

4.3 Brent Hayes Edwards and Jean-Baptiste Naudy (SW)

Transcript

Sarah Wasserman

Hello and welcome to Novel Dialogue, a podcast sponsored by the Society for Novel Studies and produced in partnership with Public Books, an online magazine of arts ideas and scholarship. I'm Sara Wasserman, one of your hosts this season. On this podcast, we bring scholars and novelists together to talk about how novels work, how they're written, read, studied, and remembered. But this season is a bit different, as we're focusing on how novels get translated. All season long, we're bringing together novelists, translators and critics to talk about what happens when novels and novelists move from one language to another.

Today I have the honor of welcoming Professor Brent Edwards and translator and publisher Jean-Baptiste Naudy. They'll be talking today about the novels of Claude McKay, the Jamaican American writer whose poetry and novels shaped the Harlem Renaissance and offered readers a complex treatment of race, place and politics. Brent and Jean-Baptiste will be talking about translating McKay into French, sometimes translating McKay out of French, and also about translating McKay scholarship into French.

Brent Edwards is the Peng Family Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is the author of the prize winning *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* and *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. With Jean-Christophe Cloutier, Brent edited Claude McKay's *Amiable with Big Teeth*. His many translations include essays, poems, and fictions by authors such as Édouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Leiris. In 2020, Brent was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and he is joining us today from New York.

Jean-Baptiste Naudy is a publisher and translator from Paris, France. He translated to French *African Journey* by Eslanda Goode Robeson in 2020 and *Amiable with Big Teeth* by Claude McKay in 2021. He has also recently translated *An Archaeology of Holes*, a short story collection by the South African writer Stacy Hardy, which came out with his publishing house Rôt-Bò-Krik. He co-founded of Rôt-Bò-Krik in 2021. It's an independent publishing house based in Sète. Jean-Baptiste is a man of many talents, and he's played a number of roles in the past. He's been a bookseller, he founded Société Réaliste, an art cooperative, and as an artist he's exhibited his own work in exhibitions around the world. And he joins us today from an undisclosed location in France.

Thank you for joining us. My real job here is to get out of the way and let the two of you do the talking. So I'd like to begin just by posing a very general question to both of you, which is what is it that drew you initially to Claude McKay, and perhaps more importantly, what is it that keeps drawing you to his work?

Brent Edwards

Well, thanks. It's a pleasure to do this and fun to be able to chat with Jean-Baptiste about McKay and about our continuing transatlantic dialogue around McKay's work. I guess I'd say from my own perspective, I was first drawn to McKay because I was attracted to—as a young intellectual, even before I went to graduate school, attempting to write myself, but also a young expat that lived in France before I came back to the US to go to graduate school—and I was attracted to the vagabond, the peripatetic nature of McKay's life, his travels, his wanderings, his errancies around the globe and that he, as his autobiography is titled, spent so much of his life “a long way from home.”

So that was the first to me, as an expatriate—for the same reason that I carried with me on the plane to Paris, when I first moved to France in the early 1990s, James Baldwin's *The Price of the Ticket* (Baldwin's complete essays), McKay was part of my very small three- or four-book bookshelf when I moved to Paris the first time. It was one of those—he was one of those authors that I felt had to come with me, as part of the baggage. Jean-Baptiste, what attracted you to McKay?

Jean-Baptiste Naudy

Well, I discovered McKay by chance. I guess like a lot of French readers, because at the time when I was studying at the university, I was studying around francophone black literature. Of course I had to work a lot around négritude and around Aimé Césaire and Senghor and Damas, et cetera, and the Nardal sisters, not so much at that time, actually. And studying those writers, it was clear that black American literature had a strong influence on them and that's when I heard for the first time about McKay. And when I was a student at Sorbonne, actually there was only one book by McKay that was available in French, which was *Banjo* that was just re-translated at that time in Marseille by a Marseille publisher called André Dimanche. And so it was a very specific period when McKay had completely disappeared from the French panorama. And there was this effort by this Marseille publishing house to try to bring him back—and first via the Marseille trope, actually; so, this idea that *Banjo*, which is set in Marseille, which is one of the most famous novels about Marseille even for French readers, could lead to the rediscovery of McKay in France. And actually André Dimanche, this publisher, some years after translating, re-translating and publishing again *Banjo*, did the same for *A Long Way from Home*.

So this was my first encounter with McKay and then I have to say that I was part of the—I was in the middle of this wave of renewed interest for McKay in the French readership that started maybe three or four years ago, something like that. And of course, I mean, I have to give credit when credit is due, reading your book, Brent, *The Practice of Diaspora* where the central chapter about McKay and vagabond writing was extremely powerful to me. And so it gave me also the urge to go and read McKay in English and try also to discover in McKay and the English writing of McKay, English language writing, the polyphony that was at work within his work. The fact that he was Jamaican was of a lot of interest for me, especially what kind of approach could have some kind of imperial language like English is, from a Jamaican point of view compared to what happened to the French language at the same period under the eye and the scope of West Indian writers or African writers. How they used the imperial language in a certain way. And I was willing to try to see and to detect in the way McKay approached novel writing—and poetry, of course—the same problem.

The French are telling themselves a story about race relations, a story in which the American experience, and specifically the African American experience, has a very important part. So, so the United States played the role in the French imaginary of this epitome of racism. So it's kind of the definitive example of what anti-blackness is and the fascination of the French for African American literature and for

African American, let's say culture in general, is very much related to the denial of a specific French racism. And there is a part of the story of African American writers in France that they can interpret in this way. So they keep on feeling that if all those very important writers from McKay to Baldwin to Chester Himes, and even very important figures like Nina Simone and very key figures of African American culture of the 20th century came to France, it was supposedly because France was a less racist country than the United States, that such things as anti-blackness could not exist, you know, in our country. And so I think that it's a very crucial aspect if one wants to understand why McKay now has such an important, let's say, renaissance in France.

BE

Yeah, it strikes me that there's an interesting, you could call it a misrecognition of McKay as African American in the way that French readership takes him up and the French publishing industry takes him up. One of the things I write about in my diaspora book is the excerpt from *Banjo* that's published in *Légitime Défense*, the incendiary journal put out by a group of Martinican students in the early 1930s. And they titled this excerpt from *Banjo*—this book by a Jamaican author about black communities in Marseille—they titled it “L'Étudiant antillais vu par un noir américain.” So: “the Caribbean student as seen by a black American.”

And they miss, in this very interesting but very symptomatic way, the fact that the main character who's featured in this excerpt—because the excerpt is from a chapter where the main character meets a Martinican student—the main character in the novel (in both of McKay's first two novels, in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*) is Haitian: Ray. So what you're actually getting in McKay is a much more complex and much more critical portrait of inter-imperial dynamics and even inter-francophone dynamics where we have a French Caribbean but Haitian character in Ray confronting a French Caribbean Martinican, still a colonial subject figure, in the student that he's talking to. And the French interestingly miss that or elide that in making McKay a representative of the Harlem Renaissance.

It used to be—I mean, maybe I should ask you, Jean-Baptiste, if you had a conversation with Nouvelles Éditions Place, with the publisher, about this. It used to be that books would say—I think it's changed now, but it used to be that books in France, translated American books that were translated in French would say, “traduit de l'américain,” so translated from American English as opposed to “traduit du,” I think it used to say “britannique,” from British English.

And your version of *Amiable With Big Teeth*, I think it's now the convention that it says “traduit de l'anglais,” and then in parentheses it has “États-Unis.” So: “translated from English (United States).” But even that—there's something complex going there because that little preparatory frame put up at the front of the book says that there's a certain kind of English that's moving, that's being carried over when, of course, with a novel like *Banjo*, or even a book like *Amiable with Big Teeth*, which is set in New York but equally involves diasporic communities, involves Ethiopians interacting with black folks of Caribbean descent who have moved from the south to the north, various kinds of Englishes. And there's an interesting kind of fudging of that. Did you talk about that with Cyrille [Zola-Place], the publisher, when you were working on your translation?

JBN

Well, I insisted on presenting McKay as a Jamaican writer. So I knew that at a certain point in his life he had the American nationality, but the fact that he was from Jamaica for me was crucial. And the fact of using this expression, which is so standard in French now, like “translated from English” and, between parentheses, “United States,” in a certain way opens up a little this idea if you compare to “translated from American”—because we can say that in French, “traduit de l’américain.” So because McKay, of course, was educated in a British colony and was raised in the British colony, for me the fact that he was a Jamaican was very important in presenting him to the French readership, so there's a very clear idea, maybe a little bit too clear, about what the Jamaican is supposed to be. And that is something very different from the American.

But I think it's very interesting what you say about the fact that in *Légitime Défense* he was presented as—Ray, the Haitian character, was presented as, misread as—an American, because I think it has a lot of relation, I mean it relates to, in a certain way, this international blackness has been constructed from the point of view of the French Empire. So it was very important for me in terms of this translation to insist on the fact that McKay was a Jamaican. Especially because people that know McKay in France, they know him as an African American writer in France and not so much as a West Indian.

And then regarding the way of mentioning the language of translation, I would have considered a little bit excessive to call it “translated from Jamaican English.” This would have been a little bit too much, especially because McKay wrote in Jamaican English, in patois, a book of poetry. It was the first book ever published in patois, actually. So this would be some kind of, let's say an excessive way of understanding it.

So, and I guess it's interesting to have a Jamaican writer writing in English in the American context after being in Europe. So this, I mean, looks a lot like McKay, like something very, very, peripatetic, you said, a very vagabond way of understanding language and identity.

BE

Yeah, I guess what fascinates me about it and what seems interestingly off, is that to me—going back to what draws me to McKay—if anything, McKay is about a confrontation *among* Englishes. All of McKay. You never have just American English, or just Jamaican English, or just expatriate English, whatever that would be. You have Englishes. There is no just US English or just “English English,” British English. That's what I find fascinating about McKay and, in *Banjo*, in the story-swapping scenes and the arguments on the quay in Marseilles: part of what you're hearing is this stew of languages, of versions of English and other languages coming into contact. So it's an interesting thing to try to put him in a national box, this writer in particular. To say this is—this book is “American English” in particular.

I'm also fascinated by what that does to the way McKay becomes influential for—going back to what I was saying about *Légitime Défense*—for the négritude generation, for the black French intellectuals, for the writers who become the so-called fathers of négritude who read McKay and take him as a tutelary influence, as kind of a pedagogical text or set of texts around what it means to think black consciousness. But they're reading McKay through this particular lens that warps him in interesting ways, in a way that becomes formative. It's not exactly a right-or-wrong thing. It's about the way something becomes formative as it moves. So again in my diaspora book, I talk about the fact that the first translator of *Banjo*, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, is a French Communist politician, actually, in the early 1930s. And every time McKay uses words like “folk” and “common people,” Vaillant-Couturier uses in

French *le prolétariat*: “the proletariat.” He translates some of the terms that McKay uses quite often—of course, “proletariat” is a word in English, but McKay writes words like “folk” and “common people” all the time, and if you read that early version of *Banjo*, Vaillant-Couturier translates it in that direction. It's not so much about getting it wrong. It's more—to me the interesting question is: what does it mean that *this* is the McKay, with *le prolétariat*, with “the proletariat” injected, that Léopold Senghor, that Aimé Césaire, that they're reading McKay in French and this is the McKay that they're being influenced by.

One example in *Amiable with Big Teeth* that I was going to ask you about, Jean-Baptiste, is in the chapter “The Emperor's Letter.” It's when the Ethiopian envoy, Lij Alamaya has—so he's gone to Harlem to try to raise support and to raise funds for the Ethiopian cause after Ethiopia has been invaded by Mussolini's Italy. And he has a letter from the emperor, from Haile Selassie, authenticating him as an envoy, saying, “I've sent you as my envoy to raise money,” and he goes to this gathering and shows the letter and it gets stolen by the bad guy of the book, the evil communist. But—this is a detail from that chapter: they're chatting about it; Lij Alamaya pulls out the letter. There's an English guy, and it's interesting—going back to what we were saying about McKay being a British imperial subject—that McKay makes this person a white Englishman rather than any of the other characters who are in the room. And a white Englishman whose name is Pickett, Aubrey Pickett, they're having this conversation and the African American woman who's kind of chaperoning the Ethiopian envoy, Alamaya, has brought him late because, she says, you always show up at parties late. We've got to be late. And it's the English guy who says, when they come in the door, “Oh, I see already you're keeping CPT.”

And I was really interested to see what you do with that, because CPT to me is a very African American, it's a very US black English idiom. “Colored people's time.” And it's hard to handle in French because there's not quite an equivalent to it. And what you ended up putting is “Je vois que vous êtes à l'heure africaine.” You're keeping African time. I'm not sure how else you could do it. Because you can't just do a literal translation of the idiom, which loses its idiomaticity that has a specific meaning in African American vernacular English. But “African time” is tricky, too, because what happens in the scene is this tension between the meaning of “colored,” “African,” and “black,” because Lij Alamaya, the Ethiopian, is standing there and thinking, Well, I think of myself as African, but I don't quite think of myself as colored, so why is this white English guy telling me I'm keeping “colored people's time”? I'm African but I'm *not* colored, is actually what—the way the passage unfolds. So it's a very hard passage to translate.

I'm not sure it's about finding some—as though there could be some perfect or exact equivalent. The whole point is that there is not an exact equivalent and in the original passage, part of the dynamic is that there is not exact equivalence, right. Lij Alamaya is not quite getting it, if CPT is not—he doesn't quite get that. And it's the white English guy trying to pretend to be cool who's saying, yeah, I know what CPT means. It's the white guy who's throwing this black vernacular term into the conversation. But the whole conversation in English in the novel is about this linguistic discrepancy, that idioms don't necessarily carry over, that even in Anglophone contexts, they're not necessarily transparent. So it's not about some right version of that that Jean-Baptiste could have found, it's about the work of these discrepancies that travel and reshape things in these very interesting ways.

I wonder what—you were laughing as I mentioned it—I wonder, you must have wrestled with it. I wonder how you came up with the solution you came up with.

JBN

And you have to say that right after this mentioning of CPT, Aubrey Pickett, this Englishman is turning to the African Americans that are there and saying, Oh, but you should explain to him what CPT is. And—

BE

And they don't know!

JBN

—none of the African Americans that are there understand what that means.

So they don't know because they are from the upper-class, let's say, part of Harlem, and for them it's—I mean, they miss the point. So well, I completely agree with what you say, and in this precise case, my point was not to, let's say, use a literal translation, that could have worked in a way, because French people now have an understanding of African American culture that could have made it understandable, let's say. But I wanted to reproduce the colonial gaze that was at stake here. And if you would have compared in time, you know, like in a French speaking context, what would an Englishman like that say to an African in France, while he would be with French-speaking African people or West Indians, it would have been this. So “African time”: *l'heure africaine* or *le temps africain*. And so I inverted the effect.

So, in a way it's not aggregating Lij Alamaya to this African American concept of—or, say, American context of—CPT, but it's agglomerating in this version, this French version, those African Americans to a colonial African understanding. So they are reduced, I mean their blackness is there reduced to their Africanness so they are in a way associated to something that is completely outside of their reality, because they are absolutely not Africans and especially compared to this Ethiopian guy.

So this was my choice: to try to keep the brutality of this pun or this joke. And that triggers a reaction then, because like Lij, Lij Alamaya becomes a little bit aggressive. In his way, he's a very mild guy, but he has some kind of reaction after this consideration. So what most of translators do when it's about translating African American vernacular English is that they use, let's say, popular French, which sounds like actually white worker French. So the question of race is raised there, but I think it's inevitable. You cannot reassess the race dimension while translating this aspect.

BE

Well, as we were talking about before, you could say that there's a McKay vogue, or a wave or resurgence or renaissance of interest in McKay over the past couple of years. Part of that, understandably, is due to the rediscovery and first publication of these previously unknown books, of *Amiable with Big Teeth* and *Romance in Marseille*. So to that degree it may it may be an understandable feature of literary history.

But as Jean-Baptiste was saying earlier, the interesting thing is that you could say there are multiple waves. Waves aren't—in literary history, in publishing history, waves aren't permanent because publishers go out of business, because things go in and out of print. So I thought—that was when I was starting my teaching career as an assistant professor when Michel Fabre translated, retranslated *Banjo* and *A Long Way From Home*—that felt like a wave, right around the millennium. Those are 1999 [Banjo], and *A Long Way From Home* he translated, I think, around 2001. And I was in contact with Michel because I was doing research in France around then. And I remember thinking, wow, here's McKay coming back into view.

Waves, I think it's important to realize that waves are not permanent. And the other thing I think it's important to realize that it's hard to talk about—it's interesting how difficult it is to talk about—is that chronology shifts in translation. Some things come out in sequence, but there's this interesting skewing of the chronology, a reordering of the corpus. W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* wasn't translated until 1959. What does that do for the French understanding of African American racial politics? Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was not translated until 1996. I was just reading—it was retranslated recently—Sika Fakambi's translation, a couple of years ago, of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in 2018. An extraordinary, I think—as a translation—an extraordinary performance, because she doesn't do what you were talking about, Jean-Baptiste, she doesn't fall into the pitfall of replicating a kind of proletarian French as a version of a vernacular French, of conflating race with class that way. She finds a way of inventing a vernacular that's not a West African or Caribbean French or creolized French. But she invents a vernacular that gets close to what Hurston does with English. But that book only came out a couple of years ago. Nella Larsen wasn't translated until about a decade ago: *Passing* and *Quicksand* were not available in French until around 2010. Jean Toomer wasn't translated until the 1970s, *Cane*.

So what we might take for granted about the canon—it does not move in the chronological shape that we tend to take for granted in thinking about the shape of the tradition. Jean-Baptiste, I don't know if you've thought about it this way, and I, in preparing for our conversation, I was just looking over some of the history and thinking about this in relation to McKay, because I was thinking, what does McKay mean now in relation to the emergence of a black consciousness in France, beyond just the fact of the discovery of *Amiable* and the first publishing of *Romance in Marseille*? Why is McKay coming back into view? But then I started thinking about it and realizing that the chronology is shifting as it moves over. I don't know if you've thought about it this way—if what I'm saying makes sense?

JBN

Absolutely. I would say that the French history with McKay is really a history with *Banjo*, actually. So this book influenced a lot of the négritude movement. This book was the first one published by McKay in France. This book was the only one that adds some kind of public recognition, much more than *Home to Harlem* or *Banana Bottom*. And of course it's the opposite than the American context, where *Home to Harlem* was the main book, the main novel of McKay. And when *Home to Harlem* was translated in France in 1932 the approach was really, so in this kind of proletarian literature framing, let's have some kind of exotic view on this African district or black district in New York. And the title chosen for the translation at the time was *Quartier Noir*: "Black District." So there was a kind of exotic approach of it. And then in 2021, so last year, there were those two publications, but of unknown books by McKay so, *Romance in Marseille* and *Amiable with Big Teeth*.

And so this is kind of a funny situation. So, you can understand in the American context, everybody has access to the whole oeuvre of McKay and suddenly two unknown books appear and are published and they're in this kind of continuity. In France it's completely different. So, nobody was reading McKay except *Banjo*. That is the specific status. And then suddenly those two unknown books by McKay happened to be published, but all the other books of McKay are completely unknown as well, you know. And so now starts a new trend because of the success of *Romance in Marseille* and of recognition of *Amiable with Big Teeth* and now they start republishing the whole oeuvre.

So about, so that's interesting about chronology and publishing edition, and publishing history. And about the very interest, the new, this renewed interest in McKay, I think it's very, very much related to contemporary issues and political issues of our day, because for some years now the anti-racist movement in France has been, let's say extended, very much politicized, very much a lot of positive and productive way radicalized. And so people, militants or not, are looking for sources and cultural elements on which to build. And the very specific--well, and to that extent, the history of the African American political movement has always been very influential in France in that aspect. Very interesting to see the influence of Fanon on the Black Panthers, and, reciprocally, how the Black Panthers shaped a lot of racial consciousness and understanding of political issues in France in the 70s, 80s. And so there is some kind of looking after those key figures of the anti-racist corpus.

BE

Oh, I'll add just one thing. I agree with everything you said, but the other thing I would add is that it's interesting to think about McKay's work, and especially these recent republications, as a Marseille-focused corpus. So it's giving—in the French context, it's giving a vision of a French cosmopolitanism, a French worldliness that's insistently Mediterranean. I mean, yes, it's about the African diaspora, it's about vagabonds and dockers and wanderers meeting up on the docks, on the quays in Marseille—but that it's Marseille, not Paris (and McKay, as we know, really did not care for Paris; he spent some time there, but he was not attracted to the cafe life, the dilettante life of the Parisian sidewalk scene). So in the French context, it gives an interesting counterpoint to—Marseille famously is always the “other city,” the alternative to Paris, since the French conception of itself is so centralized, the metropole is so capital-focused. That McKay is a Marseille-focused France—that I think is part of the mix that's really interesting.

JBN

Yeah, I would say to that extent, so, we had some kind of political debate last year because so as you might know, we have something called the Panthéon, where we put the ashes of important people as defined by the French Government. And so last year, as some kind of answer to the current rise of the anti-racist movement, which is strongly opposed of course to our government, so the government had this brilliant idea to put in the Panthéon Josephine Baker. Which is the embodiment of, for them at least, of this African American exile to Paris, you know, and this refuge far away from segregation in the land of the free, or freedom that Paris is supposed to be.

And that's interesting to that extent that I think McKay also, in a way, the reason why he shows Marseille, so it's probably for very practical reasons, that he was—he had no money so he couldn't really stay in Paris. It was very difficult for him at that time, and he had some connections that led him to the South of France. But also, because in Marseille he met with what was of interest for him at that period, which was this colonial diaspora that Marseille is the embodiment. In France, like, for example, we have various sayings about Marseille that pretends that Marseille is an African city, is the beginning of Africa, you know in the colonial conception of space, because it's a colonial harbor and open to North Africa. It's the first step to Africa.

SW

Well, I feel like the two of you have, I don't know, for me sketched this McKay—*multiverse* would be the word of the moment, but that there are so many McKays and so many Englishes and so many sites that that the work touches on and convenes upon and of course we could talk for so many more minutes, but it's my job to sort of wrap things up by asking you our podcast signature question. And this season, it's about translation, and I think it will actually return us to some of the things that we were talking about earlier in the show. And so ironically, in the season about translation, it's a question about what defies translation and it's a question I'm sure you've heard before, which is, is there a word or concept that you consider untranslatable or very difficult to translate?

BE

It would be an entirely other conversation, which we probably don't have time to have. I admit to some frustration with the untranslatability debates because to me, even if we read that work on untranslatability, the theorists who introduced the term define it—it's admittedly, openly a catachresis, it's a misnomer, it's a word used misleadingly because untranslatability as [Barbara] Cassin defines it doesn't mean you can't translate it; it means you keep trying to translate it. It's the word that you keep coming back to, that you keep wrestling with. And that to me is the point—although I wouldn't call it untranslatability because it's exactly *not* untranslatability. The untranslatable is the thing that you have to keep translating retranslating, to keep working at.

As a translator, untranslatability is perplexing and simply unacceptable. As a translator—Jean-Baptiste, I think we'll agree—you don't have the option of untranslatability. You can cushion, you can graft, you can contextualize, you can provide a glossary, a footnote, you can put a word in brackets, you can show some of the difficulties of translation. But you can't not translate: as a translator you're in the room, you're in the pages of the book to carry over. So you have to find a solution. If you don't believe, as I was saying before, that the task of the translator is to find some pristine, perfect, one-to-one correspondence between original and translation, then it's not a matter of fidelity. It's not a matter of a perfect match. It's a matter of the work you do when you carry it over and inherently, unavoidably change it in the process. But you don't have the option of saying, "I would prefer not to," in *Bartleby's* phrase. You've got to find a solution. As a translator you're doing—when I was translating Michel Leiris, there were particular phrases I struggled with. We know that idiomatic phrases, that jokes, that they're particular registers of language that are hard to translate. But you don't have the option of just not doing it or saying that's untranslatable. You've got to find a way to do it.

So to me the term, I don't find the term helpful, opening up the space of questioning, because it doesn't get you to the real work of translation, which is the task of facing the necessity and impossibility of translation always going together. That's my answer. That's as quick an answer as I could give.

JBN

Yeah, I can make a kind of double answer myself. We were talking about *The Wretched of the Earth* by Fanon, and I find very interesting that in the English translation of Fanon, the term blackness happens a lot. It is reiterated a lot, and this word does not exist in French. So the translator to English chose to amalgamate things that Fanon were saying to this very English-language concept of blackness. And the other way, when we have to translate books that deal with blackness we are struggling trying to find something instead of blackness. So some translators do not translate it, which is not a solution for me of course. Like as Brent just said, as a translator you have to do something and, so, but there are so many,

so many options and so many ways of translating blackness. There is no equivalent, no good solution, so it's always the best error you can make, something like that.

So to my second point which is actually a reference to Brent's book *The Practice of Diaspora*, but there is a whole part, very beautiful and mesmerizing for me, about a French word called *décalage*. So a word that is not translatable in English and is absolutely crucial to the understanding of the practice of translation. So this *décalage* means lacking something, or in a way, some kind of something that doesn't fit very much, doesn't fit as well as it could, and that is inescapable. And translation is about that, is about *décalage*. So, you have to find temporary solutions. And that's why retranslating is so important, in a way. Because of course you cannot translate McKay the same in the 30s or in the 90s or now or 30 years from now. So we have to keep on translating and we have, an English translator has to keep on translating Fanon and again and again and again, to re-appropriate it, change it, looting in a way. So I think that's very important.

SW

Yeah, the waves have to keep coming, obviously, and I really like the phrase, Jean-Baptiste, that you offered us: "the best error you can make."

BE

And keep following those ripples right? Because it then it moves into, it shapes the tradition of the debates and the discourse of French philosophy.

SW

Thanks. Thanks to both of you. Thanks to Brent and Jean-Baptiste. In addition to reading McKay, which we hope you will, you can find Brent and Jean-Baptiste's books and translations online and visit Rôt-Bò-Krik at Rôt-Bò-Krik.com.

As always, we are grateful to the Society for Novel Studies, for its sponsorship, to Public Books, for its partnership, and we acknowledge the support of Duke University. Hannah Jorgensen is our graduate intern and Connor Hibbert is the sound engineer. Novelists from past seasons include Chang-Rae Lee, Teju Cole, Ruth Ozeki, Jennifer Egan, George Saunders and many more.

On November 17th, tune in for the season finale in which host Aarthi Vadde talks with Saskia Ziolkowski and Ann Goldstein, the translator of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan quartet.

From all of us at Novel Dialogue, thanks so much for tuning in. Keep listening and keep reading.