HOW TO MAKE LOVE TO A NEGRO:
BUT WHAT IF I GET TIRED?
TRANSCULTURATION AND ITS (PARTIAL) NEGATION
IN AND THROUGH TRANSLATION

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Dany Laferrière’s first novel, Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre was a literary sensation when it was first released in Quebec in the mid-80s. The author/narrator plays with reader’s expectations, presenting both a stereotypical image of the black man (sex-obsessed, white-hating) and one that contradicts and upsets their expectations. Influenced by English, American, Eastern, European and South American cultures, traditions and literature, the narrator/author plays with them all, creating an effective satire of contemporary culture.

But some of this transculturality is lost in the translation. An off-handed comment made by Laferrière to David Homel, the translator, works to negate the transcultural influences of the novel, “Don’t worry about the translation. The book’s already in English. Just the words are in French.” The translator, as a result, refuses to see the other possible influences in the novel, and refuses to translate certain non-anglo aspect. This paper will show how the translation of Comment faire amour avec un Nègre negates the idea of transculturalism and in fact acts, to a certain degree, to assimilate the text. This is not to say that the translation is a complete “failure”, but it does illustrate the possible limitations of the process of translation.
Comment faire amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer, Dany Laferrière’s first novel, is loosely based on the author’s own experiences during his early years in Montreal. Laferrière’s self-aware narrator uses humor in order to examine the predominant sexual and racial hierarchies in North American society. In French, the title communicates the irony, parody and playfulness that is prevalent in the novel. It invokes a stereotype, a stereotype of the black sex god, an image central to the plot, but an image that is ultimately refuted and rejected. It reminds us of “How to” instruction manuals, then immediately laughs at our expectations: here is a book on how not to be exhausted by the black sex god. However, the second half of this not-so-subtle subtext is lost in the translated title: How To Make Love to a Negro. Its dry tone leaves the opposite impression on the English reader: we no longer expect humor, and in fact we no longer know what to expect.

Jana Evans Braziel (2003: 867-8) goes as far as to say that the omission of the latter part of the title in the English translation reveals something profoundly significant about American (and Canadian) sexual representation of black masculinity which the American racial machine désirante (“desiring machine”): the stereotype of the violently aggressive, hypersexualized, insatiable black man...marks the exhaustion of the cultural imaginary that always frames black men.

Braziel, in her study of Laferrière’s work, chose to “focus on Laferrière’s textual and intellectual engagements with other black men (artists and writers)” (ibid 869). Her choice highlights something important about the impact of the translation/transmission of the text into English: the translation’s negation of other, more transcultural readings of Laferrière first novel. It is important to note that while Braziel works with the original French text, she nonetheless shares many of the same myopic interpretations of the text as the English translation. This interpretive consensus suggests that an examination of both the English translation and the English criticism of Laferrière’s work to see whether they both negate the same textual aspects, and thereby affect the Anglo readers’ perceptions of his work in the same manner, would prove to be valuable.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the translation of Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer, as well as the work of a number of critics, has negated or ignored a number of non-American cultural influences on the text in order to appropriate the novel completely into the Anglo-American tradition. It will begin by showing how and to what extent Laferrière’s novel (and to a greater extent his entire project) is transcultural in nature. It will then move on to reveal how Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre, despite statements to the contrary, actually challenges Anglo-American hegemony through a multiplicity of transcultural references. Finally, it will seek to demonstrate how a number of omissions/decisions in the translation affect the text, as well as critical responses to the novel, in terms of its transcultural content.

"...JE NE VEUX PLUS DE FRONTIÈRE"

Few scholars would argue that Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer is not a transcultural novel. In fact, Fernando Ortiz’s original definition (1970: 102-3) seems to have been written to describe Laferrière’s first novel:

[The word transculturation better express[es] the different phases of the process of the transition from one culture into another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of the previous culture, which could not be defined as deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon, which could be called neoculturation. In the end...the result of every union of cultures]
is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.

Laferrière, however, resists easy categorization or label. He tells an interviewer: “My intention [with his first novel] was to get away from the beaten path of our [Haitian] literature. What society expects is a pain in the ass” (qtd. in Coates 1999: 911). In other interviews, Laferrière goes as far as renouncing his association with his home island and the entire region: “Déjà le mot ‘Caraïbe’, comme le mot ‘Antilles’, ne me plaisait pas. Je les trouvais trop liés à la colonisation... Je ne suis pas un écrivain typique d’Haïti, de la Caraïbe ou du Tiers-Monde. J’écris comme je veux.” (qtd. in Lobelt 2002).

While elsewhere he revolts against any label whatsoever, including “black”:

Je suis condamné, quel que soit la posture que je prends, à me faire coller une étiquette sur le dos [écrivain immigrant, écrivain ethnique, écrivain caraïbéen, écrivain du mé联谊issage, écrivain postcolonial, écrivain noir]...Voilà, je le redis pour la centième fois, au cas où vous auriez manqué le début: Je veux être pris pour écrivain, et les seuls adjectifs acceptables dans ce cas-là sont : un “bon” écrivain... ou un “mauvais” écrivain... On me traite aussi d’ “écrivain nègre.” Qu’est-ce qu’il ne faut pas entendre! (J’écris 105)

It is this rejection of traditional borders and labels that leads Laferrière into the realm of transculturation. As Alvina Ruprecht notes, “Laferrière rejects any kind of unique origin either in terms of his own lived experience or in terms of his aesthetic and linguistic production” (Ruprecht 1995: 255). The author becomes like Jacques Poulin’s old Volkswagen, which Winfried Siemerling considers a metaphor for transculturalism: “a mobile and open vehicle moving through cultures that collects traces of other cultures –yet becomes a container nonetheless” (Siemerling 1998: 195). As stated by Laferrière himself: “Profon-
Laferrière's narrator is (or tries to be) an international man of books. He is constantly reading books by authors from all over the world. Near the end of the novel, the narrator, in a fit of writer's block, describes his surroundings and gets to describing the contents of his bookshelf:

Hemingway, Miller, Cendras, Bukosky, Freud, Proust, Cervantes, Borges, Cortazar, Dos Passos, Mishima, Apollinaire, Ducharme, Cohen, Villon, Lévy Beaulieu, Fennario, Himes, Baldwin, Wright, Pavese, Aquin, Quevedo, Ousmane, J-S Alexis, Roumain, G. Roy, De Quincey, Marquez, Jong, Alejo Carpentier, Atwood, Asturias, Amado, Fuentes, Kerouac, Corso, Handke, Limonov, Yourcenar. (Comment faire 103)

The influences are also apparent in reading the very structure of the narrative: the titles of chapters are often taken from various literary and cultural sources, including Conrad (“Le Nègre narcissé”), René-Guy Cadou (“Le Nègre est du règne vegetal”), photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (“Comme une fleur au bout de ma pine nègre”) and Simone de Beauvoir (“On ne naît pas Nègre, on le devient”). Franz Fanon is evoked throughout the novel (this will be addressed more fully farther down), as is Freud. Bouba, the narrator’s roommate, quotes extensively from the Koran. The list could go on, but for now, it is sufficient to say that Laferrière’s narrator’s cultural and textual influences span the globe, reflecting the author’s borderless taste in literature.

Most, if not all critics recognize Laferrière’s playful and ironic approach to his subject matter. They acknowledge that the author plays with racial and sexual stereotypes in order to critique and challenge the status quo. However, many critics examine only certain parts of the text as parody or satire; other parts are taken at face value. One such aspect is the statement: “L’AMÉRIQUE EST UN TOUT” (Comment faire 29). This declaration, made by the narrator at the end of the fifth chapter, has been the basis of many studies of Comment faire that focused solely on the American influences in the novel. This perspective is evident in a number of critics, such as Jana Evans Braziel, Daniel Coleman, and Anne Marie Miralia. Their studies also tended to focus almost exclusively on the African-American influences on the author, either to the exclusion or assimilation of other cultural sources.\(^3\)

Alvina Ruprecht, however, suggests that the statement, “L’AMÉRIQUE EST UN TOUT,” should be considered as part of “the ironic play that is fundamental to his literary production.” She argues that this reflects the author’s desire to “grasp [America] in its totality with all its differences” (Ruprecht 1995: 254). One does not need to look very far into Laferrière’s novel to find the author undercutting his own statement. The list of cultural influences and textual references is in no way limited to the United States. Ruprecht quotes Laferrière saying that “Amérique, c’est moi,” and then goes on to show how this is an equally ironic statement that recalls at least three different cultural heritages (Haitian, French and Cuban) (ibid 254-5). Again, one needs to be on guard with Laferrière’s fictional creation and consider carefully his novel’s words.

“THE BOOK’S ALREADY IN ENGLISH”

This brings us to the translation, How to Make Love to a Negro, by David Homel. The translation itself was generally well-received.\(^4\) But, rather than focusing on the critical reception of the translation, I will focus on some of the negations and misinterpretations made by the translator, while also showing how these negations and misinterpretations are not isolated, but are actually reinforced by the writings of a collection of critics. In a subsequent article, Homel (1995: 48-9) outlines the relative ease he experienced translating the novel:

\(^3\) It should be noted that much of the Québécois criticism of the text focuses on how Laferrière successfully incorporates and recalls many Québécois cultural and textual references. Included in that group are Simon, Purdy, Vachon, Clarke, Naudin and De Souza.

\(^4\) See Godard, Braziel, Grady, Simon and Rigeleff. For a more negative review of the novel in English, see Lenowski.
When I first met Laferrière and his books in 1986, just after Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer came out, and the subject of an English version came up, he assured me confidently, “Don’t worry about the translation. The book’s already in English. Just the words are in French.”

An outrageous yet sensible claim; a justified claim, as it turned out. The patron saints of the work are Charlie Parker and Sigmund Freud and Henry Miller, with a liberal dose of the Koran. There is a manic, immigrant energy there that is perfectly suitable for the English language (some would say that the energy is the English language). Since it turned out that Laferrière was right—that the book was indeed already in English—I had the rare and delicious opportunity to do what all translators secretly want to do: outwrite the work, outdo it, be better than the original, the attempt at which is the duty of all translators.

While Laferrière has stated elsewhere that he had wanted to write the novel in English (if only he had been able), and that it was in fact written to the “beat américain” (J’écris 224), and while there certainly is no doubt about the extent of the Anglo-American influence on the novel, issues do arise with how far Homel goes to support Laferrière’s statement. The Koran is not an “English” text in any sense of the word, although translations obviously do exist. There exists a certain hegemonic influence in the claim that English is the sole language capable of capturing the immigrant experience. The domesticating tendency expressed by the translator transferred itself into the translation, certainly helping the novel become “better than the original” for an Anglo audience.

Accepting that the novel is in fact an “English” novel negates other non-Anglo influences and the linguistic tensions Laferrière exploits in his work. Central to the narrative (and to the novel’s commercial and critical success in Quebec) was that the narrator sleeps with rich, English girls. These conquests are readily and repeatedly associated with the colonizing forces in history, which is ironic in this context due to the fact that Haiti was colonized by the French. But importantly they also represent a perceived colonizing force on the French in Quebec. While the narrator was bedding the rich English girls the French in Quebec, the initial audience for the book, were cheering him on. The linguistic politics of this novel are as important as the sexual and racial ones. Laferrière recalls nationalist authors Pierre Vallières (Nègres blancs d’Amérique) and Michèlle Lalande (“Speak White”), among others. Going back to the quote from the novel above, of the 40 authors listed, more than two thirds are of non-American origin, and almost 10 are Québécois in origin. Laferrière includes in this list of Québécois authors two problematic names: Leonard Cohen and Gabrielle Roy. Cohen is an Anglo-Montreal Jewish writer, while Gabrielle Roy is a Franco-Manitoban. Laferrière thereby manages to simultaneously celebrate Québécois literature, by placing it within the same framework of other world authors, and call that nomenclature into question, with one author who is clearly from Quebec but excluded from the tradition because of his language and one who has been appropriated into the designation. Regardless, the culture that Laferrière absorbed while living in Quebec is evident through this passage.

Another omission of the Québécois influence is the reference in the title of Chapter Fifteen, “Nous voici Nègres métropolitains,” to Émile Ollivier, author of the poem of the same title and one of the first Haitian writers in Quebec (Comment faire 83). Laferrière puts an asterisk at the end of the title and footnotes Ollivier’s name at the bottom of the page. The chapter is the narrator’s experience of interacting with other Black immigrants in Quebec, regardless of their origin. Those other Blacks in the bar that the narrator speaks to have been through the October Crisis and countless Quebec winters. Both the title and the content of the chapter imply a history and a tradition that exists in Quebec, that Blacks in Quebec are not a new phenomenon. But this connection to Quebec history is partially lost in the translation when Homel simply puts “Negros at the Exile Café” and makes no reference to Ollivier (How to 66). In fact, the critic Daniel Coleman, working
exclusively with the English translation, goes as far as to say that the novel “never once mentions an African-Canadian figure,” signaling out Emile Ollivier specifically, and that “little is made of the French-English conflict that runs throughout Quebec’s political history” (Coleman 1998: 79). This conclusion is a direct result of the translation and the choices of the translator.

Coleman also chides Laferrière for not more effectively “elaborating the kind of analogy between the oppression of Africans and that of the Québécoises (sic) developed in Pierre Vallières’s Nègres blancs d’Amérique” (Coleman 1998: 79). The original French title of the novel, Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer, obviously recalls the original French title of Vallières’s book. But this immediate association is in part lost with the English translations of the two titles. Vallières’s title becomes White Niggers of America, while Laferrière’s book becomes How to Make Love to a Negro. Homel addresses the challenge presented to him in the title with the use of the word “nègre” in his preface to his translation: “The problems started as early as the title...I finally decided on ‘Negro’... ‘Negro’ is outdated, it smells of pre-Black Power liberalism, and because of those echoes it is particularly well suited to Laferrière’s satirical content” (How to 10). One can also imagine that a novel titled How to Make Love to a Nigger would not elicit the desired response in the reader; but it would create an immediate association with Vallières’s manifesto.

Another scene that recalls Vallières, as well as exposes flaws in the translation, is in Chapter 9, the scene in the post-office. The narrator is verbally attacked by Miz Cheveux Ras, and then defended by “un syndicaliste typique” (Comment 50). This is a direct reference to Vallières’s Marxist approach to Quebec history, and his call for the “travailleurs du Quebec d’apprendre a se tenir debout et d’exiger, de prendre ce qui leur appartient de droit” (Vallières 24). The speech that the “typical union man” (How to 44) offers in defense of Laferrière’s narrator, however, problematizes the statement that Vallières makes. “qu’il n’y a pas, au Quebec, de ‘problème noir’” (Vallières 1968: 26). In the speech, the union man tries to show solidarity of a sort with the narrator (much like what Vallières attempts to do in his book), but instead patronizes and silences the narrator: “Il ne faut pas tout mélangé, dit-il, un emmerdeur est un emmerdeur et les Nègres ne sont pas tous des emmerdeurs. Si vous dites ça des Nègres, alors que doivent dire les Nègres de nous autres, les colonialistes. Moi aussi, je crois que la drague est dégradante pour la femme mais que vaut une innocente drague à côté de la Traite des Nègres?” (Comment faire 50-1). The problem in the translation lies in how Homel chooses to translate the word “Nègre” in the exchange. In the original French version, Miz Cheveux Ras, the narrator and the union man all use the word “Nègre.” In the translation, Homel translates “Nègre” as “nigger” in Miz Shaved Head’s speech: “And it’s not just the niggers!” (How to 43). Immediately afterwards in the text, Homel reverts back to using Negro when the narrator states: “But to attack...the tradition of the Negroes is going to far” (ibid 44). And when the union man speaks, “black” is used instead; “lots of guys hassle women and not all of them are black. If you think that about blacks, what do you think they think of us?” (ibid 44). In the original, it is important that the same term is used; the same term that Vallières uses, the same term used by Miz Cheveux Ras, by the narrator and by the union man. In the translation, the union man appears to be aware in part of the implications of his speech by using the “softer” term, black. In the original, it is important that there is no such distinction, much like there is no distinction in Vallières.

**CADOU, GIDE, AND THE SMELL LEFT BEHIND**

The Québécois literary tradition is not the only French-language tradition Laferrière incorporates into his novel. Chapter Four presents another problem in the translation of non-Anglo American transcultural references. The title, “Le Nègre est du règne végétal,” is a reference
to French poet René-Guy Cadou's collection of poetry, *Hélène ou le règne végétal*. While the translation itself is accurate, "The Negro is of the Vegetable Kingdom," the reference of the title to the French poet risks being lost because Cadou's complete collection of poems is unavailable in translation. If the reader has not been informed through other points of the narrative to be attentive for non-Anglo-American influences, it becomes doubly hard to recognize the English title of a book that has never been published in English. The problem is compounded further in the chapter when the narrator restates the reference within the text. The complete passage reads as follows in French:

Miz Littérature a laissé son odeur dans la salle de bain. Gide rapporte dans son journal (*Retour de Tchad*) que ce qui l'avait frappé en Afrique, c'était l'odeur. Une odeur fortement épiceée. Odeur de feuilles. LE NÉGREGU EST DU RÈGNE VÉGÉTAL. Les Blancs oublient toujours qu'ils ont, eux aussi, une odeur. La plupart des filles de McGill sentent la poudre Bébé Johnson (*Comment 25*).

The poem "Hélène ou le règne végétal" is a love poem that places the beloved Hélène in perfect harmony with nature and bestows in her the power to rejuvenate both the narrator and nature: "Penche-toi à l'oreille un peu basse du tréfle/Avertis les chevaux que la terre est sauvée/Dis-leur que tout est bon des cigués et des ronces/Qu'il a suffi de ton amour pour tout changer" (*Cadou 1966: 19*). Cadou concludes with the following lines, "Quand tu es loin de moi tu es toujours présente / Tu demeurs dans l'air comme une odeur de pain/Je t'attendsrai cent ans mais déjà tu es mienne/Par toutes ces prairies que tu portes en toi." This echoes Gide's statement about the smell of Africa, combining the smell of food and the smell of nature, as well as the narrator's observation about "Blancs" having a smell as well. What is interesting about this passage is the juxtaposition of two images within the statement "Le Nègre est du règne végétal," as well as the change from "Hélène ou le règne végétal." It at once recalls the primitive native that Gide writes about in his travel narratives, but also calls upon the possibility of a more concrete form of redemption than that one offered by Hélène in Cadou's poem. Most importantly, however, is that this subtext is lost in the translation.

What makes this omission all the more startling is Homel's decision not to translate the title of Gide's book in his translation; it remains in a parenthetical aside as *Retour de Tchad* (*How to 23*). It is worth noting that *Retour de Tchad* does appear in English translation, but as a second part to *Travels in the Congo*. Gide is also certainly more well known in English than Cadou.* Nevertheless, Homel leaves Gide's title in French while translating Cadou's. Gide and his travel narratives are important within Laferrière's narrative in terms of the documentation of the French colonial history in Africa, as well as a reflection of Laferrière's own ambiguous treatment of race relations. Gide at once was critical of French colonial practices on the African continent and concending and paternalistic treatment towards the natives he encountered. The reference to Gide also reminds the reader once again that the crimes of colonialism are not limited to those who speak the English language.*

Homel has decided, however, that the reference to Gide is more significant than the reference to Cadou through his translation, negating an important transcultural aspect of the text.

**"NÉGRITUDE" AND FANON**

By only acknowledging the novel's Anglo-American influences, Homel negates the important impact that French Negro thought has on the sensibility of the narrative. In Chapter Two, Laferrière introduces the term "négritude," which is a play on the concept on "négritude," a

5 A quick search of the MLA database is by no means conclusive, but certainly revealing: A search for René Guy Cadou generates 23 references (22 from the same journal) and all in French, while a search for André Gide generates 1785 references, a significant number in English. 6 Michele Lalonde makes a similar observation in her poem "Speak White," stating "parlez un français pur et atrocement blanc comme au Viêt-Nam au Congo."
philosophy developed in France by black intellectuals from French West Africa and the Caribbean. Négritude combines the concept of négritude with either (or both) the words “nourriture” and “écriture.” The full sentence in the French text is: “Ca va terriblement mal ces temps-ci pour un dragueur nègre consciencieux et professionnel. On dirait le période de NÉGRITUDE terminée, has been, caput, finito, rayée” (Comment 17). It is clear that Laferrière is invoking the French Negro intellectual and philosophical history. He will later express his own interpretation of Franz Fanon’s understanding of sexual and racial hierarchies while receiving oral sex from another rich English girl (ibid 43-4). This reference to Fanon is more subtly done: one who is not familiar with Fanon’s theory would never know to look there. The clue is provided for us in the second chapter (ibid 17). And the clue is missing in English.

Homel translates the passage quoted previously as “Things are going terribly wrong these days for the conscientious black pick-up artist. The black period is over, has been, kaput, finito, whited out” (How to 17). The translation “the black period” hardly contains the same charged value as “nègritude.” Homel seems to try to racially charge the passage by translating “rayée,” which is more directly translated as “crossed out” as “whited out,” but fails to point the reader to the possibility of non-Anglo influences on the text. As an alternative, and to preserve the clue, I would suggest the following: “The black period is over, no more négritude, has been, kaput, finito, whited-out.” Laferrière clearly outlines the English influences in his text in the French original, so why not highlight the French influences in the English translation? Homel, however, would disagree, not only because he believes the text is in fact “English with French words,” but also because: “I don’t believe that translators need to leave in foreign terms in order to insure the foreignness of the work they’re doing. Especially in Laferrière’s case—though the same is true in all works—the foreignness is built in, as surely as the letters are printed on the page” (Homel 1995: 510). The paradox of his comments is that when the words on the page are already, in essence, “English” and the role that Homel assigns for himself is to “be better than the original,” the foreignness that is so “built in” into the original French is seriously called into question.

It should be noted that despite this exclusion in the translation, almost every critic looks to Fanon in order to understand Laferrière. The mutation of the concept négritude, for many, represents a critique from Laferrière. Anthony Purdy, for example, states that “En effet, la négritude de Laferrière n’est pas le negritude engagée, politisée, de la décolonisation; c’est une négritude ludique, postmoderne, fondée moins sur la revendication que sur la déconstruction parodique des stéréotypes” (Purdy 1992: 54). André Lamontagne asserts that the word represents Laferrière’s attempts to “démarrer de la littérature noir plus traditionnelle,” a tendency reflected as well in his desire to surpass African-American writers: “UN JEUNE ÉCRIVAIN NOIR DE MONTRÉAL VIENT D’ENVOYER JAMES BALDWIN SE RHABILLER (sic)” (Lamontagne 1997: 37-8). Laferrière’s desire to transcend Fanon is reiterated in his book J’écris comme je vis: “Avec Duvalier, un adepte de cette école de pensée de [Jean] Price-Mars qu’est la négritude, on va se retrouver à un carrefour. Et les questions vont plonger. La négritude a-t-elle débouche sur la dictature?” (J’écris 69). He goes on to talk about moving past the idea of black literature more generally: Les écrivains noirs ne parlent que de la littérature noir en citant d’autres écrivains noirs, revêtant une public blanc, naturellement... D’autant plus que la plupart de ces écrivains noirs... sont des hypocrites puisque, rentrés chez eux, ils se précipitent sur Rimbaud, Cervantes, Voltaire, Goethe, Faulkner, Shakespeare ou Homère... Quand vous allez chez eux, leur bibliothèque regorge d’écrivains africains, haitiens ou américains.

7 Braziel sees Laferrière’s interaction with Fanon as being a “reiteration of Fanon’s concerns” (Braziel 2003, 884), and not as a critique of this Black intellectual.
cains noirs—ça, c'est plutôt pour la galerie—mais, comme lecture de
chevet, ils ont Bacon, Pope ou De Quincey. (ibid 114)

Laferrière's critique of both these concepts (negritude, literary
segregation) is reflected in his novel, but partially negated in transla-
tion.

It should also be noted that in the primary section that critics typi-
cally cite in order to show the relation between Laferrière and Fanon,
"C'est que dans l'échelle des valeurs occidentales, la Blanche est infé-
érieure au Blanc et supérieure au Nègre..." (Comment faire 43). Lafe-
rière himself attributes to another source, D.H. Lawrence. As Lafe-
rière says:

Ce livre, L'amant de lady Chatterley, m'a poursuivi très longtemps et a
eu une influence certaine dans ma manière de voir la sexualité en tant
qu'écrivain...Si on regardait attentivement la grande majorité des scènes
sexuelles que je décrit dans mes livres, elles tiennent toutes leur source
dans ce vieux principe que l'attraction est plus forte quand on a en pré-
science deux personnes de races ou de classes sociales différentes. (J’é-
cris 61)

While it is important to recognize Fanon's influence on Laferrière
and Laferrière's criticism of Fanon's writings, the most scathing criti-
que of Fanon (that his writings present nothing new), is an observation
only attained through the transcultural reading of Comment faire.

SEX, VIOLENCE, JAZZ, AND THE KORAN

The editors of the English translation expressed concern regarding
the amount of sex found in the novel (Homel 1995: 49). Homel, how-
ever, is quite right when he says that "there is much less sex in the narra-
tive than what first appears" (ibid 49). Certainly this is true of the
English version because there is not a lot of sex, but certainly a lot of
fucking. Homel chose to translate the term "baiser," which is what
Laferrière uses to describe the act that the narrator and the white,

English, middle-class women engage in, as the term "to fuck." When
the center of the narration is the carnal act, what the translator decided
to call this act will affect the reader's reaction to both the narrator and
the story he is telling. One of the problems that faces a translator in this
particular situation is the lack of synonyms available in North America
for the act of sex. We can have sex, we can screw, we can make love, or
we can fuck. One is neutral to the point of being clinical, one is posi-
tive, and two are negative to varying degrees. Fuck is a curse word
with heavily negative connotations. "Baiser" in French does not con-
tain that kind of negative connotation. According to the Petit Robert, it
means either to kiss (when in the form of a noun) or "Faire l'amour."
"Fourrer" would be the term in French that would come close to con-
taining the same amount of negative connotation as fuck: "Faire entrer
brutallement et sans ordre." Or perhaps "enculer," where the definition
is "Posséder physiquement" and, according to the Petit Robert, the
word is "très vulgaire." Both these terms embody the violence that is
implied in fuck. But this violence, aggression and vulgarity that are
found in the English are not in the original French: the author chose to
use the non-violent and non-vulgar word "baiser" to describe the
sexual act. Even in instances where violence and hate seem to be emo-
tions manifested through the sexual act, Laferrière continues using
"baiser." Is expressing the anger that is implied in the text, underneath
the humor, in a more explicit format really improving the text, or does
the message end up getting lost along the way? It should be noted that
one of the distinguishing (and important) qualities of the narrator in
French is that he is a very reasonable, intelligent and respectful person.
We as readers can then sympathize with him and are in effect seduced
into his story. Not to mention that the actual personality and qualities
of the narrator stand in direct opposition to the black stereotypes put
forward by the novel. In English, that sympathy is harder to achieve
because the narrator comes off as being more like the stereotypes that
Laferrière is refuting. A more appropriate translation of the word "bai-
ser” may be “screw.” In addition to not being a vulgar curse word, the word also carries the connotation of being tricked or duped, a reflection of the narrator’s playfulness and the structure of the narrative.

This violence thus associated with the narrator in the English version of the novel carries over to the interpretation of the Koran in the text. Many critics (and the translator) interpret the inclusion of the Koran with the Nation of Islam, a radical Muslim group based in the United States consisting primarily of African-Americans. Coleman observes that the references to the Koran represent an “allusion to the black consciousness movement of the Nation of Islam” and that the inter-racial relationships of the narrator “remind[s] the reader of Malcolm X’s autobiographical confessions of his own dalliances with white women before his conversion to the faith” (Coleman 1998: 66).

However, one should also note which character in the text is the primary reader of the Koran: Bouba. Bouba embodies “la plus forte figure de l’altérité” and “la pensée orientale” (Lamontagne 1997: 37). With his reading of Asian texts, his tea drinking rituals, and his extended meditations, Bouba is both “la différence identitaire à l’intérieur d’une même ethnie” (ibid 40) and “a parody of the counter-culture guru and its obsession with the oriental philosophy” (Ruprecht 1995: 259). A parody of Western stereotypes of the Orient, Bouba also refutes the stereotypes of the radical, aggressive, Koran-quoting Nation of Islam member. He is further complicated by his devotion to Freud and jazz. The embodiment of the East worships the products of the West; jazz, which is so readily associated with critics with the narrator, is actually Bouba’s obsession. In any case, neither of the two characters in the novel seems to embody the values and the aggression normally associated with the Nation of Islam, or the violence implicit when the characters “fuck” the women. As Laferrière notes, “Remarque qu’il n’y a aucune situation de violence physique dans ce roman. Tout se passe dans la tête des personnages” (J’écris 219-20).

“ÉCOUTEZ, C’EST TRÈS SIMPLE, IL SUFFIT DE LE LASSER FAIRE”

Laferrière, by his own design, is a difficult author to label. As outlined above, he detests being categorized. However, that certainly has not stopped his critics from trying to do so, to the detriment of what Laferrière tries to accomplish through his texts. David Homel, in his translation of Comment faire l’amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer, also works to assimilate Laferrière’s novel into the Anglo-American canon. Moreover, while Laferrière describes his novel as being written in the “beat américain”, his transcultural influences are not limited to the borders of the continent. What is often overlooked as well is that Laferrière considers the entire continent, including Haiti, as “America,” not just the United States.

Another danger in reading Laferrière is inferring transcultural influences that are not readily present in his work. Critics will often see Africa as a cultural influence on Laferrière’s writing. Yet Laferrière himself expresses a total disassociation with Africa: “L’Afrique n’existe pas pour moi, jusqu’à présent...La connaissance que j’ai de l’Afrique est une connaissance superficielle. Une Afrique fictive...Il faut retourner à l’Afrique, mais quelle Afrique?...Au fond, c’est remplacer un snobisme par un autre” (J’écris 183). Tied to the critique that he applied to Negritude, Laferrière also warns against backward-looking towards another continent and another history. In his imaginary interview with Miz Bombardier, the narrator shows how the blacks in his

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8 Laferrière elsewhere critiques the Nation of Islam. In Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit? Laferrière has imaginary dialogues with a number of African-American cultural figures, and it becomes clear that he “does not appreciate the reasoning of the Reverend Farrakhan” (Reprecht 1995: 262).

9 Miz Bombardier represents Denise Bombardier, a popular Québécoise talk show host. This reference once again shows how Laferrière incorporates the local, Québécois culture into his narrative.
novel are Westernized, and how looking back to Africa can be damaging:

Hier soir, j’étais dans un bar du centre-ville. Il y avait, à côté de moi, un Noir et une Blanche. Je connaissais le type. C’est tout juste s’il ne disait pas à la fille qu’il était un amateur de char humaine, qu’il venait de la brousse, que son père était le grand sorcier de son village. Bon, on connaît la musique. Et moi, je voyais la fille hocher la tête, en extase devant un vrai de vrai, l’homme primitif, le Nègre selon National Geographic, Rousseau et Cie. Je connais très bien ce type et je sais qu’il vient, non pas de la brousse mais d’Abidjan, l’une des grandes villes d’Afriques, qu’il a longtemps vécu au Danemark et en Hollande avant de venir s’établir à Montréal. C’est un urbain et un occidental. Mais cela, il l’admettra devant aucune Blanche pour tout l’égoïsme du monde. Devant le Blanc, il veut passer pour un Occidental, mais devant la blanche, l’Afrique doit lui servir, en quelque sorte, de SEXE SUNU-MÉRAIRE...

...Ce type aussi a été blessé... (Comment faire 146-7)

Which Africa should be looked to? Through Boubu and through the interactions in the “Exile Café”, Laferrière problematizes looking to Africa for an identity. To conclude the interview, the narrator tells Miz Bombardier: “On dit les Noirs. C’est une espèce. Il n’y a pas d’individu” (ibid 147): looking towards Africa can play into that assumption, there are no individuals.

Laferrière’s novel and interviews make up a complex transcultural body of literature important to the development of Québécois literature, but it is a body of literature more broadly and more generally understood. The intricacies of his critical commentary at once recognize and criticize Anglo-American hegemony, while ensuring that he gets to be a “rock star” (Laferrière 2000: 56). One could be exhausted from reading Laferrière and his multiple transcultural references. So how should you read Laferrière without getting tired? “Écoutez, c’est très simple, il suffit de le laisser faire” (J’écris 159).

REFERENCES


RILKE Y CERNUDA,
O CÓMO TRADUCIR EL RECUERDO DE UN OLVIDO

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En las siguientes páginas propongo entender las nociones de cultura y de traducción desde el denominador común de la experiencia. Para este efecto me parece oportuno recordar algunas reflexiones que han sido formuladas por el pensamiento especulativo del Idealismo alemán de finales del siglo XVIII alrededor del concepto “Bildung”. De hecho, podemos considerar la palabra germánica “Bildung” como equivalente histórico del vocablo latino “cultura”, tanto en términos lingüístico-conceptuales como filosófico-literarios. No obstante, las implicaciones semánticas y las dimensiones metafóricas del concepto son más amplias.

“Bildung” significa un proceso de formación que abarca múltiples niveles culturales como, entre otros, el individual, el nacional, el artístico, el lingüístico, tratándose por lo tanto de un proceso en el cual se adquieren conocimientos generales e/ó específicos y se desarrollan facultades determinadas que permitan la configuración de una imagen (Bild), una forma de sí mismo. Este proceso de formación se define por ejes temporales y espaciales con lo cual se manifiesta históricamente...
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Writing as Translation in the New-Baroque Poetics
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En 1992 el Consejo de Universidades autorizaba al Departamento de Filología Moderna de la Universidad de León a impartir el primer Doctorado en Traducción de las Universidades españolas. Con la misma fecha iniciaba su andadura LIVIUS: REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS DE TRADUCCIÓN, dedicada preferentemente, si bien no exclusivamente, a recoger contribuciones sobre la Historia de la Traducción y a servir de actas de las cinco Jornadas nacionales e internacionales que sobre esta temática había venido organizando el Departamento citado.

LIVIUS cumplió su misión a lo largo ocho años y catorce números, varios de ellos hoy agotados, y tras un paréntesis de reflexión quizá demasiado largo viene a ser relevada en su misión investigadora y difusora de los Estudios de Traducción por esta nueva revista que el lector tiene ahora en sus manos, INTERCULTURALIDAD Y TRADUCCIÓN (I&T), que nace ya con distinto ideario, si bien con la misma vocación nacional e internacional.

I&T pretende ser una revista académica interesada en el diálogo intelectual sobre culturas y traducción en el marco de los estudios comparados y descriptivos, y por ello interesada sobre todo en las mutuas relaciones, influencias e intersecciones que se dan entre los Estudios Culturales, la Literatura Comparada y los Estudios de Traducción. Centrada su atención en estas disciplinas, I&T aspira a alentar en sus páginas el estudio y la investigación de las respectivas aproximaciones metodológicas, sus convergencias discursivas, desarrollo histórico, metodología, etc. Aspira asimismo a explorar las vías por las que la traducción afecta (y ha afectado en el pasado) a las relaciones interculturales (influencias, confluencias, concordancias, adaptaciones y revisiones), así como a indagar en la influencia que los procesos traductores tienen en el desarrollo y evolución de lenguas, literaturas y culturas en general.

I&T tiene, pues, abiertas sus páginas a estudios que examinen las vías por las que la literatura absorbe y procesa el multilingüismo literario, el diálogo cultural, la poliglosia discursiva y los modos de transculturación, por lo que albergará en ella estudios que traten de la importación y/o exportación de modelos literarios por medio de la traducción o que traten de la transformación de los discursos literarios nacionales mediante el diálogo intercultural que la traducción posibilita, y ello tanto en ámbitos locales como regionales, nacionales o transnacionales, y con temática que abarque desde el estudio descriptivo de casos particulares a aspectos teóricos generales, aproximaciones metodológicas, revisión de anteriores estudios, etc.