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NEW WORLD MAKER

RYAN JAMES
KERNAN

RADICAL POETICS, BLACK INTERNATIONALISM,
AND THE TRANSLATIONS OF LANGSTON HUGHES



New World Maker



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New World Maker

*Radical Poetics, Black Internationalism,
and the Translations of Langston Hughes*

Ryan James Kernan

Foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley



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for Olivia Irene Kernan

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Foreword

Robin D. G. Kelley

Up to my neck in work as usual, having translated some thirty Mexican and Cuban short stories this last month to make an anthology . . . I think you'll like my Mexican-Cuban stories. They are swell. Lots of Indian and Negro characters. Almost all the authors in these countries are left. And some are even lefter than left.

—Letter from Langston Hughes to Matt and
Nebby Lou Crawford, May 20, 1935

In 1937, Langston Hughes traveled to Spain as a journalist to cover the dramatic story of Republican Spain fighting desperately to defend itself from the fascist assault led by General Francisco Franco. What caught Hughes's attention were the Black men from the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa who joined the International Brigades to defend Spain, and Franco's use of North African troops (the "Moors") to attack the Republic in the name of defending Christian civilization from communism. Hughes's time in Spain inspired a litany of poems, including "Air Raid: Barcelona," "Moonlight in Valencia: Civil War," "Spanish Folk Songs of the War," and "Madrid, 1937," and several powerful essays documenting his experiences and those of the Black *brigadistas*. In one article for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, he wrote: "I knew that Spain once belonged to the Moors, a colored people ranging from light dark to dark white. Now the Moors have come again to Spain with the fascist armies as cannon fodder for Franco. But on the loyalist side, there are many Negroes of various nationalities in the International Brigades. I want to write about both Moors and Negroes." In fact, he had planned to gather his essays in a book bearing the title "Negroes in Spain," that

was to include a concluding section on the “World Meaning of Spanish Struggle.” The book never saw the light of day.

I’ve always understood this moment as Hughes doing what he often did during his “radical” period: finding Black diasporan fellowship along the red path of internationalism—or in this particular instance, across the fault lines of radical internationalism. Everywhere Hughes went, he sought out and found our folk, painting powerful word portraits that evoke familiarity and demand solidarity. And Hughes’s notion of “the folk” was expansive, drawing the Shanghai foundry worker, the Russian factory worker, and the Irish immigrant into its warm, revolutionary embrace.

But along comes Ryan Kernan’s remarkable book, *New World Maker: Radical Poetics, Black Internationalism, and the Translations of Langston Hughes*, and suddenly Hughes’s Spanish encounter, the nature of his internationalism, the strident radicalism of his poetry and prose, take on new meaning and greater depth. By examining Hughes’s pioneering work as a translator of radical literature from around the world, Kernan forces us to reconsider the origins and sources of what critics, fans, and detractors alike identify as his left turn. For Kernan, translation is more than a window into the politics of diaspora and identity; it functioned as both an avenue and a catalyst for Langston Hughes’s politics. Hughes’s early translations of the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Regino Pedroso, Jacques Roumain, Federico García Lorca, and many others reveal the formation of a radical critique coming from all parts of the world. Discovering and translating such powerful depictions of proletarian life inspired visions of revolution in the cadences of working people who till the soil, sweat in factories, and risk life and limb extracting coal, copper, gold, and iron ore from deep underground. It is no accident that Hughes’s traveling companion to the Spanish battlefield was the great Black Cuban bard, Nicolás Guillén.

As Kernan deftly demonstrates, proletarian poetics was not Langston’s miscalculation or an unfortunate detour by a naive and overly romantic American writer, but his participation in a worldwide movement. Kernan is not uncritical of Hughes, whose autobiographical accounts are inconsistent, at best, exacerbated as they were by his later efforts to bury his tracks in a desperate act of survival in the face of McCarthyism. But by following Hughes’s engagement with the world through translation, Kernan not only demonstrates exactly how his poetry was transformed by these sundry transnational encounters, but situates him at the very center of a worldwide movement. Indeed, as today’s schol-

ars seek to “decenter” cultural and political movements by finding new loci of Black activity (e.g., shifting from Harlem to Paris, Mexico City, Dar es Salaam, Cairo, Accra, etc.) and new vectors of collective self-fashioning through migration and settlement, Kernan shows us how Hughes’s commitment to translation was responsible for constructing so many virtual metropolises of radical imagination.

Translation in this context is more akin to collaborative composition, for Kernan reveals the co-constitutive character of these works when he insists that Hughes’s early radical poetry ought to be read in *chorus* with his first translations of Nicolás Guillén and Regino Pedroso. The possibility of world-making, of producing a new collective sensibility that could free humanity, marked Hughes’s radical break from the aesthetic imperative of the New Negro Movement and the attempt, in Kernan’s words, to “demonstrate his [the New Negro’s] common humanity by creating works of art whose beauty and sophistication would compel a cultural reevaluation that would precede or go hand in hand with the betterment of race relations.” For Hughes, what held this diverse and vibrant humanity in common was the shared experience of oppression, exploitation, and struggle. He identified with the multitude, especially those of a darker hue, who struggled to make a life for themselves and a movement for each other in spite of differences in language, culture, and nationality. They had nothing to prove, only a world to gain.

And for those of us still here, living on a much smaller and more vulnerable planet, we too have a world to gain—and to save. That said, *New World Maker: Radical Poetics, Black Internationalism, and the Translations of Langston Hughes* is a work of literary and cultural history but also a work for our time. With both eloquence and urgency, Ryan Kernan reminds us that language is no barrier to a liberatory future, but rather it is the path to make our world anew.

Acknowledgments

This book is a long time in coming. While researching and writing it, I benefited from the generosity of many people and institutions.

The UCLA Department of Comparative Literature offered fertile ground for the genesis of this project. The rich role that translation studies played in the graduate curriculum during my tenure there was a testament to the vision of several faculty members, but chief among them were my friends and mentors, the late Michael Henry Heim and Efraín Kristal. Also among my former teachers, I am indebted to Richard Yarborough for introducing me to the works of Langston Hughes and to the African American literary canon, more broadly speaking. If this book has a starting point, it is in the many conversations I had with them in their seminars, offices, and homes.

It is not easy to support a scholar with my interests. The early phases of this project required research at Yale's Beinecke Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Efraín Kristal facilitated financial and logistical support for my journeys into the archives, and I was also greatly aided by Michelle Clayton's mentorship and aid.

This book, though, really began to take shape while I was an N.E.H. Scholar in Residence at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Under the stewardship of the late Colin Palmer, who generously offered notes on the entire manuscript, my Schomburg fellows cohort, which included Lisa Collins, Shane Graham, Venus Green, James de

Jongh, Esther Lezra, Adrienne Petty, Kevin McGruder, Carolyn Brown, Robin Hayes, and Millery Polyne, helped me to workshop several chapters, and to locate my project's intervention in the complicated, multidisciplinary terrain of Africana studies. The cohort was greatly aided by the organizational work of Diana Lachatanere, and the book benefits from archival finds in the Schomburg collections that would not have been possible were it not for the work of Stephen G. Fullwood. I was also fortunate to have Naomi Bland working as my research assistant while in residence at the Schomburg Center.

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I presented portions of this manuscript at various conferences, including the annual conferences of the MLA, the ASA, and the ACLA. I am grateful to the panel organizers and to my fellow presenters at these conferences for their invitations and generous feedback.

I am also thankful to Andrew Parker and the Program in Comparative Literature at Rutgers University for organizing a brown bag lunch where I presented an early version of the book's second chapter. In a similar vein, portions of chapter 3 were printed under the title of "Langston Hughes's Cuban Contacts: Translation, Complementary Conversation, and Inter-American Dialogue" in the *Langston Hughes Review*, vol. 24, copyright ©2010 by *The Langston Hughes Review*. This article is used by permission of the Pennsylvania State University Press. Portions of chapter 6 appeared under the title "The *Coup* of Langston Hughes's

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I have been aided by the anthropologist Carlos Moore in interpreting language associated with the Abakuá brotherhood and in addressing race relations in Cuba in the 1930s and 1940s. Carole Viers and Magdalena Edwards have helped me to interpret French- and Spanish-language texts since graduate school, providing camaraderie all along the way. I am indebted to Lawrence Venuti, who generously gave his time and helped me to refine my thinking about translation. And I am profoundly grateful to Robin D. G. Kelley for writing the foreword to this book.

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In the end, book writing is a solitary endeavor at its core. To my wife Betsey, who so ably held up the domestic scene while I closeted myself away with my computer, I owe a deep gratitude for tolerating my absences and for pitching in with proofreading, permissions, and a variety of unanticipated tasks that go into the making of a book in 2022. She, along with my daughter Olivia, not only provided respite from the demands of book writing, they brought the kind of joy to my life that has only made the project more meaningful to me. To my mother, Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, who has nurtured this project intellectually and financially from its beginning until now, helping in countless ways, in roles ranging from sounding board to editor, I owe the most thanks, the deepest gratitude.

New World Maker

Langston Hughes

Poet-Translator and Black Radical Internationalist

. . . having safeguarded the message put forward by Langston Hughes, which had to be taken up in turn by Palés Matos in Puerto Rico, Nicolás Guillén in Cuba, Jacques Roumain in Port-au-Prince, Claude McKay in Jamaica, Cabral in Saint-Domingue, Solano Trindade in Brazil, Debrot in Curaçao, Albert Helman in Suriname, and, *last but not least*, by Césaire in Martinique, Senghor in Senegal, and by me . . . I could not allow my country, French Guiana, to remain deaf to this drummed language in the night, the Afro-Americans of the North, Center, and South resolutely and firmly pursuing the path.

—Léon-Gontran Damas, “New Sum of Poetry from the Negro World: African American Introduction,” in *Présence Africaine*, 1966

CULTURE, THEY SAY, IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

—Langston Hughes, “Cultural Exchange” in *Ask Your Mama*, 1961

Langston Hughes occupies a preeminent place in African American and African diasporic belles lettres as a poet, dramatist, novelist, lyricist, librettist, author of short fiction, anthologist, and children’s writer. While he was dubbed the “dean of Black letters” in the United States and abroad, seldom do American readers refer to Hughes as a world-renowned Black leftist poet or as history’s most prolific African American translator. Although both Hughes’s friends and most ardent political detractors labeled his 1930s poetry radical, it is the latter who are largely responsible for the popular conception of this body of work in the United States. On April 1, 1947, the New Jersey senator Albert Hawkes attacked Hughes as a radical subversive when he read the poet’s “Good Morning, Revolution” (1932) and “One More ‘S’ in the U.S.A.” (1934)—poems that celebrate Soviet communism—into the

Senate record. When Hughes testified before the McCarthy committee in 1953, Roy Cohn followed suit, citing excerpts from “One More ‘S’ in the U.S.A.,” “Goodbye, Christ” (1932), and “Ballads of Lenin” (1933) as evidence of Hughes’s allegiance to the Soviet form of government. In so doing, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) offered a reductive vision of Hughes’s radical poetry and succeeded—in the fog of the Second Red Scare—in suppressing the dissemination of his 1930s poetic production in the United States. As Cary Nelson notes, this silencing was accomplished with the collusion of academics who were frightened of the committee and whose embrace of New Criticism didn’t accommodate any mixture of politics and poetry.¹ *New World Maker* recovers some of the poetry that was “lost in politics.”

As scholars have studied Hughes’s radical or revolutionary oeuvre from the 1930s with increased care in recent decades, they have rediscovered the treasure trove that was nearly lost under the weight of New Criticism and the Cold War.² As a result, the body of Hughes’s political poetry, long maligned as communist propaganda and dismissed as devoid of artistic merit, has been placed in conversation with topics ranging from proletarian poetics to Black modernism.³ More recently, critics have engaged with Hughes’s work as a translator, being attentive to his affinities with and poetic influence on Jacques Roumain and Nicolás Guillén.⁴ This book builds on these developments by illuminating the extent to which Hughes’s radical poetry and its portrayal of Black internationalism, his practice of translation, and his presence in translation were deeply enmeshed.

To advance this core claim, we must first recognize that Hughes’s 1930s radical poetry speaks in conversation with his presence in translation. This line of investigation follows Hughes to a number of leftist geographies in the Hispanic, Soviet, and Francophone worlds, where he is translated according to different aesthetic regimes (aesthetic norms and criteria) and different understandings and/or repurposings of his identity. At times he is figured as a Black American and, at others, as a representative member of the more encompassing “Negro race.” In accounting for how the experience of seeing his poetry refracted through the lens of translation fueled Hughes’s radical poetic production, the book constructs a cartography of influence via a comparativist approach to the literature of the African diaspora. This approach shows how Hughes’s oeuvre voiced and performed the work of competing and overlapping nationalisms and internationalisms in different racial and political arenas. It also shows how Hughes’s translators, often working

in concert with him, capitalized on what Lawrence Venuti labels the inherent violences of translation (interpretive, intertextual, and material) to marshal Hughes's poetry in ways that forged and preserved a number of influential radical Hughesian personas.⁵ Through Hughes, *New World Maker* examines how blackness worked as political capital in a variety of locations inside and outside formulations of the African diaspora and how literary blackness was used to advance revolutionary change. By "literary blackness" I do not mean some transcendental essence of blackness, but rather a complex co-authenticating network of malleable signs that convey prevailing understandings surrounding people of African descent and their attributes in different cultural and geographic milieus. These differing incarnations of blackness intervened in Cuban debates about racial democracy, injected Black voices into Soviet debates over the ideal forms of revolutionary poetry, and planted the seeds and saplings of *négritude* in the Francophone world and the *poesía negra* movement in Latin America. Contextualizing Hughes's radical personas and poetic production against these different intertextual backdrops, I take special account of the ways in which his radical poetic production was remade by the translation and dissemination of his poetry.

Second, an appreciation of Hughes's 1930s political poetry also requires a familiarity with the poetics of the authors he translated, authors whose poetic repertoires he drew upon to give voice to his own lyrical vision of Black left internationalism. In focusing on his translations of Nicolás Guillén, Regino Pedroso, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Louis Aragon, and Federico García Lorca, I show how Hughes's original 1930s verse exploits the foreign-language poetics he encountered as a translator. In doing so, I am guided by philosopher Richard Wollheim's admonition that the scrutiny of a work of art ought to include an attempt to reconstruct the artist's creative process, and art historian Ernst Gombrich's view that the study of art should pay as much attention to the repertoire of the artist as to the finished product.⁶ Hughes's evolving revolutionary repertoire transforms generally held truisms among scholars studying his work from this period, allowing for an account of the poetic growth afforded to him by the accumulation of the specific artistic choices he made in the course of composing his translations.

The shifts that occurred in Hughes's practice and *techné* of translation over the course of the 1930s correlate to shifts in how he conceived, practiced, and portrayed Black left internationalisms, and tell a nuanced story about his evolving thoughts on their potentials and pitfalls. At the outset of his career as a translator, Hughes produced translations

crafted to foster Black solidarity by erasing difference. He later became so concerned with diasporic heterogeneity that he turned to what he referred to as *literal* translation strategies in order to avoid the potential erasure of difference even in translating non-diasporic authors. Lastly, Hughes's faith in translation deepened as he came to see good poets as deserving multiple translations and translation itself as a process that was integrally connected to the strengthening of Black internationalist consciousness and solidarity. By "Black internationalist consciousness" I mean an esprit de corps formed by a nuanced understanding of the diaspora conceived not as *Diaspora writ large*, but rather as the variety of means by which people of African descent have negotiated and advanced their common interests beyond the borders of the nation-state. Ultimately, and with these three points in mind, it is impossible to know Langston Hughes without knowing him in translation.

HUGHES'S RADICAL VERSE:
TOWARD A CRITICAL REAPPRAISAL

Eric Sundquist's harsh appraisal of Hughes's radical verse of the early 1930s reprises the unfavorable critical reception this body of Hughes's work has traditionally met from critics in the United States. While bemoaning Hughes's overemphasis on reading "through the lens of race," Sundquist acknowledges poetic resonances among Sandburg, Steinbeck, and Hughes and in so doing indirectly suggests foci for a critical reappraisal:

In Hughes's case, blindness to the Soviet charade, hardly unique among Western intellectuals of the day, sprang first from reading everything through the lens of race. But his seeming naiveté also had another source. Paid regularly and fairly well as a writer for the first time in his life, Hughes failed to grasp, or was not ready to admit, that the Soviets had good reason to reward talent that was critical of America. . . . He rewrote Sandburg's maudlin "Good Morning, America" as "Good Morning, Revolution," a buoyant prophecy of international Communism, while in one of his most telling poems of the decade Hughes sounded like John Steinbeck's Tom Joad drunk on Marx. . . . Embarrassing though this poetry is—Hughes excluded most of his radical verse

from his *Selected Poems* in 1951—it is also, as it happens, a superior instance of socialist realism in America and worthy of study for that reason alone.⁷

Sundquist is not alone among tough critics of Hughes's radical verse. James Smethurst notes that no portion of Hughes's literary career has been more commonly dismissed by critics than his verse of the 1930s, who figure it as "didactic" and lacking in the "lyric humanism" and "folk wit" that inhabit his verse of the 1920s, '40s, and '50s.⁸ Even Arnold Rampersad, perhaps Hughes's greatest champion, has characterized this body of work as "proletarian doggerel."⁹ This nadir in Hughes's career is generally attributed to his (over)involvement with the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), and his poetry from this period is differentiated by the perception that he abandoned racial or pan-Africanist concerns in favor of largely color-blind Marxist ones.¹⁰ Despite convincing demonstrations that Hughes's 1930s poetry is anything but color-blind (Brent Hayes Edwards, Jonathan Scott, William Scott, James Smethurst, and Jeff Westover), it remains commonplace to dismiss his radical poetry as little more than propaganda pandering to a Soviet thirst for anti-Americanism (Sundquist, Rampersad). These criticisms founder in routinely failing to grapple with what Vera Kutzinski has labeled Hughes's "plurilingual" poetics on the levels of form, content, and form as content. Thus, Hughes's harshest critics fault and dismiss his radical poetry because they perceive its content to be plain as day, a perception arising from their failure to grapple with the foreign-language poetics and prosody that give his poetry shape. In the present work, I treat Hughes's practice of translation as a new and useful vantage point from which to perceive these elements of foreign poetics in his verse.

Sundquist's comment on Hughes's "blindness" to the "Soviet charade" rehearses what William Maxwell identifies as three dynamics through which Black literary involvements with communism are generally viewed: "manipulation, disillusionment, and betrayal."¹¹ This line of criticism, wherein Black writers typically suffer "near-death experiences in party clutches," arguably reaches its apex in Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), which attributes the faults and Black nationalist shortcomings of forty years of African American literary production to a white communist discipline born in the 1920s.¹² These dynamics are also present in Sundquist's suggestion that Hughes's embarrassment caused him to omit his 1930s "socialist realism" from

his *Selected Poems* (1951). This position re-silences Hughes insofar as it relies on the 1953 Cold War testimony that he offered to Roy Cohn and HUAC, where he expressed a cagey regret over the immaturity of a few of his 1930s poems. It also eschews the far more likely cause for their omission—that Hughes wanted to escape political persecution—and frames Hughes’s 1930s verse within a Stalinist literary paradigm whose parameters had yet to be articulated when his poetry supposedly took its radical turn for the worst. Contrary to the misconception reflected in Sundquist’s remarks, Hughes’s radical poetry began to take shape in 1930, when there was anything but a single party line issuing from Moscow regarding the writing of poetry. Rather, Soviet poetics and literary theory in the era prior to 1932 exhibit a contentious field of debates over how best to write the literature of the revolution.

These debates were not simply local but were played out in labor and avant-garde periodicals across the globe. With Havana’s avant-garde print culture as a foundation, this book argues that the experience of seeing his own work in Cuban translation and his translations of Cuban poetry brought Hughes into working contact with a range of Soviet poetics and theories of revolutionary literature. These theories included Proletkult’s embrace of dialectical materialist poetics and proletarian authorship as a means to create, *ex nihilo*, a proletarian culture; and Vladimir Mayakovsky’s LEF (Left Front of the Arts) and NOVY-LEF (New Left) espousal of “factography” and “life-making” as a means to transform poetry from a mere ornament for passive contemplation into an active participant in production and proletarianization. The On Guardists—another proletarian literary faction in Russia—held that portraying the struggles of the “living man” was a means to come to proletarian consciousness and the best way for literature to answer to the demands of realism and the revolution. Their view coexisted with theories and compromises about “peasant literature,” “peasant-imitating literature,” and “de-peasantation” that ultimately positioned the ideal Soviet literature as “proletarian in content” and “national in form.” By examining Hughes’s translations through the lens of these movements and cadres, we can achieve a better understanding of the poetics of his radical period and better explain why the work Hughes penned prior to his radical period was received, in translation, as “combative” or “revolutionary.” I argue that the negative appraisal of Hughes’s radical poetic production has less to do with his “blindness” to a Soviet “charade” and more to do with a Second Red Scare “blindness” daunting U.S.

critics who failed to bring into their orbit the important role that Soviet theories of literature played in poetic production across the Americas.

To illustrate the stakes involved in the aforementioned critical shortcomings, a reading of Hughes's poem "Call to Creation" that pays greater attention to the international debates surrounding proletarian poetics would be less apt to follow in Sundquist's footsteps and more inclined to read the poem's exhortations against a complex panorama of internationalist literary experimentation and debate that marked Soviet poetics during the New Economic Policy, and which attended the variegated development of proletarian poetics worldwide.

Call to Creation

Listen!

All you beauty-makers,
 Give up beauty for a moment.
 Look at harshness, look at pain,
 Look at life again.
 Look at hungry babies crying,
 Listen to the rich men lying,
 Look at starving China dying.
 Hear the rumble in the East:
 "In spite of all,
 Life must not cease."
 In India with folded arms,
 In China with the guns,
 In Africa with bitter smile—
 See where the murmur runs:
 "Life must not cease,
 Because the fat and greedy ones
 Proclaim their thieving peace."
 Their peace far worse than war and death—
 For this is better than living breath:
 Free! To be Free

Listen!

Futile beauty-makers—
 Work for awhile with the pattern-breakers!
 Come for a march with the new-world-makers:
 Let beauty be!¹³

When so contextualized, Hughes's call to "let beauty be" is revealed as not only a rejection of ornamentation, but a stance that firmly locates him on one side of a key debate in the Soviet literary diaspora concerning the role that "reading the classics" and avant-garde experimentation (the beautiful) could play in the development of proletarian culture. Likewise, Hughes's self-characterization as a "new-world-maker" encamps him alongside groups like Proletkult, RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), and Mayakovsky's LEF, whose espousal of "dialectical materialist poetics" placed "life-making," or the integration of poetry with the very means of production, as the chief task of revolutionary art.

However, Hughes's call to "let beauty be" also functions as a strident rejection of the aesthetic theories that fueled the New Negro Movement as espoused by W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke. To "let beauty be" is to reject the argument that the New Negro could demonstrate his common humanity by creating works of art whose beauty and sophistication would compel a cultural reevaluation that would precede or go hand in hand with the betterment of race relations. Hence, a poem like "Call to Creation" can be read as mining the debates surrounding the form and function of proletarian poetics in order to make an intervention into the ethos and aspirations that fueled the New Negro Movement.

To classify such a poem as more Marxist or political than it is Pan-Africanist or racial is thus to impose a binary that is constitutively unable to come to terms with the poem's aesthetic commentaries and contributions.¹⁴ It also overlooks how these aesthetic commentaries work in harmony with the poem's juxtaposition of communist fidelities and anti-imperialist (or racial) ones—the manner in which it intentionally conflates racial and political solidarities while simultaneously troubling their orthodoxies. The poem's invitation to look at and listen to India "with folded arms" alludes to the challenges that Gandhi's stringent embrace of nonviolent resistance posed to the orthodoxies of the pro-independence Indian Communist Party from which he would soon be hopelessly estranged. At the same time, the poem's call to look at "China dying," where the Kuomintang had made an about-face and purged their Soviet-backed allies, suggests that communism has an indispensable role to play in all anti-imperialist struggles. But fidelity to communist struggle alone cannot account for Hughes's call to look at Africa with "bitter smile." This call suggests and makes an appeal for Black left internationalist solidarity between African Americans and Africans by asking the former to read Africa's "bitter smile" as an ana-

logue for the African American tradition of masking (performing) Black contentment in order to express and nurture Black resistance in the face of white supremacy. Hughes's poem not only asks its African American reader to think of his own predicament like that of a colonized African and vice versa but also recognizes the inextricable ties between the political and the racial. To divorce Hughes's political poetry from his racial verse is to silence the multifaceted ambitions and achievements of his 1930s poetic production. It is to overlook both the ways in which Hughes routinely mined proletarian poetics to prompt his readers to (re)think the "problem of the color line" in terms of labor, communism, and Third World anti-imperialism, and the ways Hughes used the expressive and discursive strategies of African American culture to advance his own political commitments.

Despite its mocking dismissal, Sundquist's appraisal of Hughes's radical persona as a "Tom Joad drunk on Marx" can be read, albeit against the grain, as illustrative of how Hughes's 1930s proletarian poetry does work. Sundquist's characterization of "Good Morning, Revolution" as a rewrite of Sandburg's "Good Morning, America" highlights a common strategy of rewriting in proletarian poetics adopted from the formal and thematic subversions carried out by workers' protest songs. This strategy of rewriting, combined with Sundquist's need to contextualize Hughes's 1930s poetry in terms of Steinbeck, also points to the dense intertextuality that Cary Nelson identifies as a hallmark of U.S. proletarian verse during the 1930s.

In light of its characteristic subversions and intertextuality, proletarian verse demands to be read "chorally," or dialogically, as "mutually responsive contributions to an emerging revolutionary consensus."¹⁵ Building on Nelson's notion of the proletarian poetic chorus and on recent work done by critics to rehabilitate Hughes's 1930s verse, I argue that Hughes's translations of the Cuban poets Regino Pedrosa and Nicolás Guillén are best read in *chorus* with his poetic production from the winter of 1930 to the fall of 1932.¹⁶ In my view, Hughes's reception in Cuba, his experiences of seeing his own work in Spanish-language translation, and his translations of Regino Pedrosa's proletarian poetry enriched his own poetic palette, infusing it with Soviet-inflected Cuban poetics that he mined to compose poems that are generally considered to mark the beginning of his 1930s "radical period." These poems bear formal and thematic imprints of Pedrosa's politics and dialectical materialist poetics, but are most fruitfully read as Hughes's attempt to infuse the tapestry of U.S. proletarian literature with a poetry chorus of

his own making. This chorus placed Hughes's translations of Pedroso's proletarian verse in complementary conversation with his own poetry in order to contribute to Third Period Communist and Pan-Africanist discourses on race, labor, and capital.

Hence, I reject Sundquist's intimation that Hughes's verse did little more than clumsily toe a Comintern or CPUSA party line, and I argue that Hughes's engagement with Pedrosian poetics was a departure from what Foley and Smethurst identify as the scant communist prescriptions for Black American writing. Far from a party line, these prescriptions called for a nationalist literature built upon the Black folk culture of the rural South, which was figured as intrinsically oppositional to bourgeois interests and cultural hegemony.¹⁷ Hughes's decision to forsake the "folk" inspiration that informed much of his early leftist verse like *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) and to construct a Black proletarian poetic chorus was just as decidedly Black internationalist in its ambitions as it was a by-product of his desire to resist this literary and political ghettoization. Rather, he favored an approach that injected Black workers' voices into what Mike Gold labeled the "world phenomenon" of proletarian literature. I further contextualize Hughes's decision to go proletarian in light of the primitivism that marks his early poetry, and I argue that Hughes's primitivist and proletarian verse reflect a lifelong commitment to infuse Black left internationalist voices into literary movements that were transnational in their scope and poetics. Building on Maxwell's observations that many articulations of the "New Negro" were decidedly "proletarian" in character, in my view Hughes's modernist primitivism, like his radical poetry, reflects his commitment to promote Black left internationalism in his poetic work. Simply put, the criticism of Hughes's oeuvre has overwhelmingly tended to periodize it by associating his 1920s verse with primitivism, blues, and cabaret life, and with an embrace of the African American "common people," and his 1930s production with a presumably incompatible commitment to communism. Rather, Hughes's oeuvre, from its inception in 1921 until his death in 1967, is profitably understood not as a series of ruptures, but as a series of engagements that wed cross-cultural poetics with Black left internationalist politics.

This critical approach eliminates the commonplace conception of a somewhat schizophrenic Hughes who goes primitive one day and red the next, and promotes a deeper understanding of how Hughes used translations to infuse the tapestry of Black American literature with his own

poetry chorus in order to provoke a Black left internationalist discourse about race, labor, and capital. This chorus placed Hughes's translations in complementary conversation with his own poetic production and routinely depended on translation decisions that expanded the source poems' personas to encompass the community of the translator. In this sense, Hughes used translation as a vehicle to create literary networks and inspire visions of Black collectivity that were transnational, and his translational practice entailed the erasure of differences among the darker, colonized peoples of the world. His attempt to forge community via transgressive translation, though, reflected a practice of Black internationalism whose ethics he would soon come to challenge and outgrow.

LANGSTON HUGHES: ALWAYS RADICAL?

From the outset of his career, Hughes was labeled by his harshest critics, his champions, and himself not only as a race-poet but as a proud member of the 1920s New Negro Movement dedicated to African American social uplift. These facts would have also qualified him as radical in the eyes of many. Hughes's early poetry was self-professedly indebted to the work of Walt Whitman, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Vachel Lindsay. His lengthy catalogues, his carefully constructed poetic sequences, his use of "black English," and the investment in "blues verse" or "jazz poetry" which mark his first two volumes of poetry—*The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927)—display these influences and are also intertwined with the projects of articulating African American artistic experience and experiments. Notwithstanding these influences, works by Hughes from as early as 1924 suggest the unacknowledged influence of proletarian poetics at work in his career as a poet. Likewise, from their beginnings, translations of his work earned him the enduring sobriquet of a militant in the Hispanic and Franco-phone worlds.

Keep in mind, though, that the lines between racial and proletarian literature in the United States of the 1920s and '30s were far more permeable than most of today's critics paint them. Jean Toomer's "Georgia Dusk" (1922) and "Race memories of king and caravan, / High-priests, an ostrich, and a juju-man" first appeared in the pages of Max Eastman's socialist magazine *The Liberator*. Mike Gold's "Towards a Proletarian Art" (1921) is nearly intoxicated with the idea of the unsullied primitiv-

ism of the “masses.”¹⁸ Even for Alain Locke in 1937, the very “program of the Negro Renaissance”—“to interpret the folk to itself, to revitalize it from within,” and to assert “a wholesome vigorous assertive racialism”—was “explicitly proletarian in conception and justification.”¹⁹

The widespread critical characterization of Hughes’s 1930s poetry as radical or revolutionary is somewhat anachronistic, since his association with radicalism clearly preceded his association with radical socialism or communism. In fact, Hughes was raised to be a revolutionary. Rocked to sleep each night by his grandmother in what he believed to be the bullet-riddled shawl of her first husband (Lewis Sheridan Leary, a participant in John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry), Hughes was literally cradled in stories of revolt. Nevertheless, it is precisely Hughes’s engagement with leftist internationalism, both poetically and politically, that has assigned his 1930s literary production a preeminent place in his radical poetic portfolio.

The fact that most critics have bypassed this moment of Hughes’s career is an outgrowth of academic reluctance to forcefully engage with leftist poetry from the 1930s. Nelson’s *Revolutionary Memory* (2001), Maxwell’s *New Negro, Old Left* (1999), and Smethurst’s *The New Red Negro* (1999) help to redress this silencing. The New Critics’ exasperation with proletarian poetry resided in their investment in the idea that poems should be considered as autotelic texts. This principle prevented them from recognizing that proletarian poetry aims to be part of a larger discourse and that to read or write proletarian poetry was “to be hailed continually by other voices.”²⁰ As both Nelson and Barbara Foley argue, the New Criticism’s valorization of “eternal truths,” “balance,” and “unities of opposites” worked in tandem with its dismissal of modes of criticism that positioned art as a reflection of the cultural milieu in which it was produced. These interpretive pillars inaugurated an era in U.S. literary criticism when it was nearly impossible for any political poem to be considered anything but didactic, leading critics to ignore the interdependence of history and aesthetics that accounts for proletarian poetics at a formal level, and thereby helping to exclude the vast production of proletarian literature from the U.S. academy.²¹ Critical approaches such as these, which neglect the historical moment and political content of Hughes’s poetry, provide a deficient lens for appreciating what he achieved with this body of work.

Langston Hughes’s 1930s poetic production evinces a strong Marxist politics, articulates a galvanized Black working-class subjectivity, avoids

the hermeticism of formalism but not formal experimentation, and seeks to provide readers with a new political perspective on capitalism, imperialism, fascism, religion, and racism that was meant to promote revolutionary action or consciousness. It is for these reasons that critics like Cary Nelson prefer to label it “progressive” or “proletarian” poetry, to designate it as the American cousin of the post-revolutionary avant-garde Soviet poetics that rose to prominence in the 1920s in the pages of leftist periodicals like *New Masses* and *The Liberator*.²² Hughes’s radical poetry of the 1930s is pithy and hard-hitting, and its political exhortations make extensive use of both direct address and the second person. It calls for interracial labor cooperation, celebrates Soviet communism, and speaks to contemporary events such as the Great Depression, the Scottsboro trials, the Spanish Civil War, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and the Chinese revolution. Its appeal to these kinds of issues is arguably why James Smethurst labels it “revolutionary” and why others have preferred to use the terms “political” or “radical.” Although all these labels have merit, I use the phrases “radical poetry” and “radical period” to refer to Hughes’s 1930s poetry because it is not simply oppositional but is also aligned with Robin Kelley’s concept of “freedom dreams” in the Black radical tradition, where what is radical imagines a new world as it ought to be. Hughes’s radical poetry also reflects a prolonged engagement with Black internationalism. His 1930s poems often speak to or for a Black international collective that is united by both class and race—for a proletariat in solidarity with other proletariats, though separate with its own distinctive profile. That is why the present argument refers to these poems as Black radical or Black left internationalist.


The new directions that Hughes’s radical poetic production displays, alongside his intensifying dedication to translation, seem to be products of factors both foreign and domestic, economic and racial, and aesthetic and political. Hughes’s autobiographies purport that his 1930s verse was the result of a revelation brought about by crises both personal and societal and were nothing less than a defense of the literary Black authentic. However, Hughes revealed more than one version of what happened in his writings, masking some truths for specific goals. His inclination to revise these accounts provides one thread that can facilitate our exploration of his radical poems.

As his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940) nears its conclusion, Hughes introduces the uninitiated reader to his 1930s poetry via a par-

tial citation of his “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria” (1931). His narration of events is worth examining:

In the midst of that depression, the Waldorf Astoria opened. On the way to my friend’s home on Park Avenue I frequently

FINE LIVING ... *a la carte* ?? *Come to*



Listen Hungry Ones!
Look! See what Vanity Fair says about the new Waldorf Astoria:
“All the luxuries of private home . . .”
Now, won’t that be charming when the last flop-house has turned you down this winter? Furthermore:
“It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted in the hotel world. . . .” It cost twenty-eight million dollars. The famous Oscar Tschirky is in charge of banqueting. Alexandre Gastaud is chef. It will be a distinguished background for society. So when you’ve got no place else to go, homeless and hungry ones, choose the Waldorf as a background for your rags—
(Or do you still consider the subway after midnight good enough?)

Roomers
Take a room at the new Waldorf, you down-and-outers—sleepers in charity flop-houses where God pulls a long face, and you have to pray to get a bed.
They serve swell board at the Waldorf Astoria. Look at this menu, will you:
GUMBO CREOLE
CRABMEAT IN CASSOLETTE
BOILED BRISKET OF BEEF
SMALL ONIONS IN CREAM
WATERCRESS SALAD
PEACH MELBA
Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless. Why not?
Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of your labor, who clip coupons with

Illustration by Walter Steinbiller

ROOMS

MISSION

“Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria” from *New Masses*, December 1931. Copyright © by the Langston Hughes Estate. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates.

passed it, a mighty towering structure looming proud above the street, in a city where thousands were poor and unemployed. So I wrote a poem about it called "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria," modeled after an ad in *Vanity Fair* announcing the opening of New York's greatest hotel. (Where

the Waldorf-Astoria!



clean white fingers because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed garments, poured steel—to let other people draw dividends and live easy.

(Or haven't you had enough yet of the soup-lines and the bitter bread of charity?)

Walk through Peacock Alley tonight before dinner, and get warm, anyway. You've got nothing else to do.

Evicted Families

All you families put out in the street: Apartments in the Towers are only \$10,000 a year. (Three rooms and two baths.) Move in there until times get good, and you can do better. \$10,000 and \$1.00 are about the same to you, aren't they? Who cares about money with a wife and kids homeless, and nobody in the family working? Wouldn't a duplex high above the street be grand, with a view of the richest city in the world at your nose?

"A lease, if you prefer; or an arrangement terminable at will."

Negroes

O, Lawd, I done forgot Harlem!

Say, you colored folks, hungry a long time in 135th Street—they got swell music at the Waldorf-Astoria. It sure is a mighty nice place to shake hips in, too. There's dancing after supper in a big warm room. It's cold as hell on Lenox Avenue. All you've had all day is a cup of coffee. Your pawnshop overcoat's a ragged banner on your hungry frame. . . . You know, down-town folks are just crazy about Paul Robeson. Maybe they'd like you, too, black mob from Harlem. Drop in at the Waldorf this afternoon for tea. Stay to dinner. Give Park Avenue a lot of darkie color—free—for nothing! Ask the Junior Leaguers to sing a spiritual for you. They probably know 'em better than you do—and their lips won't be so chapped with cold after they step out of their closed cars in the undercover driveways.

Hallelujah! undercover driveways!
Ma soul's a witness for de Waldorf-

Astoria!

(A thousand nigger section-hands keep the roadbeds smooth, so investments in railroads pay

ladies with diamond necklaces staring at Cart murals.)

Thank God A-Mighty!

(And a million niggers bend their backs on rubber plantations, for rich behinds to ride on thick tires to the Theatre Guild tonight.)

Ma soul's a witness!

(And here we stand, shivering in the cold, in Harlem.)

Glory be to God—

De Waldorf-Astoria's open!

Everybody

So get proud and rare back, everybody! The new Waldorf-Astoria's open!

(Special siding for private cars from the railroad yards.)

You ain't been there yet?

(A thousand miles of carpet and a million bath rooms.)

What's the matter? You haven't seen the ads in the papers? Didn't you get a card? Don't you know they specialize in American cooking?

Ankle on down to 49th Street at Park Avenue. Get up off that subway bench tonight with the evening POST for cover! Come on out o' that flop-house! Stop shivering your guts out all day on street corners under the L.

Jesus, ain't you tired yet?

Christmas Card

Hail Mary, Mother of God!

The new Christ child of the Revolution's about to be born.

(Kick hard, red baby, in the bitter womb of the mob.)

Somebody, put an ad in *Vanity Fair* quick!

Call Oscar of the Waldorf—for Christ's sake!

It's almost Christmas, and that little girl—turned whore because her belly was too hungry to stand it any more—wants a nice clean bed for the Immaculate Conception.

Listen, Mary, Mother of God, wrap your new born babe in the red flag of Revolution:

The Waldorf-Astoria's the best manger we've got.

For reservations: Telephone

ELdorado 5-3000.

by Langston Hughes



no Negroes worked and none were admitted as guests.) . . .
The thoughts made me feel bad, so I wrote this poem, from
which these excerpts are taken.²³

Hughes explains “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria” as the outgrowth of personal discomfort stemming from his race and class solidarities at the onset of the Great Depression. He also slyly ties his unease and growing class consciousness to the increasing distance between him and Charlotte Mason by noting how the structure loomed over him every time he visited his patron at her Park Avenue residence. This distance is drawn into sharper relief when Mason rejects “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria” as un-Hughesian despite the poet’s insistence that the poem came from “thoughts [that] made me feel bad”:

“It’s not you,” my benefactor said when she read that far.
“It’s a powerful poem! But it’s not you.”
I knew she did not like it.
I began that winter to feel increasingly bad, increasingly
worried and apprehensive. Not all at once, but gradually I
knew something was wrong.²⁴

Hughes follows this sense of foreboding by abruptly shifting gears and moving the scene of his autobiography to Cuba:

Not Primitive

That winter I had been in Cuba, looking for a composer to write an opera with me, using genuinely racial motifs. The lady on Park Avenue thought Amadeo Roldan [*sic*] might do, or Arturo Cartulo [*sic*]. I could not find Cartulo, and Roldan said he wasn’t a Negro. But Miguel Covarrubias had given me a letter to José Antonio Fernández de Castro, a person extraordinary of this or any other world. José Antonio saw to it that I had a rumba of a good time and met everybody, Negro, white, and mulatto, of any interest in Havana—from the drummers at the Marianao to the society artist and editor of *Social*, Massaguer.

But I came back to New York with no Negro composer who could write an opera. More and more tangled that winter became the skein of poet and patron, youth and age, pov-

erty and wealth—and one day it broke! Quickly and quietly in the Park-Avenue drawing room, it broke.²⁵

Hughes's decision to subtitle this portion of his autobiography "Not Primitive" foreshadows his later contention that he ultimately had to part ways with Mason because "she wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did."²⁶ Because Hughes interrupts the story of his break from Mason to offer an account of his stay in Cuba, he prompts the reader to question whether the break and the trip are related, painting a portrait of a poet whose enhanced class consciousness was also linked to his increased international awareness and new friendships. His account seems all the more crafted to imply this because he had yet to write "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria" when he broke from Mason and because the hotel itself was not yet open for business in the winter of 1929–30, when Hughes was suffering from a poetic paralysis. In short, Hughes manufactures a scenario wherein the composition of "Advertisement," his trip to Cuba, and his break from Mason are all coeval, and this very fabrication begs his readers to investigate these connections.

In the opening pages of his second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), where we find him returning to Cuba and Fernández de Castro the following year, Hughes claims that his thoughts about his 1930s writing began to take shape on a U.S.-occupied Haitian shore and were prompted by a curious newfound freedom arising from the disproportionate unemployment of Black writers in the United States during the Great Depression. Hughes also tied this newfound freedom to his disavowal of "the primitive" and his split from his patron. Let us consider these developments in the order that Hughes presents them, beginning with his reflections on the role that the U.S. literary marketplace played in his transformation as a poet:

Poets whose poetry sold hardly at all had been offered jobs on smart New York magazines. But they were white. I was colored. So in Haiti I began to puzzle out how I a Negro could make a living in America from writing . . . There was one other dilemma—how to make a living from the kind of writing I wanted to do. I did not want to write for the pulps, or turn out fake "true" stories to sell under anonymous

names. . . . I did not want to bat out slick non-Negro short stories in competition with a thousand other commercial writers [at] *The Saturday Evening Post*. I wanted to write seriously as well as I knew how about the Negro people, and make that kind of writing earn for me a living.²⁷

This passage sets forth several interconnected and illuminating paradoxes. Hughes depicts a bleak New York literary landscape that conducts its hiring practices with a greater concern for skin color than profits, and whose ranks therefore are swelled by anonymous panders, usurpers, and sellouts, presumably because of an enormous demand for commercial (mis)representations of the Negro *volk* and lumpen. And yet what makes these “fake ‘true’ stories” both “fake” and “true” is that they can pass for the kind of serious writing to which Hughes is now committed. The fact that counterfeit coin is the preferred currency of New York’s smart set undervalues all claims to the Black authentic, but nevertheless charges Hughes’s commitments to himself and to his subjects (“to write seriously as well as I knew how about the Negro people”) with this very weight. It also speaks to a state of affairs that would make all of Hughes’s wants, refusals, and commitments completely quixotic unless one acknowledges what goes mostly unsaid here: that there were foreign markets for Hughes’s writing of which he was well aware. That is to say, “[a] Negro could make a living in America” by writing “as well as I knew how about the Negro people” if and only if his work succeeded abroad and in translation.

This solution to Hughes’s puzzle underlines the advantages in the Negro writer’s broadening his sense of identity beyond U.S. borders to draw new collectivities into his fold. This altered self-concept rests on a dizzying number of seismographic shifts and assumptions central to the history of criticism on Hughes and Cuba that continue to haunt contemporary African diasporic and translation studies. Can the content and contours of Hughes’s serious writing about “Negroes” survive the inherently transformational violences of translation, especially considering the degrees of racialization and the diverse discourses on race that are at play in the global arena? What risks are involved in assuming that U.S. race relations have comparable analogues elsewhere in the Americas, in the Francophone world, or in colonized Africa? Does Hughes have the ethical authority to write about, or on behalf of, Negroes in this broader American and global sense? Does this broader sense even have a concrete referent?

If these questions are posed assuming that Hughes expects the translations of his work to preserve an invariant content or truth contained in his telling attempt “to write seriously as well as I knew how about the Negro people,” they might also be said to entirely miss the mark, and to look past what is perhaps the most intriguing implication of Hughes’s faith in translation. Hughes does not, here, place his faith in what he has already ruled out as an impossibility. He does not, in other words, believe that his original writing alone can “earn for me a living” or accomplish his professed goal to write seriously about “the Negro.” Rather, he entrusts these missions to the afterlife of his writing, to its translation. Hence, the most germane questions do not revolve around whether Hughes’s writings about “the Negro” survived the violences of translation, but rather ask: How successfully did Hughes and his interlocutors use translation (and all of its violences) to remake “the Negro people” anew as both national and international subjects? How did Hughes’s work have to be transformed to travel across different geographies while still writing seriously about “the Negro people”?

The second “domestic” development that played a decisive role in his Haitian-based machinations, according to Hughes, was his split from “Godmother.” In one of the few instances of overlap between his two autobiographies, Hughes relates:

She wanted me to be more African than Harlem—primitive in the simple, intuitive and noble sense of the word. I couldn’t be, having grown up in Kansas City, Chicago and Cleveland. So that winter had left me ill in my soul. I could not put my mind on writing for months. But write I had to—or starve—so I went to sit in the sun and gather my wits.²⁸

Despite the fanfare about his newfound poetic freedom and commitments that Hughes offers his readers, he offers precious little about the character of “serious writing about the Negro people.” For all his bluster about new beginnings, Hughes is still gripped by poetic paralysis. His rejection of Mason’s “African” and his self-definition as “Kansas City, Chicago and Cleveland” does not lead him to a poetic promised land. Quite the contrary: Hughes’s assertion of his American identity leaves him dazed, startled out of his wits on a Haitian shore and presumably still unable, yet determined, to write. However, the deft move that Hughes makes from discussing himself as a writer who needed to earn a living to one who wanted to “make” a kind of poetry that could

“earn for me a living” does offer the careful reader a clue about the nature of his “serious” poetry. It is not poetry engaged in passive contemplation, but rather in the act of production and reproduction. It is writing, like the proletarian laborer, that earns, and, of course, writing that, like the Black lumpen, travels. It is a poetry that is international in its scope and its wellsprings—poetry that can be written by a Hughes who is “Kansas City, Chicago and Cleveland” only after he has acquired the Black internationalist perspective and freedom dreams afforded by the vantage point of a Black island nation. Haiti’s independence had, for more than a century, posed a direct challenge to the economic and political hegemony that fueled and safeguarded global race capitalism and which had propelled Europe to world dominance. In short, the “serious poetry” that Hughes envisioned would be a poetry engaged in the revolutionary “life-making” that marked the works of Mayakovsky’s LEF or the social construction of Proletkult, a poetry that seeks to engage and rethink communism from the perspective of the world’s disproportionately colored proletariat with the dual aim of aiding production and of inciting worldwide revolution.

THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN HUGHES’S CREATIVE PROCESS

In order to explain how Hughes’s practice of translation fueled his radical 1930s poetic production and enriched his poetic palette, it is helpful to conceptualize translation as a problem-solving process. This process involves (at a minimum) engaging with the poetics of the source language, learning the semantics of its prosody, weighing possible word substitutions in order to avoid unwanted historical, linguistic, or cultural connotations, and gaining familiarity with the idiosyncrasies of the poet in question. In his essay “The Hermeneutic Motion,” George Steiner identifies four phases of this problem-solving process: interpretation, penetration, embodiment, and restitution. Interpretation entails scrutinizing how the content of a source text conveys meaning. Penetration refers to the process-oriented interdisciplinary work required to reconstruct the circumstances surrounding and informing the production of the original text. Embodiment is the ethical attempt to discard a self that has been altered by the preceding processes of interpretation and penetration. Finally, restitution refers to the composition of the translation—its actual rendering in the target language.²⁹ An analysis of each phase facilitates

an understanding of the challenges Hughes encountered in translating poets ranging from García Lorca to Mayakovsky. In moving through these steps, Langston Hughes's poetic palette was significantly enriched by the need to deal with the poetics, prosody, and politics surrounding source poems and their authors, as well as translations and their target zones. In other words, Hughes's practice of translation enhanced the set of poetic alternatives within his working repertoire. Hughes's original production exhibits this enhancement and testifies to the intertwining of his activities as a translator with his creative process as a poet. When one examines the very extensive list of authors Hughes translated, one finds a distinguished list of poets who had much to offer, providing him with a rich reservoir of radicalisms and poetic innovations.

Hughes's papers housed at Yale University's Beinecke Library include translations of poems and short stories by Antonio Acevedo Escobedo, Julian Anisimov, Louis Aragon, Juan de la Cabada, Francisca "Nellie" Campobello, Cipriano Carlos Altorre, Jean Cocteau, Pierre Dalcour, Léon-Gontran Damas, Luis Felipe Rodríguez, Federico García Lorca, Eliseo Grenet, Nicolás Guillén, Gulan Gafur, Armand Lanusse, Anthony Lespes, Herman List Azurbide, Rubén Salazar Mallen, José Mancisidor, Levi Marrero, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Gonzalo Mazas Garbayo, Gabriela Mistral, José Moreno Villa, Rafael Muñoz, Lino Novás Calvo, Boris Pasternak, Regino Pedroso, Jacques Prévert, Arturo Ramírez, Francisco Rojas González, Jacques Roumain, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Emi Siao (Xiao San), M. Sire-Valenciano, Pablo de la Torriente-Brau, Gerardo de Valle, Xavier Villarutia, and Jean Vincent. Although Hughes was not successful in securing publication for many of his translations, poems originally written in French, Spanish, Uzbek, Russian, and Chinese are all part of this body of work. The respective national contexts of these languages—Haiti, Martinique, France, Senegal, French Guiana, colonial Louisiana, Mexico, Spain, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Chile, and China—and their differing sociopolitical contexts provided Hughes with both local fodder for the promotion of revolutionary consciousness and unique topographies to be historically referenced in poetic expression. This book focuses on five instances where translation enhanced Hughes's repertoire—his engagements with the poetry of Regino Pedroso, Nicolás Guillén, Louis Aragon, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Federico García Lorca—not because they are anomalous, but because they shed light on how Hughes's practice of translation inspired his radical poetic production of the 1930s and informed its portrayal and practice of Black internationalism.

New World Maker reflects a commitment to interrogate the individual creative processes of reading, writing, and rewriting that are integral to an exploration of Hughes's practices of translation and those of his translators. Steiner's paradigm of "the hermeneutic motion" is useful for these purposes insofar as the content-oriented work of interpretation and the process-oriented work of penetration mirror the work undertaken by the scholar engaged in translation studies. At the same time, I underscore the extent to which these processes and practices are embedded in the evolving ideological and historical context that surround literary production and translation in the Hispanic, Francophone, and African American worlds.

As a case study of a mode of inquiry into translation, this book demonstrates that an elucidation of the contemporary events, literary developments, and world visions that impact translators and their decisions is of central importance to the project of accounting for the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of translation and its place in world literature. Just as translations testify to their moments in time and space by betraying the cultural contacts and collisions that engender them, so too does the work of individual translators speak to their respective experiences, aesthetic sensibilities, intents, and places—temporally, spatially, and politically—both inside and outside the literary world. Hence, a study of translation that avoids ascribing a secondary status to the practice of translation reveals much more than a history of bungled nuance and phrases lost in translation. It reveals history itself and the way history gets inscribed in literature, translation, and the knowledge structures we come to know through translation. Moreover, the translator's ideological and aesthetic objectives manifested in the target text do not simply locate the poem but ultimately create a different poem in translation, one that may be self-consciously crafted by the translator to subvert or bolster the intent and themes of the original. In the case of Hughes and his translators, ideologically driven translation was the prominent mode, given their competing and overlapping visions of Black internationalism, Black radicalism, and communism.

While ideologically driven translation may certainly also be *literal* translation—where "literal" denotes the quest for a word-for-word translation—the majority of Hughes's translators shied away from word-for-word equivalence. They favored inventive and domesticating strategies for their often transgressive translations—where "domesticating" refers to the process of altering a source text so as to make

it more meaningful for the target audience according to contemporaneous conventions and literary standards. In short, Hughes's poetry was continually reinvented in diverse cultural and political contexts to fulfill multiple agendas. However, the fact that Hughes was translated differently in different target zones is to be expected. Reinvention in the practice of translation is not a choice. It is the name of the game. The multiple personas of Hughes in foreign-language translation are as much a function of translation itself as they are a function of the desire, on the part of his translators, to deliberately create him anew in the service of a given agenda.

My interest in uncovering the worlds of Hughes and his translators via a scrutiny of their translation decisions is a project that aligns with what Lawrence Venuti would label a hermeneutic model of translation, a model within which reinvention is inescapable. Change is unavoidable when translation is conceived of as an act of interpretation and re-contextualization that renders a source text variable in form, meaning, and effect. For example, in "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation" (2009), Venuti works to "theorize the relative autonomy" of the translated text. For him, establishing this "autonomy" does not entail searching for self-contained textual meaning, but rather exploring the unique diversity of intertextual relations through which we make meaning of any translated text. Granting autonomy to a translation seems to involve releasing it from any rigid ethical obligations to its source text, a parameter of concern to other translation theorists who wish to avoid erasure of meaning. In his essay on "the poet's version," Venuti has argued that a translation's ethical responsibility is as much or more to its new linguistic context as to that of its source text. In "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation," he moves away from the language of ethics altogether. All too often, discussions of translational ethics fall back on assumptions about a source text's invariant content, as if a translation could be a reproduction or duplicate of an original. As Venuti underscores, it is nonsensical to expect that a translation's intertexts should only lie within the language of its source text. To translate, Venuti says, is not to decontextualize but to recontextualize. To acknowledge this alerts us to the gains, as well as the losses, inherent in the act of translating. Venuti accordingly shifts the conversation to a discussion of intertexts and interpretants. This refreshing approach to translation has been very helpful for this book. Moreover, in his article "Translation, Community, Utopia," Venuti posits that every text creates a new textual community that quests toward the "utopian dream" that

translation allows: that of finding a common cause between domestic and foreign. This was clearly an objective of Hughes's translations and translators.

Venuti's position is somewhat at odds with another critical theme in translation studies, one that is concerned with the preservation of meaning from source to target zones and has been particularly focused on the issue of "untranslatability." The idea of "untranslatability" implies that the failure of a translation to transfer some essential and unchanging meaning, semantic element, or formal effect of a text results in a loss that is critical. This seems to be Vera Kutzinski's concern when she critiques Carruthers's use of U.S. Black dialect to translate Nicolás Guillén's *criollo* since *criollo* has no American English-language equivalent. In her view, this translation choice suggests sameness at the expense of obfuscating difference and is a decision with ethical implications.³⁰ For her part, Kutzinski rebukes the "field of African American (literary) studies" insofar as it places "too little pressure" on the pervasive assumption that "literary discourses of blackness in the Hispanic Americas" are "culturally rooted and ideologically unified, both within themselves and across languages" simply because "African slavery was a New World practice." In her perspective, this lack of critical rigor has led critics (Cobb, Mullen, Dixon, Jackson, Feracho) "to rush to assert transnational links between cultures" at the expense of the exploration of the "racial and ethnic heterogeneities that had energized diaspora studies in the first place." However, the forces animating "diaspora studies in the first place" and those driving Black left internationalism in the 1920s and '30s are not one and the same. As Brent Hayes Edwards reminds us, diaspora was a mid-century academic intervention that was meant to add clarity to the densely populated field of diverse pan-Africanisms. Granted, since racial categories can be unstable across time and region within the same nation, they are not always a guide to greater understanding of the place of race in a society. Many types of asymmetry do arise in the context of translation, some trivial and minimally, if at all, affecting the meaning of the poem, while others may be transformative. Because of this, Kutzinski cautions against reliance on sameness for unifying purposes and argues, as an important methodological issue, that the failure to recognize

differences in how racial distinctions have affected Latin American societies internally, in relation to each other, and in relation to the US, has still not taken sufficient hold in

comparative literary scholarship originating in the US American academy. In that academy, assertions of cultural sameness have been key constitutive elements in the formation and legitimization of academic fields such as African American and African Diaspora Studies.³¹

However, if differences in terminological and other cultural systems along national lines are treated as a starting point for community, and community is then defined in terms of unity or “sameness,” the resulting paradigm cannot be used to conceive of trans- or extra-national Black collectivities as anything but fictions or fantasies. Such a theoretical formulation, however, cannot account for the histories and workings of Black internationalisms on the ground. I refer here to the Black internationalist freedom dreams of people like David Walker, Martin Delany, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore, Malcolm X, and Aimé Césaire. These individuals, and the movements and initiatives with which they are associated, exemplify efforts to engage in consciousness-raising and mobilization across national and class lines, and it must be recalled that the very capacity of Blacks for self-mobilization along these lines was a common fear of U.S. and European empires. Recall that Black internationalisms were incredibly powerful forces for much of the twentieth century in the geopolitical realm. It would be myopic to dismiss the convictions and sympathies of a multitude of freedom dreamers for whom the European-derived nation-state had failed to offer community. Likewise, it would entail erasing the fact that these dreamers’ concrete circumstances provided the very impetus for investments in modalities of extra-national collectivity. Among these Black internationalisms were pan-Africanisms and counter-discourses to white supremacy, like blackness, which have been used by peoples of African descent in their emancipatory struggles against the political and psychological shackles of U.S. and European empires. To suggest that an African diasporic community is somehow more romantic than the idea of French Gallic heritage, more fictional than the idea of U.S. citizenship, or more guilty of obfuscating difference than the idea of a European Union would be to indulge a myopia that would discount articulations of Black resistance, Black nationalisms, and Black internationalisms as well as their study.

Venuti’s hermeneutic model of translation provides a more suitable framework for examining the role of translation in creating and fostering extra-national collectivities. Critics interested in exploring the workings of

extra-national collectivities challenge the idea that the European-derived nation-state is the *primum movens* behind geopolitics and the formation of personal and collective identities, and they don't assume that national belonging ultimately trumps all other forms of collectivity. In the case of scholarly works on Hughes's and Guillén's literary relationship, the enthusiasm with which scholars like Martha Cobb and Richard Jackson have explored matters of extra-national kinship sharply contrasts with the work of other scholars who continue to insist on acknowledging difference in order to avoid the hegemony implicit in favoring a domestic zone terminological domain over that of the target zone. This is to say, as the preservation, imposition, or illumination of cultural difference became a paramount concern for contemporary comparative explorations of the relationship among Black writers across the Atlantic, the project of exposing "false equivalences," "unhappy misunderstandings," "cultural asymmetries," and "fragmentation" of the diaspora along largely national or imperialist lines has become its *modus operandi*.

Brent Hayes Edwards raises a related issue about the concept of African diaspora when he asks if it is possible to assume that the assertion of a "Negro" or "Black" transnational identity or community can withstand dis-articulation from within. Such a disarticulation asks us to pay careful heed to the differences in the diaspora; to its cultural and ethnic variety, to its linguistic incompatibilities, but also to the nationalist and imperialist paradigms and agendas that historically have sought to disrupt and destroy transnational Black collectivities and their study. Conversely, can we, as Michelle Stephens astutely points out, responsibly dismantle "blackness" or "Black internationalisms" without first taking into account the material forces that caused peoples of African descent to look to a new means of extra-national collectivity and belonging?³²

The stakes are high, and the issues they raise are by no means new. If blackness can travel—if it can be translated—several consequences follow for the study of the diaspora. The most obvious consequence in academic study is, and has been, that it allows scholars to talk about a diasporic community, politics, and even aesthetics. Scholarship that gratuitously disputes narratives of Black internationalism seems to reify the primacy of the European-derived nation-state while simultaneously waving the protest banner against the imposition of paternalistic U.S. racial paradigms in an international arena. Can we posit a diasporic identity or collective without effecting an erasure that runs contrary to the conditions that supposedly drove Black internationalism in the first place?

Here, I want to argue that the story of Langston Hughes's translations and translators not only suggests that blackness can travel, but that it does, has, and continues to travel. In fact, the story of Hughes and translation suggests that "blackness" can be regarded as the U.S. vocable for a set of international discourses that either embody or stand in opposition to another concept for which we have no other name, curiously enough, than white supremacy. Blackness is a concept that is always unstable, always subject to flux and to changing national narratives and international realities. It is always a local domestication of an international text or fabric of texts that range from the Code Noir's delineation of slave non-rights to the French republican enshrinement of the rights of man and citizen, and from the variegated discourse of the New Negro to the racist dogma of Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*. Blackness, precisely because it is ever morphing in translation and transaction, haunts and shapes these texts which most often seek—in a Sisyphean endeavor—to define it, to delimit it, and, quite disturbingly, even to erase it. Does "blackness" erase difference? Like any collectivizing term, there can be no question that it does to some extent. But what if the difference that blackness effaces is productive in its eradication? What if erasing or subordinating national nuance is conducive to a project of international justice, a justice that seeks its relief in the disarticulation of European and European-imposed difference on Black communities, relief from a difference or discourse of difference upon which global capitalism and European imperialism and nationalisms have always relied to thwart Black internationalism or transnational resistance in order to perpetuate the inequalities of their imposed economic, political, and cultural systems?

Despite the widespread espousal of post-structuralist theories of language in U.S. literature departments, most contemporary scholars continue to embrace what Lawrence Venuti calls an "instrumental model of translation": a mental model of translation in which a translated text is seen as the reproduction or transfer of an invariant contained in the foreign text. Most literary scholars writing after George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975) will also readily concede that translation is an interpretive act. But when called upon to evaluate a translation, they do so by comparing the translation to its original in ways that routinely fail to acknowledge the translator's mediated access to the source text and the critics' mediated access to both.³³ Unfortunately, instrumentalist approaches to translation quickly become essentialist approaches to race studies when they are applied to the workings of entities like the cultural traffic of

Black internationalism. In other words, insofar as instrumentalist approaches to translation studies are principally concerned with the preservation of an invariant, they inevitably encounter substantial problems when grappling with concepts like race—concepts that can be said to possess the qualities of an invariant only when they are conceptualized in essentialist terms.³⁴ Racial paradigms and linguistic variants such as dialect or Black vernacular speech are positioned as untranslatable because the knowledge necessary to decode them is figured as inextricably bound to and bounded by national contexts. In my estimation, this emphasis on sameness is misplaced because communities do not depend on “sameness” to the degree that some scholars would have it. Communities may share a same, but this same is always one shaped for the subject by power. It is a same propagated to counterbalance the differentiations and hierarchies that domination institutionalizes, rationalizes, and depends upon to realize its interests. It is but one mechanism among many that allows for power relations to come into being, and is no less imagined than is any articulation of racial or diasporic belonging.

The stories of Langston Hughes and his translational encounters help to debunk the arguments that racial paradigms, discourses, literatures, and speech are untranslatable because they are so inextricably bound and informed by nationalist frameworks and agendas. These stories also discredit the idea that since Black internationalisms supposedly depend on a shared sameness that is revealed to be illusory when examined in light of translation, the very idea of transnational Black collectivity can only exist in a vacuum of critical rigor supposedly facilitated in the contemporary moment by misguided, romantic, or racially essentialist thinkers questing after a shared yet fantasized historical otherness or a romantic sense of racial belonging. To be more precise, Black internationalisms only appear to be illusory when examined in light of the unhappy analogues, miscommunications, and transgressive translations that come to the fore when a translation of racial discourse is compared to its original using an instrumental model of translation. Hughes’s translational encounters suggest that racist discourses and discourses on race, literary and otherwise, travel so easily precisely because of two factors: the inherently transformational violences that take place in any act of translation, and because global capitalism itself depends on the dissemination of racist ideologies. In short, I accept the premise that discourses on race can and do circulate as adjuvants to global capitalism and that these discourses can be transformative in their new environments. To agree with thinkers like Edwards, discourses on race are not

fungible because they are to greater and lesser degrees unique and particular, shaped by disparate economic and geopolitical circumstances and power relations. But they are not untranslatable. On the contrary, it is precisely because racist discourses are eminently translatable and, as a result, always different, localized, and unique that they can help to bring into being (or pave the way for) the political and economic relationships that facilitate the liquidity upon which global race capitalism depends.

The dismantling of Black internationalism via translation study ultimately rests on a faulty understanding of how both Black internationalism and translation work. Translation is an inherently transformative and interpretive act, and all translations differ not from some sacred originary meaning, but from the critics' interpretation of the source text. Seeking common ground and poetic equivalences might be said to flatten difference, but this flattening is not an erasure, but rather the dialectical outgrowth of ego-driven social networking striving for community. Concomitantly, any analysis of the movement of racial discourse exploring such traffic using an instrumental model of translation will inevitably conclude that racial themes and discourses cannot escape change in translation because blackness is perhaps the furthest thing from an invariant. Blackness, as Henry Louis Gates reminds us, "does not have an 'essence' as such but is defined by a network of relations."³⁵ Literary blackness is defined, in turn, not by the presence of some invariant content, but rather by the way Black texts offer themselves to the world as a complex system of signs. In other words, literary blackness is defined intertextually—by how texts respond to other texts—just as much as it is by the relation of form to content or by the nature of Black figurative language. The translatability of blackness should therefore be assessed less with an eye to the existence of ready analogues for racial lexicons and paradigms—centered around questions of whether there can be a "Cuban black" or "pardo norteamericano"—and more with an eye to assessing how translators transform the system of signs and re-create the intertextual relations that convey blackness in one arena into the system of signs and intertextual relations that convey blackness in another. If there is any single lesson to be learned, from translation, about the authenticity of blackness that can extend Gates's observation, it lies in the realization that the Black authentic travels not as any single artifact, author, or discourse but rather as a collectivizing, authenticating, malleable system of signs referring to an African-descended stratum capable of producing different authentic blacknesses in different geographies.

To tell Langston Hughes's story through the lens of translation studies is also to trust in a wedding of disciplines and subdisciplines—or to be faithful to the idea that translation research is an enterprise whose problem-solving character forces both scholar and translator alike to turn to a variety of disciplines and interdisciplines: in our case, biography, history, political science, anthropology, literary criticism, translation studies, and literary theory. At the same time, it is also to trust in two interrelated ideas: that the more one knows about the translator himself, the better one will be able to account for that translator's decisions. Also, when close read against this archive, a translation decision can help us to better come to terms with the materiality that informed it—to better re-create the translator, the range of the interpretants, the impetus for translation, the circumstances of production of the translation, and so on. This is in accord with the idea that translation studies is not only an integrating force in a fragmentary and discontinuous world, as Rainer Schulte would have it, but a tool with which we can better decode the complexities of this very fragmentation, as Edwards suggests in *The Practice of Diaspora*. In accord with Edwards as I read him, it is certainly to argue that translation studies is much more than a tool that can only reveal difference, or one with which to dismantle blackness or the study of Black internationalisms. Rather, it is a valuable tool, as I understand Edwards's "against the grain" reading of Senghor's use of *décalage*, that enables us to grapple with the difference that is the starting point for, and not the destruction of, Black internationalism. Two interrelated points come into focus here: that while a healthy investigation of a translation can and does prove useful to readings of the source and target texts, a basic distrust of translation boils down to a basic distrust of interpretation and reading itself. Translation and reading are inherently interpretive exercises beset by similar risks, rewards, and pitfalls because, as Blanchot puts matters, texts, at bottom, do not really exist. For a text to exist it needs to be read, and the act of reading requires a leap. But "if you do not jump, you do not comprehend."³⁶ The project of understanding a translation both as a reading and through an archive that accounts for the translator can thus be argued to restore a kind of materiality to literary studies that pays heed to post-structuralist paradigms of language, but which has implications far beyond the realm of literary theory.

The story of Langston Hughes and translation is told here in seven chapters. Each chapter examines a particular intertextual archive—a group of poems, translations, and other archival evidence in the form

of letters, drafts, and essays—that when read in chorus against a historical, cultural, and political-economic backdrop points to rich cross-fertilizations between Black internationalism and translation in the arena of poetic practice. Hughes gains prominence in African American intellectual history while being positioned in a social formation that is still in the making—the African diaspora. The book enriches our view of Hughes as the progenitor of Black poetic production that Damas described by placing him at the intersection of cultural and political dynamics in Cuba, Russia, Spain, and France, thereby not only illuminating literature in its transnational movement but also enlarging our view of Hughes the poet by bearing out the truth of his statement that culture is a two-way street.

Writer's Block

Unmuzzling Racial Discourse in Cuba

Despite his achievements when he set sail for Cuba in the early months of 1930, which included the publication of over 200 poems in numerous journals and periodicals as well as two volumes of original verse, Langston Hughes was confronted by the sad fact that his love affair with poetry had foundered. The debut of his collection *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in the opening months of 1927 had resulted in a spectacular failure, as most literary critics on both sides of the color line excoriated the now seminal volume. Invited by the *Pittsburgh Courier* to respond, Hughes wrote "These Bad Negroes: A Critique on Critics," in which he placed his portrayals of the common folk in line with those of Homer, Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman. While Hughes publicly aligned himself with a panorama of poetic influence and inspiration, he confessed to confidantes like Amy Spingarn that his poetic well had run dry. Although he had published one poem since *Fine Clothes*, "Sunset-Coney Island," in *New Masses*, the Langston Hughes who set sail for Cuba does not seem to have been propelled by a revolutionary wind. Rather, he was a man with his tail between his legs, exhausted by the completion of the manuscript for *Not Without Laughter* (1930), on the verge of financial and inspirational bankruptcy, and trying to please his demanding patron Charlotte Mason, a woman who required that he address her as "Godmother." In the previous year, Hughes had pleaded his

way back into Mason's good graces from which he'd fallen because he had not adequately thanked her for his Christmas gift. He promised her that he would use his time in Cuba to find a composer for the opera he intended to write, pledging to get back in touch with "the song." Mason backed the idea at once, for, as Arnold Rampersad reports, "Cuba must be very primitive."

By the end of 1930, Langston Hughes had parted from Mason. He would begin 1931 by publishing radical poems like "Tired," "Call to Creation," and "A Christian Country" in *New Masses*, and he ended 1930 by sending out a very different kind of Yuletide greeting with "Merry Christmas" in the pages of the same:

Ring Merry Christmas, Africa,
From Cairo to the Cape!
Ring Halleluiah! [*sic*] Praise the Lord!
(For murder and for rape.)

Ring Merry Christmas, Haiti!
(And drown the voodoo drums—
We'll rob you to the Christian hymns
Until the next Christ comes.)

Ring Merry Christmas, Cuba!
(While Yankee domination
Keeps a nice fat president
In a little half-starved nation.) (9–20)¹

Hughes had entered his radical period. Within a year, his poetry had garnered so much leftist acclaim on a worldwide stage that when he returned from Cuba in 1931, he was invited by the Scottsboro Nine's defense team to visit Alabama's Kilby prison. Over the course of the first four chapters of this book, I will argue that Hughes's Cuban translational encounters played an integral role in shaping his 1930s radical poetry. In this chapter, I argue that Hughes's 1930 Cuban reception, in person and in print, had a transformative effect on his poetry and poetics, offering him a road map for how to succeed in translation that helped to lay the groundwork and establish the networks that nourished his radical period.

Some ninety years later, we are accustomed to thinking of Hughes's visit to Cuba as a site of diasporic cultural exchange, because the pre-

vailing wisdom has been that Hughes gave Nicolás Guillén the idea to write his *son poemas* during this trip. In exploring Hughes's visit and dissemination in Cuba, this chapter will examine the trip and Hughes's first appearances in Cuban print culture for what they offered him as a poet looking to succeed in translation, and for what his Cuban interlocutors saw as an opportunity to use translation to unmuzzle Cuban racial discourse. Of interest is how this cadre of leftist intellectuals and artists used Hughes's visit to provoke a comparative conversation about race in Cuba, where whitening politics and repression by the *machadistas*—supporters of Cuba's authoritarian president, Gerardo Machado—had rendered Cuba's large Black population virtually invisible. These intellectuals' resistance to Black marginalization was complex and multifaceted, but recovering the *tema negro* (or black thematic) and transforming the Black lumpen into an engagé proletariat were central to their radical aspirations to rid the island of the U.S. imperial presence and promote a communist revolution.

There is a telling flash-forward at the beginning of *I Wonder as I Wander*. Before Hughes reaches his Haitian shore, the first chapter, "In Search of the Sun," tells of the warm reception that he and Zell Ingram enjoyed in Havana, one largely orchestrated by José Antonio Fernández de Castro, a poet, scholar, aristocrat, communist, and Hughes's first Spanish-language translator:

José Antonio was a newspaperman on the *Diario de la Marina*. He later became an editor of *Orbe*, Cuba's pictorial magazine. Then he went into the diplomatic service to become the first secretary of the Cuban embassy in Mexico City, and from there to Europe. Painters, writers, newsboys, poets, fighters, politicians and rumba dancers were all José's friends. And best of all for me, he knew the Negro musicians at the Marianao, those fabulous drum beaters who use their bare hands to beat out rhythm, those clave knockers and maraca shakers who somehow have saved—out of all the centuries of slavery and all the miles and miles from Guinea—the heartbeat and songbeat of Africa.²

Hughes paints Fernández de Castro as a man of the people but stops short of identifying him as a well-known leftist. He could even be said to hide Fernández de Castro's political sympathies and affiliations by neglecting to mention that the latter also served as Cuba's ambassador

to the Soviet Union. Rather, what the two men share most is not politics, but a passion for the Afro-Cuban primitive, a thirst for the “song-beat of Africa” in the Marianao district of Havana. Hughes also fails to mention that Fernández de Castro worked as a translator or that he translated any of his work, but he mentions his poetic labors, pointing out that his “poems had been published in Spanish in a number of Cuban magazines and papers.” He also praises the “human dynamo” as “about the best person in Cuba to know,” owing to his social network that extended to all walks of Cuban life, including the heart of Cuban print culture. As in *The Big Sea*, Hughes’s sequencing of events in narrating his life story ties his break from Mason and the “primitive” to a falling-in with a new Cuban society and to the birth of his radical period, only now, his reception in translation becomes an important part of the picture.

Contrary to his claims in *I Wonder*, Hughes’s career as a radical poet was well under way when he crossed paths with Fernández de Castro a second time. His characterization of himself as a blocked writer “startled out of his wits” on a Haitian shore in April 1931 is patently false. He had been publishing poems like “Merry Christmas,” “Tired,” “Militant,” and “Call to Creation” in *New Masses* for half a year. As was the case with “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria,” in *The Big Sea* Hughes misdates his radical period, and, now, the poetic writer’s block that preceded it. He again suggests that his Cuban reception was coeval with the birth of his radical period, but now it is his third trip to Cuba that leads to his epiphany in Haiti about “serious writing.” Why? And does this disturb our contention that Hughes’s radical period found its wellsprings, in part, in his reaction to Fernández de Castro’s 1930 translations of his verse? Hardly. As Andrew Jarret points out, Hughes’s oscillations “between fact and fiction, documentation and fabrication” and his “approximations of historical reality” reflect his uneasiness about displaying his communist affinities while compiling his account of his most “radical years.” I would also note that these inconsistencies serve as flags, drawing attention to the very leftist ties he didn’t obscure, but rather hid in plain sight. In other words, Hughes is all too easily caught here, and he seems to have had faith that history would catch up with him.

Several good accounts of Hughes’s 1930 trip to Cuba come to us from sources in addition to his autobiographies, including his diaries, his correspondence, Fernández de Castro’s *Tema negro en las letras de Cuba* (1943), Nicolás Guillén’s “Recuerdos de Langston Hughes”

(1967), Edward Mullen's *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* (1977), the first volume of Arnold Rampersad's *Life of Langston Hughes* (1981), Faith Berry's *Beyond Harlem* (1983), and more recently, Frank Guridy's *Forging Diaspora* (2010) and Kutzinski's *The Worlds of Langston Hughes* (2012). The first two articles about Langston Hughes that appeared in Spanish-language print—Fernández de Castro's "Presentación de Langston Hughes" and Guillén's "Conversación con Langston Hughes"—offer accounts of Hughes's experiences in Cuba in 1930. Because the histories of Hughes's personal and print reception in Cuba are intertwined, I offer a brief account of the events of Hughes's trip.

On February 18, 1930, Hughes attempted to book passage to Cuba, but was denied a ticket by the Ward Line offices on Fifth Avenue after being shown interoffice correspondence to the effect that Negroes, Chinese, and Russians were not allowed to land in Cuba except as seamen. Hughes sought remedy at the Cuban consulate (where nobody had heard of such a regulation), and then from Walter White at the NAACP headquarters. White sent wires to the Department of State of Cuba and to the U.S. embassy in Havana, demanding to know why Hughes should not be allowed to enter Cuba. While awaiting a reply, Hughes secured a stateroom from the Cunard Line, but the entire incident left him embittered, and he would pursue the matter in Havana, visiting the Ward Line offices and, again, receiving no satisfactory response.

Hughes arrived in Havana on February 25, 1930, aboard the *Caronia*, and spent the day securing lodging, visiting Chinatown, and buying souvenirs and postcards for Charlotte Mason. The next morning, armed with a letter of introduction from Miguel Covarrubias, he presented himself to Fernández de Castro at his editorial office at *Diario de la Marina*. He was apparently unaware that Fernández de Castro had already translated one of his poems, "I, Too," for the lush pages of *Social* in 1928, and given the Spanish-reading public their first and only look at Hughes to date, but one imagines that the topic of translation quickly came up. The aristocratic, well-connected Fernández de Castro immediately called Gustavo Urrutia (editor of "Ideales de una raza," a weekly column in *Diario de la Marina* dedicated to Afro-Cubans), Nicolás Guillén (an occasional contributor to Urrutia's column, and a poet whose avant-garde verse had met with some critical acclaim), and Regino Pedroso (Cuba's first *poeta proletario*). Pedroso was unavailable, but Urrutia, Guillén, Fernández de Castro, and his brother Jorge took Hughes to lunch at Lolita Zamora's. In the following days,

Fernández de Castro included Hughes in several more outings and dinners, introducing him to José Zacarías Tallet, Conrado Massaguer, Juan Marinello, and Ramos Blanco (the Black Cuban sculptor whom Hughes would soon celebrate in prose), and to the nightlife of Havana's Marianao district.

In connecting Hughes to figures like Tallet, Massaguer, and Marinello, Fernández de Castro introduced Hughes to fellow members of the now famous, though defunct, *minorista* group. This cadre of writers, artists, and artisans was united by an eight-point manifesto that called

for the revision of false and empty values; . . . for vernacular art and, in general for new art in its diverse manifestations; . . . for the introduction and popularization of the latest artistic and scientific doctrines, theories and practices; . . . for the autonomy of the university . . . ; for the economic independence of Cuba; . . . and against Yankee imperialism; against dictatorial politics universally, in the world, in the Americas, and in Cuba; . . . against the excesses of pseudo-democracy; . . . against the farce of suffrage and for the effective participation of the people in the government. And for the betterment of the farmers, cane field cutters, and the worker in Cuba; . . . for the cordiality and unity of Latin America.³

Given their thirst for new poetic forms and vernacular and popularized art, and their commitment to the betterment of Cuban “cane field cutters,” who were largely the descendants of slaves, it is no surprise that the *minoristas* were among the first to propagate a heterogeneous literary movement of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s often referred to as *Afro-cubanismo* (Afro-Cubanism). Driven somewhat underground by *machadista* repression, the *minoristas* provided *Afro-cubanismo* with its first *negrista* (white) poets and prose writers (José Zacarías Tallet, Francisco and Felipe Pichardo Moya, Ramon Guirao, Alejo Carpentier) and with the print culture necessary for its flowering. *Minoristas* headed the most influential *avanzada* (advance guard) publications in the nation: *Revista de la Avance* (Juan Marinello, Jorge Mañach, Félix Lizaso y Tallet), *Orbe* (Fernández de Castro), *Social* (Rubén Martínez Villena, Conrado Massaguer, Agustín Acosta, Alejo Carpentier, Fernández de Castro, Mañach, Marinello, Julio Antonio Mella), and the literary supplement to Havana's newspaper of record, *Diario de la Marina* (Fernández de Castro). In an era when, as Angel Rama reminds us, “the immense majority of

Latin American *letrados* continued to regard politics as the normal offshoot of world letters,” many of the *minoristas*’ members, including founder Rubén Martín Villena (also one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party [PCC]) and Juan Marinello (the head of the PCC until it was taken over by Fidel Castro in 1959), were influential leftists of note, and for this reason *minorismo* is often associated with “el proceso comunista” in Cuba.⁴ Even Guillén, who had yet to join the illegal PCC, was still openly professing his desire to be a professional politician in 1930. Hence, in meeting Fernández de Castro’s circle, Hughes was introduced to the epicenter of Black poetry in Havana, and to its revolutionary underground—to a unique environment where those invested in seeing a flowering of Afro-Cuban culture, like Fernández de Castro, were also ardent nationalists and communists.

Following Guillén’s interview of Hughes for “Ideales de una raza,” the poets were paired again when Hughes was toasted by Havana’s Afro-Cuban elite at the Club Atenas. According to the club’s newsletter (unearthed and translated by Frank Guridy), after an opening speech by Primitivo Ramírez Ros,

Juan Jérez Villarreal, the well-known and admired man of letters from Bayamo . . . read a fitting translation of various poems of Mr. Hughes, which was well received by the audience. Immediately thereafter, the poet Mr. Nicolás Guillén gave a reading of two of his own compositions, which were read afterward in English by Mr. Hughes, who has produced an admirable translation of them for a great New York magazine.⁵

Guridy’s find is noteworthy because it reveals that the second time Hughes’s poetry was presented to the Cuban public it was “live” and read alongside Nicolás Guillén. Further, it is likely that Fernández de Castro was the Spanish-language translator for Club Atenas, since he would soon publish four translations of Hughes’s poetry in the March edition of *Revista de la Habana*. Villarreal had strong ties to the *minorista* literary network, having worked beside Fernández de Castro at *Revista de la Avance*, *Orto*, and *Diario de la Marina*. Most importantly, it reveals that within days of meeting Fernández de Castro, Hughes’s Cuban interlocutors had not only turned him into a translator, but Hughes had already secured a place for his translations. These discoveries, alongside Guridy’s finding that Hughes spent a lot of time in 1930

sneaking off to translate Regino Pedroso's poetry, help to make sense of my own archival findings: namely, of Hughes's drafts of Guillén's and Pedroso's verse dated "Havana, 1930." In short, there was an awful lot of translating during Hughes's 1930s trip that has largely escaped comment, and this activity had to convey to the poet that his newfound friends valued what his poetry, in translation, could bring to Cuba—as well as the possibility that, as a translator, he could take Cuban poetry and culture and place its writers of color on a world stage.

As Hughes reports in his autobiography, his meeting with Amadeo Roldán did not result in a collaboration on an opera. Hughes spent his final days in Cuba enjoying the fruits of Havana's Marianao district in the company of Guillén, Urrutia, and Fernández de Castro. On March 7, 1930, the three men accompanied Hughes to the port when he departed aboard the *Essequibo* in third-class quarters, depleted of funds, still dependent on Mason, but with a suitcase full of works by Guillén, Pedroso, Tallet, and Francisca "Nellie" Campobello, having taken up the task of the translator.

Before Hughes left, around March 5, Gustavo Urrutia gave him a copy of a letter he sent to the Cuban secretary of state—a protest of the Ward Line's treatment of Hughes that made mention of letters of inquiry from several of Hughes's friends, including those from "the most distinguished intellectual social circles of that country." Urrutia had embarked on a campaign that, within two months, resulted in the Machado regime's renunciation of the travel ban. He wrote Hughes about this latest development on May 1, and by the year's end he had published the essay "Turistas negros en Cuba" ("Negro Tourists in Cuba"). This essay, detailing the skirmish's success, first appeared in "Ideales de una raza" and later, via Hughes's translation, in the February 1931 edition of *Crisis*. While sparked by Hughes's Ward Line encounter, the essay focuses on a similar denial of passage to Mary Bethune. Faced with journalistic pressure on two fronts, the Cuban government began enforcing the existing laws that clearly allowed the free passage of all U.S. citizens into Cuba. Hence, the first piece of correspondence that Hughes received from his Cuban friends detailed the Black internationalist significance of his trip and launched a series of events that produced change on the ground.

I dwell on Urrutia's championing of Hughes's cause because it is symbolic of the latter's 1930 Cuban reception as a whole. Urrutia, Fernández de Castro, and Guillén realized that Hughes's world celebrity could be leveraged nationally and internationally to change Cuba's racial

front. This front included the realm of Cuban belles lettres, where, as the Club Atenas's bilingual reading demonstrates, Hughes's fame was marshaled to advance the career of Nicolás Guillén. Hughes's warm reception proved to be a strategic one—the more his interlocutors could tie him to Cuba, the greater the potential for this kind of leveraging. In assessing the influence of this reception on Hughes's radical turn, one can assume that his experiences in Cuba taught him that his growing literary fame furnished a great amount of political capital to advance the causes of the darker peoples of the world, capital that could be used both in his poetic production and in his work as a translator.

Hughes's warm reception on the ground in Cuba in 1930 was quickly followed by the publication of Fernández de Castro's short essay "Presentación de Langston Hughes" in the March edition of *Revista de la Habana*, a small literary and cultural journal edited by Gustavo Gutiérrez y Sánchez. Here I explore "Presentación de Langston Hughes" as a transgressive translation of Carl Van Vechten's preface to Hughes's *The Weary Blues* (1925), one that transforms Van Vechten's primitive vagabond into a complex mixture of the primitive and the proletarian, and into a figure who worked with and challenged Cuban notions of blackness. I will later read the way Guillén's interview "Conversación con Langston Hughes" juggles the semiotics of the primitive and the anti-imperialist as a similar attempt to influence the Cuban racial landscape, and I read it as a mechanism by which each author endowed the other with Black internationalist bona fides. The Hughes unearthed from these readings proves complicit, if not actively involved, in shaping his Latin American persona—a poet crafting, and reacting to, his status as a Black militant in translation.

"Presentación de Langston Hughes," which Edward Mullen has called a "paraphrase" of Van Vechten's preface, provided the paratext (and a reading hermeneutic) for four translations of Hughes's poems—"Yo, también . . ." (a retranslation of "I, Too"), "Luna de marzo" ("March Moon"), "Los blancos" ("The White Ones"), and "Soledad: Extracto de una cubana" ("Soledad: A Cuban Portrait")—that Fernández de Castro would shortly publish in *Revista de la Habana*. However, while Mullen correctly identifies the first part of Fernández de Castro's essay as a translational paraphrase, it would be a grave error to think that Hughes was introduced to Cubans the same way he was to his U.S. readership, for two interrelated reasons. First, Van Vechten's largely primitivist portrayal of Hughes decoded very differently for a white Cuban readership who had grown accustomed to seeing the Black primitive as an existen-

tial threat to Cuba's status as a civilized nation. Second, Fernández de Castro made a number of strategic omissions and telling additions to Van Vechten's biography of Hughes that enriched Van Vechten's primitivism by tying Hughes to the working class and to a leftist politics. The resulting Hughes was both primitive and proletarian, a persona who both conformed to and challenged Cuban notions of blackness. From Hughes's perspective, the differences between his Cuban-fashioned persona and the one built by Van Vechten offered him a glimpse of what attributes of his poetry and poetics were valued, or succeeded, in Cuban translation.

Fernández de Castro begins his brief essay by quoting Carl Van Vechten's claim that Hughes's life would make for a great "picaresque" romance, and, like Van Vechten, he supports this opinion by listing the cities where Hughes lived before he attended high school: "Ciudad de México, Kansas, Buffalo, Colorado, Topeka, Cleveland, Chicago, etc." However, whereas Van Vechten lets the list of cities speak for itself, Fernández de Castro points out that Hughes has lived both "in his country and abroad," endowing Hughes with a kind of cosmopolitanism that is only hinted at in Van Vechten's prose.

Fernández de Castro then strategically paraphrases Van Vechten's account of Hughes's life after graduation, omitting Hughes's choice not to rely on his father's wealth and, in the process, turning Hughes into more of a self-made man. Whereas Van Vechten writes:

After four years in Cleveland, he once more joined his father in Mexico, only to migrate to New York where he entered Columbia University. There, finding the environment distasteful, or worse, he remained till spring, when he quit, broke with his father and, with thirteen dollars in cash, went on his own. First, he worked for a truck-farmer on Staten Island; next, he delivered flowers for Thorley; at length he partially satisfied an insatiable craving to go to sea by signing up with an old ship anchored in the Hudson for winter. His first real cruise as a sailor carried him to the Canary Islands, the Azores, and the West Coast of Africa . . .⁶

Fernández de Castro paraphrases:

Newly graduated from high school, he performed various jobs: messenger, farmhand. Return to Mexico. Student at Co-

lumbia University. He flees the university. Enlisted as a sailor, lived like the men of the river and sea, on the Hudson, on the Atlantic, Canary Islands, on the West Coast of Africa.⁷

Van Vechten infuses Hughes's work history with a primitive whimsy. The poet meanders from one job to another, migrates between the United States and Mexico, enrolls and withdraws from college, and is propelled to sign aboard ship less by his material needs than by his "insatiable craving" for the sea. By contrast, Fernández de Castro portrays Hughes as propelled by both working-class concerns and by his primitive nature. His terse list of occupations suggests a man driven by financial need who couldn't find meaningful labor until he lived and worked "like the men of the river and sea," but his decision to portray Hughes's withdrawal from Columbia University as an escape amplifies Van Vechten's primitivism. Hughes does not simply find the "environment distasteful," but rather "flees" the confines of Columbia's civilized society.

There are many translation decisions, additions, and omissions in "Presentación de Langston Hughes" that reflect Fernández de Castro's intention to both proletarianize Hughes and to associate him with the primitive. For example, he omits asides that interpret Hughes's succession of menial jobs as resulting from his whimsical nature in favor of short sentences that render Hughes a cosmopolitan figure who had to find work in regions as far-flung as Africa, Mexico, and Italy. Whereas Van Vechten accounts for the time Hughes worked in Paris as a piece of luck—"he was soon provided for: a woman of his own race engaged him as her doorman at her *boîte de nuit*"—Fernández de Castro simply writes that Hughes worked as a "portero en un cabaret de Montmartre" (doorman in a Montmartre cabaret), presenting Hughes as a tough member of the Atlantic's lumpenproletariat, rather than as a meandering poet in need of care. More intriguing are Fernández de Castro's additions. He aggressively associates Hughes with leftist politics and letters by tying Hughes's journey to Italy to that of the Cuban writer and socialist Félix Pita Rodríguez, and by transforming an account of Hughes watching dockworkers "getting their heads whacked by the Fascisti" into a scenario wherein Hughes has "luchas obligadas con 'camisas negras'" (obligatory fights with "Blackshirts"). His masculinist depiction of Hughes takes on additional primitivist and leftist literary resonance when he compares the poet's life at sea and in port—"Mujeres. Peleas. Contrabandistas. Marineros borrachos. Corrida de toros. 'En cada puerta una novia'" (Women. Fights. Smugglers. Drunken

sailors. Bullfights. “In every port, a girlfriend”)—to that of Rafael Alberti, who was part of Spain’s anti-establishment Generation of ’27. Fernández de Castro occasionally outdoes Van Vechten’s primitivism. Before listing the places Hughes visited in Africa, he inserts the phrase “nombres sugestivos cautivaron su oído y quedaron grabados para siempre en su espíritu” (suggestive names captured his ear and remain forever recorded in his spirit). Hence, Fernández de Castro’s Hughes, while decidedly primitive, has leftist and proletarian credentials inside and outside the literary realm that Van Vechten’s does not. In an era when proletarian authorship was, for many, one of the distinguishing attributes of the proletarian text, this is no small point.

The rough-and-tumble biography that Fernández de Castro creates for Hughes in “Presentación” complements his evaluation of Hughes’s verse in the second half of his essay, an assessment that both echoes and differs dramatically from Van Vechten’s. Despite the fact that *The Weary Blues* presents its readers with voices that range from port-town prostitute to nightclub patron, Van Vechten implies that Hughes’s poetry should be read as autobiography (or the “primitive outline” of one), as a body of work whose subject matter is, ultimately, the author himself:

[Hughes’s] verses are by no means limited to an exclusive mood; he writes caressingly of little black prostitutes in Harlem; his cabaret songs throb with the true jazz rhythm; his sea-pieces ache with a calm, melancholy lyricism; he cries bitterly from the heart of his race in “Cross” and “The Jester”; he sighs, in one of the most successful of his fragile poems, over the loss of a loved friend. Always, however, his stanzas are subjective, personal. They are the (I had almost said informal, for they have a highly deceptive air of spontaneous improvisation) expression of an essentially sensitive and subtly illusive nature, seeking always to break through the veil that obscures for him, at least in some degree, the ultimate needs of that nature.⁸

Here Van Vechten begins by alluding to the world of voices inhabiting *The Weary Blues*, noting that Hughes’s verse is by “no means limited to an exclusive mood” and takes forms varying from “cabaret songs” to “bitter cries.” By the end of this paragraph, however, Van Vechten blurs this distinction, asserting that despite the volume’s multiplicity of form and mood, Hughes’s stanzas are always “subjective” and “personal.”

The moods alluded to are the author's, and his verse—above all else—reveals an “illusive nature” seeking to “break through the veil that obscures him,” and an autobiographical impulse lurking beneath the surface but yearning to be uncovered. Van Vechten's erotically charged depiction of Hughes's verse firmly embeds the poet within the traditional tropes of primitivism. Hughes's writing is framed in terms of a primal sex act: he writes “caressingly,” his songs “throb,” his pieces “ache,” he “cries” from the “heart of his race,” and then, post-orgasmic, “he sighs.” And the entire process reflects—in Van Vechten's now fully deployed vocabulary of primitivism—the “ultimate needs” of Hughes's “nature.”

Both seconding and departing from Van Vechten, Fernández de Castro's “Presentación” similarly celebrates Hughes's verse for its “personal” quality, but provides a backdrop for its contextualization that extends far beyond the poet himself:

In the lyrical work of L.H.—as in that of Countee Cullen, Walter F. White, Jessie Fauset, Claude McKay, to name only the most representative writers of the Negro race in the United States—there's a vigorous racial pride evident, a combativeness unknown in the intellectual production of that race until the present moment. His technique is modern and his sensibility achieves very personal touches that make it stand out, on its own terms, in the complicated panorama that is contemporary poetic production in the United States.⁹

Fernández de Castro figures Hughes as a “modern” writer whose work manifests a “vigorous racial pride” and “combativeness” paradigmatic of his U.S. peers, but heretofore “unknown” in the “intellectual production” of the race more generally. In light of his bemoaning the dearth of Black writing in Cuban literature in his *Tema negro en las letras de Cuba*, Fernández de Castro provides a partial rationale for his translation of Hughes's verse; namely, to remedy the relative absence of “the black thematic” in the Cuban literary milieu. It would seem that a Hughes so imported was designed to help tear the Cuban racial muzzle asunder and to answer Guillén's calls to write and speak openly and forcefully about race in Cuba. However, Fernández de Castro did not naively import Hughes to serve as a mouthpiece for Afro-Cubans. He seems to have believed that Cuban perceptions about *la raza negra* could be altered by a foreign representative of the race.

By balancing the proletarian and the primitive under the umbrellas of the combative and the modern, “Presentación de Langston Hughes” speaks to a Cuban agenda meant to challenge perceptions and depictions of Afro-Cubans and their cultural production as dangerously backward and primitive. These perceptions stemmed, in part, from the anthropological investigations of Afro-Cuban religious societies conducted by Fernando Ortiz, who spoke with an authoritative voice on blackness in Cuba during the early republican era. His findings added scientific weight to the dichotomy that Cuban elites and state authorities consistently evoked to distinguish themselves, the presumed inheritors of European civilization, from Blacks and mulattos, the presumed incarnation of the African primitive, in their attempts to bolster the nation’s whitening politics. Ortiz claimed that newly arrived European immigrants (*guajiros*) and white Cuban peasants (*criollos*) were susceptible to “black superstition” which produced “in them a type of vertigo” that led away from the “heights of civilization and return[ed] [them] to the primitive.”¹⁰ Fernández de Castro’s decision to aggressively tie Hughes’s “spirit” to Africa while painting his verse technique as “modern” is thus revealed to be a strategic recovery of blackness, one that panders to a conception of the Black primitive only to question or complicate it by foregrounding a “modern” that is not strictly the provenance of peoples of European descent.

The idea that Fernández de Castro translated Hughes to put race center stage in Cuba gains further traction in his conclusion to the “Presentación” article, wherein he alerts readers of Hughes’s intention to translate, or to celebrate in prose, poets and composers in Cuba who are readily associated with *la raza negra*:

During his recent visit to Cuba, L.H. was received and celebrated by representatives of our young intelligentsia and by distinguished Cuban personalities and entities of the black race. Upon his return to New York, where he usually resides, he intends to make known, in English, some poems written by young Cuban writers: Tallet, Guillén, Pedroso. He will also write about our contemporary composers: Roldán, García Cartula.¹¹

By offering an endorsement of their respective poetic projects by way of reporting Hughes’s interest in them, Fernández de Castro confers the racial, poetic, and political bona fides that he bestowed on Hughes

onto Tallet, Guillén, and Pedroso. Tallet's poetic efforts to capture Afro-Cuban musical rhythms, Guillén's anti-establishment neo-modernist work (not yet concerned with matters racial), and Pedroso's proletarian lyrics all find an informed affirmation in Fernández de Castro's *presentación* of Hughes. Thus, "Presentación de Langston Hughes" did much more than introduce a Black, modern, and proletarian poet to Cuban audiences; it altered the intertextual fabric of the target zone, allowing indirect commentary on Cuba's poets of color and its poets whose work treated "the black thematic." Given that Fernández de Castro conceived of translation as "consecration," the announcement of Hughes's intention to translate is also fruitfully seen as a proclamation that it was Cuba's Black poets who mattered the most in the eyes of Hughes, who is positioned as a representative not only of *la raza negra* in the United States but also of an international poetic left.¹²

"Presentación" was also intended to shape the reception of the four poems by Hughes that Fernández de Castro translated for *Revista de la Habana*—which he claimed included a reproduction of Hughes's "I, Too," as translated for *Social* in 1928, but which really contained its re-translation. It is not my intention to analyze every translation published in *Revista de la Habana* because not all of them had an influence on Hughes's subsequent poetic production. Nevertheless, each poem seems to have been chosen to resonate with an aspect of Hughes's poetics or personality that was highlighted in the "Presentación" essay. For example, the voyeuristic speaker in the erotically charged "Luna de Marzo" ("March Moon") resonates with the masculinist Hughes portrayed in the essay—the poet with a girlfriend in every port. And "Soledad: Un extracto de una cubana" ("Soledad: A Cuban Portrait") suggests a Hughes not only taken by the work of Cuba's young poets, but moved by the plight of Cuba's poor.

With regard to the race-proud, combative Hughes advertised by "Presentación," Fernández de Castro makes several strategic translation decisions that make the speaker in "Los blancos" slightly more pugnacious, class-conscious, and calculating than the speaker of "The White Ones." These decisions occur in the final three lines of the poem—lines that Fernández de Castro, unlike Hughes, presents in a stanza of their own. Whereas Hughes's poem offers:

I do not hate you,
For your faces are beautiful, too.
I do not hate you,

Your faces are whirling lights of loveliness and splendor, too.
 Yet why do you torture me,
 O, white strong ones,
 Why do you torture me?¹³

Fernandez de Castro, after offering a straightforward translation of Hughes's first five lines, closes "Los blancos" with a stanza that reads:

A pesar de que ustedes me torturan.
 Oh! Blancos poderosos!
 ¿Por qué me torturais, oh blancos poderosos?¹⁴

This translation takes advantage of the Spanish language's formal and informal second-person plural. The speaker addresses "Los blancos" using conjugations and possessive pronouns that alternate between the deferential (e.g., "me torturan") and the familiar (e.g., "me torturais"), causing his word choice to challenge the power relationship that the poem stages between speaker and addressee. Moreover, Fernández de Castro's decisions to translate "strong" as "poderoso" (powerful), and to repeat the phrase "blancos poderosos" in his final line, stress a difference between the titular whites, *los blancos*, and those responsible for the speaker's persecution that is only hinted at in Hughes's composition. Lastly, Fernández de Castro's decision to insert a line break before "A pesar de que ustedes me torturan" (Yet/Although you torture me) and to omit Hughes's "why" from that line causes the second stanza to read as the outgrowth of the thoughts that precede it, whereas in Hughes's poem, the single stanza points more to a puzzling contradiction that is perceived by the speaker from the outset. In other words, the speaker reasons as the translation progresses. This is no small point because, in the realm of proletarian poetics, it is the poetic speaker's growth into increased class-consciousnesses that often constitutes the core action of the poem. Despite these shifts, the translation, a plaint of sorts, would hardly seem combative until we remember that, for a Cuban reading audience, the mere mention of a race problem would have qualified it as such. For Hughes, though, the translation choices made in "Los blancos" had to suggest that he was not quite as combative as Fernández de Castro wanted him to be—that his Latin American readership was hungry for a (more) militant, class-conscious Hughes.

Arnold Rampersad, Vera Kutzinski, and I have all commented on the resonance that Hughes's line "I, too, am America" acquired for a

Latin American readership suffering under the boot of U.S. imperialism. Moreover, both I (in my examination of the 1928 translation) and Kutzinski (in her analyses of both versions) have argued that Fernández de Castro's "Yo también . . ." takes steps to "Cubanize" Hughes's "I, Too" and to make him appear more militant for a Latin American audience. The anti-imperialist resonance of "Yo también . . .," in its 1930 incarnation, would not have escaped Hughes, nor would the capacity for his voice to serve, in translation, as that of a multitude united by their shared exploitation at the hands of U.S. and European imperialism.

Hughes's print reception in Cuba was largely orchestrated by José Antonio Fernández de Castro. Its purpose was to end a different kind of writer's block than the one suffered by Hughes—one constituted by the near "ausencia" (absence) of Black authors and Black racial themes in Cuban belles lettres. Recollecting the Cuban literary scene of 1930 in his *Tema negro en las letras de Cuba* (1943; *The Black Thematic in Cuban Letters*), Fernández de Castro claimed that, apart from two "mestizo" poets, Guillén and Pedroso, Cuba had produced no writers of color who were "worthy of mention" in the early republican era. He correlated this lack of "the black thematic" with the U.S. imperial presence on the island and saw that thematic's revitalization as a key ingredient for the resurgence of Cuba's revolutionary zeal. Noting that "racial" and "artistic" movements shared a "common denominator," namely "nonconformity with the situation," Fernández de Castro argued that the rejection of white supremacy in the arts demonstrated the need for a more "complete set of liberties" that would dwarf "that of the famous French postulate" which was "no longer sufficient." In short, Cuba couldn't ignore its most exploited "masa" (masses) and still hope to be free.¹⁵

As Fernández de Castro conceives matters in his *Tema negro*, the relative success of every Cuban war of liberation—the 1868–78 Ten Years' War, the 1879–80 Small War ended by the Peace of Zanjón, and the 1895–98 War of Independence—depended, in no small part, on the mobilization and cooperation of Cuba's *clase negra*. The degree of this mobilization, in turn, depended on the presence of the *tema negro* in Cuban art. Both Domingo del Monte's publication of Manzano's autobiography (Cuba's first, and arguably only, slave narrative) and the supposed role of Plácido and his poetry in the *Conspiración de la escalera* (1840–44) had helped to foment the Ten Years' War. Moreover, the comparative failure of the Small War was linked to a decline of the *tema negro* in Cuban art. Lastly, the success of the War of Independence

was linked to Martín Morúa Delgado's antislavery novel *Sofía* (1891) and José Martí's condemnation of slavery in poems like "XXX" from *Versos sencillos* (1891).

Hence, when Langston Hughes walked into his office at *Diario de la Marina* in February 1930, Fernández de Castro saw an extraordinary opportunity: a chance to stimulate "the black thematic" by translating Hughes and by turning him into a translator of Black Cuban poets. He seems to have realized that the introduction of Hughes into Cuba's literary milieu would alter its intertextual fabric, particularly how the efforts of Cuba's authors of color were received and contextualized by the Cuban public. Tying these authors together with Hughes as a cadre would allow their works and personas to complement one another, despite their differences; it would create a Black poetic front intended to alter the valences of blackness in Cuba and associate the Black Cuban masses with an awakening proletarianism rather than with criminality, witchcraft, and a malignant African primitive.

Fernández de Castro's efforts to stimulate Cuban racial discourse took place at a time when expressing interest in racial matters and material was considered to be unpatriotic and divisive by many Cubans, both Black and white. The performance of *comparsas* (celebratory Afro-Cuban music and dance processions) was still illegal in Havana in 1930, where five years earlier President Machado had extended the city's ban on "drums and analogous instruments of African nature" and "bodily contortion that offended morality" to all of Cuba.¹⁶ This maneuver was part of an ongoing grab for national identity that sought to elevate a mixture of white *criollo* and *guajiro* culture to the status of *the* national culture during an all-out campaign against Cuban Blacks that began with the U.S. occupation of the island at the turn of the century.¹⁷ In demonizing Afro-Cubans as dangerously primitive, Machado and the Cuban elites, like their predecessors, sought to obfuscate the historical as well as contemporary role of Blacks in Cuban national culture and to exclude Afro-Cuban religious societies from the public realm.¹⁸

Bans on the so-called barbaric inheritance of Afro-Cubans extended to the realm of public and political speech, where Cuban nationalism exterminated racial politics at gunpoint during the Little Race War of 1912 and traditionally frowned upon the mention of a race problem. Nicolás Guillén, in his "El camino de Harlem" (1929), strained to get many of his Cuban readers to realize, or to admit, that "Yes, sirs, the colored race has a problem in Cuba and still needs to struggle much to resolve it."¹⁹ Addressing the kind of muzzle placed on the discussion of

a race problem in Cuba in his “La conquista del blanco” (1929), Guillén argued that the Cuban Black was much to blame for his current state of affairs because his “social ill” was “his timidity.” In the face of growing (and illegal) public segregation in Havana, he asserted that Black Cubans urgently needed to remind their countrymen that “we live in the Republic of Cuba and not on a cotton plantation in the United States.”²⁰

With these conceptions and struggles about blackness as background, it is worth examining the cartoon titled “El Racismo” (see the figure), specifically the ways it frames and reworks blackness for us here and now and how it attempted to rework blackness in Cuba in 1910. Although the cartoon predates the translation of Hughes’s work into Spanish by some twenty years, it nevertheless offers us a window onto the field of contestation that served as the impetus for the Cuban translation of Langston Hughes’s poetry, since the anxieties it displays were still in deadly play in Cuban politics in 1930.

In recent years, scholarly works like Helg’s *Our Rightful Share*, Andrews’s *Afro-Latin America*, Carlos Moore’s *Castro, The Blacks, and Africa* and *Pichón*, and Alejandro de la Fuente’s “Myths of Racial Democracy” have convincingly demonstrated that institutionalized racism



“El Racismo” from *El Triunfo*, February 18, 1910.

pervaded pre-independent, republican, and post-1959 Cuba alike. And studies like Esteban Morales Domínguez's *Desafíos de la problemática racial en Cuba* (*The Challenges of the Racial Problem in Cuba*) offer a rich history driven by an argument with which mine is in full accord; namely, that it is and was the very absence of racial discourse from Cuban political life that makes racism such a difficult problem to address there. Domínguez's study works in combination with the Cuban Communist Party's official 2012 finding that "confronting discriminatory prejudice and conduct based on skin color" remained one of the country's most pressing problems. I offer these few facts straight from the horse's mouth because the idea of a racist Cuba runs contrary to Cuba's foundational rhetoric, as exemplified in its constitution and, famously, in texts like José Martí's "Mi raza." Racism in Cuba remains an uncomfortable topic on Cuban soil and likewise in U.S. leftist circles to this very day. The removal of Roberto Zurbarano from his post as editor of *Casa de las Américas* after publishing an essay on racism in Cuba in 2013 confirms what Carlos Moore told the *Miami Herald* in 2007; namely, that "there is an unstated threat, blacks in Cuba know that whenever you raise race in Cuba, you go to jail. Therefore the struggle in Cuba is different. There cannot be a civil rights movement. You will have instantly 10,000 black people dead."²¹

Moore's specter of 10,000 Black Cubans dead owing to raised voices should not be mistaken for hyperbole. By way of introducing this political cartoon, it was the growing political voice of the Independent Party of Color that led to its ban, subsequent Black-led rebellions, and the Cuban government's indiscriminate massacre, with the help of U.S. Marines, of somewhere between two thousand (the Cuban government's estimate at the time) and twelve thousand (as estimated by Tomas Fernández Robaina in 2006) Black men, women, and children in the so-called Little Race War of 1912. Though rumors of white women captives, sacrificed white babies, and witchcraft abounded in the yellow journalism of the day, the massacre was enabled legally by the so-called Morúa Law (1909), which banned "racist" political parties as illegal in light of title 5, section 1, article 11 of the Cuban republic's Constitution. This clause affirmed, as does the tablet held by the white woman who embodies the Cuban nation in the cartoon, that "todos los cubanos son iguales antes la ley" or that "all Cubans are equal before the law." Thus, the caption for this cartoon provided by Aline Helg (the scholar who rediscovered it), which describes an "Afro-Cuban man, tempted to kill Cuba, represented as a white woman, with the dagger of racism," does

seem a fair take, making this 1910 cartoon an ominous portent of the massacre that was shortly to come.

The cartoon also seems a clear reworking of *Macbeth*: the Black man (a proletarian worker, not an agricultural worker; note the IWW dress) stands in for Macbeth, the dagger is tellingly referred to as “the poisonous dagger of hate and ambition” in the caption, the cowled “tétrico huésped” (gloomy guest) of racism takes the place of the witches who tempt Macbeth to commit a threefold crime (against kin, king, and guest), and the white woman replaces Duncan or the nation. When considered in this light, points of significance come to the fore. First, the cartoon strives to make a point about the national reality in Cuba, but it does so by making recourse to a text or discourse about national fidelity and personal ambition that is already international in nature. This cartoon doesn't work in this way because *Macbeth* is an English play written by an English playwright; it works because, by 1910, *Macbeth* was a piece of world literature, translated into scores of languages, and capable of being restaged, as it is here, for strategic domestic purposes.

The 1930s Cuban literati were doing the same thing with Hughes, only the dagger of racism that attended his growing international fame was intended to kill U.S. imperialism, not Cuba. This is crucial and should not be overlooked. We have here a cartoonist turning to an adaptation of an English play in order to make a statement about contemporary Cuban politics. This restaging begs a comparison from the reader; namely, it asks the reader to compare Cuba's “race problem” (or lack thereof) in 1910, when the dagger of racism was gaining steam, to the plot of *Macbeth*. In short, the cartoon works because literature is both a national and an international system. The other international system(s) at play are nothing less than racism and labor. The former is presented as a sin of personal ambition, the gloomy guest, whose figure calls to mind the witches from Shakespeare's play. The witch is figured as foreign to Cuba, as a new feature of Cuban political geography, and could be interpreted as a metaphor for the U.S. imperial presence, one blamed for exacerbating racial tensions at the time. More intriguingly, given the Cuban context and the demonization of Afro-Cuban religion, the witch can also be associated with the largely banned Afro-Cuban religious societies, including Palo Monte, Calabarí, Santería, and the Abakuá brotherhood. From early 1836 onwards, the Abakuá brotherhood played a crucial role in all of Cuba's wars despite its illegality and banned language, but it was widely demonized as a backwards religious cult. Although African religious societies were traditional bases of Black

collectivity in Cuba, they were routinely demonized as foreign, “Haitianizing,” and “Africanizing” entities due to their association, real and imagined, with the large influx of Black immigrants into Cuba required by the U.S. imposition of a sugarcane monoculture. So interpreted, the cartoon presents its Black readers with a choice: to embrace proletarianism or the primitive, to choose between national fidelity or racial fidelity, figuring the latter as destructive to a body politic that is tellingly figured as white. Above all, given its intended audience, this cartoon seeks to frighten the reader into quietly turning a blind eye to the race issues at hand and to muzzle discourse about race and racism (or racialism). In short, the *machadistas*’ whitening politics sought to accomplish its goals by muzzling racial discourse in Cuba altogether: to be “racial” was to be “racist.” And it was with all this in mind that José Antonio Fernández de Castro and the *minorista* literary network undertook the translation and dissemination of Hughes in Cuba—a writer whom he framed as “vigorously proud” of his heritage and combative in defense of his people—in order to provoke an explosive comparative conversation that would tear the *machadista* muzzle asunder.

Nonetheless, the refashioning of racial discourse in Cuba could not be accomplished by the translation of a foreign author alone. Rather, what Fernández de Castro seems also to have realized is that he could place Cuba’s poets of color center stage by placing them in choral conversation with Hughes, who was quickly becoming the most famous Black author in the world. The work of framing Hughes in Cuban print culture as a combative, anti-imperialist poet with both primitive and proletarian faces was also performed by Nicolás Guillén’s “Conversación con Langston Hughes,” which was published in “Ideales de una raza” (the weekly Black interest column in *Diario de la Marina* edited by Gustavo Urrutia) on March 9, 1930.²² The piece resulted from an interview arranged by Fernández de Castro on March 2, and positioned Hughes’s work as the outgrowth of his sincere interest in “things related to the black race.” These “things” ranged from Black-influenced popular music in the United States to the predicaments of colonized Africans, and found expression in poems that Hughes and Guillén both claimed could “translate” Hughes’s “people.” The “Conversación” interview was thus crafted to establish Hughes’s credentials as a Black poet for an Afro-Cuban readership, but, like the reading at the Club Atenas, it was also designed to enhance Guillén’s own reputation. The interview is riddled with so many fabrications that it carries the imprint of a collective endeavor undertaken at least by Guillén

and Fernández de Castro. It goes to great lengths to frame Hughes and Guillén as kindred souls in their poetic ambitions. This is striking because Guillén had yet to publish poems associated with race. However, Hughes's papers reveal that Guillén gave him unpublished copies of "Caña" and "Mujer nueva," poems with Afro-Cuban themes, before he left the island. Moreover, Hughes's drafts and subsequent publications reveal that these copies were intended for translation. In light of this evidence, "Conversación con Langston Hughes" is most fruitfully read as an artifact that paves the way for Guillén's own nascent poetic project, one that would establish his Black bona fides by establishing them in the man whom he could call his English-language translator.

The idea that "Conversación con Langston Hughes" reciprocally positions Hughes and Guillén as voices for "the black race" finds support in the interview's opening paragraphs, wherein Guillén concocts a scenario that allows him to focus on Hughes's physical appearance. Guillén begins by placing himself among a "we" that, prior to the interview, knew Hughes only by way of *The Weary Blues* and *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, and asserts that to know Hughes in a "purely intellectual way" is to speculate that he is a man of "physical maturity."²³ However, the archive strongly suggests that Guillén couldn't have known Hughes in this way, given his poor command of English. Guillén's speculation is thus a kind of ruse, one central to the series of reversals that follow. These reversals begin when Guillén relates that, after Fernández de Castro "sounded the voice of alarm" alerting him to the "the great black singer" visiting Cuba, he was duped by "someone" into believing that Hughes was "forty or forty-five years old, tall, quite fat, almost white in skin color, and with an English mustache decorating his thin, bitter lips." Guillén is surprised to meet a thin, small, "corn-colored" twenty-seven-year-old who wore no mustache, "neither English nor that of any other nation":

He seems to be precisely a Cuban *mulatico*. One of those trifling mulatto dandies who pursues his degree at the National University and who spends his life organizing small family outings at two pesos a ticket. Nonetheless, at his core burns one of those spirits most sincerely interested in things related to the black race, and a very personal poet, with no greater preoccupation than to observe his people in order to translate them, to make them known and to make them love. He, before any poet in his language, has managed to incorporate

into US literature the purest manifestations of popular music in the US, so influenced by Blacks. His “jazz poems,” his “blues poems” and his “spirituals” are characteristic.²⁴

In order to decode Guillén’s remarks, it helps to know that Cuba’s racial system included whites and a *raza de color* (race of color) or *clase de color* (class of color) encompassing Blacks and mulattos.²⁵ In 1930 this system had no parallel in Latin America, and it provided a unique context for the continuing Cuban use—unquestioned until the 1959 communist revolution—of the generic terms *los negros* or *negro* to classify both *mulatos* or *pardos* (mulattos) and *morenos* (Blacks).²⁶ In this sense, there is no contradiction in Hughes, a *mulatico*, observing a “black race” that also constitutes his “people.” However, it helps to recall the freckle-faced Roldán’s denial that he was “a Negro,” and the fact that “los negros” in Cuba had their own racial hierarchies and divisions that were more permeable for some than others.

Guillén’s surprise at the interest of Hughes’s “spirit” in “matters related to the black race” is thus a surprise that signifies on a Cuban mulatto caste that, presumably, has an interest in preserving its privileges, and this qualifies Hughes as somewhat unique in a Cuban context in his passion for “his people.” Hughes is an authentic poet not only because he is “very personal” but also somewhat paradoxically because his verse can be said to “translate” the “black race,” a feat manifest in his successful incorporation of popular, Black-influenced music into the U.S. poetic landscape. Guillén reminds his audience that Hughes’s status as a *mulato* does not foreclose the possibility of his serving as a voice for *la raza negra*, and this makes room for Guillén’s own voice to accomplish similar work. Guillén’s decision to call attention to the contradiction posed by Hughes’s appearance and accomplishments proves to be self-serving, given his own status as a Cuban *mulato* with poetic and political ambitions that involved representing Afro-Cubans.²⁷

Guillén’s ostensible surprise at Hughes’s appearance (since the two men had met earlier) serves as the rhetorical starting point for an interview that begins by calling Hughes’s blackness into question and then proceeds to rid the reader of such doubts by framing Hughes’s poetic accomplishments as the outgrowth of long-standing commitments to social justice for his race and to a Black left internationalist politics. Operating according to the same logic that drove its opening, the interview gives the reader more reasons to associate Hughes with blackness and further cause to associate Guillén with Hughes as it progresses.

Following his comments about Hughes's success incorporating popular music into American literature, Guillén remarks that Hughes, "like few others," has a "preoccupation" with "everything related to Blacks." He then offers Hughes's first quoted remarks, wherein the latter acknowledges that although an interest in Blacks is now "a la mode," for him it has been nearly a lifelong pursuit. Hughes then characterizes the poetry that he has written since his youth as "my form of reacting faced with the misery of the humble classes, and faced with the terrible situation in which Blacks in my country live." In quoting Hughes, Guillén provides a motivation for the composition of his verse, contextualizing his interests in "everything related to Blacks" as a mode of resistance. He thus frames Hughes's successful incorporation of Black-influenced popular music into English-language poetry as a sociopolitical commitment and sets the stage for his own (future) work to be interpreted in like fashion.

Guillén's efforts to confer Black credentials on Hughes reaches its zenith at the moment his interview is most clearly trying to tie the two men together. This point occurs shortly after Guillén, via quotation, establishes Hughes as both a bohemian who left Columbia University to launch a world tour during which he lived "at the margins of conventionalism," and as a member of the lumpenproletariat, who labored on a farm and aboard ship. Offering another myth of poetic origins for his work that Guillén, in turn, seizes upon to suggest that the two are kindred souls, Hughes relates:

"He visitado Dakar, Nigeria, Loanda. . . . Por aquellas tierras se me fortaleció en el alma un sentido de amor a los negros, que ya no habrá de abandonarme. En contacto con esa dulce gente, a la que Bélgica le corta los brazos y a la que Francia diezma brutalmente en la tala de bosques, como ha dado a conocer al mundo el periodista Alberto Londres, yo comprendí que era necesario ser su amigo, su voz, su báculo: ser su poeta. Yo no tengo más ambición que la de ser el poeta de los negros. El poeta negro, ¿comprende usted?"

Yo, sí comprendo. Y siento que me sube del fondo del alma aquel poema con que este hombre abre su primer tomo de versos: "Yo, soy negro: negro, como la noche: negro, como las profundidades de mi África."²⁸

"I visited Dakar, Nigeria, Loanda . . . Those lands caused my soul to fortify itself in regard to its love for black people, and

that love has yet to leave me. In contact with those sweet people, whose arms are cut off by the Belgians and who are brutally decimated by the French tree-felling of forests (which the journalist Albert Londres has made known to the world), I understood that I had to be their friend, their voice, their support: to be their poet. I have no greater ambition than to be the black people's poet. The black poet, understand?"

I do understand. And I feel the poem with which this man opens his first volume of verse rises from the depths of my own soul: "I, I am black: black, like the night: black, like the depths of my Africa."²⁹

Upsetting the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism that infected the dreaded fear of "Africanization" in Cuba, Hughes frames the act of bearing witness to the depredations visited upon Africans by the Belgians and the French as the primary motivation behind his ambition to be "the black poet." Guillén's editorial response is one that binds him to Hughes via a common Black left internationalist commitment that is manifest in Guillén's understanding of Hughes's poetic ambitions and in their shared identification as *negro* and African—in Hughes's "Proem" and in Guillén's feeling that the poem could have sprung from the depths of his own "soul." For the reader familiar with "Proem," Guillén's invocation of it seems remarkably apt, especially given its explicit mention of Belgian colonial violence in the Congo.³⁰ However, "Proem" was not yet available in Spanish-language translation. The fact that Guillén can relate to Hughes's anti-imperialist ambitions via the translation of the poem's opening lines and in the absence of the lines that reference the Congo thus frames Hughes's identification with blackness and Africa as an anti-imperialist sentiment in its own right. Recalling Guillén's poor English, it also reveals the existence of a third hand at work in the interview, most likely that of Fernández de Castro. This fact only serves to strengthen the contention that "Conversación con Langston Hughes" was part of a far-sighted undertaking, one heavily invested in establishing Guillén as Hughes's Cuban counterpart and in controlling the political valences of Black poetry in Cuba. The poetry of blackness, in their hands, becomes anti-imperialist.

The idea that Fernández de Castro had a hand in composing the "Conversación" article gains traction in light of the fact that the Hughes who emerges from the interview helped to reinforce the persona constructed by "Presentación de Langston Hughes." This is especially true

insofar as both works present the public with a poet who was, himself, a careful commingling of the proletarian and the primitive. This commingling was the outgrowth of Hughes's self-presentation both as a laborer who had worked in the "most humble of positions" and come to know "the pain of the people up-close," and as a poet with a commitment to giving voice to the Black oppressed:

"I live among my own. I love them. The blows they receive hurt me to the core, and I sing their pain, *translate* [my emphasis] their sadness, and put their worries to rest. And I do this in the way that the people do, with the same sincerity with which the people do it. Did you know that I have never worried myself studying the Classical rules of verse? I've had the good luck to have never written a sonnet. Did you know that? What I write comes from inside of me. Like I could sing, as the ancestors did. I don't 'study' the Negro. I 'feel' him."

Then, completing his thought, he told us:

"My sole aspiration is to preserve the Negro's freshness so that he never forgets what's his. It seems to me that white civilization can extinguish the primitive that exists in the Negro, dressing him in clothing that will never be his own. Naturally, there are many Negroes fighting me because they deem some of my poems to be only dedicated to the people below, to the substratum, and because they are playing to the aristocracy, to the 'high life,' imitating their former masters! . . . But, what can one do!"³¹

Juggling the semiotics of the primitive and the proletarian, Hughes outlines the prerequisites and responsibilities entailed in being "the black people's poet." He must be of and among his people so that he can draw on his experience and psychocultural knowledge to compose verse that springs from "inside" and yet puts communal "worries to rest." Insofar as his poems are dedicated to the "people below," or the "substratum," and find a natural enemy in the Black petite bourgeoisie, Hughes figures his poems as Black working-class poetry. Hughes's dedication to the Black masses is also manifest in his aspiration to safeguard their "primitive" patrimony, one that resides in an enduring continuity between Black life and Black expressive culture. His poetry sings "as the ancestors did" and "in the way the people do," and the catharsis it pro-

vides necessitates a poetics that has little to do with “Classical” rules of verse or the trappings of “white civilization” whose cultural hegemony threatens to “extinguish” Black forms of cultural expression, and Black “freshness” along with them.

Hughes’s commingling of the primitive and the proletarian to authenticate his own poetry as Black was, of course, nothing new to the man whose essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926) had argued that a nearly inexhaustible supply of poetic material could be culled from the Black “low down folks,” and who labeled jazz the “eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro, the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world.”³² Nevertheless, given his explicit self-identification in *The Big Sea* as “NOT PRIMITIVE,” it is striking to see Hughes characterize his work explicitly in this fashion and to paint himself as a voice for the African colonized, suggesting a Hughes who was in transition and not quite the committed proletarian poet on display in “Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria.”

Perhaps most striking is Hughes’s claim that he responds to the race problem in the United States by *translating* the feelings of the people into a new form that is at once both an affirmation of their condition and a means of release from it. Hughes thus draws into relief the sophisticated theoretical, political, and existential stakes involved in the transformative activity (or task) that, for him, constitutes the core of his creative process—namely, translation.

Hughes’s and Guillén’s characterization of the former’s poetic practice as a process of translation is infused with both profound and perplexing resonances. If the art that Hughes produces for and from the Black masses (e.g., his “blues” or “spiritual” poetry) is best conceived as a work of translation, then the traditional conception of translation—one involving a process whereby a writer remodels one sequence of words (embodied in the foreign-language original or source text) into another (embodied in the target language of the translation itself)—requires some rethinking. Moreover, if translation is best conceived as an activity that preserves continuity via affirmation and transformation, Hughes’s blues verse does seem to fit the bill. His “blues” poetry does not present its reader with crafty transcription, but rather employs the blues lyric’s traditional structure and thematic juxtaposition of pathos and laughter to produce original poems, and arguably a new contribution to English-language verse forms. Setting aside the crucial issue of a difference in language for the moment, if *Fine Clothes to the Jew* presents its reader with a series of translations, then these translations,

quite paradoxically, cannot be said to correspond to any series of originals. Hence, Hughes's remark embodies a radical view of translation which sees it not as a secondary activity but as a primary one, consistent with the views of other Latin American writers such as Oswald de Andrade, Jorge Luis Borges, and Carlos Fuentes. Like Andrade, he is a "cannibalist" who devours Black culture and European letters to produce a hybrid that safeguards the cultural production of the Black masses. However, when one recognizes that the inspiration provided to Hughes by the Black American masses differs significantly from the quasi-infinite iterations and reiterations that constitute the history of belles lettres for Fuentes, and which prompt him to assert that "originality is a sickness" of a modernity "that is always aspiring to see itself as something new," one quickly recognizes that the original fount fueling Hughes's so-called translations bears little in common with a popular (or even forgotten) source text.³³ Rather, the distinct quality of Hughes's fount is the direct result of its historical marginalization, the result of slavery and its aftermath. As Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1995) forcefully asserts, the fact that the various advances of the Enlightenment—and, more broadly speaking, of modernity in general—drew their force from the subjugation of the slave necessitates a critical framework that recognizes the radical separation between the culture of modernity and slave culture:

Having recognised the cultural force of the term "modernity," we must also be prepared to delve into the special traditions of artistic expression that emerge from slave culture. . . . Art, particularly in the form of music and dance, was offered to the slaves as a substitute for the formal political freedoms they were denied under the plantation regime. The expressive cultures developed in slavery continue to preserve in artistic forms needs and desires which go far beyond the mere satisfaction of material wants. In contradistinction to the Enlightenment assumption of a fundamental separation between art and life, these expressive forms reiterate the continuity of art and life. They celebrate the grounding of the aesthetic with other dimensions of social life. The particular aesthetic which the continuity of expressive culture preserves derives not from dispassionate and rational evaluation of the artistic object, but from an inescapably subjective contemplation of the mimetic functions of artistic performance in

the process of struggles towards emancipation, but this form of interaction is not an equivalent and idealised exchange between equal citizens who reciprocate their regard for each other in grammatically unified speech.³⁴

When seen in this light, Hughes's seemingly paradoxical conception of his original verse as translation—a conception that locates the position of the original within a shared cultural form and forum that praises originality but recognizes no original—not only reiterates “the continuity of art and life” but also firmly embeds his poetics in a “particular aesthetic” preserved by the “inescapably subjective contemplation of the mimetic function of artistic performance in the process of struggles towards emancipation.” As “el poeta de los negros,” Hughes grounds his work in “other dimensions of social life,” and his “mimetic” interventions allow him to aid the “struggles towards emancipation” by means of “subjective contemplation,” by writing “what comes from inside of me.”³⁵ Moreover, his task lies not in perpetuating the “sickness of modernity,” but rather in maintaining the “continuity of expressive culture.” Black writing, or Black translation in this case, is thus a matter of providing a complement to past cultural production that resonates with the common people—the descendants of “the ancestors.”

When continuing to explore the reciprocity that characterizes the “Conversación” article, it is important to keep in mind that translation also performs an authenticating function. To the extent that Guillén could pre-frame his forthcoming work as translation, he could endow it with a kind of ethnographic weight that masked his leftist intentions. Hughes was well aware of this potential for racial signifiers to simultaneously function as slave and worker protests. In fact, for him, plantation songs were a “guise of entertainment” that read one way to outsiders but were in fact “the first Negro protest songs.”³⁶

With this in mind, the received interpretation of Guillén's closing remarks begs new scrutiny. “Conversación con Langston Hughes” concludes by describing how Guillén indulged Hughes's thirst to experience authentic Black Cuban culture by taking him to a dance hall. Upon entry, Hughes exclaimed “My people!” and then stood for a long time next to a band that was wildly playing a Cuban *son*. (*Son* is a distinctive genre of popular music and dance in Cuba that blends Spanish with African-derived elements.) Hughes was eventually overcome by a new spirit within him and exclaimed, “I'd like to be black. Really black. Truly black!” reflecting a kind of crisis of Black authenticity that comes

to the fore when it is examined transnationally.³⁷ However, these remarks are read more productively not as a case of irreducible difference, but as yet another attempt by Guillén to endow Hughes with a uniquely Cuban Black authenticity.

As Ivor L. Miller reads Guillén's "Canción del bongó"—a poem routinely framed as Guillén's attempt to inscribe Cuba's "imagined binary heritage" (*mulatez*)—the work's very opening lines, "Esta es la canción del bongó: / Aquí el que más fino sea, responde, si llamo yo" (This is the song of the bongó: / He who is most refined here, responds, if I call), actually serve to evoke traditional Abakuá ceremonies, the so-called secret society practices that Carlos Moore designates as the "center of black life in Cuba."³⁸ Miller figures Guillén's *bongó* to be a coded stand-in for the *èpke bongó*, or to the *eripo* drum that in *Èpke* and Abakuá practices serves as a kind of epicenter for all Abakuá lodges. The sounding of each lodge's *eripo* drum is said to invoke "la Voz" (the Voice), a code name for the universal Earth Mother who is also referred to as Sikán or the Leopard, and whose invocation protects the safety of Abakuá lodge members. It requires that each lodge member affirm their presence—that "el que más fino sea, responde, si llama yo."³⁹ Hughes's trance-like state before the *bongosero* (bongo drummer) can thus be said to tie him to the Cuban Black authentic, positioning him as a member of the Abakuá called to respond to the *èpke bongó* of the *bongosero*.

The malleability reflected in "Conversación con Langston Hughes" allows the Hughes who emerges from the interview to help reinforce the persona constructed by Fernández de Castro insofar as he presented the public with a careful balance of the proletarian and the primitive, thereby implying that Afro-Cubans were an integral part of Cuba's revolutionary base. Looking on, Hughes could have understood Guillén's remarks about his appearance and his entrancement by the *bongosero* as a kind of dig at his Black credentials. If the claim that Hughes made to Hoffman Reynolds Hays in 1942 is true—that during his 1930 trip, he gave Guillén the idea for his *son poemas*—Hughes would have seen the interview as I have framed it, as a way of altering the Cuban intertextual milieu so as to more easily frame Guillén's work as a leftist endeavor. Whether or not Hughes was in the know, he had to have learned quite a lot about what authenticated him as a Black poet for the readers of "Ideales de una raza"—that his blackness could travel with some retrofitting.

Guillén's dwelling on his skin color would have taught Hughes that his racial makeup alone did not qualify him as Black for all interna-

tional audiences—that there was something more to being *negro* in the eyes of his Cuban interlocutors. Rather, given Fernández de Castro’s invisible hand here, Hughes would have learned that Fernández de Castro and Guillén wanted to frame his (or any) commitment to blackness as an anti-imperialist allegiance. He would have also grasped that Guillén could most easily identify with him as *negro* because of their shared political commitments, and Hughes may well have concluded that the perception of his blackness had a great deal to do with the perception of his political commitments. He also would have seen that conferring Black bona fides transnationally was a tricky business, that it necessitated not a single voice, but the creation of a chorus or consensus to come into being. Lastly, Hughes would have seen that his introduction into the Cuban literary milieu was one designed to use him to stimulate racial art and discourse.

I highlight Guillén’s and Fernández de Castro’s shared interest in provoking conversations about race alongside Guillén’s insistence on the difference between U.S. and Cuban racial paradigms in order to forefront this chapter’s contention that the translation and dissemination of Langston Hughes in Cuba was meant to spark a *comparative* conversation about race. This conversation asked readers to rethink their “national” race problems from a transnational perspective, and depended on them making, and not making, ties between Hughes’s work and that of Guillén and Pedrosa. Such a comparison helped to affirm that Cuba was not a Southern plantation, but it also brought into focus the extent to which Cubans and American Blacks were common victims of U.S. imperialism and global race capitalism. Hence, the cultural front that Fernández de Castro constructed did not attempt to create a chorus that spoke in unison, but rather one whose dissonances and resonances provoked conversations that furthered the goal of unshackling Cuba from the United States.

Hughes’s relationships with his translators continued to blossom via copious correspondence and literary exchanges—in the form of published and unpublished poems, periodicals, and books—with Guillén, Urrutia, and Fernández de Castro. It is marked by six noteworthy objectives. First, Fernández de Castro strove to make Hughes aware of the fact that he was not only continuing to labor as Hughes’s translator, but was also enlisting the help of other key *minoristas* in furtherance of his cause. Second, he attempted to awaken Hughes’s sense of reciprocity by urging him to translate Cuban writers as he himself had been translated, and to use his celebrity as a means to propel the work of Pedrosa and

Guillén.⁴⁰ Third, the Cuban critic attempted to forge partnerships both with Hughes and between Hughes's influential circle of artists and activists and his own cadre to create a cultural exchange that extended beyond poetic translation. Fernández de Castro sought to use Hughes as a conduit for communication between lefts both Cuban and North American, political and cultural, Black and white.⁴¹ Fourth, in advancing all these ambitions, he strove to convince Hughes of his important role as an international ambassador by reminding him of the enormous influence that he had already exerted and could continue to exert in the future. Fifth, it provides evidence of an ongoing and concerted attempt by former *minoristas* to link Hughes to Guillén in a Cuban print culture redolent with interpretations of Soviet prescriptions for revolutionary poetry. Finally, it provides us with evidence of a concrete material exchange of print cultures that speaks to a presumed interest and even expertise about Soviet poetics on Hughes's part. The exchange can also serve as a microcosm for an intertextual milieu that had been carefully crafted by *negrista décimas* and *comparsas* since 1928 and which had just been given a "fuel injection" by the incredible success of Guillén's *Motivos de son* (*Motifs of Son*), a poetry collection dedicated to Fernández de Castro.

Fernández de Castro's epistolary effort to tie Hughes to Cuba and Cuba to Hughes can be documented from June 4, 1930, onwards, but references a correspondence that well preceded this date. The June 4 letter begins abruptly and unconventionally, signaling to Hughes that Fernández de Castro's editorial offices at *Diario de la Marina* may not be the proper place to compose, or to send, a completely candid letter:⁴²

I am writing to you from the newspaper. Of course I will not apologize for not writing earlier. You know my kind of life.

....

The little mexicans went away about 50 days. You know how I feel for that. Of course I dont let anyone see it, but Gosh it hurts . . . The other thing that you know I'm interested in run by not so swiftly as I would like them. One of my very closest friends need to go away from Cuba, because after 20 years of enjoying the climate, this became to dangerous for his health.

And so forth. I'm working harder than ever. I believe that you have received "Revista de la Habana" numbers 3, 4, 5 and "Social" Abril and May. I order them to be sent to your address, because in every one of the numbers—except-R. de

la H. 4—there came out something about you. Please let me know about it.

In the July number of R. de la H. I will publish the translation of the chapter “Ey! Boy!” with a marvelous portrait of the author made by Karreño, the very good artist boy, that I believe you met here.

I have received every single thing you promised me. I thank you con todo el corazon. I will make Massaguer publish in the pages of music of “Social” the piece you gave me with your verses.

Have you received the collection of “Havana Magazine” where your “Momento Habanero” came out? Let me know about it.

Write me chap. You know I will always care to know about you. What about Mike and Rose? What about your translations of Cubans poets? What about the translation of “Francisca”? . . . My brothers and friends speak about you in almost every occasion. We never forget you.

I am going to write an essay on “The actual negro literature in E.S” to be published in R. de la H. I will dedicate it to you a Mike Covarrubias. May be some of these days you will receive a little essay I wrote on the death of Mayakowski. I will you to read it, and tell me about it.⁴³

Fernández de Castro’s letter alludes to fears of *machadista* surveillance and the life-threatening dangers associated with it: first, by largely avoiding the use of names of the leftist and Black leftist poets about whom he inquires (“Francisca” for Francisca Nellie Campobello, “Cuban poets” for Pedroso and Guillén); second, as noted, by marking the location of his letter’s composition as either a safe or unsafe place from which to write in his curious opening line; and third, by the obvious play on “climate” with regard to an unnamed and shared friend who has been forced out of Cuba by an increasingly repressive regime. And yet, Fernández de Castro displays no fear of naming foreign leftist-sympathizers of international fame like Miguel Covarrubias and communists like Vladimir Mayakovsky, both of whom, he was fond of noting, focused on the lot of the Cuban Blacks in their portrayals of Cuba. In the letter, resistance to President Machado’s repression of communism is nearly advertised, but Black Cubans are completely erased. What is disguised in this letter, then, is not communism or Mexican

agrarian reform, but rather poetry written by Black communist Cubans. This erasure offers ample testimony to a pervasive fear of the political ramifications of Black immigration, which had been steadily on the rise since 1902, when U.S. imperialism began to complete the work of transforming Cuba into a sugarocracy.

The letter offers an extraordinary amount of information. In little more than three months' time, assuming that Hughes did simply stumble into Fernández de Castro's office on February 26, 1930, the two men had developed a coded system for communicating about the translation of leftist poets like Pedrosa, Guillén, and "Francisca" (Nellie Campobello) that was successful in eluding surveillance. They had secretly broken Hughes's poetic dry spell with the publication of "Momento Habanero."⁴⁴ They had also exchanged an enormous amount of intellectual material in the form of leftist publications, which provided Fernández de Castro (via the mediation of publications like *New Masses*) with the "raw" materials needed to proletarianize Cuba's avant-garde print culture, and provided Hughes with a window into the leftist Cuban (and Latin American) literary milieu and further exposure to poetic developments in the Soviet Union. Finally, they had developed a personal and professional relationship that allowed Fernández de Castro to feel comfortable leveraging his own success in publishing Hughes's translations into a not so subtle request for reciprocity.

Fernández de Castro's confirmation that he had received "every single thing you promised me" is testimony to the fact that, within three months of his 1930 trip to Cuba, Hughes had sent Fernández de Castro, Guillén, and Gustavo Urrutia regular installments of *New Masses*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *Opportunity*, and *Crisis*, and copies of all of Hughes's original poetry volumes.⁴⁵ Hughes also sent editions of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*, Walter White's *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*, V. F. Calverton's *Anthology of American Negro Literature*, Scott Nearing's *Black America*, and Robert Russa Moton's *What the Negro Thinks*.⁴⁶ This collection of Afro-American and leftist journals and seminal volumes of the New Negro Movement spoke to matters ranging from the "race problem" in the United States to the worldwide struggles between newly formed international organizations and the powers of European colonialism. The infusion of these works into the heart of one of Cuba's most influential circles is of incalculable import. It represents a rapprochement and intellectual cross-pollination in the form of a concrete material exchange between communities of color in the Americas that facilitated the flow-

ering of Black left internationalism just as much as did the oft-cited personal relationships between figures such as Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, and Jacques Roumain.

These exchanges offer ample proof that Hughes was well aware that he was not being translated simply because of his aesthetic prowess, but because he was also part of nothing less than a communist conspiracy that used translations not only to link Hughes's poetic production to Guillén's but also to undermine U.S. imperialism by providing a cultural wing for the burgeoning Black left internationalism of the 1930s. Fernández de Castro's June 4 letter also testifies to the enormous amount of power he wielded in a Cuban publishing community that we must assume was complicit with his revolutionary agenda ("I will make Massaguer publish in the music pages of 'Social' the piece you gave me with your verses"); playfully hints at his habitual use of pseudonyms while simultaneously providing proof that Hughes was well aware of them; and seeks to keep Hughes in mind of a fidelity to "friends" and "brothers" who "speak about you [Hughes]" at "every occasion." Most intriguingly, it reveals Fernández de Castro to be a critic-translator who is more than eager to shape and promote New World poets by infusing their poetic palettes with Soviet theories, theorists, and practitioners of revolutionary poetry. "I will you to read it and tell me about it," he tells Hughes with regard to his little essay on the death of Mayakovsky. This last point is important. It suggests that Fernández de Castro played a large part in Hughes's development as a radical poet, and it adds support to my contention that Fernández de Castro, more than anyone else (Tallet, Pichardo de Moya, Guirao, Hughes, and Federico García Lorca), should be credited with inspiring Guillén to write his *Motivos de son*—a collection that Guillén, after all, did dedicate to him. The term "inspired," though, is questionable here, not because of the undeniable amount of power Fernández de Castro held on the Cuban poetic scene (and thus over Guillén) at the time, but because the term "bullied" actually seems more appropriate. One need only imagine how the young, struggling Guillén must have felt—at the Club Atenas—when made to recite his largely dismissed Parnassian poetry alongside Hughes's verse, in simultaneous translation, just when Hughes's musicality was being celebrated as a prime example of a Black combative-ness that Guillén himself had noted was sorely missing in Cuba in an essay published a few months prior to Hughes's arrival.⁴⁷ Thus, as both critic and publisher, Fernández de Castro translated Hughes, in part, to

inspire Guillén, and to give Guillén an aura of “black authenticity” by tying him to Hughes.

Other letters informing Hughes of his visit's effect on the Cuban literary community accompanied the missives sent to him detailing the international ramifications of his entry into Cuba. On April 20, 1930, the very day that Guillén's *Motivos de son* were published in *Diario de la Marina*, Urrutia wrote Hughes of the appearance of “eight formidable negro poems” that not only were “the exact equivalent of your ‘blues,’” but constituted “real cuban [*sic*] negro poetry” because Guillén had “written [them] in the very popular slang.”⁴⁸ Urrutia predicted enormous success for Guillén's new work, and celebrated the unprecedented appearance of “the language and feelings of our dear negroes made most noble by the love and talent of our own poets.”⁴⁹

Urrutia's letter and Fernández de Castro's characterization of Guillén as “the Cuban Langston Hughes” echoed one another and helped to fuel a long-standing and contentious debate between Cuban and U.S. literary critics as to whether Nicolás Guillén received the idea for his *son* poems, first exhibited in his *Motivos de son* (1930), from Langston Hughes. The argument from Hughes's camp is simple enough. After the two men met in Cuba in 1930, Hughes convinced Guillén to look to *son* and *rumba* to shape his poetic voice, just as Hughes himself had looked to American jazz and blues to create a new poetry capable of celebrating his cultural identity and reflecting his culture's popular forms. Guillén, as the argument runs, heeded Hughes's advice and imitated his style, producing his own revolutionary compositions with these very same aspirations. However, the only evidence to document this influence lies in Fernández de Castro's letter, in the implicit suggestion of Hughes's influence found in Urrutia's letter, and in Hughes's correspondence with Hoffman Reynolds Hays dated July 13, 1942.⁵⁰ Therein, Hughes responds to Hays's request for information on Jacques Roumain and Nelly Campobello by, tellingly, suggesting that he seek information from Fernández de Castro. Hughes continued:

Both he [Jacques Roumain] and Guillén say they've been influenced by my work, but Roumain toward the free verse-race matter side, and Guillén toward the use of folk forms and idioms, the Cuban equivalent of my blues. Guillén was writing Spanish free verse when I first met him around 1930 and hadn't yet touched the dialect-folk idiom that made

him famous. I pointed out to him then the music of the Cuban son, I mean the word-music and rhythm aside from the melodies. And a year or two later he sent me his early son poems.⁵¹

When considered in light of his correspondence with Guillén and Urrutia—which documents that Hughes received and praised *Motivos de son* just a few months after the two men met—the truth of the claim that Hughes guided Guillén toward the use of folk forms becomes as cloudy as Hughes’s memory. Moreover, Nicolás Guillén and his critics tell quite different stories that range from an insistence on Guillén’s radical originality to arguments that detail a long line of Cuban influences; and from Guillén’s declarations that the poems represented months of laborious work, to remarks he made later in life which attributed his inspiration to an odd dream and a bad night’s sleep.

This chapter does not lend a hand to either side of the influence debate. Rather, it has figured Fernández de Castro as a fulcrum, or active axis, who helped to give rise to the dispute by convincing Hughes of his influence and through his own assiduous efforts to tie the two poets together. However, Fernández de Castro was not the only critic to note the affinities between Hughes’s blues poetry and Guillén’s *son* poems.

Hughes’s popularity in Cuba and, more specifically, the notion that he had provided Guillén with the inspiration for *Motivos de son* were matters that produced considerable anxiety among many Cuban and Mexican critics. The critic and thinker Ramón Vasconcelos not only jumped to this conclusion but privately urged Guillén, in a May 18, 1930, letter from Paris, to ignore the compliments he had lately received and return to “the well-restrained inspiration” that had fueled his reputation.⁵² Vasconcelos told Guillén that he had done himself a great disservice by embarking on a poetic quest whose object was of little worth and would not long endure. He faulted Guillén for imitating Hughes’s poetic project, quipping, no doubt to the delight of Guillén the essayist, that Cuba was not *el yanqui sur* (the Yankee South), and that “el son” was not “el blue.”⁵³

The differentiation that Vasconcelos makes between the cultural production of *el yanqui sur* and that of *América del Sur*, as well as his assumption that Hughes’s work inspired something “fácil” (easy), rehearses a Latin American literary dichotomy that posits an irreducible difference between North Americans and Spanish Americans that stretched back to José Enrique Rodó’s influence on Rubén Darío and the

early U.S. imperialist forays into Latin America. This dichotomy associates Latin Americans with cultural refinement and religiosity and the United States with mammon and cultural bankruptcy, and finds its most famous Cuban incarnation in José Martí's essay "Nuestra América." It thus comes as no surprise that Vasconcelos's letter to Guillén and the review that stemmed from it are most often cited by U.S. critics as indigenous proof positive of an asymmetry that arises when the two poets are compared.⁵⁴

However, no critic to my knowledge has ever examined Vasconcelos's criticisms for what they were: private remarks that Guillén appears to have urged Vasconcelos, a close associate of the *minoristas*, to amplify in a published review. In fact, the critic's May reply from Paris indicates that Guillén must have contacted him immediately upon publication of his *Motivos*, enclosing a folio of his poems and seeking a printed review of them. It is quite possible that on the day that Guillén solicited Hughes for his opinion about his poems, he also asked Vasconcelos to write a review of them for *El País*. Asking Vasconcelos for a review was by no means a capricious decision. Guillén had been showered with praise in private correspondence by figures like Juan Marinello (part of Cuba's communist "brain trust"), Emilio Ballagas (an early and well-versed critic of *poesía negra*), and Fernando Ortiz (whose investigations of the Abakuá had come to be seen as investigations into the primitive Black authentic in Cuba), but Vasconcelos's critique offered Guillén a springboard he couldn't resist.

Vasconcelos's May letter stresses that his criticisms were meant for the private realm, but that he was willing to publish a review of "faithful words that you [Guillén] will know how to interpret faithfully." This curious pronouncement of fidelity is no simple admonition for Guillén to take him at his word, but rather points to a collusion between the two—to the planning of a staged debate about the *Motivos*. The fact that the Vasconcelos review is but an echo of his private letter, though, points to a Guillén who wanted his poems critiqued on such grounds, even though he did not disclose this to Vasconcelos. In his letter of June 5, 1930 Guillén urged Vasconcelos not to misconstrue his efforts. The link between Cuba and the American South, between "el son" and "el blue," were connections he slyly credited to Vasconcelos, claiming that he had composed the poems in full ignorance of any such resemblance.⁵⁵ He informed Vasconcelos that a great deal of time, effort, and thought had gone into composing his "sones" and that they were neither unworthy endeavors nor simple quests, but prime examples of his "estilo bien en-

trenado” (finely wrought verse). Guillén concluded his letter by saying that he remained, as always, Vasconcelos’s most devoted admirer. Most importantly, Guillén’s letter implicitly refuted Vasconcelos’s assumption that his works were inspired by Hughes’s poetic experiments. Evoking the ongoing battle to counter the “whitening” of Cuban national culture, Guillén asserted that he wrote the *Motivos* because “guajiro music” lacked the popular, human, and social manifestations of “la música Afro-Cubana.”

El País published Vasconcelos’s review of *Motivos de son*, which echoed the views contained in his letter of May 18.⁵⁶ Six days later in the same newspaper, Guillén published an essay titled “Sones y soneros” (“Sones and Son Players”), a far more militant defense of his work. Responding to Vasconcelos’s review, Guillén repeated his claim that at the time he composed the *Motivos de son*, he was unaware of any similarity between the blues and *son* or between Cuba and *el sur yanquí*, using Vasconcelos’s own published words. In the same breath, Guillén defended his “poemas de son” as an embodiment both of the Cuban vernacular and of Cuba’s most representative music.⁵⁷ He further argued that, given the political significance that popular forms held for the Left in the contemporary world, his *poemas de son* did constitute the “avanzada” poetry that Vasconcelos so craved.⁵⁸

In the essay, Guillén figures his embrace of local culture and speech as an anti-imperialist endeavor, a first step toward clearing Cuban heads too often filled with “imports.” Once again, he asserts that the creation of *Motivos de son* was no easy endeavor and that it was, in fact, only his mastery of craft and laborious work that made them seem so. If his “son poems” constituted something *fácil* (easy), it was only because he wanted to create “algo verdaderamente sencillo, verdaderamente fácil, verdaderamente popular” (something truly sincere, truly easy, and truly popular).⁵⁹ Guillén’s deft choice of words links his *son* poems to José Martí’s revolutionary *Versos sencillos* and does so in a manner that associates the folk with the revolutionary. He neither embraces nor distances himself from Hughes, but rather places their respective efforts within the aforementioned leftist argument that popular or folk forms are the best vehicle to communicate revolutionary and, in this case, anti-imperialist sentiments to the people.

Guillén juxtaposes his labor, a popular and populist *tarea* (work), with the elitism of Vasconcelos’s beloved *avanzada* and reclaims the helm of the advance guard, a position that Guillén regards as the inheritance, though at times a burdensome one, of the heroic common laborer, a posi-

tion neither defined nor occupied by the elite circles of “el gran periodista Cubano” (the great Cuban journalist).⁶⁰ Guillén insists that his poems are autochthonous Cuban creations in harmony with their professed mission: to keep Cubans from thinking with “imported heads.” But it was precisely the importation of Langston Hughes’s verse and the aggressive effort to tie the two men together that allowed Guillén to defend and define his poetic mission in this way.

Guillén’s debate with Vasconcelos is fruitfully conceived as a “Big Bang” that reverberates to this day. No instance of Hughes’s travels abroad has attracted more attention from critics in various disciplines than his trips to Cuba and his relationship with Nicolás Guillén. Notwithstanding Hughes’s lifelong wanderlust and his correspondence with and influence on literary and political figures ranging from Césaire in Martinique, Senghor in Senegal, Damas in Surinam, and Peter Abrahams and the Drum circle in South Africa, to Alioune Diop and *Présence Africaine* in Paris and Senegal, his trip to Cuba continues to loom large. Despite the fact that Guillén’s and Hughes’s later residency in Spain reveals a longer friendship that arguably had a deeper impact on their work, we nonetheless look to their time together in Cuba, and repeatedly return to a particular bone of contention: Did Hughes play a role in Guillén’s *Motivos de son*? Were the *Motivos* inspired by Hughes’s work? Did Hughes awaken Guillén’s race consciousness? Does the similarity between Hughes’s blues poems and Guillén’s *son* poems reflect or form part of a larger diasporic accord or affinity that existed between the two authors?

What is not debatable is that the figure of Hughes in Spanish-language translation opened up new modes for Guillén to provoke racial discourse in Cuba, succeeding where Guillén’s previous work had failed. To the extent that this conversation was enabled by the translation of Hughes’s poetry and complicity with the *minorista* effort to link him to Guillén, it also testifies to the integral role that Black left internationalism played in bringing this conversation about. Recall Guillén’s efforts the year previous, with Urrutia’s help at *Diario de la Marina*, to spark this conversation in his first published essays, “El camino de Harlem” (1929) and “La conquista del blanco” (1929), implying in the former that the U.S. presence on the island had exacerbated Cuban social segregation and boldly asserting in the latter that his readers ought to realize that they lived in the Republic of Cuba and not on a Southern plantation. Despite, or perhaps because of the boldness of these words, they largely fell on deaf ears, as Vasconcelos’s quipping can attest. This is to

say that the comparative discussion of race relations in Cuba and the United States that grew out of and was coded in the Guillén-Vasconcelos “bout” testifies to the great success that the *minorista* literary network enjoyed in its efforts to tie Hughes to Guillén in the eyes of the Cuban public before the publication of *Motivos*. It suggests that one of the reasons behind this endeavor was to provoke a comparative conversation about race relations in Cuba and the United States that could help to counter U.S. imperialism and promote communist revolution on the island. But this coded conversation could not go on forever inside Cuba, given *machadista* censorship, repression, and decades-old whitening politics. What Fernández de Castro, Urrutia, and Guillén seem to have realized from the very moment Hughes arrived in Havana was that making a translator out of him would open up discursive freedom and possibilities unavailable to them in their Cuban context. In other words, these essays and poems were risky endeavors, and Guillén and his *compadres* doubtless feared not only censorship but imprisonment. What Hughes provided, both as a translator and in translation, was a means for Guillén’s and Pedroso’s poetry to be internationalized before it could be suppressed. Moreover, it was only in the arena of world letters that Guillén’s poems could upstage the ongoing effort to elevate white *criollo* and *guajiro* culture to the status of a national culture in Cuba. In other words, just as Hughes’s cold climate forced him to look to translation to articulate his “serious writings” about the “Negro people,” Guillén and his compatriots turned to translation and Hughes to nationalize Cuban blackness.

Hughes’s short stay and literary reception in Cuba had opened up a remarkably felicitous path for the reception of Guillén’s *Motivos de son*. The Havana effort to make Hughes revisit his roots as a translator, which began on Cuban shores, would follow him home.⁶¹ In fact, the work that Urrutia and Fernández de Castro tried to accomplish by convincing Hughes of his enormous influence on the island was arguably a stratagem to make Hughes not only Guillén’s translator, but Urrutia’s and Pedroso’s as well. In fact, Guillén incessantly pestered Hughes for his approval of the *Motivos de son* so that he could solicit Hughes to translate them. In a remarkable bit of correspondence to be explored further in the third chapter, Guillén went so far as to tell Hughes that even though he was convinced Hughes would be unable to understand his use of language or its significance, his poems would “gain much” from Hughes’s translation. This paradox alone supports my contention about Guillén’s desire to benefit from Hughes’s fame as a Black musical

poet, and once again brings to the fore a triangulating strategy of Black left internationalism in Cuban practice. Hughes was soon to be no longer a writer blocked, and his status as an international cultural broker, bolstered significantly by translation, allowed him to unblock the Cuban Left's Black cultural front of which he was, owing to Fernández de Castro, already a part.⁶² The explosives had been rigged, and with the Vasconcelos exchange, the explosive device was detonated. The race to control the explosion's afterlife would continue in translation well into the winter, and would not only internationalize Guillén and Pedrosó but also entrench Hughes among the Latin American literary Left and enrich and regenerate his poetic voice.

The Cuban print culture referenced in Fernández de Castro's letters worked in concert with Vasconcelos's review of *Motivos*, helping to inaugurate a critical debate and discourse that surround Hughes and Guillén to this day. It is arguably the influence of this debate, more than either Hughes's or Guillén's poetry, that accounts for both men's status as practitioners and precursors of the *poesía negra* movement in Latin America. If Guillén, the poet arguably at the heart of the movement in its nascent years, was influenced by Hughes, then so too did the movement bear Hughes's fingerprints. Moreover, this discourse (a high-profile debate) can be credited with inspiring several of *poesía negra's* most important voices to make use of local rhythms and vernacular speech in their verse. These poets would include Solano Trindade in Brazil, Nícomedes Santa Cruz in Peru, Luis Palés Matos in Puerto Rico, and Manuel del Cabral in the Dominican Republic, who expanded and enriched the transnational literary milieu of this poetics. The work of these authors exemplifies how Guillén and Hughes created a poetics by being put in conversation with each other and is illustrative of how diasporic poetics develop intertextually.

Reborn in Translation

Conversing with a Hughes Born Abroad

Langston Hughes studied his own work in translation. When he saw how his verse was transformed to participate in new conversations, he chose to extend those conversations, to speak back to, or in dialogue with, his own voice in translation. To support this claim, this chapter constructs and reads a textual archive that facilitates a culturally thick, historically contextualized, literary comparison between three works: Hughes's "Brass Spittoons," first published in *New Masses* in December 1926 and reprinted in *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in 1927; Fernández de Castro's translation of the poem, penned under the pseudonym Ivan Parsons, and titled "Escupideras de metal" ("Metal Spittoons"), which appeared in *Social* in May 1930; and one of the first poems stemming from Hughes's radical period, "Florida Road Workers," printed by the *New York Herald Tribune* on November 23, 1930. I argue that when Hughes saw "Brass Spittoons" in translation, he was faced with an inspiring interpretation that reflected a Cuban creolization of Soviet-inflected poetics that would prove invaluable to him as his radical period commenced with poems like "Florida Road Workers."

In speaking back to Fernández de Castro's translation of "Brass Spittoons," Hughes engaged an experienced translator whose views on translation practice and its potential political weight were already well formed. I will use Fernández de Castro's *Tema negro en las letras*

de Cuba (1943; *The Negro Thematic in Cuban Letters*) to explore his thoughts on the revolutionary potential of Black poetry and poetics in Cuba; his essay “Sobre la poesía y la política en la U.R.S.S.” (published in 1927 and 1930; “On Poetry and Politics in the U.S.S.R.”) to reveal the extent to which he was also invested in infusing the Cuban literary scene with Soviet revolutionary poetics; and his essay “Poetas hispano americanos actuales traducidos al inglés” (1930; “Contemporary Hispanic Poets Translated into English”) to excavate how he conceived of the task of the translator. I read “Escupideras de metal” as a translation that was crafted, on the one hand, to infuse the poem with additional proletarian weight. On the other hand, I take note of how Fernández de Castro’s translation transformed Hughes’s poem by infusing it with elements of Afro-Cuban folk and *negrista* poetics. The result tied Hughes to Pedroso, Cuba’s first proletarian poet, as well as to Guillén, who had just used folk forms to great acclaim (and scandal) in his *Motivos de son*; this made the poem itself a symbol of Fernández de Castro’s effort to foster the perception of a Black poetic front. I then read “Florida Road Workers” as a poem inspired by the shifts that made these transformations possible—as evidence that Hughes’s radical poetry was influenced by the very poetics used to translate his work.

“Escupideras de metal” exemplifies our contention in this book’s introduction that blackness travels as a malleable system of signs that function as counter-discourses to local manifestations of white supremacy. To expand and to introduce what follows, I propose to examine Ivan Parsons’s (Fernández de Castro’s pen name generally reserved for the translation of Soviet poets) 1930 translation “Escupideras de metal” not simply as a case example of how blackness travels in translation, but also as an artifact that highlights how the work of translation begs comparison, and, in doing so, provides Black internationalism with one of its most powerful modalities.

The claim that Parsons’s “Escupideras de metal” translates blackness may prove troublesome for several reasons. First, much of the recent critical work on Hughes’s translations anchored by translation theory is committed to a supposed respect for cultural difference that commits the “missteps of anti-imperialist reasoning” pointed out by John French.¹ This misstep is proffered as a respect for cultural difference but is often encumbered by its own Western provincialism—by European notions of what is home, close to home, and foreign. Second, scholars naively building on Brent Hayes Edwards’s insight that conceptions of blackness are remarkably hard to translate at the level of the single vocable

have apparently forgotten that we still do inhabit a post-Sapir-Whorf world. Third, these anticipated objections necessitate a selective myopia or strategic ignorance of racist discourses that flourish outside U.S. soil, disclosing an amnesiac exceptionalism which assumes that New World race relations can be cleanly separated at the borders of nation-states whose very race relations emerge from international histories of slavery, human trafficking, and commerce—from a shared history of subjugation by white internationalism. This is to say that while scholars are wise to be careful about the imposition of U.S. racial categories onto distinct contexts in a heterogeneous African diaspora, a dogmatic refusal to do so based on equating the changes produced by or the difficulties inherent in translation with irreducible cultural difference falls victim to the worst kind of racial essentialism and displays an ignorance of the histories of people of African descent in the New World. For example, the influx of cane workers into Cuba from around the Caribbean that persisted throughout the country's early republican era was prompted by the U.S. imperialist imposition of a sugarcane monoculture on Cuba. However, the rise of white nationalist propaganda that consistently raised the dread fear that the island nation would fall victim to the "primitive"—to specters of "Africanization" or "Haitianization"—was built on a centuries-old entrenchment of white supremacy on the island that was both distinctly Cuban (heavily inflected by fears of a sister revolt after Haitian independence) and connected to the institution of slavery throughout the New World. It was also fueled by the scientific racism of the day, including Fernando Ortiz's claim that Black immigration posed a particular danger to the white working class because of its "psychic proximity" to the African.² Cuban elites and state authorities consistently invoked the alleged dichotomy between European civilization and African barbarism to call for the suppression of African-based popular culture in all its manifestations. Hence, on 1930s Cuban terrain, blackness could not only travel, it was contagious, and it could be spread through the artistic production of all peoples of African descent.

Arriving at an appreciation of how Parsons's translation "Escupideras de metal" converts and conveys blackness is, of course, mediated by my understanding of how the poem and translation functioned in their respective milieus. It is complicated further by the fact that poetry need not answer to truth claims, and consists in using words in nontraditional ways so that they acquire new meanings (e.g., the terms "Negro" and "Black" acquire additional meaning as "Proem" progresses). The work of translating a poem entails more than substituting the exact

referential equivalents for the vocables it contains. Rather, to transgressively borrow from T. S. Eliot, translation requires grappling with how poetry dislodges new meaning from old words in multiple contexts. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that examining these works vis-à-vis the ties they make to one another has the purpose of bringing to the fore what I perceive to be a larger agenda at work in all of Hughes's Cuban encounters, be they in translation or as a translator. This multifaceted agenda seeks to wed the cultural representation of blackness, both in Cuba and in the United States, to proletarianism.

Langston Hughes's poem "Brass Spittoons" has long been considered an exemplar of the literary Black authentic in U.S. circles for social and biographical reasons. It is generally thought to be an honest, or representative, portrayal of a member of the Black urban lumpenproletariat because Hughes himself, at age twelve, spent a summer cleaning hotel cuspidors. If such attributes mark the poem as authentically Black, they could also be said to identify it as proletarian. In writing about the reception of *Fine Clothes to the Jew* in *The Big Sea*, Hughes credited Margaret Larkin with being the first critic to term his work "proletarian."³ He claimed that "Brass Spittoons" was one of his favorite poems and bemoaned the fact that *Fine Clothes* did not bear this same title. Larkin's review of *Fine Clothes*, "A Poet for the People—A Review," appeared in *Opportunity* in March 1927. Larkin figured Hughes as deserving of the title "Proletarian Poet" because his poems were readable by the working class, and because poems like "Brass Spittoons" gave "voice to the philosophy of the people, more rugged, more beautiful, better food for poetry than the philosophy of the 'middle classes.'"⁴ Over forty years later, Jean Wagner would dispute Larkin's claim and argue that Hughes had only managed to speak for a "black proletariat" because "to speak of the proletariat is to speak of class consciousness and class struggle," work which "Brass Spittoons" failed to accomplish.⁵ The difference between Larkin's and Wagner's criteria for proletarian poetry is a fecund starting place for an examination of its translation, "Escupideras de metal," which infuses its speaker with a class-consciousness not present in the source poem.

Hughes's "Brass Spittoons" might be said to convey the lot of the Black lumpenproletariat by playing with and against the interiority that is the constitutive paradox of the English lyric mode—by bookending the speaker's thoughts with what most take to be commands issuing from external voices (or a voice) saturated with the entitlement of white supremacy:

Clean the spittoons, boy.

Detroit,
Chicago,
Atlantic City,
Palm Beach.

Clean the spittoons.

The steam in hotel kitchens,
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
And the slime in hotel spittoons:
Part of my life.

Hey, boy!
A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,

Two dollars a day.

Hey, boy!
A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,

Two dollars

Buys shoes for the baby.

House rent to pay.

Gin on Saturday,
Church on Sunday.

My God!

Babies and gin and church
and women and Sunday
all mixed with dimes and
dollars and clean spittoons
and house rent to pay.

Hey, boy!

A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.

Hey, boy!

A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished,—
At least I can offer that.

Come 'ere, boy!⁶

Such a reading, though, is contingent on multiple assumptions. First, it depends on the presence of an intrusive voice that is not the voice of the poem's speaker. However, one quickly notes that Hughes never makes use of quotation marks or italics to make that clear. Rather, he creates a deliberate ambiguity that becomes even more salient when one recognizes that a reading of the poem as polyvocal is also facilitated and frustrated by the printing of the poem itself. The lines that can be read as commands and which contain the word "boy" are generally indented and suggest an outside presence, but this is not true of the first line, nor are the indented lines the exclusive province of any one voice. Rather, as the poem progresses, the lines punctuated by the word "boy" come to occupy the center, while the speaker's thoughts about his job are relegated to the poem's margins as he engages in greater and greater religious reverie to justify his menial labor. Of course, the most salient factor that supports a reading of this poem as presenting the reader with a Black speaker whose thoughts are propelled by the intrusion of a racist white voice is Hughes's use of the word "boy" and its status as a derogatory, racist, and yet all-too-common appellation for Black men in the United States. One might even assert that it is Hughes's use of the word "boy" that racializes the poem's power dynamic and allows it to perform a kind of recovery of blackness itself. Certainly, a good argument could be made that Hughes's use of "boy" helps the poem perform the work of Black modernism as James Smethurst and Houston Baker conceive of it—the redefinition of blackness against and through the minstrel mask. Indeed, all of Hughes's poems translated under the Parsons pseudonym offer portraits of laborers whose very work required masking obsequious contentment that bordered on buffoonery in the face of dehumanizing racist appellations like "boy." In this sense, Hughes's poem could be said to recover and authenticate blackness by providing a glimpse behind a kind of Dunbarian mask.

Moreover, nothing prevents an equally, if not more, fair reading of "Brass Spittoons" as a poem that never strays at all from the conventions of the lyric and in which all the voices presented are interior ones. They reflect the persona's memories and real-time experience of the daily hails and mockery that are a part of his job, or perhaps an internalization of racism that he uses to urge himself to work, "Clean the spittoons, boy." This assumption allows for a reading of the near polyvocality of the poem to serve as an apt symbol for Du Bois's double consciousness, allowing the entire poem to authenticate blackness as a

state of being wherein one only sees oneself through the “eyes of others” who look on in “amused contempt and pity.”⁷

Whether they are intrusions into the interior lyric mode, glimpses of the speaker’s mind at work in real time, or both, the lines that Hughes punctuates with “boy” always stage a conversation that drives and frames the action of the poem while grounding the speaker’s thoughts against the backdrop of his socioeconomic condition. For example, the opening line, “Clean the spittoons, boy,” propels the speaker to justify the degradation he suffers with a purely financial argument (it “buys shoes for the baby”); and the penultimate line drives the speaker’s thoughts to a far less earthly plane to find a religious justification for his menial labor (“at least I can offer that” [to the Lord]). It is this oddly one-sided conversation that seems to drive and frame the action of the poem, offering a biting social and religious critique. The fact that the speaker’s religious reverie is set in motion and fueled by enchanting associations that stem from brass, a kind of proverbial fool’s gold, suggests that his religious solace is a kind of counterfeit coin and that Christianity is little more than an opiate for the Black masses. When we consider that 1 Chronicles 18:8 is the one passage in the King James Bible that explicitly links David, Solomon, and brass together by noting that Solomon’s columns were built with materials that David sacked from the cities of Hadarezer (acts frowned upon by God), we discover the religious reverie of the speaker to be laden with a biting and satirical irony. This irony signifies on the speaker as well as on the patrons and owners of the hotel, associating the former with a tragically naive piety, and the latter with theft and even impending doom.

But the biting ironies of Hughes’s poem, biblical and colloquial, produce more than simple authorial critiques of race/labor relations in the United States, since the insights contained between the lines can be attributed to either Hughes or to the speaker’s artful display of masking in the face of white domination. This ambiguity allows the entire poem to be read as a retreat into religious reverie, and as a portrayal of masking—a retreat behind the mask of Black contentment whose very ironies serve to mark it as such for an in-group audience. “Brass Spittoons” could fairly be read as a poem that portrays not African American interiority so much as the performance of blackness, and in doing so, it weaves a Black discursive tool into the fabric of what was then an evolving system of world literature.

Bolstering Larkin’s observation that his poems were proletarian, Hughes suggests as much in *The Big Sea* when he writes that “since high

school” he “had been writing poems about workers and the problems of workers—in reality poems about myself and my own problems.”⁸ Hughes’s characterization of “Brass Spittoons” as both “proletarian” and about “me” may highlight yet another paradox of textual authenticity. It also conveys his desire to be associated with the sprawling worldwide movement of proletarian poetry. Critics have been far too apt to see Hughes’s choice of the word “proletarian” as simply referring “to workers” or his “own problems,” and have paid insufficient attention to Larkin’s explicit (and Hughes’s implicit) contentions that “Brass Spittoons” ought to be read as an offering to proletarian poetics. The poem is one of Hughes’s early efforts to introduce modes of African American discursivity into a self-regulating, amorphous poetic genre that was developing worldwide, through translation, and in dialogue with itself.

The very label “proletarian poetry” is vexing for the translator, since its current usage is often anachronistic and nondescriptive. In the wake of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, the felt need for a literature that celebrated and encouraged Soviet industrialization incited contentious debates about the form, function, and even the possibility of a proletarian literature that raged in the 1920s and early 1930s. As the critic Barbara Foley has shown, because U.S. proletarian literature developed in conversation with Soviet theorists and practitioners, it could neither follow a uniform course nor answer to a Soviet party line.⁹ Soviet groups and organizations such as Proletkult, the Smithy, October, VAPP, Litfront, and LEF differed on the basic criteria for revolutionary and proletarian literature. Their debates raised questions about its appropriate authorship, perspective, and subject matter; its relation to past bourgeois cultural production; “leftism”; and the role of avant-garde experimentation.¹⁰ Despite or arguably because of this lack of definition, proletarian literature had developed, as Mike Gold noted in “Towards a Proletarian Art,” into a global, self-regulating artistic movement by the time Parsons translated Hughes:

Thousands of books and articles on proletarian literature have been published in Soviet Russia, in Germany, Japan, China, France, England, and other countries. There is not a language in the world today in which vigorous bold youth is not experimenting with the materials of proletarian literature. It is a world phenomenon: and it grows, changes, criticizes itself, expands without the blessing of all the offi-

cial mandarins and play-actor iconoclasts and psalm-singing Humanists of the moribund bourgeois culture.¹¹

In this sense, proletarian poetry is accurately conceived as the output of a worldwide movement with many centers of production that held diverse views on its defining attributes. Proletarian poets attempted to engage the world at large through dialectical materialist aesthetics that were themselves propelling proletarian culture forward.

Given the paucity of Spanish-language translations of New Negro poets in 1930, the paratext that accompanied Parsons's publication of "3 poemas de langston hughes" in the May 1930 issue of *Social* had to exert an enormous influence over how that magazine's *avanzada* readership interpreted Hughes's work. Narrowly construed, this paratext includes Parsons's title, his prefacing of the three poems with Mary White Ovington's 1927 biography of Hughes, and the subheading "a special translation by ivan parsons." When conceived more broadly, the paratext of "3 poemas de langston hughes" contained an advertisement for the translations that was printed in the magazine's April issue, the Spanish-language translations discussed in chapter 1, and would soon include, and perhaps give rise to, the Vasconcelos-Guillén debate also discussed in chapter 1. This paratext, like the "Presentación" and "Conversación" articles, positioned Hughes as a bohemian yet representative U.S. Black poet whose work credentials included a long history as a laborer, a fidelity to "los negros" the world over, and a nature poised for mobilization against organized society. Parsons's translation of Ovington displays a translator who negotiates the literary Black authentic not simply at the level of content, but also on the levels of intertext, context, and paratext. In other words, the Hughes that Parsons offers Cuba by way of Ovington conveys a lot about why and how Hughes was imported to Cuba and the valences of blackness on the island:

Hughes es así se muestra en las poemas que aparecen en estas páginas. Cuando no está sacándole brillo a escupideras de metal, está sirviendo de recadero a los habituales del lobby del hotel donde trabaja y al terminar su tarea es seguro que encuentra un címbalos de los danzarines del Rey David, o está bebiendo una copa del mismo.

Hughes es el más vagabundo de los poetas negros. Adora el camino desconocida, la sorpresa inesperada que lo aguarda en el campo abierto o al volver de una esquina en la ciudad.

Pero el vagabundo tiene en estos días de sociedad organizada poca oportunidad para satisfacer las ansias de su espíritu, a no ser trabaje sus diez o doce horas diarias. De modo que Hughes, buen mozo, apuesto, de manera encantadoras, tiene que emplearse en los trabajos propios a los negros—dependiente de restaurant con la bandeja en la palma de la mano, asistente de cocinero llenado de pequeños cuadrados de mantequilla, platos y más platos—portero de pullman, como en la poema. Muchacho de elevador “pa’arriba” y “pa’abajo” hasta que ya está cansado y que se larga. Luego, agricultor, mandadero. Siempre moviéndose entre gentes y siempre huyéndole a la monotonía.¹²

This is Langston Hughes, polishing the brass spittoons when he is not running errands for loungers in the hotel lobby and when his polishing is finished, finding a cymbal of King David’s dancers or Solomon’s wine cups.

Hughes is the vagabond of Negro poets. He loves the untrodden road, the joy of the unexpected, whether it be in the country or in and out of bright city streets. But the vagabond has little chance to gratify his roving spirit in this day of organized society save as he works his 8 or 10 or 12 hours. So Hughes, handsome, charming of manner, takes such jobs as a colored boy can get—waiter with a tray on uplifted palm, omnibus boy, dropping pats of butter on diners’ plates, porter:

I must say
 Yes, sir,
 To you all the time.
 Yes, sir!
 Yes, sir!
 All my days climbing up a great big mountain
 Of yes, sirs!

Elevator boy, “goin’ up an’ down, up an’ down,” until he decides—

I been runnin’ this
 Elevator too long
 Guess I’ll quit now.

Truck gardener's helper, errand boy, always among people,
and always seeking to avoid monotony.¹³

The truncated translation of Ovington's portrait that Parsons uses for his preface allows him to urge his Cuban reader to approach "3 poemas de langston hughes" as a reflection of the very poet himself, while simultaneously juggling the valences of the modernist primitive and the proletarian to authenticate Hughes and his poems and to recover blackness for a Cuban audience. Ovington's first line proclaims "That's Langston Hughes," and Parsons also insists that Hughes is "just as he is revealed to be in the poems that appear in these pages" and that, due to the nature of his transient employment, he is "the most vagabond of the black poets."¹⁴ Parsons's translation works both with and against the grain of Cuban racist discourses on blackness by noting that this poet of the lumpenproletariat works "diez o doce horas diarias" (ten to twelve hours daily) only because it is the sole means that "sociedad organizada" (organized society) affords him "para satisfacer las ansias de su espíritu" (to satisfy the cravings of his spirit). In a series of gestures that slyly recover Cuban blackness, Parsons frames Hughes as a primitive yet acculturated proletarian poet who gives voice to the Black masses using the conventions of Afro-Cuban speech. Parsons's translation further directs his readers toward a blanket biographical interpretation of all three poems by relating that Hughes worked as a "portero de Pullman," as a "muchacho de elevador 'pa'arriba' y 'pa'abajo'" (elevator boy "goin'-up" and "goin'-down"), and then, capitalizing on the time lag between Ovington's piece and his translation, goes so far as to insinuate that Hughes was still working ten to twelve hours a day running errands for hotel guests and shining spittoons.

Hughes is thus positioned as a member of a transnational racial aggregate ("Blacks") whose exploitation by "organized society" is the very precondition for that society's existence—placing race not as an epiphenomenon, but rather racism as the precondition for global capitalism. Concurrently, Hughes is offered to the Cuban public as a dissonant internationalist whose zest for life authenticates his blackness and presents an oppositional stance against the civilized society that undervalues and exploits him. This take on the primitive, of course, resonates with Claude McKay's "vagabond" or "dissident internationalism," as Edwards and Joel Nickels put it, and frames the translations of Hughes's "work poems," as well as Fernández de Castro's translations of Hughes's primitivist poetry in *Revista de la Habana*, in the same way

that Hughes and Guillén framed “Proem”—as modernist primitivism intended to function as a collectivizing antidote to the imperialist exploitation of “los negros.”

Continuing to frame Hughes as both primitive and proletarian, Parsons retains Ovington’s claim that when Hughes isn’t cleaning spittoons, he’s “finding a cymbal of King David’s dancers or Solomon’s wine-cup,” thus associating Hughes’s enjoyment of bootleg King David’s gin and his visceral and poetic celebration of nightlife as qualities associated with someone who is comfortable living outside convention and the law. Parsons’s translation, like Ovington’s biography, is careful not to paint Hughes as a man unfit for labor, but rather as a man for whom “organized society” has failed to offer meaningful work. Parsons juxtaposes Hughes’s lack of investment in his job with his strong but directionless work ethic, and then deepens this implicit critique of race and labor relations by mentioning Hughes’s good looks, his charming manner, and their seeming incompatibility with the exhausting work of jobs “proprios a los negros” (reserved for Blacks) in a marketplace that includes but is notably not restricted to the United States.

In another deft move, Parsons’s paratext manipulates primitivism to control the religious valences of Hughes’s poem by associating biblical references with stereotypically primitivist yet quotidian Black realities like illegal drinking and promiscuous sex. He complements his translation’s foreclosure of any reading of the speaker as religiously devout and recovers the Black primitive by associating the speaker more with an awakening proletarian spirit than with the Black *primitivo* to which Cuban audiences had become accustomed. Whereas Hughes’s poem permits a reading wherein the speaker’s religious reverie may be a performance—an artful display of masking—Parsons’s version of the poem and its speaker openly scoff at Christianity, its promises, and even at the supposed succor they offer to the exploited worker. Although the reliability of the speaker in “Brass Spittoons” is undercut by his suggestive reference to the book of Chronicles and by the bleak sarcasm marking the conclusion of poem, it is the very potential for the speaker’s religious justification of his menial labor to be read in earnest and as coded in-group performance that makes Hughes’s poem a literary portrayal of the African American art of masking. It is the very believability of the speaker’s religious justification that a “bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord / Bright polished brass like the cymbals / Of King David’s dancers, Like the wine cups of Solomon” that is central to a reading of the poem which sees it as an authentic representation of a Black man

(and by metaphorical extension a Black population) beguiled by religion and, perhaps more intriguingly, as a reading that recognizes quite another layer of consciousness at work, one signifying to those attuned to the discursivity of Black resistance.

The recognition of Hughes's literary deployment of masking in "Brass Spittoons" is no small point, especially when it comes to arriving at an understanding of how Hughes himself conceived the aesthetics and discursive strategies of the literary Black authentic. It points to a vision that locates the Black authentic in and beyond the level of content, and highlights a problem that might be said to haunt the translation of many Black discursive modes. Namely, how can one translate a code without breaking it and destroying it as coded discursivity in the process? How can a translator convey in-group messages to his target, a de facto foreign audience? It is possible to forcefully argue for a reading of the speaker's scoffing at Christianity in "Escupideras de metal" as a faithful choice that Parsons made to preserve the meaning of Hughes's coding, though he could neither preserve the code nor the coding mechanism. However, an argument construed along these lines must also grapple with the question of how to distinguish the deciphering of Black discursivity from any act of poetic translation, given that poetic translation is inherently interpretive and is always engaged in the act of decoding and encoding artifacts that are themselves complex semiotic systems conveying meaning in a manner distinct from other modes of discourse. And yet it is undeniable that something else is going on and an additional purpose is served here: establishing authentic blackness.

The speaker's assumption, in Parsons's translation, that there is a king of the Bible named David, and that he, along with "that other one, Solomon," enjoys dancers and gin as much as Hughes (via paratextual suggestion) complements the way that Parsons's speaker seems to openly scoff at the notion of the promises of heaven:

Una jarra de cobre pulido es grata ofrenda a Dios. / De metal muy brillante como eran los címbalos / de los bailarines del Rey de la Biblia: David / Y las copas en que tomaba vino, aquel otro Salomon / ¡Ay familia!¹⁵

A jar of polished copper is a welcome offering to God. / Of very brilliant metal as were the cymbals / of the dancers of the King of the Bible: David / And the cups from which he used to drink wine, that other one, Solomon / Oh brother!¹⁶

The speaker's evocation of scripture in Hughes's poem leads the reader to a stark irony that either reveals the speaker to be duped by religion or capable of taking people in by masking religious contentment. In contrast, Parsons's poem seizes on the speaker's ignorance of scripture to authenticate the poem as Black. It should be recalled that the target zone audience was increasingly associating blackness with Cuba's African religious societies, most notably the *ñáñigos* of the Abakuá brotherhood, and with a vision of an authentic blackness linked to and embodied by the brotherhood depicted in Ortiz's "Los negros brujos" and, by extension, much more with the witchcraft and threats of "Africanization" and "Haitianization" than with biblical scripture. Parsons's translation thus seems to trade Black discursivity, one of the components of literary Black authenticity, for another—the perception of blackness already held by the target audience. This is not to equate Cuban authentic literary blackness in all its dimensions with U.S. authentic literary blackness. But it does help us to recognize that the matter of portraying authentic blackness was, in both cases, a matter of evoking extant discourses of blackness that worked to entrench white supremacy in order to supplant these discourses with new understandings of blackness—that translating blackness was also a matter of (re-)creating a counter-discourse to local manifestations of white supremacy.

I am not suggesting that Parsons's translation does not position Black linguistic coding as a requirement of the Black authentic. It does. In fact, Parsons's Black authentic seems to have required both the coded use of Spanish and the deployment of Cuban Black vernacular speech. But what is most important to note here is that the shifts and compensations that attend the re-creation of authentic literary blackness in translation were concerns for Fernández de Castro, aka Ivan Parsons, that warranted a great deal of reinvention, since they were the driving forces behind the translation's composition and its intended intervention in the Cuban national consciousness. Parsons's translation of Hughes's poem may be said to Cubanize Hughes, but this domestication was itself not a simple matter of exchanging one lexicon or set of signs for another. It required reinventing the valences of blackness in the target zone via translation. Nearly all of Parsons's transgressive translations serve at least three overlapping interests. First, they beg comparisons between U.S. and Cuban race and power relations that depend on highlighting differences to illuminate their common ground. Second, they recast the figure of the Black Cuban primitive as the increasingly proletarian-minded yet

volatile Afro-Cuban lumpen; and third, they create a Black communist poetic chorus that could perform all this work. These overlapping agendas give rise to a translation and a poetic project whose fidelity ultimately lies with the health of the Cuban body politic and not with creating the dynamic or semantic equivalent of Hughes's poetry in Spanish.

As we have already seen, it would be a grave error to mistake the shifts that distinguish "Brass Spittoons" from "Escupideras de metal" as unprincipled in their design. Rather, Parsons's *techne* of translation seizes on the portions of Hughes's poem that are most difficult to translate—moments where cultural difference might be said to be most visible—to infuse his translation not simply with authentic blackness in its Cuban incarnation, but with increased proletarianizing potential. Take, for example, the translation's very title. Parsons's decision to forsake a literal translation of "Brass Spittoons" as "Escupideras de latón" in favor of "Escupideras de metal" ("Metal Spittoons") may produce a shift in meaning that homogenizes insofar as it flattens a difference between the metals present in Hughes's original (i.e., brass is a type of metal, but not all metals are brass). This erasure of difference comes at no small cost because Hughes's speaker's attempts to fortify himself by finding solace in brass that is beautiful to "the Lord" hinge on his ability to deploy the term "brass" in literal, metaphoric, metonymic, and intertextual ways. However, this loss could not have been prevented by a more literal translation. When one attempts to search out the intertextual counterpart to 1 Chronicles 18:8 in its Spanish-language counterpart (in the Reina Valera Bible), the word "brass" is nowhere to be found:

18:8 Asimismo de Thibath y de Chûn ciudades de Adarezer, tomó David muy mucho metal, de que Salomón hizo el mar de bronce, las columnas, y vasos de bronce. (RVB)

18:8 Likewise from Tibhath, and from Chun, cities of Hadarezer, brought David very much brass, wherewith Solomon made the brasen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass. (KJV)

Bronce and *metal* occupy the place of brass. This fact, given that the nouns being modified are the "cups" and "pillars" of Solomon, might be said to endow subsequent Spanish-language translations that carry the title "Escupideras de bronce" with a greater fidelity to Hughes's origi-

nal than does Parsons's, even though they still differ semantically from Hughes's original. But though the referent may differ, Parsons's choice of "metal" does successfully lead us to 1 Crónicas 18:8, while notably strengthening the poem's intertextual critique of religion by shifting the focus to the first clause of the Spanish-language biblical verse and thereby highlighting a reference that has more to do with David's theft and pillaging than with the wonderful yet doomed court of Solomon. In other words, Parsons's translation practice is one that takes advantage of the transformations (and violences) that attend all acts of translation in order to create a Hughesian speaker and poem that authenticate and refashion the valences of blackness in the target zone, and do so in a manner that releases additional energy to aid the overlapping agendas of Black collectivity and communist revolution in Cuba. To further illustrate this, given that one typical aspect of Soviet proletarian poetry and proletarian literature consists of the celebration of metal or machinery, the very title "Escupideras de metal" offers an ironic commentary on the underdevelopment of manufacturing jobs in Cuba that attended the U.S. imperialist imposition on the island. Metal that could serve the purposes of industrialization is, in Parsons's poem, in the service of an exploitative tourist industry whose English-language hotel "lobbies" serve as powerful symbols for the U.S. imperialist occupation of Cuba. Parsons's transgressive translation decisions thus speak to a vision of translation possessed by multiple fidelities: to an interpretation of Hughes's poem that releases new energy, to the influence of Soviet literary theory on Cuban translation and poetics, to the creation of a transnational Black communist poetic chorus, to the advent of a communist Cuba, and to the health of the Cuban body politic.

The fidelities, agendas, and poetics just mentioned also help to account for the impetus behind the Cuban translation of Hughes's poetry, as well as the paratextual framing of Hughes as an engagé poet whose militancy sprang from his life experience as a vagabond and whose poetic production was an authentic account of his experiences on the job as a member of the Black lumpenproletariat. They also give shape, like all the carefully constructed artifacts explored thus far, to a *militante* persona whose autobiographical representation could not be convincingly offered to a Cuban reading audience via the conventions and lexicons of U.S. Black masking. In short, Parsons's paratext and the print reception of Hughes in Cuba created a Hughesian persona incommensurate with the seeming meekness of the speaker who inhabits "Brass Spittoons," and this helps to account for the extensive transformations

the poem had to undergo in order to be faithful to the militant vision of Hughes that Parsons, Nicolás Guillén, and the *minorista* publishing network had already constructed and were continuing to nourish in a target zone governed by different semiotics of blackness.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the relationship between the paratextual presentation of Hughes the poet and the poetic presentation of Hughes as the persona who gives voice to “Escupideras de metal” lies in the number of telling paradoxes that result from Parsons’s contention that Hughes is “just as he is revealed to be” in the translations that appear in the pages of *Social*. On the one hand, this claim can easily be read as an attempt to render the translator invisible. It uses the passive voice to blur authorship, suggesting that the poems contained in *Social* were written by the poet himself, and it further domesticates a Hughes who, via paratextual citation, already speaks to his Cuban audience using the conventions of Afro-Cuban speech. The translation could thus be said to rely on the flattening or near erasure of cultural difference to suggest a commonality between Hughes, a representative U.S. Black, and Afro-Cubans.¹⁷ On the other hand, Parsons’s contention can be read literally and against the grain to suggest that it is his translations rather than Hughes’s poetry that reveal Hughes to be just as he is. This contention, of course, makes perfect sense for a Spanish-reading public, but Parsons’s use of the passive voice also works implicitly to suggest that his rendering of “Brass Spittoons” offers a more faithful vision of the man and his poetry to the Cuban public and the world at large than does Hughes’s original composition. This suggestion speaks to a vision of translation that not only sees it as a practice that can improve upon the original, as Fernández de Castro’s contemporary Jorge Luis Borges famously argued, but which also places its fidelity more with the re-creation of an authorial presence than with the re-creation of the author’s textual production, privileging presumed intent over achieved content. It also profoundly resonates with Hughes’s declaration that his “serious writing” about the “Negro people” would come to fruition in translation.

Despite Parsons’s paratextual framing of Hughes as a poet whose spirit is hemmed in by race and labor relations, who is consigned to work in positions “propios a los negros” in a labor market that certainly includes but is not limited to the United States, and who, as a transient person, is “the greatest vagabond” among a cadre of nameless “black poets” of unspecified national origin, it would be a grave error to mistake Parsons’s translation of “Escupideras de metal” as a work

that naively swaps Cuban visions and refashionings of blacknesses for U.S. ones in order to promote Cuban communism or Black left internationalist solidarity at the cost of difference. Instead, Parsons's paratext works in conjunction with his translation choices to create paradoxes that beg questions that prompt the reader to confront difference—to come to grips with the complexities of Black transnational migrancy and to imagine the possibilities of extra-national Black poetic and political collectivity. For example, Fernández de Castro's paratextual advertisement of Hughes's "Brass Spittoons" as one of Hughes's most recent poems to employ the "black dialect of Harlem" in the April issue of *Social*, and his decision to preface "Escupideras de metal" with Ovington's biographical reading of Hughes's "Brass Spittoons" work to ground Hughes as a U.S. poet whose verse portrays his representative life experience as a Black laborer in the United States. But the speaker who inhabits "Escupideras de metal," paratextually offered to the reader as a faithful portrait of Hughes in the flesh, uses the conventions of the Afro-Cuban vernacular to give voice to grievances that, given Parsons's strategic domestications, seem to speak directly to the lot of the Afro-Cuban lumpen. Parsons presents his Cuban reading audience with a paradox—a U.S. Black poet who speaks in Cuban vernacular—which arises not from the differences between "Brass Spittoons" and "Escupideras de metal," but rather from the tensions that result from reading Parsons's translation in light of the poem's Spanish-language paratext.

In this case, the paradox of translating authentic blackness consisted of much more than the trading of one regional racial lexicon for another. It required Parsons to approach literary blackness as an intertextual and inter-discursive fabric; as a malleable set of collectivizing and authenticating semiotic systems that articulated a proletarian counter-discourse to Cuban doctrines of white supremacy; and as a phenomenon that led him to grapple with how Black texts signify via content, via the relation of form to content, via the politics of form, intertextually, paratextually, and—throwing everything into jeopardy—via coded critique of or signifying on all of the above. But these problems, as we shall soon see, were nothing that a little faithful translation couldn't solve. Indeed, the questions raised and the comparisons begged by the incongruities that come to light when we compare the Hughes presented to the Cuban public by Parsons's paratext and by his *minorista* print reception with the Hughes paratextually positioned to be the autobiographical speaker of "Escupideras de metal" find echoes in the first lines of Parsons's translation:

Chico, limpia escupideras.
 Detroit,
 Chicago,
 Atlantic City,
 Palm Beach,
 Limpia las escupideras
 Y el hollín de las cocinas en los hoteles
 Y recoge la basura de todos los lobbies de los hoteles
 Y lava la saliva de las escupideras en todos los hoteles
 Esto es parte de mi vida.
 ¡Yey! familia (1–11)¹⁸

Clean the spittoons, boy.
 Detroit,
 Chicago,
 Atlantic City,
 Palm Beach.
 Clean the spittoons.
 The steam in hotel kitchens,
 And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
 And the slime in hotel spittoons:
 Part of my life.
 Hey, boy! (1–11)¹⁹

This passage presents the reader with three interconnected and illuminating paradoxes. The first and most salient one stems from Parsons's decision to offer the reader a speaker who gives voice to his dissatisfaction using Afro-Cuban speech but whose life experience in Detroit, Chicago, and Atlantic City decidedly locate him as a U.S. Black. This paradox is one of careful design because Parsons's perceived need to use the Afro-Cuban vernacular is implicitly legitimated by Fernández de Castro's false advertisement of Hughes's poems as having been written in "the dialect of Harlem," and cannot be written off as a typical incongruity or remainder caused by the inescapable phenomenon of what Lawrence Venuti labels "domestication." The second interconnected paradox stems from the manner in which Parsons's decision to omit Hughes's indentations and to translate "Hey, boy!" with the exclamation "¡Yey! familia" ("Hey, buddy" or "Oh, brother!") work together to suggest a single speaker calling out to a fellow Afro-Cuban, while his series of pluralizations suggest a speaker who is more a multitude than an

individual: a speaker who is hyperbolically, simultaneously, and comically responsible for cleaning the “hollín” (soot) in “las cocinas en los hoteles” (the kitchens in the hotels), for collecting “la basura de todos los lobbies de los hoteles” (the trash from all the lobbies in the hotels), and for cleaning “la saliva de las escupideras en todos los hoteles” (the saliva from every hotel’s spittoons) in Detroit, Atlantic City, Chicago, and Palm Beach. The paradox that pluralizes the single voice is perhaps most convincingly read as Parsons’s attempt to locate the speaker as a member of the Black lumpen: positioning the speaker as but one among the many who did perform all this work on a daily basis. The third paradox might be said to be the poetic summation of the tensions brought about by the previous two. Namely, it is Langston Hughes, a U.S. Black paratextually framed as the poem’s persona, whom Parsons’s pluralizations and deployment of Afro-Cuban speech authenticate as a member of and spokesman for both the U.S. Black and Afro-Cuban lumpen.

These tensions, which in themselves draw attention to cultural difference for the target audience, force the most adept of Cuban readers—readers who might have approached Parsons’s “Escupideras de metal” as a transgressive translation forged to foment leftist ties between different Black populations—to ask the very questions that Guillén and the *minoristas* had long wanted their nation to pose to itself. To what extent were U.S. race relations enmeshed with Cuban ones? How had U.S. imperialism transformed Cuban race relations for the worse? To what extent were Afro-Cubans like U.S. Blacks? Did these populations share an inquietude and, if so, did they have common cause for the same or similar reasons? And for Cuban readers with anti-imperialist ambitions, how could the suggestion of an extra-national similarity or solidarity aid Cuban nationalism or help to foment a free, communist Cuba? Could Cuban nationalism be leveraged to ameliorate racial discrimination in Cuba? Lastly and perhaps more pointedly for contemporary critics who routinely fault or dismiss translations like Parsons’s for their erasure or creation of cultural difference, how could such scholarly models possibly account for a literary and political project such as his that depends on highlighting recognizable erasures of difference and the creation of incongruities to beg questions about common cause from the margins—questions too dangerous to pose explicitly? Don’t such models prove constitutively incapable of grappling with the very modalities of Black liberation on which Guillén and the *minoristas* depended to bring about a free Cuba through the translation of belles lettres? In other words, at what point does a curatorial respect for difference boo-

merang and become a fetish that actually stifles subaltern struggles for social justice and their study?

Fernández de Castro published “Escupideras de metal” under the heading “3 poemas de langston hughes (traducción especial por ivan parsons)” in the May 1930 issue of *Social*, Cuba’s premier organ for the dissemination of *avanzada* art and the journal most tightly controlled by former *minoristas*. The play that arises from Fernández de Castro’s comically “Russian” yet Western pseudonym is not limited to the collision it restages between Soviet attempts to create revolutionary poetics and Western modernism. Rather, the possibility of reading the subtitle as “a special translation by ivan parsons,” as a “particular,” “peculiar,” or “extraordinary translation by ivan parsons,” or even as “a typical translation for ivan parsons” provides a number of frames for a reading of “Escupideras de metal.” The header’s polyvalence thus serves as an apt symbol for a translator whose very practice was remarkably attuned to the three “violences” of translation as Venuti describes them (interpretive, material, and intertextual), and who routinely capitalized on these violences to advance a political agenda in the target zone. For example, the fact that “Ivan Parsons” was a name associated with the importation of Soviet poetry and politics into Cuba and that his translation of Mayakovsky’s “Chicago” would appear in the next issue of *Social* makes “Escupideras de metal” a special translation penned by a particular translator who recognized that his very name carried a discursive weight. This name could associate Hughes with either Soviet poetry or with the international cultural front of Third Period Communism more generally. Parsons is a translator who capitalized on the de-contextualization and re-contextualization inherent in any act of translation to work with an extant literary milieu that he and his fellow *minoristas* had been seeking to infuse with Russian cultural production and thought for quite some time.

Parsons’s “3 poemas” were also “special” because, in his Fernández de Castro guise, he promoted them as translations of Hughes’s “latest” poems written in “the dialect of Harlem—the black city.” The translations are nevertheless peculiar, though, because while Parsons does make extensive use of Afro-Cuban vernacular speech to infuse his poem’s speaker with working-class consciousness, Hughes’s “Brass Spittoons,” “Elevator Boy,” and “Porter” do not employ Black American dialect, nor did they represent Hughes’s most recent work. They appeared in *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, Hughes’s only volume that does not mention Harlem. The translation thus goes to extraordinary lengths to

tie Hughes's work to Guillén's *son* poems, which *Social* would augment with the publication of "Hay que tené boluntá" in its July issue, accompanied by a promotional piece on Guillén written by none other than Fernández de Castro. The journal's publication of Guillén's poem thus made Mayakovsky and Hughes the poet's predecessors. Insofar as Fernández de Castro's article painted Guillén as a "proud" and "ansioso" poet with a "sincere desire to express the soul of his race" and his *son* poems as revolutionary works that also reflected "the primitive sensuality of their author," it tied Guillén to the portrait of Hughes offered to the Cuban public in March by the "Presentación" piece and Guillén's "Conversación" interview.

The translation strategies and decisions that make "Escupideras de metal" a very different poem from "Brass Spittoons" include a number of ties and domesticating shifts that make it quite easy to pick apart as an affront to fidelity if one subscribes to an instrumental model of translation that is primarily concerned with loss. However, when one embraces a hermeneutic model, and begins to think about fidelity (as I have suggested above) not only as equivalence but also as faithfulness to a perceived underlying meaning, a shared cause, or a sanctified union, and concedes that equivalences can be located at the level of content or form and assessed in terms of different units (by word, by sentence, by stanza, or by a poem in its entirety), one sees that what makes this a "typical translation for ivan parsons" is Fernández de Castro's cannibalistic, "life-making" approach to the practice of translation itself. This approach points to a translator who was also the architect of a Black poetic chorus, and whose fidelity lay with the health of the Cuban body politic and, concomitantly, with what I label a "dialectical materialist" approach to translation.

The logic of dialectical materialism is more easily summarized than are the multitude of attempts to develop strategies, conventions, and theories that answered the Soviet call to apply a dialectical materialist method to literary production and criticism. Nevertheless, in order to explicate what I mean by a dialectical materialist approach to translation, it proves useful to (a) recall that both proletarian and de-peasanting works that placed folk or peasant literary forms in tension with proletarian content were considered applications of the dialectical materialist method, (b) briefly summarize what dialectical materialism means for the Marxist philosopher, and (c) offer an overview of five basic traits that are generally considered to be integral to proletarian literature and criticism.

For the Marxist dialectical materialist, all reality is material; all matter is objective, primary, and in motion; and all change is a result of conflict between opposing tendencies. Since matter is vitally possessed and because the psyche is initially blank, reality is fully knowable. The knowing subject, in turn, is compelled to act on matter so as to release its energy to aid either the process of production or the proletarianization of the subject and his fellow man. The subject is thus born into a world that determines him but is also capable of becoming a responsible “maker” of that world not because he can think in an autonomous way, but because the energy that he is capable of releasing can have an effect on social being which is responsible, more or less, for conditioning the subject. The author of proletarianizing folk poetry, for example, helped to change social being by bringing proletarian content into conflict with peasant literary forms, thereby releasing energy that aided the project of transforming the Russian revolutionary peasant into the ideal Soviet proletarian citizen. Proletarian literary works relied on a variety of devices to produce the tension necessary to effect revolutionary change in social being, but in the realm of poetry and in the genre of *skaz*, they most often relied on speakers whose very psyches reflect an internal battle. Hence, the worker/peasant sketches that Soviet critics valued most tended to present a portrait of a laborer and his labor that also reflects a stage in his progressive coming to proletarian consciousness. Although taxonomies differed, the proletarian literary work was also thought to generally encompass these traits: a purposeful attitude toward the outside world, the apotheosis of labor, the theme of metal and machines, and the spirit of collectivism. Additionally, all poetic works that were in harmony with the dialectical materialist method proclaimed authoritative by RAPP in 1928 necessitated an outside presence, either a critic or an additional speaker, who served to ground the speaker’s thoughts against the backdrop of his socioeconomic reality.

A dialectical materialist approach to translation would also entail a commentary function (while commenting differently) in both the target and source zones for bilingual readers, and would primarily call upon the translator not to reproduce a poem, but rather to translate it in a way that either preserves or infuses it with the tension needed to proletarianize readers in the target milieu. Contextualizing Parsons as a translator of this sort allows us to come to grips with the fidelity of a number of his translation decisions—decisions that reveal him to be a translator more concerned with tying Hughes’s work to that of Guillén and Pedroso than with finding Spanish-language equivalents for

Hughes's word choice. The translation decisions that tie Parsons's translation to Guillén's *Motivos de son* and to Pedroso's proletarian "social lyrics" could be said to embody, to tie together, and to function as part of the cultural front that Fernández de Castro created as a publisher, editor, and translator. We should thus approach Parsons's translation with an eye to how the ties and equivalences it forges perform the work of "life-making" in Cuba—by attending to how Parsons's translation creates additional dialectical tensions and releases new energy in the service of proletarianization, production, or both in the target zone.

Thus, I do not assess Ivan Parsons's "Escupideras de metal" in terms of its success in transmitting some ineffable qualities of blackness that I perceive in the original, and then impose my standards and multiple understandings of blackness and fidelity to assess their presence or absence in its translation. Rather, I will begin by examining Parsons's translation in a way that the reader might find counterintuitive. I will take it for what it is—an interpretation of Hughes's original—and ask why Parsons would make the translation decisions he did in "Escupideras" and how those decisions can illuminate the translator himself and the social milieu he inhabits. This will entail an interrogation of the individual creative processes of reading, writing, and rewriting that were part and parcel of Fernández de Castro's practice of translation. At the same time, it will entail an exploration that pays special heed to how these processes and practices were embedded in the evolving ideological and historical contexts that surrounded the translation's production. In the present case, this means excavating how Fernández de Castro conceived of translation, of equivalence, of blackness, and how these practices and constructs were informed by and made interventions into historical, cultural, and political arenas. But, to reiterate, the first step toward a fruitful reading of Parsons's work is less invested in scrutinizing how "Escupideras de metal" betrays Hughes's original, and far more invested in how it helps to reveal José Antonio Fernández de Castro, the workings of Black left internationalism, and the story of Hughes and Cuba.

Although José Antonio Fernández de Castro (1897–1951) penned the first Spanish-language translation of a Langston Hughes poem ("I, Too") in 1928, it was really a media blitzkrieg, an offensive move he launched in March 1930, which resulted in the translation deluge of Hughes's poetry in the Hispanic world that would continue unabated throughout the course of the poet's life, firmly entrenching him among the Latin American literary Left.²⁰ This translation blitzkrieg was not only comprised of the four translations that Fernández de Castro penned

under his legal name, the parsimonious translation of Carl Van Vechten's preface to *The Weary Blues* (1926) that comprises most of his "Presentación" article, and the partial translation of Hughes's "Proem" essay that provides the crux of Guillén's "Conversación" piece. On the contrary and to the point, Fernández de Castro continued the translation and dissemination of Hughes's poetry well past April 20, 1930, when Gustavo Urrutia published Guillén's *Motivos de son* in *Diario de la Marina*. Further tying Hughes to Guillén and both men to the revolutionary, Fernández de Castro's reprints of "Yo también," "Los blancos," and "Soledad: Retrata de una cubana" appeared in Urrutia's supplement ("Ideales de una raza") in its next weekly installment and were flanked, as were Guillén's *Motivos*, by a lengthy article written by Lino D'ou—a senator, war hero, mentor to Guillén, and an outspoken member of the Abakuá brotherhood. Fernández de Castro offered the Cuban public a glimpse of the poems Hughes supposedly categorized as his "sea" and modernist primitive poems when he published "Poema," "Calma del mar," "Nota de suicida," and "Miedo" in the August 1930 issue of *Revista de la Habana*. For that same issue, Fernández de Castro translated a chapter from Hughes's proletarian novel *Not Without Laughter*, "Oye, muchacho!" This issue also contained a portrait of Hughes by Karreño, the same artist who provided the geometric primitivist artwork that served as a backdrop for *Motivos de son*; Fernández de Castro's translation of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem "150,000,000"; and a scathing article that he wrote on Trotsky that he would later append to his essay "Poetry and Politics in the U.S.S.R." Fernández de Castro was also behind the Cuban printing of William Grant Still's musical setting of Hughes's poem "Breath of a Rose" (*Social*, October 1930), a song that Hughes privately complained was "so modern" that "nobody can sing it." Notwithstanding the fact that Fernández de Castro was one of Cuba's leading experts on the *tema negro* (Black thematic) in Cuban letters, the translation of a New Negro poet (and of any U.S. poet) constituted a departure for the translator who, at the ripe age of thirty-one, had already established his reputation as Havana's most prolific translator of Russian and Soviet authors and was credited with translating Babel, Pilnyak, Blok, and Mayakovsky, notwithstanding his extravagant use of pseudonyms (e.g., Juan Mambí, Half Deck, Patient No. 20, and Ivan Parsons). It was arguably his Soviet bona fides that were his most pronounced.

The nature and extent of Soviet literary influence on Cuban and New World poetics in the 1920s and '30s will always be remarkably

hard to ascertain, but it is nevertheless central to the project of coming to grips with the translation and dissemination of Hughes in Cuba. In Cuba, political oppression severely limited access to Soviet literary material prior to Batista's legalization of the Cuban Communist Party in the late 1930s. Furthermore, there was no single Soviet line for the production of revolutionary poetry until Stalin inaugurated the reign of Socialist Realism in 1932. There was, though, a growing Cuban take on the politics of Soviet poetics that Fernández de Castro had a large role in shaping as a translator, tireless publisher, and essayist. Published in 1927 and again in August 1930 as part of the blitzkrieg, Fernández de Castro's article "Poetry and Politics in the U.S.S.R." offers a window on the growing hunger that Cuban avant-garde print culture had for news of Soviet literary developments. The article speaks to the disinformation about the Soviet Union circulating in Cuba, and to the circuitous routes that reliable news had to take in translation and in communist and leftist publications via France (*Demain*), England (*The Guardian*), and the United States (*The Liberator* and *New Masses*) to reach the Cuban public. Most importantly, the article's republication in 1930 was part of an interrelated *minorista* publishing thrust that was designed to offer the Cuban public Soviet-inflected literary hermeneutics for the interpretation of Guillén's and Pedrosa's work, and of works by Mayakovsky and Hughes in Spanish-language translation. For example, a month before *Social* published Guillén's "Hay que tené boluntá," it reprinted an essay by none other than Carlos Marietegüi that slyly set forth criteria for reading Guillén's "popular folk" *son* poems by asserting that the Soviet interest in promoting Peruvian *indigenismo* was driven by a mindset that saw that literary movement as one akin to "mujiksta" (peasant) literature in czarist Russia and, in turn, one capable of aiding communist revolution in Latin America as it had in the Soviet Union. Even the very placement of Guillén and Hughes's work was assiduously bookended in print by essays about communism or by Soviet works. For example, Fernández de Castro's "Oyé, muchacho" ("Hey, Boy!"), a translation of a chapter from Hughes's *Not Without Laughter* (1930), appeared in the August issue of *Revista de la Habana* sandwiched between his "León Trotsky trata de autoexplicarse al mundo" ("Leon Trotsky Attempts to Explain Himself to the World"), which was offered as an appendix to "Poetry and Politics in the U.S.S.R.," and an article concerning communism in Spain. This framing so successfully wed the authors that by February 1931, Ramón Vasconcelos was privately praising Guillén as Cuba's own Mayakovsky (a designation formerly and generally re-

served for Pedroso), while other Cuban critics were starting to make curious mention of Mayakovsky's *jijantáfora* (poetic device using sounds that lack meaning whose function lies in phonic play).

In "Poetry and Politics in the U.S.S.R.," his longest essay about Soviet poetry during the New Economic Policy (NEP) period, Fernández de Castro begins with the telling assertion that the Cuban public had been grossly misled by conservative writers forced to flee the Soviet Union and by earlier radicals forced out of czarist Russia. In his view, these writers and radicals had successfully convinced the world that Soviet literature, from 1918 to 1922, had betrayed the masses and consisted of little more than a few pamphlets written by Lenin. Fernández de Castro then makes quick note of a number of "superior minds," like Max Eastman, John Reed, Guilbeaux, Fernando de los Ríos, and Waldo Frank, who in the pages of *avanzada* journals had finally brought the "truth" about Soviet art to the world. He proceeds to offer these truths, satirically framing them as English "watchwords" from *The Guardian*:

Ah! Lunacharsky is not a fanatical moron. The Bolsheviks are putting out the unpublished works of Dostoevsky. There is a Tolstoy museum. . . . Kropotkin isn't suffering harassment. Gorky publishes journals that have Continental charm on behalf of the proletarian state. Theatre is being tested in new directions. Cinematographers work and films get produced. . . . There are literary magazines in Siberia. Useful vocational academies . . . A general campaign against illiteracy underway. The army is a school. Children's education is integrated and equal. Women write. . . . Musical concerts are consistently offered even on the most dismal days. Lenin is not an ogre and has been seen walking with the incendiaries Gorky and Trotsky. The arts have not only remained intact, they have been enriched. . . .

In Germany, the leftist intellectuals rush to acquaint the public with the new Russian works and have begun to familiarize themselves with the poetry of Mayakovsky, of Yesenin . . . all the work of Blok . . . of Biedny—official poet of the Soviets—and his proletarian singer disciples—the "Serapion Brothers."

And every day uncovers a distinct insight that opens our eyes a little more. Along with Fedin, recently translated into Spanish—an Arosev, a Pilnyak, a Babel. . . . New names con-

tinue to sprout up, names whose works contain lessons—incomparable, useful and fertile—such that we, the Spanish American readers, should hasten to devour all that is going on in the USSR so that we never fall back into ignorance again.²¹

Fernández de Castro's numerous endorsements of and familiarity with Proletkult and RAPP are noteworthy, as is his mention of the Siberian literary journals, because all of these would have given him ample exposure to the most popular literary genre of the NEP—the sketch or *skaz*, a form that often lay at the crossroads of the debates between writers and critics invested in peasant and those invested in proletarian literature. Most importantly, his valorization of figures who held trenchant yet opposing viewpoints—for example, Lenin's insistence on foregrounding literacy placed him in harmony with Trotsky only insofar as both men shared the latter's dismissal of attempts to create a proletarian culture *ex nihilo*—speaks in concert with his call for Cubans to devour not a single camp but rather the whole of the revolutionary Soviet scene. Thus, Fernández de Castro's writings suggest a translator possessed by the “cannibalistic” spirit characteristic of his 1930s contemporaries Oswald de Andrade and Jorge Luis Borges and later celebrated in spirit and practice by Haroldo de Campos, Octavio Paz, and Carlos Fuentes.²² Lastly, his admonition to the Cuban public “not to fall back into ignorance” speaks to the motivation underlying his keen interest in the *ausencia* (absence) of the *tema negro* in Cuban belles lettres. In other words, Fernández de Castro's literary efforts were meant to fill a dual discursive lack in Cuban culture, and “Escupideras de metal” is best read accordingly.

According to Fernández de Castro, the *ausencia* of the *tema negro* reached its apex while the Cuban republic was under the boot of the Platt Amendment (1902–34). It was, moreover, an “ausencia” that could not be filled by either the “innumerable sonnets about Maceo” flooding the country or by the efforts of his fellow *minoristas* to counter Cuba's whitening politics by composing poems that were “transcriptions” of the banned oral *décimas* and *comparsas* (e.g., Felipe Pichardo Moya's “Comparsa”) or that offered a vision “of the negro from within” by drawing on the rhythms of rumba and the vernacular speech that originated with “los negros” in the cane fields and city slums (e.g., José Zacarías Tallet's “La rumba”). These efforts were laudable in Fernández de Castro's eyes, and were distinguished from earlier *negrista* efforts

like Poveda's "Grito de abuelo" because, in addition to capturing the rhythms of Afro-Cuban music, their use of the vernacular carried "the class consciousness of the worker of the Cuban fields." However, they still failed to fill the *ausencia* of the *tema negro* because their content did not speak to Cuba's most pressing political concerns. For example, Pichardo Moya's "Poema de los cañaverales," like Poveda's "Grito de abuelo," successfully captured the primitive animating spirit of Afro-Cuban music—its ability to allow the reader to experience a "regresión au nègre." But insofar as Poveda "trusted" to God the "defense of our rich agricultural wealth which is threatened by imperialist power," his poem suffered "from defects of argument" that were "very easy to point out."²³ By contrast, a poem like Nicolás Guillén's epigrammatic "Caña" ("Cane") could mobilize a Black population that was "already freed from corporeal servitude but still in the period of pre-organization" because the poem reflected an understanding that it was "precisely monoculture" which was the "origin of all the ills that Cubans are suffering from today" and because its *colono* speaker, who was aware of "yanqui" oppression, hinted that he would soon use his machete "in a very different way." Moreover, Guillén's employment of Black vernacular speech, Afro-Cuban rhythms, and "onomatopoeia that is not exclusively onomatopoeia" successfully incorporated the "vigorous and authentic musicality" that could "come from no other root than the African soul."

It is worth pausing for a moment to state that the primitivism which marks Fernández de Castro's assessment of Afro-Cuban music also extended to the realm of authentic poetry written by both Cuban and American Blacks. In his 1935 essay "Langston Hughes: Black Militant Poet," he characterized Hughes as "the quintessential" Black poet because, on the one hand, his work was primitivist—jovial, spontaneous, and endowed with a natural sense of rhythm—and on the other because it was engagé, the work of a Black radical spokesman for the proletariat. Fernández de Castro's remarks on the "quintessential" Black poet speak to his desire to transform blackness in Cuba from its associations with *el primitivo*, criminality, and the dreaded fears of "Africanization" and "Haitianization" into an identity that would convey proletarian and communist weight.

The comparison that Fernández de Castro makes between Guillén's "Caña" and Pichardo Moya's "Poema de los cañaverales" ("Poem of the Cane Fields") is also worth exploring a bit further because it reveals a translator who surveyed the Cuban poetic scene as would an informed

critic of the Soviet literary diaspora. The distinction Fernández de Castro makes between the “mimicry” of Pichardo Moya and the class awareness of Guillén points to a critic who, like his Soviet colleagues, eschewed peasant imitating in favor of de-peasanting works that infused the logic of dialectical materialism into Cuban poetry by placing peasant forms in tension with proletarian content. This factor put Guillén on a par with Cuba’s other revolutionary poet of note, Regino Pedroso, the unofficial cofounder of the *minoristas*, the poet whose “revolutionary stuff” Hughes would later write Claude McKay that he had spent the summer of 1930 translating, and the man whom Fernández de Castro had been promoting as Cuba’s only proletarian poet since 1927.

Despite Fernández de Castro’s criticism of many of their poetic endeavors, most *minoristas* shared his interest in revitalizing the *tema negro*, his valorization of vernacular art forms, and his leftist sympathies, and, as publishers and editors, they played key roles in Fernández de Castro’s translation blitzkrieg of Hughes. Recalling the group’s manifesto of 1927 provides the clearest account of their political orientation and provides a good frame for contextualizing Fernández de Castro’s interests in both Soviet poetics and the *tema negro*. The manifesto’s pointed calls for “the revision of false and empty values” and “for vernacular art and, in general, for new art in its diverse manifestations” are illustrative of this transparency. This new conception of value was to work in concert with these new art forms as a cultural front that could fulfill the other key tenets of the group’s manifesto; namely, a call for strident opposition to U.S. economic imperialism as chiefly manifested in its exploitation of Cuba’s sugar-rich provinces, and a commitment to the betterment of Cuban *colonos* or cane-field sharecroppers, who were mostly the descendants of former slaves.

It may also be recalled that *minorismo* was often conceived as part of the communist transformation of Cuba. Echoing Marx, Fernández de Castro saw Cuba as a colonial enterprise founded “on the shoulders of the enslaved black masses,” and the “fabulous richness” of Caribbean culture as the superstructure determined by this Black agricultural base. The mobilization of this population segment was thus a necessary element in the fomentation of Cuban communist revolution, and their erasure from Cuban belles lettres had to be recovered.

In one of the most intriguing passages in *Tema negro en las letras de Cuba* (1943), his book-length study of the Black thematic in Cuban letters, Fernández de Castro underscored his arguments about this historical and cultural erasure of Black participation in Cuba’s wars for

independence by contending that the failure to achieve independence in the Ten Years' War (1868–78) was not because Cuba's Black lumpenproletariat had been co-opted by Spanish colonial wealth. Rather, he contends that the white conspirators behind the war attempted to free Cuba's slaves, first and foremost, because they understood that no rebellion in Cuba could succeed without the support of the Black *mambí*, or rebels. Their promise of abolition succeeded in transforming Cuba's slave population into committed revolutionaries and helped to produce a generation of pro-independence Cubans, including José Martí and the Maceo brothers. But the rebellion's racial egalitarianism proved to be its downfall. Long-standing ties between a Cuban gentry threatened by the *mambí* and the landed oligarchy in the American South (in defeat after the Civil War) found a common base. And that base, according to Fernández de Castro, was "the unjust and eternal exploitation of the Black masses who existed for the sole use of white hands." With U.S. assistance the Ten Years' War was put down, the white gentry were kept in power, and the presence and central importance of the Black *mambí* was erased from (or forbidden entry) into Cuban belles lettres and public discourse.

The association that Fernández de Castro draws between the absence of racial themes in the arts and the success of white internationalist empire, and, in contrast, an abundance of such themes with Cuban independence provides, in microcosm, the backbone of his argument, and helps to explain his efforts and those of other former *minoristas* to promote the *tema negro* in Cuban art and culture. It contextualizes the impact of Guillén's *Motivos de son*, the significance of the debate over that work's alleged foreign influences, and the impetus for translating Hughes into Spanish. It also calls to mind the distinction that Venuti makes between good translations filling a discursive lack and bad translations adding to discursive plenitude in the target milieu. Perhaps most importantly, it positions race as a powerful force in a transnational space marked by transactions whose political and economic importance could not entail greater stakes.

In stark contrast to the narrative trajectory of "Brass Spittoons" but consistent with his agenda to recover race, Parsons's translation offers the reader a *ñáñigo* (member of the Abakuá brotherhood) poetic speaker whose short exposition of his labor concludes when he scoffs at the idea that Christianity can provide a rationale for his menial labor. The small step toward class awareness that constitutes the poem's arc mirrors the ideal worker's sketch and falls within the Soviet template of a literary

work that is simultaneously imbued with proletarian and peasant revolutionary potential. Insofar as this step is brought about via conversation with an outside grounding presence, the poem can also be said to reflect the dictates of the dialectical materialist creative method proclaimed authoritative by RAPP in 1928. The most salient transgressive translation decision that exemplifies Parsons's agenda to wed authentic Cuban blackness to proletarianism is his choice of the Afro-Cuban slang "¡Yey! familia" ("Hey, buddy" or "Oh, brother!") to translate Hughes's "Hey, boy!" Each time the speaker breaks the lyrical frame to repeat this phrase, he seeks and gains silent affirmation from a fellow member of the Black lumpenproletariat. By thus conforming to the dictates of the dialectical creative method, "Escupideras de metal" recovers the much-maligned figure of the *ñáñigo* and the Abakuá brotherhood by figuring the speaker and his addressee as fed-up workers rather than as primitive witches and criminals. But the translation entails more than just a recovery of the figure of the *ñáñigo* and the Afro-Cuban religious societies that were the traditional foci of Black collectivity in Cuba. Rather, the Abakuá brotherhood becomes a force for the proletarianization of Afro-Cubans. At the very same time, the translation's strategic deployment of *ñáñigo* words gives "Escupideras de metal" a musicality that calls to mind the choral refrains of the banned *comparsas* and *décimas* that accompanied the processions of Afro-Cuban religious societies, and the *negrista* use of "African" words or phonetic clusters as faux-*estribillos* in their poems. These decisions, which help to make "Escupideras de metal" a seemingly more faithful representation of the lives and living conditions of Afro-Cuban laborers, also serve to advance Parsons's agenda to wed Hughes to Guillén and thereby to recover blackness by wedding primitivism to proletarianism:

Con eso hay que comprar zapatos a los hijos
 guardar "pa" el alquiler de cuarto
 pa la "juma" los sábados y el sermón del domingo
 Dios Mío!
 Los hijos, y la "juma," el sermón, la mujer y el domingo
 Todo eso mezclado con reales y pesos y escupidera limpias.
 Y el alquiler del cuarto.
 ¡Yey! familia²⁴

Buys shoes for the baby.
 House rent to pay.

Gin on Saturday,
 Church on Sunday.
 My God!
 Babies and gin and church
 and women and Sunday
 all mixed up with dimes and
 dollars and clean spittoons
 and house rent to pay.
 Hey, boy! (21–31)²⁵

Reclaiming the authentic Black, Parsons's translation works to infuse the passage with details that associate the speaker with the Black lumpen and that rehabilitate blackness from *el primitivo* in its Cuban incarnation. For example, his decisions to translate "house rent" as "el alquiler del cuarto" (the rent for the room) and "the baby" as "los hijos" (the children) further serve to authenticate the translation's speaker as a member of the Afro-Cuban lumpen, a population largely confined to city slums that seldom allowed for "nuclear family" living. Insofar as gin was not a normal part of Afro-Cuban life in the 1930s, but *juma* (a type of liquor, a state of drunkenness, or simply foodstuff) remains a stock feature of *rumbas sábados* to this day, Parsons's decision to translate "gin" using the *ñáñigo* word "juma" performs a similar authenticating function. In a similar vein is his insertion of "pa," a common substitution for "para" in Afro-Cuban speech. Parsons's choice of the *ñáñigo* word "juma" thus works in conjunction with his decision to collapse Hughes's lines "Gin on Saturday / Church on Sunday" into a single line and his insertion of the line "Dios mío" to beg a rethinking of the propaganda that maligned the Abakuá brotherhood for its supposed religious shortcomings. His rendering of the aforementioned lines as "pa la 'juma' los sábados y el sermón del domingo" puts the expenditures associated with drunkenness and those associated with "el sermón" on an equal footing as commodities, but the poem's overall dismissal of Christianity serves to privilege "juma" over a largely desacralized "sermón." The decision to conjoin the two lines also throws the referent of the common Spanish-language colloquialism "Dios mío!" (My God!) into jeopardy, causing a provocative confusion. The speaker might be referring to Abasí (supreme deity in the Abakuá pantheon) or Jehovah, but most readers would read the phrase as a colloquialism. Nonetheless, Parsons offers the reader a speaker who is both a member of the Abakuá brotherhood and an acculturated Cuban, implicitly

refuting the rationale behind the Cuban and Spanish persecution of the brotherhood as a primitive cult. Because Fernando Ortiz's anthropological investigations of *la raza negra* were largely confined to studies of the Abakuá brotherhood, its practices, its legacy, and the figure of the *ñáñigo*, the term “juma” helps to weave its speaker, Hughes's persona (via paratext), and the Abakuá brotherhood together in a figure that again refashions the incarnation of authentic Cuban blackness as both primitive and proletarian. This dual resonance is achieved because *juma* is both a drink and a state of drunkenness and because the word itself is, for Carlos Moore, “strictly *ñáñigo*-talk,” spoken by lodge members and perhaps by “slummers” or by “people who may have worked beside them as stevedores and at hard jobs like that.”²⁶ For this reason, the very term “el sermón” could be read as code for an illegal, yet routine Abakuá lodge meeting or for any gathering of an Afro-Cuban religious society. This act of coding, moreover, serves to authenticate the speaker as an Afro-Cuban attuned to the dangers of speaking too openly of entities like Abakuá in Cuba. Insofar as Parsons's decision to place the word “juma” in quotation marks suggests a speaker appropriating words from the brotherhood, it complicates matters in much the same way as Moore's revealing hedging of “strictly” does, allowing for readings of the translation wherein either the speaker or his addressee could conceivably be an Afro-Cuban outside the brotherhood, a white member of the lumpen, or even for a reading which suggests that Parsons felt it necessary, as a translator, to distance himself from association with the use of *kaló*, a Cuban Black vernacular that often appropriated words from the Abakuá brotherhood's secret and outlawed language.²⁷ Hence, at the very moment when the poem's speaker seems to authenticate himself as a member of the Abakuá brotherhood, Parsons's use of quotation marks calls this assumption into question. In other words, “Escupideras de metal” proves quite attuned to the coding of U.S. Black vernacular speech—to the manner in which subaltern and slave populations routinely infused the languages forced upon them with coded resistance.

These very decisions produce seven lines whose rhyming musicality stems, in part, from the deployment of Afro-Cuban dialect, which affords an accumulation of short “a” and “o” vowel sounds (“con eso hay comprar zapatos a los hijos / Pa el alquiler del cuarto / pa la ‘juma’ los sábados”), and from Parsons's decision to combine Hughes's lines and insert the common Spanish-language colloquialism “Dios mío,” which allows for an accumulation of “el” and “ē-ō” vowel sounds (“y el sermón del domingo / Dios mío”). The singsong quality of this section

of the poem thus depends on a Cuban creole that is also at work in its metrics. These metrics likewise depend on the deployment of Afro-Cuban slang to produce a line that evokes the use of traditional yet popular Spanish octosyllabic meter, and on the use of the Spanish colloquialism “Dios mío” to call to mind the choral refrains recited in Cuban Spanish and punctuated by the use of *kaló* in the *décimas* chanted by the Abakuá brotherhood, as well as in *estribillos* in *negrista* poetics and in Guillén’s *son poemas*. Consistent with Fernández de Castro’s praise of Guillén’s “Caña,” though, the musicality of “Escupideras de metal” and its use of the Afro-Cuban vernacular does not indulge in the apolitical “white mimicry” of a Poveda or a Pichardo Moya. Rather, the poem offers a speaker whose use of Afro-Cuban vernacular reveals him to be freed from corporeal servitude but still in the period of pre-organization, making “Escupideras de metal” a de-peasanting poem as much as it is a worker’s sketch in verse.

These very decisions produce seven lines whose rhyming musicality also stems from the deployment of phrases like “con eso” (with this) that offer a speaker who draws our attention to his penury with the exactitude of a laborer frustrated by a chronic state of overwork and underemployment. The fact that Parsons’s speaker is forced to stretch a “con eso,” comprised of “reales” and “pesos,” to both “gardar pa” the rent and to pay “pa” the litany of expenses he outlines, helps us to decode his “¡Yey! familia” as an in-group protest—to read the refrain as an “Oh brother!” (from one brother to another) meant to stress, in its poetic accumulation, mounting disquiet with a shared socioeconomic predicament. These protestations, in turn, point the reader to a colloquial reading of Parsons’s final line, “¡Vamos, chico!” which translates the preceding Afro-Cuban slang and punctuates the short step in the speaker’s coming to proletarian consciousness—to a reading of it as: “Gimme a break, man!” or “C’mon, man!” Yet these back-translations lose the collectivizing force gained by Parsons’s decision to employ the first-person plural “vamos” (let’s go), a decision serving to make the voice arguably more inclusive and certainly more exhortative than “C’mon, man!” or Hughes’s “Come ’ere, boy!”

Parsons’s additions offer the reader a window onto a speaker whose thought process culminates in a small step toward class consciousness. This is crucial to understand not only because this portrayal conforms to the “core of the ideal worker’s sketch” but also because the Soviet ideal of portraying “the living man” calls upon the proletarian writer to “probe his psychology, lay bare the conflicts and contradictions which

take place in him, and understand these contradictions as part of a dialectical process of development.”²⁸ The “living man” slogan, then, represented the dialectical aspect of the Soviets’ dialectical materialist method, and the behavior and thought processes of the living man comprised the core of the ideal sketch.²⁹ Moreover, the poetic portrayal of the “living man” in Cuba had been one of the central preoccupations of Pedroso’s proletarian verse, and could be said to reveal that Parsons’s translation is an attempt to fill the double-discursive lack or absence outlined above. The poem thus places one form of revolutionary writing in tension with another—and harkens to Fernández de Castro’s calls to both devour Soviet poetics whole and put an end to the “absence” of the *tema negro* by creating a poem that answers to both of these vacancies. This creolization allows the poem to stage its own formal dialectic, making Hughes’s poem, in translation, both a sublation of Soviet-inflected Cuban poetics and the very material required to construct a Black communist chorus, one resounding with the voices of Hughes, Pedroso, and Guillén, for Cuban readers.

We thus can credit Parsons with being a dialectical materialist translator not only because of the tension he creates and resolves between these two dominant genres of revolutionary poetry but also because of the life-making that this tension allows “Escupideras de metal” to perform.

Though practical agendas brought Hughes and Fernández de Castro together, their evolving common cause strengthened their relationship and engendered significant camaraderie between them:

By God! Langston, that’s a damn good joke you played on us—You made me get up at 4:30 A.M. and stay on foot for four full hours, waiting and waiting. God bless you ‘spittoon boy—The reason why Urrutia did not go with us, is that he was sick . . . Our friend the Cuban Langston Hughes—you know I mean Guillén—did not care to go with us, alleging that he did not understand English. . . . I am mighty glad you have been translated into Russian. Maybe someday I will accomplish that honor too.³⁰

What’s in a joke? Here, just about everything. Fernández de Castro’s letter of February 2, 1931, speaks to a friendship with Hughes suffused with pranks both literary and personal—to two men accustomed to using translation to put one over on the world with the help of a Nicolás

Guillén who, in all of his “alleging,” proves to be one of their trickster ilk. Moreover, the letter implicitly suggests that these pranks were part of a shared and active engagement with literary developments in the Soviet Union, including a common interest in producing translatable works that could participate in the revolutionary cauldron of Soviet literary experimentation and in the developing worldwide system of proletarian literature. In fact, the “damn good joke” in question was not a joke at all, but rather a confusion that arose after Hughes gave Fernández de Castro the wrong date for Walter White’s arrival in Havana, causing him to wait four hours for a Black man who never disembarked from the *Duchess of Bedford*. The letter might also speak to the great difference between the struggle for Black liberation in the United States and the anti-imperialist struggles of republican Cuba, as well as to a difficulty in translating racial and vernacular lexicons across Cuban and U.S. borders.

In both cases (and recalling the Comintern’s “black belt thesis”), we find that the collectivization of Blacks in the United States and the nationalization of blackness in Cuba both served the interests of Sovietization.³¹ In this light, Fernández de Castro’s approbation “God bless you ‘spittoon [*sic*] boy” might be (mis)taken for a rather awful racial gaffe illustrative of a cultural gulf between the two men. However, when we consider the appellation in light of the fact that “‘spittoon boy” is one of several ways to read the opening line of “Escupideras de metal,” this ostensible gaffe actually suggests the existence of a prior correspondence wherein Hughes inquired meticulously about Parsons’s translation of one of his favorite poems. Hughes could not have been expected to identify Fernández de Castro’s phrasing as a joke were he not acquainted with the multiplicity of potential readings that arise when “Clean the spittoons, boy” is translated with a *faux ami* as “chico, limpia escupideras,” which is its lexical, but not semantic, equivalent. Despite the fact that a bilingual dictionary such as Google Translate would render “boy” as *chico*, the latter word is much harder to associate with white supremacy in Cuba than is the interpellation “boy” for a U.S. audience. And while *chico* can be read as a put-down of sorts, it more easily—given Parsons’s syntactical inversion—carries the weight of an endearment, a scolding, or even a plea if an additional emphasis was placed on the Spanish-language “i” (as “cheeco”). It is only the context of Parsons’s poem and its repeated deployment of the in-group, collectivizing phrase “¡Yey! familia”—an Afro-Cubanism whose meaning escapes many native speakers of Spanish—that allows for the most

plausible reading of the first line as either a fraternal hail or the mimicking of a beckoning hotel patron; that is, a phrase which can be read as something akin to “You! Spittoon boy!” or, more simply, as “spittoon boy.” In this sense, “spittoon boy” is perhaps best read as part of the playful back-and-forth that permeates the entire letter and as part of the life-making aftermath of Parsons’s translations. Fernández de Castro acknowledges that Hughes may have played a “damn good joke,” but he reminds Hughes that he is a trickster of equal talent whose translations and literary efforts are responsible for offering Hughes the “spittoon boy,” the *ñáñigo* poet, and the idea of a “Cuban Langston Hughes”—“you know I mean Guillén”—to the Cuban reading public.

When considered in light of Fernández de Castro’s June 4 letter, which indicates that Hughes had both Parsons’s May translations and Fernández de Castro’s April advertisement of them, the phrase “spittoon boy” strongly suggests that Hughes was not simply familiar, but in league with Fernández de Castro’s project—that Hughes understood why Parsons was the best man for the job and why “Brass Spittoons” had to undergo the transformations enumerated above to be a part of that project. With all of this in mind and recalling both Cary Nelson’s core contention about the choral nature of proletarian poetry and my own about the commentary function of dialectical materialist translation, I would contend that the greatest proof of Hughes’s awareness of Fernández de Castro’s project lies in his continuation of (or in his contributions to) it.

Published in the *New York Herald Tribune* on November 23, 1930, and again, in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro* (1934), “Florida Road Workers” is one such contribution and one of the earliest artifacts that illuminates how translation affected Langston Hughes’s creative process and artistic production in the summer, fall, and winter of 1930.³² It was also one of the first poems that Hughes published as a contributing editor to Mike Gold’s *New Masses*, the sole American organ dedicated to the dissemination of proletarian literature and culture. For our purposes, “Florida Road Workers” is one of the first original poems that Hughes contributed to the Black left poetic chorus that he, Guillén, Fernández de Castro, and Pedroso forged as poets, translators, and poet-translators. This Black left poetic chorus was by no means ephemeral, and with the addition of Hughes’s translations of Jacques Roumain’s poetry and the spectacular successes of Sterling Brown’s vernacular verse, it comprised the core of a Black left internationalist poetics for publishers, poets, and critics ranging from Nancy Cunard to Léon-Gontran Damas and Martha Cobb.

Accordingly, I will argue here that Hughes's "Florida Road Workers" is fruitfully read as a choral response to "Escupideras de metal": as a poem engaged in complementary conversation (in a dialectic) with Parsons's translation and its commentary function. This is not to suggest that Hughes took all of the commentaries raised by Parsons's translation to heart and then simply wrote a poem that was more in line with the conventions of proletarian realist poetry, or the worker's sketch, or de-peasanting literature, although there is some truth in this. Nor is it to argue that "Florida Road Workers" was simply inspired by "Escupideras de metal." Rather, it is to begin by noting that "Escupideras de metal" has more in common with "Florida Road Workers" than it does with "Brass Spittoons," and then to contextualize and interrogate this commonality as the dialectical outgrowth of a poem and its translation.

"Florida Road Workers" is evidence of Hughes *speaking back* to his own voice in translation in order to help stir to action the cultural wing of a Black left internationalist body politic and Third Period Communism. With regard to the perennial question of cultural difference and translation, the idea that "Florida Road Workers" is *speaking back* to both Parsons's translation and its commentary function is of the utmost importance because it speaks to a poet translator who, like Parsons, was building on the very violences of translation (on difference and *différence*) to "life-make."³³ Most importantly, and insofar as the poem's dual response can be said to reveal the workings of the transnational Black communist chorus in focus, "Florida Road Workers" is unmasked as an artifact produced by and for a transnational network or cultural front. This cultural front was just as regulated by calculated responses to differences raised in translation as it was attuned to the plethora of commonalities that were its impetus and which found creative articulation in the creole and common ground of its cultural production. In this sense, our discussions of the differences between translation and original, and between target and source zones, can be freed from the discourse of loss and the fetishization of inviolate and incompatible cultural difference that haunts contemporary translation studies, and we can allow ourselves to examine these differences for what they were designed to be—sites and sources of exorbitant and expanding poetic and political gain.

I'm makin' a road
 For the cars
 To fly by on.

Makin' a road
 Through the palmetto thicket
 For light and civilization
 To travel on.
 Makin' a road
 For the rich old white men
 To sweep over in their big cars
 And leave me standin' here.

Sure,
 A road helps all of us!
 White folks ride—
 And I get to see 'em ride.
 I ain't never seen nobody
 Ride so fine before.

Hey, buddy!
 Look at me!
 I'm makin' a road!³⁴

To explicate how the commentaries offered by Parsons's translation of "Brass Spittoons" informed the composition of "Florida Road Workers," it is helpful to compare the complacency of the speaker beguiled by religion in "Brass Spittoons" with the vocal discontent of the speaker in "Escupideras de metal" who is aware of his racial and economic exploitation, and to recognize that this awareness finds choral expression in the speaker's class awareness displayed in "Florida Road Workers." Fernández de Castro's translation suggests that Hughes goes astray in "Brass Spittoons" when he depicts the Black masses as dupes. Rather, as "Escupideras de metal" and, in turn, "Florida Road Workers" seem to suggest, the Black working classes are more productively portrayed as fed up, as ripe for organization, or as class-aware—as members of the populace ripe for radicalization. Whereas the speaker of "Brass Spittoons" might be said to mask a discontent that is to be decoded by the reader, or simply to accept his lot in a way that makes the reader critical of religion, the discontent of the speakers of "Escupideras de metal" and "Florida Road Workers" is on open display: the speakers themselves are awakened. This bears emphasis, for if there are distinctive aspects to Hughes's 1930s radical poetics, then the high level of political awareness of the poems' speakers is chief among them. "Brass Spittoons," or Hughes's blues poems, for that matter, could be considered leftist, but

what makes the radical poetry stand apart from the work that Hughes did not label “political” is the fact that the speakers themselves are endowed with Marxist consciousnesses.

Secondly, Hughes’s collectivizing hail “Hey, buddy!” which is notably how Carlos Moore translates “¡Yey! familia,” transforms the interchanges between the spittoon boy and his summoning superiors, “Hey, boy!” into an exchange between fellow Black workers. Because it allows the hail to be read as a call to the reader, the poem becomes more proletarian insofar as it becomes more collectivizing, furthering the proletarianization accomplished by making the speaker of “Florida Road Workers” more aware of the unfairness of his economic circumstances. The conceit of the poem, then, mirrors that of proletarian literature more generally—a poem addressed from one worker to another. The poem is less a matter of portraying exploitation, as in “Brass Spittoons,” than it is of portraying a shareable disquiet about this exploitation, as in “Escupideras de metal.” The sarcasm that seems to drip from the final stanza also reinforces the sarcasm that frames the speaker’s ability to see through the imperial promises of “light and civilization” and the rhetoric of white supremacy, and instead points to a speaker who might be outside the fold of civilized society but is very familiar with the exploitation on which it depends.

Although Hughes does not use “Hey, buddy!” as a choral refrain, as does Parsons’s “¡Yey! Familia,” the latter’s revolutionary creole does find a counterpart in Hughes’s work song-like repetition which serves as a kind of folk leitmotif in “Florida Road Workers.” Hence, Hughes seems to answer to the commentary raised by “Escupideras de metal,” in what might be considered a transitional radical poem, by combining a proletarianizing message with the suggestion of Afro-folk (and labor) form. The fact that “I’m makin’ a road” becomes increasingly ironic over the course of the poem only serves to underscore the extent to which the speaker is clearly aware that this road is of no benefit to him. The very symbol of a road worker, a figure who, at the end of his particular road, constructs and yet never gets to enjoy the fruits of his labor, is an apt metaphor for an exploited proletariat more generally. When it is recalled that road work in the South was often done by convict labor, this last point is amplified.

However, akin to the way that Parsons uses *ñáñigo* words to punctuate his speaker’s proletarian awakening, the lines in “Florida Road Workers” most marked by Black speech, or better said by Black discursivity, correspond to the point where the speaker is at his highest state of class awareness: “Sure, / A road helps all of us! / White folks ride— /

And I get to see 'em ride. / I ain't never seen nobody / Ride so fine before." But therein lies the rub. Hughes's use of the triple negative reads more as a minstrel performance of Black inferiority than it does as an authentic rendering of Black vernacular speech. It is a performance of masking for a fellow road worker that positions an awareness of the false promise of empire as insider-knowledge for the exploited Black whose ability to code resistance speaks to a shared disquiet, and to a collectivizing modality for voicing it, that depends on the instability of Black speech to function.

"Florida Road Workers," though, does not take all of Ivan Parsons's commentaries to heart. "Escupideras de metal" could also be said to influence "Florida Road Workers" in the way the latter pushes back against the changes that occur in the former. To explicate, it is helpful to recall the differences that arise when we compare the series of pluralizations that authenticate Parsons's speaker as a member of the Black lumpen with the dialectic that Hughes's poem stages to achieve similar purposes. If we then treat Parsons's seemingly transgressive translation decisions as both successful attempts to compensate for the difficulty of translating the U.S. racial weight of the term "boy" and as a commentary on how Hughes's poem racializes its speaker, a pointed critique emerges. For readers like Hughes or Fernández de Castro who were attuned to the nuances of each composition and familiar with the fact that a collectivizing tendentiousness and an apotheosis of labor were generally thought to be among the central features of proletarian poetry, Parsons's pluralizations offer a critique of Hughes's rendering of the literary Black authentic. This critique suggests that blackness might be more productively portrayed and authenticated, for the purposes of Black labor collectivization, by referring to a shared condition of chronic underemployment rather than by foregrounding the interracial tensions in "Brass Spittoons" that serve to facilitate global race capitalism. The critique, in turn, helps to illuminate why Hughes chose to racialize the speaker of "Florida Road Workers" the way he did. Hughes, insistent on portraying the intersectionality at the heart of global race capitalism, chooses to characterize his exploiters as white and old, where old also suggests outmoded, or pertaining to a waning era.

The work done by Hughes's marked Black speech differs from Parsons's and speaks back in chorus with the latter's citational use of Afro-Cuban words to offer two interrelated and pointed commentaries that help us to better understand the artistic impulses and political rationales that led Hughes to compose "Florida Road Workers" as he did. The

first of these commentaries *signifies* on Fernández de Castro's paratextual positioning of Hughes's work as written in the "dialect of Harlem" by suggesting that translators should pay more attention to how Black people make language serve them in the face of white supremacy, rather than regarding Black dialect as a *sine qua non* of Black authenticity. In turn, the second of these commentaries intimates that Parsons's employment of caustic sarcasm to translate the speaker's masking in "Brass Spittoons" overlooks the points of overlap between the literary Black authentic and Black discursivity: that to translate the meaning behind the mask—the coded message rather than the coding mechanism—is to undermine the linguistic elusiveness on which Black resistance typically depends. These commentaries help explain why Hughes chose to layer "Florida Road Workers" with multiple levels of irony (some of which depend on a familiarity with Black American discursive traditions); namely, to force his readers and translators alike to grapple with the complexities of Black literary and vernacular speech. In other words, by weaving the complexities of Black discursivity into a poem that depends, more or less, on overt sarcasm and irony to make its central point, "Florida Road Workers" begs its translator to examine how Black discursivity works differently from other types of poetic, ironic, or indirect speech. In this sense and for the bilingual reader, "Florida Road Workers" can be understood as a poem that contributes to an "emerging revolutionary consensus." It is a poem that speaks in conversation with "Brass Spittoons," "Escupideras de metal," and with Parsons's translational commentaries; and is a poem that is itself the dialectical outgrowth of Hughes confronting his own voice in translation, a poem composed with both past and future translations in mind.

The argument that "Florida Road Workers" is a work composed with an eye to its choral reception for an international audience increasingly attuned to the conventions of proletarian (or de-peasanting) literature might seem at odds with a reading of the poem that depends on a knowledge of U.S. Black discursivity to perform its collectivizing and revolutionary work. Why would a poem with international ambitions make itself so reliant on local linguistic knowledge? This paradox is resolved by recalling that, for Hughes, the origins of Negro protest in the Americas were in the "guise of entertainment" provided by slaves' coded work songs. We thus approach "Florida Road Workers" as a work song that not only works and codes accordingly, but which also strives to provide extant modes of Black discursivity with new de-peasanting codes (and coding mechanisms) of resistance. Just as

much as Hughes's poem asks its international audience to come to grips with how U.S. Black discursivity might productively infuse the emergent world tapestry of proletarian literature with new poetic weapons, "Florida Road Workers" can be said to recover and proletarianize the specter and spectacle of Black inferiority. It does so in a manner that relies on local linguistic knowledge and domestic conventions to infuse the tapestry of U.S. representations of Black culture with new brands of proletarian aesthetics and coded resistance that could speak globally. The way that "Florida Road Workers" racializes and recovers its speaker by speaking with and speaking back to "Escupideras de metal" thus proves emblematic of the many ways that Hughes builds on Parsons's translation and the commentaries raised by it in a dialectical fashion to produce a poem that is most fruitfully viewed as their complement— aesthetically, thematically, and geopolitically.

The way "Florida Road Workers" complements the work performed by Parsons's "Escupideras de metal" reveals how the genesis of Hughes's radical period was informed by his adept interpretations of his poems in translation as relatively autonomous works (in Venuti's sense of the term). He saw his poems as works whose meaning is not self-contained, but rather shaped by the unique literary intertextuality and cultural diversity of the target zone and by his participation in a dialectical choral conversation. This conversation depended on manipulating Soviet-inflected poetics and the violences of translation, willed and inherent, to recover the Black lumpen as a revolutionary collective in both the target and source zones. On the one hand, the fact that Parsons's *ñáñigo* speaker offers the reader a work history that he limits, in name, to U.S. metropolitan geographies but which also includes "todos los hoteles" produces a dissonance in translation that begs the reader to make comparisons between the different lots of the metropolitan Black lumpen in the United States and in Cuba, and asks the reader to come to grips with the extent to which these two labor pools were interconnected.

For its part and building chorally and reciprocally on the relative autonomy of "Brass Spittoons" in Cuban translation, Hughes's "Florida Road Workers" responds to the Black internationalist implications of Parsons's translation by asking the question: What does the exploitation of Cuban Blacks by the Cuban tourist industry mean for Blacks in the United States? Florida introduced chain gangs in 1919 ostensibly to build roads for the growing tourist industries in Miami and the Florida Keys, but also, of course, to aid U.S. interests in Havana by providing better distribution routes for the legal and illegal importation and exportation

of sugar, molasses, and alcohol from Cuba and the export of manufactured goods and arms to that country. The poem's title, "Florida Road Workers," thus locates the speaker as a member of a labor collective that, on the one hand, is quite literally carrying out the work of global race capitalism, and on the other, is serving the interests of a transnational black market, making it an apt symbol for the Black lumpen more generally—for workers on the perpetual move whose Sisyphean labor is both the precondition for a corrupt civilization and the very bar that keeps them from ever enjoying its fruits. Thus, these poems have in common a local manipulation of international generic expectations for revolutionary literature that positions the exploitation of the Black lumpen as either the prerequisite or as part and parcel of global race capitalism.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence supporting my contention that a dialectical conversation existed between Hughes's poems and Fernández de Castro's translations of them lies in the latter's conception of the *choral* form as itself the ideal translation:

Over the last few years, the issue of poetic translation has greatly improved . . . I refer you, in the first instance, to a forceful poem written by the Mexican Poet Maples Arce. . . . The poem in question is titled "Urbe" in Spanish and "Metropolis" in English, and it was translated by none other than the young and great Yankee writer John Dos Passos . . . People who know the original can assure the reader that there is no difference between the two versions. It could even be said that one complements the other.³⁵

As his essay "Hispano Americanos actuales traducidos al inglés" ("Contemporary Hispanic American Poets Translated into English"), which appeared in *Revista de la Habana* in late 1930, corroborates, Fernández de Castro saw translation, and the textual conversations it engenders, as a means of cultural exchange that also encouraged complementary and revolutionary relationships.

Fernández de Castro supported his paradoxical claim that "no difference" can exist between the ideal translation and its original, and that nevertheless one "complements" the other, by debuting Guillén's "Mujer negra" in *choral* print alongside a supposed reproduction of "Black Woman," Hughes's translation of it. However, the "exactitude" that Fernández de Castro assigns to Hughes's translation is visually undermined by Hughes's additional line breaks as the two versions are placed

side by side on the page. Fernández de Castro then builds on his claim by asserting that the breakthrough of Cuba's young Black writers owed its success to Hughes's "exactitude and love," and to a distinctly Cuban *personalidad* that now could be found in *yanqui* presses. To unravel the paradox, Fernández de Castro not only believed that faithful translation was inherently transformational, but that the changes a text undergoes in translation create dialectical conversations that shed comparative light on both source zones and target zones, illuminating common, yet different, ground that proved faithful to poetry and politics.

The poets of Latin America had both a message to broadcast and a mission to carry out, and the translators who provided their introduction would prove, in complementary fashion, to be a means of support for the Latin American poets' new audience, the English-reading *público yanqui*, as well as a buoy to Cuban nationalism and Third Period Communism. It would seem, as Fernández de Castro wryly concludes, that Cuba was now capable of exporting something more than "materias primas" (raw materials).³⁶

Despite the praise for Hughes it contained, Fernández de Castro's brief essay, seen in the light of his letters to Hughes which repeatedly forefront the notion of a Hughes-inspired Cuba, represents an about-face in some senses. Hughes's role in Cuba's struggle against imperialism, as played between the covers of *Revista de la Habana*, grows out of his ability to invigorate the *tema negro* in Cuba, to be influenced by it, and, in turn, to invigorate the *público yanqui*.³⁷ He is to serve as a conduit and as a source of support for the "verdaderos poetas" (true poets) of Latin America and, simultaneously, for an English-reading community yet to be invigorated by the infusion of new, highly crafted Cuban exports.

Fernández de Castro's about-face, though, reveals him to be much more than the personification of the Italian maxim *traduttore: traditore* (translator: traitor) when seen in light of his remarks that view the ideal translation as one which both complements and is complemented by the original. Rather, he was a translator whose conception of fidelity allowed for multiple allegiances, a translator possessed by a confidence in the *personalidad* of Cuba's Black poets and by a faith in translation's capacity to broadcast the original in a frequency free from static, a process that, at the same time, necessitated a transformation that also altered the original forever. One might even go so far as to say that, for Fernández de Castro, it was translations that gave birth to originals and which made them an integral part of national literature by positioning them as such on a world stage.

Talk about Mothers

Translating the Modernist Folk

During the thirteen months between Langston Hughes's departure from Cuba on March 7, 1930, and his return to the island on April 7, 1931, important relationships and financial support came to an abrupt halt or died a slow death, and his production of blues verse and engagement with primitivism temporarily ended. Nevertheless, Hughes's career as a poet and as a literary translator experienced a rebirth. These resurrections were not independent; they nourished each other as Hughes's resulting poetic production, shaped by his translation of foreign texts, displayed a new class-consciousness.

Hughes's translation decisions manifested his desire to bridge the gap among the "darker races" foreign and domestic by arousing a sense of international solidarity among them. Behind the scenes stoking the fire, Fernández de Castro continued to propagate both Hughes in translation and the Cuban authors that Hughes chose to translate. He encouraged Hughes's renewed dedication to translation by commending him as a poet of enormous international influence and praising him for strengthening the reputations of Pedroso and Guillén by "consecrating" them in foreign-language translation.

These developments—births, deaths, resurrections, and consecrations—occurred against backdrops of demise and new life on both socio-economic and political fronts; namely, against the worldwide depression

following the Wall Street “Crash” of 1929 that marked the end of the Roaring ’20s and the beginning of the burgeoning popularity of communism in the United States and abroad.¹ Among Blacks in the U.S., this popularity was bolstered by the 1928 and 1930 “Comintern Resolution[s] on the Negro Question in the United States,” James W. Ford’s 1932 vice-presidential candidacy, and the Communist Party’s central role in the Scottsboro incident shortly after the Scottsboro Nine were convicted in April 1931.

Sometime in early April 1930, Hughes began to collaborate with Zora Neale Hurston on a play that eventually bore the title *Mule Bone*, which was touted as the first piece of Black folklore ever to be adapted for the American stage. Nonetheless, he was forced to confess to James Weldon Johnson (in April or May) that he had no new material to contribute to the revision of the latter’s seminal 1922 anthology *The Book of American Negro Poetry*.² However, Hughes’s poetic dry spell soon came to an end with the publication of “Dear Lovely Death,” “Flight,” and “Aesthete in Harlem” in the June edition of *Opportunity*.

Although these poems speak of death, disillusion, and enslavement, owing, perhaps, to Hughes’s strained relationship with Mason (as Rampersad asserts), other poems, published as 1930 came to a close, bespeak change, escape, and new sources of inspiration. Leftist themes and ideals such as interracial cooperation among a worldwide proletariat, atheism, and a conception of racial struggle as inextricably linked to class conflict surfaced alongside manifestations of Hughes’s increasing distaste for (and distance from) his previous poetic personas and the themes to which they gave voice. Hughes’s submission of his translation of Guillén’s “Mujer negra,” not yet published in Spanish, and his essay on the Black Cuban sculptor Ramos Blanco to *Opportunity* suggest that these new founts stemmed from Hughes’s Cuban encounters.

Hughes’s translation and poetic production in the early 1930s was fueled by his ambition to create a Black communist poetic chorus of his own making. The composition of his chorus mirrored and contributed to that of Fernández de Castro, but it was also shaped by a desire to inject Black voices into the emerging world fabric of proletarian culture, to inject the politics of Black left internationalism into the national folk, and to create a diasporic fellowship by embracing a vision and practice of translation inspired by his Cuban encounters, a practice that he would soon outgrow.

What follows then, as the principal focus of this chapter, is an analysis of the interactions among three works: “Mujer negra” by Guillén,

“Black Woman” by Hughes the translator, and “The Negro Mother” by Hughes the poet, which illustrate these new directions and explore the extent to which Hughes’s Black poetic chorus was also a one-man cultural front.

“Black Woman” reveals that, as his international persona grew, Hughes came to see translations as texts around which new communities could develop, as well as works that could reshape the wellspring of the living folk.³ It also unveils the extent to which Hughes the translator sought to create a poetic chorus that would foster the notion of a racial identity which was extra-national in its shared interests and its inherited modalities of resistance. Translation became a powerful tool to aid this enterprise, creating new hermeneutics and intertextual fields for the interpretation of the works he translated and for the reevaluation of his own poetic production, both past and present.

“Black Woman” exemplifies two tendencies that marked Hughes’s early years as a translator. The first is that Hughes translated texts in strategic ways to suggest racial and political affinities between different populations of African descent in the Americas.⁴ The second is that Hughes wrote poems to augment his translations: poems that carried across discursive functions that his translations, owing to their new intertextual milieus, could not perform for his Black readership in the United States. A case in point is “The Negro Mother.” Hughes did not overlook the supposedly untranslatable local overtones and allusions that reflected the diversity of Black communities in the Americas. His strategy was to fill discursive lacks in the fabric of Black culture in the United States which came to his attention during the process of translation.⁵ Informed by these practices, I conclude my reading of “Black Woman” by positing that the Black radical significance of “The Negro Mother” is best appreciated as the dialectical outgrowth of the difference that exists between Guillén’s “Mujer negra” and Hughes’s 1930 translation of the poem.

Nicolas Guillén sent Hughes one letter prior to the publication of “Black Woman” in the August 1930 edition of *Opportunity*. He posted another one shortly after Fernández de Castro reprinted the translation alongside the debut of Guillén’s “Mujer negra” in the September edition of *Revista de la Habana*. Both contextualize Hughes’s translations against the backdrop of the ideological and historical contexts that surrounded literary production in this volatile era. The letters show how Hughes’s endeavor caused Guillén to fear his translator might know too little, and as a consequence, betray too much. They also speak to

the nature of the secret concealed—to Guillén’s attempt to encode the stock of the modernist primitive with a New World myth of African origins. Guillén posted the first letter to Hughes on August 11, 1930, and although it makes no direct reference to “Black Woman” or “Mujer negra,” it offers proof that Hughes shared drafts of translations with Guillén and Gustavo Urrutia prior to their publication and that Guillén felt Hughes’s efforts would benefit from a longer stay in Cuba:⁶

I opportunely received your translation of some of my poems, for which I sincerely thank you, that’s a great honor for me. I think they were all very good, as you did them. Urrutia read them to me and gave his favorable opinion. I love the idea of you translating some of my “son” poems, they would gain much in your hands.

I wish you were in Havana, but for more time. For example, for a month, so that many things of the greatest interest can be taught to you that you couldn’t see the last time, and, in my opinion, are worth knowing.⁷

Guillén oscillates between praise and irreverence for Hughes and his translations.⁸ He thanks Hughes for the “great honor” of his translations and deems the drafts “very good,” but intimates that Hughes had not seen enough of Afro-Cuban cultural life to properly contextualize the *Motivos de son* or the poems that Guillén sent home with him. He loves the idea of Hughes translating his latest poems, but diminishes the confidence expressed by informing Hughes that his assessments are based on Urrutia’s approbation and, somewhat whimsically, on Hughes’s own poetic reputation. Guillén’s reference to Urrutia and “translations” prior to their publication also gives notice that the poet was aware that Hughes was checking his translations with Urrutia, and was similarly reliant on the latter’s bilingualism to achieve their mutual aim to introduce Guillén to an English-reading audience.

Compounding matters, Guillén implies that Urrutia may not be the best man to assist Hughes. Although Guillén is sure that his poems would profit from Hughes’s translation, he also implies that they would benefit if Hughes could gain a more in-depth familiarity with certain aspects of Afro-Cuban life. Insofar as he expresses a desire to teach Hughes about things that he “couldn’t see” during his 1930 visit, Guillén gestures toward a type of Cuban cultural performance that is outside the reach of Fernández de Castro and Urrutia’s upper-class circles. Guillén refers to

“many things of the greatest interest,” as if inviting Hughes to aspects of Afro-Cuban life that lay beyond the *academias de bailes* of the Marianao and the “high life” of the Club Atenas. Notably, however, Guillén forgoes mention of these “things of interest” in a piece of correspondence that was subject to *machadista* surveillance and written on government stationery probably poached while he worked for the secretary of the interior. Guillén’s silence, secrecy, and vague references suggest that what was “worth knowing” had something to do with the banned performances of Afro-Cuban religious societies and the important roles they played in Afro-Cuban cultural life and in Guillén’s recent poetry.

Guillén was just as evasive but less flippant when he wrote to Hughes on September 30, 1930, requesting to see Hughes’s translation of “Mujer negra” along with the rest of the August edition of *Opportunity*. The letter contains the first and only instance in their extant correspondence when Guillén expressed a desire to see a specific Hughes translation, telegraphing that the publication of the translation was of particular concern to the poet:

I received the clippings you sent me, with poems of mine translated by you. I thank you very much for all your attention, which I do not know how to repay. You are a very kind person and a very fine one. I want you to send me an “Opportunity” issue, where “Mujer negra” appeared, because I did not receive it. In one of my last letters I asked you for it. Forgive me this annoyance, but I can’t find it in Havana.⁹

Guillén’s letter is marked by an anxiety and a sense of urgency seldom (if ever) found in the letters exchanged between the two poets. He thanks Hughes for the translations but forgoes commentary on any title save for “Mujer negra.”¹⁰ Nearly obsequious in his gratitude for the clippings that Hughes sent of two other translations, he asks Hughes (ostensibly for a second time) to send him the entire August issue of *Opportunity* where the translation of “Mujer negra” appeared. His misleading assertion that Hughes’s translation of his poem was nowhere to be found in Havana is even more curious.¹¹ Guillén suspects that Fernández de Castro has not reprinted Hughes’s translation exactly as it had appeared in *Opportunity*, and so he wants to see Hughes’s work along with its paratext.¹²

What was Guillén so anxious to see or afraid to discover? His poem and its translation had already been offered to the Cuban public, so

what was it about his U.S. debut that so concerned him? And what of Hughes? Why had he been so generous with drafts and clippings and yet so slow to provide Guillén with a copy of the first translation he published of his work? What was it that made the translation of “Mujer negra” a source of consternation for both men?

The intense anxiety, confessed to in an interview printed in *Cuba Internacional* in 1980, that gripped Guillén on the day his *Motivos de son* first saw print helps to contextualize his concerns over Hughes’s translation of “Mujer negra.” Guillén’s worry had everything to do with what he felt Hughes had yet to learn about Cuba. The interview contains details that speak between the lines, providing another instance where Guillén suggested that his 1930s poetry was marked by deep engagements with the iconography, culture, and lore of the African religious societies in Cuba and the Abakuá brotherhood in particular:

I felt . . . anxious when I saw the *Motivos* . . . I had given them to Urrutia two or three weeks before, but I asked him not to publish them without warning me . . . This measure was inspired by my fear. . . . that the verses did not belong to me. When I communicated my apprehensions to Urrutia, he laughed and said: “But you’re crazy, what foolishness; they’re yours and yours for the best; now, hold onto what’s to come.” That night, or better said, that afternoon, Urrutia and I went to see Lino D’ou . . . Lino was enthused, just as was Urrutia; but I remained concerned, like a boy who, having committed a misdeed, feared the punishment of his elders.¹³

Guillén’s fear of punishment from his “elders” precludes the argument that he co-opted Afro-Cuban communal cultures for personal gain. His recollection that the former senator and veteran of the *mambise* army, Lino D’ou, “was enthused” by his efforts confirms that he had personalized his poems enough to call them his own. The fact that D’ou was an outspoken advocate of the Abakuá brotherhood suggests that Guillén’s “elders” were also members of D’ou’s secret society. Guillén’s fear of betraying the secret brotherhood contextualizes his concern over the debut of his poem, first abroad in translation and domestically in simultaneous publication, as one born of personalizing too little and betraying too much. Had he or his translator given away too much? Had Hughes pointed to a forbidden fount of inspiration in the paratext that surrounded his translation?

Although Guillén repeatedly pointed to Lino D'ou as a father figure, and the Fundación Nicolás Guillén routinely sponsors the commemoration of the deeds and martyrs of the Abakuá brotherhood, few literary studies of Guillén's poetic production explore the role that Abakuá history, language, and cultural practices played in it.¹⁴ This silence is an outgrowth of the secret society's illegality and its desire to keep its mysteries inaccessible to outsiders. It is only because of decades of anthropological investigation into the society (by figures ranging from Fernando Ortiz to Robert Farris Thompson) that T. F. Anderson and Ivor Miller have been able to bring to light the extent to which two of Guillén's most seminal poems, "Sensemayá" and "La canción del bongo" ("Song of the Bongo"), draw on living Abakuá iconography and lore.¹⁵ Guillén's poems of the early 1930s thus tie a rethinking of Cuban origins to a protest against the persecution of the "secret" brotherhood and the banning of its cultural practices.

In Anderson's argument, the large and socially recognized role that serpents played in Abakuá iconography made the chant "kill the snakes" in Guillén's "Sensemayá" work as a metaphor for the government's efforts to stamp out "African" cultural practices. This encoded the silencing of oral Abakuá *décimas* and *comparsas* in a new form of written chant that recalls, but does not rehearse, the banned practices of the African religious societies themselves. And as you will recall, for Miller, "Canción del bongo's" opening lines, "Esta es la canción del bongó: Aquí el que más fino sea, responde, si llama yo" (This is the song of the bongo: He who is most refined here, responds, if I call), serve to inscribe traditional Abakuá practices in Cuba's "imagined binary heritage."

Guillén's invocation of Abakuá practices, performance, and iconography in both poems thus offers a subversive intervention into the Cuban government's long-standing whitening policies. This invocation protests the persecution of African religious societies on the one hand and attempts to infuse African ancestry into Cuba's myths of national origins on the other. The poems also register a contemporary protest which testifies that the Abakuá brotherhood was still powerful and still under fire at the time of the poems' composition.

These contributions would seem to register in full only with a small in-group; namely, those readers who were familiar with the brotherhood's iconography and, for Anderson, with its language. However, the poems' reliance on Abakuá iconography and lore betrays the paradoxical fact that banned Abakuá speech and cultural production, to quote Carlos Moore, were "the center and the heart of black life in Cuba" in

the 1930s and '40s—and that an ongoing political and cultural campaign was transforming the figure of the *ñáñigo* from a *brujo* (sorcerer) inclined to violence and criminality to a subject at the center of the attempt to nationalize Cuban blackness.¹⁶ Indeed, Fernando Ortiz remarked as early as 1928 that the integration of Abakuá into Cuban popular culture made “things of blacks” into “things of Cuba.”¹⁷

In my view, Guillén’s “Mujer negra” offers, among other things, a Cuban modernist comment on the then present predicaments of Afro-Cuban religious societies, which works much the same way as “Sensemayá” does for Anderson and “La canción del bongo” does for Miller. This poem places the tenets of multiple semiotic systems in conversation with one another, using the interplay among intertextual allusions to reimagine Cuban blackness. More specifically, I contend that “Mujer negra” draws on the origin myth of the Abakuá brotherhood to recover Afro-Cuban culture as an essential aspect of Cuban national culture.

The Abakuá brotherhood is a hierarchical paramilitary society with progressive rites of initiation. As a member moves “through the ranks” of his particular lodge, mastering the brotherhood’s secret language, he gains greater access to its myths and mysteries. The most closely guarded of these secrets concerns the myth of the society’s origins, and it therefore comes as no surprise that anthropologists have recorded multiple oral and written versions of this myth. The following version, assembled by Flora María González from others collected by Lydia Cabrera in *La sociedad secreta Abakuá: Narrada por viejos adeptos* and *La lengua sagrada de los ñáñigos*, is thus a composite, but it can be fairly argued to contain all the constitutive components, or the repeated features, of this myth (or these myths) of Abakuá origins:

Sikán, daughter of the king of the Efor peoples, went to retrieve water from the Oddán, the river that separated the Efor from the Efik. Abasí, the Supreme Being, saw fit to divulge his powers to her. . . . As Sikán placed her calabash of water on her head, she heard the Supreme Being’s powerful voice (breath, life). Frightened, she fled to her father, who kept her in a secret place and commanded her not to share her story with anyone. Ultimately, Sikán divulged the Efor secret to her husband, an Efik prince. Consequently, the Efik demanded that the Efor share Sikán’s secret with them. A battle ensued and was settled with the proviso that Sikán’s life be sacrificed by hanging from the sacred palm tree. Her

body was dismembered and her flesh and blood consumed by the first members of the society. (Cabrera, *La lengua sagrada de los ñáñigos*, 483–86, 168–72). The voice of the sacred fish Tansí, which had been caught in Sikán’s calabash, can now be heard in the sound of the sacred Èkué drum, made from the wood of the palm tree found by the Odán river and covered with the skin of Tansí . . . Because the drum did not at first have as powerful a voice as when Tansí was alive, Sikán’s eyes were applied to its skin. . . . But even Sikán’s sacrifice did not invest the drum with the original powerful voice. Eventually, the skin of a goat, representing Sikán herself, was superimposed on the skin of the sacred fish; only then was the powerful sound that Sikán had heard reproduced.¹⁸

In this origin myth, the concepts of transformation and re-creation are nearly synonymous. It is only after a series of symbolic and transformational substitutions that the Abakuá and their regenerative (and foundational) Voice are brought into being. Notably, these substitutions do not result in the transmission of the Divine Being’s secret. Rather, what brings the Abakuá into being is the cannibalistic consumption of the vessel: the bloody sacrifice required to end the war over the possession of Abasí’s secret. What is generative in this myth of origin, then, is not some secret originary meaning, but rather the symbolic substitution for that missing meaning—not some privileged originary content, but the joyful participation in the Benjaminian afterlife of the secret.

The place that a lodge’s ekué drum, or *èkué bongó*, holds as the epicenter of all practices in Abakuá lodges presents a telling example of how Abakuá mysteries and practices do not recognize a hierarchy between “original” and “translation.” Rather, the sounding of a particular lodge’s ekué drum affirms the legitimacy of that particular lodge and the equality of all Abakuá lodges (and members) because all ekués are, in essence, both translations and translators. There is no divine presence in the ekué drum bathed in the blood and eyes of Sikán and Tansí that does not also reside in its re-creation (a re-creation which, in itself, entails the symbolic substitutions of goat skin and chicken blood for the skin of Tansí and the blood of Sikán). Just as the first ekué drum transmitted the voice of Tansí, which was itself a transformation of the secret of Abasí, the Voice of (or a code for) the regenerative Earth Mother, so too does the sounding of each lodge’s ekué drum transmit the Voice (*la Voz*) and, in so doing, affirm the lodge’s legitimacy. Ekué drums are

thus simultaneously markers of difference, since each one is unique to its lodge and functions partly as a seal, and affirmation of communal “oneness,” since the ability to evoke the Voice is what affirms the equality of all lodges and all lodge members. In other words, the symbolic substitutions conform to an underlying semiotic code that serves an authenticating function without requiring uniformity. What is required is more like semiotic equivalence than sameness and involves interpretation, bringing to mind Lawrence Venuti’s contrast between hermeneutic and instrumental models of translation study. To quote Venuti, instrumental models treat “translation as the reproduction or transfer of an invariant contained in or caused by the source text, whether in its form, its meaning, or its effect.” Hermeneutic models treat “translation as the inscription of an interpretation, one among varying and even conflicting possibilities, so that the source text is seen as variable in form, meaning, and effect.”¹⁹ Abakuá lodges can thus affirm their unity without erasing their differences precisely because their myth of origin does not depend on the preservation or privileging of originary meaning, but rather on the iterability of its symbolic substitutes. Every evocation of the Voice, for the Abakuá, is an instantiation, or a translation of a translation of an origin myth that centers around a mutual loss of meaning that was the price of a new peace and the beginnings of a new community.

For a Cuban readership that was familiar with the mysteries and iconography of the Abakuá brotherhood in the 1930s, Guillén’s “Mujer negra” reads much like an evocation of, or a poem in conversation with, the Abakuá’s myth of origin. And in this second sense, Guillén’s poem can also be said to be in line with traditional Abakuá practices that place a premium on both repetition and the revision in the telling of the tale:

Con el círculo del Ecuador
 ceñido a la cintura como a un pequeño mundo,
 la negra, mujer nueva,
 avanza en su ligera bata de serpiente.

Coronado de palmas
 como una diosa recién llegada,
 ella trae la palabra inédita,
 el gesto nuevo,
 el anca fuerte,
 la voz, el diente, la mañana y el salto!

Chorro de sangre joven
 bajo un pedazo de piel fresca,
 y el pie incansable
 para la pista profunda del bongó!²⁰

The poem's first stanza transforms the titular figure from an Ur-mother into a temptress, recalling Sikán's status as both mother to the Abakuá brotherhood and a transgressor of its patriarchal order. The equatorial circle she wears "ceñido a la cintura como a un pequeño mundo" (cinched around her waist as though about a little world) provides a geographical metaphor that unites the Abakuá with their ancestral Africa. And the fact that Guillén's "diosa recién llegada" (newly arrived goddess) has been "coronado de palmas" (crowned with palms) and carries with her "la palabra inédita" (the unpublished and unmediated word) calls to mind the story of a Sikán whose sacrificial hanging from the sacred palm and subsequent deification was the consequence of her imparting a divine secret to her lover. It seems rather hard to account for the poem's dwelling on this temptress's "el anca fuerte" (strong haunch), "diente" (tooth), and "salto" (leap) without knowing that Sikán is also, to the Abakuá, known as the Leopard and the Voice. These associations, though, are dependent on an ability to interpret the poem's action in light of its syncretic symbols and on a familiarity with the Abakuá myth of origin. Given that I am the first critic to write about "Mujer negra" and Sikán, this has proven to be a difficult business not only because it depends on this dual familiarity but also because the myth was a closely guarded secret despite the public's growing familiarity with Abakuá culture in the 1930s. In other words, if a member of the Abakuá brotherhood (or Guillén himself) were to explicate the poem via a telling of the myth of Sikán, he would both betray the secrets of the brotherhood and admit to his illegal membership in it. These factors make it more accurate to characterize "Mujer negra" as a poem that encodes the Abakuá myth rather than one that alludes to it, and helps to explain Guillén's anxiety over the publication of Hughes's translation by contextualizing it as a case where the exorbitant gains of translation and not its lamented losses were the issue at hand. However, they do not account for why Guillén infused his poem with scattershot references to this secret myth or why Hughes chose to translate it.

An answer to the first question begins with an exploration of Guillén's poem as a modernist intervention into Cuban national culture. This requires contextualizing "Mujer negra" within the intertextual milieu in

which it was published and coming to grips with how the poem participated in a creolization of modernisms that was unique to Cuba, and was committed to creating poetry that played a vital role in politics on the ground. The *minoristas* had called for an aesthetic that mined “the fervor of the European avant-garde” to forge “a radical opposition to Alfredo Zayas’s government” as early as 1920. By the time that “Mujer negra” saw print, the Cuban *avanzada*²¹ had initiated a poetic symbiosis between the African primitive and the European modern, inspired by the early anthropological work of Fernando Ortiz and the founding of the Cuban Communist Party in 1925.²² Guillén thus penned his poem at a time of remarkable change in Cuban poetry—at a moment when the Cuban *avanzada* was trying to forge a union between modernist experimentation and Afro-Cuban tradition while simultaneously grappling with what a distancing from European poetics and political models might entail.

Guillén’s intervention in Cuban modernism also built upon poetic developments that laid the groundwork for the *neobarroco*, a poetics that was heavily dependent on citational intertextuality, rupture, fragmentation, and de-realization of the real while simultaneously answering Jorge Mañach’s 1927 call for Cuban writers to radicalize poetry by answering to the “categorical imperatives of time.”²³ This was accomplished by highlighting the social and political coordinates of Cuba in their contemporary complexity and by calling for a modernism which acknowledged that the advances of U.S. modernity often came at Cuban expense. These demands contextualize how Guillén’s “Mujer negra” places multiple worldviews, cultures, and religions in syncretic conversation to undermine the policies of a comprador government and to protest the exploitation of Afro-Cubans and the commodification of their culture. Although the vast majority of Guillén’s readers could not associate “Mujer negra” with the Abakuá myth of origin, the poem itself made them privy to how this myth and Cuban modernism itself worked—according to a logic of substitution, rupture, and constant change.

“Mujer negra” depends heavily on intertextuality, symbolic action, and syncretic imagery to beg a reconception of Cuban national identity. For example, the poem’s paradox of a goddess who wears the equator about her waist and yet is a little world unto herself can be resolved by recalling a mythic figure of European origins, Gaia, the personification of the earth and the primordial mother of mankind in Greek mythology. The association of “la negra, mujer nueva” with Gaia thus

creates a tension between blackness on the one hand and, on the other, empire and the Cuban whitening politics of the time. This paradox also has a geographical resolution that locates the ancestral origins of this Black new woman on the African continent—a world unto itself bisected by the equator. The association of a Black new woman with Eve, made by Guillén’s clothing the former in a “light serpent’s robe,” would probably prove unsettling to a Cuban oligarchy that had traditionally privileged its European ancestry. Insofar as Eve is both temptress and Ur-mother, she evokes the origin myth of Sikán, another Ur-mother and transgressor of the patriarchal order. In this sense, the poem’s overlay of semiotic systems, ranging from antiquity to the Cuban popular, suggests a rethinking of Cuban culture that sees it as a collision between European and African civilizations, as well as between U.S. imperialism and Cuban nationalism. The poem announces itself as a poem about beginnings, highlighting the substitutional nature of origins by overlapping intertextual allusions to Ur-mothers drawn from European and African myths that symbolically reflect the heterogeneity of the Cuban populace. There are also allusions to the perennial need to come to terms with the entanglement of origin myths and present-day circumstances. Guillén’s second stanza suggests that this new beginning must come to grips with being distanced from European ideals by assigning his goddess-like figure a “palabra inédita” that, insofar as “inédita” denotes both “unpublished” and “unmediated,” associates her word with Edenic fruit and the unmediated word of God in Christ. Guillén’s *diosa* (goddess) is also described in terms that do not reprise Western ideals, epistemologies, or ontologies. For example, the poem is at odds with a European literary expectation that the celebrations of feminine beauty will move from rapture with physical beauty to a reverence for the soul. Contravening these expectations and the worldviews that undergird them, Guillén celebrates his *diosa* in terms that move from the celestial to the carnal. His goddess embraces a new modality of divine communication, with the gesture brought to the fore in the final stanza by a “pie incansable” (tireless foot). This reference occurs only after the mentions of “blood” and a “chunk of skin” gesture at the dismemberment of Sikán and, in syncretic fashion, yet another symbolic substitution and reincarnation: transubstantiation. But the movement between the bodily and the spiritual here is reversed as a movement from the planetary to the quotidian reality (and mythology) of a Cuban dance floor. The way the poem portrays the arrival of this new Black woman thus begs the question of alternative modes of conceiving and imagining a modernity that arises

in the context of the Cuban culture wherein she reincarnates. Guillén's most salient intervention into the Cuban contemporary moment lies in the third stanza's focus on a tireless "pie" (foot or track) that either belongs to a dancer on "la pista profunda" (the deep track / the deep dance floor) or to Sikán, now in the form of the leopard, whose "pie" follows in her own tracks; the latter points ambiguously to the intersection between Cuban popular culture and the banned folk productions of Afro-Cuban religious societies. In pointing to the hypocrisy of a whitening politics at a time when *bongoseros* (bongo drummers) were becoming a stock feature of Cuban nightlife, the poem's encoding of an African myth could be read as Guillén's attempt to inscribe the origin myth of Sikán into an emergent cultural front. The poem thus works to encode Afro-Cuban origins and discursive modes of resistance via a syncretism that Guillén considered an essential part of Afro-Cuban folk culture, and a living entity and revolutionary resource for an Afro-Cuban proletariat. This encoding depended on a colonial mindset that rehearsed extant discourses on "African" women's sexuality, and on the evocation of one of the stock figures that the Black modernist primitive sought to reclaim; namely, the hypersexual native temptress who personifies the colonial fear of "going native." It also depended on encoding this figure with a dizzying, neo-baroque symbolism that, for an in-group, celebrated the resilience and resistance of Black Cubans while registering an implicit modernist critique of a civilization that depended on their disenfranchisement. In this sense, Guillén's "la negra, mujer nueva" is "nueva" in two senses: she offers the advent or the embodiment of a new, leftist era in Cuba, and she rehabilitates previous discourses on "la negra," transforming her from a primitive danger into an anti-imperialist icon.

Did Hughes know that he was working with an Abakuá myth of origin when he sat down to translate Guillén's poem in 1930? We don't know yet. Hughes did make poetic mention of the figure of the *ñáñigo* in "Gospel Cha-Cha," one of the Black internationalist poetic catalogs in his *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961). In the foreword to his *Poems from Black Africa* (1963), Hughes also wrote that translating "folk poetry" presented a "formidable task," given its regional "allusion and overtones," but Nicolás Guillén was a writer who had "proven" it could be done "beautifully in poetry" in his "poems of *ñáñigo*" [*sic*] and in his use of the "rhythms of *sones*."²⁴ However, the strongest proof that Hughes was aware of the myth of Sikán in 1930 actually lies with

the manner in which he translated Nicolás Guillén's "Mujer negra" and with one of the poems from his radical period, "The Negro Mother."

After Hughes secured a deal to place four translations of Cuban poetry in *Opportunity*, editor Elmer A. Carter congratulated him for taking "the first steps" toward an intellectual rapprochement between people of color in the Americas.²⁵ A view of Guillén's "Mujer negra" in light of its intertextual relationship with the Abakuá myth was not, of course, perceptible to the readership of the National Urban League's *Opportunity*, but the majority of its allusions were, and they took on new meanings in new contexts. What was it, then, that led Carter to read Hughes's translation as a step toward harmonious relations between people of color in Cuba and the United States?

I would argue that the lack of Cuban intertexts in Hughes's target zone is precisely what allowed him to shape "Black Woman" in ways that placed Guillén's poem in conversation with his own modernist primitive poetry and with that of the New Negro Movement. For people like Elmer Carter, these conversations raised questions about other commonalities and affinities among people of African ancestry in the Americas. The intervention of Hughes's Black poetic chorus thus altered the U.S. hermeneutic for interpreting his translations and his poems, past and present, at a critical crossroads of the rise of Black left internationalism and the waning of the vogue for *l'art nègre*. Hughes's translation of "Mujer negra" reads:

With the circle of the equator
Girdled about her waist
As though about a little world,
The black woman,
The new woman,
Comes forward
In her thin robes
Light as a serpent's skin.

Crowned with palms,
Like a newly arrived goddess,
She brings the unpublished word,
The unknown gesture,
The strong haunches, voice, teeth,
The morning and the spring.

Flood of young blood
 Beneath fresh skin!
 Never wearying feet
 For the deep music of the bongó.* (1–18)

*Bongó—Afro-Cuban drum [Hughes’s gloss]²⁶

Hughes’s translation decisions make Guillén’s poem resonate in an intertextual milieu that included Hughes’s own modernist primitive poetry, depictions of Black cabaret life in works like Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928) and Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928), and discourses on the New Negro penned by figures like Alain Locke. In this milieu, “Black Woman” transforms Guillén’s poem from a rethinking of Cuban national origins into an assertion of an extra-national affinity between U.S. Blacks and Afro-Cubans. For example, Hughes translates Guillén’s final stanza’s gory image of “un chorro de sangre jóven / bajo un pedazo de piel fresca” (a spurt [or gush] of young blood / beneath a fresh chunk of skin) into “Flood of young blood / Beneath fresh skin!” gesturing more toward the vigor of the young dancer evoked in the final lines of Guillén’s poem rather than a re-creation of the syncretism that ties the blood sacrifices of many Afro-Cuban religions to the rebirth of Christ in the Eucharist. Hughes’s translation omits mention of the depth of Guillén’s dance floor and instead inserts his own “music” that resounds for a dancer whose “tireless feet” presumably dance to the rhythms of the bongo drum. By the poem’s conclusion, Hughes’s strategic domestications erase the suggestive awkwardness of “el pie” (a foot) that prowls, following in a deep track, and that moves on a floor whose depth gestures toward the buried Afro-Cuban origins of Cuban popular culture. In place of this ambiguity, Hughes’s translation offers the reader a final stanza that transforms the entire poem into a modernist primitive near-deification of a Cuban nightclub dancer. The deification of this dancer temptress is also, of course, a recovery and celebration of Black beauty that makes Hughes’s translation resonate with his “Song to a Dark Virgin” and his “Danse Africaine,” wherein his night-veiled dancer’s atavistic response to the “beating of the tom-toms, / Low . . . Slow” that “stirs your blood” resonates with the way Guillén’s “Black Woman” dances with “never wearying feet” to the “deep music / Of the bongó.” The translation’s deification of Black beauty and the way it gestures toward an American entanglement with Africa resonates profoundly with Alain Locke’s interpretation of how an interest in Africa

spoke to the New Negro's reevaluation of self. In doing so, Hughes's translations beg the question of an African diasporic subject and gesture toward a shared Black aesthetic response to the changing face of U.S. and European empire in the Americas.

Guillén's poem also fit Hughes's Black left internationalist ambitions because most of the semiotic systems it places in tension to recover *la negra* as both a subject and subject position are drawn from intertexts that travel easily throughout the Western world in translation. This is not to suggest that these semiotic systems and their points of intersection decode in the same way for different reading audiences throughout the Americas. Quite the contrary: a comparison of how Hughes and Guillén recover blackness by playing with and against these intertexts reveals the heterogeneity of the African diaspora and the multiplicity of ways its writers conceive of race, national identity, and extra-national collectivity. This comparison also invites the reader to heed three inter-related phenomena: that intertextual environments are not bounded by national borders; that the integrity of semiotic systems and their interrelations are as extendable as the power relations that govern and undergird them; and that an oppositional semiotics can be a feature of both. Insofar as Hughes's translation and Guillén's poem recover the figure of the Black woman by troubling the semiotics of origin myths aligned with global race capitalism, their oppositional aesthetic is transnational in range. It participates in a literary blackness that extends beyond national and linguistic boundaries to recover Black subjects demonized by U.S. and European empire. For example, the arrival of a goddess-like figure "crowned with palms" evokes the laurels of antiquity, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and the crown of thorns he wore on the cross. The arrival of Guillén's *mujer negra* is thus tied to the beginnings of Western civilization in antiquity; to the death, resurrection, and the second coming of Christ; and to the beginning and end of Western civilization in eschatological time. The intertextual environment into which "Black Woman" was introduced, of course, prohibited the translation from evoking a *Sikán* whose hanging from the sacred palm and subsequent dismemberment were the price of her divinity and the beginnings of the *Abakuá*. It also largely foreclosed the poem's ability to suggest an entanglement between this African myth of origins and the opening lines and nationalist implications of José Martí's *Versos sencillos*, itself a poetic myth of Cuban origins: "Yo soy un hombre sincero / de donde crece la palma."²⁷ Guillén's evocation of a palm leaf, though, gestures to a stock primitivist iconography derived from a semiotics

of colonialism and imperialism so international in scope that Hughes's poetry was able to encode and subvert it with an oppositional semiotic to suggest that people of African ancestry in the Americas were bound together by their shared exploitation by Western civilization, as in his poem "Afraid" (1926): "We cry among the skyscrapers / As our ancestors / Cried among the palms in Africa" (1-3).

Hughes's "Black Woman" thus helped him to construct his Black left poetic chorus by augmenting its voices in a way that reframed his own modernist primitive poetry as Black internationalist in its scope and ambition. He had come to understand that the strategic translation of foreign-language texts could shape the intertextual fabric of his home milieu, allowing for a Black internationalist reappraisal of his literary past. In this sense, Hughes's transnational repositioning of *la negra* worked in harmony with his poetic production to construct a cultural front that served the interests of Third Period Communism and its increasing investment in the fomentation of Black nationalism.

The work of excavating how Hughes understood the discursive functions that Guillén's poem and Abakuá myth played in Cuba can also be explored through an exposition of "The Negro Mother," a new poem by Hughes that nevertheless depends on the translational endeavor of conceptualizing commonality in terms of substitution and against a backdrop of rupture and re-contextualization. It asks us to interrogate how these common features travel, and observe the ways in which they develop a new autonomy in relation to the cultural fabric and demands of the milieus in which they incarnate. It also requires us to explore how the work done by one common element can be displaced onto another in translation (e.g., the discursive functions played by the narrative content of one work might be performed by the form of another).

Hughes's engagement with "Mujer negra" reflects a translator adept at placing the recontextualizing violence of translation in the service of Black nationalism and Black left internationalism. "Black Woman" repositions Hughes's early work to suggest a diasporic affinity between him and Guillén, and it reveals him as a translator remarkably attuned to the way that both translations and originals derive their relative autonomy from their intertextual relationships. Hughes understood that all texts are also intertexts. A full account of how Hughes translated "Mujer negra" requires that we look beyond the declared translation, "Black Woman," and explore how his own poem, "The Negro Mother" (1931), mined the myth of Sikán to augment his translation. In this sense, "The Negro Mother" is fruitfully read as a text that builds on

“Black Woman” to carry across the discursive functions that “Mujer negra” played in Cuba as Hughes perceived them to be. More specifically, I am suggesting that Hughes created a figure in “The Negro Mother” that gave to U.S. Blacks and “Black Woman” what the myth of *Sikán* gave to the Abakuá brotherhood and Guillén’s “Mujer negra,” filling a domestic lack that Hughes had discovered abroad.

Hughes’s desire to fill this lack with “The Negro Mother” speaks to his conception of the literary folk as an arena of political and discursive contestation.²⁸ It serves as evidence that, by 1931, he had expanded his 1926 call for Black writers to mine the culture of “common people” by bringing into focus the ways his efforts were also meant to contribute to the cultural fabric of a living, breathing, and evolving Black folk in the United States, which he saw (as did the Comintern, the CPUSA, and leftist literati around the globe) as an inherently oppositional and revolutionary wellspring. Hughes suggested as much during his interview with Guillén—that while the expression of “el poet de los negros” had been routed through “los antiguos,” it had a role to play for colonized people in the present day. The very first lines of Hughes’s “The Negro Mother” present the reader with an Ur-mother who has “come back” to help redress the exploitation of her children in the present moment:

Children, I come back today
 To tell you a story of the long dark way
 That I had to climb, that I had to know
 In order that the race might live and grow.
 Look at my face—dark as the night—
 Yet shining like the sun with love’s true light.
 I am the child they stole from the sand
 Three hundred years ago in Africa’s land.
 I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea
 Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
 I am the woman who worked in the field
 Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
 I am the one who labored as a slave,
 Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave—
 Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.
 No safety, no love, no respect was I due.
 Three hundred years in the deepest South:
 But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.
 God put a dream like steel in my soul.

Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.
 Now, through my children, young and free,
 I realize the blessings denied to me.
 I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.
 I had nothing, back there in the night.
 Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
 But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.
 Sometimes, the road was hot with the sun,
 But I had to keep on till my work was done:
 I *had* to keep on! No stopping for me—
 I was the seed of the coming Free.
 I nourished the dream that nothing could smother
 Deep in my breast—the Negro mother.
 I had only hope then, but now through you,
 Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:
 All you dark children in the world out there,
 I am the woman who worked in the field
 Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
 Remember my years, heavy with sorrow—
 And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
 Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night
 Lift high my banner out of the dust.
 Stand like free men supporting my trust.
 Believe in the right, let none push you back.
 Remember the whip and the slaver's track.
 Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
 Still bar you the way, and deny you life—
 But march ever forward, breaking down bars.
 Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
 Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
 Impel you forever up the great stairs—
 For I will be with you till no white brother
 Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother. (1–52)²⁹

Hughes's Ur-mother offers the audience a collective and collectivizing racial history that is meant to impel them to militant action. This poem provided the U.S. Black folk pantheon with a militant mother figure who arguably served to replace the archetype of the docile mammy revived by the southern oligarchy in the 1920s. The addition of a militant Ur-mother to the masculinist folk of the 1930s is an important contri-

bution in its own right, but we must concede that fostering collectivity through cultural remembrance is a universal function of origin myths and cultural archetypes.³⁰ What is special about “The Negro Mother” is how it reveals that Hughes’s translation of Guillén’s poem led him to realize that any poem attempting to embody a Black Ur-mother had to be endowed with certain features and had to work in ways that reflected, accounted for, and resisted their shared circumstances.

Hughes’s translation had also brought him into contact with a militant Ur-mother who—in the sounding of Abakuá *èkué bongós* and in Guillén’s intervention into the Cuban cultural fabric—existed at a fixed point in time and was reincarnated throughout history to assert the equality of her descendants. His poem reflects that he perceived this duality to be an essential asset for an Ur-mother who needed to account for both present-day exploitation and a community’s hope for the future by remaking the myth of inferiority that came along with their immiseration.

“The Negro Mother” accordingly presents the reader with a temporal disjunction wherein the speaker addresses her children in the present moment but relates a story that shifts from her present reincarnation, “children, I come back today,” to the remembrance of her past dismemberment, “children sold away from me, husband too,” and finally to an egalitarian, communal remembering that is also a militant call for social justice in the contemporary moment: “remember how the strong in struggle and strife / still bar you the way, and deny you life— / [but] march ever forward, breaking down bars” (lines 1, 13–14, 46–47). This temporal disjunction is a feature common to “The Negro Mother,” “Mujer negra,” and the myth of Sikán which sets them apart from European myths of origin whose Ur-mothers—like Gaia, Eve, and the Virgin Mary—are either immortal or who lived and died at fixed points in historical or eschatological time, and, in being so fixed, legitimate the interests of the powerful and the working of domination, especially as it pertains to the entanglement between empire and white ancestry.

Hughes’s practice of translation also led him to the realization that an Ur-mother who oscillated between the mythic and the Black quotidian, as does Guillén’s “Mujer negra” via Sikán and vice versa, allowed the weight of each to impinge on the other.³¹ The transformative reincarnations in Hughes’s poem, in similar fashion, figure the lived weight of Black history itself as the primary impulse to revolution and simultaneously offer the audience a mythic Ur-mother who locates their origin in displacement and their home in fugitivity. Hughes’s Ur-mother begins

her tale not in Africa, but rather as the “child they stole from the sand.” In other words, Hughes’s poem manifests a recognition that an Ur-mother of the exploited had to differ from those that benefit from the status quo—she had to account for a history of exploitation while affirming equality and hope for an amelioration of present-day circumstances.

Hughes draws sharp attention to the central role that reincarnations and displacements play in this origin myth by, among other things, reincarnating his own poetry in ways that suggest personal and collective growth. His allusion to stairs and “Mother to Son” implies that poet and persona have moved beyond accommodationist impulses. His plays on dark, light, and beauty recall poems like “Proem,” and suggest that poet and persona have moved beyond a “long dark way” endorsed by figures like Alain Locke, who saw aesthetic achievement as a means to demonstrate common humanity and pursue social justice. Hughes had come to see translation as a tool that could work across space, language, and time to aid him in the construction of his transnational Black poetic chorus, which was simultaneously a cultural front moving toward intensified Black militance.

In an essay written some seventeen years later titled “My Adventures as a Social Poet,” Hughes confirmed that he saw the relationship between his translations and his early 1930s radical poetic production as politically, economically, and ethically a response to the call of oppressed U.S. Blacks and Afro-Cubans.³² Responding to the ongoing (New Critical) critique that his 1930s radical oeuvre lacked lyrical refinement and failed to engage with canonical poetic themes, he characterized his literary translations and poetic production of 1930 and 1931—his social poems—as the outgrowth of an increased class and international consciousness fueled by his break with his patron Charlotte Mason, and by his desire to shed light on the evils of U.S. economic imperialism in Cuba and the injustice of the ongoing Scottsboro trials. The essay is telling, curious, and spurious in several respects.³³ The anachronistic narratives that Hughes offers are built on evidence drawn, in large part, from citations of his own poetry and translations that he dated creatively in order to support his political propositions and creative versions of history. However, these very narrative acrobatics demonstrate a strong desire on Hughes’s part to write, in the face of the Second Red Scare, about how the effect of translating Guillén not only spoke in chorus with his own poetic production, but exemplified the role that translation played and could play in the fomentation of Black left internationalisms. Hughes’s revisionist history thus allows him to articulate a view of translation

that figures the practice as a highly charged domestic and international political endeavor that resonated profoundly and was, no doubt in part, inspired by that of José Fernández de Castro.

“My Adventures as a Social Poet” presents its reader with a literary figure who is also a paradox, the social poet. He is social in that his poetry is “about people’s problems.”³⁴ Yet, it is precisely this factor—weighed alongside a commitment to civil rights and an attribution of communist inclinations—that leads to his ostracization and to the censorship requisite for his curious identity as a social poet. He is, in short, a people’s poet who cannot speak to the people. “So is the life of a social poet,” wrote Hughes, as he sardonically reflected on how racism and poverty had shaped both his original poems and his literary translations, and in turn led to his political persecution at home and abroad:

I am sure that none of these things would have happened to me had I limited the subject matter of my poems to roses and moonlight. But, unfortunately, I was born poor—and colored—and all the prettiest roses I have seen have been in white people’s yards—not in mine. That is why I cannot write exclusively about roses and moonlight—for sometimes in the moonlight my brothers see a fiery cross and a circle of Klansmans’ hoods. Sometimes in the moonlight a dark body swings from a lynching tree—but for his funeral, there are no roses.³⁵

Racial and economic injustice conspire to bar the social poet from a vocabulary composed solely of roses and moonlight, as the specter of racial terrorism incessantly haunts his verse. Moreover, censorship and international political harassment—the “things” to which Hughes refers and from which he suffered—are figured as the inevitable result. For it is precisely because his verse obscures moonlight with dark bodies hung from a lynching tree—and in the process casts greater light on the brutality of the racial caste system in the United States—that he finds himself hounded by the agents of Jim Crow. So hounded, Hughes, the social poet in question—having been separated from the protection of an unnamed patron owing to an awakened class consciousness—relates that he looked for refuge in leftist Cuban folds, refuge that would not only further open his eyes to the international dimensions of U.S. racism and imperialism but also serve to excite the hounds of white racism.

The essay's deft rhetorical strategy centers Hughes's political-poetic awakening around three points in his career that speak to how his progression toward militancy was fueled by his practice of translation and his burgeoning class awareness. Hughes begins, as he did in *The Big Sea*, with a strategic account of breaking with Charlotte Mason by portraying himself as a social idealist, someone who could not ignore the "gulf between the very poor and the very rich in our society," and he offers his own poem "Park Bench"—penned long after his break with Mason and his trips to Cuba—as a peculiar form of testimony to these facts. The poem's first stanza reads: "I live on a park bench. / You, Park Avenue. / Hell of a distance / Between us two."³⁶ In this retelling of the story, Hughes offers his poem as evidence of his falling out with high society, enacts a distancing from it, and embeds the poem to convince his reader that his break with Mason was the result of his proletarian class consciousness.

In the essay, Hughes uses massive understatement, falsehoods, anachronistic causality, and verifiable personal history to call still more attention to the paramount role of translation in the Black left internationalism of the early 1930s. He turns his essay's focus to the political harassment that he supposedly suffered when he was denied entry into Cuba in 1931 and speculates as to the reasons why:

On the way I stopped in Cuba where I was cordially received by the writers and artists. I had written poems about the exploitation of Cuba by the sugar barons and I had translated many poems of Nicolás [*sic*] Guillén such as: "Cane" "Negro / in the cane fields. / White man / above the cane fields. / Earth / Beneath the cane fields. / Blood / that flows from us." This was during the Machado regime. Perhaps someone called his attention to these poems and translations because, when I came back from Haiti a week later, I was not allowed to land in Cuba.³⁷

Hughes's assertion that his poems and translations lay at the core of the Machado regime's denying him entry is striking in several respects, not the least of which is the fact that he had not written a poem "about the exploitation of Cuba by sugar barons." The sole literary capital at stake consisted of Hughes's translations of Nicolás Guillén's poetry, translations that included "Cane" but which, in publication, were limited to the apolitical "Madrival," "Black Woman," and "Wash

Woman.” Hughes resorts to the rhetorical strategy of using his own artistic production—in this case, his translation of Guillén’s “Caña,” which remained unpublished until 1934—to attest to the verisimilitude of the implied claim that his is a voice both for the proletariat and against U.S. imperialism, and further, that he was denied entry to Cuba because of his opposition to sugar barons manifest in his verse and in his translations of Guillén’s poetry. Hence, Hughes’s actions are, by his own understated proclamation, neither tied to patronage nor patriotism. Rather, the poet plays loosely with hegemonic ideologies by juxtaposing the ideology of socialism with the notion of a social poet who is constituted first and foremost by his identity as an oppressed African American in the United States. At the same time, he appropriates a Cuban poetic discourse in translation in order to introduce a polemic on the economic and racial injustices at work in cane fields that could well include the Georgia cane fields of the Black Belt, which were not a far cry from those found in Cuba.

Hughes’s appropriation and modification of Guillén’s poem can be further illustrated by comparing his translation with Guillén’s original. Guillén’s “Caña” reads: “El negro / junto a cañaveral / El yanqui / junto a cañaveral / La tierra / junto a cañaveral / Sangre / que se nos va!”³⁸ Hughes’s translation (first published in 1934 by Nancy Cunard in her seminal anthology, *Negro*) omits the exclamation point that concludes the poem’s final stanza, translates “yanqui” as “White man,” and reorients the rhythmic pattern of a traditional Cuban *clave* found in Guillén’s composition so as to shift rhetorical force from the fourth stanza onto the second. These choices produce a dramatic shift in focus in both rhythmic and thematic terms. Given that Guillén’s first three stanzas resemble each other in terms of both their rhythmic composition and their conformity to the *clave* of a popular Cuban *son*, the fourth stanza presents the reader with a subject, *sangre*, that calls attention to itself not only through punctuation but also by its inability to keep the beat. Hughes’s translation removes both rhythmic accentuation and rhetorical force from Guillén’s fourth stanza because it shifts the focus to the second stanza, having now made the latter stand out as the poem’s only subject line to be composed of more than one word—“White man.” The blood of field workers is upstaged by the image of the oppressor. Moreover, Hughes’s decision can be said to alter the identity of the person who inhabits the space “above the cane field,” who retains his identity as it is incarnate in Guillén’s original and also becomes a social and historical entity who is far more inclusive.

Hughes's choice to translate "yanqui" as "White man" enacts a shift in meaning that extends Guillén's reference to the United States to include all European exploitation, and simultaneously localizes and re-contextualizes this racial and economic exploitation in the specific context of the United States. What was portrayed as an international socioeconomic conflict becomes a conflict predicated on race, a transformation tellingly parallel to the movement of Hughes's essay as a whole. This movement begins with the invocation of a leftist political fidelity and then complicates this fidelity by calling to the fore the competing and overlapping demands of racial identity, thus animating the pressures that weigh upon the social poet.

Hughes's choice presents the reader with a creative distortion shaped by a political agenda and, implicitly, asserts a semantic equivalence (or at least the closest thing to one) between the terms "White man" and "yanqui." The latter assertion has profound implications that resonate precisely from the fact that the claim is untenable and reflects an ideologically driven translator at work. Hughes's translation redraws the geography of the Caribbean and the United States with bold strokes that create a new, slightly more expansive "us"—since neither Hughes's "us" nor Guillén's plural first person are assigned a race or exclusive nationality. Rather, Hughes's "us" is composed of Cuban and U.S. Blacks alike, and his "them" no longer includes the colored citizens of the U.S. populace, but is instead restricted to the "White man." He creates anew the locus of oppression by envisioning an international Black community that spans the hemisphere, a nation among many nations constituted by its racial composition or, at the very least, in response to its common oppressor.

Along these lines, Hughes's choice presents a plea from the translator to be exempted from the category of Yankee on the basis of race, implicitly asserts that a Black American holds more interests in common with a Black Cuban than with his fellow American white oppressor, and simultaneously offers a plea for admittance into a new "Nuestra América."³⁹ In so doing, Hughes reveals an intention to bolster a racial and political agenda in his translations, one that need not adhere to rigid ideas of semantic equivalency between original and translation.

Hughes's translation creates more than a discourse that yokes him to Guillén in a common struggle against the "White man," for it offers evidence, as does Hughes's entire career as a translator, that his translations often influenced his original artistic production in profound ways. Although Hughes does not make explicit reference to this influence in

his essay, he does point to a shared influence born of a common cause. The choral placement of his translation and the political import Hughes ascribes to it—given the fact that “Cane” had yet to be published when Hughes was denied reentry (from Haiti) into Cuba in 1931—is thus conceptualized as a polemic on the geopolitical power of translation as Hughes saw it. Figuring himself as a translator-poet undaunted in his fidelity to the common cause, Hughes’s very next sentence relates how—turned away from Cuba—he visited the Scottsboro Nine in the death house at Kilby prison and was, in turn, inspired to compose “Christ in Alabama”:

Christ is a nigger,
 Beaten and black:
 Oh, bare your back!

Mary is His mother:
 Mammy of the South,
 Silence your mouth.

God is His father:
 White Master above,
 Grant Him your love.

Most holy bastard
 Of the bleeding mouth,
 Nigger Christ
 On the cross
 Of the South. (1–14)⁴⁰

Although the translation of “Caña” occurred nearly nineteen months prior to the publication of “Christ in Alabama,” Hughes’s decision to link them chorally in the two short paragraphs that separate their appearance on the printed page in “Adventures of a Social Poet”—his decision to explicitly assert mutual influence born of a common cause—begs a reading of the latter in terms of the former. It implies that “Christ in Alabama” was inspired not only by Hughes’s trip to Kilby prison but also by “Cane.”

The reader is struck by a series of correspondences: the “White man / above the cane fields” finds a corollary in the “White Master above”; the subjugation of the “Negro / in the cane fields” resonates with the

implicit presence of plantation slavery evoked by “beaten and black” backs and intimations of slave rape; and the uncompensated “blood that flows from us” finds a close cousin in blood from a “Nigger Christ” that bespeaks something quite apart from redemption. Nevertheless, the two poems present no direct parallels, no correspondence that goes uncomplicated. The “White man” of “Cane” can certainly be read as part of a larger religious allegory infused into the poem, but he is a far cry from the “White Master” of “Christ in Alabama,” who cannot be divorced from the series of intricate metaphors that not only serve to critique Christianity as a tool of enslavement but also leave the reader—perhaps embodying this destruction of faith—with no firm ground on which to stand, as the persona speaks of the past, the present, prophets, and profits all at the same time.

Hughes’s decision to place these poems (and the potential readings that arise from them) in conversation is best conceived as his attempt to create a forum within which the two poems can be said to complement one another, a Black poetic chorus that allows each poem to cast new light on the other. In this sense, the bold critique of Christianity offered by “Christ in Alabama” can be said to draw into relief the far more subtle Christian resonances of “Cane.” The scene presented by “Cane”—a scene whose economic diction and work song–like repetitions paint a portrait evocative of an agrarian landscape—helps to ground the gruesome but nonetheless ethereal metaphorical machinations of “Christ in Alabama” in a more stark, quotidian reality. These complementary effects, in turn, bolster the impact of the leftist (daresay communist) themes at work in each poem.

These themes, which include a rejection of the opiate of the masses and an evocation of the exploitation of a Black agrarian labor force, offer a glimpse of Hughes’s conception of the task of the translator. This task is to import poetry, one of Cuba’s most highly crafted cultural products, in order to create an inter-American dialogue that combats the exploitation of Cuba’s raw materials by U.S. “sugar barons.” Moreover, the complementary light that each poem sheds on the other is a light that is not always available to the bilingual reader, but rather one that arises only in translation. For example, Hughes’s decision to translate Guillén’s “Negro” (a word that, in Spanish, specifically denotes a Black man at work in the cane fields) with the gender-neutral “Negro”—in combination with his earlier evocation of a “White man / above”—imbues “Cane” with the potential to be read as a poem, like “Christ in Alabama,” that speaks to the issue of miscegenation. In so doing,

Hughes's "Cane" puts forth a pillar of Guillén's oeuvre, with respect to Guillén's later formulation of Cuba's binary heritage (*mulatez*), that is nonetheless absent in "Caña," because the "blood that flows from us" (formerly that of a plural first person who could only be defined as a collective apart from that of the *yanqui*) takes on added connotations that bring to light a racial mixture born, if not explicitly from rape, then from exploitative relations.

Hence, "My Adventures as a Social Poet" exemplifies and sets forth a vision of translation that ascribes enormous political import to the practice, a vision that pits both the importation of foreign literary material and the conversation it engenders against malevolent forces born from the collusion of "robber barons," the Machado regime, and U.S. imperialism. The essay sets forth a vision of translation that resonates profoundly with Fernández de Castro's own vision, suggesting that it was Hughes's Cuban encounters that led him to believe that translators could foment Black left internationalist communities by suggesting commonality through choral complementarity.

Hughes Translates Pedroso

Proletarian and Social Lyrics

On the eve of his radical period, Langston Hughes wrote his friend and fellow poet Claude McKay that he had been “translating some lovely Cuban poetry lately,” and had returned from the island with “grand radical poems” by a “Chinese Negro poet” and iron foundry worker named Regino Pedroso. Pedroso was among the most formidable of Hughes’s Cuban interlocutors, and his translations of Pedroso’s poems would alter his own poetic course.

Dear Claude

I’ve been owing you a letter for months. How time can pass! I hope this one finds you. Wonder if you’re still in Spain? Anyway, I asked my publishers to send you a copy of my novel there. . . . It’s had good reviews . . . considering the book slump and summer and a market flooded with “Negro” stuff mostly by white people. . . . This summer I didn’t do anything. Had gotten awfully bored with LITERATURE and WHITE FOLKS and NIGGERS and almost everything else. . . . You’re more or less right about the Negro intellectuals. (After all these months, I could hardly expect you to remember just what you said in that last letter, but

anyhow much of it concerned your reputation after it had gone through the mouths of the niggerati and back to earth again.) Sure, they say bad things about you. . . . Certainly there are a lot of half baked beans. . . .

I've been translating some lovely Cuban poetry lately. There's a Chinese Negro poet in Havana named Regino Pedroso who works in an iron foundry and writes grand radical poems and Chinese revolutionary stuff and mystical sonnets, and there's another boy named Nicolas Guillen [*sic*] who has recently created a small sensation down there with his poems in Cuban Negro dialect with the rhythms of the native music, sort of like the blues here—the first time that has been done in Latin America. I've translated some of the revolutionary poems, and some of Guillen's straight Spanish, because neither the sonnets nor the dialect could I do over very well into English. . . . Met all the literary people in the capital, and lots of grand Negroes, and lots of players in the native orchestras. Brought back a bongo and maracas. . . . It seems that [Paul] Green's is a semi-impressionistic play or something that would suit his manner of doubting things or so they think. Countee's going to write a novel, so says rumor. Fisk University has a new library. At least a nigger a week is being lynched in the South this season, the color line is getting tighter and tighter, even in New York, but in books and the theater the Negro is still muy simpatico [*sic*]. Dance, damn you, dance! You're awfully strange and amusing!

Un abrazo, compadre,
Langston¹

Hughes gestures toward an ongoing correspondence and literary exchange with McKay that positions the two men as kindred spirits whose work and mentalities exist apart from the Negro intellectuals and “niggerati” with whom Hughes formerly identified. Their work has been rebuked by “half baked beans” (e.g., the drubbings given to *Home to Harlem* [1928] and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* [1927] by the Black intelligentsia in the U.S.); they share cosmopolitan identities; and, presumably, they share an assessment of a bankrupt U.S. literary scene where white writers have appropriated and pillaged “‘Negro’ stuff” and where Black and white writers alike are engaged in what amounts to a minstrel show wherein “the Negro is still muy simpatico.”

In surveying the bankruptcy of the literary scene and foreshadowing his felt affinity with Pedroso, Hughes's letter helps to clarify what he would later mean by "serious writing about the Negro people." Namely, this writing was to be committed to the project of engaging with the lived life of the Black masses and attuned to the realities of their struggles; it was not to be rarified "LITERATURE" about idealized "WHITE FOLKS and NIGGERS." Thus, the continental refinement of the traditionalist Countee Cullen and the sentimental and stereotypical melodramas of Paul Green (*Abraham's Bosom*, 1928) are positioned as complicit with a Broadway lineup that is out of step with the fact that "a nigger a week is being lynched in the South this season." In short, and as Hughes would recall in a letter to Prentiss Taylor sent from Moscow in 1933, his art for art's sake period (his engagement with LITERATURE) came to an end when he realized that he had to answer to both art and the exploited and persecuted Black masses.²

A second letter, this one from Guillén, also positions Pedroso as a poet of significant interest in Hughes's career as a translator. The letter, Guillén's first to Hughes, suggests that Guillén may have perceived himself as Pedroso's competitor and was looking to Hughes's translations to enhance his own stature:

I must tell you, because I think you will be pleased to know, that the poems are extremely liked, and have created a real scandal, as they are a completely new genre in our literature. If you were not (as you tell me) too lazy to write, I would like to know what you think of them and the value you place on them. As much as I am afraid it will take a little work for you to understand these verses: they are written in our criollo language; many twists and phrases escape your current knowledge—I think—of Spanish. In any case, it seems to me that there must be someone who knows Cuba well and who also speaks English to explain them to you. . . .

Yesterday, I spent the whole day with José Antonio Fernández de Castro, who seems to have written to you. He is very sad, because the Mexican women you know left Cuba, one of which was his "pelota," his "huesito santo" and the "empapamiento" of his life. (Don't understand?!) Suffer! Learn to speak in criollo.

Regino Pedroso asked me to send his greetings and to make you aware of the affection with which he always re-

members you. By the way he also asked me to tell you that his last name is PedrosO and not PedrosA, as you mistakenly wrote.

Lastly, I beg you to take the time to write to me, because I am always grateful for your correspondence. In the meantime, keep counting me as one of your most affectionate friends.³

Posted the day his *Motivos de son* appeared in print, Guillén's letter mentions Hughes's correspondence with Pedroso, and ends on a note of caustic correction that suggests Guillén was jealous of Hughes's relationship with Pedroso. He betrays a self-perceived secondary place that he tries to overcome by claiming insider status for himself and his poems. His letter succeeds in this respect by pointing to Hughes's lack of a command of *criollo*, a local vernacular. Significantly, Guillén cautions that Fernández de Castro won't be able to help Hughes translate "our criollo language," and writes that if Hughes is to understand the poems, he will need help from someone other than Fernández de Castro, Pedroso, or Urrutia. In short, Guillén's letter attempts to co-opt the authentic Cuban Black, and surpass the more acclaimed Pedroso in Hughes's eyes as an "affectionate friend."

Guillén's admonitions call to mind the fact that the Langston Hughes fashioned for Cuban audiences—a poet who wrote about his experiences and exploitation on the job—was a natural fit for Pedroso, who had been placed center stage among Cuban leftist literati after the spectacular success of his poem "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico" ("Fraternal Greetings to the Factory") in 1927. It is likely that Pedroso's proletarian poetics would have proven highly attractive to a Hughes who wanted to write about "real people" with "real problems." If the activity on the ground seems to surround Guillén, it may well be that there was no need to promote Pedroso to achieve the choral ambitions behind the *minoristas'* print efforts to stage a comparative conversation about U.S. and Cuban race relations. These ties would have been more than apparent.

In one⁴ of three letters most cited by scholars invested in the idea that Hughes influenced Guillén, Fernández de Castro suggested that Hughes's work had heavily influenced Regino Pedroso:

I'm very angry with you because you have not send me a word of you since I wrote you. ¿what's matter? Why didn't

you send me anymore “The New Masses” and the negro reviews? . . . I know that you like very much the “Motivos de Son” de N.G. So do I. And I know also what he and Regino in his new poems owe to your poetry and to your manner.⁵

This letter is significant in several respects. First, Fernández de Castro’s lamentation over Hughes’s failure to send him copies of *New Masses* reveals his intense desire to stay abreast of the latest developments in proletarian literature and literary theory. Second, Fernández de Castro’s confident assertion about Hughes’s influence on Pedroso offers additional evidence that Hughes spent far more time engaging with Regino Pedroso than has been reported. Contradicting Fernández de Castro’s claims, though, there is no evidence to suggest that Pedroso had written any poems in the interim between Hughes’s departure and the time the letter was written, nor is there any evidence to support the contention that he had changed his manner. Moreover, given the paucity of Spanish-language translations of Hughes’s work and Pedroso’s extremely limited English, it is rather hard to believe that he had a substantial poetic debt to Hughes.

Perhaps to further elevate Cuban poets on the world stage, Fernández de Castro also encouraged the opposite idea of a Pedroso-influenced Hughes when he argued that Hughes’s poetry, like Federico García Lorca’s and Vladimir Mayakovsky’s before him, had been influenced by his contact with Cuba (an assertion in a 1935 draft of *Tema negro en las letras de Cuba*). He pointed to Hughes’s “Ballads of Lenin” (1933), and its placement of “Juan,” a Black Cuban, alongside “Ivan el mujick” and “Chang el culí” at the site of Lenin’s tomb, as testimony to this fact. Fernández de Castro’s decision to translate Chang (in Hughes’s poem “Chang, from the foundries / On strike in the streets of Shanghai”) as “el culí” is extremely telling because the term *culí* largely refers to laborers of Chinese or mixed African and Chinese descent in Cuba. Hence, Fernández de Castro’s characterization slyly ties Hughes to Pedroso, a poet/laborer who made use of the term “culí” in his poetry and to describe himself. The idea that Fernández de Castro meant to evoke Pedroso with this tie gains traction because Hughes’s “Ballads of Lenin” makes no mention of a Cuban Juan, but rather of “Chico, the Negro / Cutting cane in the sun.”

It is noteworthy that at the time of Hughes’s first trip to Cuba, Pedroso was the more celebrated of the two poets and had been the focus of Fernández de Castro’s attention and promotion ever since 1925,

when the latter concluded his now seminal anthology, *La poesía moderna en Cuba (1882–1925)*, with Pedroso’s poem “La ruta de Bagdad,” suggesting that he—the youngest writer included in the collection—represented the future of Cuban poetry. Pedroso subsequently won the Cuban national prize for literature in 1939, almost fifty years before it was awarded to Guillén. Fernández de Castro, in his “Poetas hispano americanos actuales traducidos al inglés” (“Contemporary Hispanic American Poets Translated into English”), strongly suggests his interest in promoting both Guillén and Pedroso when he characterizes them as true poets of Latin America, and closes by celebrating Hughes’s translation of Pedroso’s “Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico” in *New Masses*, describing it as “one of the most valuable poems Cuba has to offer at the present time.”

The fact that Hughes penned at least two translations of Pedroso’s poetry⁶ before he left the island, however, also seems to testify to his clear engagement with the poet.

Thus, several lines of evidence point to Hughes’s entanglement with Pedroso. This chapter puts Pedroso center stage by arguing that Hughes’s 1930–31 translations of Pedroso’s poetry provided new themes, new politics, and new formal strategies for his own nascent radical poetic production. However, Hughes’s radical poetry was not simply an imitation of his translations. Rather, his poetry speaks back, or in concert, at times, to his translations, creating conversations between Hughes, Pedroso, and the version of Pedroso that Hughes forged in translation. The topics of these conversations include current events that loomed large on leftist horizons such as the Chinese revolution; the quest for a revolutionary poetics that could portray revolutionary consciousness as the dialectical outgrowth of historical reflection and revolutionary dreaming; and especially the reciprocal relationship between racial and class awareness. It is the principal thesis of this chapter that in his encounter with Pedroso, Hughes put the lessons he had learned to work and rounded out his poetic chorus by writing poems that resonated with his translations, suggesting a proletarian diasporic affinity while articulating a brand of Black Marxism that positioned cultural and racial awareness as an integral part of communist revolution.

Except for mention in notable works by Gronbeck-Tedesco (2015), Guridy (2010), and de Jongh (1990), there is limited scholarship focusing on Hughes’s relationship with Regino Pedroso, Cuba’s first and only *poeta proletario*. Nevertheless, the few scholars who have pursued this

matter, most notably the historian Frank Guridy, have been inclined to either take Fernández de Castro at his word or echo his contentions, and regard Pedroso's 1933 poem "Hermano negro" ("Black Man") as evidence of Hughes's influence on Pedroso. Guridy goes so far as to say that Hughes's 1931 visit to Cuba facilitated Pedroso's "explicit embrace of blackness in his poetry," amplifying the range of his proletarian poetic production.⁷ However, the main conceit of Pedroso's poem is that the speaker is tied to his "black brother" less by blood than he is by a shared socioeconomic disquiet—a point he drives home by mocking the idea that it was the celebration of Black cultural production, and not the global struggle against racism, that bound Black communities together. In short, for Pedroso, blackness was less a matter of culture than it was a matter of being exploited by global race capitalism:

Black man, black brother,
 I'm within you. Sing!
 . . .
 Black man, black brother, brother more in anxiety than race
 black man in Haiti, in Jamaica, New York, in Havana
 —the pain hawking, oppression in the black shop windows—
 listen now, in Scottsboro,
 in Scottsboro, in Scottsboro. . . .
 Show the world your rebellious anguish, Your human voice . . .
 And give the maracas a rest!⁸

James de Jongh's valuable reading of this poem is more nuanced than Guridy's. He sees "Hermano negro" as participating in a call and response between authors of color in the Americas that is meant to discover, in one another, a "shared subjectivity" born from a "shared" circumstance. De Jongh's repetition of the word "shared" to describe transnational Black subjectivity and a "shared racial fraternity . . . and common cause" is telling in figuring blackness as a shared subjectivity that is not only the outgrowth of racial discrimination but also the result of a shared literary project to discover the Black self in the Black Other. Nevertheless, the quest to portray Black subjectivity as a dialogical process informed both by "racial and existential fraternity" and "common cause" had marked Pedroso's verse since 1927. This fact, in combination with de Jongh's nuanced reading of Pedroso's poem, significantly troubles Guridy's claim that Hughes had somehow prompted Pedroso to explicitly embrace blackness in his poetry.

THE CONQUERORS

They passed this way. Avaricious epics
in their eyes from the Atlantic
to the Pacific. They came in iron boots,
long guns on their shoulders,
and the land wild.

What truth did they preach to men?
What gospel of joy to suffering humanity?
What psalm of Justice over the immense lands
did their iron cannons raise toward the skies?

In the name of law and peace they came...
Came toward the people calling them brothers:
And as in Holy Writ, America was the Christ
who saw them rend the earth like garments,
and fight over the free tunic of their destiny!

They passed this way.
They came in the name of a new democracy:
even on the highest peaks of the Andes
they slept the deep and brutal sleep of bayonets.

They passed this way.
With new postulates of liberty they came:
reaching as far as the old land of Li Tai Pe
on the floating skyscrapers of their battleships,
amidst the clamor of weak and torn nations.

They crossed here.
Now toward their barracks in Wall Street they go,
sacks of dollars on their shoulders,
and the land wild.

Regino Pedrosa

Translated from the Spanish. Havana, 1930.

Typescript of Hughes's translations of Pedrosa's "The Conquerors" and "Until Yesterday," Havana, 1930. Langston Hughes Papers. Copyright © by the Langston Hughes Estate.

UNTIL YESTERDAY

(A Chinese Mood)

Until yesterday I was polite and peaceful....
 Last year I drank tea from the yellow leaves of the yunnan
 in fine cups of porcelain,
 and deciphered the sacred texts of Lao-Tsuen, of Meng-sen,
 and of the wisest of the wise, Kung-fu Tsou.
 Deep in the shade of the pagodas
 my life ran on, harmonious and serene,
 white as the lilies in the pools,
 gentle as a poem by Li-tai-Pe
 picturing the rise and fall
 of ~~the~~ stars at eve
 against an alabaster sky.
 But I have been awakened
 by the echo of foreign voices booming from the mouths of
 strange machines---
 metal dragons setting on fire with spittle of grape-shot---
~~of ~~the~~ ~~of~~ ~~my~~ ~~brothers~~ ~~filled~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~night~~ ~~and~~~~
 our houses of bamboo and our ancient pagodas.

Now from the watch tower of my new consciousness
 I look upon the green fields of Europe
 and her magnificent cities
 blossoming ~~in~~ iron and stone.
 Before my eyes the western world is naked.

With the long pipe of the centuries in my pale hands,
 I am no longer enticed by the opium of yesterday.
 I march toward the progress of the people,
 training my fingers on the trigger of a ~~gun~~ *gun*.

Over the flame of today
 impatiently I seek the drug of tomorrow.
 In my great pipe of jade
 I inhale deeply the new era.
 A strange restlessness has taken all sleep from my eyes.
 To observe more closely the far horizon
 I leap up on the old wall of the past....

Until yesterday I was polite and peaceful.

Regino Pedrosa

Translated from the Spanish, Havana, 1930.

Despite such differences of view, there is a consensus among scholars, like Rampersad and Guridy, that Hughes's trip to Cuba played a role in the advent of his revolutionary poetry. For Rampersad, Hughes was awakened by the fact that Cuba was on the brink of revolution, prompting him to pen "an attack on American imperialism so blunt that it startled his friends, who warned him that such words were dynamite in Cuba."⁹ For Guridy, Hughes's Cuban class awakening is a matter of fact, one that can be supported, as Rampersad argues, by the appearance of Hughes's poem "To the Little Fort of San Lázaro, On the Ocean Front, Havana." "To the Little Fort," highly proletarian in its composition, is itself a poem that grows out of Hughes's translation of Pedroso's "Los Conquistadores." I have argued this elsewhere, contending that Hughes's poem is fruitfully read in complementary conversation with his translation of Pedroso's poem "The Conquerors."¹⁰

Pedroso's "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico" and "Salutación a un camarada culí" exemplify how his social lyrics engaged the world of proletarian literature. In describing Hughes's translations and interpretations of these poems, I will show how "Fraternal Greetings to the Factory" and "Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)" (both 1930) laid the groundwork for a series of choral responses that also constitute a large portion of his early radical poetic production. Hughes's translations of Pedroso's verse exposed him to a wide array of proletarian aesthetics that forced him to grapple with the difficulties of translating and framing a Cuban articulation of the proletarian as such for a U.S. readership. This negotiation enhanced Hughes's proletarian repertoire, allowing him to infuse the fabric of proletarian literature with compositions that spoke in chorus with his translations of Pedroso, putting race consciousness in the service of proletarian revolution rather than perceiving it as false consciousness. The result was a new brand of Black proletarian literature, forged in a crucible of international proletarian aesthetics that would ultimately augment the global literary movement by providing it with a different kind of politics—a Black Marxism—that locates subaltern racial awareness as an important stage in the coming to consciousness necessary for class revolution.

Although it is now commonplace to designate Regino Pedroso as either the man who introduced "poesía proletaria" to Cuba or as the first to produce "poesía proletaria cubana," these labels obscure some differences in perspective. Guillén used both terms to describe Pedroso's poetry, but his assertion that Pedroso's work "opens the road to social poetry, or to Cuban social poetry" has caused an enduring reluctance

among Cuban critics like Osvaldo Navarro to associate Pedroso's poetic production with a transnational literary ethos (embodied in phrases like "poesía social" or "proletarian poetry"). Notwithstanding Navarro's view, in Pedroso's 1934 characterization of his poetic project as an attempt "to contribute in this young American land to the affirmation of a social lyric," he insists that both he and the pages of *Nosotros* come from, and belong to, the "PROLETARIADO," making him a poet who wanted his work to be associated with the emerging worldwide system of proletarian literature.¹¹ So what separates the Cuban social lyric from the proletarian poem, what do they have in common, and what purposes are served by Pedroso's entanglement of the two?

The paratext that accompanied *Nosotros* (1934) reveals that the Spanish term *social* was elusive and complex. Rubén Martínez Villena, a *minorista* and a prominent figure in Cuba's *procesa comunista*, provided a preface for the book that introduced Pedroso to the Cuban public as a laborer whose avant-garde verse reflected his "revolutionary class theory" and "the troubles that touch him as a worker." His verse provided Cubans with a means to express a disquiet that was "attuned to all those who suffer, work, and struggle at his side to forge a better world." Pedroso's verse was that of an "exploited worker" who was discriminated against "racially," and whose revolutionary impulses stemmed from his place in the hierarchy of the "social." For Villena, it was a combination of Pedroso's class consciousness and a history of racial discrimination, as they played out in the realm of the "social," that fueled his revolutionary impulses.

The way Villena associates Pedroso's revolutionary poetry with racial discrimination in Cuba resonates deeply with how the latter described his social lyrics, offering additional evidence that the term "social" had both class and racial dimensions in Cuba when Pedroso coined the term "social lyric." For Pedroso, racial prejudice and social prejudice were almost one and the same. The speaker who inhabited his social poems voiced a tragic existence that had as much to do with racial discrimination as economic exploitation:

We have here the tragedy of an exploited man, the tragedy of a man to whom the state did not give the required instruction for his human curiosity, the tragedy of man who has . . . been condemned to underpaid, exhausting and coarse physical labor, and to unrelenting economic necessity. It's the tragedy of a man attacked by racial prejudice of the most generic and humiliating kind: the social prejudice.¹²

Villena's final turn of phrase here strongly suggests that Pedroso labeled his poems "social lyrics" because they were intended to portray the tragedy of the "exploited man" who was also attacked by the social prejudice of racism.¹³ Villena is careful to distinguish racism from economic exploitation and avoids figuring one as an epiphenomenon of the other. Rather, he implies that each plays a role in the social and in the tragedy of the man portrayed; namely, Pedroso himself, as we shall see. This separation of racial discrimination from economic exploitation was no small point for Pedroso, nor was the complexity of their point of entanglement in the realm of the social, in "social poetry," and in the formation of the revolutionary subject. Indeed, Pedroso's description of himself, his ideology, and its underlying rationale as the dialectical sublation of his experience of racism, economic exploitation, and what he intriguingly calls his "historical-geographic" circumstances, in the "Auto-bio-prólogo" begins his *Nosotros* collection:

Name: Regino Pedroso

Age: For 100 years, I've hoped, dreamed and lived; I'm five years old counting from when I had my truth revelation; and for biological fatalists, I was born in 1898.

Place of Birth—Considered within a narrow conception of political geography, I was born in Union de Reyes; Matanzas Province, Cuba. But to say things more dialectically, I was born in the world.

Race: Human; pigmentation: black-yellow (without any other mixture).

Profession: Exploited.

Places of Study: Small machine shops, the fields, sugar plantation factories.

Ideology: Son of the Americas. Born in a country politically and economically enslaved by Yankee imperialism, classified by traditional concepts of religion, philosophy, and bourgeois science as an individual from an inferior race—ethiopian-asiatic—belonging—proletarian—to the most oppressed and exploited class. What could be my ideology given these three fatalities—historical-geographical, ethnic, and socio-economic???? . . . That which came from Marx, was synthesized by Lenin, and spreads the Justice of the International throughout the world today.¹⁴

Pedroso's presentation of himself carries great import for his literary project because his poetic doctrine rejected a separation between author and work. The persona who gave voice to the "social lyric" was, as Pedroso's neologism "Auto-bio-prólogo" suggests, the poet himself. His self-definition thus speaks to how his poetic persona conceives of himself and the world he inhabits, coloring every poem in the collection. For example, his quip that he is only five years of age (counting from his truth revelation) is both a profession of a political commitment and a confession to naiveté, framing his poetic persona as a fledgling radical with much to learn. At the same time, his exaggeration of his age—"For 100 years, I've hoped, dreamed and lived"—points to a persona whose subjectivity is informed by a personal (and historical) memory that extends beyond that of his actual age. Pedroso and his persona, in short, carry with them the weight of history as well as the new truth of the contemporary age.

This new truth, however, does not account for Pedroso's commitment to Marxist-Leninism and the spread of worldwide communism. Rather, the poet figures his growth into leftist ideology as the dialectical sublation of the three "fatalities": his economic exploitation, his imposed inferior racial status, and the historical domination of Cuba by *yanqui* imperialism. Once again, Pedroso is careful to differentiate race from class, but he entwines the two, along with geopolitical circumstances, in the coming to consciousness of the revolutionary subject. His persona, in turn, is one whose fledgling Marxist contemplation of the world is fueled by his experience of the Cuban social realm and his current and former perceptions of it.

Pedroso's definition of himself and his commitment to portraying the "tragedy of a man" help us locate his poetic ideology against the complex backdrop of Soviet literary debates and theories of proletarian literature as perceived by Cuban literati. His crafty "Auto-bio-prólogo" reveals his informed conception of Soviet poetics and the fact that he knew how to locate his poetry in their light. For example, Pedroso identifies as an exploited worker who writes more about himself than he does about the work he performs. In so doing, he differentiates his work from the kind of proletarian cultural production in which Proletkult¹⁵ was deeply invested, such as the sketch, workers' writing and criticism, the mass chant, multi-authored workers' correspondence (largely reportage), and the "collective novel."¹⁶

Pedroso's thoughts on poetry were nevertheless remarkably in line with a cadre of poets who seceded from Proletkult to form a literary

group called Kuznitsa (The Smithy), and who argued that the work of Proletkult was “holding back the creative possibilities for proletarian writers.”¹⁷ Although the “utopian” aspects of the Smithy’s “planetarity” and “cosmism” met with sharp criticism from other Soviet organizations dedicated to the production of proletarian literature, particularly VAPP and the October Group,¹⁸ Pedroso’s description of his place of birth as Matanzas, or, “to say things more dialectically,” the world, points to his embrace of certain aspects of “planetarity” and Smithy doctrine.

However, in contradistinction to how Pedroso conceived of his poetic persona, the hero of the Smithy lyric was not the individual but the masses or the collective.¹⁹ Moreover, the main product of the Smithy “was lyric poetry, conventional in form, devoted to such themes as the factory, the ‘iron proletarian,’ and the coming world revolution.”²⁰ Pedroso’s “Auto-bio-prólogo” thus differentiates his social lyric from the proletarian literature of the Smithy, and locates his ideology as one that speaks to a number of salient controversies between the Smithy and VAPP. Eschewing the creation of cosmic songs about the “iron proletarian,” VAPP endorsed the mandate of the On Guardists, another proletarian literary faction, to portray proletarians as they really were (77). To this end, they augmented the On Guardist notion of “the living man,” calling upon the proletarian writer, in Edward Brown’s words, to “probe his psychology, lay bare the conflicts and contradictions which take place in him and understand these contradictions as part of a ‘dialectical’ process of development.”

The “living man” slogan, then, represented the dialectical aspect of VAPP’s dialectical-materialist method, and seems to have been one to which Pedroso’s poetics was deeply indebted. As he related in his “Auto-bio-prólogo,” his production of revolutionary work began when he started “experiencing [his] own pain” and writing poetry which communicated “the beauty of thought or the tremor of an emotion” in order to “awaken feelings of social justice and human concern.” This poetry was marked by a conflicted consciousness and contradictions that called on the poet to “sacrifice purity of voice” in favor of “a new expression which is, now, a fire in the souls called for in our consciousness.” If poetry was to play a role in politics, Pedroso argued, “then we must admit without reserve that politics done in this way is also humanly aesthetic.” To know man, Pedroso proclaimed, is “the most essential thing.”²¹

A full exploration of Pedroso’s poetics in light of both his self-presentation and the literary debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, my exploration of these topics

and the conventions of U.S. proletarian literature is intended to provide the information necessary to explore “Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico” as a fertile example of how Pedroso’s social lyrics engaged the world of proletarian literature, and to explore how Hughes used translation to manipulate U.S. understandings of proletarian literature to advance a Black Marxist politics, a revolutionary politics that does not subordinate race to class. We also find ourselves in a position to explore how these factors laid the groundwork for a series of choral responses from Hughes that constitute a large portion of the radical poetry he began to write in 1930 and 1931. What follows then is largely dedicated to a close reading of Hughes’s translations of Pedroso, focusing on how they exposed Hughes to poetics, politics, and translational challenges that manifest in his poetic production.

“Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico,” written in free verse, presents the reader with a one-sided conversation between the poem’s speaker and an anthropomorphized factory that is alternately positioned as a site of perennial capitalist exploitation and revolutionary Marxist potential. The poem is organized in twenty stanzas of varying length, but is perhaps more fruitfully considered as a work composed of three movements. The first movement is concerned with the speaker’s desire to find a proper aesthetic mode by which to represent the factory he seeks to address. The speaker invokes and engages with representational strategies from an array of experimental European, Latin American, and Soviet avant-gardes, only to eschew them as wordplay that is incompatible with his poetic project.

The poem’s second movement is marked by much more intimate poetic diction coupled with a somewhat anarchic consciousness. The persona speaks to the “alma colectiva” (collective soul) of the factory, focusing, at times, on his hatred for its long and painful history of exploitation, and at other times, on how the factory palpitates with (and nourishes) a spirit of proletarian revolt. In line with the doctrine of the “living man,” the poem’s final movement is marked by hope and skepticism. The speaker entertains the notion that the factory may be a forge for tomorrow’s revolutionary “postulados,” admits to his skepticism about this prospect, and somewhat optimistically concludes by ruminating that the factory may very well be a revolutionary womb incubating a better tomorrow marked by love, faith, and a “communion de razas.”

In contrast, Hughes’s translation, “Fraternal Greetings to the Factory,” displays a number of translation decisions (and willful mistranslations) that downplay the skepticism present in Pedroso’s original, creating a

poem and persona with a decidedly stronger faith in the revolutionary potential of the factory and the emancipatory promise of Marxist class struggle. These decisions increase the “youthful clarity of the poem,” strengthen the conviction which its “social theme” relates, and downplay the “pessimism” that obscures the revolutionary élan behind class struggle, thereby helping to align Hughes’s translation with the expectations and objectives of U.S. proletarian literature as articulated by Mike Gold.²² Hughes did not slavishly transform Pedroso’s poem to fit a U.S. vision of proletarian literature; rather, his goal—to situate Pedroso’s lyrics as proletarian poetry for U.S. audiences—required that he make certain translation decisions that fulfilled the literary expectations of the target zone. Hughes capitalized on these transformations and their attendant revolutionary optimism to rework the Marxist conception of race as an epiphenomenon of class struggle into a formulation of communism that positioned the realization of racial egalitarianism as both its impetus and goal. In this sense, Hughes’s translation decisions forefront what he arguably found most exciting about Pedroso: the way his poetry positioned racial and cultural memory, both real and imagined, as facilitators of communist revolution. In short, Hughes’s translation sets forth a brand of Black leftist thought that adheres to the doctrines of U.S. proletarian literature in order to surreptitiously enlarge the scope of Hughes’s Black communist poetic chorus and the politics and panorama of proletarian literature more generally. Hughes’s translation of Pedroso’s opening stanzas embodies one of the key features that differentiates his work from Pedroso’s original—its revolutionary certitude as opposed to Pedroso’s doubt:

Tensión violenta del esfuerzo
 muscular. Lenguas de acero, las mandarrias,
 ensayan en los yunques poemas estridentistas
 de literatura de vanguardia.

Metalurgia sinfónica
 de instrumentales maquinarias;
 ultraístas imagenes de transmisiones y poleas;
 exaltación soviética de fraguas.

¡Oh, taller, férrero ovario de producción: jadeas
 como un gran tórax que se cansa!
 Tema de moda del momento

rara geométrico cubism
e impresionismo de metáforas.

Pero tienes alma colectiva
hecha de luchas societarias,
de inquietudes, de hambre, de laceria,
de pobres carnes destrozadas:
alma forjada al odia de injusticia sociales
y anhelos sordos de venganza . . .

Te agitas, sufres, eres
más que un motivo de palabras . . . (1-23)²³

Hughes translates:

Concentrated tension of muscular strength.
With tongues of steel
the sledge-hammers practice on their anvils
strident poems of the literature of the vanguard

Metallic symphony of great machines;
ultramodern images of transmissions and gears;
soviet exaltation of the forges.

Oh, factory, iron ovary of production,
panting like a great throat grown weary!
fashionable theme now for geometrical cubisms
and metaphorical impressions:

You have a collective soul
made up of social struggles, of unrest, of hunger,
of weariness, of poor shattered bodies,
minds forged in the hatreds of social injustice
and smothered longings for vengeance.

You move restlessly, suffer, are more than a theme for words . . .
(1-13)²⁴

Whereas the speaker's militant epiphany in Hughes's translation is brought about by observations that largely build on one another, the

growth of Pedroso's speaker stems from a series of dialectical tensions and sublations that culminate when he reaches a stage of ambivalence. This ambivalence places his historically informed doubt in dialectical tension with his revolutionary optimism, creating a persona who develops the capacity to entertain revolutionary possibilities, but is nonetheless beset by the doubt and contradictions that mark the consciousness of the "living man." For example, Hughes's decision to forgo translating the first word of the third stanza, "pero" (but), makes for a speaker who is aware that the factory is both a fashionable theme for the avant-garde and a site endowed with a "collective soul" that has suffered a history of social injustice. These two observations build on one another and lead Hughes's speaker to conclude that the factory is "more than a theme for words." For his part, Pedroso's "pero," and the easily accessible language that follows it, offers a speaker whose consciousness develops dialectically, by placing one vision of the factory in tension with another to arrive at a sublation which helps him to realize that the factory is "más que un motivo de palabras" ("more than a theme for words").

Hughes suggests a clarity of mind that complements his speaker's steady growth into militancy by making a series of translation decisions in the first three stanzas that facilitate smooth readability. Whereas Pedroso's poem begins with a jarring sentence fragment, "Tensión violenta del esfuerzo" (Violent tension of effort), which forefronts the dialectical tensions that will ultimately propel his speaker toward an optimistic ambivalence, Hughes's decision to collapse Pedroso's first two lines (both fragments) into one (nearly) complete sentence, "Concentrated tension of muscular strength," implies greater clarity of thought and purpose. Nevertheless, Hughes's translations of "tensión violenta" as "concentrated tension" and "esfuerzo" as "strength" significantly trouble the idea that his decisions were solely motivated by a desire to create an easily readable poem that fell readily into line with the expectations of U.S. proletarian poetry. Although "esfuerzo" finds equivalents in English-language terms as diverse in meaning as "effort," "exertion," "strain," and "toil," it does not connote "strength" (*fuerza*). Likewise, "violenta" (violent) is not a close cousin to "concentrated." These choices are of particular significance because Pedroso's first line functions as a header that sets the stage for a number of violent tensions that develop over the course of his poem: the tension between historically informed skepticism and a revolutionary optimism; the tension between labor and capital; and the tension between a factory that both nourishes and exploits.

Hughes's translation replaces this header—framing both the first stanza's act of poetic creation and the speaker's in-step growth into Marxist consciousness not as the dialectical outgrowth of violent psychological tensions, but as the fruit of a concerted strength. Hughes's translation is exposed as motivated not only by a desire for "clarity" and "swift action," but by a strategy that takes advantage of the transformations, (more or less) mandated by the target milieu's literary expectations, to alter the revolutionary valences of Pedroso's poem.

Hughes's first stanzas speak back to Pedroso's poem—psychologically, politically, and aesthetically. They introduce the translation's commentary function: that a coming to revolutionary consciousness is less a matter of working through contradictions than it is the outcome of progressively clear and historically informed reasoning. And these stanzas work with the violences of translation to transform Pedroso's implicit argument—that modernist experimentation and its attendant hermeticism are incompatible with the "social lyric"—into an explicit, albeit comedic argument that such "verbal acrobats" have even less to do with the production of proletarian literature for a U.S. readership.²⁵ To illustrate, Hughes's decision to translate "poemas estridentistas" as "strident poems" rather than "estridentista poems" and "ultraístas imagenes de transmisiones y poleas" (ultraist images of transmissions and gears) as "ultramodern images of transmission and gears" effaces Pedroso's polyvalent invocation of two avant-garde Latin American literary movements that were deeply invested in modern technology and mechanical symbols—Estridentismo and Ultraísmo—but which were unfamiliar to Hughes's U.S. proletarian readership.²⁶

Insofar as Hughes's translation produces a comic effect, lampooning modernism by associating avant-garde poetry with cacophonous sound and amplifying this mockery with the hyperbolic neologism "ultramodern," it does prove faithful to an interpretation of Pedroso's wording that sees it as more deeply invested in dismissing hermetic modernisms than in evoking them. Hughes's translation thus capitalizes on the inability to preserve Pedroso's play for the latter's target audience, making for a translation—as was the case with Parsons's "Escupideras de metal"—whose irony is made far more trenchant and accessible to readers of Hughes's own target audience. In this sense, Hughes's translation works both with and against the grain of Pedroso's original, wherein the opening stanzas gesture to a hermeticism meant to recall the linguistic experimentation of certain Latin American, European, and

Soviet avant-gardes only to eschew them in favor of a more suitable poetic voice with which to address and portray the “collective soul” of the factory.

Hughes’s translation thus expands Pedroso’s audience while also performing a commentary function. This commentary critiques Pedroso for using hermeticism to make reference to hermeticism and is ultimately in line with Gold’s dictate that the poetry of “the so-called common man” only qualifies as such if its intensity is the product of “the Worker molding his own words.”²⁷ Hughes’s decision to collapse Pedroso’s rejection of avant-garde poetics (which are figured as types of wordplay produced for their own sake: “Te agitas, sufres, eres / más que un motivo de palabras . . .”) into a single stanza which, in translation, constitutes the poem’s longest line, speaks emphatically to this distancing.

Pedroso’s second movement is largely composed of a series of stanzas that juxtapose the revolutionary optimism that the factory inspires in the poem’s speaker with his trenchant skepticism arising from a long and enduring history of political disappointment and collective loss, aborted revolutionary impulses, and economic exploitation. The balance of the speaker’s focus—on the factory’s painful history of exploitation and on its present-day potential to transform and be transformed—is in line with both the doctrine of the living man and with Pedroso’s conception of the ideal vantage point (subject position or state of consciousness) from which to portray the contradictions brought about by revolutionary dreaming:

We believe in the goodness of art as the supreme manifestation of beauty, as a great collective of human truths focused sharply on life:—one eye open to emotion’s flesh that looks at the world and feels, and one with the maturity of thought . . . colored by what has been lived—and ultimately, as the definitive return of the dream’s country.²⁸

Hughes’s “Fraternal Greetings to the Factory” similarly frames his speaker’s coming to consciousness as the outgrowth of his own and a collective racial history that resemble, and yet stand apart from, the Marxist weight of history. Hughes transforms the chaotic and lawless conscience of Pedroso’s personified factory into one that is resentful, embittered, and primed for revolution not by a class consciousness that leads to a racial realization, but rather by a legacy of slavery and prejudice that leads him to a proletarian awakening:

Sé tu dolor perenne,
 sé tu ansiedad humana,
 sé como largos siglos de ergástula te han hecho
 una conciencia acrática.

Me hablas de Marx, del Kuo Min Tang, de Lenin;
 y en el deslumbramiento de Rusia libertada
 vives un sueño ardiente de redención:
 palpitas, anhelas, sueñas, lo puedes todo, y sigues
 tu oscura vida esclava.²⁹

Hughes translates:

But I know your perennial pain.
 I know your human needs.
 I know how long centuries of parturition
 have made in you an acrid conscience.

You speak to me of Marx, of Kuo Ming Tang, of Lenin;
 and in the dazzling brilliance of a free Russia
 lives your ardent hope of salvation;
 you pulse with life, you dream,
 you can do everything—
 yet you keep on living in bitter slavery.³⁰

Hughes points to a generative power of the factory by translating “largos siglos de ergástula” (long centuries of slave prison) as “long centuries of parturition” and rendering “acrática” (anarchic) as “acrid.” However, given that this generative power has produced an “acrid” consciousness, Hughes’s translation suggests that years of exploitative practices have transformed the factory, making it into a site that also manufactures revolution by embittering the proletariat. Hughes thus reframes the to-and-fro of the poem’s second movement. The vacillations of the speaker no longer mirror the “anarchic” consciousness of the factory, but are instead the reflection (as well as the source) of the speaker’s disaffection caused by a “perennial pain” and a parturition which suggest that the collective soul of the factory has been kept from enjoying the fruits of its labor.

Hughes’s erasure of Pedroso’s “slave prison” could be mistaken, at first glance, for a decision that deracinates the poem, bringing it more

into accord with a U.S. labor movement that saw racism as a tool of class division. However, Hughes's decision to translate "y sigues / tu obscura vida esclava" (and you continue / your dark slave life) as "yet you keep on living in bitter slavery" compensates for this omission by suggesting that industrial labor is akin to (and the product of) slave labor. Similarly, this translation decision points to a contradiction whose resolution suggests that the "collective soul" of the factory belongs to a Black proletariat. Hughes thus, slyly, makes Pedroso's metaphors concrete and introduces an emphatic brand of Black leftism cloaked in a doctrinal embrace of class struggle.

The idea that class and cultural awareness are both reciprocal and complementary pervades Pedroso's poetry from 1926 on, and manifests in four of the six poems that Hughes carried home from Cuba in 1930. Pedroso's "El heredero," which Hughes translated as "The Heir" in 1930 (but failed to publish), presents the reader with a Chinese speaker whose self-identification as an "hijo de la Revolución" (son of the Revolution) is qualified by his proud proclamation that "son mis antepasados illustrious!" (my ancestors are illustrious!). This speaker, though, rejects his ancestor's "tesoros" (treasures), requesting instead that he bequeath only his "manuscritos raros." These ancient texts, in turn, are figured not only as untainted by Occidental imperialism but also as texts that presage Marxist thought and the speaker's revolutionary consciousness. In other words, the poem's dialogue stages a dialectic between an ancient cultural past (or a nationalist racial history) and a militant Marxist present whose mutual sublation accounts for the speaker's radical consciousness.

Likewise, Pedroso's "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante" ("Opinions of the New Student") offers a speaker whose knowledge of his cultural past informs the horizons of his revolutionary consciousness.³¹ The poem's speaker accounts for this consciousness by telling the story of how the massacre of his schoolmates transformed him from a peaceful student of ancient Chinese culture into an armed revolutionary who, tellingly, jumps onto "la vieja muralla del pasado" (the old wall of the past) to gain a wider perspective on the future that lies ahead. Hence, "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante" and "El heredero" articulate a Marxist consciousness that is decidedly inflected by quasi-nationalist longings for a Chinese cultural legacy. Insofar as Pedroso's Chinese speakers are generally thought to reveal his deep interest in his Chinese ancestry, this Marxist consciousness is also shaped by an internationalist impulse driven by racial identification, history, and memory (both lived and

imagined). This aspect of Pedroso's poetics and politics—that class, history, and cultural awareness are both reciprocal and complementary—had a profound effect on Hughes that, arguably, is manifest in one of the best-known poems that stem from his revolutionary period; namely, “A New Song.” This poem also speaks to a racial history that incorporates a Marxist awakening and contains a warning that there are perils in the pathway to the future, but it is nonetheless driven by an internationalist impulse and racial identification. It is the memory of a racialized past that impels the speaker to action in the present moment.

I speak in the name of the black millions.
 Let all others keep silent a moment.
 I have this word to bring,
 This thing to say,
 This song to sing:
 Bitter was the day
 When I bowed my back
 Beneath the slaver's whip.
 That day is past. (1–10)³²

 New words are formed,
 Bitter
 With the past
 And sweet
 With the dream.
 Tense, silent, without a sound,
 They fall unuttered—
 Yet heard everywhere:
 Take care!
 Black world
 Against the wall,
 Open your eyes—
 The long white snake of greed has struck to kill!
 Be wary—
 And be wise!
 Before the wisdom
 Of the darker world
 The future lies. (49–58)³³

In entangling race, class, and cultural history, “A New Song” exhibits further common ground between Hughes and Pedroso. The poet who awakened Hughes’s special interest proves to be one invested not simply in giving voice to proletarian revolt, but one whose poetic exploration of proletarian class struggle deals in the complex portmanteau of race, class, and cultural cohesion and collision. While “A New Song” speaks back to Hughes’s translations, those translations do not simply produce (and promote) a Marxist inter-American literary exchange. Rather, the translations and the original poems with which they resonate conscript proletarian poetics to provoke transnational conversations about how the complex interactions (and intersections) among race, culture, and class beg a rethinking of Marxist and communist doctrine in a global arena. This arena is marked by conflict among the forces of market capitalism (fueled in large part by Western imperialism and colonialism); Soviet internationalism; and a host of anti-imperialist nationalisms (largely inflected by communism) in places like China, India, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Haiti, and Cuba.

Although Pedroso’s “Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico” and Hughes’s translation of it maintain their respective “anarchic” and “acrid” vacillations in the second movement’s latter half, both tap into a lineage of loss that brings intergenerational proletarian misery into focus by now characterizing the workers as the factory’s children who witness and are the victims of exploitation on a daily basis but are nevertheless “estéril al sueño de gestas libertarias,” or “sterile in visions of liberating power.” “A New Song” also incorporates this intergenerational misery, but punctuates past injustices with the declaration “That day is past” and draws to a close with a warning before offering a more optimistic promise of a different world in the future that belongs to the darker peoples. Thus, loss is juxtaposed with allusions to a Marxist remedy manifest in Pedroso’s original as a hope and in Hughes’s translation and in “A New Song” as a certainty. Illustrative of this point, Pedroso’s original refers to the factory’s “inmenso salmo de esperanza” (immense psalm of hope) while Hughes’s “psalm” is figured as “what is to come,” like the future promised in “A New Song.” Likewise, Pedroso brings the second movement of his poem to a close by staging a tension between two stanzas, the first, four lines in length, and the second, composed of a single line.

The first of these stanzas culminates in the speaker’s confession of past hatred for a factory that “ahogaba / mi ritmo interno” (drowned / my internal rhythm), but which he now salutes “en grito de igual an-

gustia humana!” (with a cry of equal human pain!) in the stanza that follows. The separation of stanzas differentiates this salutation from the hatred that precedes it but does not negate it. In contrast, Hughes’s decision to augment Pedroso’s salute by prefacing it with a “now”—“Now I salute you with a cry of human pain!”—suggests an epiphany wherein the speaker’s past hatred has been overcome. The emphatic coming to revolutionary consciousness that marks the finale of “Fraternal Greetings to the Factory” is commonplace in U.S. proletarian poetry and prose but is by no means the rule. One needs only to recall the muddled thinking of Bigger Thomas in the final moments of *Native Son* to realize that proletarian literature is equally, if not more, replete with climactic moments in which characters, narrators, and poetic personas either take a small step toward Marxist class-consciousness or fail to escape the trappings of bourgeois ideology altogether.

The common denominator in these cases, though, could be labeled an accounting of consciousness. Characteristically, proletarian works offer their readers concrete details that help to explain the differing levels of class awakening manifested by their characters, narrators, and poetic personas. The speakers of “Fraternal Greetings to the Factory” and “Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico” prove no exception to this rule. Each speaker relates a history of collective loss and meditations on emancipatory futures that account for his present state of consciousness. Hence, Hughes’s translation is not simply invested in presenting a speaker who draws more radical conclusions from his experiences than does Pedroso’s. Rather, Hughes’s translation strategy assiduously produces shifts that are fruitfully understood as successful attempts to alter the valence and the account of the speaker’s Marxist awakening. Although Hughes’s translation of “Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico” does much to downplay the doubt of Pedroso’s “living man,” it nevertheless offers its readers a dialectical and dialogic progression that formally and thematically refracts the progression of Pedroso’s original.

This refraction creates yet another dialogic interaction between Hughes’s translation and Pedroso’s poem for those who are bilingual, and resonates with Hughes’s “Red Flag over Tuskegee” (later renamed “Open Letter to the South”). This poem is presented in the form of an address that speaks in chorus with Hughes’s “Fraternal Greetings to the Factory,” thereby amplifying the revolutionary certitude that differentiates his translation from Pedroso’s by providing a complement that augments the revolutionary optimism of his translation still further:

White workers of the South

Miners,
Farmers,
Mechanics,
Mill hands,
Shop girls,
Railway men,
Servants,
Tobacco workers,
Sharecroppers,
GREETINGS!

I am the black worker,
Listen: (1–13)

. . . .

Let us become instead, you and I,
One single hand
That can united rise
To smash the old dead dogmas of the past—
To kill the lies of color
That keep the rich enthroned
And drive us to the time-clock and the plow
Helpless, stupid, scattered, and alone—as now—
Race against race,
Because one is black,
Another white of face. (21–31)

. . . .

Let union be
The force that breaks the time-clock,
Smashes misery,
Takes land,
Takes factories,
Takes office towers,
Takes tools and banks and mines,
Railroads, ships and dams,
Until the forces of the world
Are ours!

White worker,
Here is my hand.

Today,
We're Man to Man. (54–67)³⁴

Hughes's "Red Flag over Tuskegee" resonates with his translations by deploying a racially egalitarian vision of the future—"Let union be / The force that breaks the time-clock / Smashes misery"—that imbues his speaker with a faith in the emancipatory promise of Marxism. This resonance is facilitated most saliently by the third movement of his "Fraternal Greetings" translation. At no point in his translation does Hughes's dual strategy make itself more manifest than here. This strategy uses an emphatic embrace of Marxism to cloak the way Hughes figures racial egalitarianism as both the impetus and goal of communism:

¿Fundirán tus crisoles los nuevos postulados?
¿Eres sólo un vocablo de lo industrial: la fábrica?
¿O también eres templo
de amor, de fe, de intensos ideológicos
y comunión de razas? . . .

Yo dudo a veces, y otras
palpito y tiemblo y vibro con tu inmensa esperanza,
y oigo en mi carne la honda VERDAD de tus apóstoles:
que eres la entraña cósmica que incubas el mañana.³⁵

Hughes translates:

Do your crucibles smelt the new postulates?
Are you only an industrial word, factory?
Or are you a temple of faith, of burning idealism,
and communion of the races?

Sometimes I doubt—
and yet again I breathe and burn and vibrate
with your immense hope;
and I hear in my heart the great truth of your apostles:

You are the cosmic belly breeding tomorrow!³⁶

Hughes makes five translation decisions here that not only alter Pedroso's conclusion but shift the political weight of the entire poem,

transforming it from a meditation riddled with doubt into a text offering its reader a triumphant coming to revolutionary consciousness. First, Hughes replaces Pedroso's future-inflected "¿Fundirán tus crisoles los nuevos postulados?" (Will your crucibles smelt the new postulates?) with "Do your crucibles smelt the new postulates?" implying that these (presumably) Marxist prescriptions might already be in production. Second, Hughes chooses to conjoin this line with the stanza that follows, producing a significant shift in emphasis. Whereas Pedroso's interrogative stands alone as the core question to which the remainder of the poem speaks, Hughes's conjoined stanza presents the reader with a series of questions that culminate to suggest that the aim of these new postulates is a "communion of the races." Third, this implication is reinforced by Hughes's decision to omit the ellipsis that concludes Pedroso's stanza, an ellipsis that implies doubt, on the one hand and on the other, suggests that there are still more questions to be posed. Fourth, Hughes's interjection of the phrase "and yet again" after the mention of "doubt" downplays the ambivalence that marks Pedroso's persona, a speaker who doubts "a veces" (at times) and palpitates with Marxist fervor at "otras" (others). Most dramatically, Hughes's decision to create a separate stanza out of Pedroso's concluding line and, moreover, to punctuate that line with an exclamation point conveys the sense that the speaker is wholeheartedly convinced of the truth of his proclamation. This decision is partially justified by Pedroso's capitalization of "VERDAD" (rendered by Hughes simply as "truth"), but nevertheless presents the reader with a Marxist epiphany that is absent from Pedroso's original.

Hughes's "Fraternal Greetings to the Factory" speaks back to "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico" and produces an inter-American dialogue that, among other things, suggests that modernist experimentation has even less of a role to play in the proletarian poetry published by *New Masses* than it does in the social lyrics published by *Diario de la Marina*; and that racial communion is not simply a happy by-product of Marxist revolt, but rather its chief aim. Hughes's translation offers a brand of Black Marxism that is animated as much, if not more, by racial concerns and collective memory than it is by class consciousness.³⁷ In doing so, Hughes sets forth a vision of race (or racial consciousness) not as an epiphenomenon of class struggle, but rather as an impetus for communist revolution.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that the way Hughes positions race, or racial history, as an animating force for Marxist revolt

is by no means alien to Pedroso's poetic production. Rather, the way in which Pedroso routinely frames class and racial awareness as reciprocal and complementary is arguably what made him so attractive to Hughes. Hughes finds in Pedroso a poetics that positions the past in a way that reframes Hughes's early engagement with poetic primitivism and, simultaneously, anticipates his radical verse. In fact, three of the six poems that Hughes translated from Pedroso's oeuvre present the reader with a speaker who accounts for his (increasingly) revolutionary class consciousness by figuring it as the sublation of an interest in, or commitment to, Marxism and a self-awareness fueled by knowledge of ancient cultural history. The dialectical progressions that account for the speakers' consciousness in these poems thus differ substantially from the dialectic between historically informed skepticism and Marxist optimism that marks the "living man" of "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico." The poems in question do not simply answer to the On Guardists' (and RAPP's) call for a "living man" whose focus is primarily on the contemporary conflicts and contradictions that surround him. Rather, they provide speakers whose machinations can be said to be mindful of Lenin's call for a proletarian culture that reworks bourgeois artistic production from an "awakened" perspective, staging dialectics that bring the speakers' ancient cultural heritage into contact with both their contemporary moments and their radical "freedom dreams," to borrow from Robin D. G. Kelley.³⁸ The workings of these dialectics, in turn, produce accountings of consciousness that figure the relationship between class and (ancient) cultural awareness as reciprocal and conducive to the project of revolution. Moreover, they produce speakers whose Marxisms are not only informed, but shaped by their cultural heritage.

Hughes's attempt to facilitate an inter-American dialogue about race and Marxism is most salient in his translation of Pedroso's "Salutación a un camarada culí," or "Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)."³⁹ This poem offers the reader a vision of the intersection between class and race in a global arena fraught with conflict, while also suggesting that these intersections can serve as bases for revolutionary solidarities. The Cuban speaker's salute to his Chinese comrade inspires a series of progressively more militant meditations whose revolutionary ambitions center around the liberation of a *Nuestra América* whose geography extends from the Rio Grande to Tierra del Fuego. However, Pedroso's revolutionary thoughts about the contemporary conflicts and contradictions he perceives are decidedly inflected by his Afro-Chinese ancestry. The speaker's coming to consciousness over the course of "Salutación"

is driven by his sharpening perception of the political, cultural, and racial solidarity that he shares with his revolutionary addressee. In short, the speaker's salute to his "camarada culí" (Chinese comrade) sets in motion a series of complementary meditations that lead to the realization that he is bound to his comrade by both an "estirpe" (lineage)—marked as much by collective political loss and exploitation as by racial commonality—and by a "nueva inquietud ideológica" (new ideological restlessness) shaped as much by an investment in ancient culture as it is by a commitment to Marxism.

The way Pedroso's poem routinely stages collisions between the politics of the past and present to articulate reciprocal and complementary solidarities that progressively bind the speaker to his addressee is set in motion by the poem's first stanza, wherein the speaker offers his "camarada culí" an "exaltación" that is said to arise from "del fondo de los siglos" (the depths of the centuries), but is nevertheless also figured as the speaker's response to the fact that he has read "una Iliad de libertad" (an Iliad of liberty) in the "pupilas oblicuas" (slanted pupils) of his "camarada." These "pupilas oblicuas de libertad" mark the "camarada" both racially and politically, since they gesture to a phenotype associated with Chinese ancestry, as well as to a fixity of vision that symbolizes an intense political commitment. The salutation that begins the poem is thus a gesture of revolutionary solidarity that results from a dialectical engagement between the speaker's racial past and a present moment wherein the speaker finds inspiration in the eyes of the revolutionary and racial "camarada."

Hughes's translation of "Salutación a un camarada culí" contains several translation decisions that reflect his particular interest in the layering effects produced by the interactions and intersections among race, culture, and class in Pedroso's poetic production. These decisions position racial solidarity not as one factor woven into a revolutionary fabric comprised of reciprocal and complementary economic, cultural, and political solidarities, but rather as the starting point for a Third World Marxism whose ultimate end resides in the revolutionary triumph of subaltern peoples over Western imperialism. Hughes's submission of his translation to *New Masses* also offers additional evidence that helps to illuminate how he used the print culture of the CPUSA to stage (and foster) a conversation about labor and Marxism inflected with and shaped by the concerns of people of color in the Americas. In this sense, Hughes's translation filled a discursive lack in the largely domestic focus of U.S. proletarian literature in 1930 by introducing a

decidedly internationalist ethos. “Salute!” proves to be the most transformative translation of Pedroso’s poetry that Hughes penned, forging a text that positions racial solidarity as an indispensable catalyst for Marxist revolt.

The freedom dreams that “Salute!” articulates thus differ from those of “Fraternal Greetings,” but also resemble them insofar as the speakers of each text frame the aims of Marxism in non-doctrinal terms that are heavily inflected by aspirations and concerns for social justice. The two poems and their translations share several formal features and sociopolitical preoccupations. Each poem uses the conceit of a dialogical address between its speaker and an addressee who is not the reader but rather a comrade (as in “Salute!”) or the “collective soul” of a factory (as in “Fraternal Greetings”) to mourn a history of collective political loss and economic exploitation. This mourning animates a meditation that is framed as dialogic, and by extension, collective and which produces a dialectical engagement between the speaker’s historically informed vision of the past and a present moment pregnant with Marxist possibilities. And each poem culminates with a sublation that accounts for the speaker’s level of revolutionary awakening by offering the reader a vision that speaks to the emancipatory potential of Marxist revolt. All these common denominators, manifest in poems like “A New Song” and “Red Flag Over Tuskegee,” are stock features in the type of radical verse that Hughes began to write, in concert with his translations of Pedroso and Guillén, upon his return from Cuba.

The length of Pedroso’s “Salutación a un camarada culí” and the number of Hughes’s translation decisions, which are perhaps better qualified as adaptations, prohibit a lengthy comparison between the two texts here. For our purposes, we will examine the most important facets of Hughes’s translation by exploring how his fifth, sixth, and seventh stanzas work in conversation with the stanzas that they conjoin (stanzas five through nine of Pedroso’s original):

Mas, sangre de tu sangre, yo vivo en fiebre ahora
 tu fuerte gesto y tu tragedia.
 Nos ligan doblemente los vínculos
 de la estirpe y la nueva inquietud ideológica.

Tu has despertado en mí lo que en mí hay de Asia;
 adormecido estaba por el Pan-americanismo y el Hispano-
 americanismo,

mas yo vengo de allá en connubio con Africa:
 dos grandes continentes humillados, vencidos . . .
 Mi destino es más triste que el tuyo:
 que hasta la tierra india a cuyo sol me abierto,
 cuya brisa he bebido,
 desde Río Grande al Fuego—patria continental—
 también es destrozada por el imperialismo.⁴⁰

Hughes translates:

Blood of your blood,
 I live feverishly
 the strong gestures of your deep tragedy,
 for we are doubly linked
 by the bonds of race and restless dreams.
 And you have awakened in me all there is of Asia
 lulled to sleep by Panamericanism.
 Besides, I come from afar in marriage with Africa—
 two great humiliated lands, conquered . . .
 My destiny is sadder than yours
 because this southern world
 beneath whose sun I've grown,
 is crushed by imperialism.⁴¹

Hughes's decision to conjoin Pedroso's fifth and sixth stanzas works in harmony with his choice to combine the two sentences that comprise the former insofar as the effect produced by both decisions produces a stanza that frames the speaker's anti-imperialist awakening as yet another step in a series of events set in motion by his assertion of racial solidarity with the addressee. The assertion of a blood bond that allows the speaker to live out his comrade's "deep tragedy," with Hughes's addition of "for," flows causally into the speaker's realization that the two men are "doubly linked." Hughes's decision to decline to preserve the "mas" (yet) that begins Pedroso's first line and the "ahora" (now) that concludes it also revises the way the fifth stanza builds upon the fourth to suit a similar agenda. Whereas Pedroso's "mas" and "ahora" temporally mark the speaker's recognition of his blood bond as a new stage in his coming to consciousness, a progression that reposes in him the responsibility to leave behind his passivity by making him a mutual participant in his comrade's "tragedia," Hughes's deletion of these terms

brackets the speaker's awakening to a "new dawn" in the fourth stanza between two assertions of racial commonality. The speaker's assertion that he and his addressee are of the same race in the poem's second stanza can thus be seen to animate the awakening that transpires over the course of the fourth. And the invocation of the blood bond that begins the fifth stanza—no longer temporally marked as an additional stage of growth—can be said to both reiterate and confirm the central importance of the role that racial solidarity plays in this awakening. For this reason, Hughes's decision to translate "estirpe" (lineage) as "race" is particularly significant, since the latter term is not only more inclusive and devoid of the shared concrete history than the term "estirpe" implies, but, more importantly, reiterates a prior racial identification instead of introducing a new basis for solidarity.

Hughes's decision to conjoin Pedroso's fifth and sixth stanzas makes the first stanza's unpunctuated first line, "Blood of your blood," an antecedent clause to the entire stanza, framing all its statements in a manner that figures racial solidarity as a type of *primum movens* that facilitates the speaker's anti-imperialist awakening. In this sense, the speaker's acknowledgment that the addressee "has awakened" in him "all there is of Asia / lulled to sleep by Panamericanism" is but a link, given Hughes's insertion of the linking term "and," in a chain of thoughts that all spring from the assertion of racial solidarity that begins Hughes's fifth stanza.

In contrast, Pedroso's fifth and sixth stanzas assign neither this awakening nor the realizations of cultural, racial, and political solidarities that follow to a definitive source. Insofar as the speaker's pronouncement of this development constitutes the beginning of a separate stanza, Pedroso's text allows for multiple animating factors. The cause of the speaker's awakening might reside in his admiration for his comrade's "fighting impulse," in his reassertion of racial commonality, in his entry into a "new dawn," or in a combination of all three of these factors. In fact, it is the lack of clear causal connections between Pedroso's fifth and sixth stanzas and within the sixth stanza itself that marks his speaker's machinations about solidarity and difference as relatively autonomous—as interrelated rather than interdependent. Pedroso ties his speaker's thoughts about the awakening of "lo que en mí hay de Asia" to his dismissal of intercontinental (pan-American) as well as transatlantic (Hispanic-American) alliances and to his assertion of additional cultural and historical affinities and differences, combining all of these flows causally in one loosely connected sentence whose very

construction mirrors the interrelationship among autonomous solidarities that animates the speaker's Black left internationalist awakening.

Hughes's decisions to conjoin the two stanzas and to introduce causal connections by adding words like "for" and "and" thus work against the grain of Pedroso's original, suggesting not only that the speaker's multiple bases for solidarity with his addressee are interdependent but also that they are of common origin. Hence, Hughes's speaker's realization that he, too, is engaged in a struggle with imperialism is figured as the last link in a chain of thoughts set in motion by his recognition of racial solidarity. Hughes's translation thus speaks in chorus with yet another of his radical poems, namely, "Always the Same," a poem which frames international racial solidarity as a stepping-off point for class awareness:

It is the same everywhere for me:
 On the docks of Sierra Leone,
 In the cotton fields of Alabama,
 In the diamond mines of Kimberley,
 On the coffee hills of Haiti, (lines 1–5)

....

Black:
 Exploited, beaten and robbed.
 Shot and killed. (10–13)

....

And all the black lands everywhere.
 The force that kills,
 The power that robs,
 And the greed that does not care.

Better that my blood makes one with the blood
 Of all the struggling workers in the world—
 Till every land is free of
 Dollar robbers
 Pound robbers
 Franc robbers
 Peseta robbers
 Lire robbers
 Life robbers—

Until the Red Armies of the International Proletariat
 Their faces, black, white, olive, yellow, brown,

Unite to raise the blood-red flag that
Never will come down! (35–51)⁴²

In addition to laying the groundwork for a poetic chorus composed of translation and new poem, “Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)” remaps the borders encompassing the collective that Pedroso’s speaker seeks to incite to Marxist revolt to make them inclusive of U.S. southern Blacks. Whereas Pedroso’s poem goes to great lengths to identify the collective and his mixed-race speaker as Latin American by figuring their shared homeland as a “tierra india” (Indian land) whose borders stretch “desde Río Grande al Fuego,” the “southern world” that Hughes’s translation offers in place of Pedroso’s “patria continental” can be said, insofar as it is “crushed by imperialism,” to include an American South that, by 1930, was considered by the Comintern to be the patrimony of its oppressed Black inhabitants. Hughes’s translation thus mines Soviet foreign policy to assert a political solidarity between Latin Americans and U.S. Blacks which augments the collective that Pedroso seeks to infuse with a Marxist ethos. Moreover, given the fact that Hughes’s speaker identifies racially and politically with an Asia and an Africa that have been “conquered” and “humiliated” by Western colonialism and imperialism, this “southern world” is also a community whose solidarities gesture toward its inclusion in a larger collective of subaltern peoples bound together more by shared political loss than by common ancestry.

Hughes’s rendition of Pedroso’s seventh stanza thus serves to advance two projects already set in motion by his translation decisions: the first amplifies the suggestion that racial consciousness animates anti-imperialist struggle, and the second articulates the racial and political contours of the speaker’s “southern world”:

Con tu ancestral instinto, tu oculta fuerza adormecida,
liberta, liberta;
aunque el oro de Europa
y la amenaza odiosa del bárbaro nipón
llegue hasta tí, liberta.⁴³

Out of your ancestral instincts,
your sleeping occult forces,
freedom!
Although the gold of Europe

and the hateful menace of the barbarous North
comes toward you,
freedom!⁴⁴

Hughes's decision to translate "bárbaro nipón" (barbarous Japan) as "barbarous North" transforms a regional conflict into a global one. He thus provides his "southern world" with an adversarial counterpart that is in league with "the gold of Europe" and propelled by the forces of global race capitalism. Hughes's decision to translate "liberta" (liberate) as "freedom!" not only offers a noun in place of a verb, but also transforms a dialogic exhortation to rebel into a decidedly more ambiguous exclamation. This exclamation, in turn, speaks less to the process of revolt and more to its end. In this sense, the speaker's first cry of "freedom!" is yet another example of the way Hughes's translation repeatedly positions racial solidarity, manifest here in the speaker's embrace of primitivism and his ancestral past, as a spark that can ignite revolutionary consciousness.

On the other hand, given the fact that the speaker's second cry of "freedom!" stems from his perception of the global inequities that haunt his present political moment, Hughes's decision to translate "liberta" as "freedom!" can be said to punctuate yet another Pedrosian coming to revolutionary consciousness that is facilitated by a dialectical engagement between the speaker's ancient cultural past and a political present infused with a vision of an emancipatory future. In either case, Hughes's translation of the fifth and sixth stanzas juxtaposes a subjugated "southern world" against an imperialist "North." The latter's ambiguous geography and "barbarous" materialism gesture toward an imperialist complex that includes both Europe and the United States, and the former's political and cultural solidarities point to an even greater collective of subaltern populations that would be well served by the "freedom!" that the poem associates with Marxist revolution. Hence, Hughes's translation suggests, far more forcefully than does Pedroso's original, that the advent of a proto-Third World Marxism would remedy the maladies propagated by imperialism.

Hughes's translation decisions seem to resonate with yet another original poem of his, "Scottsboro," and to signal indirectly the generative power of the chorus he is fashioning with his strategic translations and his original poetry. Although less reliant on creating resonances between the primitive and the proletarian, as we shall see, "Scottsboro" also pivots on decisions Hughes made in translating "Salutación a un camarada culí," and in so doing achieves similar unifying functions.

Foremost, among the features of “Scottsboro” that resonate with “Salutación,” is Hughes’s further expansion of the collective that Pedroso’s speaker sought to incite to Marxist revolt. Whereas in Hughes’s translation, Pedroso’s *Nuestra América* becomes inclusive of American Blacks, in “Scottsboro,” the enlarged collective is revised to become global. Also pivoting on his translation, Hughes seems to suggest in “Scottsboro” that the past can be brought to bear against present-day oppression—that a transnational historical consciousness of geographies both real and envisioned can serve as a force that impels class struggle. The poem’s beginning is marked by a typeface that suggests a newspaper headline (the latest news), but the injustice it advertises finds a potential remedy in the power the speaker draws from his world historical awareness. “Scottsboro,” then, speaks once again in chorus with Hughes’s own translation:

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.
WORLD, TURN PALE!

8 black boys and one white lie.
Is it much to die?

Is it much to die when immortal feet
March with you down Time’s street.
When beyond steel bars sound the deathless drums
Like a mighty heart-beat as They come?

Who comes?

Christ,
Who fought alone.

John Brown.

That mad mob
That tore the Bastille down
Stone by stone.

Moses.

Jeanne d’Arc.

Dessalines.

Nat Turner.

Fighters for the free.

Lenin with the flag blood red.

(Not dead! Not dead!
None of those is dead.)

Gandhi.

Sandino.

Evangelista, too,
To walk with you—

8 BLACK BOYS IN A SOUTHERN JAIL.
WORLD, TURN PALE!⁴⁵

In his translation of “Salutación,” Hughes’s conjoined version of Pedroso’s eighth and ninth stanzas begins with a clause that works, like the antecedent “blood of your blood,” to frame racial solidarity as a kind of *primum movens* that gives rise to and intensifies the speaker’s political commitment and his exhortation to revolt. This deepens an engagement with the power and potential of primitivism, mirroring the way that Pedroso’s eighth stanza pits the speaker’s ancient racial past, now explicitly characterized as “primitiva,” against a present moment wherein the speaker is, at first, weighted down by the trappings of Occidental imperialism to the point of passivity. The racial solidarity that marks “blood of your blood” differs from the racial identification that animates the speaker’s atavistic primitivism in both Hughes’s translation and Pedroso’s original. Hence, Hughes’s translation foregrounds the potential for primitivism to act as a powerful facilitator of Marxist revolt, producing a stanza whose action is framed and sparked by the invocation of primitivism in its first line:

La virtud de tu raza primitiva
surja viril y recia;

y del ensueño fútil del paisaje laca,
 y del embotamiento del opio aniquilante,
 y del quietismo inútil de tu filosofía,
 brote el clamor de guerra.

Lucha contra los buitres
 que te devoran las entrañas;
 vampiros extranjeros que sorben tus derechos
 bajo una fermentada noche civilizada.⁴⁶

The power of your ancient race
 rises virile and strong.
 From the futile dreams of lacquered landscapes
 and the drowsiness of death-dealing opium
 and the useless drain of languid philosophies—
 let the clamor of war explode!
 Fight against the vultures
 that are tearing at your entrails,
 those foreign vampires sucking away your rights
 in this long deceptive night called civilization.⁴⁷

Not only does Hughes's decision to conjoin Pedroso's two stanzas give rise to the plethora of shifts detailed above, it also works in conjunction with three other transgressive translations. Two of these also serve to amplify the potential for primitivism to animate revolt, and one reframes Hughes's early literary efforts by alluding to his poetic primitivism. First, Hughes's decision to translate "virtud" (virtue) as "power" preserves Pedroso's contention that a distant racial past can constitute a potent force for revolt, but erases Pedroso's suggestion that both his ancient past and revolutionary present are governed by a moral strength that can combat the passive decadence engendered by imperialism. This imperialist decadence is, in turn, symbolized by both the "embotamiento del opio aniquilante" (torpor of obliterating opium) and the "quietismo inútil" (useless quietude) of a pacifying Western "filosofía" that ostensibly serves the interests of imperialism. In short, whereas Hughes's speaker calls upon the "power" of an "ancient race" to rise "virile and strong," Pedroso's speaker sees the "virtud" of his and his addressee's "raza primitiva" as a wellspring for the liberation of the exploited from their psychological subjugation. Thus, Pedroso's poem not only articulates a proto-Third World Marxism but also gives voice

to a proto-*négritude*, making it no surprise that Léon-Gontran Damas devoted a great deal of time to exploring Pedroso's poetic production during his final years.

At first glance, Hughes's decision to translate "primitiva" (primitive) as "ancient" shies away from the primitivism he associated with his split from Charlotte Mason. Whereas Mason's primitive implies a past (or present) that is usually characterized by romantic embellishment and gestures toward either a prelapsarian purity or a state of development that falls short of Western standards, an "ancient" race is distinguished by its capacity to endure in the face of defeats and achievements that reach back to the beginning of recorded time. Hughes's speaker thus locates the "power" he exhorts his addressee to harness on a foundation far more material than that provided for Pedroso's "virtud." However, it would be a grave error to interpret Hughes's decision to avoid using "primitive" as symptomatic of a rejection of primitivism altogether. Quite the contrary and consistent with the aspirations he voiced to Guillén, Hughes's translation positions *lo primitivo* as a potent force that combats "civilización blanca," since his conjoined stanza seems more invested in a primitivism that sparks both racial and revolutionary solidarity than does Pedroso's eighth.

Hughes makes two translation decisions that testify to this investment and that provide a Marxist frame for the primitivism of his early poetic production. His decision to conjoin Pedroso's eighth and ninth stanzas by rendering Pedroso's "brote el clamor de guerra" (burst forth the clamor of war) in terms even more generative—"let the clamor of war explode!"—introduces a detonation symbolic of the speaker's awakened and agitational state of consciousness. And insofar as this exhortation is punctuated by an exclamation point, Hughes's translation suggests, more strongly than does Pedroso's original, that an identification with a racial past unmarred by Occidental exploitation can act as an accelerant for anti-imperialist revolt. Moreover, the exclamation point that conjoins Pedroso's two stanzas implies that the speaker's exhortation to "fight" is not motivated simply by a desire for political autonomy. Rather, his incitement is also driven by a freedom dream wherein subaltern populations experience a psychological emancipation from "languid philosophies" that gesture to Enlightenment assumptions which legitimate colonialism and transform subjugated populations into their own jailers. Most intriguingly, Hughes's transgressive translation of the line that concludes Pedroso's ninth stanza places his own (prior) poetic primitivism in conversation with the prim-

itativisms that animate the speakers' revolts in both Pedroso's poem and its translation. Hughes's "in this long deceptive night called civilization" does more than amplify Pedroso's caustic commentary on the light that the civilizing mission of colonialism purports to bring to the peoples it subjugates "bajo una fementida noche civilizada" (beneath a deceptive civilized night). Hughes's formulation summons the binary opposition between "civilization" and "primitive" that structures the logic of both imperialism and primitivism in a way that "noche civilizada" does not. His addition of the word "long" works in harmony with the insertion of "called" to suggest that "civilization" is either a guise called upon to justify exploitation, or a mode of being that marks the pre-imperialist past. Hughes's phrasing thus not only continues to amplify Pedroso's primitivism, but further yokes it to a rhetoric that pervades the artistic production of the New Negro Movement and the worldwide "negro vogue." In doing so, Hughes calls to mind his own use of "civilization" in primitivist works like "Poem" (aka "Poem: For the portrait of an African boy after the manner of Gauguin") and "Lament for Dark Peoples." This calling to mind, though, alludes to more than a simple affinity, and produces alignments that frame Pedroso's proletarian verse in terms of Hughes's primitivism, and Hughes's primitivism in terms of Pedroso's Marxist-Leninism. Hughes's avoidance of a literal translation of "primitiva" thus reveals itself to be a part of a larger strategy at work. This strategy seeks to supplant a primitivism that pursues the rehabilitation of Africa as solely a means to recuperate a positive identity with a Pedrosian primitivism that figures an identification with an ancestral past as but one step in the process of subaltern Marxist awakening. Hence, Hughes's translation decisions reframe works like "Poem," translated for the Cuban public as "Poema" by Fernández de Castro in May 1930, offering the reader a new optic for interpreting both the speaker's seemingly hopeless lament that concludes the poem, "I am afraid of this civilization— / So hard, / So strong, / So cold." and his atavistic self-identification that sets the poem in motion: "tom-toms of the jungles beat in my blood."⁴⁸ This new optic, in turn, can be said to be Pedrosian in its inspiration, but is nonetheless shaped by the numerous transgressive translation decisions that Hughes uses to intensify the revolutionary power and potential of primitivism in Pedroso's original.

Perhaps the greatest single piece of evidence that supports our contention about Hughes's desire to create a Black communist poetic chorus that was facilitated by the interplay between his translations and his own poetic production lies in the publication of Nancy Cunard's

It was the memory of water and the scent of air
Blown from the sea
That bothered me!

When you laughed, and that was so rare a festival,
I wanted to think of gulls dipping—
Grey wings, white-faced, into a rising wind
Dipping. . . .

Do you remember the day
You held a pale white flower to the sun
That I might see how the yellow rays
Played through the petals?
As I remember now

The flower was beautiful—
And the sunrays playing through—
And your slim fingers
And your tilting chin
But then:
There was only the indistinguishable sound of water silence;
The inaudible swish of one wave breaking. . . .

And now that you have moved on into the past;
You and your slim fingers
And your boiling hair,
Now that you have moved on into the past,
And I have time to stroll back through the corridors of memory,
It is like meeting an old friend at dawn
To find carved here deep in my mellowing mind
These words:

“Sea-Woman—slim-fingered-water-thing. . .”

FLORIDA ROAD WORKERS

Langston Hughes

I'm makin' a road
For the cars
To fly by on.
Makin' a road
Through the palmetto thicket
For light and civilization
To travel on.
Makin' a road
For the rich old white men
To sweep over in their big cars
And leave me standin' here.

Sure,
A road helps all of us!
White folks ride—
And I get to see 'em ride.
I ain't never seen nobody
Ride so fine before.

Hey, buddy!
Look at me!
I'm makin' a road!

HOUSE IN THE WORLD

Langston Hughes

I'm looking for a house
In the world
Where the white shadows
Will not fall.

*There is no such house,
Dark brother,
No such house
At all.*

TO CERTAIN NEGRO LEADERS

Langston Hughes

Voices crying in the wilderness
At so much per word
From the white folks:
“Be meek and humble,
All you niggers,
And do not cry
Too loud.”

ALWAYS THE SAME

It is the same everywhere for me:
On the docks at Sierra Leone,
In the cotton fields of Alabama,
In the diamond mines of Kimberley,
On the coffee hills of Hayti,
The banana lands of Central America,
The streets of Harlem,
And the cities of Morocco and Tripoli.

Black:
Exploited, beaten and robbed,
Shot and killed.
Blood running into

Dollars
Pounds
Francs
Pesetas
Lire

For the wealth of the exploiters—
Blood that never comes back to me again.
Better that my blood
Runs into the deep channels of Revolution,
Runs into the strong hands of Revolution,
Stains all flags red,
Drives me away from

Sierra Leone
Kimberley
Alabama
Hayti
Central America
Harlem
Morocco
Tripoli

And all the black lands everywhere.
The force that kills,
The power that robs,
And the greed that does not care.

Better that my blood makes one with the blood
Of all the struggling workers in the world—
Till every land is free of

Dollar robbers
Pound robbers
Franc robbers
Peseta robbers
Lire robbers
Life robbers—

Until the Red Armies of the International Proletariat
Their faces, black, white, olive, yellow, brown,
Unite to raise the blood-red flag that
Never will come down!

From The Liberator, Nov. 4, 1932

GOODBYE, CHRIST

Langston Hughes

Listen, Christ,
 You did alright in your day, I reckon—
 But that day's gone now.
 They ghosted you up a swell story, too,
 Called it Bible—
 But it's dead now.
 The popes and the preachers've
 Made too much money from it.
 They've sold you to too many
 Kings, generals, robbers, and killers—
 Even to the Tzar and the Cossacks,
 Even to Rockefeller's Church,
 Even to THE SATURDAY EVENING POST.
 You ain't no good no more.
 They've pawmed you
 Till you've done wore out.
 Goodbye,
 Christ Jesus Lord God Jehova,

Beat it on away from here now.
 Make way for a new guy with no religion at all—
 A real guy named
 Marx Communist Lenin Peasant Stalin Worker ME—
 I said, ME!

Go ahead on now,
 You're getting in the way of things, Lord.
 And please take Saint Ghandi with you when you go,
 And Saint Pope Pius,
 And Saint Aimee McPherson,
 And big black Saint Becton
 Of the Consecrated Dime.
 Move!

Don't be so slow about movin'!
 The world is mine from now on—
 And nobody's gonna sell ME
 To a king, or a general,
 Or a millionaire.

From *The Negro Worker*, Nov.-Dec. 1932.

West Indian Poetry

"Poetry in the West Indies has been too often only an imitation of European models in form and content. The young Negro poets presented here, however, are doing much to free the poetry of their islands from out-worn foreign patterns. *Nicolas Guillén* has written with great success in the dialect of the Cuban Negro, using the rhythms of Caribbean folk-music. *Regino Pedrosa* has put into verse his background as a factory worker in Havana, and as a child of Chinese and Negro blood. In Hayti, *Jacques Roumain* writes of the black peasants and the African strain in the New World. And all three of these poets are vastly concerned with the problems of the darker peoples." These translations from the Spanish and the French are by Langston Hughes.

CANE

Nicolas Guillén

Negro
 in the cane fields.
 White man
 above the cane fields.
 Earth
 beneath the cane fields.
 Blood
 That flows from us.

BLACK WOMAN

Nicolas Guillén

With the circle of the equator
 Girdled about her waist
 As though about a little world,
 The black woman,
 The new woman,
 Comes forward
 In her thin robes
 Light as a serpent's skin.
 Crowned with palms,
 Like a newly arrived goddess,
 She brings the unpublished word,
 The unknown gesture,
 The strong haunches, voice, teeth,
 The morning and the change.
 Flood of young blood
 Beneath fresh skin!
 Never wearying feet
 For the deep music
 Of the bongo.¹

THE CONQUERORS

Regino Pedrosa

They passed this way. Avaricious epics flamed
 in their eyes from the Atlantic
 to the Pacific. They came in iron boots,
 long guns on their shoulders,
 and the land wild.

What truth did they preach to men?
 What gospel of joy to suffering humanity?
 What psalm of Justice over the immense lands
 did their iron cannons raise toward the skies?

In the name of law and peace they came . . .
 Came toward the people calling them brothers:
 And as in Holy Writ, America was the Christ
 who saw them rend the earth like garments,
 and fight over the free tunic of their destiny!

They passed this way.
 They came in the name of a new democracy:
 even on the highest peaks of the Andes
 they slept the deep and brutal sleep of bayonets.

They passed this way.
 With new postulates of liberty they came:
 reaching as far as the old land of Li Tai Pe
 on the floating skyscrapers of their battleships,
 amidst the clamor of weak and torn nations.

They crossed here.
 Now toward their barracks in Wall Street they go,
 sacks of dollars on their shoulders,
 and the land wild.

¹ Bongo: Afro-Cuban drum.

anthology *Negro* (1934). This was the only anthology in the interwar period that attempted to “document the discourses of black internationalism” from a multidisciplinary perspective that included the arts. Three of the seven pages under the heading “Negro Poetry” in the anthology are almost exclusively comprised of Hughes’s Cuban translations and his early 1930s radical poems. These poems include “Florida Road Workers,” “Always the Same,” “Cane,” “Black Woman,” and “The Conquerors.”

The date of Hughes’s correspondence with Nancy Cunard that most directly concerns *Negro* supports our previous contentions about the interrelation between, and dating of, Hughes’s translations and the poetry that began his radical period. It reveals that the poetry which Cunard’s volume published was guided by Hughes’s editorial hand:

Also your idea of doing an international book of COLOR which I hope you will succeed in filling with new and exciting material from all quarters. Have been terribly busy since I got back from Haiti . . . but if I can help any more, I’d be happy to. Here are a lot of things enclosed from which you may choose whatever you might like. . . . I think there’s a lot of talent in Havana. . . .⁴⁹

Hughes’s letter speaks to the Black internationalist ambitions of Cunard’s project. It also reveals that, by 1931, his “happy” helping hand was particularly interested in publishing his own poetic production in choral relation with the “clippings” he sent from the “talent in Havana”—in the printing of his Black communist poetic chorus.

Brent Hayes Edwards offers a great deal of insight into Cunard’s anthology in the “Coda” to his *The Practice of Diaspora*, and in concluding this chapter, one of his insights proves particularly helpful. Edwards’s argument that Cunard’s volume offered the communist world a poetic and historical “record” of “‘black internationalism’ as a sort of dialectical materialism precisely by producing blackness as an inescapable presence” adds weight to our contention that Hughes’s translations and translators embraced a dialectical practice of translation that sought to foment international communism by illuminating the cultural and political commonalities and differences between peoples of African descent in the Americas as a potent political force. Edwards’s argument also augments our contention that it was the very comparative questions begged by these translations, as well as the debates that stemmed

from them, that helped to bring the conception of blackness and an “international presence” into being. At the same time, our argument helps to nuance and contextualize Edwards’s observation of this inescapable presence, as far as the volume’s poetry was concerned, by revealing it to be largely the outgrowth of one man’s, Hughes’s, conception and framing of blackness.

In this sense, the plethora of translation decisions that surreptitiously helped to bring Hughes’s invisible hand into choral relation with his own poetry represents an attempt at Black internationalist bridge-building that was shaped by a somewhat naive praxis which obscured the heterogeneity of a Black internationalist community. Hughes’s translation practice was thus in line with his immature imagining of Black internationalism, but this vision of Black internationalism was one that he was in the process of outgrowing—one that would change in concert with his praxis and *techné* of translation over the course of the next year as the poet-translator engaged the work of Louis Aragon and Vladimir Mayakovsky, two of the key players in our next chapters.

Moscow, Martinique, and Me

Freedom-Dreaming and World-Making

Langston Hughes held a prominent place as a radical poet in the Soviet Union and in the Francophone world of 1932, but the portions of his poetic production that earned him revolutionary acclaim differed in those two arenas, making Hughes's work radical in profoundly different ways both aesthetically and politically. These two visions of Hughes and his revolutionary poetry provide the backdrop for chapters 5 and 6 because the Soviet reception of Hughes's verse was conditioned by its reception in Black internationalist circles in the Francophone world, where the pan-Africanism of his early verse resonated strongly. This chapter compares the image of Hughes propagated in the Soviet Union by the Comintern in the pages of *International Literature* in 1933 with his image as fomented in French print culture from 1924 to 1932 and lays out the factors underlying their differing grounds for engagement with his radical verse.

Hughes's reception and publication in Soviet international print culture was, in large part, guided by an agenda that sought to co-opt his iconic anti-imperialist status in the Francophone world. Although the pan-Africanist politics that adhered to Hughes's early work posed a competitive threat to Third Period Communism which tolerated no internationalisms that weren't routed through Moscow, the Black left internationalist credentials conferred on Hughes by the reception of his

modernist primitive verse in the French and Francophone world was worth a great deal to the Comintern. So too was his status as a Black translator. If his proletarian turn could be made to suit Soviet ends, the Comintern could use both Hughes's original poetic production and his translations of poetry with communist commitments (and his tacit endorsement of them) to further its cultural front against both the imperialist powers of the globe and the Black internationalisms that were competing for geopolitical influence in the colonized world. Hughes, however, resisted Soviet efforts to co-opt his work and persona into the Soviet cultural front under construction, insofar as these attempts disrupted his own Black internationalist commitments. He deliberately eluded their preconceptions about workers' life in the United States, and their assumptions about the homogeneity of the global Black masses. The interplay among politics, aesthetics, and translation that informed Hughes's Soviet reception also shaped the vocabulary and the means of resistance he deployed to thwart Soviet efforts to use him either as a cultural weapon against pan-Africanisms or as the Black face for the Black masses.

Although Hughes made use of Soviet political and poetic prescriptions for his verse, he also strategically defied and transformed this inheritance. His Soviet-sponsored translations also brought him into contact with revolutionary aesthetics that expanded his own poetic horizons. Hughes's Moscow poetry took on new attributes as he sought to undermine Soviet (and pan-Africanist) conceptions of a homogenous global Black population and replace them with a Black left internationalist politics and poetics that acknowledged the inherent difficulties that Bolshevik theories of collectivist subjectivity posed for a heterogeneous African diaspora. The marginalized subject spoke himself into being by highlighting the extent to which he was estranged by and from the poetics and politics that, to varying degrees, were complicit or dependent on his disenfranchisement and exploitation.

Hughes fashioned subjectivities unconstrained by racial essentialism, by artificially provincial notions of African American artistic forms, or by the vexed inheritance of European modernist or proletarian aesthetics for Black subjects. The burdensome responsibility assigned to him by the Comintern, to be the poetic voice of a global Black proletariat, prompted Hughes to write poetry and translations that refashioned aesthetics which carried an ideological weight incommensurate with the Black proletarian experience or which were tainted by associations with imperialism and colonial piracy. In this sense, Hughes's very mode of

composition and practice of translation foreclosed the idea that there was a single poetics or a single politics for remedying either the race or colonial problem. Accordingly, and poised as an anti-imperialist voice in Moscow, Paris, and the French Antilles, Hughes forged poetic personas that articulate their revolutionary subjectivities from the intersections of diverse intertextual planes (and their discursive regimes), where they play with and against the texts he forged in translation, as well as with poetic and political intertexts ranging from the classical to the post-Symbolist. In so doing, Hughes fashioned a poetics that performed the work of his brand of Black left internationalism—writing poems that made use of (and transformed) the whole of world literature to voice Black subjectivities marked by both their historical uniqueness and their Black internationalist concerns.

A robust appreciation of Hughes's poetic ambitions and accomplishments during his residency in Moscow and shortly thereafter thus compels a genealogical examination of the factors—an international collision of aesthetic ideas and ideals—that contributed to the Soviet denigration of Hughes's 1920s poetic production as a doomed attempt to solve the race problem inside a capitalist paradigm. This dismissal stands in contrast to the Francophone valorization of this same body of verse as a Black internationalist vehicle for the revolutionary aspirations of the Black proletariat in the French West Indies. This genealogy allows the chapter to account for Hughes's Moscow production by placing it in the international light for and under which it was conceived, and entails the recovery of the numerous developments (literary, political, and historical) that explain how and why his Moscow poetry and personae were informed by the shifting political valences of his work in Francophone literary milieus and by his work as a translator.

“Moscow, Martinique, and Me” also asks us to consider how Hughes's Moscow “me” was shaped by a collision between the revolutionary poetic and political ideals of the Soviet Union and French Caribbean students in Paris; to reconsider the Black left internationalist fidelities of Hughes's Soviet poetic production; and to interrogate how Hughes's Moscow production forefronted the dilemmas that Sovietization (and Bolshevik collectivism) posed for an increasingly robust Black left internationalism that could only operate by heeding the diasporic difference that also comprised the core impetus behind its formation and collectivizing formulations.

With these divergent ideals and conceptions of Hughes as a revolutionary poet in mind, it is helpful to introduce the idea of an “aesthetic

regime,” which denotes the relationship between the aesthetic criteria governing the production and assessment of works of art, on the one hand, and the regimens of artistic practices and their associated politics in a given milieu (national, international, colonial, etc.) on the other. This idea enlists a conception of intertextuality from Julia Kristeva which sees “the literary word” as “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue between several writings.”¹ It also draws upon Lawrence Venuti’s idea that intertextuality “enables and complicates translation, preventing it from being an untroubled communication and opening the translated text to interpretive possibilities that vary with cultural constituencies in the receiving situation.” To fully appreciate the “relative autonomy” of the translated text, Venuti argues, entails coming to grips with its place inside the complex fabric of the intertextual milieu into which it is introduced.² The idea of an “aesthetic regime” applies to the different intertextual and cultural backdrops that inform the manner in which poems decode as they take on new relative autonomies in new target zones. For example, I argue that the reception of Hughes’s modernist primitivism in French-language translation was mediated by French and Francophone aesthetic regimes that granted his work a relative autonomy which encamped it alongside the poetics and politics of the Surrealist movement.

As we unearth the contours, conventions, criteria, and expectations for revolutionary verse of the Soviet aesthetic regime that shaped the Russian reception and response to Hughes’s work in 1933, we create a critical discourse for interpreting the poetry he penned in Moscow and shortly thereafter. We do so by applying Wollheim’s doctrine of criticism as retrieval, and Gombrich’s advice to attend to the repertoire of the artist as much as the finished product. I also take guidance from Efraim Kristal’s astute observation that Wollheim’s doctrine of criticism as retrieval posits that “the scrutiny of a literary work ought to include an attempt to reconstruct the creative process.”³ Combining Wollheim, Gombrich, and Kristal, I argue that culturally embedded factors, including customs, norms, ideologies, and the state of tradition that informed the Soviet scrutiny of Hughes’s work, offer a window on to the most salient factors impinging on Hughes’s creative process and his response to them at the time.⁴ In short, to know the rules of the game is not only to know how to play it; it is also the precondition for determining how well, or to what effect, the game is played. Hence, the reconstruction of Hughes’s creative process in Moscow entails performing several excavations because his Muscovite poems play with and against multiple

aesthetic regimes and because we must account for how this play was meant to be interpreted inside (and outside) a Soviet critical framework. By considering both the poetic constraints and the new poetic possibilities imposed on Hughes's creative process by the regimens of Soviet literary practices, we can foreground the knowledge of the literary repertoire available to him at the time. Just as, for Gombrich, the study of the artist's palette helps us to understand the possibilities and the choices involved in the creation of a painting, so too does a knowledge of the Soviet aesthetic regime in 1933 help us to understand the aesthetic and political interventions that Hughes's Soviet poetic production makes.

Wollheim and Gombrich share an approach to aesthetic interpretation that sees the creative process as a problem-solving mechanism. Their approach, along with Kristal's synthesis, provides a set of conceptual tools that are particularly useful to the present argument because Hughes had to navigate among a multiplicity of challenges, inspirations, constraints, and expectations while in Moscow, and because translation is also a mode of problem-solving. Translation played a large role in Hughes's creative process during his sojourn in the Soviet Union, particularly during his stay in Moscow from December 1932 to January 1933. As Hughes's manuscripts attest, it was there that he completed his Filatova-assisted Mayakovsky translations, titled "Black and White," "Syphilis," "Hygiene," and "Youth," and his author-assisted translations of portions of Louis Aragon's unfinished *Hourra l'Oural*, which are examined in chapter 6.⁵ In Moscow Hughes encountered poems and poetics, some of which he translated, but nearly all of which enriched his poetic palette. In this sense, scrutinizing Hughes's evolving poetic palette transforms generally held truisms about his work dating from this period and allows for an account of his growth that figures it as a process of accumulation—via translations, travel, influence, and individual innovation—of culturally diverse aesthetic instrumentalities.

Langston Hughes's Soviet experience began on June 15, 1932, when he was among twenty-two African American writers, students, actors, and film-workers who set sail for the Soviet Union aboard the North German liner *Europa*, expecting to make a film titled "Black and White."⁶ According to their publicist, Henry Lee Moon, the Mesch-rabpom Film Corporation of Moscow planned to produce a movie to inform Soviet workers about "the conditions under which Negroes" in America live, and to knit a closer cultural bond between the people of the two countries.⁷ The collaborative project's much-advertised fail-

Thou Too, Comrade?

By CHASE



W. C. Chase, "Thou Too, Comrade?" in *New York Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1932. Reprinted with permission of *New York Amsterdam News*.

ure remains the subject of much debate and symbolic significance.⁸ As the historical record seems to bear out, several of the players maintained that U.S. industrialists had sabotaged the project by threatening to withdraw financing for Stalin's second five-year plan. Hughes, however, always maintained that the film project came to naught because he refused to rewrite a scenario which he found to be ludicrous, unsalvageable, and "not true to American life."⁹ However, none of the participants in the project gave voice to the possibility which Chase's cartoon "Thou Too, Comrade?" (see the figure) suggests, that the project failed

for three reasons: because U.S. industrialists saw the film as potentially dangerous to their interests both foreign and domestic; because the Soviet Union was more invested in attaching a Black face to their collective and collectivizing film project than they were in hearing from the man who wrote, “I, too, sing America”; and because Langston Hughes refused to be that face, or part of a patently apocryphal representation of race in America.

Despite his refusal to serve as script doctor, by 1933 the Comintern had come to hail Hughes as “the first revolutionary poet of the Negro proletariat.” The Soviet critic Lidiia Filatova granted Hughes this sobriquet because his latest work portrayed a level of class-consciousness that moved beyond “petty bourgeois” celebrations of Black beauty. In her estimation, while Hughes’s agitprop poetry and his “realistic” proletarian novel (*Not Without Laughter*, 1930) had their defects, being overly given to schematics and rhetoric, they were welcome arrivals offering proof that the poet had moved beyond the “bourgeois aestheticism” which marred his attempts to “assert his race aesthetically” in essays like “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926).¹⁰ This new work separated Hughes from his New Negro contemporaries, including Claude McKay, who had once shown revolutionary promise but had never escaped the spells of individualism and racial chauvinism. Hughes’s turn to proletarian aesthetics, by contrast, offered proof positive of a personal and political transformation. His “Call to Creation” was the “complete negation” of his “former poetic credo,” and demonstrated that he had now entered a “revolutionary period.” His poetry was now grounded in the class struggle of the “negro toilers” of the earth, was capable of performing the work of proletarianization of the Black masses, and was no longer marred by the “varnished” portrayals and “romantic illusions” of Africa contained in *The Weary Blues*.

In light of her aesthetic and political commitments, Filatova’s assessment of Hughes’s poetic trajectory is fair, and one that Hughes tacitly endorsed when he praised her “critical articles” as “brilliant” in *I Wonder as I Wander*.¹¹ However, the Hughes who refused to be the Black face behind Meschrapom’s film project was also entering a new phase as a translator that did not allow him to be a rubber stamp. He had come to realize that his own international renown as a Black poet influenced the reception of his translations, endowing them with new poetic and political valences, and he refused to ignore this fact or let his voice be co-opted in translation. Rather, his translations reflect a keen awareness of the effects of his international persona and of his attempts

to render himself invisible. While Hughes did not hijack works in translation to advance his own politics, his translations from this period display a tendency to translate lines in ways that resolved poetic play and preempted certain poetic possibilities from compromising the integrity of his poetic and political identity as the “first revolutionary poet of the Negro proletariat.” In short, Hughes was not invested in penning translations that betrayed their originals, but rather in creating ones that betrayed his subject position—translations that highlight how the status, identity, and worldview of the translator play a key role in determining the relative autonomy of the texts he translates in the target zone.

To augment Kate Baldwin’s insight that Hughes’s Moscow fiction placed a spotlight on the question of “self-possession, or more precisely, self-ownership, as a means to articulate autonomy [that] was precisely at issue in Bolshevik theorization of subjectivity in which the collective was prized over the individual,” Hughes’s Moscow poems and translations highlight his individualism in the inherently collective and collectivizing endeavors of translation and revolutionary agitation, mirroring his vexed position as a poet charged with being the representative of the Black masses who was nevertheless loath to allow himself to be the face of a homogeneously conceived collective.¹² Most importantly, Hughes’s highlighting of his own subject position in his translations and original poetry reveals that negotiating his status as “the first poet of the negro proletariat,” composing verse for the Soviet international press, and his work as a translator were coeval problem-solving operations that informed and enriched one another. Hence, exploring how Hughes’s Soviet works intertwine allows for an informed decoding of the significance of his poetic and translational choices, which in turn affords a window onto his expanding poetic palette and evolving creative process. In short, Hughes’s practice of translation also continued to evolve along with his poetics and portrayals of Black internationalism, and became one that heeded how translation and modes of composition could transform Black individualism into Black collectivity and vice-versa.

By 1932, the translation and dissemination of Langston Hughes’s poetry in France and the Francophone world had also given rise to a vision of the poet that was decidedly revolutionary. This vision, however, had little to do with the poetry that Filatova prized. Rather, it resided in the fact that Hughes’s French-language translators and interlocutors, possessed by colonial anxiety or angst, paid special heed to the Black internationalist valences of his early verse. In these environments, Hughes’s modernist primitivism, ethnic transnationalism, themes of Occidental

alienation, and celebration of his African heritage were much more than the Hughesian song of self-discovery that Carl Van Vechten and Alain Locke presented to their readers. Rather, the “I” that inhabits Hughes’s early work, in French translation, voiced a reappraisal of self that was a cry around which the Black proletariat could rally. Faced with the false French colonial promise of enfranchising assimilation, Hughes’s celebration of his Black individuality was received—as a wellspring for new modes of Black subjectivity and collectivity—as psychological grist for the mills of anticolonial revolt, Black internationalism, and communist revolution. In fact, one is hard-pressed to find—in either the limited number of articles written about Hughes or in the precious few French-language translations of his verse—arguments and poems that do not speak to the entanglement of modernist primitivism, colonial assimilation, Marxist revolt, and pan-Africanism.¹³

The association of Hughes with these points of entanglement first began to take shape with the 1924 publication of his poetry in the bilingual journal *Les Continents*, the print organ of the Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire. This pan-African organization, founded by Kojo Touvalou Houénou and René Maran, sought to defend and protect the rights of Black people throughout the world by generating solidarity among them. Hence, although no commentary accompanied the publication of Hughes’s “Negro” and “A Black Pierrot” when they appeared in English in the journal on May 25, 1924, his Parisian debut was one that immediately tied him to a Parisian brand of Black internationalism that was heavily invested in anticolonialism.

Maran’s and Touvalou Houénou’s selection of texts offered the French public a Hughes who was both a Black internationalist and an author whose poetry seemed to speak to the unique concerns of Blacks living in France or under French colonial rule—characterizations which demonstrated that the Negro remained both a national and an international subject. On the one hand, the editors’ decision to publish “Negro” speaks to their receiving Hughes as an engagé poet with Black internationalist fidelities who was committed to fomenting Black internationalism and to shaping a Black internationalist subjectivity. On the other hand, their decision to publish “A Black Pierrot” positioned Hughes as a poet who fit comfortably inside the Parisian poetic milieu, and who not only seemed to understand and share the concerns of French citizens and non-citizens of African descent but also possessed enough knowledge of French cultural traditions to make his rejection of Western assimilation an informed one. The race-proud persona who

gives voice to “Negro” articulates his subjecthood in internationalist terms. He manipulates the tropes of colonialism to assert an individuality and a commonality based on African ancestry and the shared historical burdens borne by peoples of African descent. The speaker offers an “I” who defines his subjecthood in terms of a collective that spans time and space, and by reworking Conradian convention, proudly compares himself to the black “depths” of a continent to which he lays a personal claim (“my Africa”), despite the narrative of displacement, dismemberment, and disenfranchisement that follows:

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I’ve been a slave:

Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I’ve been a worker:

Under my hand the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I’ve been a singer:

All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I’ve been a victim:

The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:

Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.¹⁴

On the heels of a romantic invocation of an Africa that simultaneously gestures to the rhetoric of colonialism and the European vogue for *l’art nègre*, Hughes’s speaker defines himself as an aggregate of *I*’s whose common history of economic and cultural exploitation spans the whole of Western civilization, accounting for its greatest achievements

while tying these achievements to its past and present atrocities. The recognition and recounting of this common history are means of self-definition that simultaneously bring into being both the speaker and an international collective to which he belongs. And yet, after drawing a contemporary parallel (or pointing to a complicity) between the horrors of European colonialism and U.S. racial terrorism, the speaker brings the poem full circle. The near-repetition of the poem's first stanza transforms its colonialist tropes into a solemn, proud definition of self, recovering and refashioning the rhetoric of white internationalism. Negro subjecthood becomes more than a matter of common African ancestry or common contemporary ground. Rather, it is figured as a carefully imagined though as yet unrealized ideal meant to foment a contemporary pan-African solidarity, while simultaneously foregrounding the necessity for such a collective. In this sense, the poem's persona speaks to the very mission of the *Ligue Universelle pour la Défense de la Race Noire*, and the rationale behind the poem's Parisian publication not only becomes apparent, but speaks to the fact that Hughes's primitivist production was received in French print as a pan-Africanist weapon of world-making long before it was reprinted in *The Weary Blues* and framed, by Van Vechten, as the natural outpouring of a primitive spirit.

At the same time, the way that Hughes's poem displays a fascination with the Dark Continent gestures to a complicity between the European avant-garde's mining of primitive African art and European colonialism. His Black internationalist subject thus (re)defines himself in terms that tie the colonial tongue in knots; he subverts the white supremacist underpinnings of European modernist primitivism in order to give voice to a Black internationalist subject who repurposes the exoticism that masked the horrors of French colonialism and marked European modernist primitive artwork. This subject defines himself in collectivist and collectivizing terms that are tellingly appropriated from an aesthetic tainted with the mindset and blood of colonial piracy. In this sense, Hughes's "Negro" is a potent metaphor for the crisis of expression that attends any attempt by the colonized subject to define himself or the international collective to which he belongs. In the wake of the destruction of indigenous culture that is part and parcel of the colonial enterprise, and of the slave trade which provided the labor and capital that propelled and perpetuated it, the colonized subject must define himself by subverting the tongue of a colonial domination so complete that it determines the vocabulary and paradigms of resistance.

“A Black Pierrot” presented the Parisian public with a variation on a stock character with which they were quite familiar. At the end of the nineteenth century, Jules Laforgue published a series of poems in the voice of Pierrot—a traditional figure in French pantomime whose face was usually covered in flour or whiteface to distinguish him from the blackface of the conniving Harlequin—that were popular and influential on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁵ Hughes’s Pierrot, though, differs insofar as his poem attaches a special significance to Pierrot’s mask and offers a pointed commentary on the promises of French colonialism:

I am a black Pierrot:
 She did not love me,
 So I crept away into the night
 And the night was black, too.

I am a black Pierrot:
 She did not love me,
 So I wept until the red dawn
 Dripped blood over the eastern hills
 And my heart was bleeding, too.

I am a black Pierrot:
 She did not love me,
 So with my once gay-colored soul
 Shrunken like a balloon without air,
 I went forth in the morning
 To seek a new brown love.¹⁶

In Hughes’s poem, the melancholy that typically characterizes Pierrot takes on a racial dimension. The suggestion that Pierrot might cure his melancholy by seeking “a new brown love” strongly suggests that it is the Black skin beneath the white mask that comprises the chief obstacle for Pierrot as he pursues his white beloved. Pierrot’s failure to couple with his beloved comes to symbolize the extent to which his inclusion in white society is impossible, and his whiteface serves as a powerful symbol of the futility of assimilation in both French and U.S. contexts. Assimilation becomes a process that can only leave the soul “shrunken” and in search of “brown love.” Hughes’s speaker displays a mastery of French poetic convention that attests to his Occidental assimilation, and this frames his abandonment of the assimilative enterprise not as

his own failure, but as an informed decision made in the face of a civilization that has failed him. When one considers the fact that French colonial policy was firmly invested in political, linguistic, and cultural assimilation, the politically explosive content of Hughes's poem in its Parisian milieu comes into sharp focus. It is nothing less than an indictment of the French civilizing mission, and it positions the promises of assimilation as fool's gold, as a false ideal doomed to fail by the assumptions of white internationalist supremacy that were integral to that policy's genesis. In short, *Les Continents* offered its readers a Hughes who was race-proud, primitivist, anti-assimilationist, anti-imperialist, pro-worker, and concerned about Blacks throughout the world. His modernist primitive poetry was a pan-Africanist cry, a Black internationalist poetry of anticolonial revolt that would soon turn him into an anti-imperialist icon in the Francophone world.

In fact, so large had Hughes's anticolonial stature grown by the end of the decade that mainstream French print organs, betraying a centrist thirst for the imperial status quo, began to carefully frame his poetry as doggerel pan-Africanist propaganda written by a poet whose U.S. roots disqualified him as a legitimate spokesman for a global Black population. In 1929, Franck Schoell published Hughes's "Notre pays" ("Our Land") and "Moi aussi" ("I, Too") in *La Revue de Paris*, and Hughes's "Cabaret" ("Cabaret"), "Jeune danseuse nue" ("Nude Young Dancer"), "Untitled" ("Songs to the Dark Virgin"), "Lamentation pour les hommes au teint foncé" ("Lament for Dark Peoples"), "La Peur" ("Afraid"), and "Une mère à son fils" ("Mother to Son") in the *Revue Politique et Littéraire*, making him Hughes's most prolific translator to date.¹⁷ Schoell's translations were widely read and, according to Abiola Irele, an acclaimed critic of and participant in the Négritude movement, helped to expose Césaire, Damas, and Senghor—who all regard Hughes as a literary forefather—to Hughes's early verse.¹⁸ While Schoell's choice of poems does not depart from the general trend of focusing attention on Hughes's primitivist poetry, his evaluation of Hughes's verse—offered in an essay titled "Un poète nègre: Langston Hughes" ("A Black Poet: Langston Hughes") which accompanied his translations for the *Revue Politique et Littéraire*—credits Hughes with great poetic talent, but argues that Hughes's focus on race limits his artistic horizons:

There is little doubt as to why Langston Hughes limits himself to this poetry of propaganda and racial demand that, naturally, has met with great success in Negro periodicals.

The inspiration will quickly run dry and further attempts in this direction could prove less successful.¹⁹

Schoell's critique, once again, highlights how divergent aesthetic regimes make for divergent readings. It is not Hughes's 1930s radical poetry that is regarded as propaganda (as is so often the case with Hughes's U.S. critics), but rather his poetry of "racial demand" that fits the pejorative bill. The question now arises: If these poems are "propaganda," what ends do they serve? While Schoell does not provide an answer to this question in "Un poète nègre," he does argue—in the essay he wrote for *La Revue de Paris* titled "La 'Renaissance nègre' aux États-Unis" ("The 'Negro Renaissance' in the United States")—that the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, insofar as it concerns itself with Africa and race pride, functions as a means to bolster solidarity among Blacks the world over.²⁰ Schoell alludes to two incarnations of Black internationalism (Du Bois's Pan-Africanism and Marcus Garvey's UNIA), and argues that the worldview of each is akin to that of a naive poet who considers himself to be a symbol of his race.²¹ In Schoell's eyes, each of these movements represents an attempt by a small minority of New World Blacks to speak for the world's Black population as a whole with which they have little in common.²² While Schoell's arguments have merit and echo the very sentiments that contributed to the mutual distancing of Claude McKay and the Soviet literary and political world, his arguments about global solidarity rest on the intriguing assumption that Hughes intended for his verse to be translated at the time of its composition. Hence, Schoell regards Hughes as a poet who is well aware of his international stature, as a poet writing for a global audience.

Situating Hughes as a pan-Africanist poet in France and the Francophone world, though, was by no means the only aspect of his reception that would have proved threatening to the ideals of Sovietization. The French conservative and centrist penchant, between 1924 and 1932, to frame Hughes's race-proud, modernist primitive production as the by-product of a failure, particular to the United States, to adopt assimilationist policies with respect to the race problem must have proved equally if not more troubling to the Comintern. This argument presupposed that the problems of ethnic nationalism and racial chauvinism could be solved within an imperial framework, and it suggested that Black resistance was distinct from proletarian revolt—it was a disquiet that did not lead to class awakening, but rather to a collectivizing racialism that performed its work on the cultural front. For example, Régis

Michaud, in his *Panorama de la littérature américaine contemporaine* (1928), argued that the “tragic” failure of the United States to assimilate its Black population led to a “beautiful revenge in poetry and in art” that, in the case of Langston Hughes, manifested in a “primitive outpouring” that celebrated the grandeur of Africa’s ancient civilizations with a remarkable “vivacity of rhythm.”²³ Michaud’s atavistic racial essentialism makes his championing of the virtues of assimilation highly suspect, and Hughes’s primitivism has little to do with the modernist primitivism of the European or U.S. avant-garde. Rather, it is an outcry whose primitive form betrays its impetus and its unassimilated subject—the failure to assimilate Black populations into U.S. folds, in Michaud’s account, makes them go native.

In this sense, the reception of the New Negro Movement in France both fostered Black internationalism and championed the benevolence of the French imperial enterprise. Paulette Nardal, in her now seminal “Éveil de la Conscience de Race” (1931; “Awakening of Race Consciousness”), argued that Hughes’s poetry and his 1926 essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” represented a rejection of an “inferiority complex” thrust upon him, since Blacks in the United States were denied “the liberal spirit which characterizes the politics of France towards colored peoples” exemplified in “the power of assimilation of French genius.” She also set forth the argument that the artistic achievements of the “American Negro” aroused “the interest of the Antillean students in their own race,” and in so doing, alerted the latter to “the necessity of creating a feeling of solidarity between different groups of Negroes living throughout the globe.”²⁴ Confirming Schoell’s worst suspicions, Nardal figures New World Blacks as a kind of advance guard, as a population responsible for lending a “helping hand” to “their retarded brothers.”²⁵

Michaud and Nardal’s valorization of a nearly race-blind France is specious, but their arguments articulate visions of the Black subject that are transnational in scope—the first locating Black subjecthood as an international atavistic primitivism, and the second locating it as a shared national minority status. In either case, the comparative examination of race relations in the African diaspora brought about by the translation and interpretation of Langston Hughes’s early work under French and Francophone aesthetic regimes brought race relations on both sides of the Atlantic under scrutiny, and, in so doing, highlighted and fomented the questions of Black internationalism and of Black consciousness, enterprises that found no home in the ideologies of Soviet Third Period Communism.

This is the Langston Hughes—an anti-imperialist poet of global influence, international stature and renown who had long been framed in the Francophone world (for better or worse) as a collectivizing Black internationalist—that the Comintern attempted to remold into an agent and champion of Sovietization in the eyes of the Francophone world. In short, Hughes’s anticolonial fame was a valuable geopolitical commodity that had served the interests of the chief competing internationalisms to Sovietization in the Black world; namely, pan-Africanisms. The co-opting of Hughes’s anticolonial fame by the Comintern thus required a number of careful balancing acts. On the one hand, it entailed eviscerating the poems that most closely tied Hughes to the politics of pan-Africanism—poems increasingly held in Black internationalist and communist revolutionary esteem in France and the Francophone world both aesthetically and politically—without damaging Hughes’s iconic anti-imperialist stature in these same geographies. On the other hand, it required framing his most recent revolutionary poetry and prose as the class-awakened outgrowth of Hughes’s long-standing Black internationalist fidelities, and publishing new poems and translations by (and of) him that performed similar work. In this sense, the Comintern’s decision to grant Hughes the sobriquet “the first poet of the negro proletariat” was motivated just as much by a desire to strike a blow against Black internationalisms as it was by the desire to enhance Hughes’s role as a spokesman for the Black masses and as a powerful weapon for Third Period Communism.

Hence, when Langston Hughes arrived in the Soviet Union in June 1932, he carried with him the revolutionary promise of his latest poetry, the revolutionary afterlife of his 1920s poetic production in France and the Francophone world, and the obligation to be the voice of the Black masses. He was caught between a rock, another rock, and a hard place. Hemmed in and propelled by the limitations and liberatory promises of modernist primitivism as well as by Soviet expectations for his revolutionary verse, Hughes found himself with the mandate of giving new revolutionary voice to an oppressed mass that already saw him as revolutionary. He also found himself having to negotiate between two conceptions of how poetry could help to perform the work of communist revolution. Could Hughes continue to be a spokesman for the wretched of the earth if his new work constituted a rejection of pan-Africanisms? Could he really be the first revolutionary poet of the Black proletariat if he frustrated Soviet expectations? And most intriguingly, could his

poetry aid both pan-Africanism and international communism at the same time?

Yes. But to do so, he had to compose poetry and translations that displayed a mastery of revolutionary poetics that would bear the scrutiny of Soviet criticism, and he had to use the conventions of Soviet revolutionary poetics in ways that highlighted their shortcomings in their own terms. He had to compose poems which suggested that Soviet poetics and the politics that informed them were not intrinsically liberatory for an international Black proletariat whose subjugation was not an epiphenomenon of global capitalism, but rather a prerequisite for its existence. At the very same time, he had to compose poetry that would acquire meaning inside French and Francophone aesthetic regimes by suggesting that the collectivizing potential of pan-Africanist poetic dreaming found its complement in the materialist poetics of Mayakovsky's LEF or in a nascent Socialist Realism. In other words, Hughes's poems and translations had to answer to both Soviet and Francophone expectations while allowing each to augment the other. He had to fashion a dialectical poetics which recognized that the Black revolutionary subject could only give poetic voice to his proletarian predicaments from the margins—from ground staked on the intersection between two discursive planes that could only hasten the liberation of the Black masses if they were allowed to complement each other. This task required him to draw from the whole of his poetic repertoire—one enhanced by his experiences in the Soviet Union as a poet, journalist, and translator—and to rely on nothing less than his own creative faculties to advance his own brand of Black left internationalism. In short, Hughes not only recognized that creativity had a crucial role to play in the dialectical materialist progression of history, but that he had to marshal his creative faculties in ways that carefully answered to and departed from the prescriptive dictates that the Comintern held for his revolutionary poetic production if he was to serve as an effective voice for the Black masses.

How did Hughes accomplish these Herculean tasks?

In what follows, I answer this question by continuing to unearth the factors (personal, aesthetic, geopolitical, etc.) that impinged on and informed Hughes's literary production during his Soviet sojourn and which gave shape to his Moscow poetic palette. I argue that the constraints placed on Hughes's repertoire by the Soviet critical reception of his work and the newfound poetic possibilities (and pitfalls) he discovered in complying with the Comintern's mission to task him as a

translator played a central role in shaping the poetics of his Black left internationalism.

The project of unearthing the factors that impinged on Hughes's creative process in order to fashion a critical lens for the interpretation of his Soviet literary production finds precedent in the work of Kate Baldwin and David Chioni Moore, but is still part of a burgeoning enterprise. Even though Hughes's Soviet period, from June 1932 to March 1933, has been acknowledged to be among the most prolific of his career, the impact of his Moscow residence and his extended tour through Central Asia on his creative processes and writing has remained largely unexplored.²⁶ Until quite recently, Hughes's writing while in the Soviet Union had been routinely framed as remarkably uncreative anti-American propaganda. Accordingly, critics like Eric Sundquist read Hughes's literary production from this period through a political lens limited to its anti-Americanism—and its supposedly misguided political commitments. Reading Hughes's journalism and poetry through an anachronistic Cold War lens makes for readings that dismiss its authenticity and take precious little account of how the poet's Soviet sojourn might have informed his thinking about more than just U.S. race relations and paradigms.

Moving away from and, to some extent, participating in this tradition, David Moore's article "Colored Dispatches from the Uzbek Border: Langston Hughes's Relevance" (2002) has broken new ground by arguing that Hughes's travel writings about Soviet Central Asia (which also include the echoes of six poems that Moore discovered to exist only in Uzbek translation) are not only an essential part of Hughes's personal and political history but also help to account for his Moscow-written "Letter to the Academy."²⁷ For Moore, the comparisons that Hughes's journalism made between the U.S.S.R.'s transformation of its own "dusty, colored, cotton-growing South" and its U.S. counterpart help to account for Hughes's rebuke of Kipling in "Letter to the Academy," written during his stay in Moscow, wherein he declares that, contrary to the voice which inhabits "The Ballad of East and West," "the twain have met."²⁸ Moreover, in Moore's understanding of Hughes's poems and travels, there was "no doubt Langston was the organizer of this meeting."²⁹

In a similar vein, Kate Baldwin, the most prolific scholar of Hughes's Soviet period, argues that his essays on Uzbekistan provide a useful backdrop for interpreting the stories contained in *The Ways of White Folks* (1934). For Baldwin, *The Ways of White Folks* manifests a "pro-

scriptive delineation of the color line as mediated through double consciousness and a life of the veil, the woman's role in racial liberation, the ways in which otherness becomes denigrated as feminine, and the generative potential of disruptive boundary" that carries over "from Central Asia to figure prominently in the stories about US Society." In short and in Baldwin's account, Hughes's collection reflects how he "reoriented his vision from Central Asia to the United States" to articulate a more nuanced understanding of Black and white subjectivities.³⁰ In this sense, Baldwin's argument resembles Moore's insofar as both authors position Hughes's experiences of Soviet Central Asia as a powerful influence on his writing and worldview.

Baldwin's focus on how Hughes's experiences in Moscow led him to explore new forms of Black subjectivity and collectivity with an ever-widening transnational literary repertoire is of obvious relevance to my present argument, and I happily build upon her insights. The present argument, though, departs from hers and Moore's insofar as it disrupts the reigning narrative that Hughes's experiences and literary production in the U.S.S.R. ultimately allowed him to carry over his Soviet-born insights and infused his understanding or depiction of race relations in the United States. This chapter and the next reposition Hughes's activities in the Soviet Union as part of a larger anticolonial endeavor that forced him to negotiate between the demands of current (and evolving) Soviet norms and the weight of his background beliefs and their afterlife in translation. An understanding of the contexts that surrounded Hughes's literary production is an essential part of arriving at an understanding of his poetic and political interventions.

This chapter's focus on the growth of Hughes's poetic palette allows us to read his Moscow poetry in light of the aesthetic regimes under which it was produced and into which it was introduced. My adoption of Wollheim and Gombrich's principles separates my approach from that of Sundquist, Baldwin, and Moore because I see Hughes's Moscow production as something informed by much more than his experience of the Soviet Union. The chapter's reconstruction of Hughes's creative process takes into account the extent to which he shaped his work (and his work was shaped) to resonate within the intertextual fabric of the Soviet International's cultural front.

In a related vein, I also argue that the likely motivation behind the Comintern's decision to task Hughes with the translation of Mayakovsky's and Aragon's poetry—namely, the desire to attach Hughes's Black face and his anticolonial credentials to poetry that portrayed

or gave voice to Soviet remedies to the race problem and the colonial question—helps to contextualize Hughes’s evolving practice of translation in the U.S.S.R. as a mode of resistance. Hence, my primary concern here and in the chapter that follows is to explore how Hughes made use of the Soviet and Soviet-inflected poetics he discovered in translation to resist the Comintern’s efforts to use his poetry and translations as weapons against Black internationalism.

Although most of Hughes’s Soviet translations never saw publication, the work of translation informed all of his activities in the U.S.S.R., and its scrutiny must play a key role in any attempt to reconstruct his creative processes at the time. As two of the articles he wrote in Moscow well attest, Hughes saw translation as central to literary growth, the health of different literary milieus, and the grand enterprise of putting literature at the service of Third Period Communism. The most troubling aspect of the Comintern’s agenda to co-opt Hughes’s voice arguably consisted in the attempt to use his translations to frame the concepts of race and racism as, solely, the outgrowth of class conflict, and, in so doing, to discredit the revolutionary or collectivizing potential of Black left internationalism. The conjoining of “Black and White” was still the objective, but the mode of attack had changed and the scope of the battlefield had considerably enlarged. The Comintern looked to Hughes’s poetry (and arguably more to its translation), his translations, and mutual translations to embody, endorse, and amplify Soviet solutions to the race problem and the colonial question. It also expected Hughes’s translations to publicize Soviet industrialization and to intertwine it with the project of Sovietization—to use translation to forge and suggest new forms of utopian communities for both a colonized global proletariat and for their colonizers.³¹

The Comintern’s internationalist agenda behind publishing Hughes’s work as a translator and his work in translation becomes visible when we consider the venue in which that work was published. Whereas the majority of Hughes’s “anti-American” journalism appeared in *Izvestia*, the newspaper of record in the Soviet Union from 1917 until the U.S.S.R.’s dissolution, Hughes’s poetry and translations were published by the International Association of Revolutionary Writers in their new organ, *International Literature*, founded in 1933 as “the only international publication devoted to the proletarian and revolutionary literature of all countries.”³² The journal also promoted itself as an “organ of revolutionary militant thought” that devoted “special attention . . . to questions of Marxist literary criticism.”³³ Hence, the journal was “In-

ternational” in several senses. Its dedication to “proletarian and revolutionary literature” and “Marxist literary criticism” made it part of the global, self-regulating system of proletarian literature which Mike Gold described. Its commitment to translation, evidenced by its publication in four languages, made it an international organ designed to advance the Soviet cultural front in multiple literary milieus using the languages imposed on geographies which had been subjugated or colonized by Western imperialism. Not surprisingly, the two pieces of Hughes’s journalism that *International Literature* published are primarily concerned with describing the virtues of the Soviet literary world (at the expense of the U.S. one), and each article identified the Soviet investment in translation as, arguably, chief among these virtues.

The articles that Hughes wrote for *International Literature* are titled “Moscow and Me” and “Negroes in Moscow: In a Land Where There Is No Jim Crow” and are two of the few occasions where he addressed the topic of translation. Published in 1933 in the third and fourth issues of the new journal respectively, these articles offer a take on the role of translation vis-à-vis cultural exchange between the American Black proletariat and the citizens of the Soviet Union. Hughes’s articles contrasted the artistic production of both countries, arguing that the creation of literature and film in the United States answered only to “the money-making ideals of the producers,” while in the Soviet Union artistic production was governed by a desire to create socially important art infused with ideals for the “betterment of the Soviet People.”³⁴ Hughes painted a picture of a vigorous, internationally engaged Soviet literary community inhabited by idealistic editors who, in contrast to their U.S. counterparts publishing fake true stories, welcomed translations of “frank stories of American Negro Life” that did not “shy away from the Negro problem and the work of Negro writers.”³⁵

This openness, according to Hughes, was integral to the Soviet quest to increase national “betterment” by increasing international awareness. Soviet journal editors accordingly placed a high premium on translation.³⁶ As Hughes related in “Moscow and Me,” “I received for one edition of my poems in translation more money in actual living value than I have yet made from . . . my various volumes of poetry in America.”³⁷ Hughes overturns the closely held beliefs of many of his U.S. contemporaries that capitalism worked to engender wealth and to facilitate the accumulation of capital (both monetary and artistic) through variously articulated and assumed freedoms in the marketplace and speech realms. He does so by contrasting the embedded socioeconomic racial

hierarchies then widespread in U.S. spheres with the openness of the Soviets to U.S. Black artistic production, even as it is folded under the wing of Comintern internationalist aims. Hughes characterizes this openness and commitment to translation as the outgrowth of ideological aims that stem from an entirely different value system, one that is politically, economically, and artistically opposed to the very bases that make the wheels of U.S. industry turn.

The financial premium placed on translation by the Comintern, as Hughes implied in “Negroes in Moscow,” was also a means to create a literary space intended to hasten the global disintegration of racial chauvinism. Exemplifying this point, Hughes details the importance of Pushkin’s international literary stature to both Soviet citizens and African Americans, who, in Hughes’s truncated account, identified with Pushkin because his mother was a “beautiful mulatto.”³⁸ He then offers an account of a Moscow free of racial prejudice and hungry for “modern Negro art.”³⁹ Tying these threads together while tearing the Comintern’s agenda for his translation asunder, Hughes concludes the essay with the following remarks and a translation⁴⁰ of Julian Anisimov’s poetry:

A Moscow poet, Julian Anisimov (translator of a forthcoming anthology of Negro poetry), has written a little poem which begins like this article with Pushkin; but which ends, not like this article, with today, but with tomorrow.

It is called:

Kinship

The blood of Pushkin

Unites

The Russian and the Negro

In art.

Tomorrow

We will be united anew

In the International.

So merge past facts and present prophecy.⁴¹

Hughes introduces Anisimov as a translator of Negro poetry but makes no mention of the fact that he was one of Hughes’s most pro-

lific Russian translators. He chooses instead to quietly qualify him as a fellow translator-poet, and then quotes a poem whose status in translation is somewhat ambiguous owing precisely to Anisimov's work as an author and as a translator. The reader of the essay may ask: Is this a poem written and translated by Anisimov? Or has Hughes translated it for his reader?

Hughes's manuscripts housed at Yale University strongly suggest that he, with Anisimov's assistance, was the translator of the poem, and it is precisely Hughes's silence on this matter that is of most interest here. This omission and Hughes's concluding sentiment, "So merge past facts and present prophecy," not only blur the line between author, translator, and social critic but also distance Hughes from the work: he is a commentator on the poem rather than the voice behind it. Moreover, the commentary he offers recasts the assertion that the Negro and the Russian are united in literature as a "past fact," implicitly suggesting that these two populations, framed in ethnic-nationalist terms, either do not share a common art, or do as mutual participants, but dissonant voices, in the arena of world literature more generally. The certitude of the triumph of the International, the absolute belief in a Soviet vision of the dialectical materialist progression of history which underlies Anisimov's poem, is recast as a decidedly non-materialist divine augury, as a "present prophecy" that is tellingly voiced in translation. The poem's composition and its translation may be designed to help bring about this prophecy and this new collectivity, but they are foreign to Hughes and not ones for which he will take credit—they are not ones he would implicitly endorse or with which he could rest quiet. Hughes thus signifies on the Soviet project of translation as he earlier described it, suggesting that the erasure of racism in the International is entangled with the assimilative demand of Sovietization, and that it might well meet with a certain amount of Black resistance, as Hughes meets it here. In this sense, the above passage serves as a potent symbol for the Soviet agenda behind the decision to task Hughes as a translator and for how Hughes repeatedly not only refused to let his political voice be co-opted in translation, but also how he managed, by hook or by crook, to infuse his Soviet-sponsored translations with Black left internationalist commentaries and concerns.

Hughes's decision to undermine the contention that the Russian and the Negro shared a common literature—or a common conception of literature, or mutual confidence in the concrete promises of Third Period Communism—in a poetic reading that mixes the concrete reality

of “fact” with the visionary promises of “prophecy” is of paramount significance. It suggests that, for Hughes, the work of creating revolutionary verse for an International inclusive of the Black masses required a poetics that exploited the liberatory potential of both. It required a realist poetics that could portray and participate in the rough-and-tumble struggle for sustenance and social justice on the ground, a poetics shaped by a materialist understanding of geopolitical circumstances past and present, and a poetics of imagination and freedom-dreaming, one that could envision new emancipatory futures worthy of struggle precisely because they were not hemmed in by the limitations that past facts impose on present-day horizons.

Moreover, what Hughes is gesturing at here—an entanglement between freedom-dreaming and concrete materialist struggle on the ground—can be fruitfully conceived as an effort to push back against more than the Comintern’s agenda for his translations. It can also be read as a defense of the role of “prophecy” in revolutionary poetry, as a way of pushing back against prescriptions that the Comintern held for his own verse, or as a defense of freedom-dreaming from a Comintern disdain voiced in the same article that introduced Hughes to the readers of *International Literature*.

Published in the first issue of *International Literature* in January 1933, Lidiia Filatova’s article “Langston Hughes: American Writer” ostensibly offered readers a Soviet endorsement of “a bright and interesting talent” and an overview of Hughes’s literary career—from the publication of *The Weary Blues* (1926) to his 1931 and 1932 “revolutionary” poems and plays.⁴² Filatova describes his trajectory as a gradual movement away from the “estheticism” that attended the “petty bourgeois radicalism” of figures like W. E. B. Du Bois, and towards a proletarian commitment to using his writing “as a weapon in the struggle against capitalism, for the emancipation of toiling Negroes and toiling humanity in all countries.” The article’s attempt to lay waste to an unnamed pan-Africanism via a literary critique of Hughes’s early poetic production makes it one of the strongest displays of how the double-edged agenda behind Hughes’s Soviet reception also included an attempt to influence his latest work. It also testifies to the extent that Hughes’s international interlocutors were apt to tie his early poetry to pan-Africanisms, as was the case in France.

What is curious about Filatova’s article is that although she welcomes Hughes as “the first poet of the negro proletariat,” she offers very little commentary on the merits of what she labels his “revolutionary period,”

and bases her lukewarm observations on citations and readings that are, at best, scant. Instead, she devotes the lion's share of her essay to a series of trenchant critiques aimed at Hughes's "early poetry," making use of a hodgepodge of Soviet literary theory to support her contentions about its revolutionary shortcomings. Likewise, her prescriptive dictates are informed less by a party line for the production of revolutionary poetry than they are by a grab bag of disparate dictates crafted to limit the international scope and content of Hughes's "proletarian" verse to come. They are part of an attempt to influence what and how Hughes wrote for *International Literature* by alerting readers to both his supposed revolutionary pitfalls and his proletarian potential.

Filatova's odd, and at times paradoxical endorsements, categorizations, and criticisms expose her essay as an artifact that also draws into focus Hughes's French reception and the important role played by Parisian Black internationalist and French left presses in shaping her poetic prescriptions to Hughes. In this sense, the article brings into focus several of the key factors that informed Hughes's creative process in Moscow by unearthing the aesthetic norms, rules of decorum, states of literary tradition, and the ideological world pictures that the Comintern tried to impose on Hughes's verse and the extent to which he adhered to and departed from them. The article also speaks to the fact that Hughes's French and Francophone personas posed a serious threat to the establishment and maintenance of these norms, rules, states, and pictures in different literary geographies.

Filatova's very title, "Langston Hughes: American Writer," regionalizes Hughes, and her arguments about his early poetry quickly follow suit, assiduously assigning a nationalist frame to the poetic ambitions and interventions of his early work. Her account of Hughes's poetic career begins by detailing how Hughes "fell under the spell" of "bourgeois Negro ideologues like Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson" who saw Negro achievement in the realms of literature and art as a means to upset theories of white superiority.⁴³ Paradoxically, the project of Locke, Johnson, and Du Bois to express "Negro genius" in art to help solve the race problem, in Filatova's argument, is tantamount to an "advocacy of 'pure art' or 'art for art's sake,' of art and literature divorced from the vital problems of the race."⁴⁴ More to the point, it is a distinctly U.S. aesthetic project, one that is doomed to failure because the art it produces is tailored to suit "the tastes of the American bourgeoisie" and, more importantly, because it fails to approach the color problem as one engendered by class conflict.⁴⁵ Setting aside Filatova's reductive account

of Locke et al.'s 1920s aesthetic programs, we should note that her attempt to regionalize Hughes's early verse is also an attempt to confine two figures, Du Bois and Locke, who already loomed large on both the nascent horizons of Parisian Black internationalism and the U.S. literary scene.⁴⁶ We should also note that Filatova's attack on Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) as a socially aloof manifesto lacking in class-consciousness is extremely perplexing. Hughes's call in his essay to embrace the cultural wellspring of the "common people" is accompanied by some of his most pointed remarks about class conflict in Black American communities and how those class conflicts affect Black artistic production. Nevertheless, Filatova cites the final paragraph of Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" to discredit his social commitment:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual darkskinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it does not matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure does not matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.⁴⁷

The Black nationalist resonance of Hughes's exhortation and his appeal to an anti-assimilative group psychology is ignored in Filatova's essay. Instead, she attempts to overshadow Hughes's intriguing conjoining of Black expression, individualism, and collectivism (e.g., "express our individual dark-skinned selves") by criticizing it as one divorced from the struggle for social justice on the ground, and arguing that Hughes's "temples of tomorrow"—where Negro artists will stand "free within ourselves"—represent spaces where the artist is held "aloof from social themes."⁴⁸

Filatova's attack on Hughes's essay becomes all the more perplexing when we consider some of her advice for his proletarian verse yet to come. Although she regards Hughes's tendency to "generalise" as a positive development, Filatova, without reference to a specific poem, paints Hughes as a poet in "danger" of "falling into schematism and rhetorics." He incurs this risk because, unlike Mayakovsky, Hughes has yet to master the art of synthesizing generalizations with "concrete individual substance."⁴⁹ Filatova's critique is paradoxical because the "concrete

individual substance” to which she alludes is far from “individual,” and also because this concrete substance is exactly the formal material to which Hughes points the Negro artist in his essay’s valorization of Black folk and popular culture as a near infinite artistic wellspring. However, in Filatova’s essay, this distinction between schematism and concrete individual substance is really more a matter of the distinction between an internationalist and a nationalist voice, with the latter figured (paradoxically) as a voice associated with a conception of the race problem as the outgrowth of class struggle:

Revolutionary art is international in character. Hughes’ verses are impregnated with a spirit of proletarian internationalism, which ought to be welcomed in every way. Yet the poet goes to extremes by obliterating national boundaries and to some extent destroys the specific national atmosphere of his poetry; in this sense it is a step backward in comparison with his earlier works. We are for an art that is national in form and socialist in content. Hughes first of all is a poet of the Negro proletariat. His writing should help to solve specific problems confronting the Negro toilers of the United States. Hughes has a closer grasp and understanding of these problems than many writers of other races and nationalities. The writer should present with the utmost sharpness the problems of his own race, but they must be presented in a class aspect. The force of Hughe’s [*sic*] will be stronger, the influence deeper, if he will draw closer to the Negro masses and talk their language.⁵⁰

Filatova invokes the famous Soviet credo, advocating an art “national in form and socialist in content”—a slogan coined as a compromise on the question of the revolutionary worth of “village literature” that resulted in the endorsement of de-peasanting works. This point becomes all the more telling when we consider that among Filatova’s few positive assessments of Hughes’s early work is one wherein she notes the realism of the “dialect” used in his blues poems. His distance from this de-peasanting poetry, quite arguably, is the “step back” to which Filatova refers. She further supports this paradoxical argument for a poetry that is nationalist and yet “international in character” by echoing the demands of Socialist Realism (and also Mayakovsky’s LEF and several other dialectical materialist schools of Soviet poetry) and calling

for a realistic poetry of “concrete individual substance.” She constrains, though, the range of substance available to Hughes. Since he belongs to the Negro proletariat, his poetry ought to present the “problems of his own race” not, of course, from a “racial standpoint” but from a class aspect. Further straddling this internationalist/nationalist line, Filatova goes so far as to suggest that Hughes’s voice would be stronger if he spoke to the Negro masses in “their language.”

Filatova’s prescription is remarkably obtuse in its assumption that, in the United States, a homogeneous Negro mass exists, all of whom are confronted by the same “specific problems” and speak the same “language.” The international/national distinction becomes even murkier when one recalls that the term “negro masses,” in Comintern logic, applied to Black people the world over, to an aggregate without a shared language, geography, or “concrete individual substance.” To further compound the confusion, all of this advice is offered after Filatova celebrates Hughes’s arrival as a revolutionary poet by pointing to his internationalist “Call to Creation” and his positive treatment of the U.S.S.R. Filatova attempts to have it both ways—Hughes is an American and yet a global spokesman. In this sense, Filatova’s desire to confine Hughes to U.S. borders is consistent with the idea that Hughes could be a proletarian poet for the Black masses. Hughes could give voice to the Black masses, but he could not be an international voice. He was to be a localized exhibit.

In light of these inconsistencies of argument, Filatova’s attacks on “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” become all the more curious and speak to the fact that although she may confine her explicit remarks to Hughes’s roots in “American” borders, the subtext of her article seems much more focused on the routes that the essay had taken, particularly through the French and Francophone world. Hughes’s “Negro Artist” essay, and specifically its conclusion, might be said to be something like the shot heard round the Francophone world. It was a text discussed in the Nardal salon among the “Trois Pères” of Négritude, in the Nardals’ Black internationalist journal *Revue du Monde Noire*, and was, for Damas, the very fount of Black poetics in the Americas. More to the point, by 1932, the text had become a working part of the Francophone Black internationalist imaginary. In the “Manifeste” to their now seminal journal *Légitime Défense*, the student editors echoed and augmented Hughes’s call in “The Negro Artist” (“that we younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame”) by proclaiming, “We refuse to

be ashamed of what we feel,” and cried out against the “abominable system of coercion and restrictions, exterminator of love and the limiter of dreams, generally known as Western Civilization.” Thus, the founders of this journal integrated Hughes into their anti-assimilation and anticolonial working vocabulary, and conceived of his manifesto as a counterforce to Western civilization, the “limiter of dreams.” Perhaps most importantly, and arguably most worrying to the Comintern, the students (and proletarian organs like *Nouvel Âge*) saw Hughes’s essay as one that, from their perspective, worked in harmony with the revolutionary aspirations of Third Period Communism. From the editors’ prominent Antillean perspective, revolution (class struggle) was only possible after the power of dreaming allowed the proletariat to be sheltered from Western civilization—from the mandates and shackles of racial assimilation.

This entanglement of racialism, communism, and dreaming with the liberation of the non-Western world from the psychic and material fetters of colonialism was, no doubt, of great concern to the Comintern. Filatova’s critiques of Hughes’s portrayal of Africa in *The Weary Blues*, the afterlife of which garnered him his dangerous anticolonial reputation, are, accordingly, some of her most trenchant ones. Her critique of Hughes’s portrayal of Africa is based on the rather far-fetched assumption that his portrayal was an endeavor meant “to establish the historic past of his culture.” Filatova is careful to heed the element of protest in this body of work heard round the Francophone world, noting that element and pointing to the contrast Hughes stages between “the conventionality and inward emptiness of capitalist America” and “the richness of the race that has not been spoiled by civilization,” but she ultimately suggests that Hughes’s dreaming undermines the revolutionary potential of his Africa verse:

Hughes dreams about the far-off land of his ancestors. Notes of discord are sounded. The poet is lonesome in the cold prison of capitalist culture . . . The poet, however, shuns reality and varnishes it with romantic illusions. . . . Tomorrow is to bring liberation; but the poet’s dreams about the better future are hazy and nebulous, His protest against the surrounding realities is an abstract one. It resolves itself into a vague striving toward sunshine, toward the exotic. But with all this, we must note that the element of conflict is already evident.⁵¹

Filatova's critique of Hughes's manifesto and his poetic engagement with primitivism (or the "exotic") does not shy away from the Comintern assumption of an essentialist connection between Hughes and an unspoiled ancestral Africa.⁵² Rather, she takes exception to Hughes's early poetic production based on the assertion that underlies the polemic of her essay as a whole: that Hughes's racialism, a politics intricately bound up with his poetics and politics of dreaming, is counter-revolutionary. Moreover, since the new imperative of Socialist Realism demanded revolutionary romanticism—which allowed artists to go beyond the confines of the real to transform reality—Filatova's advice, once again, is exposed as less in line with "Marxist literary criticism" and more in line with an aesthetic program designed specifically for Hughes himself.

In contrast, the very first article contained in *Légitime Défense*, Etienne Léro's "Misère d'une poésie," exhorted Antillean poets to look precisely to Hughes's dreaming to produce a more authentic, non-assimilationist Black poetry. Léro saw Hughes's Africa as having already established a foundation for a specifically Black proletariat and an overlooked young generation of potential Antillean revolutionaries who were in no need of revision to accommodate the Soviet impulse to forefront class struggle as the "correct solution" to the "racial problem." For Léro, the distinction held so rigidly by Filatova was precisely one that had to be collapsed in order to achieve revolutionary investments that included Sovietization but which also held dear a psychic emancipation, like that of Hughes's artist who successfully overcomes the inferiority complex of the "Racial Mountain":

We hope the wind mounting in black America will soon cleanse our Antilles of the abortive fruit of an obsolete culture. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, the two black revolutionary poets, have brought us: seascapes of red alcohol, the African love of life, the African joy of love, and the African dream of death . . . From the day when the black proletariat—bled dry in the Antilles by a parasitic mulatto class that has sold itself to degenerate whites—gains access, by breaking this double yoke, to the right to eat and to the life of the mind, only from that day on will there exist an Antillean poetry.⁵³

In this passage Léro evokes Hughes's remarks on Africa—"the desolation of the Congo; Johnny Walker, and the millions of whisky bottles

buried in the sea along the West Coast”—contained in Van Vechten’s introduction to *The Weary Blues* (which, since it had not yet been translated, testifies to the deep investment that the Parisian Black student milieu had in Hughes’s work and their access to it in Spanish or English). Léro positions Hughes’s poetic production as both a surrealist and communist antidote to the three-tier caste system engendered by French colonial policy, and as a vehicle for the liberation of the Black Antillean proletariat.

The questions now arise: How could the very body of Hughes’s verse that Van Vechten distinguished from his “revolutionary” poems serve the communist ideology to which Léro subscribes? Why would Léro characterize Hughes as a surrealist? While there are no easy answers to these questions, we can point to several factors that help to untangle the web created by this collision of aesthetic regimes. First, almost all the French Surrealists were, at some point, members of the Communist Party. In fact, the authors of the manifesto figure the movements as two sides of the same coin. Immediately after expressing a political commitment to the dialectical materialism of Marx, the students proclaim that “nous acceptons également sans réserves le surréalisme” (we equally accept surrealism without reserve) as their mode of “l’expression humaine” (human expression).⁵⁴ Second, and more to the point, the role occupied by the primitive in Freud’s thought is so prominent that it is nearly impossible to disentangle Surrealism from primitivism. Third, Surrealism’s opposition to the brutalized societies left in the wake of the First World War and its rejection of European values inevitably led its adherents to draw upon non-European cultures and ethnology in order to reflect on and attack their own society. Lilyan Kesteloot makes the astute point that this reevaluation of primitive vision “did not pass unnoticed among representatives of races still considered inferior because of their non-rational cultures,” since “values had, in effect, been reversed; it was now the most ‘civilized’ man who was the most ‘naked,’ the least pure.”⁵⁵ Surrealism, therefore, provided both a rejection of European values and an excellent break from cultural assimilation. We can now begin to see how Hughes’s Africa poetry represented, for Léro, the very substance of communist revolt and anticolonial protest. Given that primitivism was conceptualized as an integral part of Surrealism, and Surrealism was seen as a weapon of communist revolt, Léro’s assertion that Hughes’s primitivist vision of Africa could both “cleanse the Antilles of the abortive fruit of an obsolete culture” and unshackle the Black proletariat makes perfect sense.

Although yoking Surrealism and communism was nothing new, Léro's attempt to do so occurred after a series of events in the Soviet Union and Paris had called into question the relationship between Surrealist expression and communist revolutionary action, particularly with regard to the colonial question. These events included the break between André Breton and Aragon during the winter of 1931–32 over the former's attempted defense of the latter in his "Misère de la poésie." Much to the chagrin of Aragon, who insisted on a revolutionary continuity between word and action, Breton's defense argued for the autonomy of poetic speech and distinguished it from other forms of agitational discourse. This crisis over the nature of poetry itself was compounded by a crisis of expression concerning the portrayal of colonialism and colonized peoples at Aragon's poorly attended counter-exhibition, staged by the French Surrealists and the Comintern to protest the French Colonial Exhibition of 1931. This exhibition marked the final collaborative effort (and the ensuing split) between the Surrealists and the Comintern. Hence, Léro's 1932 pointed transformation of Breton's "Misère de la poésie" ("The Misery of Poetry") into "Misère d'une Poésie" ("Misery of a Poetry"), a transformation meant to highlight the poverty of an Antillean assimilationist poetry, constituted a Black left internationalist middle ground in which Hughes's brand of Black surrealism was seen not only as politically engagé but also as a creative vehicle that used European avant-garde poetics to liberate Black minds from Western limitations.

We can now begin to envisage some of the aesthetic norms, ideological world pictures, and ethical problems that Hughes grappled with when he composed his Moscow verse. The very same poet who told Guillén that he yearned to be "el poeta de los negros" was now dubbed "the first revolutionary poet of the Negro proletariat," but this sobriquet carried an enormous amount of baggage. Hughes's poetic production, arguably, had never had to negotiate with so many demands and constraints as it did now. He was to compose verse that was "nationalist in form and socialist in content," but he was also charged with the perilous ethical responsibility of being the agitator-voice of the Negro proletariat. Moreover, Hughes, ever conscious of his international persona and his appearances in translation, also had to answer to a Black base, one that had lionized him for a body of verse produced in an era that Hughes had left behind. The subject matter of his poetry, if Filatova's prescriptions were to be followed, was also limited, and was to be confined to the specific, and yet quite nebulous, problems of the "negro

masses.” Even Hughes’s choice of voice for the poetic personas he was to create was circumscribed. If he desired to draw closer to the Negro masses, in essence, he had to talk Black. The poetic possibilities open to the first revolutionary poet of the Negro proletariat paled in comparison to the many constraints that Filatova’s literary prescriptions placed on his future poetic production. However, if Hughes found the task of synthesizing the individual and the general difficult, he could, as Filatova asserts at the conclusion of her essay, look to the work of Mayakovsky, the “great poet of the October Revolution,” for guidance. But who was Mayakovsky?

In *I Wonder as I Wander*, Hughes described Mayakovsky as

the mad surrealist poet of the revolution, writing strange but intriguing slogans for May Day Parades, fantastic poetic ads for Soviet shoe shops, and rhymes in favor of hygiene, such as:

Let a little more culture,
Workers, take place!
Don’t spit on the floor—
Spit in a vase.⁵⁶

Hughes neglects to mention that he is the translator of this poem. He describes Mayakovsky as both a surrealist (or fellow surrealist in French translation) and a propagandist, one invested in bettering Soviet culture and the lived life of the proletariat. But how did Hughes arrive at this assessment? How and why did all these Mayakovskys eventually add up for him? What did the “first poet of the negro proletariat” have to learn from the poet of the October Revolution? Hughes’s papers suggest that he was determined to find out. Although Hughes collected precious few articles on the poets and poetry he translated, Mayakovsky proves an exception. His copy of Mayakovsky’s essay “How One Writes a Poem” (translated for *The Paris Monthly* in 1931) affords the present argument greater access to Hughes’s creative processes. It suggests that Mayakovsky’s prescriptions for the composition of revolutionary verse not only augmented Hughes’s poetic palette and informed his poetic production in Moscow but also led him to a translation strategy that allowed him to recuperate freedom-dreaming in his striking translation of Louis Aragon (explored in chapter 6). This is not to suggest that Hughes slavishly followed Filatova’s advice. The internationalist verses he pro-

duced by mining Mayakovsky's poetics were not at all what Filatova had in mind. Hughes struck his own compromises between the national and the international, and between the collective and the individual. He did not do so as a regionalized voice or as an exhibit, but rather as a subject, agent, and poet driven by the need to reshape the cultural front of Third Period Communism—to augment it and to make it more inclusive by infusing it with Black left internationalist political commitments and a Hughesian revolutionary poetic. This poetics spoke to the unique challenges that collectivization, Soviet and pan-African, posed for a great many African diasporic communities who were invested in increasing their ties via the fomentation of Black radical internationalism. Hughes's poems and the speakers who inhabited them portrayed how a collective, or envisioned collective, without national borders had to face challenges that the U.S.S.R. did not, and accordingly, how it had to value individualism and heterogeneity differently.

The opening paragraphs of "How One Writes a Poem" present the reader with a series of juxtaposed arguments that draw into relief Mayakovsky's loose prescription for writing revolutionary verse. He begins the essay by playfully insisting that although much of his literary criticism tends "to discredit, if not destroy, the ancient art of poetry," his attacks are not aimed at ancient poetry itself.⁵⁷ Rather, they are aimed at a "petty bourgeois spirit" which embraces "the belief that only eternal poetry is above all dialectic and that the creative process merely consists in throwing one's hair back with inspiration and waiting until celestial poetry descends on one's head" (section I of the essay). He then abruptly shifts gears and asserts that Gandhi's belief that England "can be prevailed upon by love" is mistaken, and that India will only gain her independence through "brute force" (section I). After offering this polemic of revolutionary dialectical materialism, Mayakovsky turns his attention, once again, to the "ancient" poetry of Pushkin, arguing that "it is doubtful whether a young man who is burning with desire to devote his powers to the revolution will still want to occupy himself with the antiquarian element in poetry" (section I). The implication behind this juxtaposition of assertions is one that informs the logic of the essay as a whole. Mayakovsky, who qualifies himself as a "practitioner" and not a "theorist," distances his art from the verse of times past and displays a predilection to address proletarian struggle in a global arena, but he is nevertheless forced to take recourse to the "antiquarian" in order to delineate, in negative terms, the concerns of a revolutionary poet (section I). Mayakovsky holds no prejudice against ancient poetry

in and of itself, only a prejudice against verse held “above all dialectic,” and he is against assigning art and creativity to a realm outside that of the material (section I). And while it is “doubtful” that a poet who wishes to devote himself to the revolution will “occupy himself with the antiquarian element in poetry,” Mayakovsky—who, somewhat ironically, figures himself as the ideal candidate to provide the reader with a manual on how to write the verse of the revolution—begins his essay by occupying himself with precisely that element (section I).

Mayakovsky’s manual is, in essence, a rallying cry against formulaic verse, and a call for poetry to develop as does the course of human history in Marxist terms. Poetry that adheres to traditional versification, in his eyes, is little more than “the work of any trained copyist,” and “general rules” are useful only in “getting one’s work under way” (section III). These rules are akin to the rules governing the opening moves in a game of chess; they are “always the same” and “purely conventional,” and it is only when rhyme and rhythm are employed unexpectedly, that is to say when rules are transgressed, that “a brilliant coup” is made possible (section III). In short, Mayakovsky introduces his poetics as a dialectical process, as one that synthesizes a reworking of “antiquarian” poetics with a communist commitment to the worldwide proletariat.

Mayakovsky is careful to point out that the rules that govern the production of a poetry of the revolution are dictated by life itself: “Life creates the situations that must be expressed and for which rules must be invented” (section II). His poetics of dialectical revolt is, as a result, in line with the ideologies and dictates of the revolution. The poetics of revolution should, in short, embody revolution, and this requires a poetics that is, in essence, in a perpetual state of dialectical revolt. The need for a new poetry is, in turn, the outcome of the tremendous changes brought about by the October Revolution:

Language is being carried away by a new torrent. How can it be made poetic? The old rules with all their dreams, rose, and Alexandrines do not fit anymore. How can current speech be introduced into poetry, how can poetry be extracted from current conversation? Must we spit on the revolution in the name of iambic verse? Certainly not.⁵⁸

Mayakovsky’s prescription for a new poetics that favors the introduction of “current speech” in a realm where old rules no longer suffice is one intended for a revolution where what was previously considered

poetic—“dreams, roses, and Alexandrines”—gives way to the urgent need for revolutionary speech in the contemporary moment. If it is to qualify as poetry in service of the revolution, this speech must concern itself with a “social task that can be accomplished only through poetic work” (section IV). Poetry should not be considered independently from other forms of human activity, but should nevertheless concern itself with tasks that poetic work, and poetic work alone, can accomplish.

Langston Hughes’s “Columbia” is an offering that answers Mayakovsky’s call for a poetry of dialectical revolt that actively engages life. Published in *International Literature*’s second issue of 1933, “Columbia” not only provides what Arnold Rampersad labels “a highly sensational attack on the United States” but also offers its readers a speaker whose precarious subjectivity comes to the fore as a result of an intertextual conflict between the action of the poem and the poetic tradition to which it alludes.⁵⁹ More specifically, “Columbia” plays upon the tradition of the *carpe diem* (“seize the day”) poem that reaches back to Horace via its allusion to, and reworking of, Andrew Marvell’s poem “To His Coy Mistress” in order to redress the inequities of the global politics of Hughes’s day:

Columbia
 My dear girl,
 You really haven’t been a virgin for so long
 It’s ludicrous to keep up the pretext.
 You’re terribly involved in world assignments
 And everybody knows it.
 You’ve slept with all the big powers
 In military uniforms,
 And you’ve taken the sweet life
 Of all the little brown fellows
 In loin cloths and cotton trousers.
 When they’ve resisted,
 You’ve yelled, “Rape,”
 At the top of your voice
 And called for the middies
 To beat them up for not being gentlemen
 And liking your crooked painted mouth.
 (You must think the moons of Hawaii
 Disguise your ugliness.)
 Really,

You're getting a little too old,
 Columbia,
 To be so naive, and so coy.
 Being one of the world's big vampires,
 Why don't you come out and say so
 Like Japan, and England, and France,
 And all the other nymphomaniacs of power
 Who've long since dropped their
 Smoke-screens of innocence
 To sit frankly on a bed of bombs?

*O, sweet mouth of India,
 And Africa,
 Manchuria, and Haiti.*

Columbia,
 You darling,
 Don't shoot!
 I'll kiss you!⁶⁰

Although the speaker of "Columbia" does not specifically invoke "To His Coy Mistress" as an intertext until the poem's twentieth line, "Really, / You're getting a little too old, / Columbia, / To be so naive, and so coy," the conceit of the poem presents the reader with a reworking of "antiquarian" poetics that inverts the normal economy of the *carpe diem* poem in which the speaker artfully seduces the chaste object of his affection. Whereas the "vegetable love" of Marvell's speaker grows "vaster than empires" in pursuit of his coy mistress, the persona that Hughes offers moves from potential seducer to potential rape victim precisely because "coy" Columbia becomes the violence of empire incarnate.⁶¹ Hughes's decision to employ the poetic and first popular name of the United States is telling, since "Columbia" also refers to the Americas as a whole. The use of the label is therefore a kind of imperialist gesture: Columbia's name betrays her designs.

Hughes's "Columbia" puts poetic tradition in conflict with itself and offers the reader, in Mayakovsky's terms, a series of brilliant coups, or inversions, that play upon the reader's "antiquarian" expectations of the genre, complicating them at every turn. In Hughes's poem, the chaste object of affection common to the genre is figured as a vampire or nymphomaniac, and the artfully seductive gentleman poet becomes

a naive bungler whose central argument—a call for his mistress to drop all pretense and seize the day—ultimately proves to be self-destructive, since Columbia’s desire, once awakened, puts the speaker in grave peril. Moreover, the day to be seized is one that belongs, somewhat exclusively, to Columbia, and represents the intrusion, or synthesis, of what Mayakovsky might label “life”—or contemporary global events seen through communist eyes—into Hughes’s poem. This intrusion comprises, in large part, the “social task” of the poem: namely, to critique in dramatic terms the imperialist designs of the United States.

While “Columbia” certainly provides its readers with an indictment of imperialism and colonialism the world over (with a jab at the world’s “nymphomaniacs of power”), the poem is far from a straightforward polemic. Rather, the intertextual conflict staged by the poem brings to the fore a speaker whose subjectivity is rooted not in race or nation, but in the alluvial soil of the powerless. Hughes offers a poetic speaker who both is and is not the inheritor of the poetic tradition in which he seeks to participate, a persona familiar with the genre’s conventions but unable to share its spoils. His position is in many ways analogous to that of a disenfranchised worldwide proletariat, the rightful heirs to the spoils of capitalism who are denied their due by the “big powers” of the world sitting “frankly on a bed of bombs.” Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to simply characterize “Columbia” as a poem that offers a commentary on “life” from the perspective of the powerless, for it is also an attempt to redress the inequities of “life,” a poem that concerns itself with a social task that can only be accomplished through “poetic work,” given the realities of its contemporary moment.

Hughes’s “Columbia” also highlights how politics adheres to poetic forms and genres while simultaneously suggesting the instability of such linkages. The italicized voice that intrudes in the penultimate stanza, “*Oh, sweet mouth of India, / And Africa, / Manchuria and Haiti,*” illustrates this point by invoking the libidinal romanticism that typically accompanied colonial portrayals of colonized lands and peoples in the nineteenth century, and in so doing highlights how certain poetics carry certain politics.

With regard to Filatova’s nationalizing prescriptions for Hughes’s verse, “Columbia” both conforms to and diverges from the parameters laid out for the first revolutionary poet of the Negro proletariat. While “Columbia” may be “socialist in content,” it is certainly not “nationalist in form.” Quite the contrary: the *carpe diem* tradition from which “Columbia” springs is unquestionably international and possessed with

roots that reach back to antiquity. The reader finds very little of the “concrete individual substance” of the “Negro toilers of the United States” in the poem, and while Hughes’s persona speaks in a straightforward and accessible manner, he does not employ the “language” that Filatova deems suitable for a Negro proletarian poet. Rather, Hughes rejects Filatova’s essentialist assumptions and, in his first offering as the poet of the Negro proletariat, creates a poetic speaker whose subjectivity is delineated not only in terms of race but in terms of power, a persona forged not only in the fires of the color line, but in the interplay of international literature.

Translating Mayakovsky and Aragon

The Poetics of Dialectical Revolt and Intertextual Subjectivity

In light of Soviet efforts to harness Hughes's and Aragon's anticolonial reputations, this chapter examines Hughes's deft and poetically sophisticated response to their attempts to enlist him in their cultural front. The chapter, anchored largely by an analysis of Hughes's translations of Aragon and Mayakovsky, shows how Hughes eluded unwarranted interpretations of his work and persona and helps to fashion a critical lens capable of discerning how he manipulated Soviet-inflected revolutionary poetics and the shifting political valences of the European avant-garde to advance his own brand of Black left internationalism that departed from Soviet prescriptions.

During his stay in Moscow, Hughes became increasingly invested in shaping a dissonant intertextuality—in creating poems that placed multiple revolutionary poetics in contact, in conflict, and in chorus with one another. His interventions featured speakers who gave voice to subjectivities and concerns from carefully crafted interstitial spaces that not only spoke to the marginalization of Black revolutionary concerns and consciousness but also positioned these concerns as international in scope. In so doing, Hughes's translations, poetry, and poetics shunned the opposition between Black internationalism and Sovietization, choosing instead to give voice to Black internationalist subjectivities that navigated

the straits of, and depended on, both currents. These novel subjectivities balanced Black international fidelities with communist commitments to address the historically unique needs and challenges that collectivization posed for a heterogeneous Black global proletariat largely living under imperial rule. The chapter culminates by reading Hughes's poem "Cubes" (1934) as an example of how he combined his own poetics and persona as fashioned in French and Francophone translation with his experiences in the Soviet Union translating Mayakovsky and Aragon to articulate a Black radical internationalist subjectivity on an intertextual plane. It is on this intertextual field that Hughes makes use of avant-garde poetic innovations to criticize, from a Marxist perspective, French colonialism and the racial essentialism that helped to fuel it. By playing with and against avant-garde and proletarian conventions, "Cubes" draws into relief the uneasy relationship between empire, aesthetic regimes, and Black internationalist subjectivity to articulate a new vision, albeit a pessimistic one, of Black internationalist collectivity.

Hughes was not alone in his proletarian turn. His stay in Moscow may simply have happened to coincide with Louis Aragon's, but the decision of *International Literature* to publish mutual translations of their works was not happenstance. Having the two poets translate each other was not only an attempt to co-opt their well-established anticolonial reputations but also represented a chance to display their turns toward proletarianism and, for much of the Francophone world, away from Surrealism. Thus, having Louis Aragon translate Hughes's "Letter to the Academy" for the French-language edition of *International Literature* fit well into the Soviet agenda to undermine competing internationalisms.

Hughes's "Letter to the Academy," published in the fifth issue of *International Literature* in 1933, is less a response to Mayakovsky's call for a new poetics and more an echo of it. Just as Mayakovsky's "How One Writes a Poem" urges the revolutionary poet to forsake the antiquarian notion that art should be held "above all dialectic" and should respond to life's "new torrent" with a new language, Hughes's "Letter to the Academy" calls upon the academician, "whose books have soared in calmness and beauty aloof from the struggle," to forsake the classical division of "spirit" from "flesh" and to "speak about the Revolution—where the flesh triumphs (as well as the spirit)" (lines 1–19).¹ Nevertheless, it would be unfair to characterize "Letter to the Academy" as a straightforward polemic. Rather, as he does in "Co-

lumbia,” Hughes presents the reader with a persona who is drawn in greater detail as the poem progresses and invokes other texts. This progression comes to a head between the third and fourth stanzas of the poem, wherein the speaker announces that the revolution has no need of “Kipling writing never the twain shall meet— / For the twain have met”:²

Letter to the Academy

The gentlemen who have got to be classics and are now old with beards (or dead and in their graves) will kindly come forward and speak upon the subject

Of the Revolution. I mean the gentlemen who wrote the lovely books about the defeat of the flesh and the triumph of the spirit that sold in the hundreds of thousands and are studied in the high schools and read by the best people will kindly come forward and

Speak about the Revolution—where the flesh triumphs (as well as the spirit) and the hungry belly eats, and there are no best people, and the poor are mighty and no longer poor, and the young by the hundreds of thousands are free from hunger to grow and study and love and propagate, bodies and souls unchained without My Lord saying a commoner shall never marry my daughter or the Rabbi crying cursed be the mating of Jews and Gentiles or Kipling writing never the twain shall meet—

For the twain have met. But please—All you gentlemen with beards who are so wise and old and who write better than we do and whose souls have triumphed (in spite of hunger and wars and the evil about you) and whose books have soared in calmness and beauty aloof from the struggle to the library shelves and the desks of students and who are now classics—come forward and speak upon

The subject of the Revolution.

We want to know what in the hell you’d say?³

The speaker’s invocation of Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West,” in combination with his assertion that “the twain have met,” delineates

the persona as a voice for (and of) the worldwide proletariat, since the meeting of East and West, in the logic of Kipling's ballad, results in the annihilation of racial chauvinism, nationalism, and classism: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, / When two strong men stand face to face, / tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"⁴ This multiple identity is drawn into stark relief in the poem's final lines when the speaker forsakes his "I" and asks: "The subject of the Revolution. / We want to know what in the hell you'd say?" In these lines, through clever punning, Hughes asks about the "subject" (in other words, the topic of the Revolution) as well as the "subject" itself (both the personified self of the Revolution and its political subject) while he simultaneously takes advantage of this play in the following line by both directly addressing the "gentlemen" and soliciting their opinions, even as he asks the Revolution and its political subject to answer. Once again, the subjectivity of the persona Hughes creates is one engendered by international, intertextual play, and its demand echoes Mayakovsky's call that poetic discourse keep pace with life. Hughes demonstrates his vexed position regarding the Revolution, since his poetic expression in this poem disallows any facile attempts to locate him as an all-knowing or completely convinced devotee of the dictates of any conception of revolution or revolutionary aesthetics, as is evident in his questioning regarding the "subject of the Revolution."

At the same time, Hughes's willful disregard for tradition at the level of form and syntax (e.g., his completely unconventional and fumbling line breaks) work in concert with the poem's content, when read either as a straightforward polemic or as one stumbling its way into being. On the one hand, this complete disavowal of tradition makes his poem a work that renews one of the chief tenets of Mayakovsky's LEF. The LEF group was, as Evgenii Aleksandrovich Dobrenko notes,

the scene for a meeting, unique in its own sense, between the gloomy industrial and Proletkult writers, who followed the futurists in their rejection of traditional culture, the constructivists, and the formalists, who were struggling against the generally accepted concept of "tradition" . . . The LEF critics believed that under the contradictory and arbitrary conditions of "fat NEP" the preservation of the conquests of the revolution required a very significant mustering of strength; art had to take upon itself the function of preparing man for work, practice, and invention—the

revolutionary transformation of everyday life. They asked the question whether the Russian classics would further the aims of life building. The answer was an uncompromising “no.”⁵

In a sense, then, Hughes gives voice to a Soviet theory of literature via a poem to his English-reading audience. On the other hand, his punning and signifying relies on traditional forms of the African American poetic vernacular to perform its work.⁶ In other words, Hughes augments LEF’s “no” while simultaneously saying yes to African American oral tradition. In so doing, he tellingly exempts the realm of Black expression from other traditions that are to be jettisoned in the search for revolutionary expression, and he creates a dialectical tension of his own by pointing again to a potential contribution to revolutionary poetry that had gone overlooked by Western society.

In his translation “Lettre à l’Académie,”⁷ Aragon’s line breaks emphasize terms that serve to punctuate the poem’s polemic and subject matter as seen through a LEF lens. The lines end with terms like “classiques,” “sujet,” “écriture,” and “triomphe,” and appear to streamline Hughes’s poetic content while remaining faithful to his militant rejection of traditional English-language poetic norms and forms by avoiding traditional rules of French prosody. In this sense, Aragon’s decision to twice move the word “sujet” to the end of two of his verse lines emphasizes the subject of the poem, as he perceived it, and its relevance for a French audience:

Lettre à l’Académie
par LANGSTON HUGHES

Les messieurs qui doivent devenir des classiques
et qui sont maintenant âgés et barbus (ou mort et dans
la tombe) auront la bonté de s’avancer et de parler sur le sujet
De la Révolution. Je veux dire les messieurs qui écrivirent
des livres délicieux sur la défaite de la chair et le triomphe
de l’esprit qui se vendirent par centaines de milliers et
qu’on étudie dans les facultés et qu’on lit chez les gens
bien auront la bonté de s’avancer et

...

Car le couple s’est uni. Mais s’il vous plaît—vous tous messieurs
les barbus qui êtes si sages et âgés el qui écrivez mieux

que nous et dont les âmes ont triomphé (en dépit des
 famines et guerres et des malheurs autour de vous) et dont
 les livres ont pris leur essor dans le calme et la beauté à
 l'abri du combat vers les rayons de la bibliothèque et les
 pupitres des étudiants et qui êtes maintenant des classiques
 —avancez et parlez sur le sujet

De la Révolution.

Nous désirons savoir ce que diable vous pourrez dire.⁸

Aragon's streamlining also has the effect of deemphasizing the pun suggested by Hughes's decision to draw attention to the term "subject" by first isolating it and then making "subject" the topic clause in the poem's penultimate line. Hughes's apparently meaningless line breaks work in concert with his signifying, suggesting that this revolutionary challenge to tradition might not have been quite thought through. His Black discursive augmentation of LEF's thinking becomes, in Aragon's verse, something more like a restating of LEF's philosophy posed in a clever, apt form. In short, Aragon's interpretants combined with his desire as a translator to emphasize his LEF-inflected interpretation of Hughes's poem, causing Hughes's Black internationalist commentaries about the inclusiveness of Sovietization to fall by the wayside.

Despite the global literary and political import of the players involved, Hughes's English-language translation of portions of Louis Aragon's *Hourra l'Oural* (1934), published under the title "Magnitogorsk: Fragments" in the fourth issue of *International Literature* in March 1933; and Aragon's translations of Hughes's "Good Morning, Revolution" and "Letter to the Academy," published in the fifth issue, have received scant critical attention.⁹ Moreover, this limited attention is largely concerned with the influence of Baudelaire on Hughes's poetry, rather than on the relationship between Hughes and Aragon or their shared circumstances in the Soviet Union. Although "Magnitogorsk" raises "the possibility" for Alfred Guillaume that Hughes was influenced by Surrealism, Hughes's surreptitious conjoining of "Hymne" and "1930"—two of the eight parts that constitute "Magnitogorsk" in *Hourra l'Oural*—was really an effort to draw "our attention to Aragon's elaboration, and careful revision, of a quintessentially Baudelairean trope: the metaphor of blackness, the color of dusk in the village, as an evocation, not of race, but rather of the hope, ability to survive, and the latent power of downtrodden working people."¹⁰ Guillaume thus

disassociates both the poem and the translation from Surrealism, and contends that Hughes's selection of texts was particularly apt because Aragon's poem was written after his break with the Surrealist movement and during his turn to "socialist realism."¹¹ For Guillaume, then, it was the potential to put the Baudelairean metaphor of blackness in the service of all the downtrodden that attracted Hughes to the "social realist" leanings of the poem.

Similarly, for Anita Patterson, "the importance of Baudelaire's dusky imagery for Hughes's coming of age as a poet" accounted "for the reasons why . . . Hughes would have been drawn to Aragon's poem."¹² Departing from Guillaume's largely deracinated reading of both poem and translation, Patterson maintains that Aragon's "reference to the conquest of masters," his "celebration of people who till the earth, and the blurring of distinctions between Blacks and whites [were] all in close keeping with Hughes's worldview." She nevertheless agrees with Guillaume that in selecting these two fragments, Hughes intended to "call attention to Aragon's . . . use of the dusk as a quintessentially Baudelairean trope" and, by extension, to a blurring racial politics that is implicitly figured as communist in its impetus.¹³ Notwithstanding their differing interpretations of Hughes's work, its motivations and intentions, Guillaume and Patterson are firmly in accord with respect to their assessment of Hughes's translation as literal, despite the fact that it reorders Aragon to make a specifically Hughesian commentary on Magnitogorsk as the invocation of Baudelaire's poetic repertoire.

Guillaume's and Patterson's attention to Hughes's international poetic palette in the Soviet Union befits a poet whose horizons were continuing to grow alongside the body of works he translated. These authors' focus on how Hughes enriched his translation of Aragon by invoking a trope from the realm of French Symbolism in a "socialist realist" poem reveals a translator who was increasingly aware that although genres take on new meanings in translation via their relation to the intertextual fabric of the target zone, their reception is also mediated by local familiarity with international literature. Likewise, Guillaume's and Patterson's studies reveal a translator willing to draw upon multiple poetic traditions, via intertext (an association with the author, a repurposing, etc.), to give his translations added weight.

The present argument builds upon these insights into Hughes's practice of translation but departs from Guillaume's and Patterson's read-

ings of “Magnitorgorsk” in two ways. First, although both arguments (especially Patterson’s) suggest that Hughes’s status as a Black translator either attracted him to the poem or played a role in its readings, neither critic explores this status in detail or in context. In my view, Hughes’s race and his poetic reputation motivated the choice of this poem. By bringing these author-translators together, the Comintern was also attempting to signal a cross-racial political endorsement of Soviet color-blind solutions to the colonial question.

Second, Patterson’s and Guillaume’s views that Hughes’s conjoining of Aragon’s two fragments represents a synthesis meant simply to invoke the Baudelairean trope of darkness to either reassociate “black” with the “downtrodden” or with a blurring of color has considerable merit. Nonetheless, it overlooks the fact that Hughes’s conjoining of two fragments marked by distinctly different poetics presents more of a dialectical tension than a synthesis, begging the question of how best to produce a poetry that portrays and performs the work of Black left internationalism and Sovietization while suggesting that no single aesthetic can encompass or accomplish either of these conjoined endeavors.

Third, my argument is informed by archival discoveries of Hughes’s early drafts of “Magnitorgorsk,” which only translated “1930,” and by his copy of Mayakovsky’s “Kak delat’ stikhi?” (“How One Writes A Poem”). The progression of Hughes’s drafts and his final conjoining of Aragon’s fragments in a single poem display the influence of Mayakovsky’s thoughts on how to write revolutionary poetry and Hughes’s own past poetics of “freedom-dreaming.”¹⁴

Louis Aragon’s poem *Hourra l’Oural* (*Hurrah, Urals*), written after his journey to the Ural Mountains in 1932, substituted for a journalistic account expected by the Soviet and French press. It was a substitution that, in 1977, he would both defend and regret:

This poem, written in 1933–1934, when the voyage was in 1932, took the place of a report that was expected of me . . . The only surviving piece of that story appeared in *l’Humanité* of Friday 20 and 27 January 1933. . . . But it seems to me, with over forty years of hindsight, that the landscape of the Urals has been lost in passing from the initial prose to this versification of memory. . . . Basically, if I wanted you not to be in front of the Urals like “the little horse” in front of Magnitogorsk . . . perhaps it would have been necessary to renounce the “historic” march of the poem, where I find

myself speaking with some severity . . . like I did in “Red Front.”¹⁵

This passage is significant in several respects. Aragon’s dating of the poem’s composition makes clear that Hughes began his translation before Aragon completed the whole of his *Hourra l’Oural*. Since Hughes annotated one of his typescripts (dated 1933) as being translated “with the assistance of the author,” the archive suggests that, at one point, both poet and translator were content to publish “1930” as an autonomous poem, titled “Magnitogorsk (Fragment).”¹⁶

Thus, exploring Hughes’s “Magnitogorsk (Fragment)” entails investigating both an unpublished translation of a single section of Aragon’s unfinished *Hourra l’Oural*, which later carried the title “1930,” and the second half of Hughes’s redrafted, published translation, “Magnitogorsk (Fragments).” The latter work conjoins “1930” by beginning it with another of Hughes’s translations of Aragon’s fragments, which was published as “Hymne” in the completed 1934 work. The typescript’s date also contextualizes the poem against the backdrops of Parisian and Muscovite literary milieus which had been dramatically transformed in 1932. In Paris, the introduction of Mayakovskian poetics had led to “l’Affaire Aragon,” which created a permanent rift between the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Surrealists, and prompted Aragon’s break with the Surrealist movement and his supposed political and poetic conversion to communism and Soviet aesthetics. The experimental literary spirit that had accompanied the Soviets’ New Economic Policy came to a slow end after Stalin’s April 1932 liquidation of all but two of the writers’ unions, the Union of Soviet Writers and the International Association of Revolutionary Writers, with the latter finally being subsumed by the former in 1935. The Union of Soviet Writers emphatically embraced Socialist Realism as the aesthetic of the Soviet Union, despite the fact that no one quite knew what Stalin’s slogan, “national in form and socialist in content,” meant until its restrictive dictates were imposed in May 1934. Prior to that, Socialist Realism seemed to offer a compromise between the demands of social realism and the potential for creativity to play a role in the proletarianization of the workers. In one of its first attempts at a definition of the aesthetic, the Union of Soviet Writers declared that Socialist Realism

demands from the artist an accurate, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary developments.

18.

MAGNITOGORSKY (Fragment)

.....il s'agit maintenant
de la transformer.

KARL MARX

In the little houses of black earth lived
the human mole

In the little houses of black earth laughed
the child with the slanting eyes

In the little houses of black earth sleeps
the woman on the smoky hearth

In the little houses of black earth one day more
is dead

One day more in the little houses of black earth
One day more in the shadow of the church or the mosque
One day more to sew the dead days like coins
on the breasts of the women here
so beautiful quiet and adorned
on the coins the image of
Franz-Joseph or Peter the Great

Citizen asked the agitator
do you know the ways of Lenin
she shook her head and showed her pieces of silver
that kept a bit of light in the depths
of the little houses of black earth

Hughes's drafts of Aragon's "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)." Langston Hughes Papers. Copyright © by the Langston Hughes Estate.

7.

19.

MAGNITOGORSK - 2

The agitator comrade from the Komsomols
in the dusk of the village
retells in one breath the modern legend
Karr October and Lenin
the taking of the Winter Palace
the commissars of Baku
Kolchak and his sister the famine
and all at once and all at once
he explains what is being melted
he explains the world
he explains what will be
Magnitogorsk Magnitogorsk
Do you hear Magnitogorsk

At his feet little naked children crawl in the black earth
One day more one day more in the little houses of black earth
one day more

Louis Aragon

Translated from the French with the assistance of
the author. Moscow, 1933.

Within this, the veracity and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality should be combined with the task of ideologically transforming and educating the workers in the spirit of socialism. Socialist realism guarantees artistic creation the exceptional opportunity to demonstrate creative initiative and to choose from various forms, styles, and genres.¹⁷

Despite this license to experiment, the pedagogical and ideological demands of the Socialist Realist aesthetic led to a series of debates producing more restrictions, so much so that by 1933 Lunacharsky was already calling for “less abiding by norms,” decrying the advent of “premature rules,” and calling for more “free creativity.” Aragon’s poem was thus composed at a time when Socialist Realism was in the process of self-construction, and was free to draw upon a variety of devices so long as it could offer a historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary developments. This, of course, was a tall order for Aragon, who was pressured by and pushing back against the Comintern’s wish that he would strive for a poetics that did not allow the concrete to be lost in the abstract.

Second, Aragon’s contention that *Hourra l’Oural* was meant to “take the place” of a commissioned piece of journalism speaks to his attempt to create a poem and poetics that could supplant the confining dictates of journalistic prose and social realism. His half-hearted regret at privileging poetry over prose, notably, remains uncorrected by him. Hinting at another intent for his 1934 readers while chiding his contemporaries, he relates that “had he wanted” to place his 1970 reader in front of the Urals, as he did with one of the work’s leitmotifs (the little horse), journalistic prose would have been preferable. However, the portrayal of “the little horse” in the work is one marked by hallucinations and dreams. Aragon’s snide remark suggests that journalism’s pretense to accurate representation amounts to little more than sleight of hand. Prose may purport to put the reader in Aragon’s traveling shoes, but the idea that it allows its readers to participate in history is a hollow one. Rather, pointing to the literary quality of realistic journalism, Aragon figures the reader of prose as but another character the author needs “to place” inside his account. The journalist, in short, can portray revolutionary developments, but developing revolution lies outside his scope.

Third, Aragon's 1970 contention that it was the poem's "historic march" that accounted for its status as a "versification of memory" slyly invokes his 1935 critique of the Surrealists' unanimous decision to rename their journal *La Révolution Surrealist* to *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* in 1930. For Aragon, the inability to place "poetry in the service of the revolution" suggests that the progression of history is always perceived differently from different points in time. It also reveals Aragon to be an author attuned to how genre, time, and space intertwine with respect to the question of revolutionary poetics. He regrets speaking with "some severity," as he did in "Red Front" (1931), but avoids suggesting that this tone was ill-suited for the poem that is generally credited with introducing Mayakovsky's poetics to Paris. Aragon's use of the term "march" slyly acknowledges the poem's debt to Mayakovsky's "Left March" (1917) and his own debt to Mayakovsky more generally. This point highlights Aragon's status as a Mayakovskian poet, and helps explain why Hughes would ultimately choose to publish a translation, "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)," that used his author-assisted "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" to stage a coup, and also why this strategy was appropriate for a poem that contained a coup of its own.

With this chain of coups (and Hughes's typescript) in mind, we begin an exploration of Aragon and Hughes's "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," the author-assisted typescript of a fragment that was meant, at one time, to be published on its own while drawing attention to its incompleteness.¹⁸ The seemingly oxymoronic title "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" becomes less so when one considers the play engendered by the title's second half: "Magnitogorsk" is a fragment of a work, and also a work that juxtaposes the conventions of social realism and Socialist Realism to articulate the revolutionary reality of Magnitogorsk. The fragment's revolutionary aesthetic is meant to stress that no single poetics can perform revolutionary work and that revolutionary poetry depends on change, on a dialectic of permanent revolt, if it is to keep pace with life. Aragon's "1930," the poem that constitutes the source text for "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," begins:

Dans de petites maisons de terre noir vit
 la taupe humaine
 Dans de petites maisons de terre noire rit
 l'enfant aux yeux bridés

Dans de petites maisons de terre noire dort
 la femme au cœur enfumé
 Dans de petites maisons de terre noire est mort
 un jour de plus

Un jour de plus dans de petites maisons de terre noire
 Un jour de plus à l'ombre de l'église ou de la mosquée
 Un jour de plus à coudre aux jours défunts comme les pièces
 de monnaie au gilet des femmes d'ici
 si belles immobiles et parées.
 et sur une pièce il y a l'image
 de François-Joseph ou de Pierre le Grand (1–15)¹⁹

The first stanza presents three interrelated paradoxes that speak to the revolutionary ambitions of Aragon's work. First, the speaker offers a realistic depiction of the Urals, using the conventions of an outdated social realism to ostensibly portray the stagnation and the bleak lives of the inhabitants of the Urals before the region's industrial transformation. However, the conceit that the speaker is either inhabiting or describing the past, thus rationalizing its later title "1930," thwarts the conventions and generic expectations of social realism insofar as his observations do not reflect present-day social concerns. Second, the first stanza only employs present-tense verbs to describe the action portrayed—"vit," "rit," "dort," "est mort"—and yet draws attention to a temporal stagnation with its final line: "un jour de plus" (one more day). This paradox is resolved in a pointed critique, though, when one reads the poem as invoking dead aesthetics to portray pre-revolutionary times while suggesting that these very same revolutionary aesthetics cannot keep pace with life. The third paradox is perhaps a summation of the first two: that social realism is not only out of step with the newly valorized Soviet Socialist Realism, but that it is a failed revolutionary aesthetic that amounts to little more than reportage. In this sense, Aragon's first stanza figures social realism as a genre whose aims (and content) might have been revolutionary but whose aesthetic was confined to portraying a moment that was always receding into the past—it was not an aesthetic that was, in itself, revolutionary.

Aragon augments this polemic in his second stanza when the speaker's narration of time passing, "Un jour de plus," is transformed into a poetic device. The speaker's use of anaphora in the second stanza works

in conjunction with his implied or actual use of verbs in the infinitive case—“Un jour de plus à coudre”—to mock the idea that a present-day account of “reality” can portray that which is to be. In other words, the social realist poet can portray social concerns from day to day, but he cannot escape the stagnation of his poetics, a fact pointedly metaphorized by the speaker’s enamored depiction of “belles immobiles et parées.” Aragon drives this point home when he concludes the stanza with a fixed “image” of either a Russian or German nationalist icon ingrained on a coin. This specific mention of an “image” carries enormous weight because nearly all theories of Soviet literature, particularly those of Mayakovsky’s LEF and NOVY-LEF groups, saw traditional poetic conventions as integral to the poetry of the image, or as part of a bourgeois aesthetic of passive contemplation that was far distant from a revolutionary aesthetic invested in how poetic ideas could transform the world. In short, Aragon’s first stanza invokes social realist conventions only to reveal their revolutionary shortcomings.

By contrast, Hughes’s translation of Aragon’s opening stanzas juxtaposes temporal movement and stagnation, and gestures to the possibilities of a social realism while also pointing to its inability to keep pace with revolutionary progress, but for a reason different from Aragon’s: namely, because of the genre’s deep but hidden investment in the discourses of storytelling, which are generally associated with times past:

Magnitogorsk (Fragment)

. . . Il s’agit maintenant de la [*sic*] transformer

—Karl Marx

In the little houses of black earth lived
the human mole
In the little houses of black earth laughed
the child with the slanting eyes

In the little houses of black earth sleeps
the woman on the smoky hearth
In the little houses of black earth one day more
is dead

One day more in the little houses of black earth
One day more in the shadow of the church or the mosque²⁰

Hughes splits Aragon's first stanzas into three of his own to encode his intentions by creating new associations and by introducing new intertextual fields that are only made possible by what we might aptly label "translational work." First, he alters Aragon's use of time in his first stanza, dividing the opening into two stanzas, with the first using the past tense to gesture to a history, but also to invoke the conventional opening of a kind of fairy tale (e.g., "Once upon a time there lived . . ."). Hughes's use of the present tense in the second stanza, though, quickly complicates the expectations of the tale by bringing the reader into the present moment. This present moment, given the temporal movement between Hughes's first two stanzas, becomes a moment linked to what came before—not a social realist description of the present moment, but a conception of realism that, in part, relies on an explanation of times and discourses past to endow the receding present with the rhetorical force of the traditional tale.

Hughes's movement into the present tense also gives his social reality vibrancy, suggesting that while descriptions of the present moment may always be receding into the past, they are nevertheless also and always impregnated with the possibilities of the present. This feeling of possibility and vibrancy in Hughes's description of the present is heightened by choices that transform the inanimate into the fecund with his translation of "gilet" (vest) as "breast," and in his decision to render Aragon's "Un jour de plus à coudre aux jours défunts comme les pièces / de monnaie au gilet des femmes d'ici / si belles immobiles et parées" (One more day to sew the dead days like pieces / of change to the waistcoat of women from here / so beautiful motionless and adorned) as:

One day more to sew the dead days like coins
 on the breasts of the women here
 so beautiful quiet and adorned
 on the coins the image of
 Franz-Joseph or Peter the Great²¹

The days may be dead but are sewn like coins on the "breasts" of women who are not "d'ici" (from here) but rather "here" before the speaker. Similarly, Hughes's portrayal of the local women as "quiet and adorned" rather than as "immobiles et parées" (motionless and adorned) brings his scene to life. In short, in Aragon's poem, what was a gesture to social realism's incapacity to keep pace with time becomes, in Hughes's

translation, a commentary on how the past informs the present and on how social realism is infused with the conventions of the story which, themselves, are always told with present possibilities in mind.

Aragon's fragment then shifts gears and, in line with the evolving normative dictates of Socialist Realism, brings his poem to a close by playing with and against them. Although the dictates (or lack thereof) of Socialist Realist art would be the subject of debate for many years, by 1932 its founding postulates included *partinost*, capturing the general ideological base of the Soviet Communist Party; *tipichnost* (typicality) of representation, which entailed the difficult task of finding a compromise between that which really existed and that which ought to exist; and revolutionary romanticism, which allowed artists to go beyond the confines of the real to transform reality.²² These postulates do not simply inform the second half of Aragon's poem. Rather, as the poem draws to its conclusion, he puts two of them on full display:

Citoyenne a demandé l'agitateur
 connais-tu les traits de Lénine
 Elle a secoué la tête et montré ses pièces d'argent
 qui retiennent un peu de lumière au fond
 des petites maisons de terre noire

L'agitateur un camarade des jeunesses
 au crépuscule du village
 raconte d'un seul trait la légende moderne

Marx Octobre et Lénine
 la prise du Palais d'Hiver
 . . .
 il dit ce que c'est que la fonte
 il dit ce que c'est que le monde
 il dit ce que cela sera
 Magnitogorsk Magnitogorsk
 Entendez-vous Magnitogorsk

À ses pieds les petits enfants nus se traînent dans la terre noire
 Un jour de plus un jour de plus dans les petites maisons de terre
 noire
 un jour de plus²³

Indulging in the creativity of Socialist Realism, its emphasis on action, and its investment in creating collective myth, Aragon's speaker moves from a description of a landscape to the narration of an encounter between a Party "agitateur," a "camarade de jeunesses" (a youths' comrade), and a "citoyenne," wherein the former tells the latter of "la légende moderne" of Marx and the October Revolution as well as a history of Soviet strife and success. The poem's *partinost* then gives way to a vexed revolutionary romanticism that invokes the rhetoric of genesis and yet speaks in the present tense, "il dit" (he says/tells of): "ce que c'est que la fonte" (what's smelting), "ce que c'est que le monde" (what the world is), and then looking into the future, or perhaps into the present moment of the poem's composition, he says "ce que cela sera" (what the world will be). The poem concludes its penultimate stanza by addressing its readers as "vous," in the present tense: "entendez-vous Magnitogorsk," a statement made true by the poem itself insofar as it falls on the heels of the city's name twice repeated. The line thus gestures toward a present, a future, or a past Magnitogorsk and asks the reader if he hears its approach, its present-day existence, or its departure into the past, while also creating a confusion between Magnitogorsk the city, "Magnitogorsk" the fragment, and Magnitogorsk the revolutionary fervor. The poem's conclusion invokes the time play at its beginning and, in reworking it as "un jour plus," transforms a phrase connoting stagnation into one that connotes a coming change while portraying a new *tipichnost*.²⁴

On the one hand, Aragon's poem places social realism in tension with Socialist Realism, allowing each genre to inform and rework the other, and seemingly privileging the latter as a revolutionary poetics. The poem's shift from social realist to Socialist Realist conventions can thus be read as a potent endorsement of the Soviet gravitation toward Socialist Realism that began in April 1932. On the other hand, the temporal position of Aragon's speaker throws the revolutionary potential of both genres into jeopardy. Aragon's social(ist) realist speaker still inhabits a past, and that detail alone calls the revolutionary nature of his poetics into question.

Therein lies the rub and the revolutionary aesthetic of the poem. By placing his speaker at the intersection of two revolutionary poetic genres while mining each of them, Aragon suggests that while poetic norms exist, they are always applied from the outside. His poem suggests that revolutionary aesthetics must always be in a state of dialectical revolt in order to qualify and operate as such.

Hughes's translation preserves the time play in Aragon's second half of the poem, similarly gesturing toward an investment in Socialist Realism while also (and again) complicating its mandate for "historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary developments" by emphasizing the degree to which these developments are dependent on the act of storytelling:

Citizen asked the agitator
do you know the ways of Lenin
She shook her head and showed pieces of silver
that held a bit of light in the depths
of the little houses of black earth.

The agitator comrade from the Komsomols
in the dusk of the village
re-tells in one breath the modern legend
Marx, October and Lenin
the taking of the Winter Palace

. . .

he explains what is being smelted
he explains the world
he explains what will be
Magnitogorsk, Magnitogorsk
Do you hear Magnitogorsk²⁵

Hughes's revolutionary future is presented neither as a certainty nor as a revolutionary romantic fact that can be spoken of, or spoken into existence, by one man alone, as is the case with Aragon's prophetic agitator's "il dit ce que cela sera." Nor is it a static modern legend that can be told in one stroke, "raconte d'un seul trait." Rather, Hughes's choice to translate "raconte" (tells or recounts) as "re-tells" emphasizes how a legend is only made possible by its recounting in dialogue with another, a modern legend that, insofar as it must be retold, is also a changing and living one, informed by tales of past and future and subject to the same flux. In a similar vein, and of equal importance, the agitator's visionary future is only made possible by, and only resides in, a mutual understanding—in a belief, shared via the incorporative exercise of explanation, that becomes a plausible speculative tale of the future if and only if the explanation behind it becomes a mutual one. Hughes's agitator does not say "il dit" ("he says") and announce what

shall be. Rather, he explains, and the success of this enterprise depends on the successful transmission of a worldview. In this sense, Hughes's "Do you hear Magnitogorsk" is not a line that gestures toward a present, future, or past Magnitogorsk, whose temporalities can only be traversed via a revolutionary romanticism that, as Aragon implies, depends on a type of Surrealist dreaming. Rather, it is a rhetorical question that, on the one hand, gestures toward the believability, for the "citoyenne," of the agitator's explanations, and which, on the other, gestures toward the reader's inability to "hear Magnitogorsk" given his lack of access to these explanations. In this sense, the line operates as a call to the reader to learn more, and as a call to the Comintern to assume less. Hughes's "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" thus emphasizes the relativity of realistic portrayal by stressing the degree to which realities and revolutionary realities depend on shared and shareable stories.

Insofar as Hughes's translation of "1930" alters the way that Aragon plays with and against the conventions of both social realism and Socialist Realism, he also alters the coup that Aragon's poem stages. Whereas Aragon can be said to place two antiquated poetics in tension to recuperate Surrealism as a communist weapon, Hughes's translation adheres to and departs from the conventions of Soviet realisms to recuperate storytelling as a revolutionary weapon. This recuperation emphasizes the relativity of concrete realities, offering a pointed commentary on the inclusiveness of both the revolution and the Soviet revolutionary aesthetics designated to give it voice. In light of Hughes's commitment to a dialectical, choral practice of translation, his dual awareness that he himself would be read into his translations and that his translations would be used to read into him, his disruption of Aragon's coup can be seen as one that he, "the first poet of the negro proletariat," felt compelled to make. Bearing out this interpretation, Aragon's coup requires a limited (nearly subtextual) recuperation of Surrealism that depends on several factors. These include his unique subject position; his transformation of his inherited poetics (be they Soviet or Surrealist); his conception of how poetic dreaming could be put in service of the revolution; his autocritique and affirmation of self in light of works past; and, indeed, the way that his "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" repurposed his anticolonial bona fides in the Francophone world to suit the ends of Sovietization.

This is not to suggest that Hughes turned his back on Surrealism and revolutionary dreaming, or that he abandoned translating Aragon's coup. Rather, it is to suggest that both Hughes the poet-translator and Hughes the figure who arose from the afterlife of his poetry in French-language

translation had different relationships to, and different inheritances of, the poetics that Aragon used to stage his coup. As we have seen, and in the eyes of much of the Francophone world, Hughes had already transformed the vexed inheritance of European modernist primitivism to suit the aims of pan-Africanisms and had himself been transformed into a Surrealist poet whose verse, in the context of a Black Antillean concrete reality, performed the anti-assimilationist work of Black left internationalism while advancing the cause of Third Period Communism.

To complicate matters further, Hughes, who is simultaneously in league and at odds with both his own afterlife in French translation and with the Black proletarian poet that the Comintern wanted him to be, had dedicated himself to “serious writing” about American Blacks that could succeed in translation. Moreover, this dedication had worked out well for both Hughes and for the global self-regulating system of proletarian literature more generally. Left penniless by his Harlem Renaissance contributions, he owed his greatest financial success to date to the Soviet translation of his realist proletarian novel *Not Without Laughter* (1930). Nevertheless, Hughes’s acceptance into the International’s literary fold was fraught at best. It drove him to compose poems, like “Columbia,” that defied Soviet prescriptions and staged Black internationalist interventions in the Comintern’s cultural front; and to rework his translations, as he did with his commentary on “Kinship,” in an effort to thwart attempts to co-opt his voice in translation.

Given the association (or equation) that *International Literature* obviously hoped its readers would make between the two authors, had Hughes translated Aragon’s limited recuperation of Surrealism along with his autocritique, he would have robbed Black left internationalism of one of its most potent weapons and, potentially, of one of its most prominent spokesmen. In a related vein, had Hughes penned a translation that attempted to place Surrealism in the service of a Soviet-conceived revolutionary reality, he would have endorsed a Soviet monolithic conception of the real and a Sovietization that seemed more of an assimilationist enterprise than an incorporative one. He could also have been seen to turn his back on a diasporic community that saw the ability to dream not simply as a revolutionary tool, but as a revolutionary prerequisite.

Hughes was caught between too many rocks and hard places to count, but he also had a new repertoire from which to draw. His poetic palette had been enhanced by Mayakovskian poetics, and, in having to translate “Magnitogorsk (Fragment)” he confronted a work that not only staged

a dialectic between speaker and antiquated tradition but also put multiple aesthetic traditions in tension to stage a Mayakovskian coup of its own. This coup echoed and answered to Mayakovsky's call for poetry to develop in Marxist terms, as does the course of human history, by suggesting that revolutionary aesthetics, in order to qualify and operate as such, must always be in a state of dialectical revolt. Hughes had, moreover, confronted, in Aragon, a poet who had attempted to reshape and expand Soviet poetics by incorporating the revolutionary potential of his poetic past.

Hughes was thus confronted with the task of creating a choral coup, a translation that answered back to Aragon's poem and also augmented it with all the above concerns in mind. Hughes's author-assisted "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" had failed, in his own eyes, to do so. A second draft was needed. That draft, published as "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)," prefaced and conjoined Aragon's "1930" or "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" with another of Aragon's fragments, "Hymne," a sequence that offers a bold proclamation of Surrealism's revolutionary potential, not a sly recuperation of it. Hughes's "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" puts Aragon at war with himself, transforming Mayakovsky's and Aragon's poetics into a practice of translation that stages a translational coup. This coup reworked Aragon's fragments to bring a Black internationalist conception of revolutionary dreaming to the fore and helped Hughes bring his Francophone bona fides to bear on the question of how to create a poetics that performed the work of anticolonialism.

Hughes's "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" works in harmony with another decision that he makes by transforming the partial citation of Marx that concludes Aragon's "1929," the second section in the sequence "Magnitogorsk" (contained in *Hourra l'Oural*), into an epigraph for his own translation: "il s'agit maintenant de la [*sic*] transformer" (the point now is to change it [the world]). The epigraph that Hughes inserted in "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" can be said to place the imprimatur of revolution front and center and invokes another of Aragon's partial citations of Marx; namely, the latter's assessment of English colonialism in Ireland, "un peuple qui en opprime d'autres ne-saurait être libre" (a people who oppress others cannot be free), which was used as the marquee for Aragon's exhibit at the anticolonial counter-exhibition in Paris in 1931. Of equal importance, at the time of the counter-exhibition, this fragment invoked Lenin's same truncated quote to encapsulate the difference between Sovietization and imperialism in his "The Socialist Revolution and the Rights of Nations to Self-Determination."

Aragon's Marxist-Leninist citation served as a kind of epigraph that historicized and contextualized his exhibit, one that juxtaposed primitive art with mass-produced kitsch, in order to undermine the idea that French cultural superiority lay in its European aesthetics. Aragon's exhibit turned to intertextual and inter-art juxtapositions in order to provoke doubts about the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized by undermining such comparisons. As Patricia Morton observes, "although the influence of primitive art was well established in Paris by 1931 . . . any primitivist tendencies that might expose a cross-fertilisation between colonizer and colonised were 'edited out [of the art exhibitions at the Colonial Exposition]' to preserve the bipolar equation that justified colonialism."²⁶ The tensions raised by Aragon's juxtapositions undermined such binaries and justifications, tying the French Surrealist preoccupation with the primitive to a tainted history of colonial piracy that politically contaminated its aesthetics. Despite its effectiveness, as Adam Jolles points out, the counter-exhibition produced a crisis of expression, leaving little room "for distinguishing between the European fetishists unequivocally excoriated and the European avant-garde responsible for its installation. . . . As a European artist, just how was one to go about practicing an avant-gardism that remained sensitive to the politics of colonialism?"²⁷

Hughes's epigraph reveals itself to be an intertextual reference that positions "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)" within a larger debate over the aesthetic portrayal of non-Western people while associating the work with the anti-imperialist promise of international communism and Marxist-Leninism more generally. However, in hearkening back to the anticolonial counter-exhibition, the epigraph also gestures toward a shared Soviet and European crisis of expression over how to portray colonialism. In this sense, the epigraph (or Aragon's opening fragment) helps to frame "Magnitogorsk" as a poem invested in giving voice to a crisis of aesthetics that concerns the Sovietization of "primitive" peoples. The epigraph also, though, offers the readers of *International Literature* the image of Aragon that the Comintern had hoped for: an Aragon whose anticolonial reputation and adoption of Soviet poetics helped to advertise the Soviet industrialization of Central Asia as a showpiece for the wretched of the earth.

Hughes's decision to leave his epigraph untranslated distances his work from the shared European and Soviet crises of expression of Aragon's presumed original and suggests the possibility that no such crises, or that different crises over the portrayal of colonialism, presented

themselves to Hughes. At the same time, the untranslated epigraph also begs the reader to interpret “Magnitogorsk (Fragments)” as a translation of a supposed original informed by the backdrop of Soviet, French, and Francophone poetics and politics. In this way, the translation demands to be interpreted in the afterlife of “l’Affaire Aragon” and the anticolonial counter-exhibition that he organized, and reminds us that the debates to which these events gave rise played out differently for people with different investments in Surrealism.

One of the most striking aspects of *Légitime Défense*’s manifesto,²⁸ illustrating the argument above, is the students’ repeated emphasis on the fact that their mutual dedication to Surrealism, as a mode of expression, and to Third Period Communism, as a politics, occurred after these events took place:

The Communist Party (III INTERNATIONAL) is playing the decisive card of “SPIRIT” (in the Hegelian sense of this term) in all nations. . . . We believe without reservation in his triumph, and this because we claim the dialectical materialism of Marx, withdrawn from any tendentious interpretation and victoriously subjected to the test of facts by Lenin. . . . Concerning the concrete forms of human expression, we also accept unreservedly the surrealism to which, in 1932, we relate our beginnings. And we refer our readers to the two “Manifestos” of André Breton, to the entire oeuvre of Aragon, André Breton, René Crevel, Salvador Dali, Paul Eluard, . . . As for Freud, we are ready to use the immense machine to dissolve the bourgeois family which he has set in motion. We take the hell train of sincerity. We want to see clearly in our dreams and we listen to their voice.²⁹

In part, the authors’ dating of their collective endeavor is framed as a Black internationalist, Antillean endeavor informed by its own take on both the “l’Affaire Aragon” and the aftermath of the anticolonial exhibition. The authors relate their beginnings to a Surrealism that began in 1932, which suggests that the split between the French Communist Party and the Surrealists has in no way hindered their revolutionary program. This dating also works in conjunction with their privileging Aragon’s work over that of other Surrealists, as is made plain in their advice to read two of Breton’s manifestos and to examine Surrealist

works more broadly, but to explore the whole of Aragon's work. The privileging of Aragon's Surrealism, one invested in the continuity between word and action, comes as no surprise from Black internationalist Antillean radicals who repeatedly stressed a direct continuity and complementarity between the clarity afforded by Surrealist dreams and the triumph of Third Period Communism. Surrealism is, in fact, figured as a "concrete" mode of expression. At the same time, the students' referral to "the entire oeuvre of Aragon" speaks to an acceptance of Aragon's Mayakovskian and proletarian turns—to a view of Aragon, quite naturally, that perceived a continuity, rather than a rupture, between his early works, "Red Front," and his anticolonial counter-exhibition. In the aesthetic regime that these students carved out for themselves, all of these modes and genres served their interests. And perhaps most important, we can assume that what applied to Aragon and for the editors of *Légitime Défense* also applied to Hughes. He was no bifurcated poet. He was a revolutionary whole.

What makes "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" so fascinating is that Hughes's conjoining of Aragon's fragments makes a statement that echoes the one made by the editors of *Légitime Défense* about the causal and complementary relationship between revolutionary dreaming and revolutionary realisms. The statement reverberates because Aragon's "Hymne," a fragment of "Magnitogorsk" in *Hourra l'Oural*, depends on creating intertextual tensions to repurpose the conventions and commitments of Surrealism and place them in the service of communist revolution. This fragment consists of a series of stanzas that rework the rhetoric of the book of Genesis to dismantle the tenets of a Judeo-Christian Western reality, and associate the generative power of God's word with the generative power of Surrealist revolutionary dreaming:

Ils ont rendu l'homme à la terre
 Ils ont dit Vous mangerez tous
 Et vous mangerez tous

Ils ont jeté le ciel à terre
 Ils ont dit Les dieux périront
 Et les dieux périront

Ils ont mis en chantier la terre
 Ils ont dit le temps sera beau
 Et le temps sera beau

...

Ils ont pris dans leurs mains la terre
Ils ont dit Le noir sera blanc
Et le noir sera blanc

Gloire sur la terre et les terres
au soleil des jours bolcheviks
Et gloire aux Bolcheviks³⁰

Aragon's speaker suggests that Bolshevik world-making is a process that can be aptly metaphorized, and better understood, by making recourse to the manner in which the power of Surrealist imagination and imagery can transgress the confines of Western reality. The reality of Magnitogorsk is its revolutionary dream, and both the Bible and Surrealism are put in the service of this dream. The speaker occupies a surreal space, and his visions speak to Aragon's conception of the surreal as a window on the "real":

There is nothing to suggest the true nature of the real, which is only a relationship like any other. The essence of things is in no way connected with their reality, there are relationships other than the real that the mind can grasp, and which are also fundamental, such as chance, illusion, fantasy, and dream. These various species are united and reconciled in a genre, which is surreality.³¹

Aragon's "Hymne" can therefore be seen as a Surrealist meditation on the revolutionary possibility of Magnitogorsk—the dreaming of Surrealism becomes a glimpse of a Soviet "real" in all its surrealistic clarity.

Hughes's translation of Aragon's fragments as a single work—begun by his non-translation and repositioning of Aragon's "epigraph" and followed successively by a surreptitious conjoining of his translations of Aragon's "Hymne" and "1930"—mines the potential of Aragon's multiple approaches to the Soviet "real" to offer his (bilingual) Francophone readers the Aragonian take on Sovietization, on Surrealism and realism, which Black poets like Léro would have hoped for, a version of their vision of Aragon, the visionary anticolonialist:

... Il s'agit maintenant de la [*sic*] transformer

—Karl Marx

They have given man back to the earth
 They have said You shall devour all
 and you shall devour all

They have thrown sky to the earth
 They have said The gods shall die
 and the gods shall die

They have put in ferment the earth
 They have said Times shall be good
 and times shall be good

...

They have taken in their hands the earth
 They have said Black shall be white
 and black shall be white

Glory to the land and the earth
 in the sun of the bolshevik days
 and glory to the bolsheviks³²

Hughes offers very few transgressive translations here, slightly transforming some of Aragon's imagery to make it resonate more profoundly with intertexts in the King James Bible and common English-language prayers. For example, Aragon's "Ils ont rendu l'homme à la terre" (They have returned man to the earth) becomes "They have given man back to the earth," a line that more readily invokes God's separation of the heavens from the earth in Genesis and the Anglican burial service's "and unto dust shalt thou return," and arguably more tightly tying Aragon's dismantling of Western rhetorical reality to a Christianity that the editors of *Légitime Défense* saw as "suffocating."

However, in light of the work that Hughes's translation of "1930" accomplishes in the translation's second half, "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" is best seen as a translational coup that positions Surrealist freedom-dreaming as a prerequisite for the realist storytelling of the revolution. Hughes's decision to offer his translations as a single poem thus makes "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)" a kind of Black internationalist, Surrealist work that also augmented Hughes's own early poetry and its Francophone afterlife—a translation suggesting that the pursuit of liberatory dreams can be amplified by an additional engagement with the realism and realities of incorporative storytelling. In this sense,

Hughes's translation answers to the epigraph's call to change the world and to Mayakovsky's call to engage with life via poetic work by suggesting that the work of revolutionary poetry consists of transforming revolutionary dreams into revolutionary stories.

And yet, what should we make of this striking correspondence between Hughes's translation and the *Légitime Défense* editors' views in their manifesto? Given his steadfast attention to his appearance in foreign-language print, Hughes was certainly aware of several incarnations of his Francophone persona, but the idea that he was familiar with Léro's assessments seems unlikely, since Hughes set sail for the Soviet Union within months of its publication. The most intriguing possible answer is that this resemblance was the outcome of a shared valuation of poetic dreaming for a mass as heterogeneous and disconnected as the African diaspora. In short, the unique challenges that collectivization posed for Black internationalism prompted similar responses from Hughes and the editors of *Légitime Défense* precisely because all of the participants involved recognized that the literature of Black radical internationalism required a stage of shared dreaming, of brainstorming, to perform its work—that a people so dispersed by the history and forces of white internationalism and global race capitalism necessarily had to dream beyond the confines of Western reality to take a first step toward envisioning an unprecedented liberatory future.

As we can now see, Mayakovsky's prescriptions for verse present a plethora of challenges to the poet who seeks to devote his heart to the revolution, and force the translators of Mayakovskian poetics to solve difficult problems in creative ways. Perhaps a more daunting question for the poet-translator, whether Aragon or Hughes, was how to go about translating Mayakovsky's poetry with the same passions in mind. This task required the transmission of revolutionary work which, for Mayakovsky, was primarily accomplished by what he identified as the most important element of verse: rhyme. This was a task that called upon the translator to balance the interpretive possibilities of Mayakovsky's poetic play with the Soviet dogma that it could easily be interpreted to voice.

There were no easy solutions to these problems. But Hughes's papers reveal that they were not ones that he was willing to avoid when he set about translating Mayakovsky's "Black and White" (Блек энд Уайт) and "Syphilis" (Сифилис). In another rarity for Hughes, his papers reveal that he looked to other translators for advice on how to approach these issues, and his annotated copy of Aragon's preface to "À pleine voix"—the latter's French translation of Mayakovsky's poem "At the Top of My

Voice”—strongly suggests that Aragon was principal among them. Aragon advised translators to forsake Mayakovsky’s prosody and instead to interpret and communicate what they perceived as his poetic intents, a method akin to the one Aragon himself employed in his attempt to translate Hughes’s “Letter to the Academy.” Aragon asks: What disservice does a translation that forsakes the reproduction of rhyme do to a rhyming poem whose rhymes only seem to matter when they are unexpected, especially when one considers all the reworking necessary to maintain the formal features of a past that are best subsumed, if not forgotten?

Yes, Mayakovsky’s poetry rhymes. But let’s compare French rhyme, and not Russian rhyme, with Soviet rhyme! An entirely new language, the language of a new life, composed of words that were never used by old, tired poetics, which should not be thrown out because of a thirst for lyricism. . . . Moreover, Mayakovsky’s rhyme, always unexpected, often complex, is perhaps more concerned with wordplay than rhyme.³³

Aragon frames the problem of the poetic translator’s time-worn concern with the “lyricism” of rhyming verse—whether to preserve rhyme at the risk of a loss of meaning, or to forsake the translation of rhyme at the risk of a loss of the poetic—in terms that highlight the stakes of his task.³⁴ He must translate the “new language” of “a new life” and not fall victim to a “thirst for lyricism.” As Aragon goes on to write, the task of translating Mayakovsky is one of “exceptional gravity” because it represents a chance for the West to know the Soviet Union better:

Mayakovsky offers us a door to the Soviet Union, and it is by way of him that we can translate the Soviet Union. Concerns over rhyme and reason cause major difficulties for understanding a poem and making it understood by detaching it from the social reality according to which it was created.³⁵

Translation is figured as a type of political ethnography that seems to homogenize the culture of the source text, and as a way to facilitate a somewhat one-sided cultural exchange, as a means to import revolution to the West. To understand a poem which has been detached from its “social reality”—or, to be more precise, to understand a translation of Mayakovsky’s poetry unsullied by the attempt to match rhyme for

rhyme—is to begin to understand the revolution and life inside the Soviet Union. The translator of Mayakovsky’s verse should not, in Aragon’s account, concern himself with preserving elements of Russian or Soviet prosody, but with the responsibility to re-create the “dazzling proletarian truth” of Mayakovsky’s verse within the translator’s own “social reality.” This re-creation is figured by Aragon as an “echo” of the source text, and it is the translator’s task to manipulate the “enormous lyrical baggage” of the target language to allow this echo to ring in his own social milieu.³⁶ Hence, Aragon’s preface calls upon the translator to manipulate the literary conventions of the target zone (i.e., a French audience) in order to convey a kind of dynamic equivalent of Mayakovsky’s “proletarian truth” to his French-language audience. In so doing, Aragon implicitly suggests that this process requires the translator to discern how Mayakovsky’s poetry manipulates Russian and Soviet prosody to arrive at new truths, and then to find a way to manipulate the target zone’s “lyrical baggage” to perform analogous work, suggesting that the translator must be familiar with the intertextual fabric and literary traditions in both the source and target zones to accomplish this Herculean task.

What Aragon’s preface elides, though, is that the very work of the translator, especially in the case of the translator-poet, constitutes a lot of the “lyrical baggage” to which he refers. Aragon seems to look past the fact that translations construed and constructed along these lines make an intervention in the “social reality” as the translator perceives it; and he makes no allowance for the fact that his readers, as well as the poet and the readers in the source zone, may conceive of this social reality differently for a number of different reasons. A translator committed to the promises of global capitalism and to the revolutionary potential of poetic play, for example, would interpret the poetic play and translate the “truth” of a work much differently than would a translator with ideological commitments to proletarian realism.

Before Hughes spent the winter of 1932–33 in Moscow, his work as a translator had brought him into contact with only one rhyming poem, Guillén’s “Dos semanas.” Although completed in manuscript form years earlier, Hughes’s translation, titled “Two Weeks,” was published in the March 1933 edition of *Opportunity*, and offers ample evidence that he was more than willing to rework a poem’s semantics in order to reproduce its rhyme scheme.³⁷ Likewise, his unpublished, rhyming translation of a poem by Emi Siao (Xiao San) which he titled “Nanking Road”—translated with the assistance of Lidia Filatova in 1933—demonstrates that the Hughes who stayed in Moscow was, contrary to Aragon’s credo,

quite concerned with the preservation of rhyme.³⁸ This comes as no surprise from the blues poet on display in *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1926), and Aragon's advice seems ill-suited for translating a poet like Mayakovsky who, in "How One Writes a Poem," positioned rhyme as the most important element in the composition of verse. Moreover, Mayakovsky was committed to a vision of literature that situated the very idea of literary tradition itself as a counter-revolutionary force, and viewed the thwarting of traditional expectations as part and parcel of writing poetry for a new revolutionary era. Nevertheless, Hughes's translation of "Black and White" does not attempt to produce a rhyme-for-rhyme translation of Mayakovsky's poem, nor does it attempt to mimic the rhythms that manifest in his diction and in his use of the *lestrnitsa*, or stepladder line, in his verse. Rather, Hughes offers a translation of the poem that neither replicates nor forsakes Mayakovsky's poetic prosody.

Mayakovsky's "Black and White" operates according to a dialectical materialist logic that works across multiple levels and voices. On the one hand, the speaker of the poem possesses a fully awakened revolutionary consciousness that does not undergo any change over the course of the poem. Rather, his revolutionary consciousness manifests in the dialectical progression of his thoughts, in the poetic play of his speech and narration, and in his explicit prescription for a Soviet remedy to the Cuban ailment of U.S. imperialism and racism. The speaker juxtaposes Black Cuban penury and white felicity to convey the Marxist idea that global capitalism and Western imperialism can only function by creating a gulf between the wealthy few and the exploited masses. In this perspective, both racism and racialism are epiphenomena of capitalism—tools used to create confusion and division among the proletariat that serve the interests of capitalism and the white supremacist status quo. The speaker ends his poem by suggesting that Villi, the poem's main character and by extension the Black masses, will only find a remedy in global communism.

In contrast to the informed speaker, Villi is portrayed as somewhat of a dimwit. As the poem progresses, Villi's consciousness moves from a state of non-thinking to a state of utter confusion as he attempts to account for labor relations on the ground through the lens of race. He does not reason dialectically. Rather, his thoughts, presented in quotation, progress in a series of syllogisms governed by a hyperbolic internalization of racism. Nevertheless, and crucially, Villi's thoughts also offer a kind of fool's truth, a truth produced by Mayakovsky's suggestive manipulation of Russian prosody and grammar. The poem as a whole

thus stages its own dialectical tensions—between the informed speaker’s consciousness and Villi’s own consciousness, as well as between the proletarian poetic portrayal of the “living man” and Mayakovsky’s much frowned-upon lexical play—the sublation of which points to the impossibility of solving the race problem inside a capitalist system and to an (in)compatibility between proletarian poetic realism and the revolutionary insights to which poetic play can give birth.

Hughes’s task of translating Mayakovsky’s poem to produce an echo of its proletarian truth within Hughes’s own “social reality” was one complicated by several interrelated problems and paradoxes that stemmed from the visibility of the translator in this literary encounter. First, the present argument would be remiss if it failed to account for what probably constituted the chief motive behind the Comintern’s (and Meschrabpom’s) desire to have Hughes translate Mayakovsky’s verse: namely, to associate a Black face with Mayakovsky’s Soviet diagnosis of Cuba’s race problem. This desire overturns the normal economy of translation, where a cultural outsider (the translator) refashions the work of an author for export, since Hughes’s status as a Black American affords Mayakovsky’s outsider account a kind of insider legitimacy. The enormous cost of this tidy economy is, of course, the erasure of Hughes’s subjectivity and his past literary articulations of the race problem as they were received in different national and international contexts. The impetus behind Hughes’s translation of Mayakovsky was thus informed by a political project that Hughes had already rejected when he refused to rewrite the scenario for the ill-fated film project.

Second, Mayakovsky’s poem deploys a number of devices and conceits that position the work’s communist, anti-imperialist polemic as inimical to and untainted by a racism foreign to the revolutionary culture milieu inhabited by the omniscient speaker. Nevertheless, it is this very racism that is not only part and parcel of Villi’s economic exploitation, as Mayakovsky’s poem and speaker frame the matter, but is also a central aspect of Hughes’s life experience as the Comintern attempted to leverage it. Hence, the relationship between the speaker of Hughes’s translation, whether he is a conflation of Hughes and Mayakovsky or a Hughes-endorsed Mayakovsky in translation, and the poem’s Black main character could be read as symbolic of Hughes’s progression from race consciousness to class consciousness. Just as Mayakovsky’s poem can be said to offer a commentary on his own poetic progression, Hughes’s translation could be said to do the same.

Third, Mayakovsky makes numerous political points via poetic and linguistic play in the poem. Hughes's decision to largely avoid Mayakovsky's poetic play was not simply an attempt to avoid the problems inherent in translating rhyming poems but was also a matter of endorsing a certain vision of Mayakovsky, promulgated in 1930, that saw his oeuvre as hopelessly contaminated by linguistic play. In this sense, Aragon's advice to the translator also elides the fact that his prescribed translation practice for Mayakovsky's verse was informed by the Soviet establishment's assessment of the poet's revolutionary virtues and faults as perceived in the postmortem assessments that followed his suicide. These assessments, like the essay on Mayakovsky that Fernández de Castro sent to Hughes in 1930, faulted Mayakovsky for his poetic play, echoing Trotsky's (one of Mayakovsky's greatest champions) critique that, all too often, the poet conveyed communist truths in an inappropriate playful manner that lacked revolutionary sincerity and clarity. For a Fernández de Castro who looked to Trotsky, Mayakovsky was a poet who treated "Marxist postulates" too lightly by placing them in the "false mouth of the poet," and this was a facet and fault of his oeuvre that, for these two men, could be summarized by Mayakovsky's claim that the poet ought to integrate all the devices of poetic work into his literary repertoire.

The solutions to these paradoxes and problems that Hughes's "Black and White" offers, in turn, tell us a lot about how Hughes conceived of translation, communism, and Black left internationalism during his stay in Moscow. Compare, for example, the opening lines in the original and in Hughes's translation:

Блек энд Уайт
 Если
 Гавану
 окинуть мигом—
 рай-страна,
 страна что надо.
 Под пальмой
 на ножке
 стоят фламинго.
 Цветет
 коларио
 по всей Ведадо.

В Гаване
 все
 разграничено четко.
 у белых доллары,
 у чёрных—нет.
 Поэтому
 Вилли
 стоит со щёткой
 у “Энри Клей энд Бок, лимитед.”
 Много
 за жизнь
 повымел Вилли—
 одних пылинок
 целый лес—
 поэтому
 волос у Вилли
 вылез,
 поэтому
 живот у Вилли
 влез.

BLACK and WHITE

To do Havana in a glance—
 Paradise land, all it ought to be.
 Under a palm, on one leg, a flamingo stands.
 Calero blossoms all over Vedado.
 In Havana everything has its place:
 The white folks have dollars,
 The blacks haven't. Therefore
 Willie stands with his brush.
 In Henry Clay & Co., Ltd.
 Willie who has swept up during his life
 A wilderness of dust,
 Until his hair has fallen out and his stomach in. (1–12)³⁹

Here, Hughes heeds Aragon's advice by choosing not to replicate Mayakovsky's stepladder lines or to compensate for Mayakovsky's use of rhyme. Each *lestnitsa* becomes a single line of unrhymed verse. This

decision also creates a rhythmic shift, as the empty spaces in each of Mayakovsky's unconventional *lestnitsa* denote a pause in reading.

However, Hughes's decision to divide Mayakovsky's poem into eight stanzas also creates reading pauses that he uses to good effect. The accumulation of rhymes and rhythms, and the shifts between them that foreground the movements of the dialectical reasoning of the poem and of the portrayal of Villi's small step toward class consciousness, find formal translations in Hughes's text: each of Hughes's stanzas contains one of Mayakovsky's dialectical formulations and also contributes to a larger dialectical progression of thought that occurs over the course of the poem.

For example, Hughes's first stanza presents the reader with an idyllic and touristic Havana one does "at a glance," which then gives way to a closer look at the island that reveals the economic and racial injustices that lie behind the façade—a world with its own dialectical tensions where "white folks" have dollars and the "blacks" "haven't." The introduction of Willie in a state of penury serves as a sublation of these dialectical tensions—because Willie is Black, he is confined to a life of chronic underemployment and menial labor. Hughes punctuates the progression of this dialectical reasoning by translating "поэтому" (*poetomu*) as "therefore" at the end of the seventh line, making it not only the one line in the stanza to conjoin two sentences but also one of the few lines in the translation that does not correspond to a single *lestnitsa* in Mayakovsky's poem. In so doing, Hughes's translation suggests more of a causal relationship between the two observations that precede the transitions. Hence, although Hughes's translation can be said to be literal (faithful) insofar as it offers a word-for-word, or sense-for-sense, translation of Mayakovsky's *lestnitsa*, it turns to other devices to convey the poem's dialectical materialist polemic. Nevertheless, Hughes's line breaks and stanzas can be considered to reflect the dialectical progression of Mayakovsky's poem as Hughes either perceived it to be, or in some cases wanted it to be. The literal is thus revealed as yet another cloak for the strategically interpretive. It is Hughes's ability to manipulate the literal that allows him to transform the geopolitics of Mayakovsky's poem and to both reify and call its framing of blackness into question.

Hughes's decision to render Mayakovsky's title "Блек энд Уайт" as "BLACK and WHITE" performs similar work because it is not a translation in the strict sense—"Блек" and "Уайт" are not Russian words. Rather, they are transliterations that mark them as foreign-language

words (pronounced using the Russian alphabet). Mayakovsky’s title thus figures racism as a manufactured concept or a good (as goods are often transliterated) that is so foreign to Soviet soil that the Russian language cannot accommodate it, while suggesting that “Блек энд Уайт” is also an ill-suited imposition onto Cuba. At the same time though, “Блек энд Уайт” places Mayakovsky’s poem in direct conversation with his description of Havana as it appears in *My Discovery of America* (1925), in which, in his impressions of Havana from aboard ship, he pays particular attention to crates of bootleg “Black and White” whisky bound for the United States. This was a connection that Fernández de Castro made clear in an essay on Mayakovsky that he mentioned to Hughes in a letter dated June 4, 1930.⁴⁰ Hence, Mayakovsky’s title also frames the presence of the United States in Cuba as a criminal enterprise.



Bottle of bootleg “Black & White De Luxe” Blended Scotch Whisky, circa 1915–20, from the collections of The Henry Ford Museum.

Hughes's title, "BLACK and WHITE," re-creates the font used to market the very bootleg whisky noted by Mayakovsky, revealing it to be much more than a restoration of a transliteration; rather, it is a title that re-creates the resonances of Mayakovsky's intertextual allusion via an inter-art one. However, Hughes's title, insofar as it resonates with the "white folks" and the "blacks" described in the lines that follow, suggests that transnational affinities exist between U.S. Blacks and Cuban Blacks, U.S. whites and Cuban whites. The stark racial paradigms at work in both countries are likewise the product of a capitalism metaphorized as an illegal substance that induces a state of delirium. Hughes's decision to translate Mayakovsky's description of a Havana wherein everything is "разграничено четко. / у белых доллары, у чёрных—нет" (clearly delineated / White dollars, Blacks don't) as "The white folks have dollars. The Blacks haven't," alters the way in which Mayakovsky's speaker conveys multiple meanings through poetic play (e.g., "White dollars" intertwines race and capital and tellingly racializes currency itself). Hughes's translation offers, instead, a concrete statement, from an informed speaker, that can also be said to be a fair interpretation of the line. What is suggested by Mayakovsky's adjectival play, whose rhyming points to a socioeconomic reality based on color constructs, is made explicit in Hughes's translation. Nevertheless, Hughes's translation, in combination with his title treatment, augments and compensates for the way that Mayakovsky turns to poetic play to suggest sociopolitical meaning. This is the case because Mayakovsky first uses the terms "белых" and "чёрных" ("white" and "black") as subjects to designate the racial dimensions of capitalism, and Hughes's title and introduction of "white folks" and "blacks" constitutes a repetition of this. This repetition serves a dual purpose. First, it suggests that the title's "BLACK and WHITE" is meant to refer to two different racial populations who are also separated by caste or class—to the "white folks" who have dollars and to the "blacks" who "haven't." Second, whereas Mayakovsky's first introduction of racial terminology ties the qualities of Black and white in America to capital, Hughes's translation makes this tie apparent only when the terms are repeated and, in the process, defined and destabilized by an association with goods, criminal enterprises, and racial populations that serve to metaphorize the U.S. imperialist exploitation of Cuba. This destabilization, in turn, allows Hughes's translation to intertwine race with goods, as does Mayakovsky's title and his subsequent and sly use of the terms "белых" and "чёрных," via a poetic reworking that begs the reader to

grapple with how these words or ideas have been transformed. The repetition of terms that Hughes's title creates is also of great consequence because the translation's and the poem's development depend on an accumulation of these terms, on their ability to be thrown into jeopardy via the reworking of creative repetitions, so as to bring Willie to a telling confusion that can also be considered the beginning of his class awakening.

The first time we are given a direct window into Villi's thoughts, the very moment that provides the starting point for proletarian works of class awakening, we also see Mayakovsky deploying all of the dialectical tensions enumerated above. The poem's informed speaker draws our attention to this moment by framing it as the "единственное" (solitary thing) that an unthinking Villi, a man whose brain has "мало извилин" (few convolutions), has nevertheless learned. The speaker then presents this "solitary thing" via citation, offering his audience a direct view into Villi's consciousness:

В мозгу у Вилли
 мало извилин,
мало всходов,
 мало посева.
Одно
 единственное
 вызубрил Вилли
твёрже,
 чем камень
 памятника Масео:
"Белый
 ест
 ананас спелый,
чёрный—
 гнилью мочёный.
Белую работу
 делает белый,
чёрную работу—
 чёрный"⁴¹

Mayakovsky's text strays from conventions of the proletarian poem and the *skaz* in which a reasoned dialectical progression of thought results in a heightened level of class consciousness on the part of the speaker

or the character portrayed. Rather, his Villi seems to stumble across cogent insights that stem more from poetic play than from dialectical materialist thinking—insights available to the careful reader, but not ones that Villi has integrated into his worldview. To illustrate, the only noun in Villi's thinking quoted above is “работу” (work), while white and black are written in either their strictly adjectival form, as “белую” and “чёрную,” or as adjective/nouns, as “белый” and “чёрный.” The phrase “Белую работу делает белый, / чёрную работу—чёрный” is thus both a bit of rhyming poetic nonsense and a pointed suggestion that it is the type of labor, “белую работу” or “чёрную работу,” that produces the racial subjecthoods of “белый” and “чёрный.” In other words, the sonic, syntactical, and grammatical play at work in the speaker's quotation of Villi suggests that race is an epiphenomenon of labor.

Hughes's decision to translate “Белую работу / делает белый” (White work / does white) as “the whites do the light work” and “чёрную работу— / чёрный” (Black work— / black) as “the blacks—heavy,” and his decision to assign both of these thoughts to an awakened and omniscient speaker have several consequences. These consequences stem, in part, from the extreme difficulty that Mayakovsky's clever use of poetic language presents for an English-language translator, as well as from Hughes's desire to alter Mayakovsky's dialectics and, ultimately, the poem's polemic.

In Willie's brain there are few furrows:
 Little sown, little harvest.
 One thing, though, Willie knows by heart,
 Stronger than the stone of Maceo's monument:
 The whites eat the ripe pineapples,
 The blacks—those damp with rotteness.
 The whites do the light work.
 The blacks—the heavy.⁴²

Hughes's decision to assign Willie's thought to his awakened and omniscient speaker works in combination with what could be considered a fair interpretation of Mayakovsky's adjectival play to suggest that the “one thing” Willie has learned rests on solid ground. He has endured a lifetime of hard labor and penury while working in El Vedado—a modern district of Havana that, under the boot of U.S. imperialism, was being transformed from a simple port city into Havana's central business district. So positioned, and as Hughes's translation relates, Willie has

witnessed “whites” perform “light work” and enjoy the fruits of felicity, and he has noticed his fellow “blacks” performing “heavy” labor while barely surviving on the detritus of Cuba’s fruit industry, largely owned by U.S. financial interests. In short, the “one thing” that Willie knows at this point in Hughes’s translation consists of accurate perceptions that the poem’s omniscient speaker can clearly articulate using simple, grammatical sentences. And yet, the order in which the speaker presents Willie’s observations suggests that Willie has yet to think through their implications and causal relationships. As the speaker frames matters, Willie has not entertained the notion that it is, first, the exploitation of Black labor that then allows for white felicity. Rather, Willie’s perception of the world is limited to his synchronic observations: he has, somewhat paradoxically, yet to realize that the dichotomy he perceives is not simply “one thing” but rather the outgrowth of several factors. In other words, Willie has yet to realize that the “one thing” he knows can either be explained by a number of factors or, as the informed speaker suggests at the end of the translation, by their aggregate; namely, the workings of capitalism. Nevertheless, though in a similar vein, Mayakovsky relies on a convention of Russian poetry—the tendency to present characters to the reader in an order that signifies a hierarchy—to suggest that the “solitary thing” Villi knows, which is discernible as “one thing” only to a careful reader of Russian poetry, is that there is a racial hierarchy at work in the labor market. In this sense, Hughes’s decision to translate “white” as “light” and “black” as “heavy,” and to assign these perceptions to the speaker, could be said to compensate for his inability to translate the racial hierarchy that Mayakovsky’s form suggests, but which Willie does not perceive.

Hughes’s translation, though, goes to great lengths to emphasize that Willie is not simply a dolt. Rather, Hughes’s decision to translate “В мозгу у Вилли мало извилин, / мало всходов, мало посева” (In Willie’s brain few convolutions, / few sprouts, little seeding) as “In Willie’s brain there are few furrows: / Little sown, little harvest,” suggests that Willie’s lack of thought stems from a lack of education that is part and parcel of his exploitation. Hughes’s Willie is not a figure who is somewhat inexplicably given to lack of thought, or “sprouts,” as is the case in Mayakovsky’s poem. To the contrary, Hughes’s decision to render the lines in the passive voice strongly suggests that it is the power structure that has led to Willie’s lack of thought. Willie does not think very much—his brow does not furrow—because there has been “little sown.” This lack of investment in Willie, as opposed to Villi’s lack of investment,

accounts not only for why Willie has “little harvest” but also for why his “brain” has few “furrows.” In other words, since furrows are only created with the intent to sow and reap, and since imperialist exploitation finds a facilitator in ignorance, Willie’s lack of thought, in Hughes’s translation, is not intrinsic to Willie, but rather is a complacency engineered by capitalism and U.S. imperialism—forces that the translation makes incarnate in the figure of the “sugar king” Mr. Bragg—whose maintenance depends on the ignorance of the masses.

Hughes’s decision to remove Mayakovsky’s quotations and to replace the adjectives “white” and “black” with “light work” and “heavy” thus discloses a multifaceted agenda. First, Hughes’s translation presents the reader with a Black character whose progression toward class consciousness begins with relatively sound observations. The idea that Willie’s worldview is underdeveloped only comes into focus when the reader juxtaposes Willie’s thoughts against the speaker’s (or the poem’s) sly suggestion—one conveyed by the speaker’s ordering of Willie’s thoughts—that Willie has yet to make any causal connection between his observations. Hughes’s translation removes this Learian fool’s truth, a truth produced by linguistic play from Villi’s mouth, and transforms it into what seems like a fair assessment of labor relations on the ground. This decision also transforms the idea, poetically embedded in the speech of Mayakovsky’s Villi, that race is an epiphenomenon of labor. Rather, the stanza is transformed into one movement in a dialectical progression that articulates a different brand of Marxism, a Black Marxism, which comes to the fore when the reader ponders the fool’s truth that Villi voices in the penultimate stanza:

Мало вопросов Вилли сверлили.
Но один был
 закорюка из закорюк.
И когда
 вопрос этот
 влезал в Вилли,
щётка
 падала
 из Виллиных рук.
И надо же случиться,
 чтоб как раз тогда
к королю сигарному
 Энри Клей

пришёл,
 белей, чем облаков стада,
 величественнейший из сахарных королей.
 Негр
 подходит
 к туше дебелой:
 “Ай бэг ёр пардон, мистер Брэгг!
 Почему и сахар,
 белый-белый,
 должен делать
 черный негр?
 Чёрная сигара
 не идет в усах вам—
 она для негра
 с чёрными усами.
 А если вы
 любите
 кофий с сахаром,
 то сахар
 извольте
 делать сами.”

Few questions bore into Willie’s mind,
 But one was the question of questions.
 Once this question crowded into Willie,
 The brush fell out of his hands
 And it happened that **just then**
 One of the most magnificent sugar kings,
 Whiter than flocks of white clouds,
 Came to visit the cigar king, Henry Clay.

The Negro approached this fat slob:
 “Excuse me, Mr. Bragg,
 But why’s your white, white sugar made by black Negroes?
 A black cigar doesn’t go with your moustach—
 That’s for a Negro with a black moustach.
 And since you like coffee with sugar,
 Why don’t you grow the sugar yourself?”⁴³

Hughes’s translation provides further rationales for his decision to translate “white” as “light work” and “black” as “heavy,” a decision that

transforms the dialectical progression of Mayakovsky's poem. This is the case because Mayakovsky's second description of Villi's mind employs a great deal of rhyme that ties Villi to labor before Villi poses his question. More importantly, Hughes's translation implies that Willie's "question of questions" stems from his pondering the discrepancies between the lot of white and Black labor. Hughes's subsequent decision to place "**just then**" in bold type reinforces this notion, suggesting that it is Willie's recognition of this tension that prompts his question to Mr. Bragg.

By contrast, Mayakovsky's poem depicts the arrival of "мистер Брэгг" (Mister Bregg) at "Энри Клей" (Henry Clay's) as the stimulus for Villi's question. This is because the speaker's use of the phrase "И надо же случиться, чтоб как раз тогда" (and it needed to happen just then) is both a close cousin and a far cry from "it happened that **just then**." Mayakovsky's speaker suggests that it was an outside event, an "it" that had to happen just then, which gives birth to Villi's next series of questions which, in turn, illustrate that the attempt to make sense of labor relations through a capitalist lens of race is a fool's errand. This is no small point because the visit of the cigar king Henry Clay to the sugar king, Mister Bregg, and the fact that both names are offered as transliterations from English, serve as a potent metaphor for U.S. imperialism on the island and the sugarocracy that it brought into being, along with the racialized distribution of tobacco farming lands to recently arrived *guajiros*. In short, Mayakovsky's poem suggests that the impetus behind Villi's questions (and the small amount of growth they imply) could only take place in light of world historical events. It is the progression of history, or the imperialism that constitutes the final stage of capitalism in Marxist-Leninist thought, that prompts Villi's queries as much, if not more, than the workings of his own mind.

Nevertheless, the questions that Villi poses to Mister Bregg also seem to build on the poetic play embedded in his earlier observation that "White work / does white, Black / black," emphasizing the notion that race is an epiphenomenon of capitalism, and a beguiling one at that:

“Ай бэг ёр пардон, мистер Брэгг!
Почему и сахар,
белый-белый,
должен делать
черный негр?”⁴⁴

Mayakovsky builds on his earlier adjectival play and the conventions of Russian rhyme to create a dialectic whose significance, once again, is

more perceptible to the reader than it is to Villi. The rhyme that marks Villi's awkward question, "Почему и сахар, белый-белый, / должен делать, черный негр" (Why sugar, white-white / must do, the black negro?) places "мистер Брэгг" (Mister Bregg) in relation (and tension) with the laboring "негр" (negro), and the repetition of "белый-белый" (white-white) is also, via rhyme, brought into tension with "черный негр?" (black negro). In short, it is a poetic play that sets up the series of questions that reveal Villi's hopeless confusion and another bit of fool's truth: Villi has conflated race, labor, and product to such an extent that he cannot fathom why sugar, described by the two adjectives "белый-белый" (white-white), has to be produced by the "black negro." The fact that the only nouns in Villi's question are "sugar" and "negro" further highlights that the racist justification for Villi's exploitation rests on a bit of play. Villi's seemingly redundant phrase "black negro" suggests that there are two factors that comprise Villi's subjecthood: he is a "негр" (negro) because he is of African descent, and he is "черный" (black) because he performs heavy labor. Perhaps more intriguingly, Mayakovsky's poetic accumulation also implies that "негр" is "черный" because Villi labors: that his place inside the labor market accounts for his illusory self-identification as a racial subject. And yet there is more, because Mayakovsky's poetic play also invokes and plays with a crucial moment in the Hegelian (and Marxist) dialectic—the moment at which quantity becomes quality. In this sense, Mayakovsky's use of "white" in its adjectival form allows for a reading of the line, and of Villi's thoughts, which suggests that "white" is a quality produced by an abundance of quantity or capital.

Hughes's translation begs a different set of questions. His decision to render "sugar, white-white" as "white, white sugar" suggests that sugar is white because its color is white and because it is white-owned. The translation's repetition of "white" also speaks a Bakhtinian or Learian fool's truth that preserves Mayakovsky's dialectical play with respect to quantity and quality, as does Hughes's decision to translate "black negro" as "black Negroes." Their repetition, in turn, conveys another fool's truth that is in line with Mayakovsky's offering of two dimensions of blackness, and also suggests that although capitalism uses racism to maintain itself, it can only come into being after racism creates a justification for the exploitation of a labor pool. In short, Hughes's translation suggests that Mayakovsky's communist remedy for the colonial question is too pat—that it is not doctrinal Marxism, but rather a brand of Black Marxism that can most effectively combat the forces of U.S. and European empire.

However, it would be a grave mistake to think that Hughes looked past the generative political power of Mayakovsky's poetic play. The archive reveals—as shown in several drafts that Hughes composed later, and, as late as 1965, sent out as Christmas gifts—that he felt his translation could be improved. He amended the line “But why's your white, white sugar ground by black Negroes?” to “But why's your white, white sugar ground by black black Negroes?” Villi's nonsensical formulation of a black Negro, which suggests an intertwining between race and labor, is transformed into a line that is all the more loaded with a Learian fool's truth. The phrase could also connote Black-owned black Negroes. But most intriguingly, and in line with Hughes's Black left internationalist fidelities, the phrase could be read as two adjectives modifying the same noun in different ways. Hughes's Willie is a black black Negro, because Negro subjecthood combines his labor (his chronic underemployment and exploitation) and his race. Both factors are at play, and race, in Willie's speech, no longer figures as an epiphenomenon of labor, but gives fool's voice to a Black Marxism. Moreover, given Hughes's earlier decision to forsake the poetic play that marks Villi's first quote in Mayakovsky's poem, his question comes across as a synthesis, a blurring out of a realization. In short, Hughes's “Black and White” takes advantage of the desire for a racial conflation that, arguably, was the genesis of his task, and uses it to infuse Mayakovsky's poem with a Black left internationalist commentary. Creativity, for both Hughes and Mayakovsky, had a role to play in the dialectical progression of history.

Hughes's awareness of the effect that his race might have on potential readings of his translations and the inside/outside reversal at work in “Black and White” are also manifest, on the level of form and content, in his translation of Mayakovsky's poem “Syphilis.”⁴⁵ “Syphilis” is a narrative poem that begins when a steamboat pulls into a Cuban port, and its Black passengers are held in quarantine awaiting vaccination while its white passengers, despite their questionable health, are allowed ashore. The poem then focuses its attention on three characters: Tom, a Black Cuban awaiting vaccination; Tom's wife, who awaits his return; and Mr. Smith, one of the steamboat's white passengers, who is also a carrier of syphilis. While Tom waits on board ship happy to be vaccinated, Mr. Smith takes advantage of Tom's wife's dire straits, forcing “dollars” and himself upon her. Vaccinated, Tom happily returns home, but in the months and years to come syphilis ravages Tom, his wife, and Tom's children in their mother's womb. Hughes employs the same strategy he used to translate “Black and White” in his translation

1. Yamekraw 1928
 A Hollywood conception of the Negro
 Produced by Vitaphone

Musical Arrangement	James P. Johnson
Story	Stanley Rauh
Direction	Murray Roth
	Emanuel Essman
	Edward Du Par

Photography Made in U. S. A.

2. Black and White 1933
 A musical cartoon based on a poem by Vladimir Maiakovski
 Produced by MEJHRABPOMFILM
 Scenario by Kovalenkov and Skliut
 Artist-directors - L. Amelik and I. Vano
 Music by G. Gamburgour
 Sound by N. Pisarev
 Recitation by K. V. Eggert

Made in U. S. S. R.

The animated cartoon has assumed a form in the Soviet studios that is far different from that which has developed in America. Unlike the fast movement and comedy of the American cartoon, the Russians have created a drawing and composition that is far more refined, as well as a content that is of far greater substance. One need only note the treatment accorded the padre, or that refreshingly simple and unaffected statement:

The negro stood, his nose bleeding;
 his hand holding his chin.
 How should he have known
 that with such a question
 One must go to the Comintern, in Moscow

Black and White is based on a poem by that name by Vladimir Maiakovski, futurist, and one of the most popular poets of the civil war period in Soviet Russia.

BLACK and WHITE
 By V. Maiakovski
 Translated by Langston Hughes

April, 1933.

To do Havana in a glance—
 Paradise land, all it ought to be.
 Under a palm, on one leg, a flamingo stands.
 Calero blossoms all over Vedado.
 In Havana everything has its place:
 The white folks have dollars,
 The blacks haven't. Therefore
 Willie stands with his brush.
 In Henry Clay & Co., Ltd.
 Willie, who has swept up during his life *—until*
 A wilderness of dust,
 Until his hair has fallen out and his stomach in.

Hughes's translation of Mayakovsky's "Black and White" in *Film Forum*. Langston Hughes Papers. Copyright © by the Langston Hughes Estate. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates.

Meagre is the dull spectrum of his joys:
 Six hours to sleep on his back;
 And occasionally that thief of a port officer,
 Passing, might throw him a penny.
 Can you hide from dirt?
 Perhaps, if people would go on their heads?
 But then they would raise more dust—
 They have a thousand hairs, but only two legs.

The fashionable Prado runs nearby.
 Here, there clinks and flashes
 Three kilometres of jazz.
 A fool might think that really,
 Right here in Havana is the ex-paradise.

In Willie's brain there are few furrows:
 Little sown, little harvest.
 One thing, though, Willie knows by heart,
 Stronger than the stone of Maceo's monument:
 The whites eat the ripe pineapples,
The blacks—those damp with rottenness.
 The whites do the light work,
The blacks—the heavy.

Few questions bore into Willie's mind.
 But one was the question of questions.
 Once when this question crowded into Willie,
 The brush fell out of Willie's hands
 And it happened that **just then**,
 One of the most magnificent of the sugar kings,
 Whiter than flocks of white clouds,
 Came to visit the cigar king, Henry Clay.

The Negro approached this fat slob:
 "Excuse me, Mr. Bragg,
 But why's your white, white sugar made by black Negroes?
 A black cigar don't go with your moustach—
 That's for a Negro with a black moustach.
 And, ^{since} you like coffee with sugar,
 Why don't you grow the sugar yourself?"

Such questions don't pass easily.
 The king turned from white to yellow.
 The king swayed from the blow he gave,
 Threw down his glove and went away.

All around, the marvels of botany blossomed.
 The banana trees wave their solid roof.
 The Negro wiped on his drawers the hand
 That had cleaned the blood ~~away~~ from his nose.
 The Negro snuffled through his smashed nose.
 He picked up his brush, holding his hand to his jaw.

How could he know that with such questions
 He should address the Comintern at Moscow?

loosely woven together by intersecting planes of avant-garde literary and visual arts? Perhaps more intriguingly, why would Hughes distance himself from his previous poetic production and personas to such an extent that he quickly became, in the eyes of most of his contemporary and present-day critics, a poor agitprop poet reborn from a far better jazz bard?

I contend that the sardonic voice of “Cubes” stakes its claim to an internationalist radical Black subjectivity on intertextual and inter-art soil precisely because a poem and subjectivity so constructed prove incredibly resistant to interpretive closure and racially essentialist readings. Of course, any work of art lends itself to varying interpretations, but this type of inter-art has a need for multi-perspectival critical intervention and interpretation if it is to succeed as such. This emphasis on difference and different perspectives should come as no surprise, given the fact that by 1932 Hughes had actually grown increasingly disdainful of homogeneous conceptions of race. Nonetheless, he was still charged with providing the poetic, Black proletarian voice for both the Comintern and for Du Bois’s Pan-Africanism. The former saw all peoples in Africa and of African descent around the globe as part of the same homogeneous race, while the latter pitted a monolithic collective of the world’s darker races against the imperial and colonial forces that oppressed them. Not surprisingly, Hughes saw this inter-art poetics—one marked by polyvalence and multi-perspectival interpretation—as the perfect ground to articulate an internationalist radical Black subjectivity that was not only capable of speaking for a Negro proletariat but was also resistant to the implication that it spoke in perfect harmony with a worldwide homogeneous collective.⁴⁷

The voice that inhabits “Cubes” begins the poem in a nostalgic free verse whose repetitions paint a prototypical modernist scene that, in terms of form and content, will soon become the poem’s primary problematic. The poem’s very title invokes a unified yet multifaceted whole (a cube), as well as the fractured simultaneity of Cubism:

In the days of the broken cubes of Picasso
 And in the days of the broken songs of the young men
 A little too drunk to sing
 And the young women
 A little too unsure of love to love—
 I met on the boulevards of Paris
 An African from Senegal. (1–7)⁴⁸

The poem's speaker temporally locates his cosmopolitan encounter by first making reference to the aesthetic vogue of *l'art nègre* for which Picasso's Cubism—given its supposed African inspirations—stands as an emblem. Furthermore, Hughes invokes the tale of a Picasso newly arrived from Spain finding inspiration in the parades of camouflage down Parisian streets. He then links, with repetitions of “the days” and “broken,” Picasso's avant-garde production to a crisis of self-expression, to “broken songs” not quite sung by “young men / A little too drunk to sing,” implying the will to forget the trenches that are none too far away. These crises, in turn, are linked—with the decadent repetition of “A little too”—to a failure of human connection, to young girls “too unsure of love to love.” The time-worn traits and travails of modernity—the manifest inadequacy of convention to express contemporary consciousness, the alienation of cosmopolitan existence, and even war are brought to the fore just as Hughes's *flâneur* meets “an African from Senegal” on the “boulevards of Paris.” Hughes's heavily charged use of the phrase “boulevards of Paris” suggests an African who is almost on display, an exoticism exhibited in the world's cultural capital, yet also one who is under fire, bearing the signs of being a colonial conscript in the First World War. Hughes thus brings the first stanza full circle. Picasso's exotic engagement with the primitive is juxtaposed with the presence of an African incarnate on the Parisian streets, and Empire's cultural cutting edge is set against the backdrop of the colonial enterprise that fueled its innovation. Moreover, Picasso is separated from the Senegalese man, on Hughes's page, by a crisis of self-expression and a failure of human connection, suggesting that Picasso's African art serves more to silence the African than to give him voice.

These crises and failures not only beg reference to the dividing line between Picasso's prewar Analytical Cubism and his wartime Synthetic Cubism but also allow Hughes to put in focus the ethical pitfalls of Black internationalisms that are invested in homogeneous notions of race. Just as Synthetic Cubism invests in the deliberate dissociation and recombination of elements to offer, as Ernst Gombrich put it, “the most radical attempt to stamp out ambiguity and to enforce one reading of a picture,” so too do homogeneous visions and versions of pan-Africanisms and diasporas deliberately divest difference to frame race in unambiguous terms that, in turn, help to bolster their ambitions.⁴⁹ On the contrary, Hughes's “Cubes” inverts this divestment of difference and investment in uniformity in order to offer its reader a multifaceted vision of the potential, power, and pitfalls of pan-Africanism.

Like Picasso's Cubism, at least as it is portrayed in the first stanza, Hughes surreptitiously constructs an entire poem that, at first glance, is quite intentionally guilty of the same crime of silencing the African Other. Upon closer examination, however, this silencing—insofar as it represents a refusal to speak for (or in the place of) the Senegalese man—reveals itself to be central to an ethical conviction that eschews monolithic conceptions of pan-Africanism or race. The meeting between speaker and African in the first stanza does not produce fraternity, conversation, or even contact. Rather, the encounter provokes the speaker's hypothetical rumination about the Senegalese man:

God
 Knows why the French
 Amuse themselves bringing to Paris
 Negroes from Senegal. (8–11)⁵⁰

The speaker's irony is notably marked by a French-inflected syntax that gestures to an incomplete assimilation of the dominant culture by playfully suggesting, in essence, that the speaker's thoughts occur in bad translation. This irony is also tinged with a bitter identification that goes beyond the metaphysical cursing of the injustice of a colonized African fighting a European war. Hughes's Black American persona extends the American appellation of "Negro" to the man described formerly as an "African from Senegal." He also qualifies the Senegalese man as someone who has been brought to Paris and, in so doing, suggests a diasporic solidarity between the two men while simultaneously highlighting the difference that comprises the constitutive paradox at the heart of any need for a twentieth-century Black internationalism. The stanza's hierarchical presentation of "God," "the French," and "Negroes from Senegal" both forefronts the issue of French colonialism in Africa and invokes the specter of colonialism and the logic driving the white man's burden. However, it is Hughes's use of the word "amuse" that may constitute the stanza's most striking feature. It is at once remarkably apt, as it invokes the callous cruelty of the French colonial regime in Senegal, and remarkably inappropriate, since the Senegalese presence in France can hardly be characterized as a simple matter of amusement. As Hughes, in his "Negroes Speak of War," remarked a year earlier, "Somebody ought to put the French Black Africans wise to the fact that they [the French state during World War I] ought to treat them well in Paris when they are drilling them by the hundreds of thousands to

stop bullets with their breasts and bombs with their heads.”⁵¹ In short, Hughes suggests that the aesthetic regime of the French avant-garde is strikingly out of step with the global realities of French colonialism or, more maliciously, strikingly in step with a desire to obfuscate colonialism’s disturbing truths.

Hughes continues to forefront a disjuncture between a mode of artistic production (as dictated by an aesthetic regime) and the reality a work of art purports to convey in the poem’s next triangular stanza:

It’s the old game of the boss and the bossed,
 boss and the bossed,
 amused
 and
 amusing,
 worked and working,
 Behind the cubes of black and white,
 black and white,
 black and white (12–20)⁵²

With the repetition of “black and white,” Hughes invokes his own translation of Mayakovsky’s “Black and White” and, quite surreptitiously, the *lestnitsa*. What was sacrificed during the moment of a well-reasoned and strategic choice has been restored by the translator in his own work, resurrected in another arena that shared political and aesthetic recipes for revolution. Hughes furthers invokes artistic contexts of spatial play by referencing the words *jou*, *journal*, and *jouer* found in many Cubist paintings as well as Mallarmé’s “Un Coup de dés” (“A Throw of the Dice”). It is the “old game” of “black and white.” “Cubes” thus falls in line with a text that is not only credited with inaugurating spatial play in French poetics, but one that also has at its center, as does the very notion of diaspora, a “metaphysical crisis, the constant threat of collapse into incoherence.”⁵³ This crisis is the result of Mallarmé’s poetics’ “thoroughgoing investigation of chance as an aesthetic principle” and is embodied in the poem’s principal statement, “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard” (“A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance”).⁵⁴ Hence, at the very moment when Mayakovsky, Picasso, and Mallarmé are invoked with a reference to the game of “black and white,” the stability of language itself is called into question. Moreover, the business of colonialism—which Hughes characterizes, in this por-

tion of the poem, as a “game”—is now, throwing the tenets of various pan-Africanisms into still greater jeopardy, yoked to a “thoroughgoing investigation of chance as an aesthetic principle.”

Hughes further highlights this disjuncture between the poem’s ethics and aesthetics of representation in the poem’s seventeenth line. This line provides a visual symmetry to Hughes’s hourglass of colonialism, but disrupts its conceptual symmetry because the relationship between the “worked” and the “working” is hardly akin to the relationship between the “boss” and the “bossed” or the “amused” and “amusing.” Hence, the subjectivity of Hughes’s persona is one that plays with and against the aesthetic regime he inhabits, one that manipulates tradition in order to demonstrate its representational shortcomings while simultaneously exploiting those shortcomings to perform the work of representation.

In fact, the poem’s next stanza, switching both diction and register, recalls Hughes’s previous poetic use of so-called Black dialect to revise his own aesthetic practices in light of his accruing knowledge of competing cosmopolitan aesthetic regimes. This new voice is not a rupture but a continuation and complication, since the previous stanza does not end with a period. Hence, when Hughes begins the next stanza with a yet to be seen series of words, such as “But,” “fun,” and “’em,” which evoke a shift away from English words that resonate with French false cognates, like “amuse,” he lays bare a new context of interpretation that both redefines and is in line with the Cubist framing of the poem and an expansive vision of the diaspora. Even more specifically, this shift juxtaposes and relates French and American democratic traditions to aesthetically address both the realpolitik of the legal, colonial, and imperialist underpinnings of their national ideals, and the role of aesthetic regimes in articulating and dis-articulating this politics with respect to the diverse disenfranchised:

But since it is the old game,
 For fun
 They give him the three old prostitutes of France—
 Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—
 And all three of ’em sick
 In spite of the tax to the government
 And the legal houses
 And the doctors
 And the *Marseillaise*. (21–30)⁵⁵

Hughes marks an abrupt transition in this stanza by starting with the rather colloquial linguistic marker of contrast “But,” a choice that is especially striking in relation to the series of “ands” that precede and follow the hinge of difference it marks. Indeed, in the previous stanzas, he not only begins two lines with “And” but also embeds “and” as a sign of the interrelated hierarchies between the “boss and the bossed,” the “amused and amusing,” and the “worked and working,” not to mention “black and white.” Thus, the poem’s aesthetic of accumulation is interrupted by an exception that points to the blind spots in accounting for U.S. Black culture that, in some fashion, each aesthetic regime fails to account for or to subsume entirely.

Hughes’s move toward the colloquial is reinforced in the second line of the stanza when the speaker claims the trope of gaming “for fun,” and continues the poem’s strategy of contrasting registers. This is not coincidentally a different form of continuity that moves from a word like “amuse” to a word like “fun,” even though their dictionary definitions closely link them semantically. “Fun” is a word more common to U.S. day-to-day parlance than “amuse.” In this sense, Hughes revises “the old game” for a U.S. audience, and specifically for its leftist population who would most likely read this poem, given its publication in *New Masses*. Thus, since U.S. audiences expected, and still expect, Hughes to speak from and for a U.S. Black perspective, he complicates those expectations and layers the avant-garde “hasard” of Mallarmé’s dice with the “fun” of a U.S. dice game, even the specific signifying of a game of craps, the Louisiana-born variant of the old English game, hazard.

The “fun” of U.S. interpretive contexts, which includes the sense of “fun” as tricks and hoaxes, finds its suggestive correlative in the “three prostitutes” who have been hoaxed by the French State. However, when set against the backdrop of the poem’s spatial play wherein three triangles thrice shape the poem’s very form and invoke, among other things, the triangular trade, this triple trope ties the classic triangle of French political stability, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” to the most malevolent manifestations of colonialism. Moreover, as the maxim or joke is presented in English translation, it arguably serves to implicate the United States in the serious games of empire, democracy, and their rhetorical structures. The rights of man are for sale to the highest bidder, and, tellingly, they are to be found among the marginalized, the prostitutes, suggesting that the promise is little more than a pittance.

Hughes invokes U.S. Black dialect to draw in the contours of this local, and linked, disenfranchisement: “And all three of ’em sick.” The

lack of a verb—in a phrase where no verb is needed to convey meaning, precisely because the meaning inheres in the lack of a verb—and the dropping of the “th” of the implied them, typifies certain Black speech patterns as they are represented in Hughes’s earlier work. The poem thus re-contextualizes the French State in terms of its juridical ordering of prostitution, an ordering that attempts to define, confine, and isolate sexual disease. The presentation of this juridical ordering mirrors the promise of the French colonial project: to bring government, law, medicine (or science), and a national culture to the Dark Continent.⁵⁶ Hughes ends the stanza with France’s militaristic, bloody national anthem, the *Marseillaise*, placing the poem’s previously mentioned peoples—those on and of the periphery of French society and culture (the “African from Senegal,” the “bossed,” the “amusing,” the “worked,” the “prostitutes,” and the U.S. Negro enmeshed in a Parisian negro vogue)—in the context of both a national call to defend France and in the larger contexts of wars revolutionary, colonial, and race. This stanza also demands that the reader interrogate the re-articulation of the “African from Senegal” in the phrase “Negroes from Senegal.” This return, this folding-back for a new perspective, allows the poem to encompass the effort spearheaded by W. E. B. Du Bois and made by U.S. citizens of African descent to rename themselves Negroes, with a capital “N,” as a means to combat derogatory racist appellations. Hughes makes this reading possible, and problematic, by beginning the line with the word “Negroes,” multiplying possible readings in order to imply internationally diverse racial designations that include this capitalized “Negro,” its lowercase variant, and even the politically less charged Spanish word *negro*, all terms that exemplify the plurality of discourses that evoke and invoke U.S. (and other) racial paradigms and politics for their own aims. These include those of the Comintern, of Pan-Africanism, and of “colonial policy.” Hughes asks us to think about the chances of “black and white,” and points to the impossibility of maintaining a homogeneous and binary discourse about race within the aesthetic and political regimes at play in a global arena.

The switch in rhetorical registers with the transitional phrase “Of course” calls to mind the formal argumentative practices of traditional rhetoric. Yet, when cast in light of the multiply inflected “But,” this “Of course” becomes more than a concession of fact, working with and working over its inheritance of the obvious. In other words, this “Of course” becomes not a matter of course, but an ironic consciousness of the all-too-easy acceptance of canonical discourses and their multiple

revisions at play throughout the poem in the various aesthetic regimes evoked. Furthermore, it points to and beyond a rhetorical disease inherent in attempts to express subjectivities definitively—especially ideologically driven aesthetics which hope to speak for the marginalized—to a rhetorical disease that is in many ways driven by its obfuscation of chance:

Of course, the young African from Senegal
 Carries back from Paris
 A little more disease
 To spread among the black girls in the palm huts.
 He brings them as a gift
 disease—
 From light to darkness
 disease—
 From the boss to the bossed
 disease—
 From the game of black and white
 disease
 From the city of the broken cubes of Picasso
 d
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 s
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 e (31–50)⁵⁷

What the “African from Senegal” inherits “from Paris,” what he “carries back,” is no less than a supplementary disease, “[a] little more disease.” Moreover, the “disease” he brings home, to his already colonized homeland, adds to the existing diseases of colonialism that inhabit Hughes’s self-ironizing conscious dwelling on exoticized “palm huts” at the end of a line which builds from the “spread” of a cosmopolitan infection in the to-and-fro of colonial exchange, on to sexual and, ultimately, social disease. Hughes’s deft use of a “little more disease” also implies the latent presence of a sickness among “the black girls in the palm huts” who already carry the disease of the European metropole, both literally and figuratively. Thus, Hughes at once criticizes the modernist obsession with an artistic exploitation of the primitive, shows

how irony can make it a tool of and for the people, and heeds the possible economic marginalization of certain colonized peoples. These evocations go far beyond resting easy with the platitude that all people under colonial rule are equally marginalized.

The knowledge of hierarchies (racial, social, colonial, economic, and even hierarchies of knowledge itself) is crucial to understanding the revision that takes place in the lines that follow, lines which invoke “Syphilis” and Hughes’s decision to metaphorically link, in translation, the disease to “colonial policy.” In an appellation that points to its interpellation within colonial knowledge structures, the very “gift” that the “African from Senegal” “brings” is a “disease” that Hughes folds into the scientific and religious knowledge structures of the white man’s burden in order to point to their power and to criticize them at their foundation. The biting irony that “disease” might constitute a “gift” is also troubled by the serious gift that Hughes wishes to impart to his readers—a consciousness of the cubic frames through which they may come to know ethically the world and its peoples.

With the repetition of “from,” Hughes uses the tradition of anaphora—running as far back as biblical and classical models—both to invoke precisely how embedded tropes of knowledge can become, and to offer the possibility of a new starting point for different, and differing, inflections of old ways of knowing. He intersperses a newer, Mayakovskian and Mallarméan-inspired use of the empty space on the page to create a new context for anaphora when, in a manner suggestive of the *lest-nitsa*, he indents and repeats “disease—.” Not only does the indentation of each new invocation of “disease—” move farther across the page to work in tandem with the lengthening of each “From” line to form a triangle, reinforcing the triangles we have already explored, but it also visually displaces the word to represent the revised connotations associated with “disease” from the perspective of each new origin and starting point that modifies it.

The final visual representation of the multiply formed triangle is of paramount importance at the end of the poem because it visually places the New World in conversation with colonial Africa via the shape of the triangular trade, and forefronts (in partial cahoots with the avant-garde) the fact that the white man’s burden also has a transatlantic dimension. In these lines, Hughes first re-articulates a movement “from light to darkness” that calls upon the rhetoric of both Genesis and the Enlightenment. With a consciousness that it was among the European aims—broadly conceived as so-called humanitarian aims—to bring

Christianity and Reason to the Dark Continent, Hughes inverts the trope to shed a new light on how “darkness” is structured. Hughes thus indicts the discursive power that light wields over darkness by correlating it with “disease,” while also allowing for and encouraging a dis-ease with any formulation that would see the discourse as in any way natural or given.

Hughes continues his indictment in the phrase that follows, invoking the power (and economic) structures of colonialism, “the boss to the bossed,” while simultaneously embedding a Marxist movement from the “boss” to the “bossed.” This movement, facilitated by Hughes’s use of “from,” reworks the poem’s earlier power dynamic between “boss and bossed,” suggesting that the “old game” may be up, that it may have succumbed to the “disease” it engendered. Moreover, given the work performed by the fourth stanza, “boss” can be framed in a diseased U.S. context, where “boss” and boss-man are particularly charged with the legacy of slavery and the weight of Jim Crow.

The poem’s penultimate stanza serves not only to destabilize the categories of “black and white,” but also returns the reader to the third stanza and, in so doing, renews and revises the terms of “black and white.” The poem’s economy changes from one of accumulation to one of circulation. Hughes replaces “the old game” with “the game,” changing from a cynical posture to one that invokes chance as a change in fortune. The positioning of the penultimate “disease” destabilizes the categories of “black and white” by making their grammatical status unclear: “black and white” may refer to race, but the phrase can also act as an adjective modifying “disease.” The word “disease” creates a triangle within a triangle—one created solely from disease—which casts the poem’s other triangles in a new light shed “from the city of the broken cubes of Picasso.” In other words, the triangle within the triangle is a re-articulation of the multi-perspectival, Cubist strategy in the plastic arts that casts the old and the new as a simultaneity, and a violent one at that. The poem claims that this strategy of simultaneity born in the Parisian metropolis is doubly broken; broken in order to evoke simultaneity, and itself diseased and broken-down.

The breakdown of the disease comes in the final, downward-snaking “disease” that ends the poem. This final word brings together, and breaks apart, the global intertextual discourses at work and at play in the poem. First, its visual trailing down the page suggests an inevitable path of disease. Simultaneously, it draws upon the avant-garde resources of visual poetry that invoke the intersection of innovations in the plastic

arts with innovations in poetic practice. Moreover, it breaks the word into three triangles that point like arrows to the future, to the past, and again to the future, suggesting a vicious circularity between past and present incarnations of “the game.”⁵⁸ And, finally, the three triangles revisit the dis-ease, or malaise, of modern discourse, even as they again invoke a U.S. Black dialect that turns disease into two words, “dis ease.” This final point is perhaps the most crucial one, since the three triangles enable a rupture that signifies on the continuation of the ease of the “old game” by invoking another “old game,” signifying. Reading “dis ease” in this fashion highlights the degree to which the poem’s largely French aesthetic is both in and out of step with the anticolonial message the poem conveys. Aesthetically, “disease” is associated with a roll of a die, as its repetition six times in the final stanza achieves a correlation to the six sides of this particular cube that, in light of Hughes’s globally artistic game, becomes plural: “Cubes.”

Hughes’s engagement with Mayakovsky’s poetry and poetics afforded his “Cubes” the literary capital requisite to stage a twofold coup. This coup works with and against the “antiquarian” elements of both the French avant-garde and proletarian agitprop to articulate a non-essentialist Black subjectivity inside an internationalist poetics that is well suited for the portrayal of a heterogeneous Black collective. “Cubes” draws upon the spatial play of avant-garde poetics, but it does so in a manner that transgresses the movement’s socially aloof call for an “art for art’s sake” by highlighting the complicity of colonialism with avant-garde innovation, and infusing this spatial play with both a Marxist analysis of global race relations and a meditation on the potential, paradoxes, and pitfalls of Black collectivity. At the same time, “Cubes” draws upon Mayakovsky’s politics, themes, and symbols, but the poem’s cosmopolitan formal complexities and the myriad of poetic and political possibilities they suggest frustrate agitprop’s dictate for straightforward accessibility, the Comintern’s homogeneous conception of race, and the demand for an art that is “nationalist in form and socialist in content.”

By placing the avant-garde and agitprop in conversation while simultaneously frustrating the expectations of each, Hughes’s twofold coup suggests that both of these poetics are ill-suited to address the complexities of race relations in a global arena. Hughes’s use of “Black and White” and “Syphilis” as intertexts allows “Cubes” to invoke the Marxist racial polemics that inform these poems, but his decision to place Mayakovsky in conversation with an aesthetic born out of colonialism also serves to indict Mayakovsky’s agitprop racial prescriptions

as all too pat. Whereas Mayakovsky offers the reader a straightforward portrait of race relations that homogenizes the Black experience across the diaspora, Hughes's poem deploys Mayakovsky's symbolic use of disease on an African terra firma to show how the malevolent relationship between racism and empire does not always play out in a game of black and white. Moreover, by invoking and reworking Mayakovsky's poems, symbols, and themes outside the context of agitprop, Hughes suggests that Mayakovsky's proletarian aesthetic—like that of the avant-garde—is contaminated by the homogeneous racial politics of the regime that fuels it. In other words, the simplicity of agitprop mirrors and propagates both the Comintern's and Mayakovsky's oversimplification of global race relations. Hughes's poem thus throws agitprop into the hazard of the avant-garde, multiplying its poetic and political possibilities. The same can be said of Hughes's recuperation of Mayakovsky's *lestnitsa*: a traditional element of Russian prosody that is often lost in translation resurfaces in Hughes's poem impregnated with multiple political and poetic valences.

Hughes's translations of Mayakovsky's verse and his embrace of Mayakovsky's coup ultimately allowed him to use the dialectical poetics of the revolution to articulate both internationalist radical Black subjectivities and an ethical, though pessimistic, vision of Black internationalism. The subjectivity of the persona that inhabits "Cubes" is grounded on an intertextual soil composed of two Mayakovskian coups: the first politicizes the avant-garde, making use of modernist conventions to draw the heterogeneity of the African diaspora into relief; and the second nuances Mayakovsky's agitprop, pointing to the impossibility of maintaining a homogeneous discourse on race in a global arena. The speaker's observations and machinations are thus offered to the reader by making recourse to poems and poetics that are generally considered to be outside the reach of African American letters. This, in turn, allows Hughes to root his speaker's radical Black subjectivity not in artificially provincial notions of traditional African American artistic forms, but rather in the international and heterogeneous discourse of world literature. Hughes thus distances the subjectivity of his speaker from iterations or incarnations of racial essentialism and allows him to speak to the constitutive paradoxes of Black collectivity without having to serve—as one would read Mayakovsky's "Villi"—as an embodiment of that collective. Unlike Picasso's avant-garde or Mayakovsky's agitprop, the poetics of Hughes's coup are not complicit in the silencing or homogenization of the African Other, nor do they attempt to speak for

him. Rather, Hughes's twofold coup lays claim to the representational techniques of modernism and to the Marxist ethos behind agitprop to offer the reader a poem whose form and content point to an ethical vision of a heterogeneous Black collective which does not seek to obfuscate the difference that is its paradoxical precondition. "Cubes" thus testifies not only to the profound effect that Hughes's engagement with Mayakovsky had on his own verse but also to the poetic, political, and ethical sophistication of Hughes's Moscow poetic production.

Langston and Lorca

Envisioning a New Pan-Africanism

On July 27, 1936, the Popular Front government of the Second Spanish Republic saw its worst fears come to pass when a failed coup d'état by conservative-nationalist officers in the army gave rise to the bitter conflict known today as the Spanish Civil War. Less than a month later, Granada's poet laureate, Federico García Lorca, became one of the Republic's first martyrs when the fascist Falange kidnapped and murdered him. Every day that the civil war raged on, it became increasingly international in scope, as the Nationalist rebels enlisted the aid of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy while the Republicans turned to Mexico, the Soviet Union, and to the International Brigades for help on the front lines. The war also became a colonial war when Nationalist forces easily took control of Spanish Morocco and, with it, the battle-hardened Army of Africa. Commanded by General Francisco Franco and composed of the Spanish Foreign Legion and conscripted Moroccan colonial subjects, the shock troops of the Army of Africa were airlifted to the Spanish peninsula by the Luftwaffe and quickly took control of southwestern Spain.

By the time that Langston Hughes arrived in Spain as a war correspondent on July 24, 1937, more than 60,000 soldiers in the Army of Africa were on the front lines. This bloody fact presented the fledgling reporter—who saw his responsibility as recording colored involvement

“Addressed to Alabama”
by LANGSTON HUGHES

“Dear Folks at Home”
Lincoln Battalion,
International Brigades,
November, 1937.

Dear Folks at home:
I went out this mornin',
Old shells was a-fallin',
Whistlin' and a-fallin',
When I went out this mornin'.

I'm way over here
A long ways from home,
Over here in Spanish country,
But I don't feel alone.

Folks over here don't treat me
Like white bosses used to do—
Cause when I was home they treated me
Just like they treatin' you.

But I don't think things'll ever
Be like that again—
I done met up with folks
Who'll fight for me
Like I'm fightin' now
For Spain!

Salud,
JOHNNY.

“Love Letter From Spain”
Lincoln Battalion,
International Brigades,
Old cold rainy day, 1937.

Sweetie, listen:
I'm writin' this
In a front-line trench
Somewhere in Spain,
I'm sittin' in a dugout
Out of the mud and rain.

I can hear the bullets whining,
Sometimes I hear 'em crack.
But if they hit our dugout
They just smack a sandy sack.

I'm thinkin' about you, baby,
Way down in Alabama,
Are you thinkin' about me, honey,
Over here where I am?

I hope you're thinkin', sugar,
And I want you to know
That I'm crazy about you, baby,
No matter where I go.

Just now I'm goin'
To take a Fascist town,
Fascists is Jim Crow peoples, honey—
And here we shoot 'em down.

Honey, you know I loves you!
Honey, now be true!
When I get through in Spain, babe,
I'll be back to you.

Salud,
JOHNNY.

“Dear Brother at Home”
Lincoln Battalion,
International Brigades,
December, 1937.

Dear Brother at home:
We captured a wounded Moor today.
He was just as dark as me.
I said, Boy, what you been doin' here,
Fightin' against the free?

He answered something in a language
I couldn't understand.
But somebody told me he was sayin'
They nabbed him in his land.

And made him join the fascist army
And come across to Spain,
And he said he had a feelin'
He'd never get back home again.

He said he had a feelin'
This whole thing wasn't right.
He said he didn't know
The folks he had to fight.

And as he lay there dyin'
In a village we had taken,
I looked across to Africa
And seen foundations shakin'.

Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
The colonies, too, are free—
Then something wonderful'll happen
To them Moors as dark as me.

I said, I guess that's why old England
And I reckon Italy, too,
Is afraid to let a workers' Spain
Be good to me and you—

Cause they got slaves in Africa—
And they don't want 'em to be free.
Listen, Moorish prisoner, hell!
Here, shake hands with me!

I knelt down there beside him,
And I took his hand—
But the wounded Moor was dyin'
And he didn't understand.

Salud,
JOHNNY.

“Addressed to Alabama” in the *Daily Worker*, January 23, 1938. Courtesy of *People's World*.

in the war—with a vexing dual mandate. Not only did the Army of Africa include Moroccan people of color, but the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the portion of the International Brigades composed of U.S. volunteers, also brought colored combatants to Spain to fight on the side of the Republic. Hughes was dedicated both to the advent of a workers' world and to Du Bois's Pan-Africanism, and this dual allegiance of his was put to the test by the civil war. His fidelities allied him with both the conscripted colonial Moroccans, as distinguished from the cause for which they fought, and with the Republic's Popular Front. Hughes's dual allegiance followed him to Madrid, where he was enthusiastically welcomed by the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, a cadre of artists and intellectuals sympathetic to the Republican cause led by Rafael Alberti and, less formally, by his wife María Teresa León. While in residence, in addition to reporting on the war, Hughes composed original poetry and, assisted by Alianza members and friends, translated (among other works) García Lorca's *Romancero gitano* (1928; *Gypsy Ballads*). This body of wartime radical verse drew upon the innovations of García Lorca and the explosion of *romanceros de la guerra* (war ballads) to create a new poetry of revolution with the capacity to articulate his vision of Black radical internationalism, to export the Republican cause, and to foment a workers' world beyond Spanish borders.

This chapter also argues that the *techné* Hughes employed to translate García Lorca's *Romancero gitano* was informed and revised by his vision of pan-Africanism. This altered vision acknowledged the heterogeneity of pan-Africanist collectives by placing paramount importance on authority of voice—on the ability to speak for one's own community, for someone else's community, or, via translation, for another text. Hughes's newfound ethic of translation—one that figures the translator as a type of witness or medium—also led him to forsake his penchant for play as exemplified in the third chapter by "Cane" and in the sixth by his strategic reworking of "Black and White." Instead, ethical concerns prompted him to enlist collaborators drawn from García Lorca's closest friends and family to aid him in the production of an English-language text that could speak for the martyred poet.

To illustrate how Hughes's Spanish persona was carefully crafted with particular aims in mind, this chapter begins by providing close readings of Hughes's poetry, as published and translated by Rafael Alberti and Emilio Delgado, who sought to position the poet not only at the forefront of Marxist literati sympathetic to the Republic but also

as a Black American whose politics and presence in Spain were representative of Black proletarian support for the Republican war effort. The chapter makes extensive use of archival correspondence—including letters from Alberti, Nancy Cunard, and Pablo Neruda—to illustrate how Hughes placed an ethical premium on approaching the Other from a humble position of curiosity and wonder, and this correspondence reveals the active role Hughes played in the creation of his radical Spanish persona, one ripe for inclusion in Alberti's Alianza. Building on readings that speak to the ethics of Hughes's encounters with other peoples and places, the chapter examines Hughes's war correspondence and his famous speech "Too Much of Race." This examination provides the tools necessary to unfold Hughes's complex vision of writing as a process that allows one to acquire a greater understanding of the Other and as an antifascist tool capable of destabilizing monolithic notions of race and nation. Moreover, a close reading of these texts will offer an image of a Hughes who had grown still more vexed by the ethical perils inherent in serving as the voice for an oppressed population, and reveals how he subtly distanced himself from essentialist instantiations of pan-Africanism as a result. In formulating his own brand of Black radical internationalism, Hughes drew from Du Bois, Marx, and the thick fog of war that confronted him as a correspondent with overlapping allegiances.

By offering a reading of Alberti's introduction to Hughes's heavily annotated personal copy of *Romancero gitano*, the chapter goes on to examine how the war affected Hughes and his poetic production. This exploration strongly suggests that Hughes's understanding of García Lorca was guided by Alberti and framed by the Popular Front aesthetic that Alberti, perhaps unfairly, ascribed to the martyred poet. Moreover, this archival evidence suggests that Hughes saw the explosive production and publication of *romanceros de la guerra*—poems, often composed at the front, intended to serve as both news of and propaganda for the Republican cause—as, in part, the legacy of García Lorca's remarkable intervention in that form. In light of this poetry from the trenches, I then read Nicolás Guillén's interview with Hughes and Miguel Hernández, titled "Un poeta en espardeñas" ("A Poet of Espadrilles"), as evidence of Hughes's commitment to creating a new poetry of revolution out of existing popular forms. This poetry was not intended to mirror the reportage of the *romanceros de la guerra*, but rather to serve as the artistic companion of the Republican struggle and to foment similar movements across borders.

The chapter then turns to an analysis of the aesthetic innovations of *Romancero gitano* and of the ethics behind Hughes's strategy for their translation. Offering a close reading of Hughes's archival correspondence with Arna Bontemps and Hughes's "Letter from Spain," my argument figures the latter as a poem demonstrative not simply of García Lorca's influence, but rather as a text that commingles García Lorca's poetics, the proletarian poetics of the *romanceros de la guerra*, Hughes's new vision of Black internationalism, and the ethics guiding his new translation *techne*. The collision of all of these influences allowed Hughes to articulate a new vision of pan-Africanism in a decidedly antifascist, popular, and yet wholly original form. The chapter concludes by offering a reading of Hughes's "Ballad of the Sinner" that highlights the impact of García Lorca's *Romancero gitano* on Hughes's postwar poetic production, especially with respect to a sequence of ballads he published in his *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942).

The project of reading Hughes's Spanish Civil War ballads as an attempt to produce a revolutionary antifascist poetry infused with a vision of pan-Africanism and as an effort to articulate a vision of pan-Africanism inside a specifically antifascist poetics necessarily builds on analyses of Hughes's multifaceted fidelities, his multiplying poetic horizons, and his multiple personas created in translation. My argument is well served by investigating Hughes's relationship with Rafael Alberti, who helped to situate Hughes among the international advance guard in residence at the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas (also known simply as the Alianza). This advance guard guided Hughes through his first experiences with García Lorca's poetry and, most notably, via translation, had situated Hughes as an antifascist writer for Spanish audiences long before his arrival in Spain.

Rafael Alberti had introduced Langston Hughes to his Spanish public by publishing Emilio Delgado's translation of Hughes's "I, Too" and his "Open Letter to the South" ("Carta a los camaradas del Sur") in the August issue of his magazine *Octubre* in 1933.¹ *Octubre* carried the subtitle of "Escritores y artistas revolucionarios" ("Revolutionary Writers and Artists"), and was intended to serve as a forum to propagate the Marxist advance guard and "la atmósfera madrileña de la República" (Madrid's Republican atmosphere).² By publishing an anonymous translation of "I, Too" and Delgado's translation of "Open Letter to the South," Alberti was able to achieve two objectives. He placed Hughes among a select group charged with fomenting Marxist revolution, and he associated Hughes with Madrid's Republican "atmosphere" which,

with the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, had become all the more antifascist and anti-imperialist.

These associations were bolstered by the way *Octubre* framed Hughes's poetry for its readers. In the case of "Open Letter to the South," Delgado strengthens the revolutionary content of the poem through his translation decisions—imbuing, for example, the poem's title in translation, "Carta a los camaradas del Sur" ("Letter to the Comrades of the South"), with Marxist markers. In his translator's note, Delgado amplifies this association by qualifying the whole of Hughes's literary production as a reflection of "the social drama of his race, their aspirations, their suffering and their struggles against capitalist exploitation."³ Thus, Delgado figures Hughes as a Marxist spokesman and his literary production as but a tool in the revolutionary struggle, homogenizing and conflating Hughes's aspirations, suffering, and struggles with those of all American Blacks in an attempt to make Hughes their spokesman. Hughes's voice became still more expansive with *Octubre*'s publication of "Yo, también . . ." ("I, Too"). The anonymous translation serves to punctuate Alejo Carpentier's "Retrato de un dictador" ("Portrait of a Dictator"), an article that attacks the Machado regime for its tyranny, its economic exploitation of Cuba, and its complicity in the project of U.S. imperialism in the Western Hemisphere.⁴ So positioned, the voice of Hughes's poem is made to speak not on behalf of U.S. Blacks but of all the Americas, a hemisphere beset by the malignant benevolence of U.S. pan-Americanism.

Some four years after Hughes's appearance in *Octubre* and seventeen months after *Nueva Cultura* anointed Hughes "el poeta negro de la revolución" (the black poet of the revolution), Alberti—now at the helm of *El Mono Azul* (a major organ for the Spanish Republican cause)—translated and published four poems by Langston Hughes: "Yo soy negro" ("Negro"), "Estoy haciendo un camino" ("Florida Road Workers"), "Hombre convertido en hombres" ("Man into Men"), and "Yo, también . . ." ("I, Too"). In so doing, Alberti offered his Republican readers a glimpse of Hughes's race-proud persona, presented in "Negro" and "I, Too," and Hughes's Marxist, labor-agitator personas exhibited in his sardonic "Florida Road Workers" and "Man into Men." The motivation behind Alberti's decision to offer this dual portrait of Hughes can be gleaned from a reading of the caption offered below Hughes's picture on the periodical's front page:

Langston Hughes, the great, US black poet, is with us in Madrid at the Alianza. All of the delicacy, all of the sad grace,

all of the force of his repressed race emanate from his unaffected verse which is loved and recited not only by the blacks in his country, but also by writers and readers who have valorized it the world over. Langston, who came to Spain as a delegate to the Second International Writers Congress, will stay here for some time filling himself with the heroic spirit of our people, publicizing, in more than three hundred newspapers for his brothers in color and blood, the cause of Liberty, Justice, and human dignity.⁵

Mirroring his own choice of texts and, to some extent, Delgado's translator's remarks, Alberti is careful here to characterize Hughes in both national and international terms. Hughes's verse carries the approbation of "the blacks in his country" and "the force of his repressed race," and it is also highly valued in international arenas. Hughes himself, while a "great, black US poet," is portrayed as an international figure with international concerns that extend beyond the poetic realm. Hughes is to serve, in his capacity as a journalist, as a mouthpiece for the Spanish Republican cause, or as Alberti implies, to serve the Spanish people in the same manner he served his own, by championing "Liberty, Justice, and human dignity."

Alberti's translation decisions locate Hughes as both a nationalist race poet and an internationalist proletarian poet. Alberti assigns each poem a number, and his translations of "Negro" (1) and "I, Too" (4)—poems that bracket the collection—are relatively conservative and succeed in preserving Hughes's race pride and agitation. In contrast, Alberti's translations of "Florida Road Workers" and "Man into Men"—poems at the heart of the collection—tend to augment and domesticate Hughes's Marxist bent. Alberti's translation of the second and third stanzas of "Florida Road Workers" is, in part, demonstrative of these aims. Recalling the poem from chapter 2:

Makin' a road
 For the rich old white men
 To sweep over in their big cars.
 And leave me standin' here.

Sure,
 A road helps all of us!
 White folks ride—

And I get to see 'em ride.
 I ain't never seen nobody
 Ride so fine before. (8–17)⁶

Alberti translates:

Estoy haciendo un camino
 para que los viejos blancos
 pasen en sus grandes coches
 y aquí plantado me dejen.

¡Qué verdad es que un camino
 ayuda a todos!
 La gente rica pasea.
 Y yo tengo la fortuna
 de ver cómo se pasean.
 Jamás he visto en mi vid[a] [sic]
 pasear con tanto lujo. (8–18)⁷

Alberti's translation domesticates Hughes's poem by employing the colloquial word *viejos* to mock those who will pass by the road worker, reshaping the poem's wry economic protest along distinctly Spanish lines. Likewise, Alberti's translation of "leave me standin' here" as "aquí plantado me dejen" continues the work of domesticating the source text, since "plantado" (planted) evokes not the image of a nomadic road worker, but rather that of the agrarian laborer who formed the backbone of the Spanish Republican Army. Alberti's greatest departure from Hughes's original, however, occurs at the beginning of the third stanza when he transforms the understated, biting irony of "Sure, / A road helps everybody" into the bombastic lampoon "¡Qué verdad es que un camino / ayuda a todos!" (How true it is that a road helps everybody!). This decision arguably infuses Alberti's text with a criticism of the Catholic Church (a church allied with the Nationalists), since "camino" (arguably not the best choice of words to describe the type of road Hughes offers) often carries with it a religious dimension. Alberti's lampoon therefore works on both economic and religious planes, criticizing the construction (by many) of a road for the few while simultaneously mocking the church's *camino* to God, a *camino* co-opted by fascist forces and hardly helpful to everybody. Moreover, Alberti's wry economic critique is drawn in starker terms than is Hughes's. Whereas

Hughes's speaker "get[s]" to see the rich "ride so fine," Alberti's speaker has the good "fortuna" (fortune) to witness "tanto lujo" (so much luxury). Hence, Alberti's Hughes, offered in translation, is not only a Black American spokesman who speaks to Spanish concerns but also a poet militantly engaged with the international language of Marxist economic and social critique.

The translations composed by Alberti and Delgado—in combination with Miguel Alejandro's translations of "¡Buenos días, revolución!" ("Good Morning, Revolution") and "El Waldorf-Astoria" ("Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria") printed in *Nueva Cultura* in 1936—comprise nearly the whole of Langston Hughes's oeuvre published in Spain before his arrival at the Alianza in August 1937. The Hughes known to the Spanish reading public was therefore a decidedly radical Hughes, firmly embedded in leftist circles, agitation, and aesthetics. Hughes's correspondence with Nancy Cunard and Pablo Neruda suggests that he was not only aware of this status prior to his entry into Spain, but actively engaged in enhancing it by composing radical poetry for the Republican cause. In a letter dated March 5, 1937,⁸ Nancy Cunard—writing in tandem with Neruda—asked Hughes to write a poem about the Spanish Civil War whose publication would aid the Republican cause:

Dear Langston, Here is a request. You will most certainly know (with your long and full acquaintance with American-Latin and Spanish poetry) the name and works of Pablo Neruda, a famous Chilean poet; I spent much time with him and his friends when in Madrid. At present he is in Paris, and together we have decided to make a whole series of poems, by poets of diverse nationalities, on and for the people and government of Spain. We want one from you; we think of you most particularly as the one in America that will make such a poem, from the heart and from the revolutionary angle.⁹

Cunard flatters Hughes by alluding to his past work, and by coyly praising his "full acquaintance" with Hispanic poetry. She then informs Hughes that Neruda is not only well acquainted with his work, but sees Hughes as the ideal American to provide a poem "for the people and government of Spain" that is "from the heart and from the revolutionary angle." Cunard emphasizes Neruda's connection to Spain by

mentioning him and his friends as her hosts in Madrid, and implies that her request is one made on behalf of the Republic's literati. Drawing her letter to a close, Cunard replies to a question probably posed in previous correspondence, telling Hughes "Yes, I have Valdés' anthology." Ildefonso Pereda Valdés's *Antología de la poesía negra americana*, published in Santiago in Chile in 1936, contains translations of eleven of Hughes's poems.¹⁰ The temporal proximity of Cunard's letter and Pereda Valdés's anthology again reveals a Hughes intensely aware of and concerned about the publication of his poetry in translation. It is therefore not a stretch to assume that Hughes was well acquainted with his Spanish persona even before he received Cunard's and Neruda's request.

Hughes responded by submitting his "Song of Spain," which was promptly published alongside a poem written by Federico García Lorca in the third of Cunard and Neruda's series of pamphlets of pro-Republican war poems (printed in French and Spanish) in April 1937.¹¹ At present, no copy of this pamphlet is extant, and the poem from García Lorca's oeuvre selected for the pamphlet is not known. Nevertheless, Cunard and Neruda's decision to place Hughes's work alongside that of the poet-martyr of the Republican cause testifies to the enormous capital Hughes held in international leftist circles before and during the Spanish Civil War, and to a desire to combine this capital with that of García Lorca in furtherance of the cause.

"Song of Spain" presents a speaker whose desire to know Spain transforms him, in the course of the poem, from a spectator into an active participant in an international workers' struggle against the forces of fascism. The poem begins with a meta-commentary on the proletarian revolutionary aesthetic that marked Hughes's poetic production throughout the civil war, and then pursues an incessant line of questioning that dramatizes the problematic of how best to represent the state of Spain in aesthetic terms:

Come now, all you who are singers,
And sing me the song of Spain.
Sing it very simply that I might understand.

What is the song of Spain?

Flamenco is the song of Spain:
Gypsies, guitars, dancing

Death and love and heartbreak
 To a heel tap and a swirl of fingers
 On three strings.
Flamenco is the song of Spain

I do not understand. (1–11)¹²

In line with a pattern of questioning that comprises the first half of the poem, Hughes's speaker expresses a desire to know the "song of Spain" and is provided with an answer that illustrates the rich history of Spanish achievement in the arts. However, these answers—composed, in part, of references to the works of Goya, Velasquez, Murillo, and Cervantes—ultimately frustrate the speaker's earnest desire to know Spain's song, leaving the impression that the Spain he seeks to know can neither be sung in traditional terms nor represented by the aesthetics of times past. This impression is concretized when the speaker, having rejected *Don Quixote* as a candidate for the song of Spain, exclaims, "A bomber's plane's / The song of Spain" (31–32). With these lines, Hughes not only intimates that the fight against Franco and his German bombers has fundamentally changed Spain's song but also recasts the speaker's rejection of Spanish tradition, since reference and recourse to the Spain of old comprised one of the mainstays of Franco's propaganda machine. The poem then takes a turn toward agitprop, calling upon the workers of the world to end their complicity in Franco's atrocities by refusing to build the tools of war, and it does not shy away from self-indictment: "I made those bombs for Spain / I must not do it again" (71–72). This "I" is but a part of an international "we" of workers inspired by and linked to the Spanish Republican cause, a cause that, as the poem's final lines suggest, spills over Spanish borders: "A workers' world / Is the song of Spain" (80–81).

The "I" who earnestly seeks to know "the song of Spain" bears much in common with the Langston Hughes that Alberti first met. This meeting didn't take place in Spain in 1937, but rather in Mexico City in 1935. This fact is substantiated by the date on several letters of introduction written for Hughes by Alberti and addressed to, among others, Emilio Delgado, Emilio Prados, Arturo Serrano Plaja, and Pablo Neruda. These unsealed (and most likely undelivered) letters display the fast friendship between the two men and bolster the argument that Hughes was well aware of his nascent Spanish persona. They also make clear that Alberti, well before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, saw

Hughes as a powerful ally for the Hispanic Left who was possessed by a sincere desire to know Spain's song.¹³ In a letter dated May 29, 1935, Alberti introduces Hughes to Emilio Prados as “el gran poeta que tú ya conoces por la revista ‘Octubre’” (the great poet whom you know from *Octubre*), and informs Prados that he and Hughes have become “grandes amigos en México” (great friends in Mexico City). He then relates that Hughes “ahora quiera ser amigo tuyo” (now wants to be your friend) and “quiere ver Málaga” (to see Malaga), and he implores Prados to “le oriente en esa parte del sur que tan bien conoces” (guide him through that part of the south that you know so well).¹⁴ The requests and characterizations in Alberti's letter to Prados are mirrored in nearly all of the letters of introduction that Alberti gave to Hughes. He is repeatedly described as “the great poet” who appeared in *Octubre* and a friend not only to Alberti, but to Alberti's circle and, arguably, to Spain as a whole. As Alberti writes to Arturo Serrano Plaja, “Vereis qué gran amigo se os entra por España” (You will see what a great friend has come to you by way of Spain).¹⁵ Alberti persistently portrays Hughes as open-minded and eager to acquire a better knowledge of Spain, and implores his friends to either “guide” Hughes through Spain or bring him into close contact with Madrid's international literati. The letter that Alberti addressed to Neruda¹⁶ provides a prime example of Hughes's will to know and of Alberti's desire to control the frame of instruction:

México, 29 mayo 1935

Querido Neruda:

Quien te visita es el gran poeta Langston Hughes al que queremos mucho y admiramos más. Va con el deseo de quedarse una [illegible] en Madrid y está con nosotros. Preséntale a Vicente Aleixandre, Federico, al gran Kotapol a todos. Orientale en el cazalla y otra maravillas. Como tú hablas inglés puedes entenderte con él admira frecuente. Aunque él habla muy bien castellano. Llega a España dispuesto a quedarse con la boca abierta. Llevadlo a Toledo, Segovia, etc. No te pido sólo a ti Pablo sino a todos.

Con Langston te envío todo mi amistad verdadera,
Rafael¹⁷

Dear Neruda,

The man who visits you is the great poet Langston Hughes who we love greatly and admire more. He comes with the

hope of staying [illegible] in Madrid and with us. Introduce him to Vicente Aleixandre, Federico, to the great Kotapol, to everyone. Familiarize him with cazalla and other wonders. Since you speak English you can deal with his habitual admiration. Yet, he speaks Spanish well. He arrives in Spain ready to die from a whetted appetite. Take him to Toledo, Segovia, etc. I'm not just asking this of you Pablo, but of everyone.

With Langston I send you all of my true friendship,
Rafael¹⁸

From the very first line, Alberti seeks to enlist and invest Neruda in the project of exposing Hughes to Spain. Neruda had yet to meet Hughes, but Alberti slyly includes him in a “we” that loves Hughes greatly and admires him more. Implying a mutual affection while betraying a desire to orchestrate Hughes’s experience of Spain, Alberti emphasizes that Hughes comes not simply with the desire to stay in Madrid, but to stay in Madrid with “us.” He asks Neruda to plunge Hughes into the midst of Spain’s leftist literati, to introduce him to Aleixandre, to (arguably) García Lorca, to “everyone.”¹⁹ And he cajoles Neruda by appealing to his fidelity to this collective, to an “everyone” involved in the imagined enterprise of guiding Hughes through Spain. Setting aside the fact that the letter testifies to Hughes’s intent to visit Spain (and Alberti’s intent to orchestrate this visit) prior to the outbreak of war, Alberti’s letter repeatedly, and playfully, refers to Hughes as someone curious about Spain, and as someone struck by the wonder in almost everything. With the double entendre contained in the phrase “llega a España dispuesto a quedarse con la boca abierta,” Alberti implies that Hughes is both hungry to know and somewhat clueless, since “dispuesto a quedarse” can be read either literally as “ready to stay” or colloquially as “dying to know,” and “con la boca abierta” oscillates between “with a whetted appetite” and “astonished.” Nevertheless, Alberti’s letter to Neruda highlights two aspects of Hughes’s encounter with Spain that are central to the present argument. Namely, that well before his tenure as a war correspondent, Hughes was propelled toward Spain by an earnest and sincere desire to better know other peoples, and that elements of the Spanish Left were hungry to orchestrate Hughes’s encounter and to welcome him into their midst.

But who were these other peoples? Arguably, in May 1935, they were limited to the citizens of Spain and the literati of Madrid. However, by

the time Hughes arrived in 1937, the country was in the throes of a civil war populated by hosts and hostiles drawn from around the world. Alberti may well have seen Hughes as the ideal candidate to publicize the Republican cause of “Liberty, Justice, and human dignity” to his “brothers in color and blood.” However, as the column he published in the *Baltimore Afro-American* on October 30, 1937, corroborates, Hughes conceived the purpose of his tenure in Spain along slightly different lines, and in that column he announces that he places a greater premium on the racial dimensions of the war than on its radical ones:

Why had I come to Spain? To write for the colored press. I knew that Spain once belonged to the Moors, a colored people ranging from light dark to white. Now the Moors have come again to Spain with the fascist armies as cannon fodder for Franco. But, on the loyalist side there are many colored peoples of various nationalities in the International Brigades. I want to write about both Moors and colored people.²⁰

As he does time and again in both his war correspondence and his memoir, Hughes—displaying the same earnest desire to know other peoples that Alberti sees in his “boca abierta,” a desire which springs, modestly and carefully, from a state of wonder or admiration—regards his task as a journalist for the “colored press” as one that reposes in him the responsibility to write specifically about the involvement of “colored people” in the war. Hughes leaves the matter of who is colored open to debate by qualifying the Moors as a “colored people ranging from light dark to white” and then—after noting the presence of “many colored peoples of various nationalities in the International Brigades”—separating them with the proclamation that he wishes “to write about both Moors and colored people.” Nevertheless, Hughes approaches both camps from a position of wonder, and is careful to admit his relative ignorance about either side of the trenches. He displays no in-depth knowledge of the Moors—he is aware only of their distant past and their present moral predicament—and he offers the reader still less about the colored people in the International Brigades. Rather, Hughes implies that he and his readers are, in essence, starting from scratch, that they are both engaged in the process of encountering, and beginning to understand, the colored Other through writing.

Understanding Hughes’s commitment to know better the colored peoples of the world and to document their collaboration in an inter-

national struggle against fascism leads back to Hughes's relationship with W. E. B. Du Bois and his investment in Du Bois's vision of Pan-Africanism. When Hughes entered Spain in 1937, he had certainly distanced himself from Walter White's NAACP by aligning with the Communist Party and the Comintern's diagnosis of and cure for what Du Bois labeled "the problem of the twentieth century," but he had done very little to distance himself from his childhood hero.²¹ Du Bois had also come to see class struggle—where the white and Black proletariats were considered distinct—at the core of the so-called race problem in the United States. In fact, Hughes's extant correspondence with Du Bois suggests that the two men remained in cordial contact. In a letter dated May 26, 1941,²² Du Bois not only thanked Hughes for his "kind note of May the seventeenth," but praised him for his continued growth: "You have done much to be proud of since June 1921," the date of Du Bois's publication of Hughes's first poem. More to the point, Du Bois's letters convey his belief that Hughes remained unshaken in his commitment to the Pan-Africanist cause; and Du Bois himself repeatedly enlisted the poet's help in the organization of Pan-African Congresses and conventions in letters from 1929 to 1945.²³ However, the "first poet of the black proletariat" had continued to grow wary of iterations of racial essentialism and distrustful of monolithic formulations of racial categories, as had Du Bois. Hence, many of the tenets that grounded other pan-Africanist visions—like Marcus Garvey's UNIA whose most famous slogan, "Africa for Africans at home and abroad," embodied the racial essentialism at the heart of his African Zionism—must have proved troublesome to Hughes. Nevertheless, Hughes's address "Too Much of Race"—delivered to the Second International Writers Congress shortly before the poet crossed over the French border into Spain—characterizes the problem of the worldwide color line and its relation to the spread of fascism in terms that are decidedly Pan-Africanist (in Du Bois's sense) and Marxist. In so doing, the speech presents its audience with a remarkably deft confusion that reworks several of the assumptions that underlie both of these global frameworks, offering a Hughesian internationalism. This vision allows for differences in unity, for the possibility of racial self-definition and expression freed from the baggage of racial essentialism, and for collective, including interracial, action against the malevolent forces of fascism and capitalism.

The literary criticism on "Too Much of Race" has been marked by a pervasive tendency to view Hughes's remarks not only as Marxist dogma but also as testimony to his rejection of the concept of race itself, a re-

jection that was part and parcel of his international awakening, which prompted him to forsake nationalist formulations of identity that bolstered the interests of capitalism. To support these arguments, critics most often point to the speech's title and to Hughes's summary remark that he and other leftist writers like him—namely, Nicolás Guillén, Jacques Roumain, and the Indian-born Raj Anand—“represent the end of race.” These arguments have merit, since Hughes's concluding sentiments unquestionably employ the rhetoric and reason of Marxism to challenge traditional conceptions of race and their role in antifascist politics. Nonetheless, these remarks employ the rhetoric of Du Bois's Pan-Africanism to designate a collective that is capable of opposing the rise of European fascism, and, in so doing, beg a reconsideration of Hughes's vexing claim to “represent the end of race.” In closing, Hughes offers the following explanation for the U.S. State Department's refusal to grant him permission to go to Spain as a representative of the Negro press and for the British government's seizure of Anand's passport:

It is because the reactionary and Fascist forces of the world know that writers like Anand and myself, leaders like Herdon, and poets like Guillén and Roumain represent the great longing that is in the hearts of darker peoples of the world to reach out their hands in friendship and brotherhood to all the white races of the earth. The Fascists know that we long to be rid of conquering and of being conquered, to be rid of all the ugliness of poverty and imperialism that eat away the heart of life today. We represent the end of race. And the Fascists know that when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war, and no more money for the munition makers, because the workers of the world will have triumphed.²⁴

Making recourse to terminology reminiscent of Du Bois's, Hughes asserts that he and his fellow writers (and the labor leader Angelo Herdon) pose a threat to “the Fascists” because they represent the desire of the “darker peoples” of the world to achieve fellowship with “all the white races of the earth.” This fellowship is figured as the precondition for the cessation of a cycle of conflict that serves the conjoined interests of fascism, capitalism, and war. However, Hughes stops short of alluding to the world's darker races whom Du Bois's politics seeks to unite to combat the forces of Western imperialism and colonialism, and instead

envisions a far more expansive collective of workers as the antidote for the ills of fascism. Arguably, this collective of “darker peoples” and “white races” represents a felicitous collision between nationalism and internationalism, where the terms “races” and “peoples” not only refer to ethnic identities and affiliations but, respectively, connote fidelities to nation-states and to international allegiances forged outside the context of state relations. Thus, Hughes and his comrades can be said to “represent the end of race” insofar as they represent an international brotherhood of “darker peoples” united under a workers’ banner. However, Hughes’s leftist critique complicates this interpretation by inverting the economic logic which underlies the traditional Marxist conception of race and capitalism. It is not the divide-and-conquer logic of capitalism that imbues the nation-state with its conception of race and foments racism; rather, it is racism that engenders capitalism and, in turn, foments war among nation-states: “when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war.” In this critique, race antedates both nationalism and internationalism. What results is a dizzying, albeit purposeful, confusion, as Hughes’s dual reworking of Du Boisian and Marxist ideologies serves to destabilize the very conceptions of race and nation that comprise the backbone of his antifascist tract.

Hughes’s conundrums and the deft destabilizations they engender do not simply call conceptions of race and nation into question or prompt a dismissal of either as illusory. Rather, they are arguably intended to highlight an ethical strategy that permeates the address as a whole, a strategy that places a premium on keeping race grounded on shifting soil while recognizing and seeking to curb the dangers engendered by its malleability:

The same Fascists who forced Italian peasants to fight in Africa now force African Moors to fight in Europe. They do not care about color when they can use you for profits or for war . . . Race means nothing when it can be turned to Fascist use. And yet race means everything when the Fascists of the world use it as a bugaboo and a terror to keep the working masses from getting together. Just as in America they tell whites that Negroes are dangerous brutes and rapists, so in Germany they lie about the Jews, and in Italy they cast their verbal spit upon the Ethiopians.²⁵

Evoking the leftist divide-and-conquer conception of race mentioned above, Hughes describes fascism’s use of race as a “bugaboo” that is

intended to prevent solidarity among the working masses and to bolster the interests of profits and war. However, he stops far short of asserting that race can be used only in this manner or considered only in this light. Rather, race becomes a threat to peace and to the working masses when it is specifically enlisted in the service of fascism, where its malleability is exploited for nefarious ends. Race is both “nothing” and “everything” in fascist hands; it is a kind of X factor helping to facilitate the dissemination of falsehoods that serve the interests of economic and social discrimination. With this in mind, one can read Hughes’s claim that he, Guillén, Anand, and Roumain “represent the end of race” as one that positions the “colored” writer and his works as instruments that thwart fascism’s capacity to manipulate race at will. The more Hughes writes from the perspective of a Negro, the more difficult it becomes for fascists to paint Negroes as “dangerous brutes and rapists,” to, in essence, make too much of race. In this sense, writing serves—as it does in Hughes’s remarks concerning “Moors” and “colored people”—as a means to know better both self and Other, and race, while still malleable, becomes less capable of meaning “nothing” and “everything.”

To advance his dual intent to destabilize authoritative (and potentially essentialist or fascist) racial discourses and to dramatize the problem of giving voice to an oppressed population (as does the advocacy of Pan-Africanism), Hughes begins his address by claiming the right to speak on behalf of the American Negro and then lays siege to the grounds on which his claim rests. After qualifying his country as one marked both by an unequal distribution of wealth and by a racial prejudice that is the historical legacy of slavery, Hughes announces:

I come to the Second International Writers Congress representing my country, America, but most especially the Negro peoples of America, and the poor peoples of America—because I am both a Negro and poor. And that combination of color and of poverty gives me the right then to speak for the most oppressed group in America, the group that has known so little of American democracy, the fifteen million Negroes who dwell within our borders.²⁶

Hughes does not claim a right to speak “for the most oppressed group in America” on the grounds that he is their representative. Rather, his authority resides in being “both a Negro and poor,” and therefore a representative of the oppressed group for which he speaks. In emphasizing

the disenfranchisement of this group, Hughes undemocratically asserts the right to speak as one of them while democratically granting that same right to the unheard “fifteen million Negroes who dwell within our borders.” Hence, Hughes’s is an authoritative voice, but not the authoritative voice for “the group that has known so little of American democracy,” and it is this discrepancy that dramatizes the vexing problem that lies not only at the heart of Hughes’s opening remarks but also at the heart of Du Bois’s Pan-Africanism, namely: How can one speak credibly for those denied a voice without contributing to their silencing?

The Hughes who entered Spain as a war correspondent in the company of Nicolás Guillén (a correspondent for the leftist periodical *Mediodía*) was therefore a writer concerned about the ethical perils of one voice serving as the voice for a disenfranchised population. He was likewise concerned about the dangers of authoritative racial discourse, about the potential for writing to serve as a means to know the Other better and thereby disrupt fascism’s use of race, and about the success of the Spanish Republican cause. But he was also a writer whom Alberti had championed to his brothers in color and blood as “el poeta negro de la revolución” in *Nueva Cultura*, and as the voice who would publicize the cause of “Liberty, Justice, and human dignity.” Notwithstanding the expectations associated with his valorization, Hughes also had the responsibility to report on “colored” involvement in an international war that had tilted decidedly in Franco’s favor by the time of his arrival. Hughes’s wartime poetic production was informed by all of these concerns, characterizations, and responsibilities, and also bears the imprint of three additional and interrelated factors: his translation of Federico García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano*, his residency at the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, and the publication explosion of *romanceros de la guerra* (war ballads).

On October 25, 1937, *Mediodía* published Nicolás Guillén’s “Un poeta en espardeñas” (“A Poet of Espadrilles”), an article that purports to reproduce a conversation in Valencia between Guillén, the poet-martyr Miguel Hernández, and Langston Hughes. The reconstructed conversation testifies to Hughes’s persisting desire to articulate a poetry of revolution, the weight cast by García Lorca’s shadow on Republican poetic production, and the revolutionary capital held by *romanceros de la guerra*. Guillén begins with a brief biography of Hernández and then describes—via citation and narration—how the three men quickly turned their attention to the evolving relationship between poetry and war:

The conversation went drifting toward the struggle in Spain and toward the possibility for a literature closer to our pain. In other words, the possibility of bringing a new spirit to Spanish letters, one that brought to them the life of the trenches, the martyrdom of the cities, and the crimes of the fascist invaders.

“But it should not simply be”—one of us pointed out—“a literature of war, but also, and this is more important, a literature of revolution.”

Miguel intervened and said:

“I believe in that literature of ours, the product of the revolution and of the war. How’s it going to be produced? I don’t know. But only a total lack of artistic sensibility would make it possible for one to feel how death patrols the battlefronts, and then refuse to help our voice broadcast and fix that drama . . .”

Interrupting, Langston Hughes exclaimed:

“It’s not only that. Rather, we know how mankind’s great movements always introduce a concomitant artistic movement, principally literary. The war in Spain has an enormous dramatic force, really, but the social transformation that is underway as a result of that war is still more profound. Moreover, it’s a transformation that has worked enough already to propel a people towards the conquest of their liberty.”²⁷

Guillén intimates a shared investment among the three poets in the project of articulating a literature that is “closer to our pain,” but then complicates this “our”—composed of poets from Catalonia, Cuba, and the United States—by confining the project of infusing literature with the stark realities of the Spanish Civil War to the realm of specifically Spanish letters. In a limited way, he not only emphasizes the international dimensions of the civil war, but highlights the pitfalls of representing an international conflict in strictly nationalist terms. Guillén’s subsequent report of an interjection from an outside “someone”—who is logically Hughes but might be Guillén himself—brings this literary reworking, or possibility for a literature “closer to our pain,” back into the international arena, since this appeal by “someone” for a literature of “revolution” over one of “war” suggests a preference for the mobile and international over the entrenched and local.

Hughes's rejection of Hernández's vision of a new literature capable of broadcasting and fixing "this drama" offers further evidence of his desire to mine the Spanish Republican cause for an international revolutionary aesthetic. For Hughes, it is not enough to provide a view of Spanish trenches stalked by death, since this would amount to little more than reportage. Rather, he posits the possibility for a revolutionary literature that, while coming out of the Spanish Civil War, is also possessed of sufficient "dramatic" vigor to engender a literature as powerful as the larger forces propelling Spain's social transformation. Moreover, Hughes's reference to the Republican cause as one of "mankind's great movements" firmly locates the civil war in a global sphere, and anchors his drive to create a new literary movement for the worldwide proletariat that does not simply speak of "revolution" but also foments it. Responding to Hughes's interruption, Hernández intimates that the Spanish Civil War has already given birth—or more precisely, rebirth—to its literary companion:

—En las trincheras hay un gran número de hombres del pueblo cuya vocación literaria ha brotado frente al enemigo; y no escasa parte de tal producción acusa temperamentos de primer orden. ¿No habéis leído algunas de esas cosas, principalmente los romances de la Guerra?²⁸

"In the trenches there are a great number of men of the people whose literary vocation sprouted facing the enemy; and there's no small part of that production that demonstrates first-order talent. Haven't you all read some of those things, principally the war ballads?"²⁹

The "war ballads" or *romanceros de la guerra* to which Hernández refers find a poetic precursor in the *romanceros* of old, poems written or recited in octosyllabic verse, with assonant rhymes ending each even-numbered line. According to Aurelio Espinosa, these *romanceros* date back to the tenth century and had close cousins—in their employment of a popular rhyme scheme, a traditional meter, and a colloquial register, and in their use of themes martial, heroic, and fantastic—in the English popular ballad and the French *ballade*. Prior to the Spanish Civil War, these *romanceros* could be divided into six main categories: *históricos*, which narrate either history or prehistory; *fronterizos*, which offer histories of the war for Granada; *carolingios*, dedicated to

chivalric epics and legends from France; *novelescos*, inspired by common Western folklore; *eruditos*, erudite retellings of popular romances; and *artísticos*, original poems written by professional poets.³⁰ With the advent of the Spanish Civil War, as Hernández relates, the popularity of the *romancero* soared. In the words of Alberti, soldiers and professional poets alike turned to “the old traditional meter” to express “the new political conscience being sung throughout Spain.”³¹ Moreover, Alberti—having received thousands of *romanceros* at the Alianza from the trenches—recalls dedicating a column in *El Mono Azul* to their publication, and qualifies them as “almost journalistic” and as “the most vital language of that reality.”³² In addition to their journalistic quality, the *romanceros de la guerra* served as propaganda, and Eduardo Mayone Dias subdivides them into six categories: *narrativos*, the closest cousins to the *romanceros* of old, and which portrayed episodes from the war from a limited or personal perspective; *encomiásticos*, which differed little from *narrativos* and elegized heroes and heroic deeds in an attempt to bolster esprit de corps; *exhortativos*, utilitarian *romanceros* designed, often apoetically, to incite; *satíricos o insultantes*, generally attacks on an enemy (person or country); *morales*, which offered didactic, exemplary tales of Republican virtue or conduct; and *líricos*, generally small, intimate portraits of individuals (a soldier missing a limb, an orphan, etc.) imbued with the intense atmosphere of war.³³

Hughes, after hearing Guillén tell Hernández how Octavio Paz and Raúl González Tuñón characterized the *romancero* as the revolutionary Spanish form, speaks to the value of the popular *romanceros de la guerra*, but stops short of labeling them as a revolutionary form.³⁴ In fact, when pressed as to whether or not revolutionary poetry should forsake traditional poetic forms in favor of new techniques, the very same (or perhaps dramatically changed) poet who wrote “Cubes” asserts that popular forms and revolutionary poetry go hand in hand:

“I believe that, for now, we cannot forsake traditional forms. They’re the ones the people know, and hence the best vehicle to broadcast a new unrest. On the other hand, two elements have to be weaved together, form and content. It’s always good to talk to the people in a voice that doesn’t alarm them.”³⁵

Thus, Hughes embraces traditional forms as the best vehicle for broadcasting revolutionary unrest precisely because the forms them-

selves do not provoke unease among the people. In short, a shocking message should be delivered by a familiar messenger. Testifying to his vision of the civil war as an event of enormous global importance, Hughes is careful to avoid asserting that the *romancero* is the form to broadcast “unrest,” and suggests instead that it derives its revolutionary potential from its popularity. Hughes remains somewhat vague on the question of what constitutes revolutionary content, but his rejection of Hernández’s vision of a poetry of “war” replete with battlefield descriptions suggests that, for Hughes, the “almost journalistic” *romanceros* do not fit the revolutionary bill. Hence, while Hughes recognizes the potential to mine the “great human movement” of the “war in Spain” for a companion, and equally powerful, literary movement composed of popular forms, he does not confine this potential to a specific form, nor does he view poetry that merely describes revolution as revolutionary. Nevertheless, the Hughes who took up residency at the Alianza was surrounded by distinguished poets who had both embraced the *romancero* as the poetic form of the Spanish Republican cause and, like the soldiers in the trenches, were actively engaged in the project of writing them. These authors, many of whom collaborated with Hughes on his translation of *Romancero gitano*, included Rafael Alberti, Emilio Prados, Miguel Hernández, Arturo Serrano Plaja, Manuel Altolaguirre, and José Bergamín.³⁶

Although the *romancero* is a popular Spanish poetic form possibly predating the tenth century, its explosive popularity during the Spanish Civil War among both soldiers in the trenches and writers at the Alianza can also be attributed to the impact of Federico García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano*, first published in its entirety in 1928. Hughes’s annotated copy of García Lorca’s collection—an edition published in 1937 with an introduction by Alberti and archived with Hughes’s papers at Yale—attests to the attention Hughes paid to Alberti’s claim that the tips of the *romancero*’s wings were García Lorca and the people. In the introduction Alberti writes:

You [Lorca], on the stones of the old Spanish romancero, with Juan Ramón and Machado, were another, unusual and strong, at the same time the foundation and crown for the old Castilian tradition. Then the war came. Our country’s people and poets write romances. After ten months of fighting, almost a thousand have been collected. You—the glory going mostly to you—walk beneath almost all of them. Your voice, remembered, through other voices is heard in our war.³⁷

Addressing his introduction to the martyred poet, Alberti portrays the *romanceros de la guerra* as the inheritance of García Lorca bequeathed to both the people and poets. Alberti paints García Lorca's poetic intervention as one built on the stones of the old Spanish *romancero*, and then ushers in a new time period, the war, where García Lorca is portrayed as both a poetic foundation and the poet laureate. Not only is García Lorca immortalized through his poetic achievements, a more classical notion of fame, but he is also remembered and renewed through the people and poets writing *romanceros* in service of the Republican cause. His voice becomes the voice of others that form the soundscape for "our war."

Alberti's hopeful testament to García Lorca's popular appeal belies the aesthetic differences between his *romanceros* and the contemporary *romanceros de la guerra*. García Lorca, in the words of Miguel Hernández, "le impuso un sello único" (put his unique seal) on the form, reworking a genre marked by its linear narration in order to produce poems that are now celebrated for their vexing temporal play and experimentation with non-cohesive narratives.³⁸ In contrast, the actual *romanceros de la guerra* published during the civil war closely followed the traditions of old, and more closely resembled *romanceros históricos* and *romanceros fronterizos*.

Alberti's desire to link García Lorca's voice to that of the people, however vexed it may be, exhibits his commitment to a proletarian aesthetic that permeated Republican literary production at the Alianza and echoes Hernández's and Guillén's desire for a literature "closer to our pain." The governing principle behind this aesthetic underscores the enormous influence of García Lorca's legacy on artists in residence at the Alianza and Alberti's role in shaping that legacy. In fact, it was only by way of recollecting Alberti's very words that Hughes could describe García Lorca's aesthetic in his second autobiography:

Alberti added, "What the members of the Alianza want to do is to make art life, and life art, with no gulf between the artist and the people. After all, as Lorca said, 'The poem, the song, the picture is only water drawn from the well of the people, and it should be given back to them in a cup of beauty so that they may drink—and in drinking, understand themselves.'"³⁹

As Alberti frames matters for Hughes, Republican art is produced with the aim to link the artist with the people, and this aim is figured

as the legacy of García Lorca. In effect, Alberti, through García Lorca, envisions the poetic production of the Alianza as an attempt to bridge the “gulf” between art and life, and as a road to self-understanding on both individual and communal levels. The work of art itself holds the paradoxical status of a gift given from artist to people, as water “given back to them in a cup of beauty,” but it is also the perennial property of the people, a gift to the artist for which he fashions a receptacle for its return. García Lorca’s poetic practice, as Alberti records it, may purport to provide both self and community with the capacity to better “understand themselves,” but the portrait of life it offers is neither crystal clear nor straightforward. Far from the “almost journalistic” quality that Alberti ascribes to the *romanceros de la guerra*, the poems that comprise García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano*—poems which, as García Lorca frames them, paint a portrait of Andalusia—offer their reader, in Christopher Maurer’s words, “the feeling of a story half told or understood,” “narrative gaps,” and “the shadow of narration.”⁴⁰ Hence, if García Lorca’s *Romancero gitano* does wish to offer its readers “water drawn from the well of the people” in a “cup of beauty” in order to promote understanding, then this understanding is one that undercuts itself by highlighting its own incompleteness.

The project of highlighting the incompleteness of knowledge vis-à-vis a portrait of Andalusia is one that is arguably informed by García Lorca’s desire not to offer a portrait of the province of his day, but rather to render Andalusia throughout time in a manner that forefronts its heterogeneity past and present. Seeking to clarify what he intended to achieve with his *romanceros*, García Lorca relates:

Although it is called Gypsy, the book as a whole is the poem of Andalusia, and I call it Gypsy because the Gypsy is the most distinguished, profound, and aristocratic element of my country, the one most representative of its way of being and which best preserves the fire, blood, and alphabet of Andalusian and universal truth.

The book, therefore, is a retable expressing Andalusia, with Gypsies, horses, archangels, planets, its Jewish breeze, its Roman breeze, rivers, crimes, the everyday touch of the smuggler and the celestial touch of the naked children of Cordova who tease Saint Raphael. A book in which the visible Andalusia is hardly mentioned but in which palpitates the invisible one. And now I am going to be explicit. It is an

anti-picturesque, anti-folkloric book, with not a single short jacket, bullfighter's suit of lights, wide-brimmed sombrero or tambourine.⁴¹

Given the nearly perennial persecution and disenfranchisement of the Romany in Spain, García Lorca's characterization of the "Gypsy" as "the most distinguished, profound and aristocratic element of my country" can only be read as a creative reworking of their place in Andalusian society and history. This reworking eschews the awful truth in order to posit a "universal" one, and offers a vision not of the Romany, but of García Lorca's imaginative figuration of the "representative" "Gypsy," a wandering figure whose movement comes to symbolize García Lorca's poetic movement through an invisible Andalusian landscape. García Lorca's avowed disinterest in portraying "visible Andalusia" works in harmony with his repositioning of the "Gypsy," just as his rejection of the picturesque and folkloric (and their accoutrements) does not simply represent a rejection of the clichéd but also reflects his desire to present the reader with a new vision of Andalusia, an Andalusia whose "truth" has yet to generate a folklore of its own. Hence, García Lorca undercuts his "universal truth" claim while simultaneously relocating it to the realm of letters.

García Lorca's reference to elements that comprise his "retable expressing Andalusia" highlights the temporal disjuncture that permeates his collection and alludes to several of the poems therein. His mention of "the naked children of Córdoba who tease Saint Raphael" is arguably foremost among these allusions and evokes his "San Rafael (Córdoba)," a poem exemplary of the manner in which the collection's imagery depicts Andalusia by conflating past and present, placing era upon era and empire upon empire:

Y mientras el puente sopla
diez rumores de Neptuno,
vendedores de tabaco
huyen por el roto muro.

II
Un solo pez en el agua
que a los dos Córdoba junta:
Blanda Córdoba de juncos.
Córdoba de arquitectura.

Niños de cara impasible,
 en la orilla se desnudan,
 aprendices de Tobías. (22–33)⁴²

Hughes translates:

And while the bridge whispers
 ten rumors of Neptune,
 tobacco sellers flee
 along a broken wall.

Only one fish in the water
 that joins the two Córdovas:
 pliant Córdova of reeds,
 Córdova of architecture.
 Children with impassive faces
 undress on the river bank,
 apprentices of Tobias⁴³

García Lorca paints a scene at once inhabited by the “the naked children of Córdoba who tease St. Raphael” and by a “Roman breeze” that “whispers / ten rumors of Neptune.” The action of the poem and the history of Andalusia work in harmony to form García Lorca’s “retable,” and the result is a temporal confusion that depicts Córdoba as a city not only built on the ruins of civilizations past, but one inhabited by a past that still “whispers.” García Lorca further compounds eras and empires by evoking a shared religious icon and an intertext that belongs to both Christianity and Islam. As H. Ramsden convincingly argues, García Lorca’s evocation of the “one fish” that joins “two Córdovas” is intended to refer to a story in the book of Tobit wherein the archangel Raphael helps Tobias catch a fish that attempts to eat him, and thereby provides Tobias with the necessary tools (the fish’s heart, liver, and gallbladder) to cast out devils and cure his father’s blindness.⁴⁴ García Lorca himself would draw attention to the story’s shared heritage when, in a lecture on *Romancero gitano*, he labeled Raphael the “peregrine archangel who lives in the Bible and the Koran . . . and who fishes in the river of Córdoba.”⁴⁵ Moreover, the archangel and the cures he helped to produce are commemorated in Córdoba by a series of statues, one of which can be found on the Roman bridge alluded to in the passage above.⁴⁶ Hence, García Lorca’s intertextual play offers a heterogeneous Andalusia, one

that speaks of multiple peoples, multiple empires, and multiple faiths, a space where action takes place in the present, as “children with impassive faces / undress,” but which is nevertheless rooted firmly inside and outside of history. In short, via the evocation of intertexts and living history, García Lorca infuses his Spanish Catholic Córdoba with the Córdoba of the Roman Empire and the Córdoba of the Caliphate’s second period of glory (from 929 to 1031).

Hughes’s 1937 translation “St. Raphael,” as excerpted above, bolsters García Lorca’s composite vision of Córdoba and offers a small piece of testimony to Hughes’s careful attention to and reproduction of García Lorca’s verb tenses in his *Gypsy Ballads*. Hughes chooses not to replicate García Lorca’s two short phrases, punctuated by periods, which distinguish one Córdoba from the other, “Blanda Córdoba de juncos. / Córdoba de arquitectura,” and augments the degree to which the poem blends one historical era into another by offering the conjoined “pliant Córdoba of reeds, Córdoba of architecture.” Likewise, his decision to translate “blanda” (soft) as “pliant” results in a translation that is arguably literal and which also juxtaposes Córdoba’s mutability (positioned in political and material frameworks) against its historic, adamantine architecture. Nevertheless, the “vague and mysterious space time continuum” that Charles H. Leighton attributes to García Lorca’s romances is not solely the creation of the poet’s synthesis and economy.⁴⁷ García Lorca’s “continuum” is also well served by his adept manipulation and sequencing of verb tenses. Joseph Szertics regards this manipulation as, in part, in step with the *romanceros* of old, but also notes—citing Christoph Eich’s *Federico García Lorca: Poeta de intensidad*—that García Lorca’s verb conjugation allows him to highlight and complicate “la noción del aspecto” (the notion of aspect).⁴⁸ García Lorca’s “notion of aspect,” in turn, is reflected in the manner in which he employs verbs, a manner that, as Szertics figures matters, allows him to introduce temporal confusion into a form most commonly associated with its narrative clarity. Echoing Eich, Szertics cites the opening lines of the collection’s first poem, “Romance de la luna, luna” (“Ballad of the Moon, Moon”) to illustrate his point:

La luna vino a la fragua
 con su polisón de nardos.
 El niño la mira, mira.
 El niño la está mirando. (1–4)⁴⁹

The moon came to the forge
 with her bustle of spikenards.
 The child looks, looks.
 The child is looking. (1–4)⁵⁰

Szertics asserts that the order of events presented to the reader, combined with García Lorca's sequencing of verb tenses, creates scenes wherein a "cierta oposición aspectual" (certain opposition of aspect) between verbs in the preterit like "vino" (came) and verbs in the present or present progressive tense like "mira" (looks) or "está mirando" (is looking) gives rise to narrative confusion.⁵¹ Having disrupted the normal narrative economy between imperfect, preterit, and present, García Lorca makes it difficult not only to determine what constitutes the backdrop of the narrative but also obfuscates the position of the present. How can we consider the arrival of the moon as somehow setting the stage for the poem's action when the description of this arrival uses the preterit instead of the more customary imperfect? Are we to assign an added dimension to the moon's arrival based on these very grounds? Who occupies the present—a child who persistently "looks, looks" or a child who "is looking"?

Whatever the case or confusion might be, Hughes's translation of *Romancero gitano* displays, as does the above excerpt, a remarkable attentiveness and fidelity to García Lorca's unconventional manipulation of verbs, reproducing them tense for tense even in cases where this fidelity makes for a translation that, arguably, reads poorly. By way of contrast, Christopher Maurer's eminently poetic and readable translation of the same passage clarifies what, in Hughes's and García Lorca's formulations, is left somewhat obscure:

The moon came to the forge
 wearing a bustle of nards.
 The boy is looking at her.
 The boy is looking hard.⁵²

Perhaps realizing that the sonic resonance of García Lorca's third line cannot be reproduced in English translation, Maurer forsakes the repetition of the present tense "mira" (looks). This repetition—when aided by García Lorca's combination of "i" and "a" sounds—reads both strangely and lyrically in Spanish, but draws even greater attention to it-

self in English where, divorced from the source text's sonic play, it reads somewhat clumsily. Albeit in separate lines, Maurer proffers a repetition of the present progressive in its stead, and reverses the order of the third and fourth lines, replacing the emphasized "mira, mira" (looks, looks) with what arguably could be considered its semantic equivalent, "is looking hard." In addition to creating a more readable translation, Maurer offers a passage with decidedly less temporal confusion than does Hughes, as warring present tenses give way to a singular use of the present progressive.

The steadfast preservation of García Lorca's verb use imbues Hughes's translation with the source text's "vague and mysterious space time continuum" and is complemented—in the excerpt above and throughout the collection—by translation decisions that routinely serve García Lorca's vagaries by refusing to delimit meaning. For example, Maurer's translation of the passage above concretizes both the subject and object of the verbs in the poem's third and fourth lines. "El niño" is translated as "the boy" and the pronominal object of his gaze ("la luna" or "the moon") is offered to the reader in a manner that goes so far as to preserve the noun's gender in Spanish, "The boy is looking at her." In contrast, Hughes chooses an acceptable, but less concrete, alternative and translates "niño" as "child." He omits García Lorca's pronoun, sidestepping the problem of translating gendered nouns and allowing for the possibility that his child's gaze may be directed toward something more than the moon.

Hughes's desire to preserve the polyvalence of García Lorca's romances is perhaps best exemplified by his translation of the first line of the collection's most famous poem, "Romance sonámbulo" ("Ballad of the Sleepwalker"). This line, which also serves as the poem's refrain, reads "Verde que te quiero verde" and, as García Lorca's brother Francisco argues in his book *De Garcilaso a Lorca*, presents the translator with a particularly difficult task. Christopher Maurer, who chooses to render the line as "Green I want you green," summarizes the difficulties involved in the following terms:

Francisco García Lorca explores the ambiguity of this refrain, which can mean "I want you green," but also "I love you green": the "act of will" is more pronounced than the "act of love." We can even suppose that the poet is anticipating not a particular green, but the very idea of green, not yet created. In this case, "Verde que te quiero verde" would

announce the creation of green . . . “Let green exist, for I want it so.”⁵³

Attempting to speak to all of these potential meanings, Hughes, unlike Maurer, rejects a translation that reduces the “ambiguity” of the Spanish verb “querer” (to want or to love) and instead offers his reader, “Green as I would have you green.”⁵⁴ This phrasing allows for multiple readings of García Lorca’s refrain, ones that allow the line to be interpreted as an expression of “want” or “love” foregrounding the “act of will” over the “act of love,” while encapsulating both in the phrase “I would have you.” Hughes’s translation even goes so far as to gesture at the speaker’s announcement of “the creation of green,” since “I would have you green” suggests an almost divine will made incarnate. In short, Hughes’s translation strategy for *Romancero gitano* seeks to safeguard (and at times to augment) both the explosive interpretive potential of García Lorca’s “space time continuum” and the polyvalence of his poetic language. It is a strategy that places a premium not on readability, but on the possibility for García Lorca’s verse to engender multiple readings in English, readings that frequently escape interpretive closure.

The strategy that Hughes employs to translate García Lorca—one that, in essence, seeks to avoid speaking for the poet by eschewing decisions that make for closed readings—is imbued with Hughes’s growing concern over the ethical dangers inherent in speaking for others. Just as “the first poet of the Negro proletariat” had grown reticent of acting as the mouthpiece for an entire population, so too had Hughes the translator grown wary—despite the arguably inevitable realization of his fears—of penning translations guided by a definitive interpretation or a single hand that reduced the source text’s poetic potential.

Hughes allayed his concerns, in part, by enlisting the help of an unprecedented number of collaborators. As his manuscripts confirm, Hughes turned to Alberti, Manuel Altolaguirre, and other unnamed “friends” of Lorca to complete his first and second drafts of *Gypsy Ballads* while in residence at the Alianza in 1937. And over the course of the next fourteen years, Hughes completed five more drafts of his manuscript with the help of Miguel Covarrubias (1945), editors Robert Glauher and David Ignatow (1951), and Francisco García Lorca (1951). (His translation was finally published in 1951.) Hughes’s manuscripts also indicate that he checked his translations against those of Lloyd, Spender, and Barea, and his correspondence relates that Francisco García Lorca helped him to compare his collection with others published in French

and Italian. Hence, Hughes avoided the perils and pitfalls of being the translator of García Lorca by distributing responsibility for his translation's accuracy among García Lorca's closest associates and by gleaning insights from existing translations.

The paramount importance Hughes placed on collaboration and semantic precision while composing and revising his translations of García Lorca's poetry bespeaks a translator who has forsaken his former penchant for play and who views the quest for accuracy as a collective endeavor. The success of this endeavor, in turn, was both a requisite and a selling point for a good translation. In a letter dated June 8, 1951, Hughes informed David Ignatow,⁵⁵ the associate editor of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, that he had gone so far as to consult García Lorca's brother, Francisco (a scholar of his brother's work, his sometime collaborator, and an author in his own right), for assistance:

I had a very pleasant and helpful visit with Lorca frere [*sic*] this evening—just back home. A very nice guy and most careful about the translations. We went through them thoroughly, comparing French and Italian versions of lines where shades of meaning are difficult. I doubt if any other versions of Lorca have had more checking and rechecking with former friends and relatives of the poet than these.⁵⁶

Hughes's coy praise for his own text rests not on its aesthetic achievements, but rather on its thorough preservation of García Lorca's "shades of meaning" figured, in large part, as the result of Hughes's "careful" collaboration with García Lorca's "friends and relatives." Hughes thus seeks to establish the authority behind his translation as one that is multiple or shared, and also as one that ultimately rests not with him, but with those who have checked and rechecked his translation. In short, Hughes's collaboration diffuses responsibility for translation decisions and, as he frames matters, also makes for ideal translations. Echoing and augmenting these sentiments, Hughes also informed the *Journal's* coeditor, Robert Glauber,⁵⁷ of his meeting with Francisco García Lorca, writing:

I have just spent about four hours this evening with Francisco Garcia [*sic*] Lorca who is delighted that the Beloit Poetry Journal is publishing my translations of his brother's poems from the ROMANCERO GITANO. He had let the

official translator of the Lorca plays read them and had gotten an O.K. from him. And he himself had gone over them line for line with the original Spanish. Together we went over the poems again, correcting a few mistakes of my own in exact meaning, and improving on what Francisco felt to be his brother's original meanings which he thought might not come across in my English renderings—largely matters of nuance, but certainly important, since we both wish to be as exact as possible in both the literal meanings and the emotional and musical shadings. I think the translations now are about as fool proof as we can make them in their rendering from Spanish into English.⁵⁸

Once again, Hughes seeks to endow his translation with additional authority by relating that it has been checked both by the “official translator” of García Lorca’s plays and by the poet’s own brother. Hughes endows the latter with the capacity to decipher “his brother’s original meanings,” an ability that enables Hughes’s translation to better capture “matters of nuance.” Privileging Francisco García Lorca’s insights over his own and, arguably, over any other reader’s, Hughes differentiates these “original meanings” from the “exact meaning[s]” which he failed to translate correctly, and assures Glauber that his translations are now “about as fool proof as we can make them.” The “we” to whom Hughes refers—including Francisco García Lorca and, vicariously, his brother Federico as well—seeks to render “exact” translations of both “literal meaning” and “emotional and musical shadings.” Hughes’s notion of a “fool proof” translation betrays either a naiveté or a certain amount of hubris and seems particularly out of place, given his strident rejection of racial essentialism and his thirst for poetic polyvalence. However, Hughes qualifies that the desire for an “exact” translation, though admirable, is ultimately unattainable, since his translations are not quite “fool proof,” but rather “about as fool proof as we can make them in their rendering from Spanish into English.” Hence, Hughes’s letter testifies to his belief that the work of translation entails much more than a reworking of “literal meaning,” and suggests that he viewed the work of “exact” translation as a Sisyphean endeavor that seeks to reproduce meaning in all its shades and variety by privileging the “original meanings” of the source text’s author.

Hughes’s thirst for “exact” translations of “original meanings,” his fear of limiting the source text’s poetic potential, and his attempts to

diffuse responsibility for his translation decisions betray the kind of ethical anxieties that Shoshana Felman ascribes to the witness, and suggest that Hughes's work as a war correspondent greatly affected his vision and practice of translation. Exploring the ethical conundrums and paradoxes that confront the witness, Felman writes:

It is a strange appointment, from which the witness-appointee cannot relieve himself by any delegation, substitution, or representation . . . To bear witness is to bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely of that solitude . . . And yet, the appointment to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak for and to others. The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas can thus suggest that the witness's speech is one which, by its very definition, transcends the witness who is but its medium, the medium of a realization of the testimony. "The witness," writes Levinas, "testifies to what has been said through him. Because the witness has said, 'here I am' before the other. By virtue of the fact that his testimony is addressed to others, the witness, from within the solitude of his own stance, is the vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, a stance or dimension beyond himself."⁵⁹

Hughes's nearly maniacal drive to distance himself from the authority behind (and the responsibility for) his translation decisions—despite the fact that ultimately, he and he alone will bear responsibility for the exactitude of his *Gypsy Ballads*—manifests a desire to acquit himself of the witness's "strange appointment" to "bear the solitude of a responsibility, and to bear the responsibility, precisely of that solitude." Likewise, Hughes's desire to enlist collaborators reflects his desire to rid himself of the enormous ethical burden of speaking "for" someone "to others" from a solitary stance. Hence, his translation strategies manifest an awareness of the perils and burdens of bearing English-language witness to, or translating, García Lorca's verse, and seek to mitigate these dangers by escaping a position of "solitude."

This effort to mitigate speaks to the impact that Hughes's revaluations of essentialist incarnations of pan-Africanism had on his translation practice, since his reticence to speak for the unheard and for another text seeks a remedy, in both cases, in the form of greater collab-

oration. His quest for a “fool proof” translation of “original meaning” also illustrates Hughes’s wariness to speak for others, and figures the task of the translator as one nearly identical to the responsibility of Levinas’s witness, since both are to serve as a “medium” for “what has been said through” them. Moreover, both Hughes’s ideal translator and Levinas’s witness—insofar as the former strives to avoid limiting the poetic potential of other texts and the latter addresses what has been “said through him” to the “other”—are ethically bound to give rise to “an occurrence, a reality, a stance or dimension beyond himself” that is “exact” and open to interpretation.

The ethics informing Hughes’s practice of translation, his in-depth familiarity with both the poetic innovations of García Lorca’s *romanceros* and the explosion of antifascist *romanceros de la guerra* inspired in García Lorca’s wake, and his desire to create a poetry of revolution forged out of popular poetic forms and the “drama” of the “great human movement” of the Spanish Republican cause, all played key roles in Hughes’s creative process while in residence at the Alianza. So, too, did Hughes’s vision of a “darker” internationalism that allowed for heterogeneity, his belief that writing could provide a means to know the Other and thwart fascist attempts to manipulate race, and his responsibility to bear witness to “colored” involvement in a decidedly international civil war. The commingling of these factors, beliefs, concerns, desires, and responsibilities is given poetic voice in Hughes’s “Letter from Spain (Addressed to Alabama)” first published in *Volunteer for Liberty*—a periodical that provided background about current events in the United States, official news of the Spanish Civil War, explanations of military strategy, and writing and cartoons designed to boost morale for the English-speaking 15th Brigade—on November 15, 1937.

Arguably testifying to the great value that the poem held for him despite its lack of acclaim, Hughes chose to reproduce “Letter from Spain” in its entirety in his autobiography *I Wonder as I Wander* (1956), where he describes the intent behind the poem’s composition succinctly:

The International Brigades were, of course, aware of the irony of the colonial Moors—victims themselves of oppression in North Africa—fighting against a Republic that had been seeking to work out a liberal policy toward Morocco. To try to express the feelings of some of the Negro fighting men in this regard, I wrote verses in the form of a letter from an American Negro in the Brigades to a relative in Dixie.⁶⁰

In line with the mission of *Volunteer for Liberty*, Hughes characterizes the poem as a political commentary and a form of reportage concerning “colored involvement” in the war. Echoing his professed desire nearly twenty years earlier “to write about both Moors and colored people,” Hughes asserts that the poem concerns itself with the ironic position that the “colonial Moors” held in the eyes of “Negro fighting men.” And, in step with most dictates for proletarian artistic production, Hughes implies that the reprinted poem, insofar as its intent is easily summarized by way of introduction, is relatively straightforward and easy to decipher—it is simply an attempt to “express feelings” about a tragic colonial “irony.”

Hughes’s *I Wonder as I Wander* also grounds “Letter from Spain” in the realm of the quotidian by prefacing the poem’s introduction with an autobiographical account whose details resurface in the course of the poem. These details include Hughes’s confession to being “startled out of his wits” by the sight of a wounded Moor; his feelings of guilt over this shock; and the memory, prompted by this guilt, of a “white woman” in Louisiana crying out, “You colored boys get away from here. I’m scared of you.” Recounted, as well, are Hughes’s thwarted attempts to speak to captured Moors in Republican hospital wards which lack translators; and his eventual success in communicating with one orphaned Moroccan boy who detailed the horrors of being conscripted into Franco’s army.⁶¹ Hughes’s narration of these incidents, many of which also appeared in his war correspondence, allows for a reading of the poem as a composite of autobiographical incidents and implicitly suggests that “Letter from Spain” is almost a true story, both a representation of and a report from the front.

It is perhaps these autobiographical correlates, combined with Hughes’s description of his poem’s subject matter and intent, that prompted Arnold Rampersad to characterize the ballad as “doggerel” proletarian propaganda and to—in essence—take Hughes at his word.⁶² However, when one considers Hughes’s remarks about his poem in light of a long tradition of modest self-interpretation among poets that often manifests in claims of simplicity, or in light of an English poetic tradition of offering reductive meta-commentary on literary ballads (exemplified and dating back to Coleridge’s use of marginalia in his “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”), Hughes’s recollections and explanations become but a part of the picture. He works with and over his remarks about the poetry of the revolution to articulate a new vision of Black internationalism that, quite tellingly, is poetically framed as an act of bearing witness:

Lincoln Battalion,
International Brigades,
November Something, 1937.

Dear Brother at home:

We captured a wounded Moor today.
He was just as dark as me.
I said Boy, what you been doin' here
Fightin' against the free?

He answered something in a language
I couldn't understand.
But somebody told me he was sayin'
They nabbed him in his land

And made him join the fascist army
And come across to Spain.
And he said he had a feelin'
He'd never get back home again.

He said he had a feelin'
This whole thing wasn't right.
He said he didn't know
The folks he had to fight.

And as he lay there dying
In a village we had taken,
I looked across to Africa
And seed foundations shakin'.

Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
The colonies, too, are free—
Then something wonderful'll happen
To them Moors as dark as me.

I said, I guess that's why old England
And I reckon Italy, too,
Is afraid to let a workers' Spain
Be too good to me and you—

Cause they got slaves in Africa—
 And they don't want 'em to be free.
 Listen, Moorish prisoner, hell!
 Here, shake hands with me!

I knelt down there beside him,
 And I took his hand—
 But the wounded Moor was dyin'
 And he didn't understand.

Salud,
 Johnny⁶³

Just as Hughes states in his autobiography, “Letter from Spain (Addressed to Alabama)” expresses the irony that a “Negro fighting man” recognizes in having “colonial Moors” as enemy combatants, but the portrayal of this irony—which is far from simply tragic—speaks to the heart of a disjuncture that comprises both the possibility for and the difficulty of envisioning (and realizing) an equally inclusive pan-Africanism. The poem offers a deft manipulation of poetic forms and traditions which testify to the effect of García Lorca’s *romanceros* and the *romanceros de la guerra* on Hughes’s poetic production. It also demonstrates how Hughes, in translation, took advantage of the aesthetic strategies and poetic potential of these forms to create a text that voices and embodies a non-essentialist and antifascist conception of Black internationalism. Moreover, the poem employs translation as both a vehicle for and symbol of this internationalism, dramatizing the ethical stakes involved in both endeavors by offering narrative content that both translates and testifies to the last words of an Other.

After years of neglecting “Letter from Spain,” critics have increasingly drawn our attention to the poem’s ethical and aesthetic import. Brent Hayes Edwards and William Scott, especially, have illuminated how this poem demonstrates that a more sustained, nuanced attention to translation in Hughes’s poetics helps to illuminate the complexity of its Black international investments. However, I would like to make two key differentiations between their arguments and intent and mine.

In his article “Langston Hughes and the Futures of Diaspora,” Edwards uses “Letter from Spain” to radically imagine a future diaspora, which he argues must “involve not only a relation to deprivation and dispossession, but also a particular link to possibility and potential.”⁶⁴

In this spirit, Edwards stresses that Hughes became fascinated with the International Brigades not because they represented some ideal of transnational Black solidarity, but because the battle lines of the Spanish Civil War complicated any such identification, with soldiers of African descent fighting on both sides. By attending to the embedded and inherently translational reading practices of the poem's closing salutation, "Salud," Edwards argues that this final recourse to Spanish represents a "schematic, even dogmatic" indexing of diasporic incommensurability.

While I build on Edwards's sense that the poem's translational ethos announces a potential pan-Africanist solidarity that is distinctly future-oriented, I see this poem as far from schematic or dogmatic in its rendering. Nor do I subscribe to the notion that difficulties in translation can metaphorize supposedly incommensurate cultural differences. And I take issue with William Scott's "Motivos of Translation: Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes" on similar grounds. What these thinkers overlook is that Hughes's work is part of a collaborative, relational endeavor that shares a political commitment with an international poetic coterie. And yet, the "schematic" end (to repurpose Edwards's critique of Hughes) to which Scott directs his reading of "Letter from Spain"—namely, that the poem works to "translate" the non-representable lived experience and "unnamable" traumatic histories of colonial violence—overlooks the urgency and violence of the context in which Hughes and Guillén actually produced their translations in the 1930s, and depends on the constitutive paradox of translating an "unnamable." If there is an "unnamable" violence to which Hughes's poems and translations respond, it has as much or more to do with the official and unofficial suppression of racial discourse and the transformational nature of translation as it does with the supposed inherent unrepresentability of colonial violence and postcolonial trauma. What's more, while Scott rightly stresses that Hughes's and Guillén's "translations" were motivated by an investment in common aesthetic traditions, he falls back on an Anglo-American lexicon of modernist fragmentation (and Benjaminian *Ursprache*) that proves ill-fitting for discussions of Hughes and Guillén in its failure to acknowledge the poets' pan-Africanist potentiality, and he neglects to grapple with the extent to which these writers were, in fact, foundational to this Black left international aesthetic.

Indeed, the poem's epistolary frame and first rhyming stanza draw the work's pan-Africanist machinations into immediate relief, setting up alternating patterns of distancing and affiliation, of connection and disjunction, and of free will and lack of agency that will come to com-

prise, in large part, the thematic backbone of the text. Writing to his “Brother at home,” Johnny, the poem’s speaker, relates in distinctly Du Boisian terms that “we” captured a Moor who “was just as dark as me,” and then—evoking the logic of pan-Africanism while highlighting the holes with which it is ridden—reports how he rebuked the Moor for fighting “against the free” American soldiers in the International Brigades. In turn, the sociopolitical aims of the Spanish Republican cause and pan-Africanism are portrayed as in harmony, given Johnny’s surprise that a Moor “just as dark as me” is figured as someone who, somewhat naturally, should never fight “against the free.” The “free” whom Johnny references occupy a somewhat paradoxical status insofar as their freedom is integral to their shared martial status with the Moor, an irony that Hughes places at the forefront by introducing “the free” as a force engaged in the act of capture. However, this free collective of Americans does not represent a free America, a fact that Hughes’s autobiography highlights with an intertextual reference that links the racism of the scared Louisiana woman’s use of “boy” to Johnny’s expression of internal and internalized racism, “Boy, what you doin’ here / Fightin’ against the free?” Hence, Johnny’s pan-Africanist rebuke is painted in terms that highlight its American bent and origin. Moreover, neither Johnny’s “Brother” nor the “wounded Moor” can be counted among Johnny’s “free,” and his letter—from Spain addressed to Alabama—can be read as a missive from a martial setting that connects two widely separated arenas where freedom’s status is highly precarious. In this sense, Hughes’s poem serves as the type of poetry he envisioned with Guillén and Hernández in the hills of Valencia, a verse form that mines the dramatic potential of Spain’s great “human movement” for the purposes of exportation. Hughes’s epistolary frame speaks to this purpose and brings to the fore the notions of circulation and migration as, on October 30, 1937, the Spanish Republican Army was forced to abandon its capital in Valencia for Barcelona. Borrowing a page from García Lorca, Hughes places these movements in a vexed temporal continuum that, over the course of the poem, will become decidedly more so, as the incident Johnny relates is firmly fixed in a “today” that is like any other day, yet one of many dispersed throughout a “November Something.” The notions of perennial circulation and migration speak to the dispersal and return which lie at the very core of the concept of diaspora and comprise the potential for and the reason behind pan-Africanisms. Hence, the poem’s opening moments evoke and problematize the notion of a Black internationalism, portraying its preconditions in the very

form of its problematic while simultaneously figuring this internationalism as a free and yet martial force that captures first and, by way of Johnny's vexed American rebuke, attempts to convert second.

The irony at the core of "Letter from Spain" arises from the fact that both Johnny and the wounded Moor, despite their position on opposite sides of the trenches, share a common condition that can be attributed to a denial of freedom, and that both would be well served by the overlapping objectives of the Spanish Republican cause and pan-Africanism. The wounded Moor—as Johnny comes to "understand" matters via a tellingly anonymous someone who serves as translator and medium—fights against "the free" precisely because he is not free. He has "come across to Spain" because he has been "nabbed from his land" by Franco's "fascist army," and holds little hope of getting "back home again." However, given the fifteenth-century expulsion of the Moors from Spain, the wounded Moor's arrival in Spain also represents a paradoxical homecoming, reconquest, or unwilling return. In a similar vein, Johnny's journey to Spain represents a transatlantic recrossing, since the freedom that he and his "Brother" are denied by Alabama's racism is the historical legacy of slavery, the result of his ancestors being "nabbed" from a home to which only a belated or metaphorical return is possible. The themes of circulation and migration resurface as a common bond between the two colored men, but whereas the wounded Moor doubts he will "get back home again," Johnny's visionary return to the "foundations" of Africa inspires a solidarity that bespeaks fraternal allegiances to the Republican cause and to Du Bois's darker races. A Republican victory equates with the triumph of a postcolonial "workers' Spain," and also serves the interests of a pan-Africanist agenda, "Then something wonderful'll happen / To them Moors as dark as me."

If Hughes's Moor were to reciprocate Johnny's sentiments or to share in his vision, then "Letter from Spain" could easily be read as an endorsement of the power, potential, and politics of a pan-Africanism that purports to speak for all the peoples of African descent dispersed throughout the continent and the world who have in common their shared oppressed condition. But it is precisely the failure of this fellowship that allows Hughes's poem to be read as a reworking of Black internationalism which eschews its monolithic incarnations and regards its potential for success as related to its willingness to fail. Hughes does not simply dramatize the death of the Moor who "didn't understand" in order to illustrate the danger that fascism poses to Black internationalism, but rather uses the "wounded Moor" to illustrate the fascist potential

of certain Black internationalisms, ones fueled by a monolithic vision rather than by mutual assent. Johnny's vision may prompt him to see the Moor as a "dark" comrade, and the translation of the Moor's last words may signify their common condition, but the hand that Johnny extends to his "Moorish prisoner" is hardly representative of an attempt to reach a mutual accord. Quite the contrary: Johnny's extended hand presents the Moor with yet another form of conscription, as the latter cannot enter freely into an allegiance (with "the free"). The Moor does not offer his hand, Johnny "took" it. Likewise, mutual accord is made impossible by the absence of mutual understanding. The anonymous "somebody" in Johnny's company translates in only one direction, and his disappearance is arguably responsible for the Moor dying while "he didn't understand." The Du Boisian brotherhood that Johnny envisions with "Moors as dark as me" plays out as a one-sided affair, and, in the process, Hughes's concerns about the ethics of representing or speaking credibly for those denied a voice again come to the fore. If the goal of Black internationalism is an ethical community of "the free," then this internationalism must forsake a monolithic incarnation and allow for heterogeneity, for dissent, for the near impossibility of knowing its colonized self, and even for the possibility of its own failure.

In this sense, Johnny's "Letter from Spain" can be read as an implicit prescription for a pan-Africanism less flawed than the one it dramatizes, as an ethical signpost for Black internationalisms yet to come. Insofar as the letter also represents a translation and an act of bearing witness, the prescription it offers can be assigned the ethical weight that these endeavors carry—the ethics of a Hughesian Black internationalism corresponds to the ethics of translation and testimony which serve as their frame. The ethical Black international, the ideal translation, and the witness are all entities that bear the responsibility to speak faithfully for and to others; testify to what has been said through them; pursue understanding; desire equity or equivalence; strive to be both "exact" and malleable or open to interpretation; and give rise to "an occurrence, a reality, a stance or dimension beyond" themselves.

The egalitarian ethics that inform Hughes's internationalism are complemented by his choice and manipulation of poetic form. Just as the poets of the Spanish trenches looked to the "the old traditional meter" of the *romancero* to transmit "the new political conscience being sung throughout Spain," so too did Hughes embrace and rework traditional poetics when he chose to embed a faux English popular ballad inside an epistolary frame. Given the similarities between the Spanish

romancero of old and the English popular ballad, Hughes's choice can be characterized as a metaphorical translation of form, as an epistolary attempt to export the "great human movement" by employing the English verse form. Despite their many similarities, the *romancero* and the English popular ballad do differ from one another, especially, as Aurelio Espinosa noted in 1929, with regard to their "espíritu" (spirit).⁶⁵ While both forms present narratives composed of dialogue and action, the *romancero* is infused and perennially associated with its nation's history and national character:

The Spanish *romancero* is the popular-national, narrative poetry of Spanish letters par excellence. Because of its origin, history, and eminently realistic character it has come to express, better than any other poetic genre, the ambitions, feelings, and true soul of the national spirit. It is the quintessence of Spanish character, an emotional expression of nascent national life and past glories, and is a contribution of permanent value to universal literature.⁶⁶

Espinosa characterizes the defining spirit of the *romancero* as nationalist. It is nothing short of "the quintessence of Spanish character." The form's capacity to express the "ambitions, feelings, and true soul of the national spirit" is a direct function of its "eminently realistic character." Although an expression of "nascent national life and past glories," it is also, curiously enough, a contribution to "universal literature." In contrast with the episodic *romancero*, the English popular (or folk) ballad tells a compact tale in a style that achieves bold, sensational effects through deliberate starkness and abruptness. Its familiar stanza form has four lines with four or three stresses alternating, and its second and fourth lines rhyme. It is neither defined by nor is the product of English nationalism. Rather, the popular ballads, far from "eminently realistic," are primarily based on older legends and romances that are at times, though not always, nationalist.

Hughes's decision to offer a poetic account of the Spanish front in the form of an English popular ballad is therefore not a simple matter of exchanging one ballad form for another—that is, of assigning the English popular ballad the work normally carried out by the *romancero*. Nor is it simply an attempt to replace a decidedly nationalist popular form with one less affiliated with a particular nation-state in the hope of fomenting the "great human movement" across borders. Rather, "Letter

from Spain” presents its reader with a fusion of the content normally associated with each form in a ballad that, owing to its epistolary frame, both is and is not popular. In line with the dictates of the *romancero narrativo*, “Letter from Spain” portrays an episode from the war from a limited or personal perspective in an “almost journalistic” fashion, and—in line with the dictates of the English popular ballad—it presents a “compact tale in a style that achieves bold, sensational effects through deliberate starkness and abruptness.”⁶⁷ It is both realistic reportage offered in epistolary form and—recalling Johnny’s vision—a tale that “achieves bold, sensational effects” which are amplified when juxtaposed against the sparse, stark quality of Johnny’s quotidian language. Hence, Hughes chooses to embed his visions of the Spanish Civil War and Black internationalism in a form that can be characterized as a hybrid of his own invention, an original creation that, nevertheless, carries with it the popular and antifascist weight of both ballad and *romancero*.

The epistolary frame that surrounds Hughes’s popular ballad and its hybrid content highlight Hughes’s intervention while simultaneously imbuing his poem with a kind of nomadic quality that emphasizes movement and circulation over nationalistic roots. The frame also contributes to the creation of a new poetics insofar as it evokes the distinction commonly made between the English popular ballad—a form generally associated with an oral tradition and dismissed as doggerel by literary critics writing after the nineteenth century—and the English literary ballad, its erudite offspring. Although the English literary ballad is a narrative poem composed by a poet who imitates the old anonymous folk ballad, it is usually more elaborate and complex. The literary ballad generally lacks the impersonal characteristics of the popular ballad and instead calls attention to itself, to its composer, and to the fact that it is written and not spoken. Quite the rage in nineteenth-century England, famous examples of the form are found in Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Keats’s “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” and Wilde’s “The Ballad of Reading Gaol.” With this distinction in mind, Hughes’s epistolary frame and use of dialect—insofar as the former emphasizes the written quality of his ballad and calls attention to its composer, and the latter points to a letter that, nevertheless, approximates speech—can be said to blur the lines between folk and literary ballads, between popular and high art. This blurring allows for the emergence of a new, in-between form that is at once both popular and literary. It is a form that answers to the demands of

proletarian aesthetics and also testifies to García Lorca's influence on Hughes, just as *Romancero gitano*—according to Alberti and Hernández (among others)—created a new poetry by fusing the popular *romancero* of old with Góngora's highly literary, and at times hermetic, manipulation of the form.

The poetic form invented for “Letter from Spain” is by no means the only evidence to suggest that Hughes's translations of García Lorca affected his own poetic production. Quite the contrary: not only is Hughes's verse multiply marked by García Lorca's footprints, but his correspondence and essays bear witness to his high esteem for García Lorca and to his belief that the translation of García Lorca's verse could serve as an ideal model for writing poetry.⁶⁸ In a letter⁶⁹ dated June 9, 1951, Hughes updates his best friend, Arna Bontemps, on the publication progress of *Gypsy Ballads*, writing:

Meanwhile I've done a few little things anyhow—two articles for DIGEST. Revised with Lorca's brother last night his ROMANCERO which Beloit College Poetry Journal is going to publish in the fall as their First Anniversary Issue, also in Chap Book form. The poems are really beautiful. Wish I had written them myself, not just translated them.⁷⁰

Hughes confesses to a deep envy of García Lorca's poetic prowess, figuring the quality of the latter's verse as akin to a goal almost out of reach, as something to “wish for.” He praises the success of his translations, says they “are really beautiful,” but downplays his translator's task as a “little thing” and assigns the work of translation a kind of secondary status: “Wish I had written them myself, not just translated them.”

Because the ethics behind Hughes's translation strategy for *Romancero gitano* are re-articulated in the vision of Black internationalism poeticized in “Letter from Spain,” along with the fact that the poem's multiple frames represent a re-articulation of García Lorca's creative intervention in the tradition of the Spanish *romancero*, it is more than fair to assert that the translation of *Gypsy Ballads* heavily informed the creation of Hughes's war ballad. However, it is arguably the manner in which García Lorca creates a “retable” of Andalusia by employing polyvalent symbols and the intertexts that they evoke (like the “one fish” who inhabits “St. Raphael (Córdoba)” and evokes both the Bible and Koran) that influenced Hughes's creative processes more than any other

factor. This influence helped Hughes compose a poetry of revolution dedicated not only to the propagation of a workers' world and a new vision of Black internationalism but also to the project of remaining revolutionary.

Hughes creates his own retable of a "colored" Spain that employs polyvalent imagery and overlapping intertexts in order to imbue "Letter from Spain" with multiple layers of meaning that inhibit any attempt at interpretive closure. In so doing, he purposely denies his vision of Black internationalism and revolution authoritative (and potentially fascist) weight, since explicit or implicit prescriptions for either of these are complicated by the competing or dissident discourses that arise from a dizzying array of literary, popular, and historical allusions. In short, Hughes's vision of revolt, dispersal, and migration remains revolutionary precisely because it is constructed of doorways that refuse to stop revolving, of elements and arguments whose rotations, or perennial circumvention of definitive meaning, are constitutive of Hughes's poetry of revolution.

Hughes's decision to assign his ballad an epistolary frame not only bolsters the work's themes of circulation, dispersal, and revolutionary export but also exemplifies how Hughes uses polyvalent images, figures, and symbols to evoke intertexts that work with and against the ideas that his poem places at the forefront. For example, Johnny's letter to his unnamed "brother" evokes the epistles of Saint John the Apostle as an intertext, an evocation that speaks quite well to several of the poem's facets. Just as Johnny writes home to bear witness to the wounded Moor's death, arguably, with the hope of propagating the Republican vision of a workers' world among his "colored" brothers, so too does the Apostle John write his dispersed brethren to "bear witness" to "[that] which we heard, which we have seen with our eyes" in the hope of propagating "fellowship" and cementing the dictates of a nascent faith.⁷¹ In both cases, it is the letter that carries with it the potential for a greater fellowship among men seeking to redress their physical dispersal through mutual understanding, and a vision of a world where such an act is possible.

Johnny's vision of "foundations shakin'" and a postcolonial Africa further evokes the New Testament as an intertext, since it is suggestive of the sixth book of Revelation wherein the Apostle John has an apocalyptic vision of a "great earthquake" that displaces the "kings of the earth," forcing them to take refuge in the mountains.⁷² However, despite their shared visions of an apocalyptic leveling, this evocation proves

troubling for several of the tenets that underpin Johnny's postcolonial polemic, since it is not the will of man that brings about this leveling but rather the cyclical will of God. Hence, what is figured as the potential outcome of human endeavors, "If a free Spain wins this war, / The colonies, too, are free," is overlaid with a competing messianic will that undermines human agency, placing the now inevitable liberation of Africa not in the hands of a "workers' Spain" but in ones decidedly more divine.

The righteousness of the cause for which Johnny and "the free" fight is both bolstered and called into question by Hughes's use of an intertext that is also a war ballad. Johnny's letter evokes the famous "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," a U.S. Civil War ballad sung on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line and composed by Patrick S. Gilmore (a Union soldier) who claimed to have based the ballad on a Negro spiritual. As is the case with the epistles of the Apostle John, the lyrical content of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" complements the themes of "Letter from Spain" in several ways. Just as Johnny's letter, in itself a form of return, prophesizes a reappropriation of wealth, so too does Gilmore's ballad foresee a "jubilee" as an essential part of Johnny's return home. This jubilee is figured in the Bible as a decision to return to origins when Israel was marked by economic equilibrium and everyone had his own property and hence his own freedom.⁷³ In addition to their portrayal of economic justice, both ballads represent instances where martial endeavors are lauded as emancipatory struggles, especially with regard to "colored" involvement. This overlap endows Johnny's fight in Spain with the ethical high ground occupied by the Union during the U.S. Civil War, and figures the Spanish Republican cause as a fight against a metaphorical slavery or, in the case of the "wounded Moor," colonial conscription and captivity. However, when one considers that Gilmore's ballad, in all likelihood, is based not on a Negro spiritual but rather on the Irish folk song "Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye," yet another intertext comes to the fore and complicates this laudatory vision of the Republican war effort. Far from a joyous anticipation of the "jubilee," "Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye" details the tragic homecoming of a maimed Irish conscript; the song dates from the nineteenth century, when Irish regiments were extensively raised for the East India service. It is both dirge and protest, and—in the context of "Letter from Spain"—speaks both to the tragic fate of the conscripted Moor and to a nihilistic vision of martial endeavors, as the intertextual layering of ballad upon ballad suggests an almost endless cycle of conflict wherein the poor, colonized,

and conscripted serve as perennial cannon fodder for the cause. Hughes forecloses the potential for “Letter from Spain” to be read as an unqualified Republican endorsement, and draws into relief a machine of war that feeds itself with the displaced, dispersed, and disenfranchised.

Insofar as “Letter from Spain” ostensibly presents the reader with the last breath of the “wounded Moor,” the poem also evokes the famous story of “the last sigh of the Moor.” This quasi-historical tale of Boabdil’s surrender of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella figures “the last sigh of the Moor” as the place (now a tourist site) where Boabdil is said to have wept when he last gazed at Granada while, simultaneously and magically, staring across the sea—much like Johnny does—at the African continent that would become home for the expelled Moors. This intertext not only echoes the action of the poem, offering historical precedent for Republican victory, it also bolsters the poem’s themes of circulation, migration, and (a kind of) revolution. It speaks to the “irony” that Hughes saw in “colonial Moors” returning to a land their forefathers once ruled in order to fight against “a Republic that had been seeking to work out a liberal policy toward Morocco.” However, the “irony” that arises from overlaying Johnny’s tale with that of “the last sigh of the Moor” is darker than Hughes’s autobiography paints it, since the tying of “colonial Moors” to Boabdil’s subjects also implies that the Republicans’ war effort should be metaphorically allied with the expansionist, expulsionist, and genocidal armies whose conquests helped to engender Spain itself. The Republican cause is allied with the Spanish nation-state, but this is a Spain of old, a Spain of conquest and the Catholic Church, a Spain that Franco’s propaganda machine so often elegized. The capture of the Moor by Johnny and his comrades becomes slightly more vexed, since the Moor’s defeat is akin to a second expulsion from Spain brought about, in part, by a fellow member of the darker races.

Once again, Hughes’s evocation of an intertext frustrates any attempt at a closed reading of the poem, and what comes to the fore is a “retable” of Spain from a “colored” perspective, a picture akin to García Lorca’s Andalusia, composed of composite symbols and intertexts that bespeak multiple empires and eras while simultaneously offering a vision of the present moment. This present moment is both fictional and quasi-autobiographical, with the latter facet adding yet another dimension to Hughes’s colored “retable,” one that implicates him personally in a vision of Spain which serves as a symbol for the Black international. This poetic vision figures the international Black collective as both mar-

tial and mobile, a population possessed not of or by a nation-state, but rather marked by its movement, migration, dispersal, and quest for a return—a collective marked by the common conditions of slavery, colonialism, and conscription that gave rise to its nearly perpetual motion. In short, Hughes suggests that if a Black international does exist, then it occupies an interstitial space, a space inside, between, and across borders marked by circulation, commonality, and difference. Moreover, Hughes's poem implicitly suggests that if this collective is to recognize itself as such and, in so doing, foment a potent solidarity among peoples "just as dark as me" (which also constitutes a metaphorical form of return), then it must do so in a manner that does not reenact the crimes that engendered it. It cannot make converts of the "captured," nor can it eschew the difference that is both the consequence of its dispersal and the precondition for its existence. Rather, its conditions for the inclusion and recruitment of others must possess an elasticity and health akin to Johnny's salutary "salud"—the Republican fraternal hail that serves as both greeting and goodbye—since it must respect the differences and wishes of peoples who may or may not want to be a part of this international collective.

Hughes's "retable" of "colored" Spain is, in fact, so riddled with allusions that a complete inventory is beyond the scope of this chapter. Given the ballad's final moments—where a "deluded" Moor dies, arguably, because he does not "understand"—the present argument would be remiss if it did not include the intertextual role played by Othello in "Letter from Spain."⁷⁴ Like Johnny and the "wounded Moor," Othello occupies a place in the long line of "colored peoples" displaced and dispersed by martial endeavors. Likewise, just as the "wounded Moor" is both an Other and a potential brother, so too is Othello both a foreigner and an agent of the Venetian court, and it is arguably his status as both that fuels Iago's hatred and leads to Othello's downfall. Letters figure prominently throughout the tragedy, and it is the discovery of Iago's and Roderigo's letters (by Cassio and Lodovico) that facilitates Othello's partial understanding of the trickery and tragic fate to which he has fallen victim. Once Othello possesses this understanding of events, he refuses to leave Cyprus and account for his murder of Desdemona before the Venetian court, which has held him in racist contempt from the play's opening moments. Instead, he asks that his fate be relayed to the court in a letter, one that speaks to his dual status as Other and as a member of the Venetian collective:

Soft you; a word or two before you go
 I have done the state some service, and they know't.—
 No more of that.—I pray you, in your letters,
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
 Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
 Nor set down aught in malice . . .

Set you down this;

And say besides,—that in Aleppo once,
 Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
 Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
 I took him by the throat the circumcised dog
 And smote him—thus.

[*stabs himself*]⁷⁵

Stabbing himself “thus” (tellingly with his “sword of Spain”), Othello frames his suicide by recounting (and in some senses reenacting) his earlier Venetian heroism while simultaneously aligning himself with the enemy of the state, “a malignant and a turban'd Turk.” He recalls his former “service” to the state (“No more of that”) as both evidence of his former acceptance by the collective (“and they know't”) and as something which endows him with the right to ask that those present bear witness to the events surrounding his death. He asks that they speak of him as “I am,” as both unlucky Venetian and as radically other, begging that they “extenuate” nothing. Othello’s dying request asks for the same type of respect exemplified in the ethics that lies behind “Letter from Spain,” Hughes’s translation strategy for *Romancero gitano*, his vision of pan-Africanism, and the act of bearing witness. It is a respect for the Other that demands the most accurate account possible, and which requires that the witness, translator, or representative serve as a medium who extenuates nothing. The medium does not thin out the multiple mediations of his message: as Johnny says, neither he nor the Moor “understand” completely. Adding to the apocalyptic readings, the word “seed” (“and seed foundations shakin’”) does not extenuate understanding but rather points to it as potential, as a seed which may bare identity, bear fruit, or bear witness. Hughes takes up Othello’s multiply wrought demand for testimony that juxtaposes the negative (“nor set down aught in malice”) with the positive (“set you down this”). The first speaks to the disposition of the messenger, pointing not only to the avoidance of “malice” but also—via an aural pun in “ought”—to a willed absence as well as to the ethical call of “ought.” And, when compared with the

second, the dual meaning of “set down” becomes apparent. By heeding these words from “old England / And I reckon Italy, too” in his “Letter from Spain” that is “Addressed to Alabama,” Hughes offers another example of temporal layering—the contemporary with the Elizabethan and with Italian notions of Old Spain—to grapple with the “ought” and “ought” of testimony in his re-visionary ballad. He layers racial, political, and aesthetic hierarchies and timelines that are not dreamt of in García Lorca’s *romanceros*. In short, the action of Othello may parallel the death of the “wounded Moor” and add to the “colored” tragedy of Hughes’s alluvial “retable,” but the vision, ethics, and predicament that fuel Othello’s dying request find an echo and ethical counterpart in Hughes’s poem.

Given the temporal overlap of Hughes’s composition of “Letter from Spain” and his translation of *Romancero gitano*, the process of determining whether Hughes’s ethics of translation inspired his vision of Black internationalism or vice versa becomes a chicken-and-egg problem, one perhaps best resolved by granting each process its due and allowing for mutual influence. However, Hughes’s poetic repertoire, especially with regard to the composition of ballads, was decidedly enhanced by his encounter with García Lorca. Prior to his residence at the Alianza, Hughes composed only four poems which he labeled ballads: “Ballad of Ozie Powell,” recounting Ozie Powell’s (one of the Scottsboro Nine) persecution at the hands of a white High Sheriff who shoots to kill; “Ballad of Roosevelt,” a satirical first-person account of “waitin’ on Roosevelt” to cure the ills of abject poverty; “Ballads of Lenin,” discussed in the fourth chapter; and the “Ballad of Gin Mary,” a poem detailing the imprisonment (and sobering up) of the colorfully named alcoholic Gin Mary. With the exception of the last, all of these poems, like “Letter from Spain,” present a more or less popular ballad that offers a decidedly leftist take on current events, but none offers the intertextual and temporal play that marks Hughes’s Spanish Civil War ballads. Moreover, in the years following the civil war, Hughes’s poetic production displayed an explosion of ballads, as the poet went on to write twenty-one ballads that bore the unmistakable imprint of García Lorca.

Just as *Romancero gitano* does for an unnamed Andalusia, Hughes’s collection *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942) contains a sequence of ballads portraying stock figures who together offer a portrait of an anonymous Harlem. These figures occupy a “vague and mysterious space time continuum,” often comprised of past, present, and future, and the book’s major themes—as in *Romancero gitano*—are sex and death. The first of

the sequence, “Ballad of the Sinner,” not only provides examples of this “continuum” and these themes but also exemplifies the sequence as a whole. The poem’s first moments present a temporally vexed stanza that narrates an event that is both past and a beginning: “I went down the road, / Dressed to kill— / Straight down the road / That leads to hell” (1–4).⁷⁶ The speaker narrates a past completed action, “I went down the road.” He then paints a portrait of himself that is at once idiomatic, sexual, and murderous (“dressed to kill”), and concludes the stanza by relating that the road traveled is not simply a literal one, but an eternal one best represented in the present tense: “that leads to hell.” In the course of the next two stanzas, the speaker narrates how he ignored the advice of his “Mother” (twice evoked with this appellation) and family who “warned me true,” and he consistently frames matters in the past tense, even though this past is multiply layered: “I did not act like / My mother’s child” (5–6, 11–12).⁷⁷ Throwing referent, time, and religious connotations into turmoil, the speaker concludes with the following stanzas:

She begged me, please,
Stay on the right track.
But I was drinking licker,
Jitterbugging back.

Going down that road,
All dressed to kill—
The road that leads
Right straight to hell.

Pray for me, Mama! (16–25)⁷⁸

With “She begged me, please, / Stay on the right track,” Hughes creates two polyvocal lines that blur present and past as he recalls the religious tones of prior admonishment and voices defiance. If the poem means to imply that “she begged” the speaker to “please, / Stay on the right track,” then this prior advice is a remembrance that holds the possibility of redemption through a memory held true. But if “please” is read not as pleading but as the speaker’s revolt against the words of advice “Stay on the right track”—a reading supported by the line break which would punctuate the implied dialogue correctly—then the line harbors within it the seeds of a repeated Fall. The next two lines evoke

the sexualized vocabulary of jazz, as the spelling of “licker” brings to mind the licks of a jazz riff to which the speaker is “jitterbugging back.” If “please” rhetorically sways toward God, “back,” in addition to working as an intensifier, also implies the seeds of contrition when the reader keeps in mind that the road back up could be a spatial return, as well as a temporal turn back to the warnings against an earthly life that leads to eternal damnation. It is at these crossroads that the poem stages the vexed moral, temporal, and spatial locations of the narrator. In the penultimate stanza, Hughes creates the feeling of a present now composed of present-tense verbs wherein the narrator balances between the paths of righteousness and of perdition: “Right straight to hell.” This line clearly evokes the colloquialism of going “straight to hell,” but the punctuated emphasis of “Right” gestures toward the lost “right” and “straight” way. The final stanza brings the poem home with a blues tone when for the first time the narrator replaces “Mother” with “Mama.” This small change multiplies the poem’s semantic and temporal possibilities, where “Pray for me, Mama” is simultaneously a prelapsarian revisiting of a child’s cry for his mother’s prayers, an adult’s gesture of contrition over his fallen state, and an evocation of music-inspired slang that makes the line a provocative call to his lover. The aforementioned “she” ostensibly has potentially two prior referents, “Mother” and “Sister,” but—with the wordplay that results in the introduction of a lover—Hughes multiplies the subjects as well as the interlocutors. When “she” might be a lover, Hughes proliferates the possible temporal location of the original utterance, as well as the moment when the narrator chooses to tell his tale. Given the contexts of the here and now versus the eternal, Hughes courts a jovial defiance of his own where the paths of time cross so that what might lie beyond sings out as a questioning supplication. Given the temporal play of Hughes’s ballads, it would seem that García Lorca’s “Poeta en Nueva York” was reincarnated in Harlem.⁷⁹

Although Hughes’s poetic production while in Spain was scant, his residence at the Alianza—a residence that allied him with many of the Spanish-speaking world’s most acclaimed poets, including Alberti, Pablo Neruda, and José Bergamín—was perhaps, more than any other factor, responsible for cementing him in leftist Latin American contexts. His high-profile residence at the Alianza is well demonstrated by the rapidity with which his verse was translated into Spanish. This rapid-fire back-and-forth is perhaps best exemplified by the translation of his poem “Roar China,” which was published in *Volunteer for Liberty* on September 6, 1937; in the Spanish journal *Ayuda* twelve days later (ow-

ing to the influence of one of Hughes's Cuban connections, Lino Novás Calvo); and in the very influential Costa Rican periodical *Repertorio Americano* on November 6, 1937, where Novás Calvo's translation appeared under a headline highlighting Hughes's cemented international stature, "El que cantó Harlem canta China y España" ("He Who Sang Harlem Sings China and Spain").

Hughes's pressing desire for unity coupled with his respect for heterogeneity does not result in a categorical rejection of theoretical unities designed to foment global Black emancipation (Black internationalisms). Rather, this desire is best brought to light when Hughes faces a world filled with the conundrums of realpolitik that run up against the multiple aesthetic strategies mined from "great human movements" to redress multifarious and nefarious injustices. "Desire" is an especially apt word in this case because it addresses the well-recognized sincerity of Hughes's verse, and also illuminates the heretofore unappreciated pained skepticism that this desire for the ideal engenders, since the object of desire inherently flees from the one who pursues it. The object of desire remains steadfast on the horizon. And, in the case of Hughes's poetic mind, these numerous horizons historically arise under the sway of ideological frames that display their irreconcilability. Hughes cultivates poetic strategies culled from his alliances and translations in an effort to articulate and create a poetic idiom that represents political desire. The temporal layering, the attention to the material as well as its mutability, the hand held out in Black solidarity and the hand held back, the Black arm linked with the worker, and the effort to break the links of oppression that thwart full and equal political participation testify to voices recognized as consciously striving for unity in a way that copes with the mourning that these strategies engender. Hughes's questioning and questing after utopian, heterotopian, and tangible political solutions results in a poetics that shows up the edges of each horizon and can't avoid undermining their hearts' desire.

A Tapestry of Words

In reappraising Langston Hughes's radical period in light of his practice of translation, *New World Maker* has examined how he infused his 1930s verse with international leftist poetics and conversations, and thus challenged the idea that this body of work is doggerel propaganda penned by a folksy poet gone awry. In following Hughes from Harlem, to Havana, to Moscow, and then to Madrid, our examination of the growth of his poetic repertoire allowed us to open a window through which to recover and assess his influences and ambitions. Significantly, the excavations recorded in this book have supported the construction of a critical and poetic grammar with which to approach Hughes's 1930s verse and its contributions to global interwar modernisms and Black leftist international poetry and politics. In tracking the reception of Hughes's poetry across target zones that also include Paris and the Francophone Caribbean, the book sheds light on the factors that led him to be consecrated as a Black radical, or a revolutionary, in different geographies for differing and overlapping reasons. That Hughes's verse and persona were interpreted differently in disparate literary geographies comes as no surprise. That his poetic prowess grew from seeing and shaping himself in multiple intertextual milieus with different historical, cultural, and political circumstances transforms our understanding of him as an artist who lies at the heart of African Americans' efforts to recover their culture and their history.

Hughes's work as a translator in the 1930s helped to give voice to the African diaspora and to foment African diasporic poetics. We are accustomed to think of the meeting between Hughes and Nicolás Guillén as an instance of diasporic cultural exchange insofar as we are familiar with the narrative that it was Hughes who, while in Cuba, gave Guillén the idea for his *son* poems. *New World Maker* has enriched this story of unidirectional influence by pointing not only to a number of ways in which Hughes benefited from his Cuban encounters, but to how Hughes's Cuban interlocutors used his translations to advance their own agendas. Looking forward, it proves helpful to think of our discoveries as useful reminders to scholars of the African diaspora that diasporic sites of contact are almost always marked by cross-fertilization. If there were not mutual or reciprocal benefits in the diasporic social-literary network, it would cease to be a viable entity. For this reason, looking for the ego-driven gain at all nodal points of the network will likely prove central to investigations of the elaboration of the African diaspora.

The fact that the translation and dissemination of Hughes's verse in the Hispanic and Francophone worlds was used by figures like José Antonio Fernández de Castro and the editors of journals like *La Revue du Monde Noire* and *Légitime Défense* to ignite comparative conversations about race relations discounts the idea that diasporic consciousness is motivated by an impulse to reject untranslatable differences. Throughout this book, I have sought to clarify that the process of translation highlights both what is shared among Black populations and what is specific to particular populations. Translation does not flatten out specificities in order to serve some romanticized concept of transnational racial unity or diaspora writ large. Rather, as Hughes's oeuvre exemplifies, translation provides a lens through which to grapple with those specificities and, in turn, their entanglements, thus revealing both the pitfalls of misunderstanding and the potential of a heterogeneous, non-essentialist understanding of diasporic consciousness that I choose to call "Black internationalist."

Hughes's early translations of Guillén reveal him as a writer who was deeply invested in translation as a mode of both national and transnational community-building. Whether it was his practice of suggesting resonances between his poetry and Guillén's, or the manner in which he infused the U.S. fabric of proletarian literature with elements of Afro-Cuban folk culture, Hughes's translations and the poems he composed in their wake worked to create diasporic affinities between U.S. Blacks and Afro-Cubans. These affinities, however, were not grounded in a

mythic racial-cum-cultural unity that was presumably latent in all Black people and awaiting mobilization. Recalling the leftist resonance of Guillén's commitment to Afro-Cuban culture and the Marxist-Leninism of Regino Pedroso's social lyrics, Hughes's 1930s poems and translations sought to create a diasporic consciousness grounded in shared political commitments; and to confront the fact that Blacks, at that time, were either politically disenfranchised and economically oppressed minorities living in modern nation-states, or majorities living under the boot of European and U.S. colonialism and imperialism.

Although we have identified Hughes's poetry and poetics as proletarian and his politics as largely communist, his poetry does not follow a "party line," nor did his politics simply recite CPUSA doctrine. Rather, in creating a poetry that pointed to the unique difficulties faced by a Black (or worldwide colored) proletariat confronted with the workings of global race capitalism, he offered an extremely prescient articulation of what might be labeled a proto-Black Marxism. Although most of the poets that Hughes translated in the 1930s were not of African descent, their translation was a boon to his Black internationalist poetic production. Whether it was the manner in which he turned to Mayakovsky's poetics of the coup to articulate Black radical subjectivities, or the way he combined the influences of the *romanceros de la guerra* and the dense intertextuality of García Lorca's *Romancero gitano* to portray the potential as well as the pitfalls and misunderstandings that accompany Black internationalist politics, Hughes, time and again, proved adept at adopting an array of poetics to suit Black leftist international ambitions and concerns.

Political persecution led Hughes to consign his radical poetry to an early grave in the United States by omitting it from his *Selected Poems* (1959). Nonetheless, this body of work survived and flourished in the international realm. The "poeta militante" that Fernández de Castro offered to Cuban readers differed from the Black internationalist or pan-Africanist champion first offered to the French-reading public, and both of these personas put down roots. Hughes's leftist reputation in the Hispanic world may have been cemented by his high-profile role during the Spanish Civil War, but the image of the fed-up worker who gave voice to "Escupideras de metal" only gained traction in light of Hughes's 1930s verse. As early as 1936, the Uruguayan critic Ildefonso Pereda Valdés saw Hughes's radical verse as a matter of growth in solidarity—from a solidarity based on racial sentiment that marked his early poetry to a solidarity based on an identification with all of the world's oppressed,

as exemplified in poems like “Always the Same.”¹ This narrative of growth structured the Spanish-language anthologies of Hughes’s verse, which tend to begin with verse that celebrates racial heritage and culminate with poems from Hughes’s radical period. Hughes was not only aware of this underlying narrative, but complicit in its construction.² As his correspondence with his Argentine anthologist, Julio Galer, makes plain, Hughes was invested in cementing his leftist reputation in Latin American contexts.³ He steered Galer in the composition of an anthology, *Poemas* (1952), which not only contained a good selection of his self-selected radical poems, but even contained an excerpt from “My Adventures as a Social Poet.”

The fact that Hughes’s Francophone persona was enormously influential for the Négritude poets is a line of influence that has attracted much comment, and was one with which Hughes was intimately aware. Hughes’s racial poetry, embodied in poems like “Negro” and disseminated in French in the late 1920s and early 1930s, struck an anti-assimilationist chord or pointed to a reevaluation of African (or African diasporic) heritage for poets like Léon-Gontran Damas and Leopold Sédar Senghor, and this makes sense in light of the cultural erasures demanded by French colonialism. This book has accounted for much of the literary traffic and many of the factors that explain Hughes’s Francophone fame at the beginning of the 1930s, but further investigations of his connection to the Négritude movement would benefit from focusing on how Hughes’s radical poetry also played a role in his Francophone persona. For Aimé Césaire, the Hughes who wrote the primitivist “Afraid” and the poet who gave voice to “A New Song” were not a contradiction, but rather a single voice who embodied the “cry” of the Black poet.⁴ For René Piquion, the Haitian critic who was the first person to write a book-length study of Hughes (*Un chant nouveau*, 1940), the poet’s “fusion of socialism and a substantial, conscious racialism inside the spirit of a Negro” constituted “one of the most characteristic aspects of his genius.”⁵ As was the case with Galer, Hughes aided Piquion in the construction of his volume, but when Piquion asked Hughes if he could give *Un chant nouveau* an English-language birth, Hughes faltered.⁶ It was precisely Hughes’s awareness of his divergent Hispanic and Francophone personas; his willingness to let others independently, or with his aid, construct these personas; and his silence concerning the inherent discrepancies between them that afforded him his incredible wealth of poetic progeny. Hughes’s participation—both active and passive—allowed the creation of multiple visions of himself shaped by

a wealth of competing and overlapping ideologies and agendas, and his refusal to embrace or denounce these visions allowed them to coexist in relative harmony and to inspire poets from radically different camps and cadres.

It is no idle speculation that Hughes's previous experience forging both his personas abroad (as well as those of the authors whose work he compiled in translation) affected how he anthologized himself and others. Moreover, the experience of creating multiple anthologies of both his own verse and that of other poets arguably transformed his translation practice and his vision of the translator's task. The very same man who wrote Dudley Fitts a letter⁷ on October 25, 1941, in which Hughes admonished himself for composing "adaptations" for "the sake of the ear and smooth reading" instead of accurate "translations"—this despite his ongoing maniacal drive to provide English readers with an authoritative "fool proof" translation of García Lorca's *Romancero gitano*—bitterly defended the license he took while translating Gabriela Mistral's verse in 1957 from Edwin Honig's complaint that he should have attempted to render "the poetry more exactly." In a public rebuttal of Honig's critique, which had appeared in the *Saturday Review*, Hughes confessed to his imperfections as a translator and laid bare his new vision of translation:

I would be the last person to claim perfection for my translations, but my hope is that they might stimulate other more competent translators to render the same poems into our tongue. . . . So fine a poet as she was deserves many translations.⁸

Hughes conceives of translation as an ongoing (and potentially never-ending) process wherein imperfect translations of fine poets' verse may stimulate other translators—who may be "more competent" but are nonetheless, like Hughes, incapable of perfection—to produce still more translations of the same poems, notably into the same language. Hughes asserts that "fine" poets inevitably merit multiple translations—that they, in fact, "deserve" them. His assessment of the ongoing task of the translator suggests his view that no single translation or translator can provide a reading public (whether English, French, or Spanish) with a definitive view or version of a poet's verse. The assessment also evidences the formative impact that seeing his own poetry translated in the service of a plethora of agendas had on Hughes's conception of transla-

tion. Just as Hughes had encouraged multiple translations of his poetry which gave rise to a variety of instantiations of his poetic personas, so too does he now, in print, promote the idea that the works of all great poets merit such treatment. His belief in perfect translations—as exemplified in his quest for an error-free translation of *Romancero gitano*—gives way to a new vision that regards translation as a type of lifeblood that is required for the survival of literary works in a global arena. Even an incompetent translation of a foreign-language poet may stimulate others to pen better translations which, in turn, serve better to acquaint a given reading public with an author writing in a foreign language. Hughes's quest to be or find an ideal translator is based on a faith in translation that regards the craft as an integral component of world literature in general, as the means by which deserving authors and their works are (multiply) consecrated.

At the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Hughes offered his final thoughts on translation and Black internationalism by using his expansive conception of the practice to provide the framework for the thoughts on *négritude* that he offered in his “Black Writers in a Troubled World.” Just as each translation of a poem and each anthology of a poet can make poem and poet anew as part and parcel of the ongoing project of world literature and literary consecration, so too, for Hughes, did *négritude* constitute a process wherein artists, like translators, offered (in a never-ending series) their own instantiations of Black art and culture, remaking and reworking their cultural inheritance in a process that helped them not only to better understand themselves but also their brethren in a heterogeneous African diaspora. In other words, Hughes achieves his aims through a series of displacements: not only through a deft deployment of shifts between an “I” meant to stand for the individual, an “I” meant to speak for the collective, and a people contextualized and recontextualized; but also by layering the voices of these personas and people with an eye to the aesthetic regimes in which each is created, read, and reread. In the end, Hughes makes the leap between individual and shared consciousnesses through language itself—the embedded traditions it sustains, retains, and transforms—or, perhaps better said, through language as translation:

Now, the subject of the colloquium: What is the function and significance of African Negro art in the life of the people and for the people? This is where *négritude* comes into play. *Négritude*, as I have garnered from Senegal's distinguished

poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor, has its roots deep in the beauty of the black people—in what younger writers and musicians in America call “soul,” which I would define this way: *Soul* is a synthesis of the essence of Negro folk art redistilled—particularly the old music and its flavor, the ancient basic beat out of Africa, the folk rhymes and Ashanti stories—expressed in contemporary ways so definitively and emotionally colored with the old, that it gives a distinctly “Negro” flavor to today’s music, painting, or writing—or even to merely personal attitudes and daily conversation. *Soul* is contemporary Harlem’s *négritude*, revealing to the Negro people the beauty within themselves. I once tried to say this in a poem.⁹

In addressing the intentionally polyvalent “subject of the colloquium,” Hughes speaks to multiple entities and identities—art, the people, the people as subjects, soul, and *négritude*—by employing rhetorical strategies that highlight the relationship between the individual and the collective which will come to comprise one of the chief tenets of his argument. *Négritude* is rooted in the collective “beauty of the black people,” but it is also something that, in Hughes’s words, “I have garnered from Senegal’s distinguished poet, Léopold Sédar Senghor”—it’s an individual’s concept passed across language and culture to another individual. Hughes, then, highlights the shift in consciousness and context that provided him with a translation of his “garnered” understanding by pointing to “what younger writers and musicians in America call ‘soul.’” He deepens and draws in greater detail the way that his own self and self-understanding filter and give meaning to these comparative collective frameworks, saying, “I would define [soul in] this way.” Hughes’s definitions are re-articulations of old aesthetic strategies made new, the “old game” of the *negro vogue* and the “old game” of the incorporation of folk forms into proletarian art designed to draw in and draw out the people’s revolutionary potential in solidarity and similarity. Yet, as is his wont, Hughes makes recourse to the revolutionary potential and productivity of solidarity in order to reflect on solidarity’s revolutionary potential in a mirror image. In Hughes’s definition, *négritude* finds a second face in “soul”: “*Soul* is contemporary Harlem’s *négritude*, revealing to the Negro people the beauty within themselves.” In a particularly striking manner, Hughes simultaneously creates equivalence and emphasizes the geographical and temporal markers that forge the complex relationship between the two notions. He complicates this gesture

still further by reaching back into his own oeuvre to his first published poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” to the first time he “tried to say this in a poem”:

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world
and older than the flow
of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates
when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo
and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile
and raised pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi
when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,
and I’ve seen its muddy bosom
turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.¹⁰

Hughes’s citation of this poem presents the reader with a purposeful anachronism that works on multiple fronts. He subtly presents himself as both a forefather to contemporary conceptions of *négritude* and as a poet whose works still speak to the present moment. He embeds his poem in the flow of time to highlight how old poems gain new meanings when new knowledge frameworks and aesthetic regimes articulate concepts like “soul” differently; and he also chooses a poem that speaks to this age-old theme in its rich use of the classical figuration of the river as a quintessential metaphor for the passage of time. And by choosing a poem so enthralled with rewriting (or perhaps redistilling) the Whitmanesque American voice, he provides ample justification as to why “Negro” is placed in quotes in the extract quoted above. Hughes makes it possible to read change in the recourse to “Negro folk art.” Just as

the classical foot can never step in the same waters of Heraclitus's river twice and Hughes's poem requires multiple personas to know multiple rivers (which nevertheless coalesce in one soul), *négritude* is "Negro folk art" which has been—as is the case with Hughes and his multiple instantiations in a plethora of anthologies—"redistilled" and "expressed in contemporary ways so definitively and emotionally colored with the old." Moreover, this "old" involves a vexed, inherited poetic language riddled with a history that cannot and should not forget its inheritance, since it has been passed down and re-instantiated in violent displacements, colonialism, and education—as it has been given over to the very subjectivity Hughes wishes to articulate. Language's inheritance, too, "has its roots deep in the beauty of the black people." According to Hughes, he did not simply say this, but rather "tried to say" it. He conceives of inherited relations as (at least) linguistic, racial, and geographic and the hope-filled approach to them as an unending quest.

Although the approach to these relations and this inheritance may prove to be unending, the endeavor—the attempt to redistill or re-instantiate them—is, for Hughes, the paradox of forming and perpetuating a heterogeneous African diaspora that conceives of itself as such. This global community is not only engendered by translation, but, insofar as translation is always ongoing, it is also involved in a process (or practice) of perpetual evolution wherein each articulation of the collective is both individual and a part of an interwoven fabric:

If one may ascribe a prime function to any creative writing, it is, I think, to affirm life, to yeah-say the excitement of living in relation to the vast rhythms of the universe of which we are a part, to untie the riddles of the gutter in order to closer tie the knot between man and God. As to Negro writing and writers, one of our aims, it seems to me, should be to gather the strengths of our people in Africa and the Americas into a tapestry of words as strong as the bronzes of Benin, the memories of Songhay and Mele, the war cry of Chaka, the beat of the blues, and the *Uhuru* of African freedom, and give it to the world with pride and love, and the kind of humanity and affection that Senghor put into his poem *To the American Troops* when he said:

You bring the springtime of peace
And the hope at the end of hope. . . .

Down flowing streets of joy, boys play with dreams.
 Men dance in front of machines,
 and, astonished, burst out singing.
 The eyelashes of students
 are sprinkled with rose petals.
 Fruit ripens in the breast of the virgins.
 And the hips of the women—oh, how sweet!—
 handsomely grow heavy.
 Oh, black brothers,
 warriors whose mouths are singing flowers—
 Delight of living when winter is over—
 You I salute as messengers of peace!

That is Senghor. To this I affirm, how mighty it would be if
 the black writers of our troubled world became our messen-
 gers of peace. How wonderful it would be if:

Les hommes dansent devant leurs machines
 et se surprennent à chanter.
 Les paupières des écolières sont pétales de rose,
 les fruits nûrissent à la poitrine des vierges,
 Et les hanches des femmes—oh, douceur—
 généreusement s'alourdissent.
 Frères noirs, guerriers dont la bouche
 est fleur qui chante—
 Oh! délice de vivre après l'hiver—
 je vous salue comme des messagers de paix.¹¹

By attributing an English-language translation of Senghor's poem to the Senegalese president and claiming the source text as his own affirmation, Hughes presents translation as a means not only by which one gives voice to an Other separated by language (and by time) but also—since the poem's sentiments are said to be shared—as a means by which Black writers may “gather the strengths of our people in Africa and the Americas into a tapestry of words” in the hopes of propagating a decidedly African diasporic community and peace.

Literature in translation is therefore not simply a vehicle through which one can express what has not been expressed in the mother tongue, and a healthy injection of outside intellectual input; it is an exchange of identity in the pursuit of understanding. Hughes gives voice

to Senghor and Senghor gives voice to Hughes; *négritude*'s process of re-distilling and synthesis marches on. Hughes provides a list of similes for this tapestry that is punctuated at the end by a translation, "the *Uhuru* of African freedom." Hughes notably provides a somewhat transgressive translation of Senghor's poem—dividing, for instance, Senghor's "Les paupières des écoliers sont pétales de rose" into two lines, "The eyelashes of students / are sprinkled with rose petals"—and reaffirms the connection that he sees between translation and *négritude*; no two instantiations are alike and no two are unrelated. And all are threads that, when tied together, afford communion. Yet still, as Hughes implies, some threads must be undone to achieve social justice. Hence, translation must be carefully done to avoid flaws in the communal tapestry, but this care is not one akin to the pursuit of perfection embodied in Hughes's quest to translate *Romancero gitano*. Rather, it is a faith in community akin to Hughes's newfound faith in translation as an ongoing process and an integral part of both the project of world literature and of Black internationalism.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

Epigraph: Léon Gontran-Damas, “Nouvelle somme de poésie: Présentation afro-américaine,” *Revue Présence Africaine* no. 57 (1966).

1. In this sense, this book complements the efforts by William Maxwell in *New Negro, Old Left* and James Smethurst in *The New Red Negro* to redress this silencing, but it departs from their investment in conceiving of Black radical poetry as a uniquely American phenomenon. Also see Cary Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 66–70.

2. See also *New Negro, Old Left* and *Revolutionary Memory*.

3. For more on Hughes’s political poetry maligned, see Rampersad, Sundquist, and Kutzinski. For more on Hughes’s poetry placed in conversation with proletarian poetics, see Cary Nelson; and with Black modernism, see Edwards, “Futures of Diaspora”; Kutzinski, *The Worlds of Langston Hughes*, 4; Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 66–85; Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:351; Scott, “Motivos of Translation”; Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 97–123; and Sundquist, “Who Was Langston Hughes?”

4. Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms*, 93–129; Kutzinski, *Worlds of Langston Hughes*, 132–83.

5. Venuti, “Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation.”

6. Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*. Also see Schulte, *Theories of Translation*, 1–10; Steiner, *After Babel*; and Venuti, “Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation.”

7. Sundquist, “Who Was Langston Hughes?”

8. Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 93. James Smethurst has been the most vocal champion of Hughes’s 1930s poetry. His meticulously researched *The*

New Red Negro takes its title from Hughes's *Scottsboro Limited* (1931), and devotes an entire chapter to the reappraisal of what he labels Hughes's "revolutionary poetry." I build on his insights that Hughes's 1930s poetic production positions mass culture as a field of discursive contestation and mines it as a poetic resource for deployment on the leftist cultural front. Although I agree that Hughes saw mass culture (popular or folk) neither as a cultural wasteland (as did the New Critics and canonical practitioners of Anglo-American modernism like Eliot) nor as a Gramscian instrument of state control, I find Smethurst's conclusion that Hughes, instead, saw mass culture as a resource for specifically "modernist" poetics troublesome. Certainly, *The New Red Negro* draws our attention to numerous instances where Hughes's "revolutionary poetry" works by combining formal elements generally associated with the "high culture" of Anglo-American modernism (montage, citation, and fragmentation) with the forms and formal strategies generally associated with "low," popular, or Black vernacular culture (1930s radio culture, newsprint, and the folk aesthetics of the blues).

9. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:352.
10. Anthony Dawahare's "Langston Hughes's Radical Poetry and the 'End of Race'" exemplifies this viewpoint.
11. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 3. Maxwell's dynamics build upon the tripartite distinction articulated by Mark Naison in *Communists in Harlem during the Depression*.
12. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 3.
13. Hughes, "Call to Creation" in *The Collected Poems*, 135.
14. See Dawahare, "Langston Hughes's Radical Poetry," 21-41.
15. Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 166.
16. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*; Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*; Foley, *Radical Representations*; Edwards, *The Futures of Diaspora*; Moglen, *Modernism in the Black Diaspora*; Jonathan Scott, *Socialist Joy*; William Scott, "Motivos of Translation"; and Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*.
17. Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 25. Foley, *Radical Representations*, 192.
18. Gold, "Towards Proletarian Art," 7.
19. Locke, "A Spiritual Truant," 81-85.
20. Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 166.
21. Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 162; Foley, *Radical Representations*, 3-6.
22. Nelson assigns the label of "progressive" to Hughes's 1930s poetic production in his book. Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 66.
23. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 320.
24. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 323.
25. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 324.
26. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 243.
27. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 5.
28. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 325.
29. Steiner, "The Hermeneutic Motion," 186-89.
30. Kutzinski, "Fearful Asymmetries," 112-42.
31. Kutzinski, *Worlds of Langston Hughes*, 83.

32. In her article “Disarticulating Black Internationalisms,” Michelle Stephens teases out the implications of Edwards’s articulation of “diaspora” and “black internationalism” as distinct concepts. While Stephens praises the way in which Edwards’s notion of *décalage* allows us to unsettle fixed notions of blackness and to theorize global blackness in new ways, she points out that exploring “difference for its own sake” overlooks questions about the political stakes of such Black internationalist conversations. As Stephens notes: “*The Practice of Diaspora* has less substantive things to say about the creativity of these encounters in imagining the forms and institutions that could represent racial unity across linguistic lines, in the face of global, racist, oppression.” For this reason, Stephens suggests that Edwards’s work might benefit from a more materialist approach to the theorization of Black internationalism. This is not to say that Stephens’s discussion of Black internationalism opposes Edwards’s, but rather that it applies dialectical materialism to Edwards’s cogent insights. Stephens, “Disarticulating Black Internationalisms,” 100–111; Hanchard, “Translation, Political Community, and Black Internationalism,” 112–19.

33. Steiner, *After Babel*, 275.

34. I am often asked to distinguish my work on translation from that of Brent Hayes Edwards. For this reason, I have offered remarks that accomplish this task. Nevertheless, I believe that our work on translation should be read in a complementary (and not competitive) fashion. Like Edwards, I am deeply invested in the project of exploring translations as artifacts that inscribe the difference in the African diaspora (or the “differences within unity,” as Edwards frames it), and my conception of translation as complementary conversation is indebted to his notion of reciprocity.

35. Gates, *Figures in Black*, 40, 45–46.

36. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 10.

CHAPTER 1

1. Hughes, “Merry Christmas,” 132.

2. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 7.

3. Fernández de Castro et al., “Declaración del grupo minorista,” 16, 25. My translation.

4. Rama, *The Lettered City*, 83.

5. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, 152.

6. Van Vechten, “Introducing Langston Hughes to the Reader,” in *Remember Me to Harlem*, 311.

7. Fernández de Castro, “Presentación de Langston Hughes,” 169. My translation.

8. Van Vechten, “Introducing Langston Hughes to the Reader,” 311–12.

9. Fernández de Castro, “Presentación de Langston Hughes,” 169. My translation.

10. Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000*, 122.

11. Fernández de Castro, “Presentación de Langston Hughes,” 169. My translation.

12. Fernández de Castro, "Poetas hispano americanos actuales traducidos al inglés," 77.

13. Hughes, "The White Ones," 37.

14. Hughes, "Los blancos," trans. Fernández de Castro, in *Revista de la Habana*, 311.

15. Fernández de Castro, *Tema negro*, 9–10.

16. R. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 232.

17. Author's interview with Carlos Moore on October 1, 2014.

18. For more on whitening, see Andrews, *Afro Latin America, 1800–2000*, 117–53; R. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 44, 53

19. Guillén, "El camino de Harlem," in *Nicolás Guillén: Prosa de prisa*, 2:3. My translation.

20. Guillén, "La conquista del blanco," 2:7–9. My translation.

21. *Miami Herald* (website), "A Barrier for Cuba's Blacks," June 20, 2007. <http://media.miamiherald.com/multimedia/news/afrolatin/part4/index.html>.

22. It is generally assumed that the publication of "Conversación con Langston Hughes" followed that of "Presentación de Langston Hughes." However, I have found no concrete evidence which substantiates an actual publication date for Fernández de Castro's essay. So Guillén's piece could have very well preceded it. Moreover, given that the readership of *Diario de la Marina* (Cuba's newspaper of record) was much greater than that of the small *Revista de la Habana*, it's safe to assume that more Cubans met Hughes via Guillén's interview than they did via Fernández de Castro's essay.

23. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 175.

24. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 171. My translation.

25. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 3.

26. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 3.

27. In a letter to Hughes dated May 19, 1930, in which Guillén happily announced the success of his *Motivos de son*, he also announced that "one of these days" he was thinking of running for office as a "Representante" for "Cámara." Nicolás Guillén to Langston Hughes, May 19, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 35.

28. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 171.

29. Nicolás Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 171. My translation.

30. "I've been a victim: / The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo / They lynch me in Texas" (14–16). Hughes, "Negro," 24.

31. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 171. My translation.

32. Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," 9:35.

33. Bassnett and Trivedi, introduction to *Post-Colonial Translation*, 3.

34. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 56–57.

35. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 175. My translation.

36. "Thus were born, under the guise of entertainment, the first Negro protest songs. Others grew out of religious meetings and developed into such great ante-bellum spirituals as Go Down Moses, Oh, Freedom, and God's Gonna Cut You Down." Hughes, in *The Collected Works*, 9:432.

37. Guillén, "Conversación con Langston Hughes," 175. My translation.

38. Author's interview with Carlos Moore on October 1, 2014.

39. Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*, 196.

40. For more on reciprocity, see Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, chap. 2. Perhaps owing to Fernández de Castro's initial efforts in this regard, a large portion of Hughes's future translations were born of either a desire to reciprocate the favor of being translated, or conversely, offered as a potlatch—designed to facilitate the foreign-language translation and dissemination of his own poetry.

41. Hughes's efforts as a translator and cultural ambassador helped to forge relationships (largely comprised by correspondence) between, on one side, influential leaders and figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Walter White and, on the other, Gustavo Urrutia and Fernández de Castro. Hughes also dutifully translated the works of Guillén, Pedroso, Urrutia, and Fernández de Castro's sweetheart, Nellie Campobello. During his time away from Cuba, Hughes succeeded in publishing his literary translations almost as often as he did his original verse. This achievement—seen through today's post-Boom eyes—may appear less than remarkable; but given the fact that the U.S. publishing community at the time was steadfastly uninterested in Latin America, Hughes's success in this regard is nothing short of extraordinary.

42. I have not corrected the numerous minor grammatical errors and missing accents in this letter.

43. Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, June 4, 1930, Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.. Series I, b. 61, f. 1179–80. (Langston Hughes papers hereafter abbreviated as LHP.)

44. Contrary to unanimous critical consensus, Hughes's poetic dry spell did not end with the morbid reflections published in *Opportunity* that would go on to comprise the material of *Dear Lovely Death* (1930). Rather, it ceased the previous month with the Spanish-language translation of "Havana Dreams" ("Momento habanero") in *Revista de la Habana*. Hence, editor Elmer A. Carter somewhat missed the mark when he sent a letter to Hughes on July 2, 1930, congratulating him for taking "the first steps" toward an intellectual rapprochement between people of color in the Americas by translating Cuban poets and by securing a commitment from *Opportunity* to give Latin American writers special consideration in the future (Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:426). Published in English by *Opportunity* some three years later, Hughes's whimsically pensive poem "Havana Dreams" represents quite a bit more than the sophomore souvenir seen by its scant number of critics. Rather, the poem's Havana geographies infuse it with references to the beleaguering weight of U.S. economic interests in Cuba, with remarkably deft allusions to the complexity of Cuban class and racial divisions, and suggestions of the racial and economic histories that engendered those divisions. Returning for a moment to *Dear Lovely Death*, when we consider the dates that Hughes offered for his poetic dry spell in light of his correspondence with Claude McKay and Carl Van Vechten, it is more than fair to assert that, in large part, the poems that comprise that volume were composed prior (or perhaps during) the winter of 1929.

45. This traffic is documented in the following letters: Urrutia to Langston Hughes, April 20, 1930, May 1, 1930, and July 10, 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 158, f. 2925; Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, February 2, 1931, LHP, Series I, b. 61, f. 1179–80.

46. This traffic is documented in the following letter: Urrutia to Langston Hughes, May 1, 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 158, f. 2925.

47. Guillén, “La conquista del blanco,” 2:7–9.

48. Urrutia to Langston Hughes, April 20, 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 158, f. 2925.

49. Urrutia to Langston Hughes, April 20, 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 158, f. 2925.

50. Hughes to Hoffman Reynolds Hays, July 13, 1942, in Langston Hughes Collection, Accession 8870-h, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.

51. Langston Hughes to Hoffman Reynolds Hays, July 13, 1942, University of Virginia Library.

52. Vasconcelos to Nicolás Guillén, May 18, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 33.

53. Vasconcelos to Nicolás Guillén, May 18, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 33.

54. Kutzinski, “Fearful Asymmetries,” 112–42.

55. Nicolás Guillén to Ramón Vasconcelos, June 5, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 32–33.

56. Vasconcelos, “Motivos de son,” 18.

57. Nicolás Guillén, “Sones y soneros,” in *Prosa de Prisa* 1, 20.

58. Nicolás Guillén, “Sones y soneros,” in *Prosa de Prisa* 1, 21.

59. Nicolás Guillén, “Sones y soneros,” in *Prosa de Prisa* 1, 21.

60. Nicolás Guillén, “Sones y soneros,” in *Prosa de Prisa* 1, 21.

61. Hughes’s first publications were “translations” (really adaptations) of Mexican children’s stories and games for Du Bois’s *The Brownie Book*, while the magazine was under the editorship of Jessie Fauset.

62. Hughes to Claude McKay, September 30, 1930, in *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*, 136.

CHAPTER 2

1. John French took issue with Bourdieu and Wacquant’s critique of Hanchard’s investigations of Brazilian racism. French, “The Missteps of Anti-Imperialist Reason,” 107–28.

2. Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000*, 122.

3. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 300.

4. Larkin, “A Poet for the People—A Review,” 84.

5. Wagner, *Black Poets of the United States*, 426.

6. Hughes, “Brass Spittoons,” 86.

7. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 10–11.

8. Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 272.

9. Foley, *Radical Representations*, 63.

10. Foley, *Radical Representations*, 63.
11. Gold, "Proletarian Realism," 5.
12. Fernández de Castro [as Ivan Parsons], "Retrato coloreado de langston hughes," 18.
13. Ovington, *Portraits in Color*, 194.
14. My translation.
15. Hughes, "Escupideras de metal," trans. Ivan Parsons, 19.
16. My translation of Ivan Parsons's translation of Hughes, "Escupideras de metal," 19.
17. The use of "flattening" in this sentence invokes Ifa Nwankwo's overlooked though groundbreaking argument that Hughes's translations of Guillén reflect a balancing act that often erases cultural differences in order to illuminate shared pan-Africanist concerns.
18. Hughes, "Escupideras de metal," trans. Ivan Parsons, 19.
19. Hughes, "Brass Spittoons," 86.
20. Hughes, "Yo, también," trans. Fernández de Castro, in *Social*, 28.
21. Fernández de Castro, "Sobra la poesía y la política," 67. My translation.
22. Bassnett and Trivedi, introduction to *Post-Colonial Translation*, 3.
23. Fernández de Castro, *Tema negro*, 73.
24. Hughes, "Escupideras de metal," trans. Ivan Parsons, 19.
25. Hughes, "Brass Spittoons," 86.
26. Author's interview with Carlos Moore, October 1, 2014.
27. Moore, *Pichón*, 19, 55.
28. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 79.
29. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 79.
30. Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, February 2, 1931, Series I, b. 61, F.1179-180, LHP.
31. For more on the nationalization of Cuban blackness in the 1930s and '40s, see Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*.
32. Hughes, "Florida Road Workers," as published in Nancy Cunard's *Negro* (1934) Reprinted in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, 158–59, 641.
33. This observation, for this history of translation studies, is also of note because it speaks to a vision of translation that is remarkably akin to Ezra Pound's. However, whereas Pound believed a translation could either revivify or comment on a poem, this particular Black communist chorus was infused with a vision of translation as always engaged in both commentary and renewal.
34. Hughes, "Florida Road Workers," as published in Cunard's *Negro*.
35. Fernández de Castro, "Poetas hispano americanos actuales traducidos al inglés." My translation.
36. Fernández de Castro, "Poetas hispano americanos."
37. Fernández de Castro, "Poetas hispano americanos."

CHAPTER 3

1. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*.
2. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:188.
3. Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia," 468–88.
4. Nwankwo, "Langston Hughes and the Translation."

5. For more on discursive lacks, see Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia,” 468–88; and Venuti, “The Poet’s Version,” 230–47.

6. Guillén dated his letter July 11, 1930, but the editors of his correspondence have determined that he was in error. Guillén to Langston Hughes, July 11, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 43.

7. Guillén to Langston Hughes, August 11, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 43. My translation.

8. Given that the archive reveals that Hughes completed his translation of “Caña” with Guillén’s assistance in Havana in 1930, Guillén is most likely referring to “Chèvere,” “Madrigal,” “Mujer negra,” or all of the above.

9. Guillén to Langston Hughes, September 30, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 47–48. My translation.

10. By this time, Hughes’s clippings could have included “Barren Stone” (“Piedra pulida”), published by the *New York Saturday Tribune*; and “Madrigal” (“Madrigal”), “Two Weeks” (“Dos semanas”), and “Black Woman,” published in *Opportunity*.

11. Fernández de Castro had published Hughes’s “Black Woman,” ostensibly as it appeared in *Opportunity*, alongside the Spanish-language debut of Guillén’s “Mujer negra” in the September issue of *Revista de la Habana*.

12. Guillén’s suspicions proved to be well founded, and a copy of *Opportunity* would have revealed that Fernández de Castro had altered Hughes’s text, and that the paratext of Hughes’s translation included a footnote that identified a “bongó” as an “Afro-Cuban drum.” It was arguably this gloss and the emphasis it assigned to the final line of the poem that led to the revision of the poem and its publication as “Mujer nueva” in 1931, as well as Hughes’s subsequent revision and publication of the poem as “New Woman” in his *Cuba Libre* collection.

13. Nicolás Guillén, “Memorias Inéditas de Nicolás Guillén,” *Cuba Internacional* No. 122–133, 1980, 46. My translation.

14. For more on the Abakuá language, see Ivor Miller, “A Secret Society,” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1, 166–68.

15. Anderson, “Racial Experiments”; Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*.

16. Author’s interview with Carlos Moore, October, 1, 2014.

17. Miller, *Voice of the Leopard*, 177.

18. Gonzáles Mandri, *Guarding Cultural Memory*, 101.

19. Lawrence Venuti workshop, “Translation Theory and Practice: Instrumental vs. Hermeneutic Models,” University of British Columbia, Canada, April 2016.

20. Guillén, “Mujer negra,” 79.

21. The term *avanzada* was largely used to distinguish politically engaged Latin American avant-garde movements from “La Vanguardia,” a term used to refer largely to the largely apolitical avant-garde of the Southern Cone (Borges, Huidoboro, et al.).

22. See Perlongher, “Introducción,” 47–57.

23. Veres, “Nicolás Guillén y el período vanguardista en américa latina.” My translation.

24. Hughes, *The Collected Works*, 9:511.

25. Carter to Langston Hughes, July 2, 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 42, f. 727.

26. Guillén, "Black Woman," trans. Hughes, in *Opportunity*, August 1930.
27. Martí, "I," in *Versos sencillos*.
28. Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 109, 133.
29. Hughes, "The Negro Mother," 155–56.
30. "'The Negro Mother' links earlier popular figurations of the southern folk . . . with new militancy." Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 95. "However, among cultural nationalist and nationalist-influenced writers one sees the beginning of a concerted attempt to recode the folk as univocally male. To the degree that the folk is somehow feminine, this femininity is associated with passivity, accommodationism . . ." Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 52.
31. Ronald Baxter Miller contends that no poet combines the mythic and the pragmatic as well as Hughes. Miller, "No Crystal Stair," 109–14.
32. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:269–70.
33. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:272.
34. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:271.
35. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:269–70.
36. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:271.
37. Hughes, "My Adventures as a Social Poet," in *The Collected Works*, 9:271–72.
38. Guillén, "Caña," 129.
39. The term "Nuestra América" (Our America) was coined by José Martí to refer to Spanish America, and to differentiate it from the United States.
40. Hughes, "Christ in Alabama," 143.

CHAPTER 4

1. Hughes to Claude McKay, September 30, 1930, in *Selected Letters*, 136.
2. Hughes to Prentiss Taylor, March 5, 1933, in *Selected Letters*, 194.
3. Guillén to Langston Hughes, April 30, 1930, in *Epistolario de Nicolás Guillén*, 27. My translation.
4. The letter does not carry a date, but numerous factors, including Fernández de Castro's query about whether or not Hughes had seen "Kid Chocolate's" fight with "Berg," allow me to date this letter as written in late August 1930. Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, August 1930, LHP, Series I, b. 61, f. 1179–80.
5. Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, August 1930, LHP.
6. Pedroso, "The Conquerors," trans. Hughes, in LHP, Series IX, b. 426, f. 9470; and "Until Yesterday," translated by Hughes, in LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9488.
7. Guridy, *Forging Diaspora*, 146.
8. Pedroso, "Hermano Negro," trans. de Jongh, in *Vicious Modernisms*, 52–53.

9. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:203.
10. Kernan, "Langston Hughes's Cuban Contacts."
11. Pedrosa, *Nosotros*, 10.
12. My translation of Villena as he is quoted in Pedrosa, *El autor y su obra*, 4.
13. In this sense, Pedrosa's social lyric is much like Hughes's "social poem" in that it was concerned with "people's problems," and particularly with the problems of colored people around the world.
14. My translation of Pedrosa, "Auto-bio-prólogo," in *Nosotros*, 9.
15. The idea that that the development of a proletarian culture was a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of proletarian power in politics or in the economic sphere was first advanced in the Soviet Union in 1917 by an organization called the Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organization, abbreviated as "Proletkult" (Brown, *Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature*, 7). Under A. A. Bogdanov, Proletkult advocated applying Marxian dialectics to literature and art, and viewed proletarian literature not simply as a reflection of proletarian life from the viewpoint of a given class or as an expression of its ideas but also as a means of organizing collective labor (Brown, 7). Proletkult's largely non-proletarian theorists and practitioners set about the task of combating what was perceived to be a cultural "backwardness" among the Soviet proletariat, arguing that the creation of a proletarian culture was required to protect proletarian class interests (Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories*, 10). Although its most prominent members were largely non-proletarian, Proletkult was deeply invested in the project of training proletarian writers and, in its heyday (1918–20), fostered intense activity in education, music, art, and literature (Ermolaev, 10). By August 1920, the Russian Proletkult had 400,000 affiliates. However, from its inception, Proletkult aroused suspicion because of its composition, since it included non-party members, fellow travelers, and avant-garde artists. Moreover, Lenin decried the idea that a proletarian culture could be created ex nihilo, while Trotsky questioned the very idea of a "proletarian culture." Brown, *Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature*, 7; Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories*, 10.
16. Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories*, 66.
17. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 10.
18. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 12–14.
19. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 12.
20. Brown, *The Proletarian Episode*, 11.
21. Pedrosa, *Nosotros*, 10–12.
22. Gold, "Proletarian Realism," 4–5.
23. Pedrosa, "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico."
24. Pedrosa, "Fraternal Greetings to the Factory," trans. Hughes, *New Masses*, August 1930.
25. Gold, "Proletarian Realism," 5.
26. Pedrosa's avant-garde description of the "symphony" of the machines calls to mind the Smithy's celebration of machines and factories in that Pedrosa's second line uncomfortably fuses the bodily and the industrial in a manner that is evocative of the way that Maples Marce's Estridentismo movement, a politically engaged Mexican avant-garde, drew its inspiration from Dadaism,

Cubism, Futurism, Mexican mass culture, technology, and modern mechanics to create an aesthetic for post-Revolutionary Mexico. Ultraísmo was a decidedly less politically engaged counterpart in the Spanish and Latin American avant-garde that was also animated by Futurism, which itself was fascinated with the workings of modern technology and invested in synthesizing images.

27. Gold, "Proletarian Realism," 5.
28. Pedroso, *Nosotros*, 10. My translation.
29. Pedroso, "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico."
30. Pedroso, "Fraternal Greetings to the Factory."
31. The poem was thrice translated (and twice revised) by Hughes as "Until Yesterday (A Chinese Mood)" for Cunard's *Negro* (1934); as "Opinions of the New Student" for Dudley Fitts's seminal *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* (1942); and as "Opinions of the New Chinese Student" for Hughes's and Bontemps's *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949).
32. Hughes, "A New Song," in *The Collected Poems*, 170, as published in *Crisis* in March 1933.
33. Hughes, "A New Song," in *The Collected Poems*, 643, as published in *Crisis* in March 1933.
34. Hughes, "Red Flag over Tuskegee," 160–61.
35. Pedroso, "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico."
36. Pedroso, "Fraternal Greetings to the Factory."
37. For more on Black Marxism, see Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*.
38. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.
39. Pedroso, "Salute! (to a Chinese Revolutionist)," trans. Hughes, published in *New Masses*, October 1930, in LHP, Series X, b. 434, f. 9957.
40. Pedroso, "Salutación a un camarada culí," 34.
41. Pedroso, "Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)."
42. Hughes, "Always the Same," 165–66.
43. Pedroso, "Salutación a un camarada culí," in *Nosotros*, 34.
44. Pedroso, "Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)."
45. Hughes, "Scottsboro," 142–43.
46. Pedroso, "Salutación a un camarada culí," 34.
47. Pedrosos, "Salute! (To a Chinese Revolutionist)."
48. Hughes, "Poem [1]," 32.
49. Langston Hughes to Nancy Cunard, September 30, 1931, in *Selected Letters*, 169.

CHAPTER 5

1. Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 33.
2. Venuti, "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation," 157.
3. Kristal, *Invisible Work*, xvi.
4. Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 134.
5. Of all of these poems, only Aragon's "Magnitogorsk" and Mayakovsky's "Black and White" saw publication. Moreover, the publication of "Black and White" in the sixth program of *The Film Forum* in 1933 has been overlooked but can be found among Hughes's papers at Yale (Aragon, "Magnitogorsk

(Fragments),” *International Literature*, 82–83; Mayakovsky, “Black and White,” trans. Hughes. *The Film Forum*, Program 6 (May 20–21, 1933) in LHP, Series x, b. 434, f. 9956). Archival evidence brings to light that Hughes, while in the Soviet Union, also penned his Mayakovsky translations “Hygiene” and “Youth”; his Gafur Gulan translation “On the Turksib Roads”; and his Aragon translation “A Hand Organ Plays” (Mayakovsky, “Hygiene,” LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9486, and “Youth,” LHP, Series IX, b. 425, f. 9454; Gulan, “On the Turksib Roads,” LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9488; Aragon, “A Hand Organ Plays,” LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9488).

6. In his second autobiography, Hughes states that he crossed the Atlantic aboard the *Bremen*. This assertion, however, is clouded by archival evidence—in the form of press releases and newspaper articles—in which Henry Moon and Louise Thompson make it clear that the troupe made the crossing aboard the *Europa* (Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 69; Henry Moon, “Information on the Party of Players en Route to Moscow to Participate in Film on Negro Life in America,” in Henry Lee and Mollie Moon Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library).

7. Moon, “Information on the Party of Players.”

8. Articles on the failure of the project were published in numerous African American and communist journals.

9. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 77. Contrary to the critical consensus, the movie *Black and White*, based on Mayakovsky’s poem and not on the script Hughes refused to rewrite, was produced by the Meshrabpom film company as a cartoon, and was reviewed by *The Film Forum* in its May 1933 issue. This issue, the same one containing Hughes’s “Black and White,” also disproves the reigning consensus that Hughes’s translation was never published. Steven S. Lee has, in the first close reading of the Soviet scenario, argued in “‘Moscow Movie’: Reclaiming a Lost Minority Avant-Garde” that Hughes’s account of the script was heavily distorted.

10. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 103.

11. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 198.

12. Baldwin, “The Russian Connection,” 795–824.

13. This book, in line with the convention established by Shepperson, shall use a capital “P” when referring to Du Bois’s Pan-Africanism, and a lower-case “p” when referring to other forms of pan-Africanism. Shepperson, “Pan-Africanism and ‘Pan-Africanism.’”

14. Hughes, “Negro,” 24.

15. As Arnold Rampersad brings to light, “The French symbolist poet Jules Laforgue wrote a number of poems in the ‘voice’ of Pierrot in the late nineteenth century. Because of the influence of Laforgue, Pierrot often appeared in early-twentieth-century American poetry, such as the works of Edna St. Millay” (Hughes, *The Collected Poems*, 622). For more on Laforgue’s influence on Hughes, see Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms*.

16. Hughes, “A Black Pierrot,” 31.

17. Schoell, “La Renaissance nègre aux Etats Unis,” 124–65.

18. Irele's arguments concerning these meetings and influences are both echoed and well documented by numerous Francophone and U.S. literary scholars. Kesteloot's *Histoire de la littérature négro américaine* offers its readers two accounts, given by Césaire and Senghor, of how they and Damas first encountered Hughes's poetry in the Nardal salon. Kesteloot cites a letter from Senghor dated February 1960 in which he relates: "It was between 1929 and 1934 that we came into contact with American Negroes via the graces of Ms. Andrée Nardal . . . she had a literary salon." Kesteloot also records that Césaire locates his first exposure to Hughes's poetry in the Nardal salon: "It was there [the Nardal salon] that I first saw the poems of Langston Hughes." In chorus with Irele and many of Négritude's most distinguished critics, Kesteloot also argues that the poetic production of Damas, Césaire, and Senghor was influenced by Hughes, asserting that Hughes weighed heaviest with Damas: "It was American poets themselves, and above all Langston Hughes, who had so much influence on Léon Damas." The plethora of scholarly articles that share Kesteloot's assessments in this regard include Feuser's "The Afro-American Literature and Negritude," Irele's "Négritude—Literature and Ideology," and Hale's "From Afro-America to Afro-France: The Literary Triangular Trade." One is hard-pressed to find a critic of the Négritude movement in poetics who does not regard both Hughes and Claude McKay as precursors to (or as influences on) the oft-labeled "Big Three."

19. Schoell, "Un poète nègre: Langston Hughes," 437. My translation.

20. Schoell, "La Renaissance nègre aux Etats Unis," 161–62.

21. Schoell, "La Renaissance nègre aux Etats Unis," 157–60.

22. Schoell, "La Renaissance nègre aux Etats Unis," 159.

23. Michaud, *Littérature américaine*, 205–7. My translation.

24. Nardal, "Éveil de la conscience de race," 27–30.

25. Nardal, "Éveil de la conscience de race," 31.

26. Berry, *Beyond Harlem*, 189; Baldwin, "The Russian Connection," 796.

27. David Moore, "Colored Dispatches from the Uzbek Border," 1118. Moore also makes the exciting argument that Hughes's experience in Soviet Central Asia provides a productive springboard to come to grips with "the suddenly important Central Asia of today."

28. Moore, 1117–18.

29. Moore, 1118.

30. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line*, 127.

31. For more on how translation and the creation of utopian communities are deeply intertwined, see Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia."

32. "Back Liner Notes," *International Literature*, no. 1, 1933.

33. "Back Liner Notes," *International Literature*, no. 1, 1933.

34. Hughes, "Moscow and Me," in *The Collected Works*, 9:58–59.

35. Hughes, "Moscow and Me," in *The Collected Works*, 9:59.

36. Hughes, "Moscow and Me," in *The Collected Works*, 9:59.

37. Hughes, "Moscow and Me," in *The Collected Works*, 9:59. The critic Eric Sundquist makes the argument that Hughes turned to radical poetry precisely because of the translation royalties involved. Sundquist, "Who Was Langston Hughes?"

38. Hughes, “Negroes in Moscow,” 9:65–71. Hughes is not exaggerating here. Pictures of Pushkin and Dumas—both thought to be of mixed ancestry—routinely graced the walls of segregated colored schools in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

39. Hughes, “Negroes in Moscow,” 9: 5–71.

40. Julian Anisimov, “Kinship,” in LHP, Series IX, b. 424, f. 9412.

41. Hughes, “Negroes in Moscow,” 9:71.

42. Although Hughes did not help to write Filatova’s article, he did provide her with a copy of “A New Song” before it saw publication. Moreover, Hughes—just three short years after he appeared before the McCarthy committee—praised Filatova as a “brilliant critic” in his second autobiography. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 197.

43. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 99.

44. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 100.

45. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 100.

46. See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*.

47. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 100.

48. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 100.

49. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 106.

50. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 107.

51. Filatova, “Langston Hughes: American Writer,” 101.

52. For an in-depth exploration of the monolithic Soviet conception of the Negro race, see Baldwin’s discussion of McKay in *Beyond the Color Line*, chapter 1.

53. Léro, “Misère d’une poésie” 12. My translation.

54. Léro et al, “Manifeste de Légitime Défense,” 7.

55. Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French*, 40.

56. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 198.

57. Mayakovsky, “How One Writes a Poem,” section 1, trans. unknown, published in the English-language version of *Paris Literary Monthly*, 1931. Found in the Langston Hughes Papers at Yale University.

58. Mayakovsky, “How One Writes a Poem.”

59. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:266.

60. Hughes, “Columbia,” 168–69.

61. Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress,” 50–51.

CHAPTER 6

1. Hughes, “Letter to the Academy,” 169.

2. Hughes, “Letter to the Academy,” 169.

3. Hughes, “Letter to the Academy,” 169.

4. Kipling, “The Ballad of East and West,” 17.

5. Dobrenko and Tihanov, *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism*, 30–1.

6. Signifying should not be mistaken for Henry Louis Gates’s theory of signifying(g). The former is a practice common to Black vernacular speech that the latter refashions using Mitchell-Kernan’s much-acclaimed linguistic account of

signifying to provide a distinctly African American semiotic approach to the study of Black texts and culture. Mitchell-Kernan, "Signifying and Marking," 161–79; Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*.

7. Hughes, "Lettre à l'Académie," trans. Louis Aragon, typescript in LHP, Series X, b. 434, f. 9928.

8. Hughes, "Lettre à l'Académie."

9. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)," trans. Hughes, in *International Literature*.

10. Guillaume, "And Bid Him Translate."

11. Guillaume, "And Bid Him Translate."

12. Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms*, 104.

13. Patterson, *Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernisms*, 104.

14. These drafts disprove Faith Berry's contention that Hughes decided to translate the poem after hearing Aragon sing it in the spring, since Aragon's assistance on Hughes's drafts proves that he and Hughes were at work well before the spring of 1933.

15. Mahot-Bodias, "Hourra l'Oural (1934) de Louis Aragon." My translation.

16. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," trans. Hughes, in LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9488.

17. Dobrenko and Tihanov, *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism*.

18. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," in LHP.

19. Aragon, "1930," 81.

20. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," in LHP.

21. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," in LHP.

22. Dobrenko and Tihanov, *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism*. For more on the genesis of Socialist Realism, see Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917–1934*.

23. Aragon, "1930," 82.

24. Aragon, *Hourra l'Oural*, 81–82.

25. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragment)," in LHP.

26. Morton, *Hybrid Modernities*.

27. Jolles, "The Tactile Turn," 28.

28. Léro et al., "Manifeste de Légitime Défense."

29. Léro et al., "Manifeste de Légitime Défense," 1. My translation.

30. Aragon, "Hymne," 78.

31. Mahot-Bodias, "Hourra l'Oural (1934) de Louis Aragon," 10. My translation.

32. Aragon, "Magnitogorsk (Fragments)," in *International Literature*.

33. Aragon, translator's preface to "À pleine voix" by V. Mayakovsky. My translation.

34. To contextualize Aragon's remarks and—more importantly—to highlight the significance of Hughes's decision to create non-rhyming or literal translations, it is important to note here that all of Mayakovsky's poetry rhymes. Hence, Aragon's advice to the Western translator deliberately obscures Maya-

kovsky's actual poetic practices. Mayakovsky regarded rhyme as the most important element of poetry in his essay normally titled, in translation, "How to Make Verse."

35. Aragon, translator's preface to "À pleine voix" by V. Mayakovsky. My translation.

36. Aragon, translator's preface to "À pleine voix" by V. Mayakovsky. My translation.

37. Guillén, "Two Weeks," trans. Hughes, 88.

38. Emi Siao [Xiao San], "Nanking Road," trans. Hughes, 1933, in LHP, Series IX, b. 426, f. 9483.

39. Mayakovsky, "Black and White," trans. Hughes.

40. Fernández de Castro to Langston Hughes, June 4, 1930, in LHP, Series I, b. 61, f. 1179-80.

41. Mayakovsky, "Black and White."

42. Mayakovsky, "Black and White."

43. Mayakovsky, "Black and White."

44. Mayakovsky, "Black and White."

45. Mayakovsky, "Syphilis," trans. Hughes, in LHP, Series IX, b. 427, f. 9486.

46. Mayakovsky, "Syphilis."

47. Seth Moglen, one of the two critics who have explored "Cubes" in depth, contends that Hughes's poem is best understood as an "exploration of the international aesthetic transformation that we have come to call modernism" from a "black-diasporic perspective" (Moglen, "Modernism in the Black Diaspora," 1190). Although I agree that "Cubes" self-consciously uses avant-garde poetics to draw the vexed relation between modernism and colonialism into relief, I believe that Hughes's subversive deployment of modernist poetics is part and parcel of his embrace of Mayakovsky's coup, a dialectical poetics that necessitates a disruption of the normal economy of the poetics it seeks to synthesize, rather than, as Moglen argues, a "manifesto for black modernism" (1190), however that term is defined. (See, for a seminal account, Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, 65-104.) Stephen S. Lee, adopting and building on my observations about "Cubes" published in my "The *Coup* of Langston Hughes's Picasso Period," argues that "Cubes" is, as I have argued in part, a fusion of "Black and White" and "Syphilis." However, his conception that the Cuban personas of these poems are simply transposed by the Senegalese man who inhabits "Cubes" completely overlooks a plethora of reasons, detailed in this chapter and the one that precedes it, that make the argument for a simple transposition of Senegalese for Cuban facile at best. Moglen, "The Broken Cubes of Picasso," 1188-1205; Lee, *The Ethnic Avant-Garde*, 75-78.

48. Hughes, "Cubes," 175.

49. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 376.

50. Hughes, "Cubes," 175.

51. Hughes, "Negroes Speak of War," 9:65.

52. Hughes, "Cubes," 175.

53. McCombie, introduction to *Stéphane Mallarmé*.

54. McCombie, introduction to *Stéphane Mallarmé*.

55. Hughes, "Cubes," 176.

56. The taxes, legal houses, and doctors that Hughes alludes to have a historical correlative, as French prostitutes were required to register at the Bureau des Moeurs (Bureau of Public Morals), pay taxes, and submit to medical examinations at the Bureau Sanitaire (Bureau of Health). If the prostitute was infected with a venereal disease, she would then be confined to Saint-Lazare Hospital (Acton, *Prostitution*, 97–107).

57. Hughes, “Cubes,” 176.

58. These arrows gesture towards past and future in a manner that invokes the reading of a book, where what lies to the right constitutes that which is to come, and what lies to the left constitutes that which has already been experienced or read.

CHAPTER 7

1. Hughes, “Yo, también” and “Carta a los camaradas del sur,” *Octubre*, 10.

2. Montero, *Revelación de una revista mítica*, xv.

3. Delgado, “Nota,” 17. My translation.

4. Carpentier, “Retrato de un dictador.” Not surprisingly, Carpentier was also an influential member of the *minoristas*.

5. Alberti, “Langston Hughes.” My translation.

6. Hughes, “Florida Road Workers,” 158–59, 641, as printed in the *New York Herald Tribune*, November 23, 1930.

7. Hughes, “Estoy haciendo un camino,” trans. Alberti, 1.

8. Nancy Cunard and Pablo Neruda to Langston Hughes, March 5, 1937, in LHP, Series I, b 49, f. 918–20.

9. Cunard and Neruda to Hughes, March 5, 1937, in LHP.

10. Valdés, “La poesía negra en América,” in *Antología de la poesía negra americana*.

11. Schidlowsky, *Neruda y su tiempo*, 108.

12. Hughes, “Cubes,” 175.

13. Since the letters that Alberti wrote for Hughes are to be found among the latter’s papers at Yale, it is logical to assume that they did not reach their intended addressees.

14. Alberti to Emilio Prados, May 29, 1935, in LHP, Series I, b. 4, f. 61.

15. Alberti to Arturo Serrano Plaja, May 29, 1935, in LHP, Series I, b. 4, f. 61.

16. Alberti to Pablo Neruda, May 29, 1935, in LHP, Series I, b. 4, f. 61.

17. Alberti to Neruda, May 29, 1935, in LHP.

18. My translation.

19. In all likelihood, Alberti’s reference to “Federico” is a reference to García Lorca.

20. Hughes, “Hughes Finds Moors Being Used as Pawns,” 9:161.

21. Du Bois, the Forethought in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 30.

22. Du Bois to Langston Hughes, May 26, 1941, in LHP, Series I, b. 57, f. 1073.

23. Du Bois to Langston Hughes, January 31, 1929, and January 8, 1945, in LHP, Series I, b. 57, f. 1073.

24. Hughes, "Too Much of Race," 10:222.
25. Hughes, "Too Much of Race," 10:222.
26. Hughes, "Too Much of Race," 10:222.
27. Guillén, "Un poeta en espardeñas," 88. My translation.
28. Guillén, "Un poeta en espardeñas," 88.
29. My translation.
30. Espinosa, "El romancero."
31. Alberti, "Prólogo" to *Romancero general*, 9. My translation.
32. Alberti, "Prólogo" to *Romancero general*, 10. My translation.
33. Dias, "Los romanceros de la guerra civil," 436.
34. Guillén, "Un poeta en espardeñas," 91.
35. Guillén, "Un poeta en espardeñas," 88. My translation.
36. Hughes annotated the cover pages of his drafts with the names of his collaborators, the dates of collaboration, and notes indicating the translations with which he compared his own. The plethora of drafts is housed in the Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
37. Alberti, "Palabras para Federico" in *Romancero gitano*, 4. My translation.
38. Guillén, "Un poeta en espardeñas," 91.
39. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 387.
40. Maurer, preface to *Federico García Lorca*, xlvii, xlix, li.
41. Gibson, *Federico García Lorca: A Life*, 135.
42. García Lorca, "San Rafael," in *Romancero gitano*, 34-35.
43. García Lorca, "San Rafael," trans. Hughes, in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, 22-23.
44. Ramsden, *Lorca's Romancero gitano*, 58.
45. Maurer, "Notes to the Poems," 926.
46. Maurer, "Notes to the Poems," 926.
47. Leighton, "The Treatment of Time and Space," 378.
48. Szertics, "Federico García Lorca y el romancero viejo," 271.
49. García Lorca, "Romance de la luna, luna," 7.
50. García Lorca, "Ballad of the Moon, Moon," trans. Hughes, in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, 5.
51. Szertics, "Federico García Lorca y el romancero viejo," 271.
52. García Lorca, "Ballad of the Moon," trans. Maurer, in *Collected Poems*, 547.
53. Maurer, "Notes to the Poems," 926.
54. Hughes's translation of this line remains consistent from his first draft, completed in 1937, to the final publication of *Gypsy Ballads* in 1951. García Lorca, "Ballad of the Sleepwalker," trans. Hughes, in *Beloit Poetry Journal*.
55. Hughes to David Ignatow, June 8, 1951, in LHP, Series I, b. 83, f. 1602.
56. Hughes to David Ignatow, June 8, 1951, in LHP.
57. Hughes to Robert Glauber, June 8, 1951, in LHP, Series I, b. 14, f. 312.
58. Hughes to Robert Glauber, June 8, 1951, in LHP.
59. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 3.
60. Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wander*, 353.
61. Hughes to Robert Glauber, June 8, 1951, in LHP, Series I, b. 14, f. 349-50.
62. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 1:351.

63. Hughes, "Letter from Spain," 201-2.
64. Brent Hayes Edwards, "Langston Hughes and the Futures of Diaspora," 690.
65. Espinosa, "El romancero," 1-2.
66. Espinosa, "El romancero" 2. My translation.
67. *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1995), s.v. "Ballad."
68. In his 1951 essay "Ten Ways to Teach Poetry," Hughes argued that the study of translations and their respective originals was a good way to teach students how to write poetry: "Finally, as an incentive toward the study of foreign languages, American poems in French or Spanish or German translation might be studied with the original at hand. The Dudley Fitts *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry*, with the Spanish on one page and the English on the other, is particularly good for this. Various editions of Federico García Lorca are published this way, too, as are the Edna St. Vincent Millay translations of Baudelaire" (Hughes, *The Collected Works*, 9:322).
69. Hughes to Arna Bontemps, June 9, 1951, in LHP, Series I, b. 18, f. 396-407.
70. Hughes to Arna Bontemps, June 9, 1951, in LHP.
71. John 1:1-3, KJV.
72. John 6:12-14, KJV.
73. Lev. 25:10, KJV.
74. Hughes made references to "deluded Moors" in his "Negroes in Spain," published in *Volunteer for Liberty* of 1937 (Hughes, *The Collected Works*, 9:156). And Othello can be said to be Spanish insofar as the sword he carries is, in his words, "a sword of Spain."
75. Shakespeare, *Othello*, 498-517.
76. Hughes, "Ballad of the Sinner," 253.
77. Hughes, "Ballad of the Sinner," 253.
78. Hughes, "Ballad of the Sinner," 253.
79. Federico García Lorca published his "Poeta en Nueva York" in 1930.

CONCLUSION

1. Valdés, introduction to *Antología de la poesía negra americana*.
2. This awareness is documented in the following letters: Galer to Langston Hughes dated April 21, 1948; June 14, 1948; July 12, 1948; August 23, 1948; November 9, 1948; July 19, 1952; July 28, 1952; and September 8, 1952; and Hughes to Julio Galer dated May 3, 1948; June 17, 1948; and February 26, 1949. These letters can be found in LHP, Series I, b. 66, f. 1264-65.
3. This investment is documented in Hughes's correspondence with Galer cited in note 2, LHP, Series I, b. 66, f. 1264-65.
4. See Césaire, "Introduction à la poésie nègre américaine," 37-38.
5. Piquion, *Langston Hughes: Un chant nouveau*, 39, My translation.
6. See Hughes to René Piquion, June 7, 1941, and May 8, 1940, in LHP, Series I, b. 129, f. 2420-22; and Piquion to Langston Hughes, June 30, 1940, and July 16, 1940, in LHP, Series I, b. 129, f. 2420-22.

7. Hughes to Dudley Fitts, October 25, 1941, in LHP, Series I, b. 62, f. 1197.
8. Rampersad, *Life of Langston Hughes*, 2:282.
9. Hughes, "Black Writers in a Troubled World," 9:477.
10. Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," 9:477-78.
11. Hughes, "Black Writers in a Troubled World," 9:478-79.

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