



The Original 1939 Notebook of a Return to the Native Land: Bilingual Edition (Wesleyan Poetry Series)

By Aimé Césaire

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Aimé Césaire's masterpiece, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, is a work of immense cultural significance and beauty. This long poem was the beginning of Césaire's quest for *négritude*, and it became an anthem of Blacks around the world. Commentary on Césaire's work has often focused on its Cold War and anticolonialist rhetoric—material that Césaire only added in 1956. The original 1939 version of the poem, given here in French, and in its first English translation, reveals a work that is both spiritual and cultural in structure, tone, and thrust. This Wesleyan edition includes the original illustrations by Wifredo Lam, and an introduction, notes, and chronology by A. James Arnold.

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- Sales Rank: #363607 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Wesleyan
- Published on: 2013-04-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.27" h x .55" w x 6.43" l, .67 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 120 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“As the translators assert, the purpose of this new translation is not ‘to reveal what the poem ultimately means but rather how it was meant to be read in 1939.’ And unlike other translators who sought to capture the essence of the revolutionary spirit of the text, Arnold and Eshleman remain faithful to the rhythmic and incantatory power of the original text. A rare gift in translated poetry, this authentic rendering of the text makes the poem’s mesmerizing effect accessible to those without French. Highly recommended (for) all readers.” —A.J. Guillaume Jr., *Choice*

“American translators A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman bring alive in the English language the original 1939 version of Aimé Césaire’s well-known *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land). ... Dense in its illusions and complex in structure or diction, the work earns its place as one of the more important literary writings of our twentieth century—both in its cultural contexts and linguistic innovations. For scholars and informed readers, this edition offers fresh possibilities of interpretation for this document and its history as an anticolonialist manifesto, an anthem of sorts, and a representative topology of the collective colonial black consciousness of that time.” —Fiona Sze-Lorrain, *Poetry Salzburg Review*

“...A stellar addition to the Césaire lexicon, which by finally establishing the substance of the 1939 edition, allows a clearer vision and a greater appreciation of the groundbreaking nature of the *Cahier*, or the substantive differences that shaped subsequent editions, and of the arc of Aimé Césaire’s remarkable poetic voice.” —H. Adlai Murdoch, *Research in African Literatures*

“Aime Césaire’s work is by far one of the most outstanding tour-de-force in French literature emanating from the Caribbean. The texture, the beauty and the centrality of the work is set in a Caribbean milieu and firmly contextualized in the concept of *négritude*, of which Aime Césaire is a co-creator. The book will be appreciated for its depth, structure, and tactile renditions of the social impediments that strangled all of us whose ancestry heralds from Africa, but who were sequenced in various parts of the Caribbean.” —S.B. Jones-Hendrickson, *The Caribbean Writer*

About the Author

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE (1913–2008) was best known as the cocreator of the concept of *négritude*. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is a professor emeritus at Eastern Michigan University and the foremost American translator of Aimé Césaire. He is the author of *The Grindstone of Rapport / A Clayton Eshleman Reader* and translator of *The Complete Poetry of César Vallejo*. A. JAMES ARNOLD is an emeritus professor of French at the University of Virginia. He is the lead editor of Césaire’s complete literary works in French (in progress) and author of *Modernism and Négritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire*.

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