The mediated text: Transatlantic circulation among periodicals of interwar African American poetry

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ABSTRACT

The early twentieth century saw an increase in the transatlantic circulation of African American poetry, evidenced in anthologies published in the 1930s and 1940s. This article traces earlier instances of this trend by focusing on the translation of poetry among periodicals during the 1920s. Adopting George Bornstein’s “bibliographic code” as a methodological approach, I trace the transatlantic itineraries of three poems by Langston Hughes, Sterling A. Brown, and James Weldon Johnson. A reading of the interlingual translation against its bibliographic code reveals the ironies and intricacies of texts in circulation, products of translation practices seeking to transcend structures of national particularity, and editorial practices seeking to reify them.

KEYWORDS

Black Atlantic; New Negro Renaissance; negritude; poetry; periodical studies; translation

Periodicals as early venues for poetry in translation

A survey of black American poetry anthologies published during the early twentieth century shows that during the 1920s these anthologies retained a predominantly national scope. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that translations of poetry from French and Spanish first featured in black American anthologies: Nancy Cunard’s Negro Anthology (1934) included translations by Langston Hughes of Cuban poets Nicolás Guillén and Regino Pederozo, and of Haitian poet Jacques Roumain. The Poetry of the Negro, 1746–1949 (1949), edited by Hughes alongside the African American poet Arna Bontemps, published translations of poets from Cuba, Haiti, Martinique, and French Guiana. Hughes’s translation of Roumain reappeared in this anthology, with slight alterations from the version published in Cunard’s anthology.

Poetry in translation appeared in periodicals prior to this, during the early 1920s. The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races published Jessie Redmon Fauset’s translation of Haitian poets Amédée Brun and Oswald Durand as early as 1921, over a decade before Edna Worthley Underwood published her collection of translations entitled The Poets of Haiti (1934). Underwood herself published a number of translations in Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life during the 1920s, establishing herself as a translator in this periodical before publishing her collection of translations in 1934, many of which were reprinted in The Poetry of the Negro in 1949.
A similar trend emerges among Francophone anthologies. Comparatively few anthologies of black poetry were published in French during the early twentieth century. Blaise Cendrars’s *Anthologie nègre* (1921), a colonial anthology which drew its material from the African continent rather than from among the diaspora, included a limited number of “Poésies et chansons danse” (“Poetry and dance-songs”) transcribed from oral African dialects. Over twenty-five years later, two anthologies of Francophone black poetry appeared in quick succession: the Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas published *Poètes d’expression française: 1900–1945* in 1947, followed by Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* in 1948. As the titles of these anthologies suggest, the majority of poetry was in French, although a number of poems written in “patois martiniquais” (“Martinican patois”) by Gilbert Gratiant appeared in Senghor’s anthology alongside their translations into French. A contemporary review by Mercer Cook, the African American university professor who himself translated a number of black Francophone writers, including Senghor, made an explicit comparison between Senghor’s anthology and *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746–1949*, arguing that the former was far less extensive in scope, and that its framing text – Jean-Paul Sartre’s “L’Orphée noir” – overlooked the transnational links between modern black poets. The absence of poetry in translation compounds Cook’s observations of *Anthologie*, suggesting that the diasporic ambition represented by Hughes and Bontemps’s collection was slower to develop among Francophone anthologizers.

Published translations in Francophone periodicals precede and outnumber those in anthologies during the early twentieth century. Translations of Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Angelina W. Grimké appeared in the metropolitan French periodical *Candide* in 1928, with further translations by Hughes appearing in *La Revue de Paris* in 1929 and *Nouvel Âge* in 1930. So too in the handful of Francophone journals now considered foundational to the Negritude movement: translations of Hughes and McKay appeared in *La Revue du Monde Noir* in 1932, whilst René Piquion’s translations of Hughes and Cullen were published in the Haitian journal *La Relève* in advance of being collated in Piquion’s biography of Langston Hughes *Un chant nouveau* (1940).

Periodicals remain an undervalued resource in Black Atlantic studies, often consigned to the status of secondary or supplementary literature. However, the transatlantic exchange of material among periodicals in the United States and France has received increasing attention in recent years, first studied in a sustained and concentrated manner by Brent Hayes Edwards in *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003). More recent studies by Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman (2010), Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (2012), and Eric Bulson (2017) have studied the periodical as a vehicle for transnational modernism, even if at times characterised by something more akin to “transatlantic immobility.” This brief overview of poetry in translation demonstrates that periodicals present early instances of texts in transatlantic circulation, examples which should figure more prominently in the literary history of the Black Atlantic. Furthermore, the direction of translation both into and from English challenges the monolingual focus of Black Atlantic scholarship, which all too often studies transnationalism through predominantly Anglophone texts.
The periodical as material text

Several recent studies on transnational modernism have chosen to foreground the material aspects of literary circulation. George Bornstein proposes that we attend to the “bibliographic code” of modernist texts in circulation, including elements such as “cover design, page layout, or spacing,” as well as “the other contents of the book or periodical in which the work appears.” A reprinted poem might display typographical variations, and will certainly be framed by new texts. “Tracing the multiple sites of the poem reveals alternate material components of meaning,” argues Bornstein, carried as much by its “bibliographic codes” as by its “linguistic ones.” Vera M. Kutzinski applies the same methodology to her reading of Hughes in translation, extending the meaning of “translation” beyond linguistic transfer to “textual relocations” and the “material circumstances in which acts of writing and reading are always embedded.”

Translation as the central problematic in this article is therefore at once linguistic and bibliographic as I assess in tandem the linguistic transfer and the “textual relocation” of the poem from one site to another.

Periodicals present a rewarding case study for examining the overlapping linguistic and bibliographic codes. In the case of poetry in translation, textual and visual content which surrounds the poem often serves to frame it for a new readership. Established French periodicals such as La Revue de Paris (founded in 1829) along with more recently-established metropolitan journals such as Les Nouvelles littéraires (1922) and Candide (1924) use accompanying texts to frame African American poetry in national and racial terms: introducing these poems as examples of “la ‘Renaissance nègre’ aux États-Unis” [“the ‘Negro Renaissance’ in the United States,”] “la poésie nègre aux États-Unis” [“Negro poetry in the United States,”] or indeed, “poètes de l’Aframérique” [“poets of Aframerica.”] African American blues poets, including Hughes and Sterling A. Brown, are described as reciting verse in “le dialecte charmant et puéril du Sud des États-Unis” [“the charming, childish dialect of the American South.”] Similarly, the spirituals – which as a musical tradition grew in international popularity during the 1920s thanks to touring singers such as Roland Hayes, and which inspired James Weldon Johnson’s 1927 collection God’s Trombones – are described as expressing “la foi naïve et ardente que les missionnaires baptistes inculquaient aux noirs du Sud” [“The innocent, fervent faith that baptist missionaries instilled in Southern blacks.”] Ethnicity and national particularity are retained and even reified by texts which introduce this poetry to an imagined metropolitan French readership as distinctly foreign: its themes and language rooted in the antebellum American South.

In contrast, La Revue du Monde Noir (1931–32) and Légitime Défense (1932), as periodicals which addressed themselves to an international readership of black intellectuals and students, seek to transcend structures of national particularity in their framing of African American poetry. The former, in particular, stands as a tangible product of the transatlantic exchanges which took place in the Clamart salon of the Nardal sisters, to which Hughes’s contemporaries Alain Locke and Claude McKay were invited as guests. Paul-ette Nardal, editor of La Revue du Monde Noir, charts the evolution of African American poetry in the journal’s sixth and final issue. Nardal describes how the modern writers, “without discarding racial themes,” nevertheless “abandonned [sic.] the Negro dialect in favour of forms and symbols of traditional literature.” In her assessment, Nardal
echoes James Weldon Johnson in his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, written a decade earlier in 1922, in which Johnson appeals to the black American poet to find “a form that is freer and larger than dialect, but which still holds the racial flavor.”\(^26\) Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,”\(^27\) first published in *The Nation* in 1925, is another emergent source text, quoted by Nardal when she commends Hughes and McKay as two poets who, “rejecting all inferiority complex, ‘intend to express their individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.’”\(^28\) Just as African American writers were welcomed into the physical and intellectual space of the Clamart salon, so is Hughes’s essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” brought into a transnational frame of reference which reflects, as its title suggest, the globalising objectives of *La Revue du Monde Noir*.

Importantly, a reading of the linguistic and bibliographic codes in tandem makes clear that all translations appear as mediated texts. “A text is a complete artifact that sustains meanings, values, and functions specific to its originary language and culture,” writes Lawrence Venuti, “and when translated this complexity is displaced by the creation of another text that comes to sustain meanings, values, and functions specific to a different language and culture.”\(^29\) It is this displacement which I seek to demonstrate in the three close readings that follow: a displacement orchestrated as much by the interventions of the editor as by those of the translator.

**Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son,” tr. Franck L. Schoell, “Une Mère à son fils”**

Printed in *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* in December 1922, “Mother to Son” was among the first poems by Langston Hughes to be published.\(^30\) Hughes recounts in his 1940 autobiography *The Big Sea* how *The Crisis* first printed his poetry in June 1921 and how “for the next few years my poems appeared often (and solely) in *The Crisis*.\(^31\) *The Crisis* printed the full range of Hughes’s poetic style – poems as varied in language and form as “Danse Africaine,” “Dream Variations,” and “Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret” –\(^32\) despite correspondence between Hughes and Jessie Redmon Fauset, who served as Literary Editor at *The Crisis* from 1919 to 1926, revealing Fauset’s preference for Hughes’s fixed form verse.\(^33\)

Hughes published his first collections of poetry during the late 1920s – *The Weary Blues* in 1926 and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927. Subsequently, his poems began appearing in periodicals internationally, both in their original and in translation.\(^34\) In July 1929, the established Parisian journal *La Revue politique et littéraire*, founded in 1871 and commonly referred to as *La Revue bleue*, printed an introduction to Hughes written by Franck L. Schoell, whose article on “La ‘Renaissance Nègre’ aux Etats-Unis” had appeared in *La Revue de Paris* six months earlier. “Mother to Son” was the last of eight poems translated by Schoell to be featured in the piece.\(^35\)

In “Mother to Son,” Hughes assumes the voice of a mother in a private address to her son, describing her experience of struggle by way of an extended metaphor:

1 Well, son, I'll tell you:  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
1 Vois-tu, fiston, je vas te dire:  
Pour moi, la vie, elle n'a pas été un escalier de cristal.
Formally, Schoell uses enjambement in his translation to the same effect as in Hughes’s original: punctuation suspends the line instead of closing it, a formal device used to transcribe the natural pauses in speech. Hughes includes a range of African American Language (AAL) formulations throughout “Mother to Son,” both in grammar and language. Schoell inserts his own variations into the French text, which do not copy those of Hughes but nevertheless mark the text as linguistically distinct from the poems which precede it. In lines 1–2 the AAL formulation “ain’t” and double negative “ain’t been no” are exchanged for orthographic variation in Schoell’s text both in the auxiliary – “je vas te dire” instead of “je vais te dire” (1) – and the subject – “alle” instead of “elle” (2). Similarly, further down in the poem Schoell exchanges the double negative in Hughes’s text for an omission of the pronoun “il”: “Where there ain’t been no light” becomes “Où n’y avait point de lumière” (13). Schoell continues his translation of AAL in lines 9–10 by way of a grammatical formulation:

I’s been a-climbin’ on,
10 And reachin’ landin’s,
J’ons pas cessé de grimper,
10 Et d’atteindre des paliers,

Variation of the copular, “one of the most salient aspects of AAL grammar,” occurs throughout “Mother to Son” in the formulation “I’s,“ a construction of “I has” as a grammatical variation of standard English, ascribing the third person singular auxiliary “has” to the first person singular – “I has been.” Schoell offers the construction “j’ons” as a translation, a contraction of “j’avois” whereby the auxiliary of the first-person plural is assumed by the first-person subject. Historically, “j’ons” as a grammatical construction had been used in the nineteenth century to transcribe the dialect of rural and provincial fictional characters, and often to comedic effect. The elision of the pronoun “je” and its verb in line 19, “j’grimpe,” produces an awkward formulation which is again common in the transcribed speech of provincial characters during the nineteenth century. The fact that Schoell uses this formulation as a translation for the AAL of “Mother to Son” suggests an interpretation of the African American vernacular as being rural and anachronistic.

A comparison of the bibliographic codes for “Mother to Son” in The Crisis (1922) and for “Une Mère à son fils” in La Revue bleue (1929) not only elucidates the choices Schoell makes as translator but also reveals an ironic attempt by Schoell to rewrite Hughes’s literary biography. In the seven years between the publication of “Mother to Son” in The Crisis and its translation in La Revue bleue, Hughes became an established figure in the New Negro Renaissance. The placement and paratexts of these two versions attest to this transition: “Mother to Son” appears at the bottom of its page in The Crisis, squeezed in below a monthly review of foreign newspapers, the contents of which bear no relation to Hughes’s poem. Schoell’s translation, on the other hand, whilst also confined within the double-column format of the periodical, is framed by texts which serve to introduce Hughes, described by Schoell as “un des plus dignes d’être connus en France” [“Among those most deserving of being well-known in France.”] The delay between the poem’s original publication and its transatlantic circulation is conditioned by this rise to fame: it is in part because Hughes is now an established poet in America that he is considered “digne d’être connu en France” among the likes of “Jack London, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson,” other American literary figures recognisable to a French
readership. Schoell walks his reader through the full range of Hughes’s poetic style, from his “jazzonia” poems to his “poèmes d’amour” (“love poems,”) perceiving within this verse “des états d’âme” (“moods”) which recall Verlaine, and describing Hughes’s “Dark Virgin” as a “rose de charnier assez baudelarienne” (“a Baudelairean rose of the grave.”) Throughout this introduction, Schoell not only documents Hughes’s success; he seeks to promote Hughes’s work to a French metropolitan readership, emphasising its universal appeal and situating it within a Euro-American Modernist tradition.

“Mother to Son” stands in contrast to this tradition. It is the only featured poem to be, as Schoell describes it in his introduction, “écrit dans le parler encore dialectal des vieilles paysannes noires du Sud” (“written in the still-dialectal speech of old Southern Black peasant women.”) Contained in this description is an interpretation of African American vernacular in terms of class, race, gender and region; an element of backwardness is suggested in the adverb “encore,” interpreting dialect not as a modern idiom but as the language of a bygone era. In his article for La Revue de Paris, published six months prior to this translation of Hughes, Schoell delivers a wry passing comment on the imagined exchange between American and Senegalese soldiers meeting for the first time in Paris:

Il y avait même eu un premier contact, sur sol français, entre Noirs d’Amérique et Noirs d’Afrique. Je ne sais pas très bien ce qu’ont pu se dire Sénégalais et Géorgiens. Sans doute leur conversation s’est-elle bornée à quelques verres bus ensemble, car entre le français yolof [sic] des uns et l’excellent yankee des autres, il n’était sans doute guère d’échange possible.43

[“It was even on French soil that the first meeting took place between American Blacks and African Blacks. I do not really know what the Senegalese and Georgians could have said to each other. Their conversation was likely limited to a few drinks, for between the français yolof [sic] of one and the perfect yankee of the other, no doubt little exchange was possible.”]

Despite the inaccuracy of attributing “yankee” – which as an epithet denotes the northern states – to Georgians, Schoell succeeds in making a cheap joke of the linguistic hybridity employed by both Senegalese and Southern Blacks. Accordingly, the variations chosen by Schoell as translator to recreate Southern dialect are ones associated with parody, marking the text as being linguistically of a lower calibre compared to the preceding verse.

So as to confirm this reading, Schoell provides the following assessment of “Mother to Son” directly below his translation:

Il ne faudrait sans doute pas que Langston Hughes se confinât dans cette poésie de propagande et de revendication raciale, qui a naturellement un gros succès dans les périodiques nègres.45

[“Langston Hughes should by no means restrict himself to such poetry marked by propaganda and race consciousness, which of course sees huge success in the Negro periodicals.”]

Schoell makes an explicit link between “cette poésie de propagande” (“such poetry marked by propaganda”) and “les périodiques nègres” (“Negro periodicals”); moreover, it can be inferred that Schoell politicises the “parler encore dialectal” (“still-dialectical speech”) of “Mother to Son” as creating “[une] poésie de propagande.” In his biographical sketch of Hughes, Schoell attributes the early publication of Hughes’s poetry to the white author, patron, and collector Carl Van Vechten. It is “grâce à Carl Van Vechten” that Hughes “trouve acheteur pour ses vers, non pas seulement dans le monde un peu
étroit des Revues nègres telles que Opportunity ou The Crisis, mais jusque parmi d’aussi grandes et prospères Revues ‘blanches’” [It is “thanks to Carl Van Vechten” that Hughes “found someone to buy his poetry, not only in the rather narrow world of the Negro Journals such as Opportunity or The Crisis, but even among equally major and successful ‘white’ Journals.”]46 Note that Schoell inserts scare quotes around “blanches” but not “nègres,” objecting to the racialisation (and perceived “revendication raciale”) of white journals, but not of black. Whilst it is true that Van Vechten secured Hughes his first publishing deal with Alfred A. Knopf and arranged for Hughes’s poetry to be featured in Vanity Fair, he did so in 1924, three years after The Crisis first published Hughes and two years after “Mother to Son” was accepted by Fauset for publication, despite her own stated aversion to dialect poetry.47 Thus emerges the irony of this “textual relocation”: Schoell intends “Une Mère à son fils” to be an illustration of “cette poésie de propaganda” published in “le monde un peu étroit des Revues nègres,” and for it to support his argument that Hughes should distance himself from the like; the bibliographic history of “Mother to Son” instead evidences the openness of The Crisis, or more specifically of Fauset as the literary editor, to the full range of Hughes’s poetic style, having published “Mother to Son” well before Hughes’s rise to fame.48

**Sterling A. Brown, “Strong Men,” tr. Aimé Césaire, “Les Hommes forts”**

The same AAL constructions which distinguish “Mother to Son” from the poems written by Hughes in standard English feature in “Strong Men” by Sterling A. Brown. First published in Opportunity in September 1930, the poem was anthologised a year later in James Weldon Johnson’s revised edition of The Book of American Negro Poetry.49 As a student in Paris, the Martinican Aimé Césaire published his French translation of “Strong Men” in the student journal for which he served as editor.50 Although copies of the May-June 1935 issue of L’Étudiant noir are no longer available, Césaire’s translation was reprinted in 1939 – the same year in which Césaire completed an advanced studies diploma on the role of the South in black literature in the United States – by the short-lived Parisian journal Charpentes, co-edited by art critics Roger Hallot and Gaston Diehl.51

There are at least three voices in Sterling A. Brown’s “Strong Men,” in addition to the quoted speech of the “whites.”52 The poem vacillates between tenses, the ahistoric voice of the narrator listing the suffering of the strong men in anaphoric form first in past tense, “They dragged you from homeland” (1), and then in present, “They point with pride to the roads you built for them” (22). The song of the “strong men,” indented and italicised, is the first voice written in AAL and is predominantly future tense, expressing hope and aspiration that “bye and bye” (15) they are going to “lay down dis heaby load” (16) and “gonna shine” (37–38). The third voice, which is further indented and printed in roman type in the original but not in the translation, rings like a tolling bell the repeated refrain, a dialect variation on a line from Carl Sandburg’s 1922 “Upstream”:

The strong men keep a-comin’ on
40 The strong men git stronger …
Les hommes forts continuent d’avancer
40 Les hommes forts deviennent plus forts.
In Brent Hayes Edwards’s assessment “Césaire’s rather straightforward translation cannot be said to capture the force of the idiomatic English.” Instead, what “carries over” is the “anaphoric, nearly incantatory shape of Brown’s lines,” conveying the effect of “a blunt evocation of repeated, dehumanizing objectification.” Unlike Schoell, Césaire chooses to translate the “idiomatic English” of Brown into standard French, changing the linguistic profile of the poem. Nevertheless, elsewhere in his use of language Césaire makes semantic choices which evoke this “dehumanizing objectification,” meaning that the force of this central theme is carried to an extent in the poem’s language as it is in its form. See, for example, lines 26–33:

You sang:
Ain’t no hammah
In dis lan’
  Strikes lak mine, bebby
30 Strikes lak mine.
They cooped you in their kitchens,
They penned you in their factories,
They gave you the jobs they were too good for,
Vous chantiez:
Il n’y a pas de marteau
Sur cette terre
  Qui frappe comme le mien, bebby,
30 Qui frappe comme le mien.
Ils vous ont foutus dans leurs cuisines
Ils vous ont parqués dans leurs factoreries
Ils vous ont imposé des corvées qu’ils dédaignaient

The verb “parquer” to translate “penned” in line 32 connotes managing livestock, whilst the treatment of humans as mere objects is effectively described in the preceding line by the verb “foutre,” used in this context to mean “to chuck” or “to throw.” The semantic choices made by Césaire as translator in these few lines also serve to expand the poem’s historical field of reference. The term “factorerie” (32) designates the trading posts used by the French colonial administration, whilst “corvées” (33) is a term taken from the colonial Code de l’indigénat. The effect of these word choices is that the poem now enters a new historical discourse: from the slave plantations of the American South to the colonies of l’Ancien Régime. The transnational potential held in Brown’s original text – in Edwards’s words, its “evocation of black virility and resistance” – is realised for a Francophone readership through the attentive and adaptive linguistic intervention made by Césaire as translator.

Charpentes lists among its stated objectives to “servir de lien entre les provinces et les colonies françaises, les pays de langue française et les centres étrangers qui accueillent notre culture” (“provide a link between the provinces and the French colonies, French-speaking countries and foreign cities which embrace our culture.”) Thomas A. Hale writes that “one could describe the journal as colonialist and concerned with the French-speaking world of France’s empire – today one might use the term ‘francophonisant’ to describe its goal of promoting links between French-speaking peoples.” The effective relocation of Brown’s text by Césaire allows “Les Hommes forts” to participate in the “francophonisant” aims of Charpentes. What is striking in the bibliographic code of this poem is that no indication is given of the text’s origin in North America. The
typographical variation between the multiple voices of “Strong Men” is removed in this publication – whether by the editor or the translator, it is difficult to say – so that the variation on Sandburg is imperceptibly woven into the main text, removing a distinctly American intertextual element (compare lines 39–40 above). “Les Hommes forts” is one of three texts published, in Edwards’s words, “somewhat perplexingly” under the heading “Afrique noire”, perplexing because neither Brown nor Césaire hailed from the continent. “Les Hommes forts” is the only translated text in this section; the editors acknowledge Césaire as translator at the bottom of the page, but give no indication of the text’s provenance, nor its original language. These aspects of the bibliographic code serve to relocate Brown’s text, no longer representative of “American Negro Poetry” nor of “the great mine of Negro folk poetry”, words taken from James Weldon Johnson’s introduction to the poem in its anthologised iteration, but instead representative of black Africa and, beyond this, of the Francophone aire linguistique [linguistic area] privileged by Charpentes.

In this context, the untranslated “bebby” in line 29 of “Les Hommes forts” stands out as an incongruous remnant of Brown’s original text. Is this a minor oversight on the part of Césaire? The linguistic nuance otherwise present throughout the translation negates such an argument. Instead, I consider it proof of what Emily Apter calls “a policy of non-translation adopted without apology”, the refusal by Césaire – in contrast to Schoell – to provide a cultural equivalent or even to endorse cultural equivalence as an acceptable route to a transnational text. Given the phonetic proximity to the French word for baby – “bébé” – perhaps Césaire considered it unnecessary to provide a translation. Perhaps, even, Césaire deemed the term a recognisable anglicism with which a cosmopolitan French readership would be familiar as a result of its widespread use in North American music and film. Whatever Césaire’s intention behind keeping “bebby,” this single, untranslated word stands as the sole, stubborn marker of Brown’s original text, and a testament to its North American origin. Indeed, this single word serves to limit the poem’s linguistic and bibliographic relocation to la Francophonie, producing a multilingual text which signals an ongoing process by which the poem, in Edwards’s words, “reads and appropriates a predecessor,” to create a new version or variation: Brown appropriating Sandburg through intertextuality, and Césaire in turn appropriating Brown through translation.

James Weldon Johnson, “The Creation,” tr. Jean Roux-Delimal, “La Création du monde”

First published as an individual poem in the African American newspaper The Freeman in 1920, “The Creation” is the opening sermon-poem of Johnson’s 1927 collection God’s Trombones. In 1930, Jean Roux-Delimal translated the entire collection over two issues of the Marseilles-based literary journal Les Cahiers du Sud. Little is known about Roux-Delimal, but there is evidence of his links to the Surrealist group during l’Affaire Aragon, several members of which had their work published in Les Cahiers du Sud. It is likely that Aimé Césaire came across Roux-Delimal’s translation through his own connection to the Surrealist group in Paris, and in 1941 Césaire reprinted “La Création du monde” in Tropiques, a “revue culturelle” edited by Césaire alongside his wife Suzanne, and published in Fort-de-France during the Vichy occupation. In contrast to Les Cahiers du Sud, one of the only nationwide French periodicals to be based outside of Paris, the readership for Tropiques was small and local: only one thousand copies of
Tropiques were printed at its peak. So too was the focus of Tropiques local: as Césaire reflected in a 1973 interview, “nous voulions que cette revue soit un instrument qui perm-ette à la Martinique de se recentrer” [“We wanted this review to be an instrument for Martinique to recentre itself.”]

In the opening lines we are introduced to the central problematic of the poem: a God who is lonely, and who consequently decides to create:

3 I’m lonely –
4 I’ll make me a world.
3 Je suis seul –
4 Je vais me fabriquer un monde.

Johnson’s sermon-poem is the transcription of an oral performance which itself draws from written Scripture. “The Creation” displays an intertextuality typical of the spirituals; one which renders the verse form, as Edwards has described it, “vernacular […] but not a pure ‘oral’ one,” based instead “on the texts of the Bible ‘sung out and out’.” The main voice is that of the “old-time Negro preacher” which is transcribed for the most part not in AAL but in standard English, with the occasional AAL variation at the driving resolutions of the narrative – “I’ll make me a world” (4) and “I’ll make me a man” (75) – and the archaism “Bring forth!” (53) which stands as the sole linguistic gesture to written Scripture. As in “Les Hommes forts,” Roux-Delimal renders the AAL variations into standard French: “je vais me fabriquer un monde” (4). The lack of typographical variation elides the distinction between the voice of God and the voice of the preacher in the original as in the translation, thereby emphasising the role of the preacher as God’s spokesman. Anaphora and enjambement are used by Johnson to convey orality, turning the narrative, as Johnson describes it in his preface to God’s Trombones, into a sequence of “sonorous, mouth-filling, ear-filling phrases.” As with Hughes’s “Mother to Son,” Johnson employs punctuation to suspend each line, transcribing at once “the tempos of the preacher” and the “quick intaking and an audible expulsion of breath.” Toward the end of the poem, the anaphoric structure turns retrospective:

80 And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This Great God,
85 Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneed down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;
80 Et là, le Grand Dieu tout puissant,
Qui alluma le soleil et le cloua dans le ciel,
Qui éparpilla les étoiles au plus lointain de la nuit,
Qui arrondit la terre dans le creux de sa main;
Ce grand Dieu,
85 Là,
Comme une Maman se penche sur son bébé,
S’agenouilla dans la poussière
Et travailla et travailla sur un petit bout d’argile
Pour le faire à son image;
Anthropomorphism emerges as a key poetic device throughout Johnson’s poem. The human epithet of loneliness is transferred to God in the opening problematic of lines 3–4, the emotion of which is not wholly conveyed by Roux-Delimal’s translation of “I’m lonely” to “Je suis seul” – “I am alone.” In his choice of the past simple tense, however, Roux-Delimal effectively conveys the metaphysical reality behind the series of human actions ascribed to a God “Qui alluma […]/ Qui éparpilla […]/ Qui arrondit […]” (81–83), attributing this sequence to a unique and definitive act of genesis instigated by a single, divine subject. As with the anaphoric form of “Strong Men” which carries over to “Les Hommes forts,” this repetition provides the dramatic force of the verse, driven by its acting subject, “le Grand Dieu tout puissant” (80). The magnitude of these actions is used to juxtapose the figure of a humble “mammy bending over her baby,” used as a comparative image for God as forming man from clay (84–85 in Johnson’s text; 84–86 in Roux-Delimal’s translation), and it is in these lines that Roux-Delimal exercises his autonomy as translator.71 “Mammy” (86) is a Southern American derivation of “mother” which carries the historical connotation of an enslaved black woman charged with caring for the slaveowner’s children.72 Unlike the untranslated “bebby” of Césaire’s translation, Roux-Delimal chooses to translate “Mammy,” rendering it by way of a colloquial derivative of “mère” – “Maman” (86). In his interpretation of Johnson’s metaphor as a means to juxtapose the glory and humility of God, Roux-Delimal capitalises “Maman” so as to infer deity and thereby emphasise the paradox of the two images. A simple adverb, “Là,” is inserted in a supplementary line (85), allowing the reader to hold the abstract idea of “ce grand Dieu” (84) in mind before it is fixed in the figure of the “Maman” (86). Roux-Delimal’s translation is an interpretive and creative act, using formal and linguistic interventions to infer new meaning and to heighten dramatic tension within the narrative.

Tracing the itinerary of “The Creation” allows us to observe how, in Bornstein’s words, “changing bibliographic codes can alter the meaning of poems even if their linguistic codes remain the same.”73 Comparable to the established Parisian journals cited above, Roux-Delimal’s introduction serves to place Johnson’s “The Creation” within the tradition of black North American folklore. Roux-Delimal affirms both the importance of folklore as having “déterminé l’éclosion de l’art aframéricain” [“determined the growth of African American art,”]74 and its preservation: “tout ceci serait sans doute resté perdu pour la quasi-totalité du public blanc si James Weldon Johnson […] n’avait rassemblé ses souvenirs” [“all of this would no doubt have remained lost on the white readership if James Weldon Johnson […] had not brought together this collection of memories.”]75 Key to the linguistic choices made by Roux-Delimal as translator is his interpretation of Johnson’s “The Creation” as the transcription – and so preservation – of an oral performance. “La forme du vers libre,” Roux-Delimal writes in the introduction to his translation, “permet seule les arrêts, les hachures et les liaisons de ces chants très rythmés où l’orateur donne à certains mots une chaleur, une intensité et même une violence incroyable” [“The form of free verse alone allows for the stops, dashes, and ties of these very rhythmic songs in which the orator lends to certain words a warmth, an intensity and even an extraordinary violence.”]76 As Johnson writes in his 1927 preface to God’s Trombones, the “intoning practiced by the old-time preacher” is “always a matter of crescendo and diminuendo in the intensity” and “often a startling effect is gained by breaking off suddenly at the highest point of intensity and dropping into the monotone of ordinary speech.”77 With that single word, “Là” (85), Roux-Delimal suspends the line at its highest point of
intensity, the tension having built through the anaphoric “intoning” of the preceding lines, before “dropping” and settling onto the image of the “ordinary” mother. Where Roux-Delimal intervenes as translator, it is to achieve in “La Création du monde” what he perceives Johnson to have achieved in “The Creation”: the transcription of an original oral performance and consequently the preservation of this particular folkloric tradition.83

At first sight, Césaire’s introduction likewise frames Roux-Delimal’s “La Création du monde” within a tradition of African American folklore. “La poésie nègre” (“Negro poetry”) as described by Césaire is a “cri de deliverance” (“a cry of deliverance”) from the stream of injustices “dans les slums de Harlem” (“in the slums of Harlem”) and “les plantations de coton des Caroline” (“the cotton plantations of North and South Carolina.”)84 The imagined act of creation in Johnson’s poem is as human as it is divine, evoked by the double-voiced narrative of God and preacher and the corporeal features attributed to an anthropomorphic Creator. “Là est sa valeur, “There lies its value […] to be open to the whole of man.”85

Translation as mode and method

One criticism levelled against Black Atlantic studies as a discipline is that it overlooks the role of linguistic difference in the transatlantic circulation of literary texts, and
consequently remains weighted toward Anglophone texts. The examples above evidence instances of linguistic hybridity, shifts in meaning as a result of linguistic transfer and a “principle of untranslation”: a refusal to provide a cultural equivalent to the words of the spirituals, folk rhymes and blues. To quote Apter, “word histories” become “world histories” when they are shown not to travel so easily from one language to another: the “nub of intractable semantic difference” held in the untranslated “bebby” or historicised “Mammy.”

Twenty-first century histories of the Black Atlantic must attend to linguistic difference as a constitutive feature of transatlantic exchange, and to the national linguistic specificity of words which are rooted in national history, so as to allow non-Anglophone texts to preserve their autonomy within the Black Atlantic formation. This is especially important given the methodological necessity of building a transatlantic history through the reading of texts in translation.

These three examples of African American poetry in transatlantic circulation challenge how we understand and practice translation. Delay – as both a condition of translation and a factor which in turn conditions translation – assumes new significance when studying the transatlantic circulation of African American poetry. In general, it took longer for black poets to be recognised internationally, in comparison to white poets – of the 126 poets featured in Eugène Jolas’s 1928 Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie américaine, only four were black. Moreover, black internationalism and race consciousness were slower to develop among black Francophone intellectuals than among African Americans. These historical factors explain the delay in translating and recirculating each of the three poems cited above, as well as intertextual elements present in black Francophone texts from Anglophone texts published twenty years previously. In turn, this delay should condition our reading of translation as being an intergenerational process, presenting another factor of the décalage in diasporic textual exchange.

These three close readings furthermore demonstrate translation as both a mode of circulation and an interpretative method. Schoell translates Hughes into French in part to make his poetry accessible to a French readership. Yet, as a close reading of “Une Mère a son fils” reveals, linguistic choices are underpinned by Schoell’s predisposition against dialect, at once marginalising it as provincial and politicising it as propaganda. It is precisely because translation is an act of “variable interpretation” that these three translators are able to exercise autonomy, seeking not the “direct” or “pure” translation of a word, but instead the unit or phrase which conveys most effectively their reading of the source text and their repurposing of the text for a new imagined readership. As such, the transatlantic potential of “Strong Men” or “The Creation” is realised: the themes of protest and resilience in “Strong Men”; the folklore and popular religion celebrated in “The Creation,” are not replicated, but creatively recontextualised. These are early articulations of the Black Atlantic, and – whether in their language of composition or in translation – they come in the form of mediated texts.

**The mediated text**

Translation is justified not by its faithfulness to the source text – which might be arguable if translation were only a mode of circulation – but by “the conditions that figure in its production and reception,” conditions which emerge through a reading of the
bibliographic code. Particularly fascinating are the slippages that occur between linguistic and bibliographic codes: the untranslated “bebby” which creates a multilingual text and so resists the “francophonisant” aims of the periodical which frames it. In turn, it is not “pure” linguistic transfer which conditions texts in circulation, but rather translation as an act of variable interpretation. Comparing linguistic transfers of the same poem, and even by the same poet, is enough to make this clear: consider the two versions made by Langston Hughes of Jacques Roumain, published in 1934 and 1949. A joint linguistic and bibliographic reading makes clear that the translated text is a new text because the bibliographic code evidences new conditions of production and reception. Additional meanings emerge from a material and bibliographic reading of texts in translation, meanings which reveal the ironies and intricacies of texts in circulation, in which the separate strategies of poet, translator and editor serve either to complement or to counteract one another.

Periodical culture is a rich site of enquiry for studying the mediated text. In periodicals, we observe the interventions and innovations which translations allow as they circulate in a transatlantic literary space. To involve periodicals as primary sources in our literary histories of the Black Atlantic, and our wider histories of the Atlantic, is to allow new agencies to emerge beyond that of the author and extend agency to that of the translator and editor. It is to uncover early instances of texts in transatlantic circulation, enabled by the relative freedoms of the press which allowed republication without the author’s permission. It is to read a text in relation to its surrounding textual and visual content, which serves to frame it for a particular readership. In this way, we are reminded that when constructing a literary history we are reading a series of mediated texts, whether in their language of original composition or in translation. Privileging periodicals as valuable primary sources will sharpen our understanding of the Black Atlantic as being built not on the abstract exchange of ideas or the elusive traces of literary influence but on the bibliographic and material history of texts being interpreted, translated and creatively recontextualised.

Notes
1. See Kerlin, Contemporary Poetry; Johnson, American Negro Poetry; Cullen, Caroling Dusk. The scope is “predominantly” national because Johnson’s anthology includes in an appendix translations by Johnson and William Cullen Bryant of the Cuban poet Plácido. Moreover, Johnson and Cullen include poems by the Jamaican Claude McKay and Gladys May Casely Hayford, who was born in the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana) and wrote under the pen name of Aquah Laluah.
2. Compare Cunard, Negro Anthology, 265 with Hughes and Bontemps, Poetry of the Negro, 365, notably lines 7–10. In contrast to the general trend described above, Hughes and Bontemps list Claude McKay in the “Caribbean” section under Jamaica; and Aquah Laluah, under “Africa.”
3. Brun, “The Pool,” 205; Durand, “To a Foreign Maid,” 158.
4. Underwood published three translations in Opportunity in 1925: see Maran, “Gandhi,” 40–42; Maran, “Harriet Beecher Stowe,” 229–231; Pushkin, “Unpublished,” 294.
5. Edwards is wholly disparaging in his review of Cendrars’s Anthologie, describing it as “composed of already-published, sloppily translated, poorly organized ‘facts’ and documents” (The Practice of Diaspora, 72). That one of the only collections of black Francophone verse would be of such poor quality demonstrates the relative dearth in anthologized poetry.
6. Senghor, *Anthologie*, 29. In his introduction to the selection of poems, Senghor first describes the poems as written “en patois martiniquais” and only later as “textes ‘creoles’.” The scare quotes around “creole” suggest that “patois” was the more recognized term for describing the Antillean vernacular.

7. For an analysis of Cook’s translation of Senghor, see Ni Loingsigh, “Mercer Cook,” 459–474.

8. Cook, *Review of Anthologie*, 238–240. Cook observes that, in contrast to the “147 poets of different nationalities” represented by *The Poetry of the Negro*, 1746–1949, Senghor’s *Anthologie* is “limited to sixteen contemporaries: one from French Guiana, three from Martinique, two from Guadeloupe, four from Haiti, three from French West Africa, and three from Madagascar.” In an implicit comparison between *Anthologie* and the transnational scope of *The Poetry of the Negro* 1746–1949, Cook comments that the volume’s introduction, written by Jean-Paul Sartre, “overlooks the relationship between many of these [Francophone] poets and their American congeners.”

9. Maurois, “La Poésie nègre,” 3. Maurois’s article includes his translations of Angelina W. Grimké, Claude McKay and Langston Hughes. (Countee Cullen, Assistant Editor at *Opportunity* from 1926 to 1928, published his translation of Maurois’s article and reprinted Maurois’s translations in his *Opportunity* column “The Dark Tower” in May 1928.) See also, Piérard, “Poëtes de l’Aframérique,” 9; and Louis, “Langston Hughes,” 1060–1064.

10. See Kesteloot, *Les écrivains noirs*. Kesteloot analyses the content and approach of *Légitime Défense* and *L’Étudiant noir* as forming “les origines” [“the origins”] and “la naissance de la Négritude” [“the birth of Negritude”]. See also, Achille, “Préface,” xii. I quote, “[d]es Noirs français des Antilles y pussèrent de quoi structurer et nourrir une conscience de race nais-
sante qui trouva des accents originaux dans la *Revue du Monde Noir*, dans les publications estudiantines qui suivirent et dans les œuvres poétiques qui fondèrent la Négritude,” [“black Frenchmen in the Caribbean drew from [these publications] what they needed to build and nourish a new race consciousness which found fresh expression in the *Revue du Monde Noir*, in the student publications which followed and in the poetic works which founded Négritude.”] xii.

11. Hughes, “Moi Aussi”; McKay, “Printemps en New Hampshire,” 166.

12. Dash, *Haiti*, 66; De Jongh, *Vicious Modernism*, 60. Dash describes *La Relève* as “the magazine that would make the work of the Harlem Renaissance available to Haitians in the 1930s,” 60.

13. Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form*, 16. Scholes and Wulfman outline the origins of modern periodical studies and present a working methodology for the systematic study of modernist magazines, including a helpful reflection on taxonomy. Brooker and Thacker’s volume includes a section devoted to periodicals of the Harlem Renaissance, and therefore is of particular relevance to this study. Although analysis is mostly limited to a national context, essays by Rachel Farebrother and George Hutchinson explore the participation of *The Crisis: Record of the Darker Races* (1910–present) and *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (1923–1949) in an internationalist politics, and the establishment of a New Negro aesthetic drawing from European and African influences.

14. Evans, “*The Black Atlantic*,” 263. Evans summarises the criticisms against Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* that it is geographically and linguistically exclusive. Nevertheless, Evans argues that the work contains a “generative power” and has since produced an “array of culturally specific inflections” (263) which seek to extend the scope of *The Black Atlantic* beyond its predominantly Anglophone sphere.

15. Bornstein, *Material Modernism*, 6.

16. Ibid., 31.

17. Kutzinski, *Langston Hughes*, 13.

18. Schoell, “La ‘Renaissance nègre,’” 149.

19. Maurois, “La Poésie nègre,” 3.

20. Piérard, “Les Poètes de l’Aframérique,” 9.

21. Ibid., 9.

22. Ibid.
23. Although A. James Arnold describes *Légitime Défense* as a “Parisian phenomenon” (73), the collective behind the journal espoused international communism in their rhetoric, and targeted an international readership by offering foreign subscriptions.

24. A handwritten note from Claude McKay to Alain Locke invites Locke to join him at the salon. Claude McKay to Alain Locke. [n.d.] Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Washington DC, Alain Locke Papers, Box 67, Folder 8.

25. Nardal, “Éveil,” 345.

26. Johnson, *American Negro Spirituals*, 42.

27. Hughes, “The Negro Artist,” 692–693.

28. Nardal, “Éveil,” 345. The English translation of Nardal’s text is a near-verbatim citation of Hughes in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” Hughes’s text reads: “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.” See Hughes, “The Negro Artist,” 693. Further echoes of this essay by Hughes can be heard in René Ménil’s appeal to the Caribbean writer to “reconnaître d’abord ses passions propres et de n’exprimer que lui-même” [“first recognise his own desires and to express only himself”] in an article published two months later in *Légitime Défense*, which sought to establish an autonomous Antillean literature. See Ménil, “Généralités”, 9.

29. Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism*, 3.

30. Hughes, “Mother to Son,” 87.

31. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 94.

32. “Danse Africaine” appeared in *The Crisis* in August 1922; “Dream Variations” in July 1924; “Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret” was published as “To a Negro Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret” in December 1925.

33. “I still do not care very much for your vers libre. I have grown to like that combination which you do sometimes of rhymed and free verse, but I do like very much, oh more than that, I admire and am often envious of your rhymed verse. [...] But your free verse is too free.” Jessie Redmon Fauset to Langston Hughes, 24 June 1924. Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven. Box 61, Folder 1163.

34. Examples include: “Two Poems: ‘The Negro’ and ‘A Black Pierrot’” *Les Continents* 5 (July 15, 1924); “Moi aussi/I, too” *La Revue du Monde Noir* 3 (January 1932); nine poems translated by Léone Louis for *Nouvel Âge* 12 (December 1931).

35. Schoell, “Un poète nègre,” 436–438.

36. Ramsby II and Whiteside, “African American Language,” 709.

37. Letellier, *Que j’suis t’heureux !*; Gabillaud and Courtois, *Ah ! m’s enfants !!*

38. *J’urons d’la partie*, 1–2.

39. Schoell, “Un poète nègre,” 435.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 437.

42. Ibid.

43. Schoell, “La “Renaissance Nègre,”” 126.

44. “Yankee, n. and adj.” OED Online. December 2020. Accessed 23 March 2021. https://oed.com/view/Entry/231174?rskey=UmPOlh&result=1&isAdvanced=false&eid (1.a.) “U.S. A nickname for a native or inhabitant of New England, or, more widely, of the northern States generally.”

45. Schoell, “Un poète nègre,” 437.

46. Ibid., 436.

47. Fauset expressed a preference for Hughes’s fixed form verse, see note 31. In a review of Robert T. Kerlin’s anthology of African American folk rhymes, most of which appear in African American dialect, Fauset consigns the poems to ethnographical study, commenting that “from the standpoint of beauty these songs fail to satisfy, but from the standpoint of sociology they are both valuable and enlightening.” Fauset, “As to Books,” 68.
48. In an added irony, Fauset translated excerpts of Schoell’s 1923 book *La Question des noirs aux États-Unis* and published these in *The Crisis* in July 1924. See *The Crisis* 28, no.3 (July 1924), 83–86.

49. See *Opportunity* 8, no. 9 (September 1930), 265, and Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Revised ed., 258–260. In form and typography the two versions are virtually identical; *Opportunity* includes an epigraph from Sandburg’s “Upstream”, “The strong men keep coming on.”

50. Arnold, “Chronology,” xiv.

51. Césaire, “Les Hommes forts,” *Charpentes* 1 (June 1939), 52–53.

52. For a fuller analysis of Brown’s use of voice, particularly in how he uses it to play vernacular and traditional verse forms against each other, see Glaser, 181–206.

53. Edwards, “Aimé Césaire,” 5.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Charpentes 1 (June 1939), iii.

57. Hale, “Césaire,” 447.

58. Edwards, “Aimé Césaire,” 4.

59. Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Revised ed., 247.

60. Apter, *Against World Literature*, 104.

61. Edwards, “Aimé Césaire,” 5.

62. Johnson, *God’s Trombones*, 17–21.

63. Roux-Delimal, Jean, “Huit Sermons Nègres,” *Cahiers du Sud* 6, no. 2 (October 1930), 567–579; the second part of the series was published as “Huit Sermons Nègres (Suite),” *Cahiers du Sud* 6, no. 3 (November 1930), 653–673.

64. Letters written by Jean Roux-Delimal form part of the archival collection entitled *L’Affaire Aragon* at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits. Cote NAF 25094, F. 364

65. Roux-Delimal, “La Création du Monde,” 43–46. *Tropiques* carried the subtitle “revue culturelle” presumably to reinforce its assumed status as nothing more than a literary journal, as I explain on page 20.

66. See Leiner, “Entretien avec Aimé Césaire,” ix.

67. Ibid. (Leiner’s emphasis.)

68. Edwards, *Epistrophies*, 84.

69. Johnson, *God’s Trombones*, 10.

70. Ibid., 10–11.

71. A comparison of Roux-Delimal’s translation of lines 84–85 to that of Léopold Sédar Senghor, published in 1950, demonstrates the insertion of “là” and the capitalisation of “Maman” as creative choices made by Roux-Delimal: “Ce grand Dieu,/ Comme une mère penchée sur son enfant.” Senghor, “La Poésie négro-américaine,” 110.

72. “mammy, n. (and int.).” OED Online. September 2020. Oxford University Press. Accessed November 12 2020. [https://oed.com/view/Entry/113188?redirectedFrom=Mammy](https://oed.com/view/Entry/113188?redirectedFrom=Mammy) (3) “In the southern United States, esp. before the abolition of slavery: a black woman with responsibility for the care of white children.”

73. Bornstein, *Material Modernism*, 23.

74. Roux-Delimal and Roux-Delimal, “Nègres d’Amérique,” 564.

75. Ibid., 566.

76. Ibid.

77. Johnson, *God’s Trombones*, 10.

78. Morrissette (2013) and Glaser (2020) write of a “wariness” among vernacular African American poets, including James Weldon Johnson and Sterling A. Brown, of their poems being read and perceived as “pure performance” or “mere transcription” instead of poetry (Morrissette is quoted in Glaser, 170). Whilst I place the emphasis here on Roux-Delimal’s interpretation of “The Creation” as the transcription of an oral performance, it would be worth considering if and how the creative interventions of Roux-Delimal change the versification and prosody of
the original, and in doing so if Roux-Delimal is seeking to create poetry or “mere transcription.”

79. Césaire, “Introduction,” 38.
80. Ibid., 40. “Oh, when the saints go marching in!”
81. Ménil, “Pour une lecture critique,” xxv.
82. Kesteloot, Les écrivains noirs, 212.
83. Césaire, “Introduction,” 41.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Apter, “Global Translatio,” 108; Apter, Against World Literature, 104.
87. Jolas, Anthologie, 263–266.
88. This is part is due to black Francophone évolués who were educated in the French metropole often going on to serve in the colonial administration and holding to their identity as French nationals over and above any collective racial identity with other members of the African diaspora. Reports in The Crisis on the early Pan-African Congresses express the frustration of W.E.B. Du Bois and Jessie Redmon Fauset in response to the French national pride displayed by certain delegates.
89. The translation of Langston Hughes’s “Mother to Son” spans seven years (1922, 1929); Sterling A. Brown’s “Strong Men” eight years (1931, 1939); the translation and recirculation of James Weldon Johnson’s: “The Creation” twenty years (1921, 1930, 1941).
90. Cloutier, Shadow Archives, 16. Cloutier adapts Edwards’s theorisation of décalage as a condition of diasporic translation, appropriating the term in its meaning of a displacement in time in order to elaborate his approach to studying the archival as “a proleptic pastness to come” (16).
91. Venuti, Contra Instrumentalism, 39.
92. Ibid., 18.

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