

MUSICAL EKPHRASIS IN THE POETRY OF NICOLÁS GUILLÉN,
FEDERICO GARCÍA LORCA, AND LANGSTON HUGHES

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Musical ekphrasis was occurring in the twentieth century in different centers around the world, Cuba: Andalusia, Spain; and Harlem, New York, simultaneously. The writers at the heart of this movement used poetry about music as a means to celebrate the cultures of the marginalized people in their lands, los negros, los gitanos, and African-Americans. The purpose of this study is to define musical ekphrasis and identify it in the works of Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes. Also explored are the common characteristics in ekphrastic poetry by the three poets and the common themes found in their ekphrastic poetry, as well as common influences. Each author is considered in the context of his surroundings and his respective culture, and how that influenced his musical tastes as well as his writing style.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF MUSICAL EKPHRASIS.....	6
2.1 Origins of Ekphrasis.....	6
2.2 Definition of Ekphrasis.....	7
2.3 Common Characteristics of Poetry and Music.....	9
2.4 Definition of Musical Ekphrasis.....	11
2.5 Traits of Musical Ekphrasis.....	12
CHAPTER 3. MUSICAL EKPHRASIS IN THE POETRY OF GUILLÉN, LORCA, AND HUGHES.....	17
3.1 Selected Works of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes.....	17
3.2 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Nicolás Guillén.....	21
3.2.1 “La canción del bongó” (“Song of the Bongo”).....	23
3.2.2 “Si tu supiera...” (“If you knew...”).....	24
3.2.3 “Guitarra” (“Guitar”).....	26
3.3 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Federico García Lorca.....	26
3.3.1 “Poema de la siguiriya gitana” (“Poem of the Gypsy Siguiriya”).....	28
3.3.1.1 “Paisaje” (“Landscape”).....	29
3.3.1.2 “La guitarra” (“The Guitar”).....	29
3.3.1.3 “El grito” (“The Cry”).....	30
3.3.1.4 “El silencio” (“The Silence”).....	31
3.3.1.5 “El paso de la siguiriya” (“Passage of the Siguiriya”).....	31

3.3.1.6 “Después de pasar” (“Afterwards”).....	32
3.3.1.7 “Y después” (“And Then”).....	33
3.3.2 “Malagueña”.....	33
3.4 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Langston Hughes.....	34
3.4.1 “Jazzonia”.....	36
3.4.2 “Negro Dancers”.....	37
3.4.3 “Harlem Night Club”.....	37
3.4.4 “The Weary Blues”.....	38
3.5 Common Traits.....	39
CHAPTER 4. COMMON THEMES AND INFLUENCES IN THE POETRY OF GUILLÉN, LORCA, AND HUGHES.....	
4.1 Common Themes and Influences.....	40
4.2 Personification of Musical Instruments.....	42
4.3 The Traits of Home.....	44
4.3.1 Guillén and Cuba.....	45
4.3.2 Lorca and Andalusia.....	46
4.3.3 Hughes and Harlem.....	46
4.4 The Creative Centers of Musical Ekphrasis: Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem.....	47
4.5 Using Musical Ekphrasis as a Means to Validate Marginalized Cultures.....	51
4.5.1 Guillén, <i>los negros</i> , and <i>los mulatos</i>	51
4.5.2 Lorca and <i>los negros</i> of Harlem and <i>los gitanos</i> of Andalusia..	52
4.5.3 Langston Hughes and the Black Community.....	55

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION..... 58

APPENDIX. TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS..... 62

WORKS CITED.....64

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Prior to embarking on the study of musical ekphrasis, it is essential to understand the context in which it is written. For the purpose of this study, there are three centers where musical ekphrasis was occurring which will be under discussion: Cuba; Andalusia, Spain; and Harlem, New York City. In Cuba and Harlem, the black populations were treated as inferior due to the color of their skin, and in Andalusia the Gypsy people also felt this rejection. The Afro-Cuban people of Cuba, the African-American people of Harlem, and the Gypsy people of Andalusia were all forced to live in the margins of society due to their ethnicities. The poets wrote musical ekphrasis to represent these peoples and validate their culture.

In Cuba, there is a long-standing history of discrimination and marginalization of the black people dating back to the time of slavery on the island. Africans were brought to the country as slaves beginning in the 1600s to work in sugar and tobacco fields (García Rodríguez 4). After their emancipation, black Cubans still could not participate fully in Cuban society. Efforts to gain citizenship and equal rights in the early twentieth century required major struggles due to the stigma attached to the black people. Alejandra Bronfman writes, "Dissemination of the notion of the 'black barbarian' and its invocation as justification for antiblack violence complicated efforts to construct Cubans of color as virtuous citizens" (88). Discrimination against blacks in Cuba was further fueled by stereotypes. Bronfman continues, "Blackness was too easily identified with irrationality, immorality, shadowy and secretive violent practices" (88). The negative stereotypes that were perpetuated about Afro-Cubans kept them on the margins of

society, and made them subject to widespread discrimination. Afro-Cubans did, however, have something uniquely theirs, something that was a source of pride and empowerment: *son* music. The music helped validate their culture and enabled Cuban society relate to them.

The *gitano* people (Gypsies) of Andalusia were also a group who lived on the margins of society. They first traveled to western Europe and into Spain in the fifteenth century (Quintana 13). From the very beginning of their presence in Spain, Gypsies did not find social acceptance. The *gitanos* were constantly at odds with the Catholic Church, which kept them oppressed by Catholic Spain. Quintana and Ford say, “Not only did they prove themselves to be thoroughly irreligious, but also their considerable talents for bewitching local populaces with superstitions and a wide variety of occult claims readily brought them into open conflict with church officials” (15). The Gypsies’ clash with the church was not their only struggle with marginalization in Spain. *Gitanos* were perceived as criminal and untrustworthy. Quintana and Ford continue, “the beginning of rumors of alleged Gypsy practices of child stealing, cannibalism, and witchcraft combined to close many doors” (16). Despite having lived in Spain for centuries, Gypsies never succeeded in becoming full participants in Spanish society during the time period under study. *Gitanos* mostly settled in southern Spain because they found conditions more favorable in Andalusia. “Gypsies in Spain principally identified themselves with Andalusia, an area where, from all historical accounts, they found the harsher elements of life had been softened by the preoccupation of its people with the arts, romanticism, and oriental mysticism” (Quintana 17). It was their unique *gitano* culture that helped them make their way in Andalusia. Flamenco music,

especially, was something that was uniquely *gitano*, and it helped Gypsies find their place in Andalusia. Flamenco is a hybrid of Andalusian and Gypsy culture (Manfredi 38). Notwithstanding Andalusia's, and the rest of the world's, embracing of flamenco, *los gitanos* could never fully reinvent themselves and overcome their negative stigma. These stereotypes kept Gypsies living on the margins of the Andalusian society.

In Harlem, African-Americans have lived on the margins of a predominantly white society. The history of racial inequality between blacks and whites dates back to the days of slavery, when Africans were brought to the United States and sold as slaves to white plantation owners. Slavery was practiced in the original thirteen colonies and lasted until the Emancipation Proclamation, in 1863, officially freed all of the slaves. This did not mean, however, that all slaves were freed. Slaves who lived in the states of the American south which were part of the Confederate states did not gain their freedom until after the Civil War ended. Even in the post-slavery United States, blacks did not gain full equality due to widespread discrimination that was legal under the Jim Crow laws of the time. Racial inequality and discrimination, although worse in the southern United States, were also a problem in the northern states.

In the early twentieth century, blacks dealt with issues which whites in New York City did not have to, including segregation, unequal opportunities, and inferior housing. According to an article by the University of Sydney, segregation in Harlem made it so that black Harlem had "rates of disease and death that exceeded dramatically those of the city's whites" (Robertson 98). The article continues, describing the unequal working conditions of black people where "most blacks ended up in low-paid, dead-end service work" (98). Black citizens faced this bleak situation, as well as "the social reality of

living in overcrowded, deteriorating, disease infested housing, subject to the racism of white police, politicians and employers” (116). African-Americans felt like second-class citizens.

These three centers, Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem, provided inspiration for the musical ekphrasis in the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes, respectively. These poets drew inspiration from the marginalized status of people in their regions and used ekphrasis to elevate the status of those demographics by focusing on a significant asset in these communities, their music.

Ekphrasis is the re-presentation of a representation of a subject. It often refers to the literary representation of a visual work of art. In this study the definition has been adapted to include poetry as a means of representing music. The music that is under examination is the popular music of the marginalized people in each center, *son* music in the case of Cuba, flamenco music in the case of Andalusia, as well as jazz and blues music in the case of Harlem. The significance of such music is the fact that it is a unique product of these marginalized communities. Musical ekphrasis in these cases represents the music in a way that elevates the status of these populations.

The first chapter of this study develops the theoretical framework of musical ekphrasis. It covers definitions by James Heffernan, Simon Goldhill, and Carl Brown, and uses elements of each to form a standard definition of ekphrasis applied to poetry in the chapters that follow. This section then establishes the purpose and characteristics of musical ekphrasis and gives examples of each characteristic.

The following chapter embarks on a study of the ekphrastic poetry of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes. The poems examined are “La canción del bongó” (“Song of the

Bongo”), “Si tu supiera...” (“If you knew...”), and “Guitarra” (“Guitar”) by Guillén; “Poema de la siguiriya gitana” (“Poem of the Gypsy Siguiriya”) which includes “Paisaje” (“Landscape”), “La guitarra” (“The Guitar”), “El grito” (“The Cry”), “El silencio” (“The Silence”), “El paso de la siguiriya” (“Passage of the Siguiriya”), “Después de pasar” (“Afterwards”), and “Y después” (“And Then”), and the poem “Malagueña” by Lorca; and “Jazzonia”, “Negro Dancers”, “Harlem Night Club”, and “The Weary Blues” by Hughes. For each poem under investigation, the chapter examines its ekphrastic characteristics as well as the rationale for its inclusion as a musically ekphrastic work. All of the poems studied in this chapter are included in their entirety in the Appendices—for the reader’s reference.

The next chapter examines the common themes and influences of the three poets. Included in this study are the personification of musical instruments as well as allusions to the traits of the poets’ homelands. Also discussed in this chapter are the centers where ekphrasis was being written (Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem), and the use of musical ekphrasis as an instrument to validate the cultures of marginalized peoples including *los negros*, *los gitanos*, and African-Americans.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MUSICAL EKPHRASIS

2.1 Origins of Ekphrasis

For many years scholars have published studies on ekphrasis in literature, which is the literary representation of a visual work of art. Scholars generally agree on the origins of ekphrasis, but there does not exist a general consensus on its definition. One of the first known appearances of ekphrasis is generally believed to have taken place in Ancient Greece in the writings of Homer. According to James Heffernan, “The literary representation of visual art is at least as old as Homer, who in the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* describes at length the scenes depicted on the shield of Achilles” (297). The transformation that occurs from the visual perception of the shield to the literary description is ekphrasis. Heffernan continues, “According to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, the use of the word *ekphrasis* to denote this kind of description dates from about the third century A.D., and the OED tells us that by 1715 the word had entered the English language” (297). Because the word came into use in the English language hundreds of years ago, ekphrasis then should be a word that is well understood and it should have a widely-accepted definition. This is largely untrue, as the concept of ekphrasis is still subject to many different interpretations.

Scholars tend to use the word *ekphrasis* to refer to various functions. Ekphrasis has been used to describe the relationship between two different types of art through borrowing, representing, and interpreting. It generally is used to describe a literary representation of a visual work of art, but some scholars argue that the purpose of ekphrasis is to do more than represent, as will become clear in the following sections.

2.2 Definition of Ekphrasis

A precise definition of ekphrasis is somewhat elusive. There are many definitions, but the many definitions are often at odds. All of the definitions affirm that ekphrasis is literature that relates to art but they are not in agreement as to how the two are related. The most common pillars of the relationship between literature and art among the many definitions of ekphrasis are that ekphrastic poetry serves to *represent* art, *educate* about art, or *interpret* art.

Heffernan proposes “a definition simple in form but complex in its implications: *ekphrasis is the verbal representation of graphic representation*” (299). According to this definition, authors of ekphrastic poetry would be tied to what is represented in a work of art. The purpose of ekphrasis, according to Heffernan, is to describe the artist’s representation. This might imply that poets have to be careful with their representation so as to stay faithful to the intentions of the artist. This proposed definition of ekphrasis is very limited in its usefulness. First, because Heffernan explicitly states that ekphrasis is limited to graphic art. This takes away the possibility of ekphrasis occurring in reference to other mediums of art. Another limitation is that the poets are constrained in what they can write about and cannot express their feelings or interpretations in response to a work of art. Thus, as useful a definition as it is, Heffernan’s idea of ekphrasis is too limiting to apply to all cases of ekphrasis.

According to Simon Goldhill, “ekphrasis is designed to produce a viewing subject. We read to become lookers, and poems are written to educate and direct viewing as a social and intellectual process” (2). This definition of ekphrasis focuses on education. The purpose of ekphrasis then is to describe a work of art to someone who has not

seen the work, or is seeing it for the first time. The education that comes through ekphrastic poetry does more than describe a work of art, it teaches it. The teaching that occurs through ekphrastic poetry as mentioned by Goldhill, as well as the representation of art as mentioned by Heffernan, should be true to the work of art and does not have the liberty of giving an interpretation through the poetry. Once again the definition of ekphrasis, according to Goldhill, does not allow flexibility for interpretation. The purpose of ekphrasis would be only to “direct [the] viewing” of a work of art for someone who is unfamiliar with the piece. The mention of “direct viewing” also, once again as in Heffernan’s definition, limits the possibility of ekphrasis to literature about visual art and provides no opportunity for ekphrasis about other mediums of art. This definition of ekphrasis, according to Goldhill, due to its limitations, cannot stand alone as a reasonable description of ekphrasis.

These definitions are, at least on the surface, simple ideas. Ekphrasis serves to represent visual art in words. As one digs deeper, though, the definition of ekphrasis, as posed by Heffernan, can have a more substantial meaning. The term *representation* could be used synonymously with description, or representation could mean presenting the art in a different light. Ekphrasis can be used to interpret art. To add some clarity to this idea, Carl Brown says, “ekphrastic poetry [is] poetry written in response to, or interpreting, paintings or other works of art” (41). According to Brown’s idea of the purpose of ekphrasis, poets have the opportunity to have their own interpretation of the work of art. Ekphrastic poetry can reach deeper than what is perceived visually and start to elaborate a more profound significance. Another advantage of ekphrasis in this manner is that there can be many different interpretations of a single work of art, and all

of the distinct interpretations are valid. This definition is the most reasonable of the three definitions because it gives the poets flexibility to exercise their artistic abilities. This opportunity facilitates creativity and a truly artistic approach to viewing and interpreting another work of art, instead of just describing the detail of the piece. This flexibility will be essential when the possibility of musical ekphrasis is explored. Another advantage of Brown's definition is that he validates the idea that ekphrasis can occur in response to "other works of art." This qualification is also important when considering the possibility of musical ekphrasis. Because of the extensive flexibility offered by Brown in his definition of ekphrasis the possible creative outcomes are limitless. Nevertheless, despite allowing the poet freedom to interpret a work of art, Brown's definition lacks the practical educational purpose of ekphrasis mentioned by Heffernan and Goldhill, and thus cannot stand alone as a reasonable definition of ekphrasis.

Perhaps the best definition of ekphrastic poetry would be a combination of the definitions by Heffernan, Goldhill, and Brown. The definition becomes: Ekphrastic poetry represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of art in another medium. These definitions refer mostly to poetry about visual art, but as Brown states, ekphrasis is "poetry written in response to, or interpreting, paintings *or other works of art*" (41). [Emphasis mine.] As such, this same definition can be adjusted and applied to musical ekphrasis: *Musical ekphrasis* represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of *music*.

2.3 Common Characteristics of Poetry and Music

Poetry and music have always had a close relationship. Kendall Walton, in describing the relationship between poetry and music, writes, "Poetry, some of it,

belongs more naturally with music in important respects than with other literary forms. This should not be surprising given the intertwined histories of these arts” (456). Walton goes on to explain that historically when poetry was recited, it sounded like music. In Florence, Italy, the epicenter of the Italian Renaissance, there were “overlapping groups of Florentines who were working for a renewal of the close interrelationship of music, literature, and theater and who were exploring ways in which words, music, and the visual arts could cooperate to achieve a more powerful effect than each art could on its own” (Chater 329). The important connection shared between poetry and music is one that has been emphasized for centuries. Works of poetry have often been set to music, providing lyrics to the melodies of the music. The two different mediums have frequently collaborated and merged, especially when poetry was primarily recited aloud. Poetry and music share important characteristics and therefore are useful in representing and interpreting each other.

Poetry and music have important common elements. “Sound is important in poetry as it is in music[.] Likewise for meter and rhythm. Indeed, the particular meter and rhythms of a poem may match those of a musical work, even if the sounds are very different” (Walton 456). For example, sonnets are a type of poetry that require strict adherence to a prescribed rhythm. In a similar fashion, different styles of music also adhere to a prescribed rhythm, including jazz and Cuban son music. Jazz utilizes swung eighth notes, pairs of eighth notes that function as a triplet with the middle note removed. Cuban *son* music uses the clave, which is the two-three and three-two *son* and *rumba* patterns that repeat throughout the songs. These common traits of poetry and music are important to consider when discussing musical ekphrasis.

2.4 Definition of Musical Ekphrasis

Musical ekphrasis can be defined in two ways: music that represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of art; or a work of art that represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of music. Musical ekphrasis often refers to the former: music that represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of art, while the latter is less common and also less studied. In an article on musical ekphrasis in the twentieth century Bruhn says, “[M]usic, like visual art and literature, is capable of depicting and referring to objects in a world outside its own sonic realm” (565). Music is an important tool to represent other works of art because of its ability to refer to external objects. Music also has the ability to invoke feelings and emotions similar to (and sometimes different from) other art forms. However, musical ekphrasis, referring to music about another work of art, has a limitation that visual ekphrasis does not.

Music communicates its message through a system of notes, rhythms, and dynamics. This has one major limitation. While music can stand alone, in order to serve as musical ekphrasis, it must be listened to by one who has at least a limited understanding and exposure to the original work of art. Bruhn says, referring to the limitation of music:

While music is no doubt “a language,” we all know that it cannot label or describe directly; it cannot simply say or show *red* or *green*, *behind* or *in front*, *apple* or *chair*. For a music listener to understand how music responds to a work of art, it is even more necessary than in the case of an ekphrastic poem that the beholder be acquainted with the stimulus. (577-578)

This means that an ekphrastic work of music cannot stand on its own without the original work of art which it refers to. Otherwise, it would just function as music, not ekphrastic music because the listener would not be aware that it serves to represent another piece of art. Hearing the music alone would not successfully convey that message without a title referring to the work of art, or lyrics depicting the subject matter.

Musical ekphrasis that is a work of art (in this case poetry) that represents, teaches, or interprets music does not have the same limitation. A reader is capable of understanding music as an art form through poetry due to the common elements of the two art forms. In an ekphrastic poem the reader can hear the rhythm of the music. The reader can experience the instrumentation and hear the tones of the music. This can be conveyed through the naming of specific instruments in a poem. Sounds are relayed through the use of onomatopoeia and the personification of the instruments.

This is not to say that one type of musical ekphrasis is more valuable than the other. Both are important in their ability to relay messages and feelings. Both are capable of representing another work of art. However, for the purpose of this study, the focus will be on musical ekphrasis that is poetry that represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of music.

2.5 Traits of Musical Ekphrasis

The term *musical ekphrasis* will be used in this study to refer to poetry that represents, teaches, or interprets music. In addition to serving this purpose, to be considered musical ekphrasis a poem must also include at least one of the following elements:

1. References or allusions to musical styles— In this study, poetry about various musical styles will be considered. Some of these styles are referenced by name, including jazz, blues, and *son*. A poem is ekphrastic when it refers to these or other styles of music by name. The mention of the musical style in a poem provides important context to the reader about the music being represented. This is a way of accessing the prior knowledge of the reader and using that context to enrich the reading experience. However, references to musical styles do not need to be explicit for poetry to fall into this category. These can be implicit as well. For example, the manner of dress, instrumentation, or other clues that are unique to a certain style of music can imply a certain style of music.

An example of references to musical styles occurs in “Honky Tonk in Cleveland, Ohio” by Carl Sandburg. The poem references musical styles by name in verses such as “It’s a jazz affair” and “I got the blues” (164). These verses explicitly refer to styles of music, which qualify the poem as ekphrasis in addition to the other ekphrastic characteristics of the poem.

2. References or allusions to musical instruments— Musical instruments are an important part of musical ekphrasis. Their function in the creation of music is essential as they are the medium through which music passes. The different styles of music have a varied instrumentation which is distinct from other styles. These clues will be valuable throughout this study as careful attention will be paid to the different styles of music and the way they are represented in the poetry.

In the aforementioned Sandburg poem, another ekphrastic characteristic is the personification of musical instruments. It says, “The trombone pony neighs and the tuba jackass snorts. / The banjo tickles and titters too awful” (164). The mention of these instruments gives the poem a clear instrumentation which evokes an image of a jazz band playing jazz and blues.

3. References or allusions to musical rhythm— Rhythm is a key element of music. Music cannot exist without rhythm as it is the pulse that drives the song. The references or allusions to rhythm are another important trait of musical ekphrasis. It must be noted that poetry itself has rhythm to it, but this is distinct from musical rhythm. In order to be musical ekphrasis, poetry must make references to musical rhythm.

Victor Hernández Cruz refers to musical rhythm in his poem “Latin & Soul.” He writes, “with this rhythm with / this banging with fire / [...] / the dancers / are clapping their hands / stomping their feet” (33). The rhythm makes the dancers move to the beat. The allusions to percussion with the clapping and stomping help convey the rhythmic feel. The poem references rhythm as the driving pulse of the song.

4. References or allusions to dance— The reference to dance in ekphrastic poetry is another important trait. Because of the important relationship between music and dance, references and allusions to dance will be considered a trait of musical ekphrasis.

In the same poem, Hernández Cruz also refers to dance. He writes, “a shadow / the shadows of dancers / dancers they are dancing falling / out that space made for dancing” (33).

5. Cultural references about music— Cultural references about music include the people, the environment (clubs and other venues), geographic locations, and other points of reference that are important to the music scenes where these styles of music were prevalent when the poets were writing their works. These cultural elements are important traits of musical ekphrasis.

In his poem entitled “On 52nd Street,” Phillip Levine writes about music being played at a bar in New York. He writes:

At the bar
the tenor player up from Philly, shut
his eyes and whispered to no one,
“Same thing last night.” Everyone
been coming all week long
to hear this. The big brown bass
sighed and slumped against
the piano, the cymbals held
their dry cheeks and stopped
chicking and chucking. (10)

Levine describes the part of town, the street, and the bar where the music is being played. He even mentions the city of origin of the tenor player. All of this paints a picture of the culture of the music being described, or the musical environment. This poem is an example of a cultural reference.

For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary for ekphrastic poems to contain references to all of the aforementioned musical traits. In order to be ekphrastic, it is

sufficient that a poem contain at least one of the musical traits listed as long as the poem also fulfills the purpose of representing, teaching, or interpreting a work or works of music. Some poems will have only one trait while others will have many. All are important to facilitate analysis of the spectrum of musical ekphrasis in the musical and cultural center where the poets created their works.

CHAPTER 3

MUSICAL EKPHRASIS IN THE POETRY OF GUILLÉN, LORCA, AND HUGHES

3.1 Selected Works of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes

As previously stated, ekphrastic poetry has been written in many cultural centers around the world, including Cuba, Spain, and United States. The authors whose poetry will be studied in this chapter, Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes, were each responsible for the penning of musical ekphrasis that represented a significant musical style in each of their respective geographical areas. All of the poems included in this chapter are ekphrastic in nature because they all serve the purpose of ekphrasis: to represent, teach, or interpret a work or works of music. The poems are recognizable as ekphrasis per the ekphrastic criteria established in chapter one, namely, that they fulfill the purpose of representing, teaching, or interpreting a work or works of music and include at least one of the following elements: references or allusions to musical styles, references or allusions to musical instruments, references or allusions to musical rhythm, references or allusions to dance, or cultural references about music.

All of the authors in this chapter, and their poetry, share a great deal in common. Langston Hughes may seem out of place on this list, not for the content of his poetry but for the language in which he writes. Hughes is an American poet who writes in English, and as such, may not appear to be consistent with the two authors of Spanish poetry, Guillén and Lorca. The rationale for Hughes' inclusion is the pivotal role that he played in the emergence of musical ekphrasis and the influence that he had on other poets who wrote musical ekphrasis in Spanish. This chapter studies ekphrastic poetry that

represents various styles of music including *son*, flamenco, jazz, and blues. All of these genres of music are unique to the home countries of the poets discussed and represent a significant musical movement.

Son music originated in Cuba but has since spread all over the world in its derivative forms. *Son* music now encompasses several styles of Afro-Cuban music including salsa, guajira, mambo, and chachachá. *Son* originated from the mixing of the cultural musical styles of Spain and Africa. Timothy Brennan says, “Cuban music can best be heard as a combination of elements that never fully merge, that remain in productive tension: Spanish-Cuban rural genres like the guajira and the guateque, on the one hand, and Afro-Cuban devotional music, on the other” (229). This tension exists because *son* is a marriage of outside influences that when combined become something uniquely Cuban. The structure of *son* music consists of a call and response style of singing known as the *largo-montuno*, with the *montuno* part functioning as the chorus of the song. The underlying backbone of *son* is the *clave*. *Son* music features either the two three or three two *son* or *rumba claves*, which repeat throughout a song. Typical instrumentation for *son* music consists of guitar, bass, trumpet, and percussion including bongos, congas, güiro, claves (a wooden percussion instrument), and maracas. *Son* music is the basis for Guillén’s ekphrastic poetry.

Flamenco originated in southern Spain, in the region of Andalusia. Flamenco is attributed mostly to the gypsies, or *gitanos*, in that region of Spain. The three principal elements of flamenco are *cante* (singing), *toque* (guitar), and *baile* (dance) (Manuel 107). Besides the *toque* and *cante*, flamenco is accompanied by *palmas* (clapping) and sometimes by percussion instruments including the *cajón* (a box-shaped percussion

instrument) and *palillos* (castanets). Flamenco has many different *palos* (styles or forms), but they are grouped in three different classifications: *cante jondo* (deep song) which includes *siguiriyas*, *saetas*, and *soleás*; *cante intermedio* (intermediate song) which includes *malagueñas*, *bulerías*, *peteneras*, and *fundagos*; and *cante chico* (little song) which includes *alegrías*, *tangos*, and *verdiales*. The *cante jondo* is melancholy, the *cante intermedio* is slightly less intense, and the *cante chico* deals with more lighthearted subjects. Most *palos* have a *compás* (time signature) that can be counted in 12/8 time (meaning sets of twelve eighth notes) usually marked by accents (emphasized beats) in groups of three and two. For example, *soleás* and *alegrías* have accents on beats three, six, eight, ten, and twelve; and *siguiriyas* have accents on beats one, three, five, eight, and eleven. Flamenco music is the basis for Lorca's ekphrastic poetry.

Hughes focused his ekphrastic poetry on the jazz and blues music that was being performed in Harlem. Jazz is a uniquely African-American genre of music that is widely popular throughout the world. Jazz originated in New Orleans, Louisiana where it gained notoriety in dance halls and theaters (Raeburn 41). Common elements of jazz music are improvisation (when musicians spontaneously create musical phrases and solos within the context of the key signature and musical scale) and swing (when eighth notes function as a triplet that is missing the middle note, making the second eighth note late). Jazz was originally performed in African-American communities but later gained popularity with mainstream audiences. Jazz can be performed in a small jazz combo (typically a trio, quartet, or quintet), or in a jazz big-band (consisting of 10 or

more musicians). Typical instrumentation includes drums, bass, piano, guitar, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, and sometimes clarinet.

The blues is a melancholy genre of music which originated in the rural United States. Blues initially consisted of a similar instrumentation to jazz with drums, bass, piano, trumpet, and sometimes violin or clarinet (Tracy 77). According to Steven Tracy, in the era in which Hughes was listening to the blues the instrumentation was “crude banjos, gas pipes, and water jugs that were used as instruments [...] unaccompanied or accompanied by a guitar, piano, or crude home instruments” (75). The blues started in small towns in Texas and Mississippi largely in response to the struggles of African-American life in the post-slavery American South. The blues has evolved into a standard twelve-bar pattern with traditional blues scales, which are musical key signatures that are used for playing and soloing. Typically, in blues a minor pentatonic scale is used, meaning that it is a scale made up of five notes (the root *penta* refers to five). Minor scales are used instead of major scales to give the blues a sad sound. The blues is characterized by its emotional lyrics and honesty. The blues is an important musical vehicle for the theme of the everyday struggles of African-Americans in the United States. Blues and jazz are the basis for Hughes’ ekphrastic poetry.

It should be noted that the poems included in this chapter by Guillén and Lorca are translations, my own as well as Langston Hughes’ and Noriko Manabe’s, and also from a collection of Lorca poems translated by various people that have at times (when noted) been corrected or altered by me to preserve the language and intent of the original poems deemed musically ekphrastic for the purposes of analysis. Because the meter, rhyme structure, and word choice are so important in poetry, the cited portions of

the original poems in Spanish have been included as footnotes. These will be important references alongside their English translations.

Another common trait among the works of these three authors is the titles of their books: *Motivos de son* (Son motifs), *Songoro cosongo*, *El son entero* (The whole son), *Poema del cante jondo* (Poem of the deep song), and *The Weary Blues*, which all foretell the fact that the poetry included is ekphrastic and refers to the various musical styles: Cuban *son* music, flamenco, jazz, and blues. Because it is evident that these are entire books dedicated to ekphrastic poetry, it is significant to note that the poems mentioned in this chapter represent only a portion of examples of musical ekphrasis by Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes.

3.2 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Nicolás Guillén

The ekphrastic poetry of Nicolás Guillén focuses on *son* and other Caribbean music. Guillén incorporates Afro-Cuban music, especially *son* music, in his poetry. He also refers to other genres of Caribbean music including *bachata* (see “Si tu supiera...” below). The Cuban *son* has various musical aspects, including elements of flamenco music and Afro-Cuban devotional music, and similarly, Guillén’s poetry has various musical influences. Guillén writes ekphrastic poetry that embodies elements of music in his poems. According to Arrom, Guillén made the drums sing and represented the multifarious voice of the Cuban people (115).¹ Guillén’s poetry is ekphrastic in the sense that it refers to the sound of drums, the rhythm, alludes to *son* music and dance,

¹ “Demostradamente Guillén hizo [...] cantar a los tambores. En sus versos ha recogido la voz multitudinaria del pueblo cubano” (Arrom 115).

along with lyrics that are sung. Guillén's poems use oral forms (Rabassó 216).² This means that the poetry captures an oral story. The personification of musical instruments allows the raw emotion of Afro-Cuban music to be represented in the poem. Guillén's poetry offers an interpretation of *son* music and Afro-Cuban music. In other words, the musical ekphrasis of Guillén enables music to have an actual voice, not just from the lyrics but because everything has a message to convey, including the musical instruments.

For Guillén, *son* music was an important piece of black culture that needed to be given a voice in his poetry. He loved *son* music and made it the subject of three complete books of poetry. Dennis Sardinha addresses Guillén's love for *son* music, saying, "[Guillén] goes on to praise the qualities of the 'son' [sic], which to him possesses freshness and personality" (10). The nature of *son* music gives richness and relevance to his ekphrastic poetry and enables him to convey a message of pride in the culture and musical traditions of black Cubans. Through ekphrasis, he is able to introduce Cuban *son* music to new audiences. According to Sardinha, "Guillén published 'Motivos de Son', and the impact was stupendous. For here, for the first time, was folklore turned into poetry" (11). Because Guillén was one of the first to turn Cuban folklore into poetry, his marriage of music and poetry, as it occurs in "Motivos de son", is monumental.

It is evident in the titles of Guillén's books (*Motivos de son*, *Songoro cosongo*, and *El son entero*) that *son* music is the subject of much of his poetry, and that the poetry is ekphrastic in its representation of music. Enrique Noble says, referring to *Motivos de son*, that it is apparent that the work is titled after a popular Afro-Cuban

² "El poeta cubano utiliza, como Lorca, las formas orales como poemas" (Rabassó 216).

dance that is danced by both blacks and whites (7).³ Guillen's love of *son* music and dance provides important context regarding the ekphrasis found in the following poems.

3.2.1 "La canción del bongó" ("Song of the Bongo")

"La canción del bongó" (titled "Song of the Cuban Drum" in Hughes' translation) from *Songoro cosongo* (1931) is an ekphrastic *romance*, named after a common instrument in Afro-Cuban music, the bongo. Throughout the poem there are references to percussion and dance. The poem reads, "you'll drum on my tight skin yet, / you'll dance to my song yet" (Hughes 2002 118).⁴ The "tight skin" refers to the drumhead of the bongo. This poem is ekphrastic as it focuses on a musical instrument, the bongo, and also as it incorporates rhythm and dance. Not only does the poem refer to the dancing of the *son*, it also speaks to the unifying power of music. It says, "But my hoarse ringing, / but my deep bass voice, / calls both black and white / to dance the same son" (Hughes 2002 117).⁵ This alludes to the infectious nature of a dance rhythm, and how it can make people from different backgrounds dance together as equals. The refrain is repeated throughout the poem, "Here even blueblood / answers if I call" (Hughes 2002 117).⁶ The refrain of the poem serves as the chorus of the *son*, or the *montuno*, providing the structure for "Song of the Cuban Drum." The references to

³ "Veamos ahora *Motivos de Son* (1930). Inmediatamente nos damos cuenta que Guillén titula su obra con el nombre de un baile cubano: el *son*. Este baile popular afro-cubano tiene nombre español y es bailado por blancos y negros por toda Cuba sin prejuicio alguno. Y la motivación de estos poemas tiene por inspiración la vida del negro cubano acompañada con el baile y el canto popular, sin tristezas, sin dolores, sin angustias, sin soledades" (Noble 7).

⁴ "ya me golpearás el cuero, / ya bailarás a mi voz," (Guillén 1942 14).

⁵ "Pero mi repique bronco, / pero mi profunda voz, / convoca al negro y al blanco, / que bailan el mismo son" (Guillén 1942 18).

⁶ "Aquí, el que más fino sea, / responde, si llamo yo" (Guillén 1942 19).

the bongo, the rhythmic versification, the allusion to dance, and the repeated refrain all serve to make the poem ekphrastic.

3.2.2 “Si tu supiera...” (“If you knew...”)

“Si tu supiera...” from *Motivos de son* (1930), later renamed “Songoro cosongo” in Guillén’s next book of poetry of the same name, represents music through allusions to dance and to a type of Dominican music, the *bachata*. It is significant to note that the poem imitates Caribbean music, but not *son* as is typical for Guillén, because it is celebrating the cultural music of black people from other countries throughout the Caribbean, and not just in Cuba. The language of the poem is colloquial, for example when Guillén writes “cuando no *tube plata*” instead of “cuando no *tuve dinero*” (Guillén 1999 49). This is colloquial because *tube* is written as it is commonly misspelled in Cuba as opposed to *tuve* which is the correct spelling. The use of the word *plata* (silver) is significant because it is a colloquial way to say money in the Caribbean region, instead of *dinero*, which is the standard way to say money in Spanish. This sets the stage well for the cultural context of the poem, Cuba.

The poem has consonant rhyme in various places. The following is an example of consonant rhyme on even verses: “¡Ay negra / si tú supiera! / Anoche te bi pasá / y no quise que me biera” (Guillén 1999 49).⁷ However, the rhyme structure varies throughout the poem. It also has a group of verses with an a-b-b-a rhyme structure, for example: “A é tú le hará como a mí, / que cuando no tube plata / te corrite de bachata, /

⁷ “Oh, black woman, / if you only knew! / Last night I saw you pass by, / and I didn’t want you to see me” (Manabe 122).

sin acoddadte de mí.” (Guillén 1999 49).⁸ The rhyme in combination with octosyllabic verse is important because it gives the poem a traditional *son* structure.

About “Si tu supiera...” and other ekphrastic poems by Guillén and their relationship to rhythm, dance, and other important traits of Afro-Cuban music, Noriko Manabe writes:

As can be seen, Guillen's poems incorporate several aspects of the son, including the largo-montuno format, with its explanatory motivo and the repeating phrases of the montuno. Rhythms are built into the verses through the use of rhymes and assonances as in "Negro bembón," alternating accent patterns in "Si tú supiera," and uneven numbers of syllables in "Tú no sabe inglés"; these rhythms render the poems not only evocative of the dancing or the verbal interchange reflected in the text but also highly suitable for setting to music. (122-123)

Manabe's assessment is accurate due to the fact that in the poem there is a musical and verbal interchange, which again has the feel of a chorus. It reads, “Sóngoro cosongo, / songo bé; / sóngoro cosongo / de mamey; / sóngoro, la negra / baila bien; / sóngoro de uno / sóngoro de tre”. This is the “largo-montuno” aspect of the poem that Manabe mentions, or the call and response format that is typical of Cuban *son* music. The poem “Si tu supiera...” is ekphrastic not only because it references music in the poem, but because the poem itself has a musical rhythm about it, and that rhythm is conducive to dancing.

⁸ “You’ll do to him what you did to me, / when I ran out of money, / you went off partying / without thinking of me” (Manabe 122).

3.2.3 “Guitarra” (“Guitar”)

“Guitarra”, from *El son entero* (1947) is another ekphrastic poem by Guillén that alludes to Cuban *son* music through the poetic representation of the guitar. The guitar is a common instrument in *son* music; it is also the primary instrument in flamenco, which is a type of music that influenced the *son*. The poem represents *son* music through consonant rhyme and references to *son* in the refrain. The refrain reads, “Cógela tú, guitarrero, / límpiale de alcol la boca, / y en esa guitarra, toca / tu son entero.” (Guillén 1942 107).⁹ Guillén uses groups of rhyming verses in the a-b-b-a format throughout the poem. Another example of this is “y alzó la cabeza fina, / universal y cubana, / sin opio, ni mariguana, / ni cocaína” (Guillén 1942 106).¹⁰ This structure occurs throughout the poem with one exception, the penultimate stanza which has an a-b-a-b-a-b structure. Every stanza, save the aforementioned exception, have three octosyllabic verses followed by a pentasyllabic verse. The song-like rhyme structure of the poem, along with the representation of the guitar and references to *son*, make the poem ekphrastic.

3.3 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Federico García Lorca

Federico García Lorca was fascinated by flamenco music and incorporated it into his poetry. He was not only a poet, he was also a musician and, as such, was devoted to music. According to Edward Stanton, “At a very early age he began to study piano, and during his adolescence, music and poetry competed for primacy among his

⁹ “Pick it up, guitarist, / clean the alcohol off your mouth, / and on that guitar, play / your whole son” (Guillén 1942 107). Excerpt translated by author.

¹⁰ “and raised it’s fine head, / universal and Cuban, / without opium, or marijuana, / or cocaine” (Guillén 106). Excerpt translated by author.

interests” (ix). Even after Lorca focused on poetry, music never stopped being a significant part of his life as it provided inspiration for his work. Elena Torres Clemente says that for Lorca music and poetry are inseparable (Qtd. in Ossa Martínez 94).¹¹ Being a musician, Lorca kept his musical mindset when he wrote poetry. According to José Moreno Villa, music was in Lorca’s blood (“La llevaba en la sangre”) (Qtd. in Ossa Martínez 94). Music was an integral aspect of Lorca as an artist, and it often merged with his poetic technique. Antonio Martín Moreno says music was a necessary part of Lorca’s life (Qtd. in Ossa Martínez 94).¹² Music and poetry were both essential components of Lorca’s life and musical ekphrasis is the means by which he could unite his two passions.

Lorca wrote poetry about various types of music including jazz, blues, and *son*, but the music that provided him with the most inspiration was flamenco. According to Katherine Thomas, “It is known that García Lorca studied flamenco guitar with two Gypsies from Granada. He was therefore familiar with the flamenco *compás* (beat/rhythmic structure)” (26). Mora and Verdú suggest he was “very flamenco”, meaning obsessed with flamenco music; otherwise they ask, how could he have written *Poema del cante jondo?* (214).¹³ As a musician, he had an intricate knowledge of different styles of music from his classical studies as a pianist, and he acquainted himself with the workings of flamenco. He was familiar with many different *palos*,

¹¹ “[E]n Federico García Lorca, música y poesía son, aún más si cabe, indisociables” (De la Ossa Martínez 94).

¹² “[L]a música fue para García Lorca una imperativa necesidad vital” (Martín, 63). José Moreno Villa (Martín, 65-66) afirmó, en la misma línea, que ‘Federico era un alma musical de nacimiento, de raíz, de herencia milenaria. La llevaba en la sangre como Juan Breva, Chacón o la gran ‘Argentinita’” (Qtd. in Ossa Martínez 94).

¹³ —¿Será que [Lorca] mismo era muy flamenco?

—No sé si era muy aficionado o no, pero lo que sé es que era muy flamenco. ¿Cómo iba a escribir alguien que no fuera muy flamenco el *Poema del cante jondo?* Lo que pasa es que él no iba de flamenco, no se creía un especialista...Le apasionaba y punto. (Mora 214)

including the *soleá*, the *saeta*, and the *petenera*, but the *siguiriya* was his favorite (Laat 458). Lorca named poems in *Poema del cante jondo* for each of these *palos*. He incorporated the rhythm of flamenco into his poetry about flamenco.

One of the characteristics of flamenco music that fascinated Lorca was the diverse emotions portrayed in the genre, including pain, abandonment, and persecution (Laat 457-458).¹⁴ Lorca wrote ekphrastic poetry that taps into the same vein of grief and pain that is portrayed in flamenco music. He devoted a great deal of time to understanding flamenco music and Gypsy culture. He felt close to the culture and focused many writings on the representation of flamenco music and Gypsy culture through musical ekphrasis (Laat 455).¹⁵ Of Lorca's ekphrastic poetry, one of his most famous works, *Poema del cante jondo*, is a collection of ekphrastic poetry about flamenco music from which the following poems have been selected.

3.3.1 "Poema de la siguiriya gitana" ("Poem of the Gypsy Siguiriya")

"Poema de la siguiriya gitana" is ekphrastic because it represents a flamenco *siguiriya*. A *siguiriya* is a type of *cante jondo*, or deep song, in flamenco. These types of *cantes* are slow and often tragic in nature. Lorca saw the *siguiriya* as the perfect *palo*, or style, of flamenco; the perfect style for singing sad, painful music because the verses and melodies weep (Laat 458).¹⁶ The poem is divided into seven sections:

"Paisaje" ("Landscape"), "La guitarra" ("The Guitar"), "El grito" ("The Cry"), "El silencio"

¹⁴ "Asimismo, Lorca se siente atrapado por la fascinación de las rotundas emociones que el flamenco transmite: el abandono, la pena, la desgracia, la persecución, el dolor: toda una gama de sentimientos que un buen cantaor expresa. Es la sublimación de una intimidad angustiosa y desgarradora" (457-458)

¹⁵ "Federico García Lorca mantuvo un intenso acercamiento con el flamenco. Sintió pasión, admiración y respeto por esta expresión cultural."

¹⁶ "El palo flamenco (así se les llama a los diversos cantes) preferido de García Lorca era la siguiriya. De ella nos da una definición acertadísima: "en la 'siguiriya' gitana, perfecto poema de las lágrimas, llora la melodía como lloran los versos" (Laat 458)

(“The Silence”), “El paso de la siguiriya” (“The Passage of the Siguiriya”), “Después de pasar” (“Afterwards”), and “Y después” (“And Then”). Some of the sections are more ekphrastic than others but each of the sections serves an important function in the ekphrasis of the whole *siguiriya*; they all represent an important element of the *cante*. The sections occur in the poem in the same order that they would occur in an actual *siguiriya*, which is in itself an underlying ekphrastic element.

3.3.1.1 “Paisaje” (“Landscape”)

The poem opens with “Paisaje,” which sets the stage for the *siguiriya*. The section represents the countryside of Andalusia. It reads, “Above the olive grove / a [sunken] sky / and a dark rain / of cold stars” (García Lorca 1991 99).¹⁷ Here, and throughout the section, Lorca writes about the landscape of his homeland including “olive groves”, and the “river’s edge”. Later, Lorca represents the *jaleo* or shouts of encouragement from the *tocaos* in a *siguiriya*. It reads, “The olive trees / are laden / with cries” (1991 99).¹⁸ As the *cante* begins, the guitar is the instrument that plays the *compás*.

3.3.1.2 “La guitarra” (“The Guitar”)

Similar to Guillén’s “Guitarra,” Lorca’s “La guitarra” is based on the principal instrument of flamenco music. It represents the beginning of the *siguiriya*, the *falseta* or guitar solo, and then the beginning of the verses. The section is ekphrastic not only because the subject of the poem is a musical instrument, but because the guitar is used

¹⁷ “Sobre el olivar / hay un cielo hundido / y una lluvia oscura / de luceros fríos” (García Lorca 1991 98).

¹⁸ “Los olivos / están cargados / de gritos” (García Lorca 1991 98).

to represent the raw emotion of flamenco music. The refrain reads, “The guitar / begins its weeping” and “It’s [impossible] / to still it”,¹⁹ referring to the majestic sound of the guitar (García Lorca 1991 99-100). Lorca personifies the guitar; it has human characteristics and weeps like a woman in mourning. The sound of the music expresses pain. The poem continues, “[Oh g]uitar! / Heart mortally wounded / by five swords” (1991 100).²⁰ The guitar mourns and “weeps for distant things” (García Lorca 1991 101). The guitar is a metaphor for a broken heart singing a painful melody, and the reader can relate to the feelings of grief and anguish.

“The Guitar” is ekphrastic because it represents flamenco music and gives an interpretation of the emotion of music. The poem’s ekphrastic characteristics are the references to a musical instrument, the guitar, and the allusion to a style of music, flamenco.

3.3.1.3 “El grito” (“The Cry”)

This is another ekphrastic section of the poem because of its representation of the *siguiriya*. The cry, or the shout, refers to multiple facets of the *siguiriya*, the *cante* and the *jaleo*. In this section, the shout is far-reaching and emotionally charged. It reads, “The arc of a cry / travels from hill / to hill” (García Lorca 1991 101).²¹ The shout, “Ay!”, repeats throughout the section and represents the musical *cante*. Another ekphrastic element of “The Cry” is the reference to a musical instrument, the viola. It

¹⁹ “Empieza el llanto/de la guitarra” y “Es imposible / callarla” (García Lorca 1991 98-100).

²⁰ “¡Oh guitarra! / Corazón malherido/por cinco espadas” (García Lorca 1991 100).

²¹ “La elipse de un grito / va de monte / a monte” (García Lorca 1991 100).

reads, “Like the bow of a viola / the cry has set the wind’s / long strings to vibrating” (García Lorca 1991 101).²²

3.3.1.4 “El silencio” (“The Silence”)

“El silencio” portrays a significant facet of a *siguiriya*, silence. Dynamic contrast is an important component of music, especially flamenco, and silence plays a crucial role. “The Silence” represents a lull in the *cante*, a pause for effect. In a *siguiriya* the silences follows the *grito*, and is a pause in the *cante*. Absence of noise provides a moment of observation and reflection in the *siguiriya*. It reads, “Listen, my [son], to the silence. / [It is a]n undulating silence, / a silence / [where the] valleys and echoes [slide], / [and] that [bows the] foreheads / toward the ground” (García Lorca 1991 103).²³ The section uses the literary device of a paradox, “[l]isten, my [son], to the silence”. Silence in theory has no sound, and yet it is an impactful absence of sound because of the dynamic contrast that it provides, which evokes powerful emotions. This lack of sound is so impactful that nature responds to it, as it makes the valleys and echoes slide around. The dynamic contrast conveyed in “The Silence” is a compelling pause in the *siguiriya*, and it sets the stage for the next phrase of the *cante*.

3.3.1.5 “El paso de la siguiriya” (“Passage of the Siguiriya”)

“El paso de la siguiriya” is an example of a part of the *siguiriya* that conveys anguish and suffering. It reads, “[It] goes chained to the tremor / of a rhythm that never

²² “Como un arco de viola, / el grito ha hecho vibrar / largas cuerdas del viento” (García Lorca 1991 100).

²³ “Oye, hijo mío, el silencio. / Es un silencio ondulado, / un silencio, / donde resbalan valles y ecos / y que inclina las frentes / hacia el suelo” (García Lorca 1991 102).

arrives; / [it] has a heart of silver, / [and] in [its] right hand a dagger” (García Lorca 1991 103).²⁴ These verses contribute to the painful representation of the *siguiriya*.

Lorca utilizes the refrain, “earth of light / sky of earth”²⁵ to give the poem the feel of a song (García Lorca 1991 103). This is repeated as if it were a chorus to a piece of music. The tone of “Passage of the *Siguiriya*” is once again painful and violent. It refers to the *compás*, or flamenco rhythm, of the *siguiriya* when it mentions “a rhythm that never arrives” and “your rhythm headless” (García Lorca 1991 103).²⁶ These are references to the unique *compás* of the *siguiriya*. It bears repeating that the *siguiriya compás* is distinct from other *compás*es in that the accents fall on beats one, three, five, eight, and eleven of a 12/8 time signature.

“Passage of the *Siguiriya*” is an example of musical ekphrasis because it fulfills two out of the three objectives in the definition of musical ekphrasis: it represents and interprets flamenco music. It represents flamenco by referring to the *compás* of the *cante* and gives a unique interpretation of it.

3.3.1.6 “Después de pasar” (“Afterwards”)

“Afterwards” conveys another message of heartache to begin to wrap up the representation of the *siguiriya* itself. It refers to “spirals of weeping” (“*espirales de llanto*”), which solidifies the idea of suffering which is common throughout the *siguiriya* (García Lorca 1991 105). The “spirals of weeping” refers to the manner of emotional

²⁴ “Va encadenada al temblor / de un ritmo que nunca llega; / tiene el corazón de plata / y un puñal en la diestra” (García Lorca 102).

²⁵ “Tierra de luz/ cielo de tierra” (García Lorca 1991 103).

²⁶ “un ritmo que nunca llega” y “un ritmo sin cabeza”

singing in the flamenco *cante*. “Afterwards” concludes the ekphrastic representation of the *siguiriya*.

3.3.1.7 “Y después” (“And Then”)

After the representation of the *siguiriya*, “And Then” illustrates what is left after the conclusion of the *cante*. After the *siguiriya* all that is left is a desolate earth; it reads, “Only the desert / remains. / Undulating / desert” (García Lorca 1991 107).²⁷ This scene of the dreary landscape excludes all sense of optimism. It reads, “The illusion of dawn, / and kisses / vanish” (García Lorca 1991 105).²⁸ The pessimistic message portrayed in “And Then” represents the struggles of Gypsy life in Andalusia and closes the book on the ekphrastic depiction of the painful *siguiriya*.

3.3.2 “Malagueña”

“Malagueña” is another section of poetry, which comes from the poem “Three Cities” (“Tres ciudades”), and represents flamenco music. The section carries the name of a style of flamenco from Málaga. Malagueñas are played on a guitar and have no accompanying dance. The tone of the poem is one of death and mourning. Again Lorca is able to represent the somber *cante* through poetry. It reads, “Black horses / and sinister people / pass along the sunken roads / of the guitar” (García Lorca 1991 145).²⁹ The references to “black horses”, which represent a funeral, and “sinister people”, which represent danger, emphasize the sorrowful music also conveyed in this

²⁷ “Sólo queda / el desierto. / Un ondulado / desierto” (García Lorca 1991 106).

²⁸ “La ilusión de la aurora / y los besos, / se desvanecen” (García Lorca 1991 104).

²⁹ “Pasan caballos negros/ y gente siniestra/ por los hondos caminos/ de la guitarra” (García Lorca 1991 196).

type of *cante*. In this case, it is death that is represented by the somber flamenco music. Again, an important ekphrastic element of the poem is the representation of the guitar, the primary instrument of flamenco music.

The malagueña *palo* is characterized by *cante libre*, or lack of a prescribed rhythm, which is reflected in Lorca's verses. For example, "Death / goes in and out / of the tavern" (García Lorca 1991 145).³⁰ In these verses there is no set rhythm or rhyme until the end. It follows the *cante libre* style of a malagueña. This trend is present throughout the section. This literary representation of the malagueña *palo* is another ekphrastic trait.

"Malagueña" qualifies as ekphrasis for various reasons. The poem represents a style of flamenco and gives a dark interpretation of the music through the focus on death. Ekphrastic characteristics of the poem are the representation of the *cante libre* style in a traditional malagueña, the reference to a musical style, as well as a reference to a musical instrument, the guitar. Lorca uses the "Black horses / and sinister people" verses as a metaphor to describe Gypsy culture and the "pass[ing] along the sunken roads / of the guitar" verses as a metaphor for the *toque* of the guitar. The poem captures the devastation of death through its ekphrastic representation of flamenco music.

3.4 Musical Ekphrasis in the Poetry of Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes is an influential poet and is very much a prominent figure in musical ekphrasis. Although his poetry is in English, poets around the world felt his influence. Nicolás Guillén is no exception as his decision to write musical ekphrasis

³⁰ "La muerte / entra y sale / de la taberna" (García Lorca 1991 144).

stemmed from a conversation he had with Hughes, and Federico García Lorca also reaped the benefits of Hughes' innovation while living in New York in the Harlem jazz and blues scene (Smart 23). Although Hughes and Lorca did not attend Columbia at the same time (Hughes in 1921 and Lorca in 1929), their ekphrastic works demonstrate that they were steeped in the sights, sounds, people, and views of the Harlem Renaissance that affected so much of their musical ekphrasis.³¹ According to Kevin Young, "Langston Hughes's first book [*The Weary Blues*] is one of the high points of modernism³² and of what has come to be called the Harlem Renaissance—that flowering of African-American literature and culture in the public's consciousness" (xiii). Hughes was a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance, and in the validation of African-American culture through musical ekphrasis. Lorca learned about African-American music from spending time in Harlem and experiencing the influence of the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, of which Langston Hughes was one. Samuel Floyd Jr. writes, "[V]iews of black music arose from the leaders of the Harlem Renaissance. That artistic and intellectual movement of the 1920s, [was] still viable during Lorca's stay" (Qtd. in Hess 117). For this reason, Hughes is included in the present analysis and some of his important contributions to musical ekphrasis will be considered. Hughes was a key figure in musical ekphrasis' rise to prominence and the representation of important musical cultures through ekphrasis.

The musical focus of Hughes' ekphrastic poetry is jazz and blues. He was able to embody African-American culture and the musical movements occurring in Harlem. According to Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, "While [Hughes] worked at various

³¹ Please reference the Appendix for a timeline of relevant events in the lives of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes.

³² Not to be confused with Hispanic *modernismo*.

low-paying jobs, he continued to explore the blues, jazz, and other African American forms in his verse. In 1925, 'The Weary Blues' won the top prize for poetry in a contest run by the magazine *Opportunity*. From that moment Hughes was seen as one of the stars of the Harlem Renaissance" (Rampersad 43). He gave readers a glimpse into the nightlife of Harlem, into the jazz clubs and cabarets. Readers can, through Hughes' ekphrasis, experience jazz and blues music. Hughes' first and one of his most ekphrastic collection of poems is *The Weary Blues*, which was published in 1926, from which the following texts are drawn.

3.4.1 "Jazzonia"

In "Jazzonia" it is not difficult to find evidence of musical ekphrasis because the literal musical references are constant. The title of the poem itself gives a valuable clue to the ekphrastic nature of the poem. The scene is set in a nightclub. It reads, "In a Harlem cabaret / Six long-headed jazzers play" (Hughes 2015 7). This refers to a nightclub in which jazz was heard within Harlem at the time. It refers to "A dancing girl whose eyes are bold / Lifts high a dress of silken gold" (Hughes 2015 7). Dancing to jazz music was common within these cabarets. Arthur Davis describes the cabaret scene in Harlem during the time of Langston Hughes' stay:

This cabaret Harlem, this Jazzonia is a joyous city, but the joyousness is not unmixed; it has a certain strident and hectic quality, and there are overtones of weariness and despair. "The long-headed jazzers" and whirling dancing girls are desperately trying to find some new delight, and some new escape. They seem obsessed with the idea of seizing the present moment as though afraid of the future. (277).

The poem is ekphrastic because it represents and interprets jazz music. The ekphrastic characteristics in this poem are the references to jazz music, the musical environment, and dancing.

3.4.2 “Negro Dancers”

“Negro Dancers” once again gives a clear representation of the scene in a Harlem cabaret. The representation of the music and culture of Harlem is explicit in the poem. It says, “Soft light on the tables, / Music gay, / Brown-skin steppers / In a cabaret” (Hughes 2015 8). In just four short lines, Hughes establishes the location, the environment, the music, and the ethnicity of the dancers. Other references to African-American culture include the title “Negro Dancers” and colloquial language such as “Me an’ ma baby’s / Got two mo’ ways, / Two mo’ ways to do de / Charleston!” (Hughes 2015 8). The dance mentioned in the poem is the Charleston, so once again it can be noted that the references are not subtle but very explicit. All of these references to the jazz culture and environment (the cabaret), as well as references to dance and music, qualify the poem as an ekphrastic poem.

3.4.3 “Harlem Night Club”

“Harlem Night Club” is an ekphrastic poem that is set in, once again, a cabaret. As with the other Hughes poems, the title itself suggests the ekphrastic nature of the poem, but the musical references are more subtle than in the previous poems by Hughes. The poem represents jazz music and has ekphrastic elements such as dynamic contrast, meaning the varying volume of the music. There are references to jazz and dancing in the poem: “Jazz-band, jazz-band,— / Play, pLAY, PLAY! /

Tomorrow.... who knows? / Dance today!" (Hughes 2015 14). The reader can feel the music get louder and quieter through the typography and the punctuation. Also, the way "Play, pLAY, PLAY!" is written gives the feel of a musical crescendo because the capital letters indicate an increase in volume.

It is also important to note the different tone, in comparison with the previously mentioned poems, that exists in "Harlem Night Club," a happy tone. This is evident in the use of words such as "gay" and "joy". This is a marked contrast from the more melancholy, bluesy poems found throughout the book such as "Lenox Avenue: Midnight" which is a poem about heartbreak and sorrow, and "To a Little Lover-Lass, Dead" which is a poem about loneliness and death. Notwithstanding the upbeat tone of the song, there is an underlying pessimism in the poem, "Tomorrow.... is darkness". The poem shows a disregard for the future and a focus on the euphoria experienced with the enjoyment of jazz music.

3.4.4 "The Weary Blues"

It is not surprising that "The Weary Blues", from the same book, is an ekphrastic poem about blues music. This poem is ekphrastic because it represents blues music, and it is one of the most ekphrastic of all of Hughes' poetry because it contains several of the traits of musical ekphrasis. The ekphrastic traits of the poem are references to the musical style, blues; references to a musical instrument, the piano; references to musical rhythm, the syncopated rhythm; and cultural references about music, music "from a black man's soul" (2015 5). The poem goes further and describes the percussion in the music: "Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor" (2015 5). Also, there is a reference to the melody: "He made that poor piano moan with melody";

and the chords of the piano: “He played a few chords” (2015 5). The piano is personified to relay a musical message of grief and pain as it sings a duet with the singer: “I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan” (2015 5). These elements work together to form Hughes’ ekphrasis of the blues.

3.5 Common Traits

The poems that are presented in this chapter show that musical ekphrasis was occurring simultaneously in different centers, Cuba, Spain, and the United States, but the overall themes and intentions of ekphrastic poetry are similar. Each of the poems has the same ekphrastic purpose: to represent, teach, or interpret a work or works of music. Every poet has a slightly different way of achieving the goals of ekphrasis, but the central techniques are the same. These similarities of technique are linked to the poets’ environments, influences, and common themes found within their works, as discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

COMMON THEMES AND INFLUENCES IN THE POETRY OF GUILLÉN, LORCA, AND HUGHES

4.1 Common Themes and Influences

The poetry of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes shares important traits, and most importantly, it has a common purpose. Although the poems represent music, there were important differences in context for each author. First, each poet wrote about a genre of music specific to his region. There are subtle similarities in the different styles of music and in the histories of each style of music, as the different genres of music are largely distinct. That being said, each type of music lends itself well to representation in poetry. Thus, it can be concluded that musical ekphrasis can occur in reference to many styles of music and in many regions of the world.

Another significant difference to note is the language of musical ekphrasis. Guillén and Lorca write in Spanish, and Hughes in English. This helps make the point that musical ekphrasis occurs in a variety of contexts, including in different languages. So the fundamental differences in context among the examples of musical ekphrasis by Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes show how adaptable it can be to a variety of contexts. No matter what the musical subject, or the language of the poetry, musical ekphrasis can be created in order to accomplish the same goals: to represent, teach, or interpret a work or works of music.

Notwithstanding differences in context, all of the poets share similarities in their writing styles. They all use similar poetic techniques. Some common techniques include the use of onomatopoeia, personification, colloquial language, slang, and

metaphor. These similar poetic recourses are adaptable to the varying context of each poet, and all serve to create musical ekphrasis. Many of these techniques have been examined in the previous chapter, but one that is particularly significant to note in this chapter is the personification of musical instruments because it is an important common device amongst the three poets. This technique was used widely by Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes as a way to give personality to the music that is being represented. This helps the musical subjects become relatable to the people of each region.

Another similarity among Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes is the tendency of each poet to focus on the subject matter around him: the traits of his homeland. These traits are not limited to the geography or the landscape of their lands, but also rise from the culture of that region. Culture provides an important context for the music that is represented and the poetry itself. All of the poets are, at least to some extent, a product of their environment: Cuba, Spain, or Harlem. The representation of the traits of the homeland is a recurring theme and provides valuable context for the musical ekphrasis.

For this study, according to the poets who are the subjects, musical ekphrasis is considered as occurring in three hotspots around the world, Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem. Besides the obvious reason to focus on these geographic centers (as the residence of each poet), there is evidence to suggest that the music scenes of each of these centers influenced more than just the poet from that country (i.e., Lorca and *Poeta en Nueva York*). In addition to the common influence that was felt by the poets in each of the three centers as a result of time spent in those specific music scenes, the poets themselves were aware of each other and were influenced by each other. Some of the

poets even crossed paths by design, and the outcome was significant (see 4.4 The creative centers of musical ekphrasis: Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem).

The last and most significant common trait in the writings of the three poets under discussion is use of musical ekphrasis as a tool to validate marginalized populations in their homelands. Both Guillén and Hughes had personal experience with the oppression that came with their ethnicities and used that as a motivation to become a voice for their people. Lorca on the other hand, partially due to the fact that he himself felt marginalized as a result of his homosexuality, had the perspective of a concerned onlooker who assumed the role of becoming a spokesperson for oppressed people. The distinct situations of the poets send a collective message. Regardless of the reason for the poets taking on the role of representing marginalized people in their regions, they made this their mission and used musical ekphrasis as their instrument to elevate the status of the oppressed.

4.2 Personification of Musical Instruments

Guillén often uses personification to give personality to musical instruments, and uses them as a representation of the oppressed people of Cuba. Smart writes, “From the very beginning of his poetic production, Guillén manifested this tendency toward humanization, or what might be termed an artistic animism” (126-127). Not only did Guillén personify the natural world around him, he personified musical instruments, and the instruments became important subjects in his poetry. For example, in “Song of the Cuban Drum,” Guillén uses the bongo as a main character and the poem is written from the drum’s perspective (Hughes 2002 117-118). For example it reads, “you’ll drum on

my tight skin yet, / you'll dance to my song yet.”³³ The use of personal pronouns including “my” show that it is written from the point of view of the bongo drum. This is significant because the drum is human-like and shares similar struggles with the black population of Cuba. It reads, “There are some who would insult me / but not deep in their hearts, / some who spit on me in public / but kiss me in private”.³⁴ The marginalized feeling that the drum experiences is the embodiment of black oppression in Cuba. The drum has a central role in representing the black population because of its involvement in Cuban *son* music, a popular style of music that belongs to the *negro* people of Cuba.

Lorca also used personification of musical instruments in his poetry as an instrument to give the music personality. One of the best examples is his poem “The Guitar” from *Poema del cante jondo*. He writes, “The guitar / begins its weeping” (1991 99).³⁵ The guitar cries like a person and makes the painful and sorrowful music come across from the point of view of a gypsy who has lived through hardship as part of a marginalized group who were excluded from Spanish society. In a similar way, Lorca personifies a guitar once again in “The Six Strings”, also from *Poema del cante jondo*. It reads, “The sobs of lost / souls / escape through its round / mouth” (1991 129).³⁶ He refers to the sound hole of the guitar as its “round mouth”. In the poem, the guitar sings like a flamenco *cantaor* and uses its voice to express the pain of the music.

Like Guillén and Lorca, Hughes personifies musical instruments in his poems. In “The Weary Blues” he writes, “I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—” (2015 5).

³³ “ya me golpearás el cuero, / ya bailarás a mi voz,” (Guillén 14).

³⁴ “Habrà quien llegue a insultarme, / pero no de corazón; / habrà quien me escupa en público, / cuando a solas me besó...” (Guillén 19).

³⁵ “Empieza el llanto/de la guitarra”

³⁶ “El sollozo de las almas / perdidas, / se escapa por su boca / redonda” (1991 177).

Hughes' choice of verb, "moan", gives the piano that human characteristic. The piano itself is singing the blues along with the black man. In "Song for a Banjo Dance" Hughes again uses a verb that gives the instrument human characteristics when he writes, "The banjo's sobbing low" (2015 18). This style is very similar to that of Lorca, especially in his poem, "The Guitar". Both Hughes and Lorca use verbs such as "weep" and "sob" to personify instruments in their poetry. This is done in order to communicate the pain which is representative of the population of oppressed people at large. Both the Gypsies of Andalusia and the members of black Harlem lived lives marginalized from the rest of society and expressed these feelings of grief and sadness through their music. Hughes, like Lorca and Guillén, captures this musical sadness through his ekphrasis. The sad personalities of the instruments are representative of the troubles of the society as a whole within the communities of the *gitano* people of Andalusia and the *negro* people of Harlem.

4.3 The Traits of Home

A common theme among the poets is a strong sense of local identity. Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes all represented the world around them in their communities. The sense of cultural pride that they possessed led them to focus on the physical traits of their places of origin as well as the people around them and their identities. This is accomplished through the representation of communities, landscapes, popular styles of music within their communities, as well as through the portrayal of the manner of speech. They endeavored to capture the environment of their homelands to provide context for their ekphrastic poetry, as can be noted in the previous chapter.

4.3.1 Guillén and Cuba

Guillén represents *color cubano* (Cuban color) in all of his works (Sardinha 72). The pride that Guillén felt in his homeland was an ever present theme in his poetry. The poet conveyed not only the landscape of Cuba, but the colloquial language of its people. For example, in “Búcate plata”, which is another ekphrastic text due to *largo-montuno* format, Guillén writes, “Búcate plata, / búcate plata, / porque no doy un paso má / etoy a arró con galleta / na má” (1999 52).³⁷ He reflects the Cuban accent and colloquial language. The Cuban accent is conveyed in the poem by the way Guillén portrays in the verses the tendency of Cubans to drop the “S” sound, “búcate” instead of “búscate”, “etoy” instead of “estoy”, etc. Also, the regional variations in Spanish itself are manifested in the verses through the use of the word “plata” instead of “dinero”, for example.

Guillén took time to get to know his fellow Cubans and learn of their culture, and this would forever impact the subject matter of his poetry. After moving to Havana to start law school, Guillén decided to go back home and learn more about his people. Sardinha writes, “By now [Guillén] had given up Havana, was back home, but what of the future? He himself says: ‘From 1922 to 1927 I didn’t write a line’. But he was by no means idle—he was getting to know his people, their way of life, pleasures and sorrows, their music and their language” (8-9). This is significant because he was able to use this background knowledge as a basis so he could write musical ekphrasis in a way that represented and elevated the common people of Cuba.

³⁷ “Look for some money, / look for some money, / because I can’t take another step / I’m down to rice and crackers / nothing more” (Guillén 1999 52). Excerpt translated by author.

4.3.2 Lorca and Andalusia

The history and landscape of Andalusia provided constant inspiration for Lorca. His region was a theme that was ever-present in his works. He writes on multiple occasions about the famous river Guadalquivir, as well as Andalusia's olive and orange trees. Andalusia was more than just a place of origin for Lorca, it was his identity. Brian Morris says,

Lorca's life began and ended in Andalusia; his mind and his work revolved around it, even when he was far distant; his poetry and plays in particular were rooted in his native region; without Andalusia, he would not have been the man or the writer he was; without his writings, Andalusia would have been deprived of its most gifted and sensitive interpreter. (31)

Andalusia gave Lorca the subject matter for his musical ekphrasis. It was there he became enthralled with flamenco music, the music of Andalusian gypsies.

"In Lorca's work, Andalusia is more than a mere theme or lyrical background. Often it constitutes the very marrow of his poetry. It is the touchstone of his career, his *querencia*: the place to which he always went back for vital and artistic regeneration" (Stanton 55). The inspiration that came from his homeland motivated him to create his greatest works.

4.3.3 Hughes and Harlem

Hughes' adoration for Harlem became a primary voice in his poetry. Originally from Joplin, Missouri, he traveled to New York to enroll at Columbia University. Hughes, however, quickly became disenchanted with Columbia largely due to

discrimination on account of his race. Hughes then fell in love with the city of New York and especially the neighborhood of Harlem. Milton Meltzer writes, “Nothing went right at school. Langston stopped studying, spent very little time on campus and all the time he could in Harlem or downtown. He made the city his school, read a lot of books, and dented his allowance badly buying tickets night after night for the all-Negro musical hit *Shuffle Along*” (73). For Hughes, Harlem had more to offer than just college education, it provided him with a cultural education. Hughes felt like he belonged in the black community and he quickly found his voice writing ekphrasis about jazz and blues. Hughes familiarized himself with the music of Harlem by spending time in cabarets and jazz clubs. His familiarity with the jazz and blues scene of Harlem taught him about a unique facet of black culture, its music. Hughes represents this essential piece of the community through ekphrasis in a way that celebrates the black culture in Harlem.

4.4 The Creative Centers of Musical Ekphrasis: Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem

The three poets not only shared mutual influences, they themselves were aware of each other, crossed paths, and influenced each other. These mutual influences are significant because it shows that goals of musical ekphrasis are adaptable to a variety of contexts. The poets were creating ekphrasis simultaneously, in their own regions, about different styles of music and about different cultures. Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes learned from each other as they crossed paths and read each other’s works. There is also a great deal of common ground in the work of the poets as each one traveled and experienced different cultures and regions which in turn inspired their work.

Lorca and Hughes were both greatly inspired by the poetry of Guillén. Sardinha writes:

[T]he reaction to [Guillén's] poems was tremendous. Among those whose response may be mentioned is Federico García Lorca, who was in Cuba at the time and wrote a "*son*" entitled "Iré a Santiago", directly inspired by Guillén's work. In July of that year Langston Hughes wrote Guillén a letter from New Jersey expressing his delight at the beauty and success of his poems. (13)

Both Lorca and Hughes had met with Guillén in Cuba and found a similar intrigue with Cuban *son* music. Ryan Kernan writes, "Like Hughes, García Lorca was also captivated by the *soneros* of the Marianao district" (136).³⁸ The poetry of Guillén inspired Lorca to write about Cuba and *son* music, in a similar way that he wrote about flamenco music in Spain, and jazz and blues while he was in New York. Hughes found common ground between his own writings and those of Guillén on account of their representations of a similar subject, the music that is the pride of the black communities where they lived.

Hughes and Guillén were both influenced by Lorca. In fact, while the two poets were in Spain together for a writer's conference in 1937, the works of Lorca were one of the subjects that were studied (Kutzinski 133).³⁹ Guillén was so inspired by Lorca's work that he wrote a number of poems in his honor including "Angustia cuarta: Federico" ("The Fourth Anguish: Federico") and "Momento en García Lorca" ("Moment with the Muse García Lorca"). Hughes translated select works of Lorca into English as a manifestation of his sense of the value of Lorca's work.

However, the extent of Hughes' direct influence on Lorca is unclear. According to Kutzinski, Hughes never met Lorca face-to-face (89). The mutual influences between

³⁸ Marianao is a municipality of Havana.

³⁹ Please reference the Appendix for a timeline of relevant events in the lives of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes.

the two poets, however, are very clear. Both went to Columbia University for a short time, and both spent time in Harlem where they were greatly influenced by the jazz and blues scene. Although the poets were not in New York at the same time, there is the possibility that they went to the same clubs and heard some of the same jazz artists. One thing is clear, both poets reacted in a similar fashion to experiencing the Harlem scene. Both poets wrote musical ekphrasis about the jazz and blues music of Harlem in order to represent the black community.

Although it is unclear what influence, if any, Hughes had on Lorca, perhaps the best example of one poet being influenced by another is Hughes' influence on Guillén and the Cuban's decision to write ekphrastic poetry. "Hughes had first met Guillén during a much-popularized second visit to Havana in March of 1930, and the two poets had spent a good deal of time together in Spain in late 1937 [after Lorca's death]" (Kutzinski 133). The two poets became close associates after their initial meeting, and it was that first meeting that played a pivotal role in Guillén acquiring his own poetic voice. The crucial factor in Guillén's decision to write musical ekphrasis was a meeting that he had with Hughes in Cuba. After a lengthy conversation, Guillén realized his poetic voice and made the decision to write musical ekphrasis. According to Smart, "Langston Hughes had a most transcendental impact on Guillén; in fact, he literally triggered Guillén's turning to the *son* as the vehicle for his most original poetic expression" (23). Smart shows that Guillén realized the similar goals of Hughes and himself, both black poets striving to elevate the social status of marginalized black populations:

The fascinating theoretical constructs that [Henry Luis] Gates [Jr.] offers, of course, explicate what was already praxis in Langston Hughes's art by the time he and Guillén first met in January 1930. And the significance of Hughes's art was not lost on the young Guillén, who was then intensely seeking his own authentic voice. (Smart 32)

Guillén instantly connected with Langston Hughes, and recognized the similarities that they shared. Smart continues, "In his newspaper article "Conversación con Langston Hughes" (Conversation with Langston Hughes), Guillén reports that Hughes was the 'black people's poet,' in spite of his mulatto appearance—Guillén says he 'looked just like a Cuban '*mulatico*'" (32). Guillén recognized Hughes' significant role in representing black culture in his writing. Smart writes, "[Hughes] had, in fact, made the Afro-American oral literary tradition the basis of his own authentic black scribal poetry" (32). After his fateful encounter with Hughes, Guillén did not take long to follow the path of his mentor. Smart writes, "Within three months of his meeting with Hughes, Guillén set himself on the same course and discovered his own authentic voice, creating the *son* poem with the verbal rhythm of the Cuban people's best-known oral poetic form, the *son*" (32). Guillén admired Hughes and his mission to represent the pride of the Harlem community, the music, and he recognized his own opportunity in Cuba to be a similar leader through musical ekphrasis. This meeting between the two poets was crucial to Guillén's development as a poet because this desire to elevate the status of the blacks in Cuba through musical ekphrasis, in the same way that Hughes did in Harlem, became the main goal of his writing.

4.5 Using Musical Ekphrasis as a Means to Validate Marginalized Cultures

4.5.1 Guillén, *los negros*, and *los mulatos*

The message of the struggles of the black population in Cuba resonated throughout Guillén's poetic works. Sardinha says, "Guillén[...]committed to making the black Cuban take pride in what was his, and give up the idea of being second-rate" (13). He did this by capturing the importance of their musical accomplishments in his poetry. Black pride and empowerment were conveyed well through musical ekphrasis and his representation of an important element of black Cuban culture, *son* music. Rebecca Bender says, "Guillén's *Motivos* effectively challenged the status quo by celebrating an element of Cuban culture that had previously been suppressed" (21). Guillén did not just use his poetry to celebrate the *negro* culture, he used poetry as a means to validate the identity of mulattoes, a population of Cuba that felt perhaps more marginalized than *los negros*.

Guillén saw the mulatto heritage as an unfortunate situation of people who were trapped between two ethnicities. Being born to mulatto parents, Guillén was very sympathetic to this predicament of the mulatto people due to his own heritage. This dilemma made it difficult for them to feel like they belonged anywhere. According to Smart, "Neither black nor white, the mulattos's metaphysical alienation is likely to give him a clearer insight into the primordial contradiction of the human condition. Guillén seems to have developed the potential of this difficult position" (169). Guillén not only focused on the validation of the culture of black Cubans, he strove to celebrate the culture and heritage of Cuban mulattoes.

Cuban music was a way to celebrate the important role that Afro-Cuban people played in Cuban culture, and Guillén used musical ekphrasis to bring that to life in the form of poetry. The Cuban *son* was popular throughout all of Cuba and with all different ethnicities. *Son* music was important to Cubans for recreation and leisure. It was a force of unification in Cuba; it was common ground for all races to stand on. In “Song of the Cuban Drum” Guillén writes, “But my hoarse rejoinder, / deep bass voice, / calls both black and white / to dance the same son.” (Hughes 2002 117).⁴⁰ Guillén recognized the power of Cuban *son* music to unify the Cuban people, elevate the status of the Cuban *negro*, and celebrate the innovation of the *negros* in Cuba, and that is why he made it the focus of his ekphrastic poetry.

4.5.2 Lorca and *los negros* of Harlem and *los gitanos* of Andalusia

In his poetry, Lorca used musical ekphrasis to validate the culture of marginalized populations of people, namely *los negros* of Harlem and *los gitanos* of Andalusia. He celebrated their music and culture and strove to understand their status in society. Rob Stone writes, “Lorca would realize that the Gypsy *cante* was just one of the many ‘dialects’ pertaining to a universal language of the oppressed [others being] the Blues and spirituals of the Blacks” (Qtd. in Hess 116). Lorca felt like he shared common ground with both the blacks from Harlem and the Gypsies from Andalusia because he too felt like a marginalized member of his own society. This was not due to his ethnicity but perhaps his sexual orientation, as a homosexual man in Catholic Spain.

⁴⁰ “Pero mi repique bronco, / pero mi profunda voz, / convoca al negro y al blanco, / que bailan el mismo son” (Guillén 18).

Lorca is unique among the three poets because he strove to validate marginalized groups of people to which he did not belong. Referring to the primary difference between Lorca and Guillén in their poetry about the struggles of black people, Bender says, “A paramount distinction between the two poets, then, is that Guillén writes about a ‘true black experience’ from the first-hand perspective of someone who lived it, while Lorca portrays the black ‘other’ from the perspective of an outsider—a mere sympathetic observer” (10). Lorca was concerned about the injustices and racial discrimination that he saw while living in New York, but he could not personally relate since he himself was white. Bender continues, “Lorca, then, occupies a paradoxical position: he yearns to voice the racial injustices he witnesses, yet his observations are born of his own white gaze” (14). This “white gaze” refers to the perception of the black man from the point of view of one’s own white culture. This is a relationship that exists between all blacks and whites, not just in New York or Cuba. According to Frantz Fanon, “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (Qtd. in Bender 14). Notwithstanding his different heritage, Lorca had a similar view of black oppression to that of Guillén. Bender continues:

Clearly, segregated societies that privilege whiteness inevitably foster injurious sentiments within the black psyche —heightening the damage colonial expansion had already done— and Guillén could readily pinpoint this consequence from his own lived experience. Yet even Lorca could recognize the existence of this unconstructive social division and its damaging effects from his position as a sympathetic outside observer and admirer of black culture. Moreover, in their

prose, personal letters, and lectures, Lorca and Guillén expressed comparable opinions on key racial issues. (14-15)

The fact that Lorca was not himself a member of the black community does not mean that his concerns were not valid, but it does mean that he presents a unique perspective of the conflict. This perspective gives a valuable point of view of black oppression that is distinct from that of Guillén's.

In a similar way, Lorca became preoccupied with the marginalized situation of *los gitanos* but saw the inequality as a “sympathetic onlooker”. He devoted books of poetry, *Poema del cante jondo* and *Romancero gitano*, to the representation of flamenco music from his unique gaze as a non-Gypsy Spaniard. Flamenco music for Lorca was a manifestation of Gypsy culture and empowerment. Cristy Van Der Laat says, “Flamenco is the product of a world of marginalized cultures” (456).⁴¹ Lorca made himself a spokesperson for this group of people. Lorca strove to “exalt the creative role of the gypsies” (Morris 190). Flamenco music was something powerful that was the unique voice of the Gypsies, and Lorca endeavored to represent it through his poetry. Lorca said, “flamenco poetry is one of the most gigantic creations of the common people of Spain” (Qtd in Morris 186). Flamenco music was a valuable asset that celebrated the culture of a group of people who struggled to feel like they had a legitimate place in Spanish society. Through music, Gypsies gained notoriety and became socially important. Flamenco poetry was one more way to give readers a glimpse of the struggles of Gypsies in Andalusia, and to esteem them as members of Spanish society. For Lorca, “the only way to render homage to Andalusia was to

⁴¹ “El flamenco es el producto de un mundo de culturas marginadas” (456).

capture the diversity—and inherent drama—of the land, [and] the people” (Morris 184). This diversity is portrayed in Lorca’s poetry through musical ekphrasis.

4.5.3 Langston Hughes and the Black Community

Hughes embraced his African heritage and committed himself to portraying the black perspective in his poetry. Partially due to having mixed heritage, he had to balance conflicting messages within his own family to figure out his own identity. He felt not unlike the mulatto who was so often the subject of the poetry of Guillén, feeling stuck between two worlds. George Kent writes:

Despite the difficulties, Langston Hughes chose to build his vision on the basis of the folk experience as it had occurred in the South and as it appeared modified in the modern industrial city. Judging from his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, his choice proceeded from the center of his being. He liked black folks. He liked their naturalness, their sense of style, their bitter facing up, their individual courage, and the variety of qualities that formed part of his own family background. He was also in recoil from the results of his father’s hard choices of exile, hatred of blacks, self-hatred, and resulting dehumanization. His manifesto of 1926, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” revealed that choosing the life of the black folk was also a way of choosing himself, a way of possessing himself through the rhythms and traditions of black people. (186-187)

Hughes chose black heritage as his own identity. He wanted to have a more personal connection to authentic black heritage and wished that he could be “real black”. While in Cuba, Hughes wanted to hear “real black music” and immediately felt drawn to *son* music because of the authenticity of the black culture he observed. Smart writes, “The

American, literally enthralled, gazed fixedly at a bongo player ‘as black as the night’ and exclaimed ‘with a sigh of anguished longing: ‘How I would like to be black. Real black. Authentic black!’ (32). Hughes embraced his black heritage and incorporated the black culture that he experienced, from his perspective in the United States, into his writing. Hughes constantly wrote about the life, the passion, and the death of the black man in his country, especially in Harlem and in the southern United States (Nobel 18).⁴² This voice was portrayed throughout his poetry. He had first-hand experience with the struggles of black life in the United States. He said, “Unfortunately, having been born poor —and also colored— in Missouri, I was stuck in the mud from the beginning. Try as I might to float off into the clouds, poverty and Jim Crow would grab me by the heels, and right back on earth I would land. A third floor furnished room is the nearest thing I have ever had to an ivory tower” (Qtd. in Noble 18). Hughes felt like his calling as a poet was not to write poetry about the beauty of life, but *social poetry*⁴³, about the harsh realities of the life of a black man in the United States (Noble 19). However, the focus he placed on the music of the American black did create beautiful poetry, poetry out of one of black culture’s most incredible creations: music.

As a significant part of black culture, Hughes embraced their beloved music: jazz, blues, and soul, and made it the focus of his ekphrastic poems. The “black” music was not only such because it was the favorite of black communities, it was their own creation. Jazz, for example, was spawned from the creativity and vision of African-American communities. It was a product that was uniquely theirs, a product so valuable

⁴² “Diríamos que Hughes viene tratando y re-tratando constantemente la vida, pasión y muerte del negro en su país, especialmente en Harlem y en el Sur de los Estados Unidos de América. Y no debe asombrarnos esta especialidad ya que él mismo ha decidido dedicarse, hasta ahora, a la poesía social” (Noble 18).

⁴³ “Poesía social” (Noble 19).

that it even started to catch on within white communities (Gerard 84). Although few black jazz musicians were well compensated, they gained respect from both black and white American audiences (Gerard 84). This popularity helped pull black identity from the margins of society. Hughes internalized jazz, blues, and soul, and made it a focus of his poetry. He represented the culture of music, the emotion, the community, and empowerment that it brought the black society. Hughes used musical ekphrasis as a means of validating people who felt undervalued.

Hughes shared the feelings of struggle with Guillén as a result of their race. Both poets had experienced the feelings of being marginalized due to the color of their skin. This was something that he did not have in common with Lorca, yet he could relate to him as they both strove to elevate the status of minority groups oppressed by white society. All three poets, however, understood that the way to give validity to marginalized populations was to celebrate one of their culture's assets, their music. Musical ekphrasis was the instrument that could capture the richness of culture in Andalusia, Cuba, and Harlem, and make it relatable to their readers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Musical ekphrasis is the means by which Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes validated the cultures of the marginalized populations of Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem. The poets observed first-hand the discrimination of *los negros* in Cuba, *los gitanos* of Andalusia, and the blacks of Harlem and set out to elevate their status through their work. The poets made themselves the voices of the disenfranchised people in these geographic regions by writing poetry that focused on their music. *Son*, flamenco, jazz, and blues are genres of music that are products of the marginalized people within their communities. They are styles of music that originated from the innovation of people who were discriminated against in their region. *Son*, flamenco, jazz, and blues all gained popularity and led to the elevation of the status of the marginalized people. Music helped provide a common ground for various races to stand on and helped the disenfranchised people of Cuba, Andalusia, and integrate themselves into society. Musical ekphrasis is the instrument that the poets used to facilitate the validation of these marginalized cultures.

This study set out to define musical ekphrasis, identify examples of musical ekphrasis, and illustrate common themes and influences in the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes. The definition that was developed after considering those of Heffernan, Goldhill, and Brown is: musical ekphrasis represents, teaches, or interprets a work or works of music. This definition explains the purpose of musical ekphrasis. In addition to fulfilling this purpose, in order to be considered musical ekphrasis in the context of this study, a poem must include at

least one of the following elements: references or allusions to musical styles, references or allusions to musical instruments, references or allusions to musical rhythm, references or allusions to dance, or cultural references about music.

Based on the established criteria for musical ekphrasis, the study identified examples of musical ekphrasis in the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes. The poets were prolific writers who devoted entire books to their representation of music, of which only a portion was examined. The works under consideration were Guillén's "La canción del bongó" ("Song of the Bongo"), "Si tu supiera..." ("If you knew..."), and "Guitarra" ("Guitar"); Lorca's "Poema de la siguiriya gitana" ("Poem of the Gypsy Siguiriya"), and "Malagueña"; and Hughes' "Jazzonia", "Negro Dancers", "Harlem Night Club", and "The Weary Blues".

Despite great differences in context, there are similarities in the musical ekphrasis explored. All of the poets lived in different parts of the world: Cuba; Andalusia, Spain; and Harlem, New York. They spoke different languages, Spanish and English, and were exposed to different cultures. The styles of music that are represented in their poetry is different. *Son*, flamenco, jazz, and blues all have distinct characteristics, and yet they all are represented well through poetry. Notwithstanding the differences in the regions where the poetry was written and the various musical genres, all of the ekphrastic poems under consideration in this study had not only ekphrasis in common; the poems shared other similar themes. In these works, the poets all used personification of musical instruments and alluded to traits of their homelands. This sense of pride in their homelands led the poets to write ekphrasis that represented the disenfranchised people in their regions.

All three poets developed their poetic voice from being immersed in the cultures of their regions, yet they also drew inspiration from each other. The poets were aware of each other, studied each other's work, and at times interacted with each other. Guillén decided to write ekphrasis after a conversation that he had with Hughes in Cuba in 1930, and later studied with Hughes while the two of them were at a conference in Spain in 1937.⁴⁴ Guillén was also influenced by Lorca. He met him in 1930 while Lorca was visiting Spain and dedicated poetry to him including "Angustia cuarta: Federico" ("The Fourth Anguish: Federico") and "Momento en García Lorca" ("Moment with the Muse García Lorca"). Lorca spent time in Cuba and wrote poetry inspired by his stay there and the culture he witnessed. Lorca and Hughes both spent time in New York while attending Columbia, though not at the same time (Hughes in 1921 and Lorca in 1929). Both poets drew inspiration from their encounters in Harlem, and the culture and music they came in contact with.

In this study it became clear that musical ekphrasis can be easily adapted to a variety of contexts and used to validate marginalized populations. Guillén wrote ekphrasis to represent *son* music and validate the culture of *los negros* and *los mulatos* in Cuba. He had first-hand experience with the discrimination that the black population experienced in Cuba, and he sympathized with the paradox of the mulatto population, that they do not feel like they are accepted in either black or white culture. Lorca wrote ekphrasis to represent flamenco music and elevate the social status of *los gitanos* in Andalusia, Spain. He became a spokesperson for the Gypsies not because he himself belonged to their culture but because he was a sympathetic onlooker. He also identified

⁴⁴ Please reference the Appendix for a timeline of relevant events in the lives of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes.

with their marginalized status due to his own marginalized status as a homosexual man in Catholic Spain. Similarly, he identified with the black population of Harlem from his stay at Columbia University, and with *los negros* of Cuba from his visit to Havana. Hughes represented jazz and blues music in his ekphrastic poetry. He personally experienced discrimination and racial inequality being a black man in the United States, which made him desire to be a spokesperson for the marginalized black population of Harlem.

It is important that people who live on the margins of society have a voice, and Nicolás Guillén, Federico García Lorca, and Langston Hughes had a unique opportunity to provide that voice through writing musical ekphrasis. Musical ekphrasis embodies the music that is a source of great pride for the disenfranchised people of the regions of Cuba, Andalusia, and Harlem. Ekphrasis represents music that elevates the status of black populations and the Gypsies: *son*, flamenco, jazz, and blues. Music has the power to bring people from the margins of society, bridge racial divisions, and make people of all ethnicities appear to be equals. This equality was the goal of Guillén, Lorca, and Hughes in their poetry and they accomplished it through musical ekphrasis. Musical ekphrasis gives a voice to the marginalized and represents through poetry the music which, in the words of Guillén, “calls both black and white / to dance the same son” (Hughes 117).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ “[C]onvoca al negro y al blanco, / que bailan el mismo son” (Guillén 18).

APPENDIX
TIMELINE OF RELEVANT EVENTS

- 1898 Federico García Lorca is born in Fuente Vaqueros, Granada, Andalusia, Spain.
- 1902 Langston Hughes is born in Joplin, Missouri, US.
- 1902 Nicolás Guillén is born in Camagüey, Cuba.
- 1921 Hughes moves to New York and attends Columbia University.
- 1921 Lorca writes *Poema del cante jondo*.
- 1926 Hughes publishes *The Weary Blues*.
- 1928 Lorca publishes *Romancero gitano*.
- 1929 Lorca travels to New York and attends Columbia University.
- 1930 Hughes travels to Cuba and meets Guillén.
- 1930 Lorca travels to Cuba and meets Guillén.
- 1930 Guillén publishes *Motivos de son*.
- 1931 Lorca publishes *Poema del cante jondo*.
- 1931 Guillén publishes *Songoro cosongo*.
- 1936 Lorca is executed by firing squad near Alfacar, Granada.
- 1937 Hughes and Guillén attend a writers' conference in Spain.
- 1940 *Poeta en Nueva York* is published.
- 1947 Guillén publishes *El son entero*.
- 1967 Hughes dies in New York City.
- 1989 Guillén dies in Havana.

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