



The Collected Poetry

Aimé Césaire , Clayton Eshleman (Translator) , Annette Smith (Translator)

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This edition, containing an extensive introduction, notes, the French original, and a new translation of Césaire's poetry—the complex and challenging later works as well as the famous Notebook—will remain the definitive Césaire in English.

The Collected Poetry Details

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James F says

I've been reading a lot of African literature recently; here I turned to the diaspora (Césaire was from Martinique) for a poet who was a major influence on francophone African poetry. A political activist as well as a poet, he was a friend of Senghor and one of the creators of the movement called négritude; but unlike Senghor, whose collected poetry I read almost a year ago, he was also heavily influenced by the surrealist movement in French poetry.

This collection includes poems which were originally published as seven separate collections between 1939 and 1976. I have to say, as I did with Trastrémer, that I am not the ideal reader for these poems; the ideal reader would have to be a native speaker of French with a total familiarity with the Antilles, their culture, history, topography and especially their flora and fauna, which enter into the associational net of the surrealist poems. I do occasionally enjoy some surrealist poetry but here the associations often escaped me leaving me with just a random collection of words. This was especially the case with the second and third collections, *Les Armes Miraculeuse* and *Soleil Cou Coupé* which were almost purely surrealist. The first collection, *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* and the last three, *Corps Perdu*, *Ferraments* and *Noria*, although written in a style suggesting surrealism, had more of a straightforward, mostly political thread which I could relate to more, similar to the poetry of Senghor.

This was a bilingual edition with English translation on facing pages, and one reason I didn't rate it more highly was that the translation was not very good. It may be somewhat unfair to criticize the translation of a surrealist work which by its very nature is largely untranslatable, but it was not useful that whenever Césaire employs an obscure or unfamiliar word -- which is often -- the translators chose to spell the same word in English orthography, creating fake cognates which I am virtually certain have never existed in the English language. In other words, the only words I needed a translation for were not translated.

I would recommend this to someone who met the criteria above -- a native speaker of French who knows the Caribbean, and has an interest in surrealist political poetry; but given the problems with the translation I would not recommend it to anyone who would need a translation.

Blurp says

'Soleil cou coupé' stuff is better in the reworked dedicated volume by Eshleman and Arnold, but this is the real shit. No one will ever read this, busy as they are reading 'travel accounts' and 'Nudge' or whatever purse of piss is popular these days in how it tells you how you are probably going to have great ideas or, surprise!, 'everything you are doing is wrong' or 'it gets better' or 'crowdsourcing innovative trickle-down liberty for the emotionally probabilistic' or whatever other dog cancer has made it onto a Wired Twitter feed or whatever. Anyway, this almost makes me believe in God.

emm says

Being a major Fan of French poetry, I was sadly ignorant to this other side of it ,until I read this book.

secondwomn says

tremendous

ralowe says

i've had this book sitting around for sometime.

although he deploys the similar tactics of surrealist defamiliarization, the inassimilable insurgent caliban clamor is always right there.

a gaggle of delights when intoned do expressly jut upon the air most lovingly with an un-second-guessable legitimacy just like the hypeness from wayback. although i know not originally in anglais; much credit goes to the artful labor of eshelman & smith. i was attracted to this saliency enough to fancy it feeling somewhat familiar as to what gives it rise; surrealism) the only canonical object i feel curiously beholden to, unfaithfully married to. (sicorax...)

Chiwan says

His writing has influenced me as much as any work of art. This should be taught in every school.

Jessica says

Picked this up to read Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, which was brilliant and powerful despite a kind of clunky translation.

It's a bilingual version and I found myself trying to read the French and just using the translation as a comprehension check. Sadly, my French skills are quite rusty, so that made for some tedious leisure reading. Returning this to the library without venturing far into the other poems in the hope of finding better translations.

J.M. Hushour says

Cesaire possesses an expansive wit and coloring that makes his poetry both playful, grim, at times, and multi-hued enough to necessitate breaking his forms down, albeit roughly, into a number of self-contained niches. I'm not going to do that here, frankly because I'm too lazy. Point is, his verse is so diverse as to engender a universal appeal: he wanders from the political, the bleak, the flavorfully orgasmic back full circle to the surreal, the organic, and the touching. Like an Auden or Hafiz touched by the maldextrous rainbows of either illegal drugs or a nightly-troubling dreamscape, Cesaire conjures up some darn good wordsmithing, although his later works tend to be more politically-infused than his early output. There is

much to enjoy here.

Lee says

I was first turned on to Césaire by a professor in college. This anthology was my first book but certainly not my last. I love Césaire's playfulness with words and language. Making up his own and weaving images at times seemingly counter. His themes are raw, unapologetic, and unusually sans soapbox.

I own a copy of this book but it never leaves my house. It was truly a gift.

Elizabeth says

Extraordinary poetry

Sarah says

Poets that compare themselves to plants are my favorite kind.

Samir Rawas Sarayji says

I've come to a conclusion: surrealist poetry is not for me. Half-way through this large collection, I gave up. Césaire's poetry is much too cerebral, so much so that I can't feel an iota of emotion. I'm busier trying to decipher the meaning behind his odd word choices dumped one after the other (ridiculously academic), and the run-on sentences or visuals that have no cues or respites, that I feel nothing regarding the importance of his political messages. Perhaps that too is a problem, I can't help but interpret that he writes each poem with an intention to deliver a message of injustice, and in so doing his poems are heavy-handed and overly academic (apparently this has to do with his involvement in the surrealist movement).

The saddest aspect is that I don't relate to the very emotions he wants me to, those revolving around his concept of 'negritude'. I can't help but think of Christopher Okigbo, who also adopted Western techniques in par with the modernist movement yet retained enough African-ness (mythology and oral tradition) to fashion his poetry, that I was moved and rocked to my very foundations. And in Okigbo's case, his messages of injustice at both the white man and the fellow African, as well as corruption, shined through. Césaire comes nowhere close to this. His adoption of surrealism and his involvement in francophone politics is far removed from his native background, and any semblance of African-ness he tried to incorporate into his art. I can see his audience as being other surrealist enthusiasts or academics in love with the sounds of their own voices and ideas.

M Alan Cox says

Cesaire is a wonderfully complex poet. The power of his images has me in constant awe.
