourse that *négritude* arose to combat.⁷ By reversing the poles of madness and reason, Lacrosil seems to be positing the *négritude* movement as a pathological discourse, and it is no wonder that her novel was badly received. But in fact the complexities of *négritude* are quite relevant here, and if we look more closely at its particular manifestations in this novel, it seems clear that the author's critique is aimed not at the movement as a whole but at its deployment in a specific social and historical moment.

The evocations of *négritude* through the discourse of social equality in this novel are limited to a select group of people; those who are most intent on "curing" Cajou are the white metropolitan intellectuals with whom she

7. On Lacrosil's relationship to the *négritude* movement, see Corzani 238.

works.⁸ Cajou is in fact the only character in the novel with any black ancestry, and the instinct to silence her thus takes on added significance. By articulating a voice that disrupts their normalizing discourse, Lacrosil exposes the hidden agenda of Cajou's socially conscious colleagues. Germain provides what is perhaps the most revealing evidence of the motivations behind this particular appropriation of the discourse of *négritude*. Explaining to Cajou why she should stop "living in the past" and reading racial prejudice in her everyday life, he puts her objections in a political context:

Tes réactions se comprendraient si tu vivais en 1900, ma pauvre Cajou. Mais aujourd'hui! Vois le rôle de l'Afrique noire dans le jeu international. Au moment où le Français s'intéresse aux problèmes de l'homme noir et lui apporte l'appui de son expérience et de sa technique, tu t'embarrasses de complexes qui n'ont plus de raison d'être. (202)

According to Germain, then, Cajou's racist discourse is not problematic because it is harmful to her, but because it hinders the progress of the modern world. For him the historical moment—France's entry into an international struggle for equality—is far more important than the concrete incidence of racism on the individual level. In fact Cajou's perspective seems almost irrelevant here; the implication is that her sense of inferiority would have been unproblematic or even appropriate in the past, but now, when the fight for black equality has become a French intellectual investment, her refusal to cooperate is an outrageous affront to the Western world. By "weighing herself down" with complexes, Cajou is obstructing the successful deployment of French generosity.

It is because of this last view through Cajou's lens in particular that Lacrosil's novel merits reconsideration, for the author presents a perceptive critique of the paternalism that can lurk behind such ideologies of social equality, a paternalism that depends on the elimination of any contradictory narrative. Lacrosil exposes the tenuous directions *négritude* can take when a young woman who identifies contemporary racism and reclaims her heritage of slavery must be categorized as mad. Behind the apparently benevolent desire to rehabilitate Cajou's self-esteem lies an urgent need for coherence, and this coherence in turn demands the suppression of her voice. This "madwoman" refuses to let France forget its shameful past, refuses to play the role of a grateful Africa to reassure the conscience of Western liberalism, and thus in the context of her social and professional circles represents a discourse that is indeed destined to fail. Cajou's text, tragic and disturbing as it may be, remains nonetheless a lucid testament to the impossibility of living simultaneously a contemporary reality and an unknown past.

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8. Amongst Wole Soyinka's criticisms of *négritude* is the assertion that the movement was restricted to a small "bourgeois-intellectual élite" and that it "stayed within a pre-set system of Eurocentric intellectual analysis both of man and society and tried to re-define the African and his society in those externalised terms" (135–36).

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