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## Frantz Fanon: Language as the God Gone Astray in the Flesh

Chester J. Fontenot Jr.

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

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Chester J. Fontenot, Jr.

Frantz Fanon:  
Language as the  
God Gone Astray  
in the Flesh

*new series no. 60*

*University of Nebraska Studies*

1979

# **Frantz Fanon**



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# Frantz Fanon

Language as  
the God Gone Astray in the Flesh

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university of nebraska studies: new series no. 60

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To my mother and father,  
the Rev. and Mrs. Chester Fontenot,  
and to my son,  
Camara Fontenot

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## Introduction

DURING THE LAST DECADE we have experienced the rise of a new political entity known as the "Third World." Committed to overthrowing the traditional ruling powers, members of the Third World have proposed that there are a number of works essential to the realization of their cause and to an understanding of contemporary social issues. Among these works are the political writings of Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara, Karl Marx, and Malcolm X. Frantz Fanon's two major political treatises, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, have been considered so important that one can rarely find a member of the Third World or the Left who has not at times espoused the ideas they contain.

I am interested in the reasons for Fanon's immense popularity in the Third World and among revolutionary thinkers in general. Politicians and revolutionary thinkers would have us believe that the accuracy of his insights into the colonial situation in Algeria give his works their value and, thus, their influence on oppressed peoples. Students of literature have not raised this question, and so the reasons for Fanon's impact have not been investigated through sophisticated literary analysis. Literary scholars tend to avoid the entire issue, which may be in their best interests, at least for the present time, to do. Whenever a literary scholar attempts to approach a political document, he is immediately subject to the standard criticism that he is bound to be more concerned with the way Fanon articulates than with what he actually says in his works. Such criticism is irresponsible and the result of misunderstanding the critic's task. This misunderstanding grows out of the popular myth that criticism makes, indeed must make, no presuppositions of its own but attaches itself to some other subject. The literary critic becomes an "academic parasite," a second-rate author never able to make an "objective" statement about a political work.

When I became aware of this problem, I tried to find an approach that would allow me to discuss intelligently the significance of Fanon's works. While reading them, I found myself caught be-



tween accepting Fanon's works as a literal system of belief, and thus a tool which could be applied universally to the racial situation in the United States, and accepting Fanon's vision as a system of intellectual inquiry, allowing me to take what I found useful while discarding the rest in an attempt to build my own system of thought regarding the problems of colonialism. I found that there were many paths, some well-trodden and equipped with markers, others rarely taken, but all pointing in what were for me wrong directions. They directed me to the social conditions of Fanon's time, to the history of revolutions and revolutionary thinkers, to psychological factors in Fanon's mind, and to other subjects quite valid in themselves but not necessarily valid for me.

My specific task was to understand why Fanon has had such a tremendous impact on minorities and members of the Left in the United States as well as in the world. I suspected that the path I wanted led directly through literature in general and what is now usually called visionary literature in particular. What one is confronted with while reading any work of literature is a linguistic structure which often defies description as an objective statement about the world. The human psyche casts things into structures or forms in the act of expressing. These forms, or one's choice of them, affect how we understand a statement and indicate that it is not just an objective copy of reality, but expresses a particular perspective. Hence, the critical path I wanted was a theory of criticism which would, first, account for the major phenomena of literary experience; and second, lead me to a recognition of Fanon's place in literature. Such a theory of criticism is necessary in order to deal with Fanon's writings. Moreover, minority cultures do not distinguish art from social manifesto and "use." They reject the idea that the work of art should not mean but be. For them art ought to have a definite purpose, which is explicitly linked to social movements and which is to express oppressed people's social awareness or to condemn the oppressor and propose ways to alleviate the oppressive situation.

Though the typical minority stance toward literature may seem simplistic, the fact remains that there is an inherent drive in minority movements to give art a social function, probably as a result of minorities having realized the importance of artistic activity in formulating people's outlook toward the world. There is nothing new about this realization: we have long been conscious of the artist's influence on our perceptions of reality. Since the time of Plato, human beings have tried to justify the artist's role in influencing

perceptions of reality. In *The Republic*, Plato argues for the restriction of artistic activity for the good of the ideal state and asserts that only the artist who teaches the "truth," as defined by the state, should be allowed to remain in the ideal society. Other artists, whose art is little more than a second-hand copy of eternal forms, should be excluded from Utopia and not be allowed to corrupt youth with "lies."

Perhaps much of the suspicion of artistic activity which pervades twentieth-century thought has its foundations in Platonism. In the last century, many forms of this suspicion have emerged in Marxism, pan-Africanism, socialism, and so forth. Each ideology recognizes the importance of artistic activity and attempts to find a place for the artist that will serve the interests of the movement, but usually in practice each must resort to oppressive measures to keep him there. More than the traditional concept of the artist as a second-hand imitator of reality seems to underlie this suspicion of artistic activity. If the artist merely imitates reality, what possible social function could he have that would not be subversive of truth? His works could be nothing more than second-hand copies of the external world and thus of little value to any social movement.

However, it is clear that the artist's imagination *can* have great influence on others. By bringing the values and concerns of a culture to the attention of its participants, instead of merely recording and imitating reality, the artist plays a vital role in the evolution of a culture and influences social change. Through his personal vision, the artist provides the means of changing people's perceptions of the phenomenal world and, in a sense, forces his followers to see the world through the lens he provides. In changing people's perceptions of the external, objective world, the artist becomes a creator of it.

Fanon's works are visionary apprehensions of reality, that is, products of a human psyche attempting to envision, describe, and create the world as it should be. Most of Fanon's critics, however, have generally agreed that his writings are not simply descriptions of analyses of historical phenomena, but also involve an imaginative element, which has led these critics to conclude that his writings are primarily fantasy, and that they therefore lose much of their value as social documents. For example, F. M. Gottheil says that "Fanon's analysis . . . may be reflective of self-delusion rather than an objective observation."<sup>1</sup> Albert Memmi comments that Fanon's writings are the rantings of an *évolué* seeking "the solution to his personal drama in political action and philosophy."<sup>2</sup> Even critics

like Adele L. Jinadu, who claim a privileged place for Fanon as a social thinker, feel that they must offer an *apologia* for the imaginative element in Fanon's writings. Jinadu says that Fanon's work

at least some aspects of it, has been dismissed as sheer fantasy. . . . Yet it matters very little that his work contains some elements of fantasy. What matters is that his work is the product of hard thinking, acute observation, a lively imagination, a critical mind.<sup>3</sup>

Jinadu's approach to Fanon's writings is based on the notion that his is a Utopian vision and that Fanon, through his analysis of present social conditions, is advocating a Platonic society in the distant future. When pressed to state what this society would be like, most critics admit that the vision of it is blurred. Hostile critics of Fanon's writings have seized upon this aspect of them as proof that he is not a serious social thinker, but a disturbed individual seeking to rationalize his personal drama in political action and philosophy. On the other hand, critics who argue for Fanon's importance as social thinker again offer an *apologia*. Jinadu comments that

the society of the future to which Fanon is looking forward will be radically different from that of today. But unlike Marx's classless society we do not know what it will look like. But this is not a valid objection against Fanon. The attraction and merit of his position lie in its critical spirit, in its exposure to the inadequacies and shortcomings of existing society. There is certainly much that is suggestive in it. To put it another way, Fanon was a purveyor of ideas, and purveyors of ideas are not necessarily also architects or builders of new societies.<sup>4</sup>

Critics, by and large, do not value the imaginative elements in Fanon's writings. I think such a stance does not take into account Fanon's conscious intent in writing *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Indeed, in the former, Fanon tells us that we should not read his book simply as a work of clinical psychology, but as an analysis of the psychological problems created by colonization. Though he states that "this book is a clinical study," he adds:

It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Fanon's rejection of methodologies is, in a sense, symbolic of his conscious movement from identifying with and being assimilated into European culture, to asserting uniqueness. He creates a system, a myth, which he feels has the power to move the reader through the stages outlined above and finally into a mode which will allow the reader to participate in the insurrectionary activity

described in *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this sense, I suggest that Fanon is a philosopher of language and a visionary artist. He is not concerned with using his experiences as material for his vision. This implies, of course, that his vision is inchoately formed; the act of writing is an attempt to give shape and coherence to this vision so that it will become concrete and communicable to others. Fanon attempts to develop a vision through a critique of the past. He is still working toward an ideal—not necessarily a Utopia, but rather a previous, incomplete vision—but the process of writing is, in fact, the forming of his vision. It becomes more concrete as Fanon reworks his position. The central difference between the two processes is that the former—that is, using one's experiences as material for the vision—works toward a vision already present but incomplete. The latter process develops a vision dialectically, whereby the writer is not as concerned with arriving at a Utopian ideal as he is with articulating the process of analysis by which the reader becomes involved in the dialectic. This process requires the writer to proceed through negation and thus to arrive at a partially blurred vision of an alternative society. Thus, we know what the vision does not consist of, but not what it does consist of. This blurred vision does not result from oversight or a lack of methodological rigidity on the writer's part; it is intentional. Fanon says that *Black Skin, White Masks*

is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time. Ideally the present will always contribute to the building of the future. And this future is not the future of the cosmos but rather the future of my century, my country, my existence. In no fashion should I undertake to prepare the world that will come later. I belong irreducibly to my time.<sup>6</sup>

Fanon's insistence on a constant presence that is, in a sense, anti-historical makes his writings creative insofar as he engages the reader in the dialectical process of demystifying the colonial operation, of plotting the path "natives" should take to expel colonialists, and of articulating the dangers inherent in the new society that threaten to keep it attached to the "mother country" and thus in a state of constant flux. In order to understand the way Fanon operates aesthetically, it is necessary to take into account the interconnected system of signifiers that allow his writings to be called a myth. I should make clear what I mean by myth. The term has lived more lives than a cat and taken more shapes than Proteus. A myth can mean anything from a lie or a deviation from the truth, as Plato would have it, to a concrete form of primordial thinking, as Cassirer used it, to Northrop Frye's use of the term to mean litera-

ture. I use the term to refer to a structure which is given linguistic form and has prior referents in experience.

This conception of myth is based on Eliseo Vivas's essay, "The Object of the Poem."<sup>7</sup> In that essay, Vivas discusses a question fundamental to literary theory: In what sense can we say that the poem has an object other than itself? He concludes that the poem does not have an existential object, but that it does "mean something." He is trying to find a position which will trap him neither in a theory of imitation nor in one of pure formalism. Out of this dilemma arises his conception of subsistence," "insistence," and "existence." These terms refer to the various stages in which a poem becomes operative and constitutive of cultural and chart the process from the moment of its creation to its existence as a cultural objective. Vivas uses the term culture to refer to

the interrelated constellation of activities of a social group, insofar as these activities, the social institutions through which they are carried on, and the physical world embody values that enable the group to maintain itself as a purposive, distinctly human society; the meanings are the social structures as value carriers; the culture is the total pattern of values carried in the meanings. [p. 1070]

These "meanings," though an integral part of the culture, are not fully recognized by the members of the culture; they "subsist" in it. The poet discovers them by fixing them in language, and in the poem, they are the poem's form. In other words, "the poet's gift consists in discovering the not-yet-discovered subsistent values and meanings that make up his poem's object in the creative act which is the revelation of that object in and through the language to his own and to his reader's minds" (p. 1074). When these meanings are brought to the realization of both the poet and his audience, they have "insistence." This act of creation, which Vivas calls "discovery," is important because it is only through formalizing meanings in language that they are realized. Prior to this process, the cultural values are "disembodied," without meaning or form, and thus do not exist. "The poem is a linguistic thing," Vivas says,

which reveals symbolically in and through its medium meanings and values which have subsistent status in being and which are discovered by the poet in the act of creation. Note that the word "discover" is intended literally, for the meanings and values embodied in the poem do not exist prior to their embodiment. They are found by the poet in the creative act in a realm beyond existence where they subsist." [p. 1075]

Once abstractions are made from the poem, "insistence" becomes "existence," in which form the meanings become operative in the culture. People "get the impression that its [the poem's] object im-

itates meanings and values with which they have been more or less well acquainted all along" (p. 1075). But this is not so. The poem brings the meanings and values of the culture to the attention of its participants when the poem moves dormant mores to the consciousness of its audience, it performs a normative function; the participants in the culture espouse the values and meanings which the poem reveals.

The linguistic structure the poet creates from his experience with the phenomenal world is the concept of "myth" I use. In this sense, a myth is a structure, a linguistic form that has prior referents in experience. In Vivas's language, the myth is the phase of cultural meanings and values which insists on being realized. The effect the myth has on its audience is its existence; it is the phase in which the audience abstracts discursive statements from the structure.

If we accept this definition of myth, even tentatively, we can plot the structure of Fanon's system. In *Black Skin, White Masks* he sees the process of colonization and alienation as starting with the imposition of the colonialists' language on the natives. *The Wretched of the Earth* begins with the attempt to awaken the revolutionary class and outlines the process of decolonization and construction of the Third World. *Black Skin, White Masks* constitutes the beginning of Fanon's vision in that it creates a negative zone, or in his words, "a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 10). In short, this zone is the process of colonization, which is answered by *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's vision, then, has two parts: *Black Skin, White Masks*, which constructs the negative zone; and *The Wretched of the Earth*, which attempts to construct the positive one. The problem to which he addresses himself is how the black man can thrust himself through the eye of the needle, so to speak, from the negative zone to the positive one. His purpose is to show the path from one to the other, since, "in most cases, the Black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell" (*Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 10).

Though most of Fanon's critics have singled out this theory of violence as his "message," as the means by which the black man could free himself of the "yoke of oppression" and thus enter "the promised land," one can also see that Fanon offers the means to combat colonization, namely, a theory of language. This theory is central to understanding his vision of an intrinsically coherent society. Hence, I begin in this study with a discussion of the ways

Fanon's critics have misread his writings and thus have, in a sense, closed them to numerous different interpretations. This chapter is not intended as a "put-down" of the other critics, but rather part of my argument for considering Fanon from his own viewpoint. Chapter 2 considers Fanon as philosopher of language in the context of his conscious intention to create a revolution. Chapter 3 discusses how Fanon intentionally misleads his readers into thinking that he is analyzing a revolution that has occurred and of which he was a part. Chapter 4 focuses on the structure of his myth. I do not attempt to synthesize his thought, since this is a subject for a separate study. A more detailed explication of Fanon's thought than that provided in this chapter can be found in Emmanuel Hansen's *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought*. Since my emphasis is on the fact that Fanon sees himself as a creative artist, the last chapter argues for a reassessment of his writings which will demonstrate their utility both as products of a creative intellect and as a reflection and creation of social and ideological forces.

# 1. Fanon and the Devourers

FANON DISTINGUISHES between an open and a closed culture in his analysis of colonization. An open culture is one which has been allowed to develop organically, without being artificially shoved in one direction or another by an external culture. This open culture is indigenous and capable of many different directions. The important thing is that it be allowed to determine its own goals based on its own traditional past. In contrast, a closed culture is one which mirrors an external culture. In this state, the once indigenous culture has not been allowed to flower from its own traditional base, but forcefully altered by external means. The problem with a closed culture is that it is incapable of organic growth. Its options have been limited by corruption of its natural order.

In this chapter I want to wrench Fanon's open/closed metaphor from socio-cultural criticism and theory and apply it to his own writings. It seems to me that Fanon's critics have closed his system while he consciously leaves it open to a variety of interpretations. By closing his system, I mean that his critics adopt one interpretation or another, imbued with their own ideological pre-suppositions, which determines how they approach Fanon's writings.

The two most prominent approaches to Fanon's writings are biographical and sociological. In adopting either approach, most of his critics have tried to account for his tremendous influence among oppressed people by relating the themes and paradoxes in his writings to events in his life or to the socio-cultural milieu he wrote about. Though these approaches are quite different in terms of the specifics each stresses, they both relate the cultural artifact to something external to it. If we consider Fanon's analysis of the open and closed culture, we might conclude that an approach to his writings external to the imaginative experience he created in them is tantamount to a type of closure. The closure in this sense is that Fanon's critics have placed his writings in the wrong category, and thus have imposed an analysis on his writings which is foreign to them.



The biographical and sociological approaches to Fanon's writings ignore his creative side and stress the scientific one. They both proceed as if Fanon were analyzing an actual revolution instead of writing to create one. On this basis, it seems fairly easy to set up Fanon's biographers and critics who write on him strictly from a sociological perspective as straw men, dissecting their arguments on the basis that their approaches are, after all, extrinsic to the experience of reading Fanon's writings, and that they finally reveal more about the critics' particular interests than about the significance of Fanon's works. Yet there are strengths in each approach, namely that literary biography can provide a portrait of a personality within the historical context, while the sociologist can help place the writings within the socio-cultural milieu which produced them. The problems occur when one sees the life of the author as the key to unlocking the mysteries in the work, or when one reduces it to major themes and compares these with the artist's socio-cultural milieu. Once an artist puts his thoughts in symbolic form, the final product is not merely personal rhetoric, but also an attempt by the author to come to terms with his experiences and to make them universally applicable and pertinent. Hence, by the act of writing, the author subordinates his material to the demands of his form of expression, and in doing so, he attempts to redefine his position. The work he produces is not simply personal rhetoric or the product of social and political forces, but a reordering of experience through language.

When Fanon's critics focus on environmental factors which influenced him, they often ignore the process of linguistic shaping, and usually write with some political commitment. For example, David Caute is primarily interested in ascertaining the forces and intellectual influences which contributed to Fanon's unique personal and political character. He separates Fanon from other revolutionaries and sets him apart from the majority of blacks. Caute begins his political biography by attempting to link Fanon to the European existentialist tradition of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and the like. Underlying Caute's thinking is that since Fanon wrote in French, he considered himself to be part of a particular French philosophical tradition. Fanon's literary culture was, says Caute, "abstract, didactic, and often rhetorically assertive." Moreover, Fanon deals in existential categories—"the black, the white, the colonizer, the native, the racist, the peasant, the bourgeois" and his thought moves from the individual man to Hegelian categories—subject and object, self and other—

"categories which are often put to gloriously illuminating dialectical work but which sometimes shine too brightly with spurious clarity."

Caute's urge to find similarities between Fanon and the existentialists governs his presentation of Fanon's life and leads him to focus on aspects of Fanon's background which have clearly political implications. He speculates on the roots of Fanon's thoughts in the struggle between environment and individuality. In fact, Caute asserts that Fanon's attitudes toward colonialism and Europeans grew out of the fact that Fanon initially was taught that he was a French citizen, with all of the rights and privileges of a Frenchman, only to find out later that he had no more rights than any African native. Moreover, Caute wants to ascertain why Fanon did not allow himself to be assimilated into French culture and combines the techniques of psychoanalysis with the skills of cultural anthropology when he argues that "Karl Marx was created by capitalism; Garibaldi by Sicilian poverty; Lenin by the Russian aristocracy; Gandhi by British Imperialism. Fanon was created by the white man" (p. 2). Yet Caute finds that Fanon's thought is not simply the result of a negation of external pressures. "Although Fanon's predicament, 'his situation, was environmentally defined, the same cannot be said for his thought, his life, the man he made of himself' (*ibid.*). Caute claims that Fanon did not allow himself to become assimilated into French society because of what Caute calls a "distinctive personal quality, some force of temperament," which provided Fanon with the necessary distance from his social environment to make a psychological analysis.

Of course, like many other critics who write about Fanon from a biographical perspective, Caute searches for this "distinctive personal quality" in the Martinique society where Fanon was reared. The assimilationist policy in Martinique creates a psychological problem for black people who live there. The black person strives to master French languages and culture, for to do so means to distance himself from the "primitivisms" of African culture and to move toward the "enlightened" nature of French culture.

The problem of assimilation is most acute among the middle class of Martinique. Caute alludes to the fact that Fanon was reared in an upper middle class environment in order to account for Fanon's early acceptance of the French way of life, and like Fanon's other biographers, he traces the theme of acceptance through Fanon's life. In fact, he approaches Fanon's works, especially *Black Skin, White Masks*, with the presupposition that the feeling of "otherness" contributed significantly to Fanon's later rejection of

European culture in general and French culture in particular. The general principle of otherness shapes the way Caute presents Fanon's life. There is nothing peculiar about this. A biographer must find some way to shape the information gathered, lest his biography be composed of a string of events only linked together temporally. This principle of organization, however, leads us to think that the finished biography is much closer to an art form than it is to an objective recreation of life and governs the selection of evidence and the particular way the biographer orders it.

Caute's emphasis on Fanon's feeling of otherness slants objective data. While accounting for the development of his theories, Caute finds that Fanon's separation from French culture underlies his analysis of the problems of colonization. Just as the social scientist forms a hypothesis even before he begins his research, Caute, as a biographer, focuses on one aspect of Fanon's life in order to determine what evidence is important, which threatens to reduce both Fanon's life and writings to a set of truths which must be tested.

Yet, Caute, unlike Fanon's other biographers, senses the duality in Fanon of being both political scientist and artist. Since Caute is primarily concerned with supporting the thesis that Fanon wrote in the European existentialist tradition, he accounts for Fanon's tendency to "exaggerate" by his "rationalist-abstract methodology, and the normative perspective of a strongly programmatic writer." Caute proposes that Fanon "exaggerates" on purpose because "Fanon was, and declared himself to be, a didactic writer, concerned to project a particular subjectivity and to change or modify the world in the process" (p. 51).

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Caute's analysis is that he does place Fanon's work in the didactic tradition: that is, Caute claims that Fanon's works espouse theoretical or practical knowledge and not merely entertain the reader. A significant amount of imaginative literature is didactic, and a great deal of criticism has been written focusing on the distinction between didactic and imaginative works—the distinction between whether the work was intended to expound a branch of theoretical or practical knowledge, or intended for the reader's inherent human interest. However, a large proportion of didactic literature also takes on the attributes of imaginative works by translating the doctrine into narrative or dramatic terms in order to add aesthetic pleasure and enhance its effect. By insisting that Fanon, as a didactic writer, was concerned with changing the world, Caute is implying that there is

imaginative, abstract, or mythic side of Fanon which moves the reader to action. Here, Cauter considers the form of *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, and says that the former is "a clinical study in which Fanon flexed his academic muscles" and that the latter is "life itself, the world groaning in upheaval, that sweeps the narrative along."

Similarly, Cauter sees Fanon's writings as the product of a human mind at work trying to figure out the problems which confronted him during his lifetime. Hence, Cauter's reliance on biographical, psychoanalytical, historical, and sociological information is an attempt to see Fanon's writings as the product of a man who sustained considerable intellectual and emotional shocks. Fanon's writings become the personal rhetoric of a great man, after all, the product of the European tradition he criticized.

Cauter's analysis is quite different from that of Peter Geismar, who is Fanon's other major biographer. Geismar's presuppositions are hard to determine. One gets the impression that he is concerned primarily with the influence of environmental factors upon Fanon's thought, and that he has given us this rather large quantity of information about Fanon so that we will see how the different factors worked together to mold Fanon into a revolutionary. Yet after a critical analysis of the biography, it is evident that Geismar is portraying Fanon as an angry black man intent on overthrowing the colonial powers. Geismar's interpretation of Fanon is based on certain assumptions about being black and about the influence of sociological elements on the individual. One might say that Geismar has constructed a sort of "fiction" about Fanon which he then supports in the biography and writes about him in terms of the personal stages that Fanon underwent: his life in Martinique; his affiliations with France; his period of interruptions; his work in Algeria and Tunisia; his development of revolutionary aspirations; and his vision of the Third World. Geismar thus seems to be giving to Fanon's life a shape which will show that he experienced certain emotional disturbances, from which developed his writings.

Geismar emphasizes certain themes in Fanon's life. Among these, and probably most important, are the paradoxes Fanon constantly found himself confronting, culminating in the popularity of his works by those he rejected, white liberals. The first paradox is that Fanon was reared in a middle-class family, only to realize that he was just another "nigger." In search of equality and freedom, Fanon married a white woman, only to find that he suffered as a result of living in a contradictory situation—wanting to be black,

but forced to conform to the white world because of his marriage. Geismar asserts that this inner conflict is reflected in Fanon's first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. According to Geismar, this book declares that the black man is essentially like the white man in terms of his expectations of life:

Fanon linked Jung's theories with Adler's assumption that all neuroses involve some sort of final goal for which the neurotic must unsuccessfully strive. In the Antilles, the chain of Caribbean islands including Martinique and Guadeloupe, the final goal was whiteness. The Negro could not exist in himself but only in his attempt to become white—to speak like whites. He would even compare himself with his fellows against the pattern of white men. All of this continually re-enforced a collective inferiority complex.<sup>1</sup>

Geismar goes on to criticize Fanon's use of poetic language in *Black Skin, White Masks* and finds its roots in Aimé Césaire:

The first book is a poetical and philosophical tract with an emphasis on psychology rather than politics. Fanon was still in the shadow of the most distinguished teacher from the lycée of Fort-de-France, the writer Aimé Césaire. The respect of the professor was harmful only when Fanon tried to imitate his style: some of the weakest passages of *Black Skin, White Masks* are modeled on the alternating prose and poetry of Césaire's autobiography, a way of writing that Fanon never perfected. In his first book, Fanon becomes so entranced with the sound of words that he sometimes obscures all content. [p. 23]

Geismar thinks that Fanon's works, like those of all political writers, were written primarily to analyze a particular phenomenon. The clearer the writing, and the more analytical and "objective" the style, the easier it is for the reader to understand the object of the work. The important thing to consider is not how Fanon is presenting himself, but what he is saying. This split between form and content, especially in reference to Fanon's works, presents a problem since he considered his works to be a vehicle for moving the reader to action. For instance, François Jeanson asked Fanon to clarify a phrase in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to which Fanon replied: "I cannot explain that phrase more fully. I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader. . . . That's to say irrationally, almost sensually."<sup>2</sup>

Underlying this assumption that one must present such a work as straightforwardly, simply, and objectively as possible, is the presupposition that the work is an imitation of the author's experiences.

Geismar considers *The Wretched of the Earth* to be the product of Fanon's earlier Martinique experiences considered with respect to the Algerian war. For Geismar, this work is "Fanon warning against

one of the blunders exposed in the diary of Che Guevara—the idea that an outsider will immediately be welcomed as a savior by the oppressed people of rural areas” (p. 31). Whether Geismar’s claim is valid is questionable. What matters is that he considers Fanon’s works to be the products of a disturbed mind, a mind trying to make sense out of the traumatic experiences confronted daily, which began with Fanon’s enrollment at the lycée in 1946. During this period he concentrated on academic matters, and in particular read Nietzsche, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, and Hegel. He also cultivated an interest in drama through the new works of Sartre, and during this period wrote three plays himself “to relieve his own tensions.” Though Geismar is not interested in literature, and, in fact, thinks that Fanon’s literary tendency is the central, most important flaw in his analysis, he attempts to criticize Fanon’s plays by saying that

one can speculate that they were highly melodramatic and not suitable for publication; and one knows that Fanon grew away from them and preferred that they remain buried. That he had reached the depths of depression somewhere in the middle years of his medical education becomes evident anyway in *Black Skin, White Masks*, composed in uneven spurts of energy in the same period that he began and finished his career as a dramatist [p. 33].

Geismar’s dislike for Fanon’s literary flair governs his interpretation of his works and leads him to consider *Black Skin, White Masks* as poetic introspection enroute to the analytical, serious, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Geismar’s tendency to portray Fanon as disturbed, a black man trapped in a web of irresolvable paradoxes, contributes to the fiction he is trying to create of Fanon and inspired Irene Gendzier to write:

Peter Geismar has written of this early period of Fanon’s life as one which was formative and which was superseded by a clarity of purpose still missing. But to read *Black Skin, White Masks* in this fashion is misleading. The great themes that haunted Fanon are to be revealed here and to reduce them to temporary signs of depression, existential torment, or poetic introspection as though they were deviations from some central purpose, is to miss the essence of the man. [p. 36].

Nonetheless, Geismar attributes Fanon’s reconstruction of “an actional, functional and creative personality” to his relationship with his white wife, Josie. Geismar thinks Josie Fanon helped Fanon considerably by taking dictation at home and typing his manuscripts. Yet, it is precisely the fact that Fanon’s wife helped him prepare his manuscripts that Third World people have looked on his books critically. Many of them think that Fanon’s thoughts have

been funneled through his wife's mind by virtue of her typing his manuscripts. This is one of the paradoxes in Fanon's life which causes serious problems for those who come to his works looking for a cultural hero—how can Fanon write so convincingly on racial matters, condemn the white oppressor with such vigor, and yet be married to a white woman? How much Fanon's thoughts were influenced by his wife can only be speculated upon and is probably irrelevant. Whether or not her influence on Fanon was significant, his works exist and themselves have had considerable influence on the thinking of oppressed people throughout the world. In an attempt to close the Pandora's box he has opened, Geismar asserts that Fanon never denied his African heritage, yet says that Fanon left a school of dentistry in Paris because "there are just too many niggers in Paris" (p. 21). Apparently Geismar is not only presenting contradictory information, but also distorting Fanon's life by presenting him as a hero who, despite all his faults, overcame the psychological problems earlier described in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

In fact, Geismar only modulates the heroic key when he talks about Fanon's "mythic" urge, that is, his tendency to "cloak some of his more important points in literary allusions." Geismar thinks that Fanon's writing improves once he joins the revolution:

The art of Fanon's own essay serves to illustrate his theme. Once he is in the Algerian revolution, his writing loosens up; he makes larger generalizations. Everything speeds up. He offers wilder, but more original ideas. Fanon gets carried away, "struck through and through with bursting life." The conclusion of the chapter "On National Culture" is a huge outpouring of a liberated intellect, roaming without inhibition across large panoramas of cultural developments. In order to clarify his interpretations of the growth of Third World cultures he delves into highly varied forms of art, from literature to pottery to storytelling. [p. 50].

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Geismar's position is here. One gets the impression that he feels that Fanon's involvement with the Algerian revolution sharpened his focus, distanced him from literary illusions, and contributed to his clearly articulated thesis. Yet the manner in which Geismar describes his reactions to Fanon's prose leads one to consider that he is celebrating Fanon's mythic urge after all, that Fanon's use of literary devices contributes significantly to the impact of his work. If this is the case, Geismar is not only distorting Fanon's life, but also unsure of his own feelings about his work. In fact, Geismar's work is weakest when he attempts to analyze Fanon's works as the product of his experiences.

Perhaps Geismar's most refreshing feature is that he stresses the individuality of Fanon's thoughts, which he compares with those of

Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and the like. Geismar seems to be stressing the universality of Fanon's thoughts by suggesting that they have some applicability to the situation of American blacks. Yet this part of Geismar's analysis comes at the end of a disjointed work and seems out of place. He departs from an "objective" biographical perspective and begins to paint Fanon as a culture hero whose thoughts were universal enough to warrant serious treatment by American blacks.

Unlike the biographical tendency to reduce Fanon's works to a set of truths reflecting the paradoxes in his life, the sociological approach to his writings assumes that literature is a reflection of social or ideological factors. Though this assumption is partly true, the sociologist often considers only this factor in his analysis of literature. He negates the possibility of the work as the product of a person struggling to give new meaning and form to present reality. This is probably the most important reason why literary sociology is not considered a form of literary criticism, but rather a subdivision of sociology.

Though a significant amount of criticism written on Fanon has been done from a sociological perspective, there are two major works which deserve mention here: *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*, by Irene L. Gendzier, and *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation*, by Renate Zahar.<sup>3</sup> Though each author sees Fanon and his works differently, what links their methodologies is that both fall into the pitfalls inherent in a totally sociological approach.

Gendzier attempts to escape these pitfalls by opting for an interpretive study of Fanon's writings. She focuses upon the social and political dimensions of his world and reduces them to major themes which she asserts are apparent in all his writings. These themes roughly parallel those that other critics have abstracted from Fanon's works, but the importance of Gendzier's approach is that it presents the dilemma facing modern criticism—how does one relate the content of the work to the life of the author? Gendzier tries to find which work indicates that Fanon is moving from psychological observation to political action. She sees *A Dying Colonialism* as this work because "it is clear from *A Dying Colonialism* that this book marked a transition for Fanon from a period in which he had concentrated on psychiatric problems and work, to one in which he committed himself to more direct political action."<sup>4</sup>

Gendzier wants to give linear shape to the development of Fanon's thoughts and to show the sociological factors which contributed to his theories. In this way, one of the significant aspects of his



life Gendzier reveals is the influence of other writers on him. She cites several philosophers and literary writers, among whom are Jean-Paul Sartre, Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and Richard Wright. Gendzier is thus one of the few critics who attempts to see Fanon as a literary writer in the tradition of other literary figures in his own era. In fact, as noted above, Gendzier criticizes Geismar's tendency to be negative about Fanon's figurative writing.

One's sense is that Gendzier is arguing for an intrinsic study of Fanon's works, a study which will see the work as an independent entity, and, as a reflection of Fanon's philosophical growth. However, in summarizing the importance of his writings, Gendzier attributes that importance to various stages of his philosophical growth, and so falls prey to the methodology she has been avoiding—biographical criticism. The positivistic urge enters at this stage, the urge to ascertain the truth of Fanon's writings by trying to find the object the work imitates. This tendency finally takes its toll, especially when Gendzier attempts to discuss the structure of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Here she is primarily concerned with Fanon's use of case studies. She thinks Fanon included the case studies as "illustrations of the violence done to man by the colonial system." This can be seen as an attempt to present another side of Fanon, the humanist side. Nonetheless, the urge to rely upon sociological evidence to test the validity of Fanon's theories finally defeats Gendzier's attempt to show the linear development of his thoughts.

Unlike Gendzier, Renate Zahar is primarily interested in Fanon's work as it reflects the social and ideological forces from which it sprang. Though Zahar commends Fanon's ability to integrate psychological mechanisms produced by colonialism into his political analysis, she feels that "his theories are, however, limited in scope by the fact of their being based on the historic-economic and political conditions he encountered in his own revolutionary activity. His descriptions of processes of alienation can in the first instance only claim validity for those areas which he knew from first-hand experience."<sup>5</sup>

Zahar is a "follower" of Fanon, an independent and revolutionary Marxist and a social psychologist. The primary intent of her work is to show how the Marxist concept of alienation is apparent in Fanon's writings, and how this relationship links him to the European revolutionary tradition. This concept of alienation views work as the definition of the essence of man. The worker becomes

alienated from the product of his work when he surrenders it to the capitalist as part of his wage contract; the product, having become a commodity, is subsequently made available to the worker on the market as an exchange value. On this point, Zahar quotes Marcuse's assertion that:

the worker, alienated from his product, is at the same time alienated from himself. His labour becomes no longer his own, and the fact that it becomes the product of another bespeaks an expropriation that touches the very essence of man.<sup>6</sup>

Zahar continues to discuss alienation in terms of the separation of workers from the means of production. The final effect of this separation is that the worker becomes alienated from himself, since under capitalist conditions of production he is incapable of objectifying himself through labor. Hence only the abolition of capitalist class society by the socialist revolution will bring about the end of alienation. In order to make a revolution, "the working class must move from being a class in itself to being a class for itself, aware of its own proper self-existence; it must develop class-consciousness" (p. 57).

Once she has set down the basis for her explication of Fanon's writings, Zahar distinguishes between the economic and intellectual aspects of alienation. Fanon, she asserts, is interested primarily in an analysis of intellectual alienation. Through such alienation, the colonized person is forced to accept the image of himself given him by the colonizer, and so the colonized person exhibits psychological disorders.

Zahar's Marxist inclinations surface while criticizing Fanon's emphasis on racial consciousness. There is very little mention of class-consciousness in Fanon's writings, especially if one considers the development of a class along economic lines. Though Fanon does give economic factors considerable analysis, he does not restrict his analysis to them. He argues that the racial aspect of colonialism subsumes class considerations and makes the problem larger than envisioned in a strict Marxist analysis. Yet in spite of this bias, Zahar credits Fanon with including economic factors in his psychological analysis.

She considers Fanon's works to be descriptions of the phenomena with which he was confronted, copies of the external world, and imitations of verifiable historical occurrences. From Zahar's vantage point, Fanon's works are primarily concerned with describing "what actually happened," and less with trying to create "what should be." He becomes a scientist and his works become a

tool for analyzing social and ideological forces. Yet for Fanon to achieve the status of scientist, Zahar must first find out at what point he abandons the methods of the psychologist and adopts the tolls of the scientific historian. She chooses Fanon's essay entitled "West Indians and Africans" as the point at which Fanon takes a critical look at his analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* and attempts to redefine his position.

Zahar's attempt to show that Fanon is criticizing colonialism through the Marxist concept of alienation distorts her perspective on Fanon's writings, and leads her to reduce Fanon's works to a single statement about the phenomenal world. In fact, she even goes so far as to form a hypothesis based on Fanon's views regarding literature and the movement of negritude. To her, negritude was an irrational reaction to white colonialism in that it was based on the same concept of the colonized as that of the colonialists. In other words, all negritude amounted to was a group of desperate artists who, as a last resort, turned the stereotypes of the colonized around and insisted on the union of the "black soul" with nature. Zahar's ideological bias gets in the way of understanding negritude as an ideology and a movement and of understanding Fanon's struggle between accepting negritude as a means of liberation of colonized people and rejecting it on the grounds that it promoted primitivism, thereby giving the colonialists more fuel for their attack on the traditions of native society. Zahar fails to see that negritude was essentially an artistic movement, and that the language of the movement was figurative, not literal. Behind her attack is the concept that the language of art is transparent, allegorical, and descriptive of the phenomena confronting the artist. This concept of language leads Zahar to condemn negritude because it was not analytical enough.

Still, it is true that Fanon finally rejected negritude on the basis that it celebrated the "authentic" Negro, the primitive tribesman who lived in happy splendor before the arrival of the colonialists. Zahar fails to see that Fanon's rejection of negritude was because he was suspicious of the magical element in the tribal customs of the African people. Whereas negritude celebrated this element, Fanon rejected it because he felt that it was one of the reasons that the oppressed Africans never fought the colonizers. Immersed in rituals and tribal customs, the native was too busy making sure that he did not sleep with his mouth open so that his spirit could escape, or that he did not go into the forest during the night and be attacked by earthbound spirits, to concern himself with revolutionary ac-

tivities. Nonetheless, Fanon sensed a certain pride and honor in these rituals and never resolved the problem to his satisfaction. Zahar totally ignores the mythic part of Fanon and tries to portray him as a neo-Marxist concerned with a critique of the Marxist concept of alienation, and as a scientist. Perhaps we can see this better by taking a look at Zahar's discussion of Sorel and Fanon. Sorel, to Zahar, is more occupied with myth than Fanon; Fanon's stance is determined by humanitarian considerations and a desire to enlighten.

Zahar tries to ascertain the "correctness" of Fanon's theories in describing situations, and asserts that Fanon's psychological categories are irrelevant when one considers class structure. Her distinction is along economic lines. She says: "Fanon's categories are derived from social psychology; although they are adequate to describe the psychological phenomena of alienation, they become irrelevant when it is a question of assessing the class structure, in other words, the relationships of economic dependence" (p. 101). Moreover, she criticizes Fanon's class analysis on the basis that it is an abstraction not rooted in historical phenomena.

Zahar's preconceptions of literature in general, and of what works like Fanon's should include and advocate, hinder her attempts to see Fanon in a light other than that of secondhand copies of historical phenomena. She places Fanon in the phenomenological tradition of Hegel, implying that Fanon's work is more concerned with creating an analytical tool which will promote a better understanding of social and political forces. In other words, Zahar sees Fanon as a *maker*, a creator, but she does not value this aspect of him.

Though Caute and Geismar and Gendzier and Zahar approach Fanon's writings from different perspectives, they share the tendency to close Fanon's system, while he seeks to leave it open. Just as the paradoxes Fanon faced in life were irresolvable, so are his writings charged with the same paradoxes. As discussed further in Chapter 3, these paradoxes allow Fanon's system to remain open, and reject categorization into truth or falsehood. Any discursive statement abstracted from the total structure is partial and incomplete.

These paradoxes are the devices of the artist, the myth-makers of society, and the means by which he advances his argument. In fact, they are the only way he can insure the permanence of his structure, thereby frustrating those who wish to reduce his creation to a single statement. Fanon engages in paradox through his stance

toward language as a means of enlightenment and communication; through his statement that the black man's destiny is to strive toward the universal conception which white people strive toward; through his singling out of the peasantry as the revolutionary class; through his theory of violence as the cleansing force of the lumpenproletariat; through his explication of the plight of the African intellectual, the "newcomer"; through his vision of the new nation which is created, like the Phoenix, from the ashes of the pre-existing one; and through his own attitude to his writings.

## 2. Caliban and Prospero

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT PLAYS in Shakespeare's canon for a number of Third World people are *Othello* and *The Tempest*. Othello, the Moor who attempts to fit into Venician society through miscegenation, is symbolic of the struggles of black people who wish to maintain their cultural heritage and to be accepted as equal participants in the colonial world. Caliban, the brutish, unwilling slave of Prospero, is deformed both in mind and body, the product of an unholy relationship between his mother, the witch, Sycorax, and a diabolic spirit. As such, Caliban exists somewhere between man and beast; he represents the more brutish instincts in human nature. In short, he is a fallen man, stripped of both reason and grace.

Caliban's problems can be seen as the problems of Third World people, especially those of black people. Prospero sees Caliban as having no language or culture and incapable of fully learning either language or cultural values. He teaches Caliban his language but Caliban only uses it to curse Prospero. The problems of Third World people are those created when the colonialists impose their language and culture on them, thereby insisting that the colonized imitate the colonizers.

Fanon addresses himself to this problem through a theory of language acquisition which grows out of his analysis of the process of colonization which occurred in the French Antilles. In "The Negro and Language," Fanon begins to explicate the colonization process; he gives primary importance to language, "for it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other."<sup>1</sup> By 'speak,' Fanon means that to communicate is to put oneself within the cultural matrix of those with whom one seeks to communicate. He sees language as much more than the mundane process of communication; it is the means by which one signifies a relationship with "the other." When one uses language as the vehicle of expression, one acknowledges that one is either a part of the culture implied by that language or wishes to become a part of it; "to speak means to be in a

position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to assume the weight of a civilization" (p. 10). Each language is a unique process of thought. When a black person masters French he or she is, in a sense, rejecting the traditional language and culture in favor of those of the European world.

This attempt to cut oneself off from traditional language and culture makes for a rather difficult situation. The black person tries to enter European society, but finally realizes that he or she will never become a full member of that society, and does really *want* to become a part of that society. Hence, the black person experiences the double consciousness DuBois speaks of in *Souls of Black Folk*. "The Negro is a sort of seventh son," writes Dubois, "born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." This double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," produces two contradictory aims: those of wanting to be both a European and a black person.<sup>2</sup> The struggle between these two unreconciled strivings threatens to plunge the black person, who is trying to escape the native culture, into a sort of half-way house where he or she is neither accepted as part of the European world, nor as part of the black one.

In black literature this predicament has been personified in the form of heroes and heroines who have tried to break a historical cycle which threatens to return them to their historical past, namely slavery, but who have found themselves between the white and black worlds, belonging to neither. For example, Bigger Thomas, the hero in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, is caught between the lack of available options in south-side Chicago and what seems like the wide range of possibilities in the white world. Bigger rejects the oppression of the ghetto, but is not welcomed into white society on his own terms. Likewise, the hero in *Invisible Man* finds that his problem is that he has accepted the fictions of both black and white society, neither of which are right for him. The novel ends with the hero realizing that he must search within himself for answers he has so desperately sought in others. Similarly, the heroine in *Their Eyes were Watching God* rejects the standards of womanhood imposed on her by white society through her grandmother and her first two husbands, and instead creates her own conception of

womanhood through a relationship with a man who is fourteen years younger than she is. In doing so, she rejects both world views. She might not know what she wants, but she knows what she doesn't want. All of these characters personify the plight of Caliban as he moves from the "animalistic" mode to the "human" one. The problem is that Prospero makes sure that Caliban never reaches the same level he is on by creating different goals for Caliban. Each attempt to master Prospero's language is self-defeating, since the closer Caliban comes to controlling the foreign tongue the more Prospero ridicules him.

Fanon's emphasis on language acquisition is an attempt to analyze this problem, for he sees this as the basis for the psychological disorders discussed in the subsequent chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks*. When one adopts the language of the colonizer and endorses the colonizers' language as an instrument of enlightenment, one places oneself in the enemy's camp. We should recall here that Fanon says that "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other." Along with language acquisition comes an entire set of cultural mores and values. As the oppressed moves closer to adopting the language of the oppressor, he must increase the distance between himself and traditional language and culture. After all, to master the colonialists' language is to accept their world view as more valid than one's own. This is why Fanon says:

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes face to face with Being. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power. Paul Valéry knew this, for he called language, "the god gone astray in the flesh." [p. 18]

Fanon realizes that the above statement is rather extreme; mastery of language does not always mean full access to the culture of that language, especially when a basis for discrimination is color differentiation. In fact, this qualification led Fanon to the analyses evident in the other four chapters in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Black people do not gain access to European culture solely through mastering European languages; the race problem supersedes all others, whether economic, linguistic, or whatever. Yet language both creates inferiority complexes in black people and is the most direct means of liberation.

Fanon sees language as constitutive of reality, as a container for culture; the native's reality is continually shaped, like Blake's Laos,



through a constant confrontation with the stubborn structure of language. Black people must master European language without allowing it to harden into a set of fixed meanings—that is, they must be aware while mastering European language that it is but a tool which will allow them to manipulate Europeans and is not the means to enlightenment. Once the black person believes the latter, he or she is in trouble, for European language and culture is seen as a fixed norm with which traditional language and culture must be compared. If the black person sees the acquisition of European language as an instrument of enlightenment, there is a direct confrontation with European society. European society will never accept the black person as a full participant, but will always point to him as an outsider. The better the black person masters European language, the more he is regarded by European society as quaint and exotic. If the black person does not master French, for example, he or she is ostracized and called a barbarian—the language the black person speaks, a combination of creole and proper French, is referred to as “pidgin-nigger.” In short, language becomes a sort of prison house, to borrow Frederick Jameson’s terms, in which the Black person is trapped.

The struggle to leave this prison house of language creates another problem, namely that the conception of humanity which the black person is struggling toward is not indigenous. It has been created by European society for the black person; and adopting it is tantamount to becoming a European. The struggle, then, is in a sense toward a conception of humanity external to blacks, where their predicament is seen as hellish, and the position of Europeans is seen as idyllic. Each attempt to move out of this situation is an attempt to conform to the European ideal of humanity, an ideal which is out of synchronization with the universal ideal of humanity. The European strives toward the universal conception of humanity. One can see this struggle, then, as the confrontation between two conceptions of language: language as an instrument of enlightenment, but a prison house; and language as a means of gaining access to a culture. The black person who accepts the first conception of language is caught in an upward struggle, so to speak; each attempt to move beyond this conception leads to frustration, and finally toward deepening the hole he or she is already in. The upward struggle soon becomes cyclic; each act of liberation simply repeats a historical cycle; the black person is constantly confronted with an image created by European society. Europeans see language as the means of access to a culture, and finally, of control-

ling a foreign culture. Their struggle is not toward a foreign conception of humanity, but toward one which is universal and divine. Their attempts, in a sense, are linear; that is, directed toward a definite end.

We can see this conflict best, perhaps, by discussing Bigger Thomas's plight in *Native Son*. As mentioned above, he is a young black man, living a hellish existence in south-side Chicago. His fatherless family lives in a one-room rat-infested apartment which does not allow his mother and sister even the privacy to change clothes. Wright juxtaposes this existence with that of a philanthropic white family, the Daltons, who live in a mansion on the other side of town. After being sufficiently prodded by his mother to take a job to keep the family from being cut off from welfare, Bigger takes his gun to the job interview at the Daltons' home to protect himself. Bigger's image of white people has been formed by the media; when Bigger meets the Daltons, all his fantasies come true. Mr. Dalton is a white liberal who donates ping-pong balls to the local black YMCA, while keeping apartment houses in south-side Chicago; Mrs. Dalton is a half-witted blind white woman who seems unaware of her husband's activities; Mary Dalton, the daughter, is a flirty, rebellious young girl who is involved with a communist boy, Jan Erlone. When Bigger confronts Dalton, he adopts the submissive black role dictated for him by history and which he feels comfortable with. His language is that of the subservient black. He answers the Daltons by saying "yes'm" and "no'm"; he does not look either of them in the eye while speaking. He knows that if he keeps up this facade long enough, Mr. Dalton might help him go to flight school to become a pilot. The mannerisms and language Bigger adopts are a conscious ploy to reach a goal. The route to that goal is dictated by history, and thus acceptable to him.

Mary Dalton, however, does not accept Bigger's actions. To her, slavery and black oppression is a thing of the past. It is replaced by a version of social progress wherein black people have achieved full human status in American society. Mary ignores the fact that Bigger lives in south-side Chicago, where every action by whites against blacks renews oppression. She views history as a set of unrecoverable, discontinuous events. Moreover, she ignores present social reality, namely the fact that she lives in a luxurious home while Bigger lives in a ghetto. She seeks to impose her version of reality on him as the means of enlightenment, insisting that blacks and whites are equal and can work together to annihilate race and class

distinctions. She therefore attempts to treat Bigger as an equal, which only means shaking hands with him, riding in the front seat of the car he is chauffeuring, and so on.

This behavior threatens to destroy Bigger's historical role as the "ignorant ducky," and to replace it with a vision of social reality which ignores present social conditions. The conflict between Mary Dalton's belief that the adoption of American language and values are the means of enlightenment, of moving the prototypical character of Caliban from subhuman to human level, and Bigger's retreat into the role dictated by history as the means to obtain his goal—produces the story and the tension in *Native Son*.

Bigger's plight symbolizes that of the black person caught between the tension to see the language and values of the dominant society as a means to liberation and enlightenment, and to see them as a way of manipulating white society. Though he more or less resolves his plight, the struggle with language remains. Fanon emphasizes that the black man must always face this problem:

Every colonized people . . . in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. [p. 18]

Language acquisition not only creates a problem between the colonizer and the colonized; it also creates a problem within the world of the colonized. Fanon discusses language acquisition in geographical terms while considering this aspect of the predicament. He sees a sharp division between the black and white worlds, just as Bigger Thomas sees the difference between south-side Chicago and the world of the whites. Bigger says: "They're white and we're Black; we live over here and they live over there." This contrast leads to conflict within the black world. The black person who comes to know the white world, through mastering language, is viewed as a demigod by native blacks, and he insists that they see him as such. Fanon adds that many blacks, for example, "after stays of varying length in metropolitan France, go home to be deified" (p. 19). Here, "home" means the country, for when colonialists occupy territory, they usually take cities for themselves leaving the peasants in the country. A native who returns from France—Fanon calls them "newcomers"—is feared by the natives. They refer to him as almost white, while the French says that he talks like a book, and so on.

Yet, the reaction by peasants to the newcomer is twofold: he is

initially feared, since his mastery of French signifies that he has become part of the colonial world, and thus is in a privileged position; and he is shunned by the peasants, the outcasts, “the-one-who-never-crawled-out-of-his-hole, the *bitaco*” (p. 19). This ambivalent reaction is the result of the newcomer’s changed behavior; he returns clothed in the image of the colonialist. Fanon relates the folk story of a black man who returns to his father’s farm after visiting France.

After several months of living in France, a country boy returns to his family. Noticing a farm implement, he asks his father, an old don’t-pull-that-kind-of-thing-on-me peasant, “Tell me, what does one call that apparatus?” His father responds by dropping the tool on the boy’s feet, and the amnesia vanishes. Remarkable therapy (pp. 23-24).

The newcomer’s language exemplifies his plight. Since mastering French is necessary for him to participate in the colonial world, French is always foreign to him; he is liable not to master it fully, but instead to combine French with “pidgin-nigger.” The result is Creole, which French poets call “divine gurgling”. Creole is the forbidden language of the black middle class, as it shows that they are half-way between the world of the black peasants and that of the colonialists. Creole is only spoken to servants; children are scorned when they use it; it is not taught in schools.

The rejection of Creole is partly based on the black person’s reaction to racial stereotypes, given through language. “The Negro arriving in France,” Fanon says,

will react against the myth of the r-eating man from Martinique. He will become aware of it, and he will really go to war against it. He will practice not only rolling his r but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue—a wretchedly lazy organ—he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours—desperately determined to learn *diction*. [p. 21]

The stereotype of the r-eating man from Martinique is only one which is passed on to black people by the French. It is particularly important because it lays the cornerstone for degrading blacks. This degradation has two forms: the French refer to black people in derogatory and animalistic terms, or they exert covert pressure on blacks to agree with their demands. The latter technique is often the most devastating, since it forces the black unwittingly to change language and culture. However, the process of rejecting one’s traditional language and culture in favor of a foreign one is not easily achieved. In his effort not to conform to the stereotype of the

re-eating man from Martinique, the black person might purposely "embroider" his *re*'s, and in doing so, put them in the wrong place. Fanon tells the story of a Martinique black who landed at Le Havre, went into a bar, and called "Waiterrr! Bing me a beeya."

Fanon considers this process devastating to the psyche of the colonized, and chooses psychoanalysis as the method which will allow him to analyze it. Yet he rejects behavioristic models, and comments:

I grasp my narcissism with both hands and I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere mechanism. If there be no discussion on a philosophical level—that is, the plane of the basic needs of human reality—I am willing to work on the psychoanalytic level—in other words, the level of the "failures," in the sense in which one speaks of engine failures. [p. 23]

Fanon's metaphors here are interesting. He speaks of not thinking of people as mere mechanisms, yet is willing to work on the psychoanalytic level, which he calls the level of failures. Moreover, he likens these human failures to those of an engine. These mechanized metaphors, when juxtaposed with Fanon's tendency toward poetic language, suggest a tension regarding his own writings. He seems to vacillate between the methods of the creative artist and those of the scientist. Though he is willing to work, at least in part, on the scientific level, he sees that there are obvious shortcomings to a strictly scientific analysis of psychological disorders, namely that the methods of the sciences lead toward generalizations. Fanon seems to want to move toward particulars which, in themselves, have universal implications, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Here I am primarily concerned with Fanon's theory of language as it grows out of his observations of the language acquisition of black people in Martinique.

The problem of language acquisition is not all that universal. For example, it is one thing for an English-speaking person to master French, and quite another for a black Martiniquean to do so. The difference is that while the English-speaking person also adopts a certain way of thinking and acting with his mastery of French, English is recognized 'as a valuable language worthy of communicating thoughts. Thus the acquisition of French, for the English-speaking person, is simply a means of communication; it does not signify a denial of English culture and language. But the black person has no such language recognized by the French as worthy of consideration. Creole and pidgin-nigger are lower forms of communication. The acquisition of French, then, is tantamount to abandoning a primitive form of communication and mastering a

higher form. Hence along with the mastery of language comes an entire set of psychological problems.

When Fanon speaks of the black person who aspires to European culture, he does so in narrative, for the problem becomes metaphysical, which can be talked about best through metaphorical language. This poetic urge in Fanon has inspired much negative criticism. While attempting to account for Fanon's literary flair, some critics have attempted to find its historical roots. A significant number of critics have singled out Fanon's teacher, Aimé Césaire, as the origin of his writing style in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Geismar even discusses that book in terms of what he calls Fanon's "obscure language." Geismar attributes this to Césaire's influence on Fanon; he says:

the respect of the professor was harmful only when Fanon tried to imitate his style. Some of the weakest passages of *Black Skin, White Masks* are modeled on the alternating prose and poetry of Césaire's autobiography, a way of writing that Fanon never perfected. In his first book, Fanon becomes so entranced with the sound of words that he sometimes obscures all content.

This approach is based on the assumption that Fanon's works are primarily discursive or polemical—that is, intended to communicate some truth or set of truths to the reader—and that anything which impedes allegorization of the works is harmful. The clearer the writing, the better it is for the reader to get to its "object." The important thing to consider is not how Fanon presents his thoughts, but what he says. This split between form and content, especially in reference to Fanon's works, is a problem since Fanon considers them to be a way to move the reader to action. When asked to clarify a phrase in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon commented to François Jeanson that he could not "explain the phrase more fully. I try, when I write such things, to touch the nerves of my reader. That's to say irrationally, almost sensually."<sup>3</sup>

This problem of Fanon's literary flair reflects his position toward the newcomer, for both find themselves between two worlds. Since it is a difficult problem, Fanon interjects his voice by shifting the narrative device, as opposed to providing an objective, psychoanalytical treatise about this ambivalent position.

Much of Fanon's analysis is taken up with the newcomer's psychological plight. He comes back to his country and sets himself up as an oracle, then lives in terror of falling below his claims to superiority. The natives criticize him harshly. He finds that he has two choices: "throw off his 'Parisianism' or die of ridicule" (p. 25). The struggle to maintain his supposed superiority over other black

people creates an atmosphere of personal and communal tension within which he must exist. Fanon sees the newcomer's behavior as a psychological disorder and finds its origin in language acquisition, for "every dialect is a way of thinking. . . . And the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" ( p. 25).

Much like Harold Cruse in *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Fanon finds that this problem occurs mostly among the educated, since it is this class that first contacts European culture and language. It is odd, Fanon thinks, that the newcomer should become a black French European totally. Fanon does not agree with the assumption that blacks willingly become part of European culture. He believes that "the first impulse of the Black man is to say no to those who attempt to build a definition of him." From this vantage point,

it is understandable that the first action of the black man is a *reaction*, and, since the Negro is appraised in terms of the extent of his assimilation, it is also understandable why the newcomer expresses himself only in French. It is because he wants to emphasize the rupture that has now occurred. [p. 36]

Fanon's feelings toward the newcomer are ambivalent. On the one hand, he sees the newcomer's identification with European culture through language as dangerous and, at least partially the product of his own free will; on the other, he sees language acquisition as inevitable and understandable. There is more to the newcomer's urge to be like the Europeans than meets the eye. Specifically, the Europeans furnish all the successful role models, most effectively through mass media. For example, a small child may be given dolls to play with: a nurse, a doctor, a patient. If the child is black and the nurse and doctor are white, the child accepts as role models objects not belonging to his own culture and race. Hence, what the child learns is that to become a doctor, one must become white, or as close to white as possible.

This identification in childhood with the other is unconscious. It is when the problem reaches the unconscious stage that Fanon uses psychoanalysis to "help the black man free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has developed by the colonial environment" (p. 30). Foremost among these complexes is the colonialists' tendency to identify the black as children through language. Colonialists may refer to the Blacks' "jabbering," which Fanon connects to children's purposeless calling and shouting. By saying that blacks jabber, the

implication is that blacks are like children. Here, Fanon makes two observations. First, whites behave with blacks the way adults do with children. When a white person talks to a black one, he starts "smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (p. 31). To speak pidgin to a black makes him angry, because he is a pidgin-nigger talker. To adopt the language of someone you consider inferior is to insult him. To speak pidgin-nigger is tantamount to saying "You'd better keep your place" (p. 34). These problems are caused by the colonialists' tendency to see blacks as having no culture, civilization, or historical past. Thus, to impose the language and culture of the mother country on black people is not seen as colonization as such, but as salvation from a cyclic perpetuation of inferiority. The colonialists, in short, see themselves introducing proper language and culture without which the black people would be doomed to oblivion.

Fanon is Rousseauistic in this sense, although he does not consider the imposition of a particular culture harmful but rather the imposition of a foreign culture on another as harmful. A culture must be allowed to grow and develop organically, without being controlled by external forces. The conception of humanity which so-called civilized people strive toward must be grounded in their culture's historical past and directed toward an ideal developed within that culture.

Colonization destroys organic growth, and thus puts the colonized culture in a situation where it must constantly struggle against external pressure through negating the conception of humanity forced on it by colonialists. This is one of the main reasons for the striving of black people "to prove the existence of a black civilization to the white world at all costs" (p. 34). But to attempt in this way to destroy the world the oppressor has constructed only leads to frustration. In their attempts to struggle out of the conception of humanity dictated to them by history, black people seek to win the approval of whites, not through entering white society, but through trying to convince white people that black culture is at least comparable to white peoples'. Since the latter do not acknowledge the former's language and culture, the struggle to prove their existence is useless, and leads black people away from the path to liberation and toward the conception of humanity handed down by the colonialists. The struggle, in a sense, becomes circular; and the black person finds himself trapped in this prison house constructed by his efforts to seek recognition. The problem of language is never-ending. Each attempt to move out of the prison house of



language only makes the black person more entrapped within what DuBois calls "the veil."

It is interesting that Fanon does not see the only victim of colonization as the colonized. The white person, too, the colonizer in setting up a racist culture seals himself into a conception of humanity antithetical to that constructed for the black people. This tension constitutes racism. Fanon sees racism as the total corruption of a culture, an abnormal state. A culture which is in balance, so to speak, operates independently of external controls. Fanon turns his attention to the mechanics of racism and culture, for

to study the relations of racism and culture is to raise the question of their reciprocal action. If culture is the combination of motor and mental behavior patterns arising from the encounter of man with nature and with his fellow-man, it can be said that racism is indeed a cultural element. There are thus cultures with racism and cultures without racism.<sup>4</sup>

This last distinction is not enough to analyze the situation clearly, and at best only gives us the general shape of the problem. Fanon distinguishes between different levels of racism as manifested in a culture, from the primitive level of biology to intellectual and emotional primitivism. Though he makes such a distinction, he says:

This racism that aspires to be rational, individual, genotypically and phenotypically determined, becomes transformed into cultural racism. The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing. At the extreme, such terms as message and cultural style are resorted to. [p. 32]

Yet racism is only one element of many which contribute to the systematized oppression of a people. Fanon wants to determine how an oppressing people behave, and so directs his attention at the behavior of the colonialist, but not through psychoanalysis, as he criticizes "psychologists, who tend to explain everything by movements of the psyche" and who "claim to discover this behavior on the level of contacts between individuals" for not considering the special nature of racism. They tend to treat racism as any other deviation from the norm, and, as such, ignore both the fact that colonialists have little respect for other cultures and the fact that the systematic destruction of a culture is necessary for colonialism to prevail. The colonialist must force the native to adopt his manners, language, dress, and culture and he can only do so by completely destroying the traditional culture. This element of force puts the final stamp on the process of assimilation. The force used is usually economic, since the ability to earn a decent living is reciprocal to the extent to which one has adopted the colonialist's language and culture.

Fanon cautions against concluding that the simple act of setting up a colonial system destroys native culture. The intent is not to do so, rather it is to keep the native culture under constant pressure. That culture, "once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yoke of oppression." Fanon's use of the terms "opened" and "closed" in relation to culture are interesting. Colonization closes a culture which was once open to organic growth. When a culture is closed, it has the characteristics of the colonial culture; it sees the colonial world as an enlightened one and the native as undesirable. The cultural mores and values of the latter are negated and replaced. Fanon sees the closed culture as "dead" and speaks of it as "mummified," remarking that "the cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking. The apathy so universally noted among colonial peoples is but the logical consequence of this operation" (p. 34).

The loss of individual thinking is detrimental to the native culture, since the maintenance of an open culture depends largely on natural conflicts between its members. These conflicts are healthy because they insure that one version of reality does not become dominant. Without this type of exchange, the culture is inoperative and doomed. Fanon does not believe that it is possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within a culture that recognizes him and that he in turn recognizes. The apathy Fanon sees among the natives is the logical result of the suppression of organic activity.

Fanon does not believe that the colonial process is unconscious, since

racism bloats and disfigures the face of the culture that practices it. Literature, the plastic arts, songs for shopgirls, proverbs, habits, patterns, whether they set out to attack it or to vulgarize it, restore racism. This means that a social group, a country, a civilization, cannot be unconsciously racist. [p. 37]

As already indicated, Fanon considers the racist as much a victim of his own actions as the native. The racist, corrupted by his inhuman treatment of the native, becomes less than a man; Fanon says "the white man is sealed in his whiteness, the black man in his blackness" (p. 9). Racism destroys and engulfs the native and the colonialist. Instead of liberating himself from the latter, the black must escape his dungeon, which he has been partly responsible for being placed in. *Black Skin, White Masks* is a plea for "nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself." This statement removes the responsibility from the colonialist and places it on the native; it challenges him to assert his humanity and free will. The oppressed

need a language to help them see that colonialists have intentionally sought to close their culture, so that the native culture reflects the colonial world. Fanon, as a philosopher of language, sees this problem and tries to move away from the sterile analysis of psychology to word the inspirational language of the creative artist, and thus involve the reader in the demystifying process of decolonization, of reopening the native culture.

### 3. We Wear the Mask

IN *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon abandons the analytic psychological perspective and writes as if he were part of the revolution he has created in his book. This shift in language has confused all but a few of his critics, and has led most to conclude that he should not have done so. Fanon's critics often argue that since the purpose of writing a book like *The Wretched of the Earth* is to analyze a historical occurrence, his shift in language misleads the reader into thinking that Fanon is recording the events of a revolution which he observed. His importance is that he claims a privileged position from which to write about this revolution.

This is similar to the debate about the validity of the Christian gospels. The disciples claimed special expertise in writing them since they were first-hand observers to the events they wrote about. Biblical scholars have questioned one of the gospel's validity—that of Mark—since they believe that he might not have written as a first-hand observer, but as one who consciously constructed a fiction from previously written sources, namely the other gospels.

These allegations move both Fanon's book and Mark's gospel from historical records to fictions and threaten to undermine the validity of each's claim to authority. But there is another side to this debate. Let us assume that Fanon consciously wrote as if he was part of a revolution similar to the way Mark allegedly created a fictional account of Jesus' life. *The Wretched of the Earth* would become a vehicle through which Fanon attempted to move the reader to action by involving him or her in a revolution through the act of reading. Fanon's voice would be that of the Third World, of the colonized. And through his voice, the inhabitants of the Third World would witness the creation of their society.

Fanon intentionally misleads the reader into accepting the revolution he writes about as an actual historical occurrence, writing as if he is a part of it. He writes as an Algerian, as a member of a people undergoing a revolution, who hope to set up a society free of class and race distinctions. This perspective is significantly dif-

ferent from that in *Black Skin, White Masks*. There Fanon speaks as an Algerian and a Frenchman, as evidenced by his self-critical chapters on "The Negro and Language" and "The Man of Color and the White Woman." He is torn between his initial aspirations to be part of French society and his later rejection of French culture and embracement of African culture. In *The Wretched of the Earth* he resolves this tension by discussing the French as "they" and "them," and the Algerians as "we" and "us." He divides the world into the colonizer and the colonized, and joins the latter, since he believes that it is the colonized, specifically the lumpenproletariat, who will be directly responsible for the downfall of colonialism. Fanon identifies himself with the downtrodden, the peasants and outcasts of society, who are "like a horde of rats; you may kick them and throw stones at them, but despite your efforts they'll go on gnawing at the roots of the tree."<sup>1</sup> Fanon places the entire revolution in the hands of these "classless idlers" who have no stake in the colonial system. Not having benefitted from it, they want nothing short of its complete destruction and the creation of a new society where they will be able to determine their own destiny.

But the initial acts of spontaneous violence the lumpenproletariat initiates while it is still mainly a peasant class only serve to awaken the potential nation to the possibility of revolution. The natives initially commit mindless acts of violence against the colonialists, and lose because the latter have more resources. The natives retreat to the hills and begin guerilla warfare. This stage in the revolution eventually leads to the frustration and embarrassment of the colonialists. The settlers, armed with the most sophisticated machinery and weapons, are faced with the might of the majority of the natives, whom they cannot even see. Using this confusion to their advantage, the lumpenproletariat strikes at the colonial régime in an attempt to bring it to its knees.

When Fanon reaches this point in his analysis, he becomes part of the struggle, a character in his own story. This is similar to how Trotsky wrote about the Russian revolution: he wrote about the lives of everyone involved, including himself, leading one to believe that he, as a writer, was both outside and part of history. Fanon achieves this end in a different manner. Trotsky uses the vantage point of an objective narrator, while Fanon shifts his language from "they" and "them" to "we" and "us" when discussing the lumpenproletariat. For example, consider the following apposite description by Fanon of the guerilla warfare conducted by the National Angolan army's leader, Holden Roberto.

The fact is that in guerilla warfare the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the place where you are going. Each fighter carries his warring country between his bare toes. The national army of liberation is not an army which engages once and for all with the enemy; it is rather an army which goes from village to village, falling back on the forests, and dancing for joy when in the valley below there comes into view the white column of dust that the enemy columns kick up. The tribes go into action, and the various groups move about, changing their ground. The people of the north move toward the west; the people of the plains go up into the mountains. There is absolutely no strategically privileged position. The enemy thinks he is pursuing us; but we always manage to harry his rearguard, striking back at him at the very moment when he thinks he has annihilated us. From now on, it is we who pursue him; in spite of all his technical advantages and his superior artillery power the enemy gives the impression that he is floundering and getting bogged down. And as for us, we sing, we go on singing. [pp. 134-35]

We should notice specifically Fanon's shift in language from "you" to "us." For example, consider the change in tone from "in guerilla warfare the struggle no longer concerns the place where *you* are going," to "the enemy thinks he is pursuing *us* but *we* always manage to harry his rearguard, striking back at him at the very moment when he thinks he has annihilated *us*." Here, it is important to consider of what revolution was Fanon a part, and where the events described in the preceeding passage occurred. Fanon was never part of the Algerian revolution; he gave medical attention to Algerian rebels, but never became part of the armed struggle, nor saw the violence of which he speaks. Through his language, he is simply attempting to create a revolution. He uses "us," "we," and "him," implying that he identifies with the cause of revolution and is a participant in the struggle.

It appears to me that Fanon consciously changes his style in this manner; he is fully aware of what he is doing. His intention is to involve the reader in the revolution he has created, thus making a path leading to the new society. The resulting problem is that the path is not always clear, and when Fanon becomes part of the revolution, his vision becomes blurred. He cannot maintain sufficient distance from the phenomena which he is describing. In short, the form begins to dictate the vision. Instead of an analysis of the problems incurred in waging a revolution, we get a vision of a revolution which has never occurred except in Fanon's mind. The painstaking detail into which Fanon goes to describe the revolution eventually works against his intention, and one is more inclined to try to verify the events which Fanon describes than to participate in the aesthetic experience he offers. In this way, the duality in Fanon between being myth-maker and political scientist misleads the reader into thinking that Fanon is the latter when he is actually the

former. In other words, instead of seeing Fanon's structure as open, one is tempted to consider it as a "closed existence," which has been the major problem in the criticism written on Fanon, as discussed below in Chapter 4.

Moreover, since Fanon's vision of the Third World is presented and developed through a critique of the colonial social condition, and since the forming of the new order is dependent on revolution, our picture of this positive zone is also blurred. We know what the society will not look like, but we do not know what it will look like. Here, Fanon provides a series of warnings against the national middle class which eventually takes the place of the colonialists. The biggest problem is that the middle class in a third world country has no economic power, is underdeveloped, and is dependent on the colonial power. The national middle class does not change its means of production; it remains a small farmer for Europe, specializing in unfinished products. Without economic independence, the new society is doomed from its inception and becomes a mirror of the colonial power, this time under the guise of neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism, according to Fanon, eventually leads to the downfall of the new society, as it creates the same kind of problems present during colonialism. Specifically, tribalism emerges and almost single-handedly leads to the decline of the new nation. The colonialists, realizing that this is occurring, use the separate movements to regain a foothold in the country. Further, religious tensions contribute significantly to the problems the new society faces.

The solution, which Fanon offers to "heal" the wounds inflicted on the new society by the one-party system the nationalist bourgeoisie institutes, is simply to dissolve the entire nationalist group. The government of the new society must come "from the bottom up." It must be a revolutionary government which rejects stasis. The roadblocks which the nationalist bourgeoisie constructs against total liberation, "Utopia," can only be dismantled "through the upward thrust of the people, and under the leadership of the people, that is to say, in defiance of the interests of the bourgeoisie" (p. 176).

Under neo-colonialism, the nationalist party begins to work against the people, seeking to send them "back to the caves" and forsaking its oath to serve the masses. It promotes the myth of free and open competition to give the impression that everyone has an equal chance to "get a piece of the pie" and that the strongest will get the most. This policy eventually leads to the destruction of the

new society because the country people flock to the cities and suburbs in the hope of securing enough capital to buy themselves a place in society. This causes a national crisis in the new society, spearheaded by the failure of the national political party to educate the masses. On this point, Fanon notes that

to educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. [p. 137]

The failure of the leaders to educate the masses opens the door to cultural decadence, and the hope of developing a national, self-sustaining culture dwindles. Neo-colonialism is more of a threat to national culture than colonialism, for neo-colonialism, while presenting itself as a panacea, is actually more vicious than colonialism. It seeks to destroy traditional culture and tries to turn the direction of the new society entirely toward the colonial power.

At this point, Fanon's vision becomes blurred again, for he not only becomes part of his own myth, but also locates himself within his structure. He declares:

if you think that you can manage a country without letting the people interfere, if you think that the people upset the game by their mere presence, whether they slow it down or whether by their natural ignorance they sabotage it, then you must have no hesitation: you must keep the people out. Now, it so happens that when the people are invited to partake in the management of the country, they do not slow the movement down but on the contrary they speed it up. We Algerians have had the occasion and the good fortune during the course of this war to handle a fair number of questions. In certain country districts, the politico-military leaders of the revolution found themselves in fact confronted with situations which called for radical solutions. [p. 189]

It appears that Fanon considers himself to be Algerian, and furthermore, a member of the lumpenproletariat. One might wonder why he does not identify himself with the leaders of the revolution. After all, this would seem to be more natural place for him since he was part of the educated élite who had been awakened to the call for revolution by the spontaneous violence of the peasantry. Yet this same group of leaders, as earlier discussed, is finally the class which lays the cornerstone of neo-colonialism. Once the colonialists are expelled from the native society, the nationalist leaders take over the government. In Marxist epistemology, one might call this the dictatorship of the nationalist leaders. But for Fanon, a dic-



tatorship by any class is still a dictatorship, and it poses a peculiar problem for the newly liberated nation.

It is from this vantage point that Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and in this way we can better understand that his criticisms of the national bourgeoisie, native intellectuals, and artists, are finally criticisms of himself. This has led his critics to conclude that he is doing little more than generalizing about his own experiences and trying to apply his analysis to black people as a group. As previously stated, the predicament in which Fanon finds himself by becoming part of his own myth is that the reader may conclude that he is fantasizing about a revolution that never really occurred, making his work useless; or the reader may conclude that Fanon was actually part of a revolution. Fanon thus allows the means of reducing his work to being "closed," and singling out his theory of violence as the primary concern, as many of his critics have done.

My concern is to demonstrate that Fanon's myth is open, and that any attempt to reduce his structure to a theory of violence or otherwise is the result of the reader misunderstanding his works. His structure is grounded in paradox, which allows it to remain open. The nature of an open myth is that it is paradoxical. These paradoxes reject categorization into truth or falsehood, and force one to see that the statement abstracted from the structure is partial and incomplete. At this point, we should take time to show how the paradoxes in Fanon's structure actually demonstrate the openness of his myth. I think that paradox is the method by which an artist, a myth-maker, advances his argument. In fact, the only way that an artist can give permanence to his structure is by grounding it in paradox, thereby frustrating those who wish to reduce his creation to a single statement.

In the same way, Fanon builds his structure by paradox. I shall not attempt to list all his paradoxes, as that would take us into an entirely different area of inquiry. However, there are several fundamental paradoxes to Fanon's myth which deserve mention. (1) The first concerns his stance toward language: The native in a French colony, for example, is faced with a curious problem; he must learn to speak French so that he can function effectively in society. Yet he must be conscious that he is only using French as the means to an end—that end being to gain more control in the colonial world—and not as an end in itself. The native must not become a part of the mother country, but must balance his own aspirations to be accepted by the colonialists with the nation's aspiration to overthrow them. This duality presents a paradox upon which Fanon begins to build the negative zone.

(2) The native's failure to handle the first problem leads Fanon to his paradoxical stance toward the native's future. "For the black man there is one destiny. And it is white." It is ironic that the black man must realize that his destiny lies in directing his future toward that of the colonialists before he can free himself from the bonds of the colonial world. He must try, first, to attain the stature of a white man before he can pass through the eye of the needle to the positive zone where he can be a human being. This situation leads Fanon to propose "nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself."

(3) Fanon's singling out of the peasantry as the revolutionary class creates another paradox. It is these outcasts who have the potential to overthrow colonialism and to shape the new nation. Once the peasant revolt moves to the urban community, it is joined by the "scum" of society; this group become the lumpenproletariat, the potential revolutionary group which will spearhead the downfall of the colonialists' rule. It is ironic, in a sense, that the hope for the new nation comes from outcasts of society, especially from pimps, prostitutes, hoodlums, thieves—these considered the "scum" and "dregs" of society. The revolution, specifically its violence, acts as a purifying force which transforms these people from hopeless outcasts to productive members of society. This presents a problem in that it is hard to believe that they can be purified and become the potential shapers of the new nation. The paradox is evident and has caused considerable problems for those who wish to abstract a plan of political action from Fanon's writings.

(4) From the problem previously discussed stems the next paradox: violence as the cleansing force for the lumpenproletariat. This violence seems "divinely inspired." "It is at the moment when the native realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its victory." This means to be self-contradictory in that the native is reacting against a type of violence which the colonialists have inflicted on him. To turn around and fight back violently does not, at first, appear to be an indication of humanity, but of barbarity. The native seems to be adopting the colonialist's methods to free himself. Further, Fanon's own stance toward violence is paradoxical; he himself was not a violent man, and in fact saw violence as a desperate, final attempt to overthrow the oppressor.

(5) The plight of the native intellectual presents another paradox, from which grows the dilemma of the national middle class. Both are faced with irresolvable paradoxes: how can they win the favor of the colonialists, and at the same time provide for the

larger interests of the group and preserve their native identity? From their failure to cope satisfactorily with this problem, the new nation is conceived in paradox.

(6) The new nation, confronted with the irresolvable paradox of proclaiming that it is a free entity, but relying upon Europe for economic support, must constantly die and be reborn, like the Phoenix. Each time the new nation moves through this cyclic pattern, however, it moves closer to the utopian vision of the Third World. This is why Fanon's vision of the Third World is blurred; it must be shaped by the eternal cycle of death and rebirth.

(7) Finally, Fanon's relationship to his myth is itself paradoxical. The only way he can bring himself and the reader to an awareness of social conditions is for him to assume an enlightened colonialist perspective, which distances him sufficiently from his heritage and social conditions so that he can see them better. But to assume a colonialist perspective means that Fanon must assume the colonialist perspective without becoming part of the colonial world and must criticize tribal, traditional African customs without losing his identity as an African. As a result, he finds that his criticisms of the colonialists and the natives are also criticisms of himself and so he becomes part of his own myth. He is and is not a black European. It is only by assuming a colonialist perspective that Fanon can direct the downfall of the colonial world and offer the impetus to shape the new nation and the Third World.

He advances his argument by paradox. His entire myth is firmly grounded in paradox, rendering invalid attempts by his critics to reduce his systems to a "closed existence." On the contrary, his myth is open and includes a free range of possibilities. For Fanon, life and language themselves are paradoxical. We react to Fanon as an artist, a myth-maker, a creator, because we are intrigued by his clear articulation. Oppressed people, especially black people, are little more than an image within the image given to them by the colonialists. Fanon seeks to reverse the mirror so that the image oppressed people see is of their own choosing. This process is crucial, for until black people move to this level of awareness, they will always be a race of people with "black skins and white masks."

## 4. The Disarming Vision

ALTHOUGH ONE CAN DISTINGUISH between a work of art as a reflection of social phenomena and as a product of the imagination, this distinction is more rigid than necessary, as it tends to polarize the interpretations of a work of art into two diametrically opposed features. A work of art obviously can be both a reflection of social reality and a product of the imagination. The problem is how it can be both. For this reason, I would like to discuss a work of literature as constitutive or creative of reality, and to Fanon's works as visionary apprehensions of reality in the sense that through the act of writing Fanon has "creatively discovered" (in Eliseo Vivas's language), the political movement we have come to know as the Third World. My primary concern with Fanon's works is to attempt to redefine and, in effect, to create reality so that the very act of writing becomes constitutive, and so that Fanon's intent is to work out his vision linguistically, thereby creating an alternative to the phenomena which confronts him. From this vantage point, Fanon's works can be seen as an attempt to create a revolution, to generate a positive society from a negative one. It is thus possible to see Fanon's works as an "intrinsic society" which addresses itself, first, to the imagination, and second to the external world.<sup>1</sup> Once we have done so, we may be able to see the relationship between Fanon's "myth" and reality and the applicability of his myth to changing reality.

Northrop Frye points out that as a civilization develops, mythology divides into two parts: patterns of stories and images, legends and folklore which become fictions and metaphors of literature; and conceptual ideas derived from myths which extend into areas such as philosophy, political theory, and related disciplines. Thus there are two structures in a culture which descend from mythology: one is literature and the other is a body of integrating ideas in religion, philosophy, and the like, which are still largely composed of myth.<sup>2</sup> The social visionary's myth, and hence Fanon's, falls into the latter category.

Fanon's myth is complicated and takes effort to work out thoroughly. To begin with, he is concerned with the problems of colonialism created when the colonizer violates the human rights of the colonized. Fanon is concerned with human rights as opposed to civil rights because he is interested more in protecting these rights of the individual and the community which date from birth, and less with protecting the rights of the individual as defined by society. In other words, Fanon draws a distinction between human rights and civil rights, but does not restrict his analysis to one or the other. In fact, he feels that civil rights come into play when the colonial power violates the native's human rights, though it is difficult to ascertain what Fanon means by human rights. One might conclude that he is speaking of human rights such as those associated with Rousseau's man in his natural, uncorrupted state. This natural state gradually becomes corrupted by "civilization," which ultimately destroys man's right to provide for his basic needs and to seek fulfillment with nature and his fellow men. However, I doubt that Fanon is Rousseauistic in quite this sense. Rather than seeing civilization as corrupting, he sees the imposition of an alien culture upon another as corrupting. He seems to think that each culture must find its own way to develop its civil rights, like a growing organism. It can take in things from outside on its own, but it cannot be force-fed. This process of imposing an alien culture on another, often under the guise of "bringing civilization to the natives," is synonymous with the process of colonialism with which Fanon is concerned and which he divides into four stages: the initial confrontation between settlers and natives; the destruction of the natives' language and the beginning of their assimilation through acquisition of the settlers' language; the natives' internalization of the settlers' values; and the natives' aspirations to become like the settlers' and so accepted by them.

Fanon starts with the initial confrontation between the settlers and the natives. The latter, under the guise of "civilizing the heathens," of "bringing Christianity to the pagans," through their superior technology conquer the natives' territory. The settlers thereby create a Manichaen world, divided into two zones: the settlers' zone and the natives' zone. The settlers' zone is characterized by advanced technology, spaciousness, and development. In short, it is composed of the "haves." By contrast, the natives' zone is that of the "have-nots," the hungry, the ill-famed. It is cramped and houses the unwanted.

Fanon believes that though the basis for this division is primarily

economic in that the colonial town is composed of those who possess material goods, a close examination reveals that

what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.<sup>3</sup>

As shown in the second chapter, one of the main things which contributes to the division of zones is language. When the white settler occupies a country, he immediately imposes his own values and customs on its inhabitants through language. By insisting that they speak his language, the settler changes the manner in which the natives perceive themselves in relation to their environment. They lose part of their heritage and tradition, and acquire the settler's ways of acting and thinking. As a result, Fanon believes that the natives begin to create a class structure among themselves within the larger colonial system. For example, a native who can speak eloquent French is thought to be more sophisticated than the native who can speak only Creole, the patois. Hence, to speak Creole becomes more than a testimony to a native's illiteracy; it also becomes the yardstick by which status in society is judged.

Thus, two types of natives emerge: the first totally assimilates himself into the culture of the settler and for all intents and purposes becomes a European; the second is never assimilated into the new society. The latter uses stereotypes created by the settlers for his own benefit. The second type of native, however, participates in colonial society by "masking" his real character. He pretends to be ignorant, savage, and inferior, while he manipulates the settler to his own advantage. Some of these natives set up rural dwellings while others remain in the towns, becoming the "scum" of society. From this division, a conflict between urban dwellers and rural dwellers develops. This is not the historical "antagonism between the native who is excluded from the advantages of colonialism and his counterpart who manages to turn colonial exploitation to his account" (*Wretched*, p. 112). Rather, this is the antagonism between the town people, who have been assimilated into colonialist society, and the country people, who compose the bulk of the lumpen-proletariat.<sup>4</sup> Fanon thinks that the colonialists use this antagonism in their struggle against the nationalist parties, mobilizing the country people against the town people.

Here Fanon romanticizes country people. He believes that it is these people who eventually overthrow colonial power. Since they

have no stake in the colonial system and have not internalized the values and beliefs of the colonialists, they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by waging total war and do not accept the settlers' stereotypes of them. While the settlers impose their values and customs upon the natives in the towns, they also create negative images of them. For example, the settler creates the image of the ignorant, inhuman native, totally devoid of morals, values, and ethics. Often this is done through religion; the settler, who is still "bringing Christianity to the heathens" and "enlightening the natives to the ways of God," actually does little more than use religion to promote his system of secular belief. The native, instead of worshipping God, ends up worshipping the settler, a process which extends into social and political life. The settler, by developing terms which identify the natives with animalism, dehumanizes them. The terms he uses when he mentions the native are zoological. "He speaks of the yellow man's reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary" (*Wretched*; pp. 42-43). In spite of this degradation, Fanon thinks that the native mocks this constant reference to him as an animal; he knows that it is inaccurate. In fact, it is at the moment when the native realizes his humanity that he "begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure its [the revolution's] victory" (*Wretched*, p. 52).

Whether the native internalizes the picture the settler has drawn of him, the stereotypes and negative images created become literary motifs and part of colonialist culture. Though the native may unconsciously know that he is not an animal, that he is not shiftless and lazy, that he is not inferior, he is consciously bombarded with these images. The entire process makes it difficult for the native not to internalize these stereotypes, especially when one considers that the settler controls the social institutions and thus the means by which the native sees himself. He must constantly see himself through the "lens" the settler has provided, and thus at least consciously thinks of himself as an animal. The unconscious state where the native knows he is not an animal conflicts with his own aspirations and self-conception and that imposed upon him. At this point, Fanon believes the native begins the process of self-realization, to ask "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose?", questions which awaken the revolutionary impulse. Once this has happened, the native reverses the Manichaen world the settler has created. But the odds against the native are so overwhelming that

he is likely to take some time to recognize this reversal and first goes through a psychological change. He dreams of muscular prowess:

The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me. During the period of colonization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning. [*Wretched*, p. 52]

Ironically, the native does not focus this aggressiveness against the settler at this stage; he displaces it and turns against his fellow natives—"This is the period when niggers beat each other up . . ." (*Wretched*, p. 55). At this point, Fanon tries to find some outlet for the emotions bottled up inside the native during colonization. He turns to the traditional African myths, which he regards as superstitions and which he thinks have vented frustrations and exorcised fears and so impeded the cause of revolution. In fact, he goes so far as to assert that "this magical superstructure which permeate native society fulfills certain well-defined functions in the dynamism of the libido" (*Wretched*, p. 55). In spite of Fanon's objection to myths, he admits that he does not know what to make of them. "The atmosphere of myth and magic frightens me," says Fanon, "and so takes on an undoubted reality":

By terrifying me, it integrates me in the traditions and the history of my district or of my tribe, and at the same time it reassures me, it gives me a status, as it were an identification paper. In underdeveloped countries the occult sphere is a sphere belonging to the community which is entirely under magical jurisdiction. By entangling myself in this inextricable network where actions are repeated with crystalline inevitability, I find the everlasting world which belongs to me, and the perennality which is thereby affirmed of the world belonging to us. Believe me, the zombies are more terrifying than the settlers; and in consequence the problem is no longer of keeping oneself right with the colonial world and its barbed-wire entanglements, but of considering three times before urinating, spitting, or going out into the night. [*Wretched*, pp. 55-6]

This is a very interesting passage in light of the previous discussion. Fanon seems to be saying that he cannot help looking at superstitions from the enlightened, colonialist point of view; but at the same time he does not like this approach because to do so is to adopt an alien perspective. It is as if what has happened to Fanon himself is that he has been wrenched out of his cultural milieu into another, and yet been left wanting to identify with his own, which has been invaded and thus not developed naturally. He identifies



with his own culture, but is frightened by it because of its primitiveness; yet he dislikes being frightened because it is a "colonialist" reaction.

Fanon finds no place for "myths" because he thinks that they are one reason why the African has been unable to meet the challenge presented by the colonialists, the challenge to overthrow the oppression. However,

During the struggle for freedom, a marked alienation from myth is observed. . . . After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life—the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom. [*Wretched*, p. 58]

Once the native rids himself of these "myths," he is free to find new ways to channel his energies. The outlet which then presents itself is nationalist political parties. Though the political elite do not want a revolution, they are eager to use the power of the masses as leverage to obtain more power for themselves within the existing structure of society. The nationalist party structure is considered thoroughly in Fanon's analysis, for he believes that the nationalist political élite do not conduct themselves in the best interests of the lumpenproletariat. When confronted by the colonial government regarding the possibility of violence, the political élite are ambivalent. They are quick to denounce the inhuman, blind violence of the natives and to let the colonial administration know that they do not agree with the masses about violence as a means to achieve freedom and equality. This is because the political nationalist party is composed of urban people—workers, schoolteachers, artisans, and so on, who have a stake in the colonial world. They have made a small profit from the system and do not wish to see it destroyed.

The only change members of the nationalist party work for is to alter the colonial world so that they may improve their lot socially. Hence they argue and negotiate for better working hours, better wages, and so forth. The nationalist parties demand settler status, but the natives demand the settler's position. The native does not want to be equal to the settler; he wants to take his place. This is why Fanon says, "for the Black man, there is only one destiny. And it is white."<sup>5</sup> This comment has been universally misunderstood. What Fanon means is that the native adopts the psychological at-

titude that he need no longer seek acceptance by the settler. He must replace the settler. A simple reordering of society is insufficient. The native wants to live in the settler's house, eat his food, and possess his power. Since the native has nothing to lose and everything to gain, he sees the necessity of a total building of society, rebuilding which necessitates the complete destruction of the colonial world. This kind of change can occur only through violence, and it is to a discussion of the role of violence in the cause of revolution that Fanon turns.

While the native wants the total destruction of the colonial world, the political élite want no such thing. They fight to bring the settler and the native together on peaceful terms. Fanon thinks that the problem is that the settler does not want to co-exist with the native. The settler wants a structure where the native is relegated to second-class citizenship, in other words, is a black European. The native, however, wants a complete revolution, and since his desires begin to take form at this time, he chooses land as his primary objective.

For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. . . . As far as the native is concerned, morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence—in a word, to put him out of the picture. [*Wretched*, p. 200]

This conflict of interest between the native and the political élite leads to the formation of a revolutionary party which merges the concerns of both into a manifesto upon which the masses restructure society. Fanon believes that the basis for this division between the native and the political élite, or between the native and the intellectual, stems from the latter's training. Constant contact with the colonial world forces the native to consider himself as a black European. Enclosed within the colonial system and looking outward at the world around him through colonial "eyes", the native intellectual finds himself to be a person without a home; the colonialists will never accept him as a European. To them, he will always be a second-class citizen; on the other hand, by virtue of is separation from his people he is no longer an African. Fanon says that "the native intellectual loses his capacity for self-criticism through his association with the colonial intellectuals. He becomes a mouthpiece for the masses" (*Wretched*, p. 221).

The native intellectual becomes alienated from the masses because he adopts the oppressor's thinking. This poses a problem

when he tries to become part of the liberation movement. Instead of keeping the object of the struggle as his primary goal, "he gets lost in a mass of analytics and details" (*Wretched*, p. 47). He fails to see the whole movement all of the time, and divides it into compartments, singling out one for himself. On the other hand, the peasants are concerned about how to obtain land and food. Though their point of view may seem simplistic, Fanon contends that in the end it leads to the most worthwhile procedure for liberation.

The native intellectual, taught to think that individualism is the key to freedom, finds it difficult to orient his thinking to the collective aims of the liberation movement. In the movement, individualism disappears. "The native has been told that the ideal is to have a society where each person is an individual, and whose wealth is individual thought" (*Wretched*, p. 47). The native, who has the opportunity to return to his village during the struggle for freedom, discovers the falseness of this theory. He sees the cohesiveness of the peasants,

the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of the people's committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments . . . the interests of one will be the interests of all, from concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred—or everyone will be saved. . . . [*Wretched*, p. 218]

Within this framework, Fanon discusses the task of the artist during the struggle for liberation. During the period of colonization, Fanon thinks that native literature does little more than caricature the settler's literature. Aimed at achieving recognition by the colonialists, natives use settlers' stereotyped motifs for their own literature, and employ traditional European forms of artistic expression. During the struggle for liberation, the native intellectual (Fanon includes poets among intellectuals) seeks to show the masses that he is still an African. However, he often attempts to achieve this by romanticizing the traditional ways of African life in his art, as if to remind the natives of "the good old customs of the people." Political pressures force him into a schizophrenic position, from which he claims that "I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman" (*Wretched*, p. 218). He seeks to serve both the native populace and the colonial administration and hence finds himself belonging to neither. In an attempt to find a path which will lead him into a world which will resolve this tension, he tries to identify with his people, but in the wrong way. Fanon comments:

If in the world of poetry this movement reaches unaccustomed heights, the fact

remains that in the real world the intellectual often follows up a blind alley. When at the height of his intercourse with his people, whatever they were or whatever they are, the intellectual decides to come down into the common paths of real life, he only brings back from his adventuring formulas which are sterile and extreme. He sets a high value on the customs, traditions, and the appearances of his people; but his inevitable, painful experience only seems to be a banal search for exoticism. The sari becomes sacred, and shoes that come from Paris or Italy are left in favor of pampooties, while suddenly the language of the ruling power is felt to burn your lips. Finding your fellow countrymen sometimes means in this phase to will to be a nigger, not a nigger like all other niggers but a real nigger, a Negro cur, just the sort of nigger that the white man wants you to be. Going back to your own people means to become a dirty wog, to go native as much as you can, to become unrecognizable, and to cut off those wings that before you had allowed to grow. [*Wretched*, p. 220]

At this stage, through the works of native writers, Fanon traces the plight of the native intellectual: he gives proof that he has been assimilated into the settler's culture, becomes upset and decides to rediscover his roots, and finally, awakens the people. He and his work become revolutionary. From this last phase come different genres of literature. People who have probably never thought of writing before lend their creative energies to producing works of art. An example of this is the development of prison literature as a recognizable genre in oppressed societies. Here Fanon traces historically the native poet's move from assimilation, which he designates as "rhyming poetry," to the poetry of revolt. The poet must first concede that he is separated from his people, and second, that he cannot write about their universal situation. By doing so, he frees himself from his dilemma and can write about his particular experiences.

Fanon is ambiguous regarding the importance of art during the struggle for liberation. Though he argues for the need for natives to develop a "national literature" from their present literature, he turns around to say that "it is around the peoples' struggles that African-Negro culture takes on substance, and not around songs, poems, or folklore" (*Wretched*, p. 238). Yet, one can sense in Fanon the desire to make literature more directly responsive to the needs of oppressed people. To Fanon, literature has the potential to shape the movement.

It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national literature. Here there is, at the level of literary creation, the taking up and clarification of themes which are typically nationalist. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is a literature of combat, because it molds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty ex-

pressed in terms of time and space. . . . The oral tradition—stories, epics, and songs of the people—which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. [*Wretched*, p. 240]

Fanon asserts:

The contact of the people with the new movement gives rise to a new rhythm of life and to forgotten muscular tensions, and develops the imagination. Every time the storyteller relates a fresh episode to his public, he presides over a real invocation. The existence of a new type of man is revealed to the public. The present is no longer turned in upon itself but spread out for all to see. The storyteller once more gives free rein to his imagination; he makes innovations and he creates a work of art. It even happens that the characters, which are barely ready for such a transformation—highway robbers or more or less anti-social vagabonds—are taken up and remodeled. The emergence of the imagination and of the creative urge in the songs and epic stories of a colonized country is worth following. The storyteller replies to the expectant people by successive approximations, and makes his way, apparently alone but in fact helped on by his public, toward the seeking out of new patterns. Comedy and farce disappear, or lose their attraction. As for dramatization, it is no longer placed on the plane of the troubled intellectual and his tormented conscience. By losing its characteristics of despair and revolt, the drama becomes part of the common lot of the people and forms part of an action in preparation or already in progress. [*Wretched*, p. 241]

Once the people see the need for revolution and the means by which to achieve it—violence—they have moved into Fanon's second stage in the development of a revolutionary mentality. In an effort to circumvent an armed revolt, the colonialists introduce the idea of non-violence to the political élite. The colonialists seek to compromise with it, but not with the peasants. This compromise is important in Fanon's analysis because it is not a simple coming to terms between the settler and the natives. "Compromise involves the colonial system and the young nationalist bourgeoisie at one and the same time" (*Wretched*, p. 64). It is attractive to the nationalist bourgeoisie because they do not want to be caught up in violence. The political élite loudly proclaim that they have nothing to do with the terrorists and shut themselves "off in a no man's land between the terrorists and the settlers and willingly offers his services as go-between; that is to say, that as the settlers cannot discuss terms with the terrorists, he himself will be quite willing to begin negotiations" (*Wretched*, p. 62).

Others, confounded by the magnitude of the revolutionary task, throw up their hands in despair. However, the natives who see

violence as the only way to achieve freedom use guerilla warfare to fight the settlers. Once this develops, the colonialists respond to the threat of violence by invoking religion against it. "All those saints who have turned the other cheek, who have forgiven trespass against them, and who have been spat on and insulted without shrinking are studied and held up as examples" (*Wretched*, p. 93).

This violence, however, does not occur spontaneously; it has its roots in the development of the peasants' revolutionary mentality. Fanon believes that nine things lead to the outbreak of violence: the peasants become restless; the nationalist parties become more active in their attempts to act as a buffer for the peasants' violence; the police and soldiers become more active in the peasants' zone; the colonial authorities begin to arrest native political leaders, and start to organize the armed forces to display their power; the armed forces fail to impede the spontaneous outbreaks of violence by the peasants; the peasants engage in more frequent acts of spontaneous violence; the colonialists, in an attempt to end these outbreaks, commit mass slaughters of natives, which has the opposite effect of spurring the natives to more violence and increased national consciousness; the colonialists, responding to political pressures and the threat of violence, release previously captured political leaders; the nationalist parties finally begin to break down and to lose their influence in the colonial world. The militants outdistance them in their efforts to gain recognition from the colonialists.

The first part of Fanon's myth is completed by the formulation of the lumpenproletariat. This is done when the rural natives move their violence from the country to the town. Once this happens, the movement incorporates into it the so-called "scum" of society; the revolutionary group is then complete. Led by recently freed political leaders, the lumpenproletariat wages total war on the colonialists and drives them out of the country. At this point, Fanon sees violence, which has been given purpose and form by the political leaders, as the forming element for the new nation. "The armed struggle," he writes,

unifies the people, and violence begins to shape the new nation of the future. The mobilization of the masses introduces them to the ideas of a common cause, or a national destiny, and of a collective history. The second phase, the building of a new nation, is helped on by the existence of this cement which has been mixed with blood and anger. [*Wretched*, pp. 98-99]

The native, cleansed of his inferiority complex, must now devote his efforts to restructuring society so that it will benefit all. This

new nation, combined with the other surrounding nations which are struggling for freedom, becomes the "Third World." Fanon romanticizes his vision of it and puts it at odds with the world of the Europeans and the Westerners. For Fanon, the task of the Third World is

not to choose between the capitalist and socialist systems. The Third World must find their own particular values and methods, and a style which is peculiar to them. Individuals must work for the collective aims of society. The Third World must redefine itself, not in the image of the Europeans or the Westerners, but in its own image. [*Wretched*, p. 230]

Since "Europe is literally the creation of the Third World, members of the new nation must look to Europe for repayment" (*Wretched*, p. 102).

There are certain drawbacks in the structure of the new nation which make it more difficult for the Third World to succeed in its endeavors. For one thing, after the fight for liberation the nationalist party begins to adopt the features of the colonial power. Moreover, the struggle between the rural and urban people takes a different form in the nationalist period from that taken during the colonial one. Urban dwellers, in an attempt to keep rural dwellers in their place, assume a type of dictatorship. The nationalist party uses this conflict between urban and rural dwellers to secure more power for itself. This process is soon reversed; instead of obtaining more power, the nationalist party seals its own doom. This period of decline is characterized as follows: Once the settlers are expelled, the national middle class, which is little more than an underdeveloped middle class, takes over the government; this new ruling power concerns itself with race over nation and tribe over state and maintaining its influence over the peasants; faced with a depleted economy, the nationalist party turns to Europe to maintain its only source of income. Since the ruling class does not change its mode of production, "it remains a small farmer for Europe, who specializes in exporting unfinished products" (*Wretched*, p. 161).

Fanon thinks that these problems, combined with tribalism, lead to the new nation's downfall. The colonialists are aware of these developments and use the separate movements to regain a foothold in the liberated country. The nationalist party aids this resurgence of colonial authority by issuing statements intended to degrade the peasants and contribute to separatism. This struggle prepares the new nation for neo-colonialism. Concerning the nationalist party's tendency to degrade the peasants, Fanon says:

religious tension may be responsible for the revival of the commonest racial feeling. Africa is divided into Black and White, and the names that are substituted—Africa South of the Sahara, Africa North of the Sahara—do not manage to hide this latent racism. Here, it is affirmed that White Africa has a thousand-year-old tradition of culture; that she is Mediterranean, that she is a continuation of Europe, and that she shares in Greco-Latin civilization. Black Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilized, in a word, savage. There, all day long you may hear unpleasant remarks about veiled women, polygamy, and the supposed disdain the Arabs have for the feminine sex. All such remarks are reminiscent in their aggressiveness of those that are so often heard coming from the settler's lips. [*Wretched*, p. 161]

This racial prejudice develops in the new nationalist bourgeoisie and leads the new ruling power to assume a dictatorial stance. the bourgeoisie chooses the single party system because it is the easiest: "The single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous, and cynical" (*Wretched*, p. 165). This single party, incapable of sustaining the economy of the new nation independent of European finances, opens the channels for European influence. At this point "neo-colonialism sets in, and the colonial power strengthens its hold on the country by increasing its demands and takes fewer pains to mask the hold it has over the national government" (*Wretched*, p. 217). In short, the political leader of the new nation becomes an agent for the colonialists, and manipulates and pacifies his people.

Here the political party begins to work against the people, and seeks to send them back to the caves. To pacify the populace, the political party promotes the concept of free and open competition, whereby everyone is made equal. The country people, who have been systematically excluded from profiting from their labor, flock to the cities and suburbs, and abandon their fields in the hope of securing enough capital to rise to middle class. At this point, there is tension between the intellectuals and the common people and between rural and urban people. A national crisis thus arises which has five characteristics: tension between the intellectuals and the common people increases; the intellectuals begin to use technical language to persuade the common people that they need to be managed from above; the new ruling power creates a class system in which the poor work for the rich and not for the benefit of the nation; the young of the new nation become susceptible to harmful influences from the western sphere (i.e., detective novels, slot machines, pornographic movies and literature, and above all, alcohol); the new ruling class fails to give the masses adequate political education.



In Fanon's analysis, neo-colonialism is more of a threat to national culture than colonialism. Neo-colonialism gives the impression that the new nation is functioning for the benefit of all, when in reality the political leaders are like puppets, following the dictates of the colonial administration. Fanon offers no solution to this problem. Instead, he turns to a critique of national culture, which he says is not specifically a move toward a national culture, but a movement toward Negro-African culture or the Arab-Muslim culture. Instead of promoting unanimity within the country and the Third World, the new nation concerns itself with protecting its particular interests.

Here Fanon re-evaluates his own creation of the positive and negative zones, and separates it into three stages: the death of the old culture; the rebirth of imagination and the reviewing of forms of expression; the creation of a national culture and the Third World. He asks: whether the national movement is a cultural phenomenon or not. It appears to me that we can see the struggle itself as an outward manifestation of a culture asserting itself against an alien system imposed upon the native's culture. Through this struggle, the new culture becomes national, only to die and then rebuild on its own ruins. This constant struggle to create a national culture gives Fanon's myth temporality—the continual creation and destruction of a national culture resists stasis and thus frustrates the efforts of those who seek to make it a system of belief.

To sum up, Fanon's myth has two parts: colonization and decolonization and the creation of a new society. Colonization is accomplished when the colonial power violates the human rights of the natives. Next is the period in which the natives assimilate the settlers' system through language. During this period, the natives become black Europeans, absorbing and internalizing the settlers' values and beliefs. Stereotypes then develop and become part of the culture and the motifs of literature and art. Finally, the natives are either totally assimilated into the colonial world or merely use the stereotypes created by the settlers.

The second phase begins with the awakening in the natives of the need for revolution and the recognition of violence as the means by which to achieve their goal. During this phase, there is a decline in the traditional superstitions which impede the revolution and the development of a nationalist political party. This is followed by antagonism between urban and rural people and spontaneous outbreaks of violence by the latter. Through co-opting the intellectuals

and the political leaders, the colonialists buy time, seeking to pacify revolutionaries. Nonetheless, when political leaders are released from prison and join the peasants, the lumpenproletariat forms and leads the struggle for liberation.

In the second phase, the revolutionaries threaten the town with spontaneous violence. They are joined by the scum of society, and the lumpenproletariat is finally completely formed and ready to wage war against the colonial powers. Once they expel the settlers from their land, the violence of the revolutionary group begins to shape the new nation. Once it is shaped, however, it is plagued by some of the same problems that confronted it during the colonial period. When neo-colonialism sets in, the new nation crumbles and then attempts to rebuild itself, which is never fully completed in Fanon's myth, since he lacks a vision of a completed society.

## 5. The Utility of Literary Artifacts

A WORK OF LITERATURE which addresses itself only to the social conditions from which it sprang is condemned to die, so to speak. The number of possibilities the work contains is soon exhausted, and when the social conditions surrounding it are no longer visible, neither is the work. By focusing on the role of the artist in the movement, Third World activists force their artists to create a literature which serves the interests of only a small group of people. Looking back at the sixties, I. A. Baraka says that, "I was under the spell of the white man." This movement finally took an unexpected turn; by writing poems to combat "whitey," the black poet was, in fact, giving credence to the system he wished to destroy. His poems became little more than prose statements attesting to his inhumanity.

This problem revolves around the "use" of a literary object. Nearly every work of art had some kind of social function in its own era which probably had little or nothing to do with its aesthetic nature. The category assigned to works of art once they have proven to address themselves to more than the social conditions from which they belong, to the author's life and so on, is really a sophisticated abstraction which at best is an attempt to emphasize the work's enduring nature, and, at worst, is simply a reflection of social and ideological beliefs.

Whether or not we assign literary artifacts to a timeless imaginative function is largely a matter of convention, of social acceptance. The task of criticism is to determine where a work belongs. My argument has been with social and political approaches to Fanon's writings. Such approaches when practised in their most simplistic, "vulgar," senses ignore the nature of Fanon's writings as literary artifacts which have an integrity of their own and are not merely imitations of social reality or separate responses to alienation. Fanon himself saw them as creative visions of the process of liberation from the imposing colonial force and the making of a new social order based on the internal dynamics of the native culture.

The utility of Fanon's works changes as they move in time away from the Algerian revolution. They become a linguistic structure, an autonomous language, which must be seen first as independent of reality, and, second, as creative of reality and a product of external phenomena. It is useful to draw a relationship between the language of mathematics and the language of an open myth such as Fanon's. One does not ask what the language reflects; one does not try to find the numerical equivalents of mathematics in nature. We study it, first, as a symbolic system which has meaning and coherence in terms of its relationship to other symbols in the structure. Later, once one has understood this process, one is able to relate mathematics to the phenomenal world by translating external reality into the language of mathematics. In this way, mathematics both creates and describes reality; its "use" is in its being understood first as a symbolic system independent of reality, and, second, as a potential shaper of reality.

I think that we must consider Fanon's writings as works of art, similar to mathematics. The language of art is paradoxical, and must be judged in terms of its possibilities, not in terms of its practical utility. The language of paradox speaks to the imagination and is an independent set of relationships which, when taken together, form a coherent system. The value of Fanon's works is in their ability to incorporate paradox and their forcing one to see that these paradoxes are clear indications that the work contains an unlimited number of possibilities. Fanon's writings are a sort of icon, from which we may abstract discursive statements. In this way, Fanon's writings become constitutive of reality, and contain the external world.

Fanon's structure, as an icon, is a source from which we may abstract partial interpretations without exhausting its potential power to emit discursive statements which may shape reality. The use of Fanon's myth lies in its ability to resist stasis and closure and to give us as readers a way of looking at social conditions at once applicable to our own condition and to the universal condition of mankind.

My concern has been to establish the "openness" of Fanon's writings, and to examine analyses by critics who have approached Fanon's works with a decided slant which influenced their perceptions. Most of those who have written on Fanon have done so to ascertain the social function of his work. This stance is not necessarily wrong, and one can see Fanon's work in this way. But any method of studying aesthetic fictions which does not consider a

work both as an autonomous entity and as an object intended for social use, ignores much of the original function of the work. An approach such as the one described here is incomplete. Criticism of aesthetic fictions must concern itself with the work as an autonomous language, as creative of a law-abiding society which can be found only by analyzing the internal formal properties of the work on its own terms. We must not allow ourselves to extend sociological theories *ad nauseam* into other areas of creative endeavor which have little or nothing to do with studying human behavior and cultural phenomena, if such an analysis is conceivable given its obvious contradiction. Human beings are form-making creatures. We create and reason through symbols. These symbols and forms are neither totally independent of social reality, nor totally subject to social laws.

I have not argued for an art for art's sake position since such a philosophy is the product of a particular class consciousness and has a decidedly Western bias. On the other hand, I have not argued for art as social force, since this position was developed largely in response to aestheticism, yet shares many of the same fallacies of art for art's sake. Any work of art valuable to cultural participants clearly stimulates and educates the imagination by bringing the dormant cultural mores and values to the attention of the critical audience in a manner which is accessible and relevant to the critical audience through linguistic shaping. In order to determine which works perform this function for a wider audience than that of the work at a given time, we must begin by treating the aesthetic artifact first as an object which gives us a clue to its nature vis-à-vis its linguistic structure, second as a creative force which addresses itself to the human activity of form-making, and third, as a manifestation of social and ideological forces.

The tripartite analysis I have offered will not devalue the aesthetic object or place it in a mystical, élite category reserved for socially useless human products which speak to a privileged class. This kind of analysis defines the work as culturally important by insisting that its utility is at least twofold: the work helps the reader see cultural mores and values of which he may not have otherwise been aware, and it insists that human creations (societies, cultures, institutions) are not fixed, but can and should be subjected to critical scrutiny by each member of society.

Fanon's writings are important to us because they help us understand the importance of the critical act as it relates both to criticism of literary artifacts and to social institutions and processes.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. F. M. Gottheil, "Fanon and the Economics of Colonialism: A Review Article," *Quarterly Review of Economics and Business*, Autumn 1967, p. 78.
2. Albert Memmi, "Review of Peter Geismar, *Fanon*, and David Cauter, *Frantz Fanon*," *New York Times Book Review*, March 14, 1971, p. 5.
3. Adele L. Jinadu, "Some Aspects of the Political Philosophy of Frantz Fanon," *African Studies Review* 16:2 (1973), pp. 255-89.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
5. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
7. Eliseo Vivas, "The Object of the Poem," *Creation and Discovery*, 1955, reprinted in Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory since Plato* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 1069-77.

## I. FANON AND THE DEVOURERS

1. Peter Geismar, *Fanon: The Revolutionary as Prophet* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1969), p. 12. All other references to this work are made parenthetically in the text.
2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, quoted in the preface to the French edition.
3. Since the completion of this chapter a number of sociological works on Fanon have been published, most notably Emmanuel Hansen's *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976). Hansen's book, however, does not really concern the problem with sociological approaches to Fanon, since he is interested in demonstrating that Fanon's thought is cohesive. This is the first major work on Fanon by an African scholar, so, in a sense, Hansen gives us a view of Fanon and his writings from within the cultural setting Fanon describes.
4. Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. 114.
5. Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. xxi.
6. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, second edition, 1955), p. 277.

## 2. CALIBAN AND PROSPERO

1. Frantz Fanon, "The Negro and Language," *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 10. All other references to this work are made parenthetically in the text.

2. W. E. B. Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. 45.

3. Quoted in the preface to the French edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

4. Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 32. The following three references to this work are made parenthetically in the text.

### 3. WE WEAR THE MASK

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), pp. 151-52. All other references to this work are made parenthetically in the text.

### 4. THE DISARMING VISION

1. I use the term "intrinsic society" in the sense that a work of art is an autonomous entity, that the language of the work addresses the imagination, and that the work is, first, to be considered independent of social reality.

2. Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968).

3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963), p. 40. All other references to this work are made parenthetically in the text.

4. As Fanon uses the term "lumpenproletariat," it refers to the mixture of the peasants and urban dwellers in the revolutionary class. Here, Fanon differs from Marx, who ascribed the process of revolution to the working class. Fanon sees the working class as an integral part of the colonial society, and thus, only marginally a revolutionary class.

5. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), p. 58.

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