

# THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE



**THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE**  
**A STUDY OF THE BLACK MOVEMENT**  
**AGAINST INTELLECTUAL OPPRESSION**  
**IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY**

**Emmanuel E. Egar**



BrownWalker Press  
Boca Raton

*The Crisis of Negritude:  
A Study of the Black Movement Against Intellectual Oppression in the Early 20th Century*

Copyright © 2008 Emmanuel E. Egar  
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher.

BrownWalker Press  
Boca Raton, Florida • USA  
2009

ISBN-10: 1-59942-472-X/ISBN-13: 978-1-59942-472-9 (*paper*)

ISBN-10: 1-59942-473-8/ISBN-13: 978-1-59942-473-6 (*ebook*)

[www.brownwalker.com](http://www.brownwalker.com)

Cover design by Shereen Siddiqui

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Egar, Emmanuel Edame.

The crisis of Negritude : a study of the Black movement against intellectual oppression in the early 20th century / Emmanuel E. Egar.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-59942-472-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Blacks--Race identity. 2. Negritude (Literary movement) 3. Blacks in literature. 4. French literature--Black authors--History and criticism. I. Title.

DT15.E43 2008

305.896009'041--dc22

2008032460

# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	7
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	
The Problem of Definitions .....	9
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	
The Masterly Africanness of Leopold Senghor.....	15
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	
Wole Soyinka: The Negative Theology.....	27
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	
The Foreign Language Burden.....	31
<b>CHAPTER V</b>	
Wole Soyinka: The Anxieties of Negritude.....	39
<b>CHAPTER VI</b>	
Soyinka and Ambivalence: The Enemy Within and Without.....	45
<b>CHAPTER VII</b>	
Jean-Paul Sartre: The Black Evangelists.....	49
<b>CHAPTER VIII</b>	
The Poetics of Negation.....	57
<b>CHAPTER IX</b>	
The Logos of Saint John .....	65
<b>CHAPTER X</b>	
The Case of the Greek Woman .....	71
<b>CHAPTER XI</b>	
African Spiritualism.....	73
<b>CHAPTER XII</b>	
The Intellectual Orphans.....	77
<b>CHAPTER XIII</b>	
The Beginning of the End.....	83
<b>CHAPTER XIV</b>	
The Deafening Silence.....	89
<b>CHAPTER XV</b>	
The Epiphany.....	91
Epilogue.....	93
Bibliography.....	95



## INTRODUCTION

To describe some of the causes of the collapse of Negritude as a cultural and intellectual movement, a crisis, may be an over-exaggeration because the word “crisis” presupposes cause and effect like a historical process. History for some has a linear progression of continuity, contiguity, and fluidity like a flood from a tiny river, flowing aimlessly into an ocean. This may only be a traditional definition of history. History for the moderns may deal with omission, accident, and lack, sporadic or spontaneous—spontaneous like the deafening intervention that the early Christians witnessed on Pentecost Sunday.

Negritude did not have cause and effect. It was born with a fractured, troubled life so that its beginning was equally its end. These fractures, these troubles were found in definitions, ideology, and language that were muted in its anatomy from birth. However, before we get into why definitions became problematic, a short biography may here suffice. In his introduction to Leopold Senghor’s collected poetry, Melvin Dixon informs us that:

Before the trauma and upheaval of war, Senghor enjoyed the period of the thirties as a time of much intellectual ferment. Louis Achille introduced him to the work of African-American poets and to the many West Indian students that were in Paris seeking some expression and validation of their racial and cultural differences. Paulette and Jane Nardal began the controversial *La revue de monde noiré* (Review of the Black World) in 1931 and set the stage for the beginning of a new literary movement that recognized the value of black experiences throughout the world. (xxvii)

An understanding of the silent vibrations in that passage reveals some of the built-in traumas of negritude. There are several of these concerns in that passage. The first is the mysterious nature of its emergence. Negritude started without a name. This was paradoxical existence without existence like death in life. But if the name existed, it existed only in spirit and moral, and not in practice. In practice, Negritude

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

had come into being through the feminine and maternal nurturing of two sisters, Paulette and Jane Nardal, who created a journal— *Review of the Black World*, the journal that recognized the value of black experiences throughout the world. The initial theme of this journal immediately suggested that the value of black experiences throughout the world were in question. The disturbing problem with this theme was its silent insinuation of the acceptance of African values' inferiority by whomever the critic was, which was then turned around to justify the value of that inferiority. This is a reaction that has within it the discomfort of the master/servant syndrome. The nagging discomfort of the logic here is that the master will always be better than the servant, regardless of the servant's new status.

Negritude's second problem was historical: namely, that historical tag of slavery which always compels the West Indian/African-American to defend and justify his/her cultural experiences before an oppressive popular majority.

The movement depended largely on West Indians/African-Americans for its survival. However, the West Indians/African Americans had their hands full during this historical period (1920-1940): they were preoccupied with building and forming the Harlem Renaissance. We know that some of the poems and poetry from the members of the Harlem Renaissance feature very prominently in the lyrics of Senghor. It was due to these historical burdens that Negritude, like an overloaded Ark, was over-burdened by divided loyalties that were too heavy to enunciate a stable and sturdy front.

This drastic and dramatic effect could have been salvaged if the African writers had fully supported the movement. For better or worse, many African writers did not seem to have the practical reason or logic to authenticate the validity of their cultural experiences. The reason was that the African simply *is*. And if the African is, definitions are not!

## CHAPTER I

# THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITIONS

*There is a pleasure, surely in being mad which none but mad men know.*

—The Spanish Friar

The fact that Negritude started without a name may defeat any attempts at defining it. This is because definitions themselves are enigmatic in the sense that they never lead us to the thingness of things. As Kenneth Burke has taught us in his text *A Grammar of Motives*, definitions often come as teases which take us through trails of metaphors, similes, allegories, and even catachresis. The problem now becomes, without a name, how can we name?

However, the name “Negritude” could be teased out of the title of a journal by the Nardal sisters: *The Review of the African World*. This can be done through a language of petrification, the process through which iron can be produced from raw granite. This process is necessary but tedious because of the vagueness of the journal’s title. These vagaries provoke questions like: What is the Black World? Is it spiritual, cosmic, or artistic? The third question is contingent on the previous: Why does the African World need a review? What differentiates the African world from other worlds? In a global intellectual sense: For whom does the African write? None of these questions demand easy answers because the answers are as mysterious as such a movement, beginning without a name. That name Negritude, however, was first introduced by Aimie Cesaire in his long poem, “The Notebook of a Return to the Native Land.” The title of this poem also invokes another mysterious myth—the myth of the Biblical prodigal son.

The story of the Biblical prodigal son has been told and re-told by Christians because it carries within it all kinds of heart-warming beatitudes, but also generates negations by various Christian theologians. For instance, the religions purists assign to it themes of adventure, boldness, and pioneering spirit. Skeptics see it as a story about wanton recklessness, truancy, and juvenile stupidity. The more liberal theologians see in it the enormous dignity of a special son who had an enormous propen-

sity to provoke not only his father's wrath, but also his magnanimity. All of these contentions raise silent whispers in the minds of skeptics who seem to posit that perhaps, it was the son who created his father's greatness, because without this special son, the enormity of the father's wrath/magnanimity would never be known! This means that in an inverse ratio, without the son, there would not be a father.

However, apart from the prodigal son syndrome in Césaire's poem, Dixon claims, in his introduction to Senghor's poetry, that Césaire had other ideas, cravings, and even speculations about the meaning of negritude. One of these speculations was that negritude was a search for universal black values. This speculation raises some semantic tension because the word "search" provokes a sense of desperation, doubt, hope, and even desire because of its filial denotation/connotation and affirmation/negation about African universal values. The disturbing questions here are in the problem of trace, which unleashes questions like: Where are these African Universal values? Where could we find them? Such questions could logically lead to the examination of black music, art, painting, dance, and politics. The objective of the search would be to find a simple common denominator between all these cultural artifacts. This search would also have its laughter and pain because it would be full of many frustrations. These frustrations would stem from the fact that the African universe that I know is not as seamless as Senghor claims. We are as diverse and different in our cultures as we are in our languages. For instance, in some countries, what separates one tribe from another is a small river— but the people on each side of this river may not understand the language of the other. These two tribes may be total strangers, ironically living side by side! Therefore, since language is the surest way to unite a society, and Africa has such enormous diversity of languages, how can the search for the universal ever succeed?

Césaire's other speculation about the central theme of negritude, according to Dixon, was pertaining to racial exploration of language. This, too, presents problems. The central problem stems from what Paul de Man called the grammatization of rhetoric and the rhetorization of grammar. The primary concern here is how grammar subverts rhetoric and how rhetoric subverts grammar. In his speculation that negritude should deal with the racial exploration of language, Césaire inadvertently creates a tussle between the semantic/literary and form/content. This conflict, according to Kenneth Burke, may produce an alchemy— a mutation of different elements in a chemical reaction which produces a compound completely different from the elements

that formed it. Therefore, in a rather sad but sober sense, if we try to separate the elements in the alchemy, we ruin them all; we destroy the elements and the compound as we can see from the questions that this second speculation provokes: Does language have a race? Or does race produce a language from the politics and anxieties within that politics, that message? These speculations, however, are impossible to realize because the domestication of the French and English languages cannot be done in a vacuum. Here we can borrow a link from the anti-logic of composition teachers who sincerely believe that English grammar can be taught in isolation. The loneliness of language! It would be a freezing loneliness because is language ever an island? If language is a medium of communication, does it not need content (a message) to authenticate its use? This line of reasoning takes us back to the controversy in literary theory and practice about the efficacy of content/form in literature.

Aimie Cesaire and Senghor, however, had different notions about the meaning and programs of negritude. But while Cesaire concentrated on negritude as a movement that would domesticate both the French and English languages, Senghor had a different idea. He believed that negritude should not only domesticate the French language, but should also be a means for decolonization. That is why there is a fluctuation in his poetic work between poetry in the service of the artistic and the cultural, and poetry in the service of the political. That is why he claimed in his 1988 book *What I Believe* that diction possesses self-negating factions between grammar/rhetoric, between logic/illogical, and between intensions and the conflict in communicating these intensions. The central thrust here is that in this social contract between Africa and Europe, we all give and take! We share what we have depending upon the individual usefulness of our shared dealings in cultural art, education, politics, and religion. We eschew all tendencies that may lead to that master/servant syndrome. But does this sense of equity ever succeed?

Cultural sharing also has built-in tensions which tend to negate the sharing itself. Some of these tensions stem from the native, natural, and historical indicators of culture. Every culture is essentially selfish because it was meant to serve a particular and peculiar situation—a situation that is rooted in its native history. This rootedness of cultural history cannot trade places without the risk of losing its authenticity. Therefore, in simple language: once you assimilate, you cannot help but be assimilated because of the contagious nature of assimilation.

Senghor uses the fluctuations in his poetry to deal with the dual and often conflicting roles of negritude. As Dixon informs us, Senghor

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

made several assertions about his understanding of the role of negritude. Some of these included:

I. That negritude has evolved as part of the struggle for Liberation from the chains of cultural colonization in favor of a new humanism. II. That negritude evokes: the totality of values of black civilization. III. That negritude affirms: the will to assure black consciousness and to explore its multiple forms of artistic, political, expression. IV. That the power of negritude was in the utterance. It is a call into being of black presence in the modern world. (xxviii)

From his first assertion, negritude was a movement in the service of the decolonization of Africa. But a cultural or artistic movement that focused mainly on poetry and fiction can not seriously effect any political changes in a country. Substantive change takes much more than that.

The second statement places the burden on all African writers and artists to become priests or teachers so as to teach the world about sacred African civilizations. Unfortunately, this clarion call was never followed religiously by African writers.

The third assertion is too lame and apologetic to demand comment because what does the assertion “that negritude affirms: the will to assert black consciousness and explore its multiple forms of artistic political expression” mean? Does it mean that this will was nonexistent before negritude was formed? Did negritude give birth to Africa? Who is questioning the artistic, aboriginal expressions of Africa in art or politics? The burden of turning writers into teachers and priests is a burden within a burden, which leaves room for wondering if the aim here was to devise peculiar and different standards for the evaluation of African writing, art, poetry, and politics. This fluctuation in Senghor’s notion of negritude moves from the political to the language, when he further claims that the power of negritude was “in the utterance. It is a call into being of black presence in the modern world.”

Senghor displays this power of the utterance of negritude very splendidly in all of his poetry, particularly (to the music of the Koras/Balaphon and Black women) where he introduces African names into French poetry without translation. Such a shocking effect infuses his poetry with eternal beauty, vitality, and curiosity. But for the African, this assertion is problematic because there is no need to call into being a presence that has always been there: Black presence has existed even before the beginning of negritude movement. So what was the real reason to turn around and evoke it? This invocation seems to be a mild

form of appeasement aimed toward Africa's critics. This appeasement inadvertently surrenders the control of authenticity of African art and culture to the very critics of African culture. Negritude ended like the sad, desperate self-pity T.S. Eliot conveys in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock:"

I hear the mermaids singing  
Each to each  
I do not think they will sing to me. (24)



## CHAPTER II

# THE MASTERLY AFRICANNESS OF LEOPOLD SENGHOR

David Wellbery, in his text *The Specular Moment*, writes:

Modern interpretation, Carlo Ginzburg has argued in a deft essay follows the spoor of Morelli. Rather than focus on grand themes that parade as center and Essence, it seeks its clues on the periphery, among the inadvertent traces and remainders of cultural production. Morelli's major concern was to authenticate the painterly Signature of the great masters, to provide accurate attributions by meticulously examining such details as the fold of the ears. (3)

Ginzburg shows us in that piece that modern interpretation is a mimesis of Morelli's understanding and interpretations of art. Morelli was not too concerned with grand themes, but rather with those aspects of painting that illustrated the painterly signature of the great masters. His concern was with the periphery, the inadvertent traces, like the fold of the ear. Ginzburg should also have read John Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. In his interpretation and celebration of African culture, Senghor displays that painterly signature of a great master with his enunciation of great themes and details from the periphery and the inadvertent traces. He celebrates these great themes with their details in several of his poems, highlighting the essential and central Africanity of African culture. These traces, this central Africanity, are relayed intensely in several of his poems, such as "To the Koras and Balaphon," "Black Mask," "Black Women," and "Kaya Magan."

### *To the Koras and Balaphon*

The Koras and Balaphon are musical instruments that accompany a lyric or dance in a festive celebration. Around these instruments and their music, Senghor weaves an epic, a lyrical nostalgia that recounts

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

and celebrates the frustrations, anxieties, doubts, hopes, and desires of the race:

She called me “Lord! Choose! And deliciously thrust between these two friendly hands. A kiss from you Soukeina—these two Competing worlds. When painfully—Ah! I no longer Know who is my sister. And who is my foster sister among those who cradle my nights with their desired tenderness, with their clasped hands. When painfully—a kiss from you Isabella, between the two hands would unite in my warm hand once again. (18)

A seemingly innocent experience, an adolescent kiss, escalates a series of events—like a domino with the potential to rock, fracture, and destroy negritude as a cultural movement. The old maxim “love conquers all things” seems to be true. But its negation, “love destroys all things” seems equally valid as we see how Senghor struggled with his frustration, hopes, anxieties, doubts, and desires, all created by love. His amorous encounter begins with, “She called me Lord!”—a statement which reveals the respect that the traditional African woman has for her man. The man in the African family is not simply the head of the family, but also the representative of God Himself. God sends blessings to a good man to share with his family. The love and respect that the woman has for the man are tested when the same man has divided loyalties—loyalty to his black woman or to his newly found white woman. When pressed to choose, the poet evades the question and instead takes refuge in the poetry of, “The rivers, the winds, forests, the assonance of the plains and streams.”

As if the choices with his romantic encounter are not difficult enough, other problems emerge out of the woodwork: How does he choose to be loyal to his love of his native music, the music of Koras and Balaphon, and the Catholic hymns or the trumpet’s call to join the war in Europe? The poet decides once more to evade these choices rather than to take a categorical stand. He chooses the path of least resistance, the path which entails him to love and be loyal to his peasant, suffering people. This path raises questions about black racism, that eccentric love of one’s own ethnicity. So, to avoid the label of black racism, the poet surrenders to universalism. He decides to love all the peasants and suffering people of the world. He does this with the understanding that poverty and suffering are oblivious to race, gender, and national boundaries. But to choose to serve the world’s peasants raises the stakes of affirmation and negation. The beauty of affirmation is that

it draws from the Christian creed of “love thy neighbor.” Negation, on the other hand, moves the theatre of the contest from the local to the universal, and so neutralizes and even obliterates the local good. Negation dilutes the energy and functionalities of the struggle! And for better or worse reasons, this was an area where Senghor ran into a head-on collision with the militant leaders of the negritude movement. So, yes: “Your brothers are angry with you and have made you till the soil!” is a legitimate course of anxiety.

This anxiety also unleashes a philosophical dilemma: “O to be your trumpet!” How can this be? Is it wishful thinking? This statement has built-in negation/affirmation, anxieties, doubts, hopes, and desires because of all the denotation/connotations and thesis/antithesis with which it is associated. Therefore, it needs an explanation. Since this is simply an attempt to get into the bowels of the whale and here, going in is as difficult and frightening as coming out, our first concern is: what role does the trumpet play as a medium of communication in the tribe? The available answers are teasing because they are diverse and lack finality. Essentially, the trumpet relays messages of nobility, such as the arrival of a monarch. It also warns the tribe of impending problems which may lead to war. At the local, immediate level, the trumpet authenticates the identity of the owner and so relays that ethos to his audience. It concerns the ethics of self-criticism, which borders on two disturbing questions: whether one can honestly and sincerely be the best critic of himself, and whether one loses the sense of the transparent purity of the truth in blowing his trumpet. All of these muted and diverse answers shook and fractured the negritude movement.

It was this fluctuation in Senghor, between acceptance or negation of black/white, that made his leadership of the movement questionable. So, when towards the end of the poem he moans, “O my Lioness, my black beauty, my dark night, my black woman,” he is no longer believable. This lack of credibility finally exploded when he surrendered the mode of enunciation to that mad delirium of Andre Breton and his surrealism.

The music of the Koras and Balaphon is an epic, a lyrical nostalgia that carries with it the legends, the anxiety, doubts, hopes, and even desires of the tribe, which is told in the raptured mood and tone of a village groit—the painterly signature of the great master! We see the greatness of this groit in the story of the sensuous beauty of the black woman.

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

### *Black Woman*

The poem “Black Woman” celebrates what Morelli described as the painterly signature of a great master in painting. It conveys a joyful celebration of the blissful nostalgia of childhood that points to reminiscences of early beauty that is almost forgotten, but remembered so poignantly with the fury of the eagle’s attack:

“Naked woman”, black woman  
Dressed in your “color that is life”, in your  
Form that is beauty!  
I grew up in “your shadow”.  
The softness of your hands shielded my eyes,  
And now at the height of summer and noon,  
From the crest of a charred hilltop I discover you,  
Promised Land  
And your beauty strikes my heart like  
An eagle’s lightening flash.

Here we witness a celebration of primordial nature and unadulterated beauty unblemished by artificial trappings. This beauty is displayed in that natural, naked, black woman whose superior color is the color of life; a woman who nurtured and provided the joyful sanctuary with her shadow, a sanctuary that nurtured the poet from childhood to adulthood (summer/noon) and enabled him to grow up to really discover the full enormity of the beauty. This experience affects him like the lighting flash of an eagle. We witness here how his immediacy and intimacy with the black woman almost turns to adoration, reflecting that painterly signature of the great masters like Goethe and Novalis.

From that sense of adoration, the poem later conveys a mood of sensuous intimacy and immediacy because this black woman becomes sensuous like a succulent ripe fruit with firm flesh, her dark raptures like black wine. There is closeness here, an immediacy, intimacy because this woman’s mouth “gives music to my mouth.” She is compared to the wild grass of the tropical savannah grassland that is tossed and teased by the east wind; her body is sculptured as a “tom-tom” that is stretched like drum skin, moaning and quivering during sexual intimacy. Her sweet sensuous moaning is the deep contralto voice that really sounds like the spiritual song of the beloved: “naked woman, dark woman.”

Constant repetition of the sensuous visual attributes of the black woman begins to sound like the rhythmic chant of a recurrent orchestra emphasizing the dominant theme of negritude. It is a celebration of the sensuous ebony-black woman who nurtures and sustains the race! The

repetition of “naked woman, dark woman” should remind the reader of the beautiful celebration of black history that we read in Langston Hughes’ “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Here, Hughes repeatedly announces, “I have known rivers,” so as to authenticate his closeness, immediacy/intimacy, and familiarity with the heart wrenching history of the black race in America.

While Hughes recalls a history full of rise and fall, trauma, frustration, doubts, hope, and desire, Senghor’s black woman is a constant beam of joy, and is of a sensuousness that is like “oil no breeze can ripple,” or “the oil soothing the thighs of athletes and the thighs of the Princess of Mali.” She is a “Gazelle with celestial limbs, pearls are stars upon her dark skin.” She is the “joyful delight of the minds’ riddles,” and it is the reflection of red gold from her shimmering skin which develops a shade upon her hair. Her eyes inspire affirmation, hope and desire. Because this celebration of the beauty of the naked black woman is eternal, never-ending, the poem re-enacts its beginning even in its ending: “Naked black woman! Sing your passing beauty and fix it for all eternity, before joyous fate reduces you to ashes, to nourish the roots of life.” Senghor’s poetry seems to have a sort of kindred relationship with the poetry of Novalis and Goethe. The love generated by the naked black woman is similar to that generated by Sophia in Novalis’ small tale named *The Apprentices at Sais* in 1798. Wellbery reveals this attraction, this love that comes close to adoration by claiming that:

She is beloved, muse and mediator of the divine for whom, from whom and through whom his Poetry speaks. And not surprisingly, She always makes her Appearance, presents herself, in a scene of specularity, giving the poetic subject a self certainty and faith that dissolves even the otherness of death. (*The Specular Moment* 12)

This, however, is a typical case of “the allegorization of the beloved”: an absence that creates a craving and a craving that intensifies because of an absence. But in Senghor, the corporeal woman, the visual woman, her soul, her joys and bliss, are ever present in the physical, in nature, in the realm of human affairs, because the African universe is such a seamless whole that from God, through man, to the smallest grain of sand are one body! Senghor may be closer to Goethe because for Goethe, the structure of specularity is created, “when the eye of the beloved opens and fills the subject with the loving gaze.” Here we witness that human mediation of love, closeness, intimacy, and immediacy

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

which ignite endless attraction and inspiration. Love for Goethe is like a beam of light, bewitching but alluring:

Oh maiden, maiden  
How I love you  
How your eye gleams!  
How you love me  
Thus the lark loves  
Song and air  
And morning flowers  
The heaven's fragrance. (Maifest 20-25)

In Goethe, the woman is an object of seduction that ignites attraction, craving, enticement, and excitation because her “eye gleams” and because she loves him too like a lark who loves “song.” This love intensifies because of her fragrance that is eternal with all the heart-warming associations of heaven’s fragrance. Goethe’s love is a love of adoration, distant and celestial, while Senghor has a different beat. Senghor’s love is immediate, close, warm, and sensuous because this “black woman puts music in my mouth”! This is the painterly signature of the master!

### *The Black Mask*

In a typical African society, a mask is not just an artifact like a table created by a carpenter, lifeless and utilitarian. The mask or even the drum is an organic, holistic member of the cosmic family. Wole Soyinka, the poet/dramatist, gives us a profound explanation of this pantheistic African universe in his essay “Between Self and System”:

What thoughts accompany the integrated African craftsman when he sets out to make a drum? He first of all recognizes the tree trunk as an organic member of his universe. He celebrates this awareness in various forms, the commonest of which is the ritual of appeasement. And he celebrates this awareness in the animal also whose skin is going to provide the membrane. So, when the drum is completed, when he launches the new entity into its new existence, into its new function in the affective consciousness of society, he celebrates through a poetic evocation the transformed existence of these objects, even as he turns them to his use, is one of reverence. This constitutes the holistic impulse of the African. (55)

Soyinka explains to us that the craftsman in a traditional African society is not simply a carpenter or woodcutter proficient in building boxes and tables. The craftsman must be grounded in the theology of his calling. He must understand the delicate filial balance between the spiritual and the physical. He must understand not only the holistic nature of his universe, but also be cognizant of appeasement and reverence. Senghor understands this pantheistic universe of the African world—

a world of animism, appeasement, and even reverence. This is why he is exhilarated when he recognizes that spirit, that painterly signature of the great master, Picasso, in his “Black Mask”:

She sleeps and reclines on the whitest sand.  
 Koumba Tam Sleeps. A green  
 Palm leaf veils the lever of her hair,  
 Copper the curved brow  
 Eyelids closed, double basins sealed springs.  
 The delicate crescent of lips,  
 One darker and slightly heavier  
 Where is the smile of knowing woman?

Senghor carefully authenticates the physical attributes of the bronze head. The head of Koumba Tam is sited carefully “reclined on the whitest sand.” There is a patent to her cheeks that seems to be symmetrical with her chin. A palm leaf covers her brow on a face with closed eyes. This face is smooth and unblemished by rouge, wrinkles, or kisses. This is a face of grim beauty and solemnity which seems to provoke wonder and adoration— wonder because Koumba Tam is possibly a goddess of wisdom who should be cheerful because of her wealth of knowledge. Surprisingly, she is grim, which provokes the rhetorical question: Where is the smile of the all-knowing woman? Since this question is rhetorical, it does not need an answer due to rhetorical questions’ obvious enigma. The enigma is that in a rhetorical question, the answer to the question is usually buried in the question’s deep labyrinth, so that conversely, the question itself may be the answer.

However, apart from this sense of wonder at the bronze, the beauty of the mask unleashes a spirit of animism latent in Senghor to a point where he screams out in adoration:

O face such as God created you before  
 Even the memory of time  
 Face of the world’s dawn,

## THE CRISIS OF NEGRITUDE

Do not open like a tender mountain pass,  
To stir my flesh  
O beauty, I adore you with my  
One-stringed eye.

The obvious evocation of the spirit of animism, the dominant theme of negritude poetry, is clear in the piece. It is animism buried in pantheism. This fusion of the pantheistic and the animistic filters through a timeless face that was created by God at the beginning of the world. There is a careful evocation here of the organic nature of the mask, which instigates appeasement and even reverence: "O beauty, I adore you with my one-stringed eye."

Senghor here displays the reverence of a man who encounters the work of genius or who is simply overwhelmed by that aura of the divine. This genius is the genius of a man who painted reality and the horror of being real, and a man who also craved and destroyed reality so that his negation became a deadly embrace. In his essay "Picasso: Hand to Hand Combat with Painting," Octavio Paz echoes the same reverence for the genius of a painter who craved a beyond which turned to be the now; in the fury of his passion he was like:

Nature which, like the painter perpetually invents then erases what it has invented. How will people tomorrow look upon this work, so rich and violent, made and unmade by passion and haste, by genius and facility? (183)

In conclusion, we see that Soyinka understands the traditional mark of the African master craftsman who must be grounded in the theology of his calling. That is why like a master, Senghor sees the painterly signature of the great master in the meticulous visual details of the mask: Koumba Tam is sited on the whitest sand asleep. She has a face with a copper-covered brow and closed eyelids with a double basin and sealed springs. These descriptions move like a massive sea wave to unleash the animist theology of the question: Where is the smile of the all-knowing woman? However, Octavio Paz sees something different in Picasso. He sees a mutation of the fury of that violent clash of Apollonian aggressiveness and Dionysian passion that creates and destroys, and so wonders if the art will last. Will it satisfy the unknown taste of posterity? He should not bother because the eternal qualities of the master's art will always sustain it. It will always be (is). That earthly quality of Picasso's art, however, is essentially African!

The holistic, pantheistic nature of African craftsmanship involves veneration, adoration, and a craving for the divine head. We witness that divine head in Kaya Magan, a mythical God who is all-powerful but tender and loving to man and all living things, and to all Africans of various shades and colors.

In “Kaya-Magan,” we witness the evocation of a powerful mythical God who is omniscient or omnipotent and yet tender in his dealings with man, nature, and all living and non-living things. He is a god who nurtures and nourishes Africans of all shades and colors from the whites in the north (Egyptians), to the blacks in the south (Negroes), to even the red men. Senghor at this point seems more comfortable with universal claims of brotherhood than with the local restrictive ethnicity of the negritude program.

Kay-a-Magan am I! The first person  
 King of the black night, the silver night,  
 King of the night of glass.  
 Graze my antelopes safe from lions, far from the charm of my voice.  
 You delight in dotting the silent plains!  
 Here you are at my joyful feast.

By announcing the existence of this mythical God (Kaya-Magan) by name, Senghor immediately confers upon Kaya-Magan that mysterious aura of power, fear, and hope that holds Christian orthodoxy in place. This omniscient power is also revealed through the evocation of his empire’s realms, like John Keats announcing the realm of Homer’s power in his poem “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.” Keats’ poem is layered with a labyrinth of voices, so that a reader, dizzy with agitation, may wonder who is the speaking voice in these networks of voices. Because whose voice comes to the reader as he/she reads the poem? Is it the voice of Chapman coming through Keats? Is it Homer coming through Chapman, or could it be the voice of Homer coming to Chapman via Keats? How does a reader separate these muted networks of voices since it seems impossible to separate one voice from the other? This tussle in simulation is part of the mystery and the joy of reading some of Keats’ poems.

In “Kaya-Magan,” Senghor shows the mastery of his craft through the economy of his poetic language. This mastery is reflected in the fact that by invocation and divination, he brings the king Kaya-Magan to life. In this life of the king, the culture speaks through metaphors and metonymy. A metaphor is usually a tease, a substitution of an absence

for a presence, immediate for distance. In this poem, through the metaphor of the king, the culture also speaks through metaphors, so that the whole aura of divine monarchy, the culture, and power are carried in this flood of influence like a raft on a river that runs through the poem. Senghor's mastery of his craft, his concern for content, for poetry as art and arbitrary symbol, and for the charged power of words should remind the reader of that heart-warming text by Bob Perelman, *The Trouble with Genius*. In an essay from this text, "The Poet's Job, Cult/Culture," Perelman informs us about the critical characteristics of Ezra Pound as the poet of genius.

He informs us in the essay that Pound understood from the formative period of his poetic life that there are certain sensibilities and perceptions that separate the masters from the amateurs. He claims that the masters understood the critical value of content. They also understood that poetry as an art form of "pure sound is allied to music, painting, and sculpture." They understood that as arbitrary symbol, poetry is allied to prose. So, syntax which is the communal property of a society becomes the most significant tool of the poet, which only the masters manipulate and exploit:

Pound replaces ordinary syntax with a more arcane poetic syntax, comparing words to "great hollow cones of steel charged with something more complex than electricity: This peculiar energy which fills the cones is the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness and the control of it is "Technique of content" which nothing short of genius understands. (55)

Senghor, too, understands the importance of content in a poem, which is why all of his poems sizzle with ritual. He also understands poetry as an art form that is similar to music. This is why most of his poems are followed by Koras and Balaphon. It is his understanding of the efficacy of arbitrary symbols that makes his poetry so prosaic. When he uses native African words without translation, he may sound as arcane to the non-African as Ezra Pound sounded in his syntax. These native African words add rich significance to his poetry. The native words inflict a shock treatment to the non-African, thereby inviting him/her through this domesticated homeliness to come without fear to enjoy the feast at the ritual, poetry—poetry with an African "tang" and an African tag, insignia that may be shocking, but are undoubtedly alluring to the non-African.

In conclusion, having discussed Senghor's celebration of Africanness in his poems "To the Koras and Balaphon," "Black Woman," "Black Mask," and "Kaya Magan," we now must examine his contributions to the collapse of negritude. Negritude started as a cultural and intellectual movement to recognize the value of black experiences throughout the world. In other words, negritude intended to recognize the contributions of black people to world civilization. These contributions could be in arts and sciences. The theme and focus of negritude was simple: native, local, black Africans.

Senghor had a problem dealing with this rigid ethnic focus and so he developed divided loyalties in regard to his love of black women versus his love of white, a situation that he agonizes about in "To the Koras and Balaphon." He also had divided loyalties about his love of native music versus the Catholic hymns. His most disturbing contribution to the collapse of negritude was that to avoid the tag of black racism, he universalized the theme of the struggle to embrace all the suffering people in the world. But universalism neutralizes and obliterates the local good. Senghor diluted the energy and even the functionalities of the struggle and so he could not be his own trumpet. As a leader of the movement, he lost focus, and so negritude strayed and collapsed.