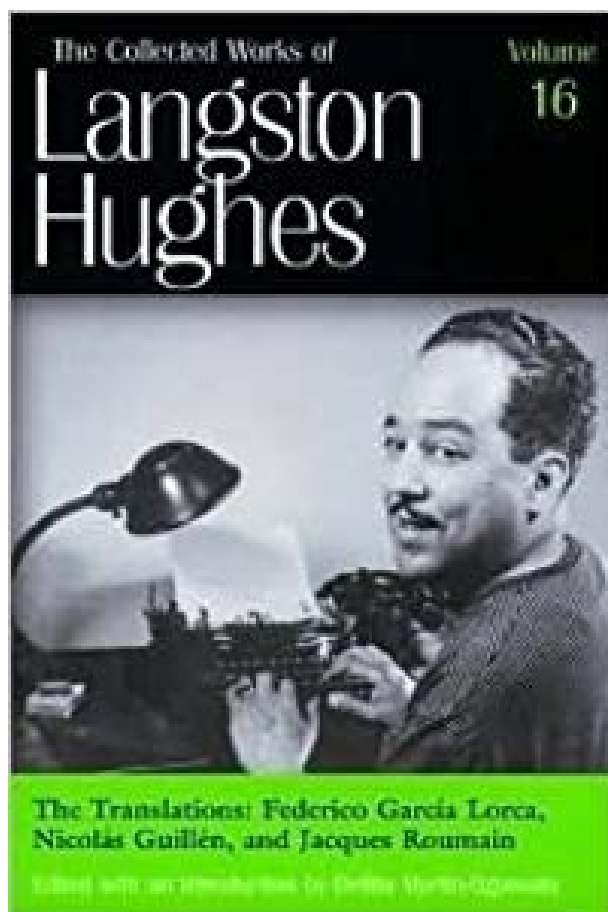


The Translations: Federico Garcia Lorca, Nicolas Guillen, and Jacques Roumain



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Creative writers have often commented that the imaginative process enables them to find comfort, healing, and restoration from the wounds of life. The darkness of pain and suffering courses like the "flow of human blood in human veins" through the works of Langston Hughes—saturating his essays, librettos, newspaper articles, novels, plays, poems, and short stories. But this darkness is ultimately transformed by catharsis. Hughes was not a translator by profession, and he was definitely aware that to translate can be to betray. Moreover, when this passionately shy North American author engaged the works of several of his internationally acclaimed colleagues, he saw translation not as an end in itself, but as a means to something larger than his own life and works.

Hughes was concerned about the similarity of his experiences with those of writers from other cultures. His perennial longing for submersion into the "Big Sea" of black life—whether in the Americas, Europe, Asia, or Africa—prompted him to build bridges between himself and a national/international circle of writers.

One of the most effective ways of doing so was to translate works by authors with whom he felt intimately connected and whose cultures illustrated essential correspondences with his own. *Bodas de sangre* (1933), by

the Spanish poet/playwright Federico García Lorca, who was brutally assassinated in 1936, is the story of a bridegroom and lover who fight to the death over the bride-to-be. Part of Hughes's therapy for the emotional scars and wounds that festered in his life was to make accessible a vital work by this Spanish writer who had also experienced alienation and marginality. The poems by Nicolás Guillén that Hughes and Ben Frederic Carruthers translated as *Cuba Libre* (1948) reveal the mutual admiration and respect between Guillén and Hughes, but they also illustrate Hughes's affirmation of self, family, and community in the international arena. The title *Cuba Libre* was the original cry for freedom by black, white, and mixed-race patriots who fought for Cuban independence during two major wars of the nineteenth century.

As early as 1927, Haitian writer Jacques Roumain had called for the intellectuals of his country to stop imitating European literature and use as models Spanish American and Harlem Renaissance authors. As a tribute to him, Hughes collaborated with Mercer Cook in translating the novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, published after Roumain's death in 1944 as *Masters of the Dew* (1947).

The novel's title conveys its rebellious slant, as it tells the story of Haitian peasants who attempt after centuries of oppression to gain control over their external world.