

# Transhistoricizing Claude McKay's *Romance in Marseille*

## Introduction to the Special Issue

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### Contexts: Gary Edward Holcomb

In February 2020 Penguin Classics published the Harlem Renaissance author Claude McKay's *Romance in Marseille*, a novel that had idled in an archive for nearly ninety years.<sup>1</sup> We believe that the debut of this work of fiction, until recently effectively unknown, may stimulate several critical areas, not only Harlem Renaissance studies but also dialogues across queer, disability, feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, Afro-Orientalist, Black Atlantic, and transatlantic modernist scholarship. As we hope the reader of this special issue will see, McKay's circa 1929–33 text also offers a fecund analytic subject to critics working in Afropessimism, primitivism, reparations, and surveillance, as well as such emergent approaches as maritime modernism and the politics of pleasure.

As *Romance in Marseille* is a good candidate for an analysis that is not necessarily obliged to a strictly historicist approach, our call for papers welcomed scholarship that explored how McKay's recovered novel offers transhistorical ways of seeing. The novel's near-century-long absence, synthesized with its pertinence to current critical concerns, speaks volumes to a range of past and present moments. The media reception of *Romance in Marseille* proved to be a popular analogue to our interest in welcoming transhistorical readings. Feted for its ability to speak with clarity to the present, not least in its depiction of the persistent crisis of Black bodies under siege, *Romance in Marseille* has shown a considerable suppleness for being read as both an artifact of its historical moment and a work of fiction that acutely resonates with present reading communities.

We first learned of McKay's novel through reading Wayne F. Cooper's indispensable 1987 biography, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner of the Harlem Renaissance*, a text that glosses the obstacles McKay faced while trying to publish it.<sup>2</sup> But *Romance in Marseille's* adversities ranged even beyond the death of the all-but-forgotten fifty-eight-year-old author in 1948. The final hurdle took the form of the McKay Literary Estate being compelled to prevent a UK university press from publishing the novel, a wrangle that seemed doomed to drag on indefinitely. Over the years, we would

check on the legal dispute's status and learn that the UK press had refused to budge. Like a soul on ice, *Romance in Marseille* remained interned in its archival vault at the historic New York Public Library Black studies collection, Harlem's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Having all but given up, we were happily amazed five years ago when the estate related to us that the UK press had withdrawn and we had the green light to move forward. The timing was ripe, after all, as a shorter typescript of the novel had surfaced at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Equally propitious, Jean-Christophe Cloutier, a Columbia PhD student, had uncovered in a Columbia University library archive McKay's lost novel *Amiable with Big Teeth* (2017), a satirical fiction set in Harlem during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War.<sup>3</sup> Cloutier and his research adviser, the Black transnational studies scholar Brent Hayes Edwards, went on to coedit an edition for Penguin Classics. *Amiable with Big Teeth* attracted substantial media enthusiasm, both before and after publication,<sup>4</sup> and Penguin's success with McKay's circa-1941 satire unquestionably paved our way. In the spring of 2018 Penguin Classics signed *Romance*, an artifact known to only a handful of Harlem Renaissance scholars.

Our own research unearthed the unabridged tale of the nightmare of a time McKay had trying to get *Romance in Marseille* into print, not least being objections to placing an African double amputee, brutally cut down at the Ellis Island immigration hospital, at the heart of the narrative. The book's troubles were exacerbated by the inclusion of a motley, intersecting, and, to some, objectionable cast of female and male sex laborers, Black and white radicals, and an array of lesbian and gay characters—despite the title, all deromanticized, including the disabled protagonist, and portrayed in the frankest manner. Correspondence revealed that its various designations, first “The Jungle and the Bottoms,” and then “Savage Loving,” and finally “Romance in Marseille,” came about partly because of McKay's attempts to adapt to publishers', editors', agents', friends', and kibitzers' bemusement over and, in some cases, downright antipathy for the text.

Two busy years later Penguin Classics released the novel as its 2020 Black History Month selection. It's a safe bet that the satirist in McKay would have enjoyed the irony of seeing a major Manhattan publisher take on a tale that the early 1930s New York publishing industry had roundly spurned and then, a still more astounding development, witnessing the once nixed novel become an instant success with the metropolis's mass media. The buzzing began with the *New York Times* preview titled “A Book So Far Ahead of Its Time, It Took Eighty-Seven Years to Find a Publisher.” Talya Zax's article introduced a conceit that went viral—that *Romance in Marseille* resonates with present issues.<sup>5</sup> The two-sentence headline of *Washington Post* writer Michael Dirda's February 5 online preview echoes the “ahead of its time” trope: “Claude McKay abandoned ‘Romance in Marseille’ because it was too daring. He was just ahead of his time.” The Pulitzer-winning critic's declaration that McKay's early Great Depression text is “woke” propelled the Penguin Classic into living social and aesthetic discourses: “Today *Romance in Marseille* seems less shocking than strikingly woke, given that its themes include disability, the full spectrum of sexual preference, radical politics and the subtleties of racial identity.”<sup>6</sup>

*New York* magazine writer Molly Young's preview, consummately titled "The Best New Novel Was Written Ninety Years Ago," also articulates the idea of *Romance* finally finding its moment. The "Vulture" section article articulates a kind of post-millennial hipster's genial irony in response to an obscure, near-century-old work of art—so queer, Black, and differently abled—appearing so well into the twenty-first century: "If you skipped the introduction and surrendered access to Google, you could easily mistake it for a novel written last year. It's about bodies, disability, sex, Islam, slavery, and capital. There are lesbians. There is gender-bending. There is socialism."<sup>7</sup> It seems likely, moreover, that McKay would have relished the irony of no less a symbol of American capitalism than the *Wall Street Journal* printing a sensitive, insightful appraisal of his Black anarchist fiction. Proffering lyricism for epic, reviewer Sam Sacks deems *Romance* "as heady and bewitching as the scene of a Vieux Port dance floor."<sup>8</sup>

Nearly ninety years after its composition and rejection, *Romance in Marseille* became a model transhistorical neomodernist text, one that seemed capable of dancing a nimble beguine between temporal breaking points. The novel may claim more than a single past: first it failed to achieve a readership; then for decades both its shorter version and its lengthier revision sat in a state of suspension on New Haven and New York library shelves; and then its indefinite detention, exacerbated by what all thought an irreconcilable legal dispute. And it now lays claim to its *awokened* present, where it speaks to contemporary readers.

Young's insight into the public reception of *Romance in Marseille* imagines two readers. The first has read the prefatory and supplementary matter, and accordingly appreciates as a vital constituent of the text the novel's historical struggle to be born. The other ignores the complementary resources and simply reads the primary text, putting off engaging with the supporting materials until later, if at all, and consequently responding to the text almost as if it were a work of art without a past. But an appreciation of *Romance in Marseille's* initial extratextual debates and then years of neglect, its former obscurity finally aggravated by its legal quarantine, should disabuse the notion that the current reader may fancy engaging with an untouched artifact. No reader comes to *Romance in Marseille* in a virtuous reading condition because, bearing in mind the struggles the text endured in its passage from the archive into the public sphere and why the obstacles against its realization occurred, no chaste version of the novel exists or ever did. Yet *Romance in Marseille* still qualifies as a contemporary work of art, because this transhistorical classic contains several pasts, none of which may claim it exclusively.

Of all the media responses, the *New York Times* truly fell for *Romance in Marseille*, its motivation consistently having to do with the novel's transhistorical dexterity. In all, the Penguin Classic racked up six *Times* notices, easily the most anomalous being an interview with Joseph Stiglitz on his reading interests. The Nobel Prize-winning Georgist economist admits that he doesn't read much literary writing but mentions that, following a conversation about *Things Fall Apart*, his newly formed reading group will be discussing *Romance in Marseille*.<sup>9</sup> The noteworthy implication is that Achebe's definitive postcolonial classic is being paired with McKay's instant classic for comparative purposes. The most thought-provoking of

the newspaper's *Romance* references, however, was an article tackling the topic of defining the classic in multicultural terms. To brand a novel that was never in print a "classic," the very term must undergo a radical reappraisal. As "Penguin Classics and Others Work to Diversify Offerings from the Canon" suggests, a classic in the sense that the Penguin imprint traditionally has used the term is effectively synonymous with *canonical*.<sup>10</sup> Over the past few years, however, Penguin Classics has been expanding the category. Salvaging works by African American, Asian American, Latinx, and other writers—from Nella Larsen to Carlos Bulosan—that were denied a place in the Western or US canon, Penguin Classics has redefined the notion of indispensable literary writing.<sup>11</sup> In publisher Elda Rotor's words: "We're seeing what people are expecting from us, and we want to bring those stories, and a more diverse and inclusive program of stories, into our series."<sup>12</sup>

In view of its capacious, militant cosmopolitanism—composed in Spain and Morocco and set in Manhattan and Marseille—it is fitting that the fascination with *Romance* roamed beyond New York literary culture. *Romance's* global notice materialized as widely as the United Kingdom, Canada, Greece, Italy, India, Australia, Argentina, and McKay's homeland, Jamaica. Of special pride for us, the *Gleaner*, where McKay published his early vernacular poetry, issued an editorial stating that the novel should stir a national discussion of homophobia in the island nation: "More than seven decades after McKay's death and 91 years after he began writing his novel, the logic of a 156-year-old buggery law, which encroaches on the rights of the individual, diminishes the humanity of a large segment of [Jamaica's] citizens and might have caused him to be jailed, isn't sustainable."<sup>13</sup> In another measure of the novel's queer transhistoricism, the LGBTQ activist site Lambda Literary applauded the novel's vanguard "pansexual" content.<sup>14</sup> And the book's first academic review, praising its internationalist themes, appropriately came out on May Day in the Routledge journal *American Communist History*.<sup>15</sup>

By late March, however, another version of the novel had begun to resonate with reviewers and readers. *Vanity Fair's* March 25 listing of the Great Depression text as one of its "Great Quarantine Reads" sums up the next phase of *Romance's* reception.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in advance of that other day in May, Mother's Day, *New York* magazine's "The Strategist," no doubt inspired by Young's Vulture section review, recommended *Romance* as an online-accessible gift suggestion for offspring who have the sense to observe early hunker-in-place orders.<sup>17</sup> Given the early April date of the *Times* article about Stiglitz's reading list, the mentioned reading group likely turned out to be a Zoom affair, the kind of lockdown exchange that soon would become all too familiar. The *Romance* e-audiobook, vividly read by *Wire* actor Dion Graham, earns a mention in an early April Bookriot.com piece starkly titled "How Audiobooks Are Getting Me through COVID-19." "My eyes," fatigued by "anxiety, sadness, anger," might "have glazed over reading it," confesses Laura Sackton, "but my ears took it in with delight."<sup>18</sup> An October 2020 *Los Angeles Review of Books* interview with the editors of this special issue tackles the grim question of how the narrative's portrayal of Black, disabled, sex laboring, and queer folk, barely existing at the margins of a germinal global capitalism, potentially bespeaks a bleak new existence.<sup>19</sup>

When the virus became our essential social reality, the response to and the character of *Romance in Marseille* adapted to the new exigency, its pansexuality conscripted against the pandemic. As the Penguin Classic took on the dubious celebrity of a plague text, it was as if *Romance* had made its way from the archive to remind us of the transhistorical imperative that the struggles of the oppressed *to be heard* are always in need of committed support and recuperation.

### Contents: William J. Maxwell

The eleven academic essays contained in this issue of *ELN*—some of the first ever written on *Romance in Marseille*—treat the novel as an aid to thought rather than a gift to celebrate. Admiration for McKay’s condensed lyricism and fertile social imagination isn’t always hidden in these essays: that much has been sanctioned by the typically positive affect of literary recovery projects and by the allowances of the recent postcritical turn. But all of the contributions press the novel into service as a tool for thinking anew about McKay’s career as a free-range artist-intellectual, and about the many active areas of cultural research that this career predicts and illuminates. Jesse W. Schwartz’s essay “Broken Bits of Color in the Dirt” leads the way for several reasons: its explicit location in a pandemic present, making common cause with the second wave of *Romance*’s first popular reviews; its equally explicit trans-historicism, assuming that the crises of the past “may not exactly repeat” themselves but that some historical “similarities feel a bit richer than rhyme”; and its status as a kind of theory and anatomy of approaches to situating *Romance* in the intersectional now. “The narrative of *Romance*,” concedes Schwartz, “seems to unravel as it approaches various problematics of difference simultaneously.” Yet he concludes that in McKay’s inability to premaster what we’ve learned to call intersectionality, “all is not lost.” “If the novel and its resonances have returned like a welcoming ghost from an inhospitable machine,” McKay also sketches “the outlines of a dialectical ‘Black Intersectional International’”—one that reckons with “various differences [in] their entanglement, conjoining without flattening them through the twinned technologies of pleasure and care, and thereby gesturing toward a ‘commonism’ of the quayside.” On Schwartz’s version of McKay’s Marseille waterfront, erotic and protective attachments to the unmeltable ethnic differences among roving Black populations offer a model for assimilating disparities of culture, gender, sexuality, and political affiliation without blurring all lines of separation.

Schwartz’s prelude is followed by a pair of essays that share his interest in the embodied politics of pleasure and care. The first, Agnieszka Tuszynska’s “‘A Syrup of Passion and Desire,’” roots its queer inquiry in the matrix of postcolonial as well as Black cultural theory. It begins with an enlightening comparison between themes of bodily disintegration in McKay’s *Romance* and Frantz Fanon’s later essay “The Fact of Blackness” but ironically navigates toward Achille Mbembe’s death-haunted necropolitics to clarify McKay’s relatively sanguine portrait of sexual desire and fulfillment. For the Black Jamaican-turned-Black world novelist, Tuszynska claims, visions of unshackled sexual expression are not racist obsessions but channels for “legitimizing the selfhood of the socially marginalized characters

who populate Marseille's Old Port." The liberating realism of *Romance's* split focus on the "body-in-pain and body-in-pleasure," Tuszynska determines, is best gauged "by examining the way Mbembe seriously considers the concept of social death yet also pushes against it as a definition of Black ontology." Eric H. Newman's "A Queer Romance" ups the ante of such advocacy of McKay's nonutopian queer positivity. The same-sex romances on the margins of McKay's *Romance*, Newman argues, are the novel's central examples of self-exceeding love and egalitarian social relations. What's more, they outdo the queer likenesses of McKay's earlier, far-better-known novels *Banjo* (1929) and *Home to Harlem* (1928) in both particularity and suggested normalcy. In the last analysis, Newman's abstract submits, *Romance in Marseille* is nothing less than "one of the most sustained [and] nuanced representations of queer life in McKay's archive and in early twentieth-century LGBT literature more generally." If for Newman justice is served, McKay's second Penguin Classic will become his first undisputed queer classic.

The next essay, Laura Ryan's "'A Little Civilization in My Pocket,'" takes up a crucial if implicit element in Tuszynska's and Newman's variations on the theme of McKay's sexuality: his engagement with the always racialized and sexualized discourse of primitivism. In particular Ryan complicates the ongoing complication of primitivism most identified with the Australian critic Ben Etherington, who has revisited this long-disreputable modernism as a productive aesthetic weapon for colonized writers as much as an othering fantasy of the imperial West. Ryan finds value in the spirit of Etherington's revisionism but finds its letter challenged by *Romance in Marseille*. There, she contends, the festive "strategic primitivism" of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* is abandoned in favor of a thoroughgoing Depression-era deconstruction of the primitive/civilized opposition—a deconstruction that should also shake McKay's status, reinforced by Etherington, as the New Negro novelist most attracted to primitivism as a double-edged sword to be seized by the racially oppressed. Stephanie J. Brown's essay, "Marseille Exposed," similarly employs *Romance* to advance a reenergized and consequential scholarly debate at the crossroads of race and biopower: in her case, the debate over the racialization of surveillance, or what Simone Browne has labeled the "dark matter" of Black bodies and texts overseen during and after slavery. *Romance in Marseille*, Brown maintains, pleads the case that modern racial surveillance involved "a set of overlapping practices by various agents—the state, the transnational corporation, and a range of other private interests—that constrain[ed] the flourishing of Black migrant lives in the transatlantic world." More unexpectedly, she views McKay's novel as a type of historical diagram tracing how the corporation came to take the leading role in the operation of this complicated panoptical machinery. With its "increasingly global reach into already existing systems of surveillance—from migration checks at national borders to social surveillance among more local interests in Marseille and New York"—the far-seeing international corporation becomes *Romance's* single most powerful antagonist. Brown's own transhistorical lens, then, reveals McKay's novel as an ingenious, never-tedious history of perhaps the decisive shift in the administration of punitive surveillance in the twentieth century.

The trio of essays following Brown's compose a loosely joined suite exploring the sea, one prime location of the surveillance that troubles Lafala, McKay's cruelly

disabled, eventually wealthy, but never-idealized protagonist. Rich Cole's contribution, "Claude McKay's Bad Nationalists," begins with McKay's own boarding of a ship heading from Spain to Morocco and lands on the problem of McKay's self-declared "bad nationalism," a cosmopolitan faith he cultivated just as Black nationalists in the mode of Marcus Garvey set their sights on transatlantic African repatriation. With an eye to the full range of both McKay's imaginative writing and the material history of "transatlantic shipping damages," Cole unveils a *Romance* in which a postcolonized call of the sea inspires Middle Passage-reversing returns to Africa—all the while threatening legal stasis and practically deracializing personal isolation. "The act of litigative justice" that makes the legless Lafala a rich and mobile man, Cole declares, counts at once "as a success consistent with the tenets of liberal individualism" and as a failure consistent with "the realization that there was no longer a recognizable home or community back in Africa for Lafala to return to."

Like Cole's essay, Nissa Ren Cannon's "'No Man's Ocean Ever Did Get the Best of Me'" mines a rich seam of originally nonliterary history to explain *Romance's* ocean voyages and symbols. Cannon demonstrates that during the same years in which McKay wrote his novel based in part on a Nigerian stowaway's horrific imprisonment on the Fabre Line, Fabre brochures promised paying Euro-American passengers "roomy, airy" cabins and dining rooms complete with "fine French cuisine and pleasing service." *Romance in Marseille*, then, qualifies as an anti-advertisement exposing the barbarism belowdecks that underwrote the conspicuously consumed civilization of the luxury liner. In Cannon's estimation, however, *Romance* is also a handbook to areas of underdevelopment in twenty-first-century maritime and oceanic studies, each of which would do well to apply McKay's text transhistorically to allow for the possibility of "hybrid figures of both labor and leisure." By the time that Lafala's transatlantic tale is through, she observes, he has sailed the ocean not only as a common seaman and frostbitten prisoner but also as "the rare Black man traveling first class." Instructively, however, during all of these journeys, whether sealed in the hold or pampered on an upper deck, the body blows of race are never avoided entirely. Laura Winkiel's "Shoreline Thinking," the final essay in the trio dealing with *Romance* and the sea, breaks from Cannon's in its focus on reification and the limits of fungible liberal subjectivity. Instead of Lafala's incomplete transition from shipboard labor to leisure, Winkiel concentrates on McKay's figures of "flotsam and jetsam" and the transubstantiation of enslaved bodies into the thingified objects they signify. "The social logic and history of racialized disposability alluded to by these terms," she shows, is a core preoccupation of McKay's shoreline text. Paradoxically, so is its proposal that "this long history of expendability contains the seeds of a transformation of Black life via lateral and reciprocal relations with humans and nonhumans alike." When Lafala pictures Aslima, his North African lover, as a "rare tropical garden" during their last meeting, he draws from an old, stereotypical well to link a Black female body with visceral nature. More tellingly, he also assembles "the human and nonhuman in a coterminous and transformative relation," typifying what Winkiel, one of the architects of oceanic studies, dubs the "alluvial" or overflowing quality of *Romance's* fluidly interpenetrating beings and things.

A pair of essays on McKay's urbane but never landlocked Afro-Orientalism follows the trio on *Romance in Marseille* at sea. Zainab Cheema's "Mooring Aslima" foregrounds the waters of the Mediterranean along with "the Moroccan sex worker whom Lafala loves and leaves over the course of the novel." The "in-between positionality" of Aslima—both courtesan and true lover, Arab and African, faithfully Islamic and constitutionally secular—personifies what Cheema describes as "the trans-Mediterranean diaspora that linked Iberia and North Africa from the eighth-century conquest of Iberia and Provence to the waves of expulsion of Iberian Moors, Jews, conversos, and Moriscos after the 1492 Reconquista." Her essay thus combines a postcolonial feminist take on the most compelling of McKay's many "Orientalized Black women" with deep knowledge of the interreligious Spanish-Moroccan history in which he wrote and partly set his text. The result is a unique account of the implications of *Romance's* "Maurophilia," the love affair with real and romanticized traces of Moorish forms in Spanish culture first named by Barbara Fuchs. Like Cheema's contribution, David B. Hobbs's "Lyric Commodification in McKay's Morocco" profits from a familiarity with the history of the Maghreb that the editors of *Romance in Marseille* cannot be said to possess. More specifically, Hobbs's essay complements Cheema's in traveling between McKay's novel and his Moroccan-set verse of the 1930s. The publication of *Romance*, Hobbs volunteers, affords "a chance to draw on [McKay's] fiction to help understand his much-neglected late poetry" by fostering "a fuller impression of McKay's years in Africa." McKay's understudied "Cities" sonnets, closely reread in the shadow of *Romance*, place the North African urban spaces of Tétouan and Fez, Marrakech and Tangier, in the position of Aslima, all fated to dream within walled confines and to craft "a cautious but indelible sense of Black liberation within the urban grid." Reworking McKay's novel as a springboard into his late Orientalist verse, Hobbs ultimately interprets the Moroccan city sonnets as a challenge to the usual story of McKay's neat transition from a classically young "poet in the 1910s and early 1920s to a best-selling novelist in the late 1920s and the 1930s." Incongruously enough, in Hobbs's analysis, the publication of another mature McKay novel reminds us that he was a lifelong author of searching, globetrotting lyric poems.

The final essay in the issue appropriately considers what some present-day voices have insisted is the final chapter of the recuperative tradition of Black literary study: Afropessimism. Michael J. Collins's theoretically elaborated "Afropessimism, Liminal Hotspots, and Claude McKay's Aesthetic of Sovereign Rejection in *Romance in Marseille*" plainly flags its major thesis in its first sentence. *Romance*, it reads, is properly regarded as "a novel whose main thematic engagements are not with liberation, freedom, and the transformative potential of desire but with the transtemporal persistence of an anti-Blackness that inflicts on the Black subject a condition of 'endless kinetic movement' and rejection from sovereignty." Collins understands McKay's fiction as a precocious illustration of what Afropessimists from Jared Sexton to Frank B. Wilderson regard as the permanent, ontologically fixed nature of Western Afrophobia. He couches Lafala's costly acceptance of personal reparations after his amputation as a departure from McKay's early Marxism, a memorable symbolic lesson that "anti-Black racism operates as something more than a consequence of economic inequality." Collins himself departs from some-



thing like the main line of Afropessimistic thought in fusing its logic with the anthropological category of the “liminal hotspot,” defined by Monica Greco and Paul Stenner in 2017 as a space and occasion “characterised by the experience of being trapped in the interstitial dimension between different forms-of-process.”<sup>20</sup> Put more directly in relation to *Romance*, Collins resolves that McKay’s novel is shot through with an always pressing but always arrested longing for existential development, a state of petrified mobility in which “Black children are on the cusp of a new being but are kept from that final status by being subjected to endless motion.” To Collins’s mind, the extended liminal hotspot that opens between *Romance*’s covers finally implies that “anti-Blackness operates within colonialism by suspending the imaginary of precolonial Black sovereignty” without ever allowing “Black being fully into the fold of modern power.” In this McKay novel, at least, the Black colonial condition hangs precariously between equally tempting, equally unreachable pre- and postcolonial objectives.

Which is not to say that Collins denies the general interpretive value of transhistoricism—among other things, a concept that reserves the possibility of escaping suspension within a single, stationary, and securely bounded historical frame. When considering *Romance* as evidence of changes in McKay’s thought, Collins proposes that the novel bookmarks “a distinctive, specifically pessimistic, phase of McKay’s career in which ‘Home,’” in Harlem or elsewhere, “is dwelled on as a philosophical impossibility.” Such a phase indeed chimes transtemporally with Afropessimism and other intellectual artifacts of our age “of Trump, the new Right, and the supposed failures of the Obama era.” In this, like the articles before it, Collins’s essay imagines *Romance in Marseille* as a text simultaneously of, after, and somewhat against its own time, a transtemporal key in novelistic form unlocking previously hidden moments in both McKay’s writing life and the evolving life of the paradigms, disciplines, and crises through which we currently read it. Taken together, the ingredients of this special issue—eleven distinct but mutually illuminating ways of looking at *Romance*—testify that McKay was a bad historicist in the same ironic and honorific sense in which he was a bad nationalist. Much as his commitment to violating the national stemmed from his brilliant observation of its inescapable effects, his firm grasp of the shaping pressure of historical immediacy sparked a desire to break tired laws of the historical imagination—above all, those laws that would restrict *Romance in Marseille* and similar historical fictions to summoning just one isolated moment at a time. To paraphrase the moral of McKay’s sonnet “To the Intrenched Classes,” written in modernism’s very good year of 1922, history’s past-beset “power is legion, but it cannot crush,” because “mine is the future grinding down today” (lines 1, 9).<sup>21</sup>

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### Notes

- 1 McKay, *Romance in Marseille*.
  - 2 Cooper, *Claude McKay*.
  - 3 McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth*.
  - 4 See Lee, "New Novel of Harlem Renaissance Is Found."
  - 5 Zax, "A Book So Far Ahead of Its Time." The print version came out two days later: Zax, "Far Ahead of Its Time, and Finally Published."
  - 6 Dirda, "Claude McKay Abandoned 'Romance in Marseille.'"
  - 7 Young, "The Best New Novel."
  - 8 Sacks, review.
  - 9 *New York Times*, "The Nobel-Winning Economist."
  - 10 de León, "Penguin Classics and Others."
  - 11 Larsen, *Passing*; Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*.
  - 12 de León, "Penguin Classics and Others."
  - 13 See James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 27–28.
  - 14 Kaler, "Claude McKay's *Romance in Marseille*."
  - 15 Levin, review.
  - 16 *Vanity Fair*, "Thirty-One Great Quarantine Reads."
  - 17 *New York*, "Seventy-Nine Gifts for Every Type of Mom."
  - 18 Sackton, "How Audiobooks Are Getting Me through COVID-19."
  - 19 Holcomb and Maxwell, "Claude McKay in Our Time."
  - 20 Greco and Stenner, "From Paradox to Pattern Shift."
  - 21 McKay, "To the Intrenched Classes."
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