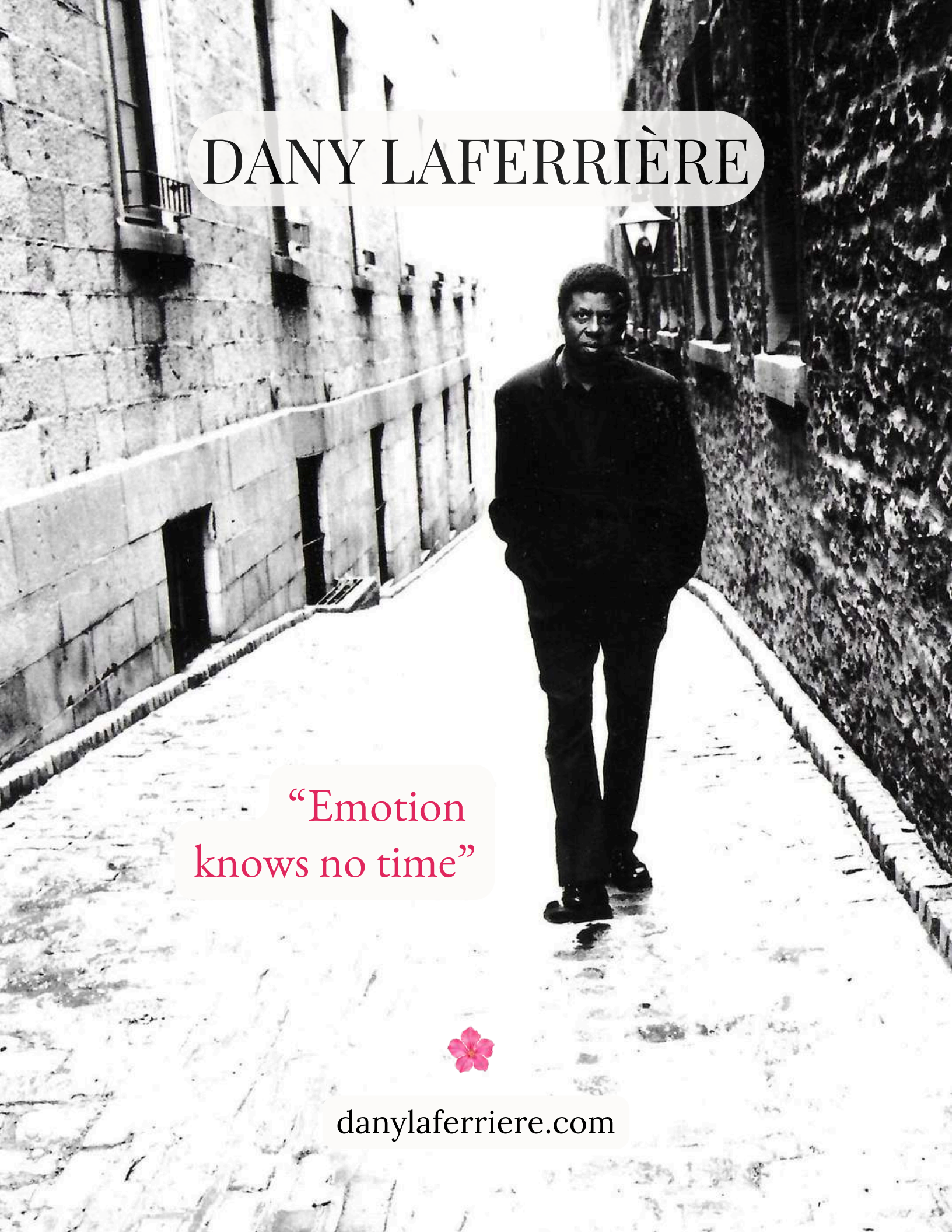

DANY LAFERRIÈRE
“Emotion knows no time”
danylaferriere.com

A SELECTION

# Honours and Awards

**Elected to the Académie française – 12 December 2013**

"I've always wanted to be good news.
– Dany Laferrière"

## NATIONAL ORDERS AND CULTURAL HONOURS

Commander of the Legion of Honour – France
Officer of the Order of Canada – Canada
Officer of the National Order of Quebec – Canada
Grand Officer of the Order of La Pléiade – Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie
Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters – France
Companion of the Quebec Arts and Letters – Canada

## HONORARY DOCTORATES

Honorary Doctorate, McGill University – Canada
Honorary Doctorate, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon – France
Honorary Doctorate, Université Paris-Sorbonne and Université Pierre-et-Marie-Curie – France
Honorary Doctorate, Middlebury College – United States
Honorary Doctorate, Simon Fraser University – Canada
Honorary Doctorate, University of Ottawa – Canada
Honorary Doctorate, Université du Québec à Montréal – Canada
Honorary Doctorate, Université du Québec à Rimouski – Canada

## LITERARY AWARDS

Prix Athanase-David – Quebec's highest literary honour
Prix Médicis for *The Enigma of the Return* – France
Governor General's Literary Award for *I'm Madly in Love with Vava* – Canada
Grand prix Ludger-Duvernay – Canada
Prix Gouverneur de la rosée – Haïti
International Grand Prize for Literature, Maison des Cultures du Monde – Allemagne

## PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

Commemorative Stamp issued by Canada Post
Sculpture at the National Library and Archives of Quebec
Sculpture at the Grévin Museum – Paris, France
Listed in Le Petit Larousse, Le Robert, Encyclopaedia Universalis and Britannica Universalis
Cœur-Nomade Library and Cultural Centre – Montréal
*A major cultural complex inspired by Dany Laferrière's work, developed by the City of Montréal.*

At the Académie française, his fellow Immortals chose a single word for Dany Laferrière: “Vaillant” – courageous in the face of adversity, but also energetic, ardent, and steadfast in all that he tackles. To the valiant, a short sword. And Laferrière’s sword is a pen.

“A language at once classical and free,
respectful and daring.”
– Bernard Pivot, *Le Journal du dimanche*, 2013

Forty books in forty years, translated into twenty languages. A powerful and exacting body of work, comprising novels, essays, poetry, books written and drawn entirely by hand, and books for children. A long river of ink flowing through half a century. A body of work built in solitude and through sustained effort, despite an exceptionally demanding schedule of media interviews, frequent travel, public appearances, and literary engagements, yet always guided by a phrase from Montaigne : “I do nothing without joy.”

In 1985, *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired* appeared and exploded onto the Quebec literary scene. A distinctive voice emerged in contemporary literature. But the writer himself had been taking shape for much longer, because, as Laferrière puts it, “it is in childhood that everything takes shape.”

“Laferrière is a man of humor and sensuality, admired by his editor Charles Dantzig for his ‘dancing intelligence.’ ”
– *Le Monde*, 2010

**The Making of a Sensibility**

Laferrière was born in Port-au-Prince in 1953. His father, an intellectual and the son of a peasant, became the youngest mayor of Port-au-Prince at the age of twenty-four before being forced into exile by the dictator. His mother, an archivist at Port-au-Prince City Hall, fearing for her son's safety because he bore the same name as his father, sent him to live in Petit-Goâve, where he was given a new name : Dany.

This world, surrounded by the tenderness of his beloved grandmother, was filled with dragonflies, butterflies, ants, blue mountains, the turquoise Caribbean, and his passionate love for Vava. At 88 Rue Lamarre, Da offered a cup of coffee to passers-by to strike up a conversation. This was the highest form of civility in a world in free fall, and would become one of the most enduring sources of his work and his life.

"The center of the Golden Age of Greece is my grandmother on that porch, offering coffee to people passing by and speaking with them. Petit-Goâve is not an idyllic or nostalgic vision of a small town. It is an effort to reconstruct the old human dream of harmony, intelligence, spirit and philosophy, as the Greeks sought to do in their time."

Determined to ensure her son's education, his mother did everything in her power to make it possible for him to continue his studies, travelling across Port-au-Prince whenever necessary to secure his schooling.

Poetry has been a enduring thread in hif life, connecting memory, emotion and experience. It infused his childhood and illuminated his adolescence. At sixteen, Laferrière discovered the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince. The hours he spent among these free-spirited painters and poets, and with their work, shaped his sensibility, giving him a sense of volume and color, a direct relationship with sensation, and, above all, an art of storytelling. At nineteen, after completing his college studies, Laferrière became a radio columnist, wrote regularly for newspapers, and produced short portraits of painters in their studios. After the assassination of his friend and colleague, the journalist Gasner Raymond, he left Haiti abruptly. Warned that he would be the next target because of his writings, he flew to Montreal, a city that was not waiting for him. It was the summer of 1976. He was twenty-three, carrying nothing but a small suitcase and the twenty-six letters of the alphabet.

"One wonders when a sensation becomes an experience. Memory serves as a backdrop to our senses. And this memory allows us to compare an old sensation with a new one, even when the river of time flows between them."

Alone, he discovers this new city and struggles to adjust to winter, wandering through the Latin Quarter, teeming with artists, where he settles. At twenty-three, he embarks on a new life, while struggling to escape nostalgia, loneliness, and poverty. On his first evening, he walks into a jazz club and sees Nina Simone on a tiny stage, a cigarette in her left hand, a glass of wine in her right, looking out through a window onto a black sky. It is a lesson in style. He will seek to bring that same grace to his writing: intensity, emotional force, the pain and violence contained beneath that apparent nonchalance.

For eight years, he moved from one precarious job to another, sometimes working in factories on the outskirts of Montreal. In a pink bathtub, with a good bottle of bad wine beside him, Laferrière read books he could not afford in Haiti: Márquez, Borges, Baldwin, Bashō, Bulgakov, Bukowski, Virgil, Cendrars, Mishima, Villon, Miller, Vieux-Chauvet, Sei Shōnagon, Vargas Llosa, Salinger, Günter Grass, Calvino, Roumain, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Gombrowicz – then sought out books to discover his new country: Miron, Aquin, Ducharme, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Anne Hébert, Marie-Claire Blais… For Laferrière, this is the library, with all those books that keep our memory alive.

"Dany Laferrière, literature's gracious host"
– Ghila Sroka, *Conversations*, 2010

This is what he calls his school of life: factory work and reading. "It is not because we make no noise that we are not part of the world." In his books, centuries collapse and borders dissolve, bringing distant voices into the present. "Reading is an attempt to lower the intensity of the noise in the world."

With $50, he bought the famous Remington 22 from a second-hand dealer on Saint-Denis Street and began typing frantically with a single finger, everything he was missing in reality: wine, laughing girls, lively conversations. "Truman Capote once said of Kerouac, 'He is not writing, he is typing.' Writing is done by hand, while typing means becoming the American writer I wanted to be. The typewriter creates distance; the sound of the keys gives rhythm to the words. It inspires me. After a long day, I would clean it. It was joyful. It applauded me."

By the time his first novel appeared in 1985, Laferrière had already found a voice unmistakably his own, and he has remained a distinctive presence ever since. His work resists both literary categories and geographical boundaries. In *The Village Voice*, Joe Wood devoted two full pages to the translation of his first novel and the discovery of the young writer:

"Laferrière accomplishes something important along the way – a certain reduction of ignorance… The 117 pages form a heady meditation, a psychic tussle that resonates with the furious stuff in James Baldwin's essays, or Louis Armstrong's smiling trumpet, or Martin Luther King's oratory: black revelation. But Laferrière does not want to be Baldwin or anyone else; he is very definitely Laferrière. Even in translation (from the French), his voice carries the casual immediacy – the intimacy one expects in a face-to-face meeting – that its author obviously intended."

Thousands of interviews follow, mainly devoted to literature, but also to painting and cinema, as well as to the issues of the day, whenever he is invited to speak as a writer. "Whenever the word 'book' comes up, I'm there." Today, children who grew up with his books are reading them to their own children. Writer, painter, filmmaker, Laferrière also works across many forms of expression.

“This man is a chameleon. We knew him as a talented writer and a perfect gentleman; now, to top it all off, he reveals himself as a playful graphic artist, a skilled draftsman, and a delightful poet.”

– Marianne Payot, *L’express*, 2018

In 1990, Laferrière and his family joined the million Quebecers heading to Florida, escaping the winter but, above all, that noisy celebrity that was hardly compatible with the inner silence a writer’s work requires. In the quiet, he wrote ten novels over twelve years, forming the backbone of his work, not far from a small lake that he walked around every morning, mulling over the descriptions and dialogues he still had to write.

During those twelve years, he also returned to his books, rewriting passages, adding chapters, altering their structures, and building bridges between them, until his American Autobiography emerged as a single, vast work. The process surprised critics, and academics even more. Laferrière continued to reinvent himself while retracing his own steps. He calls it the aesthetics of the wheel : to move forward, a wheel must turn upon itself.

This sprawling body of work, where all the books eventually touch, brings together the North American cycle – urban novels, often more aggressive – the Haitian cycle – quieter, imbued with Da’s tenderness, except when the story unfolds under the dictatorship – and a meditative cycle, in which he freely explores the great issues of his time and shares his ideas, the books he reads, and his emotions.

By the time he returned to Montreal, Laferrière's books were already successful in France and were traveling far beyond North America, translated into English, German, Spanish, Korean, Swedish, Portuguese, Italian, and many other languages. Three of his books were adapted for the screen, while Laferrière himself moved behind the camera to direct his first feature film. In 2009, *The Enigma of the Return* received the Prix Médicis, marking another turning point in the international reach of his work.

"With his words, with the sole weapon of his words,
Dany Laferrière can change the way we see the world."
– Franck Nouchi, *Le Monde*, 2010

Laferrière knew violence and poverty. He lived without legal status and was there on January 12, 2010, when his hometown was devastated by the earthquake. As co-president of the international literary festival Étonnants Voyageurs, he declared, "When all is lost, culture remains." In the eye of the catastrophe, notebook in hand, he wrote down everything that passed through his mind and crossed his field of vision. "No one is immune to tragedy. For some, it's insurmountable; for a writer, it becomes fuel, even though this does not exclude pain." The following year, his words resonated in Japan after the Tōhoku disaster, and his account of the earthquake was named one of *Kirkus Reviews*' Best Memoirs of 2013.

"Laferrière is a gaze.
He is the novelist of the intimate and the social."
– Mohamed Aïssaoui, *Le Figaro*, 2018

Laferrière has always been guided by an inheritance that has never left him: “to find his happiness without adding to the world’s pain.” He writes about faces and landscapes, the emotions and sensations with humor and infinite tenderness.

> “He’s not just a writer like many of us. He’s a writer who has become responsible for an entire country. The way some Jewish writers became responsible (or not) for an entire people after the Holocaust. That sort of weight would bring anyone to their knees [...] And he is doing it with his usual lightness and generosity, which is a real gift.”
>
> – David Homel, 2011

Where much of the world saw buildings collapsing, Laferrière turned the camera toward a forest of remarkable people. Where one might speak first of violence and dictatorship, he remembers the women who formed a circle of fire to protect childhood and education. For the point is not to confront the dictator, but to be happy in spite of him. “The most subversive thing of all, and I have spent my life saying this, is to do everything in your power to be happy right under the dictator’s nose.” These are the people who “carry their pain with such grace” and possess “a sense of life that it would be a shame to ignore.” In this sense, his experience opens onto something larger than fiction or autobiography: a literature capable of transforming the most intimate experience into a shared human space. “We should send all children to spend time at the school of exile. To this day, only the damned of the earth seem to benefit from this master class,” he writes, weary of seeing this heavily burdened word associated only with pain or punishment.

“What I hide within me is a collective heart.”

And nowhere is this more vivid than at 88 Rue Lamarre in Petit-Goâve. There, amid the chaos, he offers all the children of the world a universal address of carefree happiness, one that literature can preserve forever.

The New York Times called Laferrière “the pride of three countries” and placed him within “the republic of letters.” Bookseller Manon Trépanier describes him as a sun whose light illuminates the work of others, revealing their beauty through their flaws. François Busnel, of La Grande Librairie, calls him “the most endearing person there is,” while Charlotte Rampling speaks of his “absolute generosity” toward the creativity and imaginative worlds of others.

“I have travelled the world with a black notebook and a passport, recording the words and actions of my contemporaries. At first, I always looked upon the people and things I encountered with a somewhat bewildered gaze, until I came to understand that what is astonishing is not the difference that may exist between people, but the fact that, despite the distances that separate them, they remain so much alike.”

For Laferrière, people are not problems to be solved but vibrant worlds to explore. His work reveals, with profound elegance, what connects us across distances and differences.

– Berna González Harbour, *El País*, 2021

Laferrière is a writer of nuance. "I consider nuance to be the most persuasive form there is, and sometimes the most subversive. Not putting everyone in the same basket, once the basis of all reflection, has become a rarity bordering on originality." Death, love and childhood are at the heart of his work, as are friendship, the pleasure of conversation, and the timeless nature of literature. Laferrière does not seek to tell the truth. He seeks to recover the first emotion: "Emotion knows no time. Art is there to tell us that we feel things in the same way, regardless of climates, landscapes, social classes, races, genders, or religions. Pure emotion is blind, and yet utterly unique."

Dany Laferrière remains, against all odds, a writer of translation. Never fixed in a posture or a state, he sees himself as eternally in motion, even if only through the realm of the imagination.

– Encyclopaedia Universalis

"A great discovery.
A poetic journey into the paradises of childhood."

– Iris Radisch, *Die Zeit*, on *The Return*, 2014

December 12, 2013, marked a historic event: Dany Laferrière was elected to the Académie française. That morning, he was giving a lecture on literature in Haiti, wanting to be on that wounded land when he learned of his election to the world's most prestigious literary institution. Before the vote, the Permanent Secretary consulted the President of the French Republic, protector of the institution since Louis XIV, about a candidate who was neither French nor Parisian, but born in Haiti, a naturalized Canadian, and a resident of Montreal. The candidacy was unprecedented. The Académie had to make clear that it was not the Academy of France, but the Academy of the French language: what was being recognized was a person and his work, for their excellence and contribution. He now occupies Seat No. 2, once held by Montesquieu and Dumas (*The Lady of the Camellias*), and most recently by the writer Hector Bianciotti. Both shared an admiration for Borges, for whom Laferrière has found the most beautiful metaphor in the library.

"Your style, so simple and so elegant
which I love so much."
– Jean d'Ormesson



"Your work, shaped by wounded memory, generosity
and emotion, is our intimate homeland."
– Joël Desrosiers, 2013

In July 2026, Laferrière's visual work was exhibited for the first time at the gallery of the renowned painter Jean René Jérôme in Pétion-Ville, an artist he holds in particularly high regard. The exhibition marked a new stage in a journey that, since 2020, has moved beyond the page and into public space – from Montreal's Quartier des spectacles to the forecourt of the Académie française and the Pont des Arts in Paris, from Frankfurt's Römerberg to Tunis and Sharjah, and to the United Nations Headquarters in New York. A monumental sculpture of Laferrière stands in the art garden of National Library and Archives of Quebec. A wax figure of Laferrière was also unveiled at the Grévin Museum in Paris, he is represented seated in an armchair, a book in hand, in an eternal conversation with Bernard Pivot. In 2023, Adam Leith Gollner published a collection of interviews with Laferrière, some of which had first appeared in *The Paris Review*, among the magazine's most remarkable interviews. In Montreal, a vast new library is being built under the poetic name Cœur nomade, in tribute to Laferrière's exceptional career and as a lasting legacy for the community.

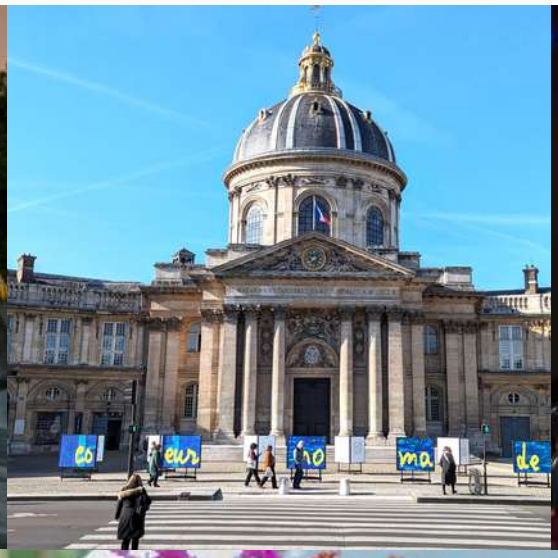
Laferrière's eloquence and relevance have made him a compelling presence far beyond the literary world. His work has inspired countless biographies, academic Thesis, scholarly studies, and conferences around the world, while earning him numerous distinctions, including seven honorary doctorates. His name appears in major reference works, including *Le Petit Larousse, Le Robert, Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. An exceptional speaker, he is regularly invited to speak around the world and serves on cultural and literary committees, including the reading committee of the Comédie-Française.

And all this life has been possible because I learned to read in Petit-Goâve more than sixty years ago. That is where the drop of ink began its journey, flowing into so many capitals through so many languages.

– Dany Laferrière









Petit-Goâve, Haiti, 2026


DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Le Goût des jeunes filles
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
CHRONIQUE DE LA DÉRIVE DOUCE
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
La Chair du Maître
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Le Cri des oiseaux fous
Dany Laferrière
J'ÉCRIS COMME JE VIS
Dany Laferrière
Je suis fatigué
Dany Laferrière
COMMENT CONQUÉRIR L'AMÉRIQUE EN UNE NUIT
TAXI
Les années 80 dans ma vieille Ford
Dany Laferrière
L'ODEUR DU CAFÉ
Je suis fou de Vava
La fête des morts
baiser mauve de Vava
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
VERS LE SUD
Dany Laferrière
Je suis un écrivain japonais
conversations avec Dany Laferrière
interviews de Ghila Sroka
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
L'ÉNIGME DU RETOUR
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
TOUT BOUGE AUTOUR DE MOI
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
L'ART PRESQUE PERDU DE NE RIEN FAIRE
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
JOURNAL D'UN ÉCRIVAIN EN PYJAMA
Dany Laferrière
à l'Académie française
Discours de réception
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
TOUT CE QU'ON NE LE DIRA PAS, MONOP
Mythologies américaines
COMMENT FAIRE L'AMOUR AVEC UN NÈGRE SANS SE FATIGUER
ET AUTRES ROMANS DE LA REMINGTON 22
Grasset
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
AUTOPORTRAIT DE PARIS AVEC CHAT
Grasset
L'EXIL VAUT LE VOYAGE
Dany Laferrière
Sur la route avec Bashō
Grasset
Dany Laferrière
Dans la splendeur de la nuit
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DE L'ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE
PETIT TRAITÉ DU RACISME EN AMÉRIQUE
Un certain art de vivre
L'enfant qui regarde
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
AUTOBIOGRAPHIE AMÉRICAINE
Dany Laferrière
Grand intérieur rouge
Dany Laferrière
L'ÉTRANGE PETIT CANARD
Konsten att älska med en neger utan att bli utmattad
VUNĚ KÁVY
Dani Laferrijer
Ka jugu
Dani Laferrijer
UKUS MLADIH DEVOJAKA
Dany Laferrière
Das Rätsel der Rückkehr
أحجية العودة
ПОЧТИ ЗАБЫТОЕ ИСКУССТВО ПРАЗДНОСТИ
Dany Laferrière
Smak młodych dziewcząt
Dany Laferrière
JAK BEZ WYSIŁKU KOCHAĆ KOBIETĘ MURZYNEM
ΠΩΣ ΝΑ ΚΑΝΕΤΕ ΕΡΩΤΑ ΜΕ ΕΝΑ ΝΕΓΡΟ
甘い漂流
D・ラフェリエール
新しい町に到着したばかりの人へ
TO AINIGMA TOY EPISTREFOY
穿睡衣的作家
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Dany Laferrière
Granate oder Granatapfel, was hat der Schwarze in der Hand?
남쪽으로
Dany Laferrière
EROSHIMA
Dany Laferrière
Pays sans chapeau
Dany Laferrière
Ich bin ein japanischer Schriftsteller
O GRITO DOS PÁSSAROS LOUCOS
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
COMO FAZER AMOR COM UM NEGRO SEM SE CANSAR
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Mwen damou pou Vava
ハイチ震災日記
私のまわりのすべてが揺れる
地面が揺れだす。
まるで風に舞う紙屑だった
Dany Lafeny
Dany Lafeny
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Come diventare famosi senza far fatica
Dany Laferrière
Vivre il Sud
Dany Laferrière
Kleine Abhandlung über Rassismus
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
MITOLOGÍAS AMERICANAS
el grito de los pájaros locos
dany laferrière
DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN
DANY LAFERRIÈRE
Dany Laferrière
El enigma del regreso
Premio Médicis
how to MAKE LOVE to a NEGRO without GETTING TIRED
dany laferrière
THE WORLD IS MOVING AROUND ME
Why must a black writer write about sex?
Dany Laferrière
エロシマ
ダニー・ラフェリエール
帰還の謎

# WORKS

His books have been published mainly by Grasset and reissued in smaller formats by Livre de Poche and Zulma. *An American Autobiography* appears in the celebrated "Bouquins" collection.

## 1985. *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*

VLB · Zulma · Typo

- *How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired*, translated by David Homel (Douglas & McIntyre; UK edition: Bloomsbury). Also published in Italian, Japanese, German, Spanish, Portuguese (Brazil and Portugal), Dutch, Korean, Chinese, Greek, Polish, Czech, Swedish, Slovenian, and Serbian. Film adaptation (1989) directed by Jacques W. Benoît, starring Isaach de Bankolé, with music by Manu Dibango.

## 1987. *Eroshima / Fête chez Hoki*

VLB · Zulma · Typo

- *Eroshima*, translated by David Homel (Coach House Presse). Also published in Japanese, Dutch and Spanish.

## 1991. *L'odeur du café*

VLB · Zulma · Typo

- *An Aroma of Coffee*, translated by David Homel (Coach House Presse). Also published in Korean, Haitian Kreyòl and Czech. Currently being translated into Spanish.

## 1992. *Le goût des jeunes filles*

VLB · Zulma · Typo

- *Dining with Dictators*, translated by David Homel (Coach House Presse). Also published in Polish, Romanian and Serbian. Film adaptation: *On the Verge of a Fever* (2004), directed by John L'Écuyer.

## 1993. *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit?*

VLB · Zulma · Typo

- *Why Must a Black Writer Write about Sex?*, translated by David Homel (Coach House Presse). Also published in Spanish and Dutch.

## 1994. *Chronique de la dérive douce*

Lanctôt · Boréal · Grasset · Livre de Poche

- *Drifting Year*, translated by David Homel (Douglas & McIntyre). Also published in Japanese.

## 1996. *Pays sans chapeau*

Lanctôt · Boréal · Zulma

- *Down Among the Dead Men*, translated by David Homel (Douglas & McIntyre). Also published in Portuguese (Brazil and Portugal). Currently being translated into Haitian Kreyòl.

**1997.** *La chair du Maître*

Lanctôt

Also published in Greek.

**1997**. *Le charme des après-midi sans fin*

Lanctôt · Boréal · Zulma

**2000**. *J'écris comme je vis*

Lanctôt · La Passe du vent · Boréal

Also published in Japanese.

**2000.** *Le cri des oiseaux fous*

Lanctôt · Boréal · Zulma

Also published un Spanish, Polish and Portuguese (Brazil and Portugal). Currently being translated into Japanese.

**2001**. *Je suis fatigué*

Lanctôt · Mémoire · Boréal

**2004**. *Comment conquérir l'Amérique en une nuit*

Lanctôt · Boréal

*How to Conquer America in One Night:* film written and directed by Dany Laferrière (2004).

**2005**. *Les années 80 dans ma vieille Ford*

Mémoire d'encrier

**2006.** *Vers le sud*

Boréal · Grasset · Livre de poche

*Heading South*, translated by Wayne Grady (Douglas & McIntyre). Also published in Italian and Serbian. Film adaptation: directed by Laurent Cantet, with Charlotte Rampling.

**2006.** *Je suis fou de Vava*

La Bagnole

Also published in Haitian Kreyòl by Lyonel Trouillot.

**2008.** *Je suis un écrivain japonais*

Boréal · Grasset · Livre de poche

*I am a Japanese Writer*, translated by David Homel (Douglas & McIntyre). Also published in Italian, Japanese and German.

**2009.** *L'énigme du retour*

Boréal · Grasset · Livre de poche · Tougas · Presses nationales d'Haïti

*The Return*, translated by David Homel (Douglas & McIntyre and MacLehose Press). Also published in Italian, Japanese, German, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Greek and Arabic.

**2009.** *La fête des morts*

La Bagnole

**2010.** *Un art de vivre par temps de catastrophe*

Presses de l'Université de l'Alberta

**2010.** *Tout bouge autour de moi*

Mémoire d'encrier · Legba · Grasset · Livre de poche

*The World Is Moving Around Me*, translated by David Homel (Arsenal Pulp Press). Also publiched in Italian, Danish and Japanese.

**2010.** *Conversations. Interviews de G. Sroka*

La parole Métèque

**2011.** *L'art presque perdu de ne rien faire*

Boréal · Grasset · Livre de poche

Also published in Italian, Chinese and Russian.

**2013.** *Journal d'un écrivain en pyjama*

Mémoire d'encrier · Grasset · Livre de poche

Also published in Italian, German and Chinese.

**2013.** *Le baiser mauve de Vava* – ill. de F. Normandin

La Bagnole

**2014.** *L'odeur du café* – ill. de F. Rovira

La Bagnole

**2015.** *Tout ce qu'on ne te dira pas, Mongo*

Mémoire d'encrier

**2015.** *Discours de réception à l'Académie française*

Boréal · C3 Éditions

**2016.** *Mythologies américaines*

Grasset

Also published in Spanish

**2018.** *Autoportrait de Paris avec Chat*

Grasset · Boréal

Currently being translated into Brazilian Portuguese.

**2019.** *Vers d'autres rives*

L'aube · Boréal

**2020.** *L'exil vaut le voyage*

Grasset · Boréal

**2021.** *Petit traité du racisme en Amérique*

Grasset · Boréal

Also published in German

**2021.** *Sur la route avec Bashō*

Grasset · Boréal

**2022.** *Dans la splendeur de la nuit*

Seuil

**2022.** *L'enfant qui regarde*

Grasset

**2022**. *De l'éventail à la coupole. Dany Laferrière reçoit Chantal Thomas à l'Académie française.*

Seuil

**2024.** *Un certain art de vivre*

Grasset · Boréal

**2024.** *Autobiographie américaine*

Bouquins

**2025**. *Grand Intérieur rouge / L'obsession du rouge*

Grasset · Boréal

**2026**. *L'étrange Petit Canard et le non moins mystérieux petit garçon*

Les contes du Museum

## Others

A selection

**2004**. Preface to Émile Ollivier's *La Brûlerie* (Boréal)

**2014**. Preface to Rivarol's *On the Universality of the French Language* (NRF)

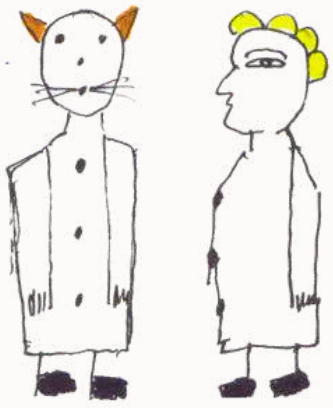
**2016**. Poem, in *Paris Will Always Be a Celebration: Great Writers Celebrate Our Capital* (Gallimard)

**2021**. Afterword to Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Love, Anger, Madness* (Zulma)

**2024**. Foreword to Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (Quarto Gallimard)

– You wrote all that, man?

– I'm the first one surprised



# THE BODY OF WORK

A selection of books and press coverage
offers a glimpse of Dany Laferrière's work
and its reception over the years.

*Titles marked with an asterisk are provisional translations.

## THE BIRTH OF A SENSIBILITY

## BREAKS AND TURNING POINTS

## THE BIRTH OF A WRITER

## A CERTAIN ART OF LIVING

## EROS AND THANATOS

## ON THE ROAD

## TROUBLED AMERICA

"A unique and original style that establishes his place among the major literary voices of our time."

– Yoshio Fujiwara, *Fujiwara Shoten*, Tokyo

**THE BIRTH OF A SENSIBILITY**

## THE AROMA OF COFFEE

*A remarkable book. An extraordinary return to childhood, a plunge into memory, a perfectly accomplished narrative. Marked by a finesse of observation and a restrained tenderness that bursts forth only in the final line, alongside an exceptional classicism of form. It is at once Japanese and Antillean.*

– LE DEVOIR

## THE CHARM OF ENDLESS AFTERNOONS*

*I know that we did not all have the same childhood. That is why I make 88 Rue Lamarre in Petit-Goâve a universal address of happiness.*

– DANY LAFERRIÈRE

*Here we find everything that made Marcel Pagnol's trilogy so beautiful. For Laferrière – and this is the strength of his books – always knows how to move from memories and personal experiences to something that touches the human condition. He surpasses himself, carries us along with him, and takes us ever further. In this sense, he is a great writer, a universal writer.*

– LA CAUSE LITTÉRAIRE

## THE SLAP*

A sensitive child, fascinated by the enigmatic Mr. Gérard and his sense of life.

*He learns to see the world as a dense novel populated by characters to be deciphered.*

– LE MONDE

*As the years go by, the writer excels at creating forms that are ever more spare, fragmented, and deeply moving.*

– LA VIE

*A short story of great beauty – hypnotic and utterly charming.*

– LE FIGARO

## DINING WITH DICTATORS

Miki, Pasqualine, Choupette, Marie-Michèle, Marie-Erna and Marie-Flore - a vivid cluster discovering desire, freedom and the power of being a woman in the charged streets of Port-au-Prince in 1970.

> *Through these amusing, and deeply moving, anecdotes, from which Laferrière strips away all pathos, the tragic portrait of a country caught in the grip of one of the most brutal political dictatorships takes shape beneath the surface.*
>
> – LETTRES QUÉBÉCOISES

## IN THE SPLENDOR OF THE NIGHT*

A poetic walk through Port-au-Prince, where the narrator encounters the figures who haunt and inspire him, including Lipo, a Chinese poet – Li Bai (李白, 701–762).

> *A gem. Rarely has a night been so luminous.*
> *One would want to quote any number of sentences touched by grace.*
>
> – LE FIGARO

> *Through his storytelling talent and the delicacy of his pen,*
> *Dany Laferrière invents "poetic magical realism."*
>
> – ALAIN MABANCKOU

## I'M MADLY IN LOVE WITH VAVA*

> *A loving gaze upon childhood. A gentle evocation of a country and its people.*
>
> – LA PRESSE

## THE STRANGE LITTLE DUCK AND THE NO LESS MYSTERIOUS LITTLE BOY*

A Fable of Friendship – A New Children's Book for Autumn 2026

## THE CRY OF THE MAD BIRDS*

*The story of my last night in Haiti. A painful episode, charged with emotion.*

– DANY LAFERRIÈRE

*A book that hits you and holds you close on every page.*

– LE POINT

*All the defining events of a life can unfold within a single night […] A perfectly balanced blend of Alfred de Musset and dictatorship, individual destiny and history, art and insurrection. Funny, lively, and grave.*

— LE MAGAZINE LITTÉRAIRE, "BOOK OF THE MONTH"

## THE DRIFTING YEAR

People don't seem to realize that there is a new prince in this city, even though for now I am nothing more than a homeless man.

*It is luminous, poignant, sad, and funny, like life itself.*

– LE NOUVEL OBS

*It is deeply moving; it speaks of the moral and linguistic loneliness of the newcomer whose dreams risk being shattered by doubt; it speaks of the contempt or, worse still, the indifference he encounters; and finally, it speaks of thirst and hunger…*

– LE DEVOIR

## I AM A JAPANESE WRITER

A book dedicated to anyone who wishes they could be someone else.

*Ironic, iconoclastic, irresistible.*

– IL MANIFESTO

**BREAKS AND TURNING POINTS**

## THE RETURN

*A magnificient book*

GRÉGOIRE LEMÉNAGER, NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR

*An affecting meditation on loss and exile*

ANGEL GURRIA-QUINTANA, FINANCIAL TIMES

*Looks set to become one of the great poetic statements of homesickness and return . . . It should be read by all exiles everywhere*

IAN THOMSON, INDEPENDENT

*That's its strength: it doesn't settle for one act. It exposes the abyss – a cry of revolt, but also pure lyricism.*

– MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS

*With precision and ease, Laferrière creates an exceptional reading experience, a text dazzling in its form which, despite its complexity, develops with playful lightness a striking poetics of how we grasp the world.*

– PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY

## THE WORLD IS MOVING AROUND ME

*When everything falls, culture remains. A memoir of the Haïti Earthquake.*

*...A knockout punch through prose favoring matter-of-fact understatement over sentimental histrionics... The framing is particularly strong, beginning with vivid detail of the experience itself, culminating in a multilayered meditation on what it means to be a survivor, to be a writer, to be alive.*

– KIRKUS REVIEW · BEST ESSAY 2013

## SELF-PORTRAIT OF PARIS WITH CAT*

*A moving, powerful result. The book, which blends drawings into the writing itself in a hybrid form, is absolutely sublime.*

– ENKI BILAL

*If I became an editor, it was in order to one day find a book like this one.*

– CHARLES DANTZIG, GRASSET

## HOW TO MAKE LOVE TO A NEGRO WITHOUT GETTING TIRED

Two young friends, sharing a shabby apartment, converse with humor and depth about the human condition.

*A free author, unburdened by the weight carried by Black writers: bearing witness to their collective condition without leaving the slightest room for individual expression.*

– ALAIN MABANCKOU, LE FIGARO

*Among the novels that defined Quebec*

– L'ACTUALITÉ

*Let's be clear and definitive: this novel is a... masterpiece.*

– DANIEL PICOULY, LIRE

## DIARY OF A WRITER IN PAJAMAS*

A hand extended to anyone who dreams of reading or writing, or simply of being carried along by the adventure.

*A very subtle and very perceptive reflection on literary creation.*

– VALÉRIE GISCARD D'ESTAING

*One of Laferrière's most delightful and most illuminating books. Told with humor, it is far from lacking in depth — quite the opposite.*

– LE FIGARO

*A wonderful reading companion.*

– PASCALE NAVARRO

## I WRITE THE WAY I LIVE*

*The perspective I bring to the world cannot be confined by literary theories. This book was also written to set the record straight. It is my reading of my own work.*

*But who is he, after all, this sly one, this first-rate schemer, fiercely independent, seemingly shy, yet capable of unexpected audacity?*

– BERNARD MAGNIER

## I'M TIRED*

It's a slow-simmering dish. I brought the water to a boil and threw in everything I love, along with a handful of salt.

– DANY LAFERRIÈRE

*He has a "Cubist" way of capturing things from different angles and perceiving what escapes most people. A sociologist and a poet united in a single person.*

– PASCALE MONTPETIT

## THE ALMOST-LOST ART OF DOING NOTHING*

*An exhilarating essay against busyness, immediacy, and screens, while also making a passionate case for reading.*

– ELLE FRANCE

*An ode to slowness, running counter to the frenzy of contemporary life.*

— LA VIE

## A CERTAIN ART OF LIVING*

*A distillation of life, a literary art of emotion. Far from bearing the weight of an exhaustive work, this book is instead a distillation of an entire body of work, with a style of writing that reaches a peak here.*

– LE POINT

*A book of breathtaking elegance.*

– GRÉGOIRE LEMÉNAGER, L'OBS

## EROSHIMA

Hoki, a Japanese fashion photographer, is implosive, radioactive. She makes love for 72 hours straight before disappearing, leaving her loft to the writer.

## DESIRE, LOVE AND MONEY*

A twenty-four-part fresco, bound together by a single obsession: the tangled forces of love, desire, and money, like a thorn lodged in the heart of Haïti.

## HEADING SOUTH

A sensual and unsettling journey where, under a harsh light, tensions between bodies, power, and Western fantasies intertwine.

*The author intertwines desire and money, the sexual misery of the rich, and the real thing – the misery of the poor. A fever that sends shivers down your spine.*

— PATRICK GRAINVILL

*Laferrière is an artist of brevity who says a great deal*

– MOHAMED AÏSSAOUI, LE FIGARO

*Laferrière is a master of haiku.*

– GRÉGOIRE LEMÉNAGER, L'OBS

## NOMADIC HEART*

*A tribute to the poets and painters who illuminated my adolescence.*

## WHY MUST A BLACK WRITER WRITE ABOUT SEX?

*Dany Laferrière aspires to be recognized as a writer. And this exuberant, deeply human book, signed by 'a Carl Lewis of the typewriter,' confirms it unequivocally.*

– LE MONDE

*A feast of intelligence, irreverence, and insight. Laferrière takes on America, that 'mountain of clichés,' blowing apart its countless forms of racism with the tightrope walker's freedom that playfully sidesteps every identity trap. A poet's freedom, ultimately, already.*

— GRÉGOIRE LEMÉNAGER, L'OBS

## DOWN AMONG THE DEAD

*I wanted to create the most beautiful portrait of Haiti, guided by a poetic intuition... where death is more mystical than mysterious.*

*On every page, we are moved, we smile, and we are touched by the poetry of the words, the humor, and the depth of this refined man of letters.*

– OUEST-FRANCE

*At the moment when Port-au-Prince begins to count its dead and clear away its ruins, I turn to Laferrière. Not to hide reality but to return to its essence, in its poetry. Poetry does not flee; it is there, intimately entwined with the horror, there with the dawn breaking...*

– PIERRE FOGLIA, LA PRESSE

## ON THE ROAD WITH BASHŌ*

*It is wonderfully accomplished. Here, words and drawings join hands. Once again, Laferrière reveals his gift for savory turns of phrase, felicitous formulations – a defining feature of his style. This journey is a delight.*

– GRÉGOIRE LEMÉNAGER, L'OBS

**TROUBLED AMERICA**

## HOW TO CONQUER AMERICA IN ONE NIGHT

*Through Laferrière's eyes, we see today's Montreal differently, but also the "two solitudes" — no longer those of English and French Canadians, but those of immigrants and women.*

– LA PRESSE

## EVERYTHING YOU WILL NEVER BE TOLD, MONGO*

*A society reveals its mysteries only to those who seek to understand it, and no one escapes this inexorable rule, whether they are from the country or not.*

– DANY LAFERRIÈRE

*Reading this book doesn't just open the mind; it opens the heart.*

– Franco Nuovo

## RACISM IS NOT MY CUP OF TEA*

*Reflections drawn from my travels in the United States, a true laboratory for observing the question of racism, with its 45 million Black Americans.*

– DANY LAFERRIÈRE

*Political in substance, poetic in form. A public service.*

– LE FIGARO

I cannot imagine myself in a society without having a say.

– Dany Laferrière

“I realize that I did not write these books to describe this landscape, but to remain part of it.”

– Dany Laferrière.

Below is the first chapter of his debut novel,
*How to Make Love to a Negro Without Getting Tired* (1985).
translated by David Homel

I CAN'T BELIEVE it, this is the fifth time Bouba's played that Charlie Parker record. He's crazy about jazz, and this must be his Parker period. Last week I had Coltrane for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Now it's Parker's turn.

There's only one good thing about this place: you can play Parker or Miles Davis or even a noisier cat like Archie Shepp at three o'clock in the morning (with walls as thin as onionskin paper) without some idiot telling you to turn it down.

We're suffocating in the summer heat, jammed in between the Fontaine de Johannie (a roach-ridden restaurant frequented by small-time hoods) and a minuscule topless bar, at 3670 rue St-Denis, right across from Cherrier. An abject one-and-a-half that the landlord palmed off on poor Bouba as a two-and-a-half for $120 a month. We're up on the third floor. A narrow room cut lengthwise by a horrible Japanese screen decorated with enormous stylized birds. A fridge in a constant state of palpitation, as if we were holed up above some railroad station. Playboy bunnies thumbtacked to the wall that we had to take down when we got here to avoid the suicidal tendencies those things inevitably cause. A stove with elements as cold as a witch's tit at forty below. And, extra added attraction, the Cross of Mount Royal framed in the window.

I sleep on a filthy bed and Bouba made himself a nest on the plucked couch full of mountains and valleys. Bouba inhabits it fully. He drinks, reads, eats, meditates and fucks on it. He has married the hills and dales of this cotton-stuffed whore.

When we came into possession of this meager pigsty, Bouba settled on the couch with the collected works of Freud, an old dictionary with the letters A through D and part of E missing, and a torn and tattered copy of the Koran.

Superficially, Bouba spends all day doing nothing. In reality, he is purifying the universe. Sleep cures us of all physical impurities, mental illness and moral perversion. Between pages of the Koran, Bouba engages in sleep cures that can last up to three days. The Koran, in its infinite wisdom, states:

"Every soul shall taste death. You shall receive your rewards only on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is spared the fire of Hell and is admitted to Paradise shall surely gain his end; for the life of this world is nothing but a fleeting vanity." (Sura III, 182.) The world can blow itself up if it wants to; Bouba is sleeping.

Sometimes his sleep is as strident as Miles Davis's trumpet. Bouba becomes closed upon himself, his face impenetrable, his knees folded under his chin. Other times I find him on his back, his arms forming a cross, his mouth opening onto a black hole, his toes pointed towards the ceiling. The Koran in all its magnanimity says: "You cause the night to pass into the day, and the day into the night; You bring forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living. You give without stint to whom You will." (Sura III, 26.) And so Bouba is aiming for a place at the right hand of Allah (may his holy name be praised).

CHARLIE PARKER tears through the night. A heavy, humid, *Tristes Tropiques* kind of night. Jazz always makes me think of New Orleans, and that makes a Negro nostalgic

Bouba is crashed out on the couch in his usual position (lying on his left side, facing Mecca), sipping Shanghai tea and perusing a volume of Freud. Since Bouba is totally jazz-crazy, and since he recognizes only one guru (Allah is great and Freud is his prophet), it did not take him long to concoct a complex and sophisticated theory the long and short of which is that Sigmund Freud invented jazz.

"In what volume, Bouba?"

"Totem and Taboo, man."

Man. He actually calls me man.

"If Freud played jazz, for Christ's sake, we would have known about it." Bouba breathes in a mighty lungful of air. Which is what he does every time he deals with a nonbeliever, a Cartesian, a rationalist, a head-shrinker. The Koran says: "Wait, then, as they themselves are waiting."

"You know," Bouba finally intones, "you know that SF lived in New York."

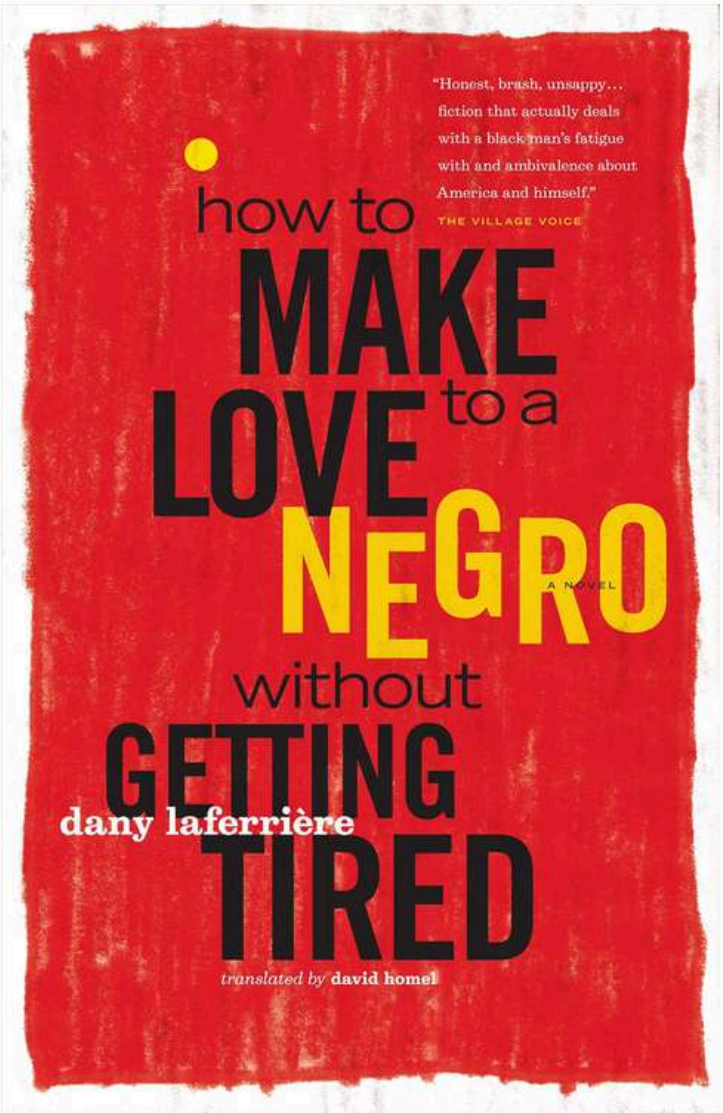
"Of course he did."

"He could have learned to play trumpet from any tubercular musician in Harlem.“

"It's possible."
"Do you know what jazz is at least?"
"I can't describe it, but I'd know what it is if I heard it."
"Good." Bouba says after a lengthy period of meditation, "listen to this then." Then I'm sucked in and swallowed, absorbed, osmosed, drunk, digested and chewed up by a flow of wild words, fantastic hallucinations with paranoid pronunciation, jolted by jazz impulses to the rhythm of Sura incantations-then I realize that Bouba is performing a syncopated, staccato reading of the unsuspecting pages 68 and 69 of Totem and Taboo.

THE EFFIGY of the Egyptian princess Taiah watches over the ancient couch where Bouba spends his days, horizontal or cross-legged, burning sweet-smelling resins in an Oriental incense-burner. He brews endless cups of tea on an alcohol lamp and reads rare books on Assyrian art, the English mystics, voodoo Vévés and Swinburne's "Fata Morgana." He spends his precious light admiring an engraving, purchased on St. Denis Street, of the fresh body of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Beata Beatrix."
"Listen to this, man."
It's the thirtieth time this week I've listened to it. It's a Parker cut. Bouba's face is as tight as a mizzenmast; he's listening to it too. You could hear a tsetse fly buzz. Saint Parker of the Depths, pray for us. I listen as hard as I can. While Bouba literally drinks in every harsh note from Parker's sax. Right in the middle of the Big Phrase (so says Bouba), right when R.I.P. Parker (1920-1955) is about to embark on those precious seconds (128 measures) that revolutionized jazz, love, death and all our goddamn sensibility the heavens choose to unfurl above our heads in the layutal form of an all-out fuckfest punctuated with strident keening, the cries of wounded beasts, a gut-ripping cavalcade of wild bucking horses, right there, right above our heads. The turn-table jumps like a treetoad with sticky fingers. What's going on? Is this the wrath of Allah? "Will they not ponder on the Koran? If it had not come from Allah, they could have surely found in it many contradictions." (Sura IV, 84) Is it Ogoum, the fire god of the voodoo pantheon? Bouba maintains we have rented the antechamber of hell and that Beelzebub himself lives upstairs. The racket resumes, more violently.

Louder. More precipitously. The frenzied gallop of the four horses of the Apocalypse. Parker has just enough time to play "Cool Blues" and afterwards, that little gem of inventiveness, of audio madness, "Ko-Ko" (1945). The only piece of music that can stand up to this insanity comes from on high. The ceiling drops a millimeter in a cloud of pink dust. Then, silence. We wait for the end of the world, impatiently, holding our breath. A private, custom-made Apocalypse. Silence. Then this taut keening cry in high C, sharp and lasting, inhuman, first allegro, then andante, then pianissimo, an endless, inconsolable, electronic, asexual cry over Parker's sax; the only song this dawn.



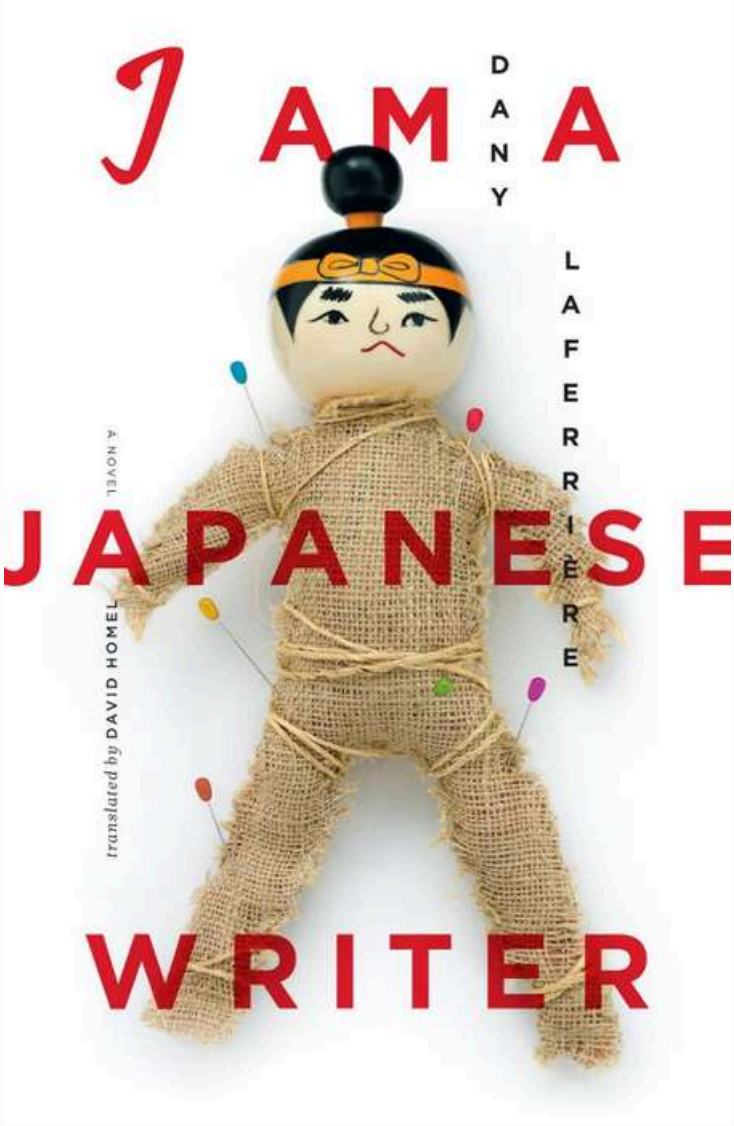
Below is the first chapter of his novel,
*I Am a Japanese Writer* (2008).
translated by David Homel

MY PUBLISHER CALLED while I was out buying fresh salmon. He wanted to know what was going on with that damned book. I'd rather talk salmon. Once, I couldn't stand the stuff. I ate it and ten minutes later I was puking. The last time was at a friend's place. I missed the bowl in her bathroom. I cleaned up the floor, washed my face and went back to the living room. I swore it was the last time I'd eat it. Okay, it's not the first promise I haven't kept. I am under no obligation to keep promises I make to myself-except the one to write this book. My publisher's voice was acid despite all the sweetness he was trying to put into it. I can understand him. He didn't exactly twist my arm to get me to do this book. I'd started nodding my head as hard as I could when he told me I absolutely had to write a new book. The word "new" has always frightened me a little. Why a new book? After all this time, we should know there's nothing new under the sun. But we keep on trying. The customer always wants something new and different. Iwasn't about to get into that discussion; he knows it by heart, anyway. We talk about it every time we meet. The setting: his tiny office one day someone will have to drag him out of there, from under the multicolored manuscripts and red books) or one of the neighborhood cafés. He's a tall young man with eyes like globes and a disarming smile. He has a habit of running his hands through his hair, as if to brush away the clouds that have gathered there. We hadn't even got to the café and I'd already found the title. I'm good at titles. Kurt Vonnegut Jr. apparently told his wife, who told me (I'm talking like a journalist now), that I was the fastest "titler" in America. The fastest titler in America, sure, why not, but I wouldn't have minded knowing in what context he said that. Vonnegut was always out of context. That was his specialty. Do we really need a context to be the breakfast of champions? Billy the Kid: the fastest gun in the West. No need for a context there. The description is complete and autonomous. Even the tone is there. Had he said it ironically? His wife didn't elaborate. It's like saying that's all I'm good at— with me, don't bother going past the title. I guess that's better than a bad title that keeps you from

You can't imagine the number of good books that are read clandestinely because of their bad titles. In bookstores, of the rare comments I hear about a book, 90 percent are about the title. Readers often ask me how I find my titles. I really don't know. I just sit there for a while, and suddenly the title comes to me. This time I didn't even need ten seconds; the title was there, waiting for me at the next corner. Are you looking for a title? How did you guess? It leaped at me and stretched out on the white sheet of paper. I need to contemplate a title, to turn it every which way. Each word—no-each syllable, each letter has to be in the right spot. Whatever the book is, these words will represent it. These are the words people will see most often. For the others, they'll have to open the cover, while these words will always be there, before our eyes. They'll contain all the other words in the book. You don't have to reread García Márquez's book; all you have to do is say One Hundred Years of Solitude or Remembrance of Things Past if we're talking about Proust (do we even have to mention his name? Doesn't everyone recognize the title?), and all the images in the book pass before our delighted eyes like a curtain of light separating us from unpleasant reality. The time we spent reading it (the days at the café, the nights by lamplight), hidden in the folds of our memory, rise to the surface with their rich parade of unnameable sensations. A good title is a fabulous password!

When you put forward a title you like, you have to be careful. In general, publishers want to hear about the content. What is it all about? They ask stupid questions like that. But not my publisher: he leaned back from the table, a smile on his lips. I used the moment to scan some of the titles on the shelves. Nothing worthwhile there. So I casually sent mine over the heaps of manuscripts. What was it? I Am a Japanese Writer. A brief silence. Then a wide smile. Sold! We signed the contract: ten thousand euros for five little words. In my euphoria, I told the Vonnegut anecdote to my publisher. He could already picture the promo copy: “The fastest titler in America." But we dropped the idea—too immodest. That's the problem with Westerners: we're too afraid of ridicule. Being ridiculous won't kill us, but the fear of it will. The other reason we dropped the slogan was the ambiguity of the word "titler." Most readers would have read it as "tattler" or "titter." So really, we lacked courage. But let's get back to the title itself. He took it in his hands as if it were a lighter in a no-smoking

area. He weighed and measured it. My title has faced every test and emerged timeless. He began writing it on the nearest piece of paper. It was pretty banal, actually – except for the word "Japanese." And that was no joke: I really do consider myself a Japanese writer.



Below is the first chapter of his debut novel,
*The Enigma of The Return* (2009).
translated by David Homel

The Phone Call
The news cuts the night in two.
The inevitable phone call that every middle-aged man
one day will receive.
My father has died.

I got on the road early this morning.
No destination.
The way my life will be from now on.

I stop along the way for breakfast.
Bacon and eggs, toast, scalding hot coffee.
I sit by the window.
A sharp sun warms my right cheek.
A quick glance at the paper.
A bloody image of a car wreck.
Death is sold anonymously in America.

I watch the waitress moving among the tables.
Busy with her rounds.
The nape of her neck is sweaty.

The radio is playing this country song,
the story of a cowboy unhappy in love.
The waitress has a red flower tattooed
on her right shoulder.
She turns and gives me a sad smile.

I leave the tip on the newspaper
next to the cup of cold coffee.
Walking toward the car I try to imagine
the loneliness of a man facing death
in a hospital bed in a foreign country.

"Death expires in a white pool of silence,"
wrote the young Martinican poet Aimé Césaire
in 1939.
What can anyone know of exile and death
when they're not even twenty-five?

I get back on Highway 40.
Little villages numb with sleep along the frozen river.
Where are they all hiding?
The invisible people.

The feeling of discovering virgin territory.
For no good reason I take a country road
that will set me back by an hour

A vast land of ice.
It's difficult for me
even after so many years
to imagine the shape
next summer will take.

Ice burns
more fiercely
than fire
but the grass remembers
the caress of the sun.

There are, beneath this ice,
hotter desires and sharper impulses
than in any other season.
The women here know it.

The men sweat for a living and
the first to open his mouth is a sissy.
Silence is the rule of the forest
if you don't want to be surprised by a bear.

He nurtured silence so long
that emptiness took hold of him.
The man became a dry branch
that cracked in the cold.

Hunger brings the wolf out of the woods
and drives the woodsman home.
He nods off, after his bowl of soup, by the fireplace.
His wife tells him what they said on the radio.
It's always about war and lost jobs.
So go the centuries in these northern villages.

It's easy to talk when we're warm,
and binding old wounds.
The wounds we're ashamed of never heal.

I always panic when
I can't hear another human sound.
I am a creature of the city.
My rhythm is the staccato heels of a woman
coming up behind me.

I have lost all direction.
Snow has covered everything.
Ice has burned away the smells.
The realm of winter.
Only a native can find his way through this.

A big bright yellow truck roars past.
The driver, happy to finally meet
someone on the road,
blows his horn wildly.
He's heading south.
I'm driving into the luminous north
that blinds and enchants me.

I know at the end of this road
a bearded man full of gentle fury,
surrounded by a pack of dogs,
is trying to write the great American novel.

Hunkered down in the sleeping village of Trois-Pistoles
on the edge of the frozen river,
he is the only one today who knows
how to dance with ghosts, madmen and the dead.

This bluish light sweeping the river
swallows me up in a single breath.
The car begins to skid.
I recover just in time.
To die amid beauty
is not granted to the petit bourgeois man
that I am.

I am aware of being in a world
completely different from my own.
The fire of the South crossing
the ice of the North
produces a temperate sea of tears.

When the road is straight like this,
ice on both sides,
no clouds to help me
find my way under the noonday sky
so completely blue,
I can touch infinity.

I really am among those northern people
who drink till they go mad
dancing a broken jig.
They scream obscenities at the sky
and are astonished to find themselves
alone on a giant sheet of ice.

The feeling of driving
through one of those cheap paintings
hanging above the fireplace.
Landscape within the landscape.

At the far end of the dirt road,
her feet not touching the ground,
that little girl with the black hair
and the fever-colored yellow dress is dancing.
The one who has lived in my dreams
since the summer I was ten.

A quick glance at the gauges
to see how much gasoline is left.
A breakdown on this road means certain death.
Magnanimous, the cold numbs before it kills.

The dogs are fighting under the table.
The cats playing with their shadows.
The old goat grazing on the carpet.
The master of the house has gone into the woods for the day,
the old housekeeper tells me.

I turn back as I go out the door
and see the cats tearing apart
a fat manuscript that has fallen from a shelf
The housekeeper's indulgent smile seems to say
that here animals come before literature.

Returning to Montreal.
Tired.
I stop by the side of the road.
A quick nap in the car.

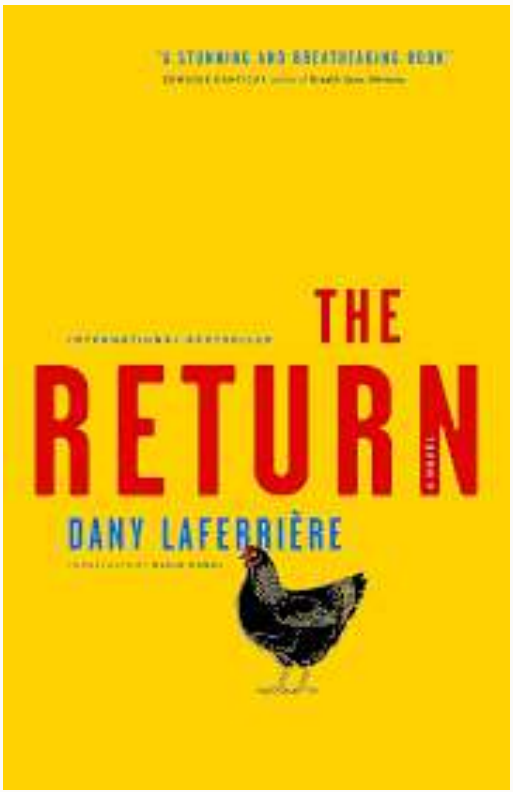
Childhood wells up behind closed eyelids.
I wander beneath the tropical sun
but it is cold as death.
The need to piss wakes me up.
A burning sensation before the liquid spurts out.

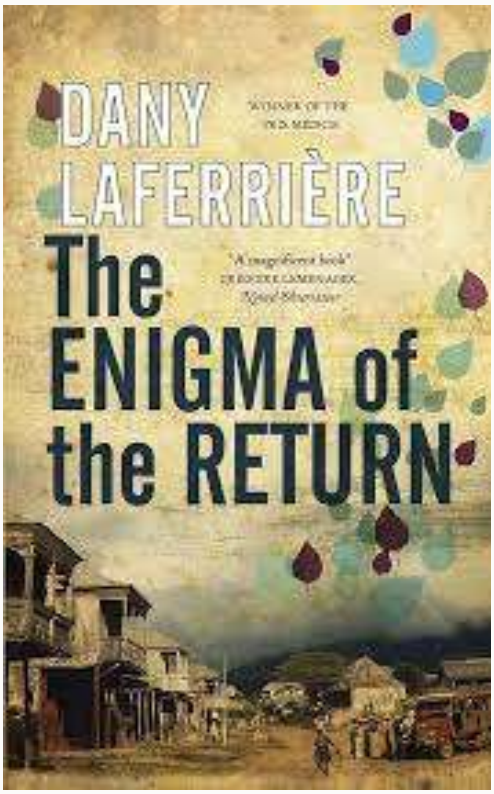
The same emotion every time
I see the city in the distance.
I take the tunnel under the river.
We always forget that Montreal is an island.

The low-angled light on the smokestacks
above the Pointe-aux-Trembles factories.
The melancholy headlights of the cars.
I make my way to the Cheval Blanc.

The afternoon drinkers have gone.
The late-night ones haven't shown up yet.
I love this brief moment
when no one is around.

The guy next to me is stretched
out on the counter mouth open and eyes half closed.
They serve me my usual glass of rum.
I think of a dead man whose features have yet
to come together in my mind.



“Art is the only serious attempt to answer our anxiety in the face of that insatiable monster called time.”

– Dany Laferrière.