THE POETRY OF JORGE GUILLÉN

By JOAQUÍN GONZÁLEZ MUELA

My interest in the poetry of Jorge Guillén began here, in Manchester, more than thirty years ago. A friend introduced me to the intellectual world of Gilbert Ryle, Wittgenstein and Dr. Leavis, who were then in vogue. There were many of us teachers in Manchester who communed with those ideas, and I was delighted to read in Guillén a phrase which had impressed me in Wittgenstein. The latter says: "Denke nicht, sondern schau". "Don't think, just look." And Guillén says: "Mira. ¿Ves? Basta." "Look. Do you see? That's enough." The Spaniards of those days (and even today) thought that we should nurture many ideas and carry them around in our pockets in order to take them out when necessary. We had an opinion ready for everything. In England, however, I learned to keep quiet and look. "Look. Do you see? That's enough." This was the revelation: Guillén had no ideas or, if he had any, he kept them to himself. I meditated over the poetry of Guillén, which, like that of Gongora, dealt with nature or, if you will, with reality, and took my recently acquired ideas with me to the United States where I wrote my book La realidad y Jorge Guillén, published in 1962. The first chapter, to be true to Gilbert Ryle, dealt with the soul. Antonio Machado had said that the poets of Guillén's generation had no soul, but Machado had not read The Concept of Mind, whereas I had.

When I say that Guillén had no ideas, I am exaggerating. All of his poetry is centred on the following idea: that there is an interrelation between things in the universe, and between things and the self, which is just one more thing. This interrelation carries with it agreement, love, harmony, and for that reason "el mundo está bien hecho" ("the world is properly made"). But from time to time one of the performers in the concerto strikes a wrong note, and that means that, from time to time also, "the world is not properly made". In his poetry, Jorge Guillén has tried either to protest against this lack of harmony, or, if there is no alternative,

1 The second Ramsden/Gybben-Monypenny Commemorative Lecture, given in the University of Manchester on 6 November 1986 under the Chairmanship of Professor R.C. Willis, Head of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies in the University. The verse translations are by Felicia F. González.
to accept it, because the laws that rule the universe are more complicated than he thought.

In the great love poems, especially in Cántico ("Salvación de la primavera", "Anillo"), the body of his beloved is compared to nature, and the act of love has its counterpoint in the surrender of the waves to the beach.

The principle "Mira. ¿Ves? Basta." is the one I have used as a guide in my method of studying the poetry of Jorge Guillén. I try not to go any further than what is to be found in a given poem, even though it may have suggestive echoes, because of the risk of the reader creating another poem if he is sent off at a tangent. That would be unfair. First, we should seek to understand the poems as well as we can, and afterwards, if anyone wants to re-create the poem, he can do it at his own risk. A poem may have more than one interpretation, but of all the possible interpretations, one alone must be the best, the closest to what the poet meant.

Let us attempt to interpret a poem by following the "Mira. ¿Ves? Basta." method. The poem I have chosen is 'Candelabro' ('Candlestick'), from the collection Homenaje.

"Surge y se yergue, solo,
Sin romper el silencio de lo oscuro
Un sonido con forma: 'candelabro'.
Apenas me ilumina vaga plata
Como la nebulosa en una noche
De inmensidad visible.
Pronuncio: 'candelabro',
Y se esboza, se afirma hacia su estable
¿Adónde voy? Me esfuerzo
Desde esta orilla torpe de un insomnio
Reducido a tiniebla,
En convivir, en dialogar ahora
Con algo que a su modo acompañándome
Ya está fuera de mí.
'Te necesito, mundo.'
La palabra y su puente
Me llevan de verdad a la otra orilla.
A través de lo oscuro
Ayúdame, mi amigo, candelabro."²

² Aire nuestro (Milan, All’Insegna del Pesce d’Oro, 1968), p.1297. All
"There appears and rises, alone
Without breaking the silence of darkness
A sound with form: 'candlestick'.
Vague silver barely lit
Like the nebula on a night
Of visible immensity.

I pronounce the word 'candlestick',
And it takes shape, its stable heaviness
Becomes definite. I make out: a candlestick.

Where am I going? I make an effort
From this awkward shore of an insomnia
Reduced to darkness,
To relate, to communicate now
With something which, in its own way accompanying me
Is now outside of me.

'I need you, world.'

The word and its bridge
Carry me truly to the other shore.
Across the darkness
Help me, my friend, candlestick."

This is the first poem of 'El Centro', the third part of Homenaje. The placing of the poems is very important in Guillén's work. Each part of the work begins with poems about dawn or morning; but 'Candelabro' is a nocturnal poem: this is a dramatic change. The next two poems are morning poems: 'Perros vagabundos' ('Stray dogs') and 'Las siete' ('Seven o'clock'—in the morning). But is 'Candelabro' really a nocturnal poem? It is, but it appears to be in a hurry for dawn to come, forgetting the old saying "no por mucho madrugar amanece mis temprano" ("Dawn won't come sooner just because you get up early.").

Professor Juan Manuel Rozas has written an excellent commentary on 'Candelabro' entitled 'Jorge Guillén: “Que sean tres los libros, e uno el dictado”'. To Rozas this is "a nocturnal poem, with insomnia, which reveals an essential renunciation hardly ever arrived at by Guillén, a man of solid and conscious humanity".

quotations from the three books of Aire nuestro, namely Cántico, Clamor and Homenaje, are henceforth cited from this edition.

3 In Homenaje universitario a Dámaso Alonso (Madrid, 1970), pp.207-220.
4 Rozas, op.cit., p.208.
Rozas underlines what is quite obvious: the opposition between darkness and light; but he tries to move on to a symbolic plane, and sees an opposition between death and life. It is the symbolic terrain that we should seek to avoid, at least until we have understood the poem on the literal plane and as best we can.

We see the poor insomniac, awake, oppressed by darkness. He is useless in the darkness; he is used to having things (the world) come at him as from shadow to mass, from mass to form, until he can see clear outlines. There is none of this at this moment, but he remembers that, even with his eyes closed, the names are still there. And he clutches at one name, candelabro (candlestick), a word faithful to a given reality: there is a candlestick in his room. There is also a little bit of light, "vaga plata" ("vague silver"). This "vague silver" is not, as Rozas thinks, the candlestick, but a ray of moonlight. With this help the insomniac, who is not totally blind, and who has had a mental object before his mental eyes, now makes it material, a sound, pronounces its name, "candelabro", and thus lights it up, exactly as in the sense of "lo da a luz" ("gives birth to it"), and the object responds, is there, becomes visible, changes from shadow to mass to form, with all its "estable/ Pesadumbre" ("stable heaviness"). Now there are two of them: the man and the candlestick. "Desde esta orilla torpe de un insomnio/Reducido a tiniebla" ("From this awkward shore of an insomnia/Reduced to darkness") man will relate to and converse with that other thing that awaits him, with that "más allá" ("beyond") that really keeps him company. "Te necesito, mundo." ("I need you, world.") This isolated line (in inverted commas because it is a direct quotation from Guillén himself) is fundamental for Rozas and for me. Certainly, from the context, it has a hint of pathos; but it is a well-known line and it is not necessary, in my opinion, to interpret it as indicating a sense of old age. For him the world as company was always a necessity. This is apparent in Cántico:

"Siempre aguarda mi sangre. Es ella quien da cita.
A oscuras, a sabiendas quiere más, quiere amor.
No soy nada sin ti, mundo." (257)

"My blood is always waiting. It is what sets time and place.
In the dark knowingly, it wants more, it wants love.
I'm nothing without you, world."

"I need you, world," is a reminder of the credo of the poet, and it
will help him avoid the total surrender that the darkness wants to impose on him.

Our interpretation is very materialistic, very realistic: a man looks for light in the dark because he cannot sleep. This situation might not seem very poetic, but it is in truth very dramatic and there is no necessity to look for symbolism in it.

Professor Rozas, however, has decided to follow that line, to search for a symbolic meaning. To him, "the presence of the candlestick—physical or mental—would not matter. Since what matters is the poet’s act of meditation and not the physical facts". For me, it does matter. The candlestick is there, and furthermore it is not lit; materially, it lights up only when the poet says the word "candlestick", approaches it, turns on the electric light and begins to write his poem. Rozas prefers a different version of this reality, or situation, which the sleepless old man is experiencing: "The dim light, mental or real, which the candlestick gives off, is nebulous in the night, is not sufficient. What is truly visible, the darkness, is the most visible, immensely visible." In this way, the idea of death would be justified, an idea that is going round in Rozas's mind, but we are not in any position to say that it is going round in Guillén's. Guillén could have written this poem when he was young, but since we know it was published in Homenaje (written between 1949 and 1966) we have to grant it that element of pathos.

Rozas would say, justifiably, that when Guillén was young, he would sometimes write differently. For example one might cite 'De noche' ('At night') from Cántico:

"He aquí lo más hondo de la noche.
No te turbes, que dentro de lo oscuro
Te rendirás a sus potencias breves
Bajo un sigilo sin horror ni enigma,
Hostil al coco, dócil al encanto." (330)

"Here is the deepest part of the night.
Feel no alarm, for enclosed within the dark,
You will submit to its brief power
In a silence without horror or enigma
That rejects the bogeyman, but submits to the charm."

5 Ibid., p. 211.
6 Loc. cit.
In the poem of his old age, ‘Candelabro’, we see no fear of the bogeyman or of death. When he was young, Guillén did not write about sleeplessness (which does not mean he did not suffer from it), among other reasons, because the specialist in that subject was Juan Ramón Jiménez who already excelled in writing sensitive pieces about insomnia.

‘Candelabro’ makes us think not so much about a Quevedo sonnet (as Rozas would wish) as about a poem of Pedro Salinas, ‘Don de la materia’ (‘Qualities of matter’) from Seguro azar, in which a person is groping in the darkness in search of light, the light of touch:

“De pronto, como una llama,
sube una alegria altísima
de lo negro: luz del tacto.
Llegó al mundo de lo cierto.
Toca el cristal, frío, duro,
toca la madera, áspera.
¡Están!
La sorda vida perfecta
sin color, se me confirma
segura, sin luz, la siento:
realidad profunda, masa.”

“Suddenly, like a flame
A boundless joy arises
From the darkness: the light of touching.
It has reached the world of certainty.
It touches the glass, cold and hard,
It touches the wood, rough.
There they are!
The mute perfect life
Without colour, is confirmed for me;
Without light, I feel it, sure and certain:
Deep reality, mass.”

“Volumen, forma, presencia,” says Guillén in the poem ‘Su persona’. This is what he wants: a world which allows itself to be touched, seen, heard, smelled, tasted, so as to keep him company.

We now examine a short poem from Cántico which reflects the way in which Guillén likes to “paint” the world whose company

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8 I deeply regret that I cannot now discuss my point of view with Professor Rozas. He died in January 1986. He was a close friend of mine.
he needs. This poem contains a whole philosophy, if I may use that word; or, rather, one would call it a vision of the world. Its title is 'Desnudo' ('Nude').

"Blancos, rosas. Azules casi en veta,  
Retraidos, mentales.  
Puntos de luz latente dan señales  
De una sombra secreta.  
Pero el color, infiel a la penumbra  
Se consolida en masa.  
Yacente en el verano de la casa,  
Una forma se alumbra.  
Claridad aguzada antre perfiles,  
De tan puros tranquilos,  
Que cortan y aniquilan con sus filos  
Las confusiones viles.  

Desnuda está la carne. Su evidencia  
Se resuelve en reposo.  
Monotonía justa, prodigioso  
Colmo de la presencia.  
Plenitud inmediata, sin ambiente,  
Del cuerpo feminino.  
Ningún primor: ni voz ni flor. ¿Destino?  
¡Oh absoluto Presente!" (186)

"Whites, pinks. Blues almost in stripes  
Withdrawn, mental.  
Points of latent light show signs  
Of a secret shadow.  
But the colour, betraying the shadow,  
Materializes into a mass.  
Lying in the summer of the house,  
A form is lighting up.  
Clarity brought to life between outlines  
Of such pure repose,  
Which cut and erase with their lines  
The base confusion.  
The flesh is bare. Its evidence  
Is resolved in repose.  
Just sameness, prodigious  
Height of presence.  
Immediate fullness, without surroundings,  
Of the female body,
No excellence, neither voice nor flower. Destiny?
Oh absolute Present!

Here we can see the way in which the contemplated object delivers itself to the attention of the contemplator. A person enters a darkened room. It is summer, maybe the hour of the afternoon nap. The eyes of the person, blinded by the outside sun, gradually become used to the inside light. First they see some faint colours which light up the shadow; then that shadow becomes something more solid, a mass. And the mass ends by being consolidated into a form. It is the form of a naked woman, lying down. We do not know if she is lying on a bed or on the cool floor. Any impure thoughts or feelings at seeing a naked female body are cut short by pure admiration of the form which is present, which fills the requirements of beauty: Ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur: integritas, consonantia, claritas. Stephen Dedalus in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man gives us a lesson in Thomist aesthetics. Professor Maria del Carmen Bobes does not expect the reader of ‘Desnudo’ to have impure thoughts, like those of Stephen Dedalus’s friend when he looks at the Venus de Milo, but sees only the “confusiones viles” a negative term—lack of light—as opposed to the clarity which becomes dominant in the form. For once, I am the one who sees more than what is in the text; but this is James Joyce’s fault.

There is the absolute presence, without environment, “sin voz ni flor”, of a nude woman about whom we know neither who she is nor what she is like. She is just there; she exists. We know from Guillén himself that ser (to exist) is “la absoluta dicha” (“absolute happiness”), but if this “absolute happiness” is somewhat abstract, one further step is necessary: estar (to be present). The obligation of the poet is to do his duty: “Look. Do you see? That’s enough.” The eyes have been following these steps: from shadow to mass, from mass to form..., and when he gets there, the poet has created another form, the poem, form or “mould” into which any nude will fit, so that the original “nude” has passed from being pure presence to being eternal. The needless question about destiny has its answer: it is “absolute presence”, as we see in another poem from the book Homenaje, entitled ‘Eso basta’ (‘That is sufficient’):

Es la absoluta dicha."
(from 'Más allá')

"El poeta ve su poema,  
A la vista como ese pino,  
Ahi, ahi como ese roble.  

todos, seres. y son: suprema  
certidumbre. basta a un destino.  
El poeta puede ser noble."
(1217)

"The poet sees his poem  
Before, like that pine tree,  
There, over there like that oak.  
All of them, beings. And they are: supreme  
certainty. Enough for a destiny.  
The poet is capable of nobility."

There was no reason to ask who she was; she is the poem, a form of language; her pure outlines ("sus perfiles puros") are contained in the language. The poem 'Desnudo' is not really a "painting" or a "picture". At most, if we wish, we might call it an abstract painting.

Let us now observe how Guillén "paints" flowers, in the poem 'Celinda' ('Syringa'), taken from the collection Cántico:

"Sobre el ramaje un blanco  
Bien erguido. ¿Qué arbusto?  
Flor hacia mi. La arranco,  
Fatalmente la arranco: soy mi gusto.  

Esta flor huele a ...  
¿A jazmín?  
No lo es.  
¿A blancura?  
Quizá.

Yo recuerdo el ataque de esta casi acidez  
Como un sabor aguda.  
Un sabor o un olor. Y un nombre fiel. Tal vez ...  
¡Sí, celinda! Perfecta: en su voz se desnuda." (259)

"On the branches whiteness  
Standing erect. What shrub?  
Flower toward me. I pull it off,  
Fatally I pull it off. I am my pleasure."
This flower smells of...
Jasmine?
It isn't.
Whiteness?
Perhaps.

I remember the attack of this almost sourness
Sharp like a taste.
A taste or smell. And a faithful name. Maybe...
Yes, syringa! Perfect: in its name it becomes bare.”

The botanical family, the colour and smell of that flower are given between question marks. Yet what really creates it is its name, a true name: the flower could not help but fit into that mould ... And supposing Guillén had walked past it not knowing that it was a “celinda”, a “syringa”...! It would have been the same as when the poet Francisco Villaespesa walked past the water lilies. To underline my meaning, I now recount a well-known story. Miguel de Unamuno was taking a walk with the poet Francisco Villaespesa. Upon arriving at a pond, Villaespesa became fascinated on looking at an aquatic flower, “Look, look, don Miguel, what a pretty flower”. And Unamuno answered, “But my dear Villaespesa, those are the nenúfares (water lilies) that you talk about so much in your poetry”. The nenúfares did not exist in Villaespesa’s vision, only in his hearing. We generally give Villaespesa a bad mark for that “gaffe”; nevertheless, he could have said, as Guillén did in a poem I shall talk about later, “But the names are still there!” Would Guillén confuse daffodils (narcisos) with asphodels (asfodelos), which are also known as gamones in Spanish?

The same thing happens with lila (lilac) in the poem ‘Hacia el nombre’ (‘Toward the name’) from Cántico; for this is a flower which cannot help being faithful to its name:

“Se junta el follaje en ramo,
Y sólo sobre su cima
Dominio visible ejerce
La penetración de brisa.
Desplegándose va el fuste
Primaveral. Ya principio
La flor a colorearse
Dospicio. ¿Sólo rojiza?
No, no. La flor se impacienta,
Quiere henchir su nombre: lila.” (302)
"The foliage comes together in a branch
And only over its top
The penetration of the breeze
Exercises visible dominance.
The branch of springtime is
Unfolding itself. Now the flower
Is starting to acquire colour
Slowly. Just pinkish?
No, no. The flower is getting impatient,
It wants to fulfill its name: lilac."

This is a good "picture". But now it seems the flower is the one which must be faithful to its name, not the name to the flower. The name can also be an adjective designating a colour. Is the flower called "lila" the one which has the colour by definition? We hope Guillén is not confusing the "lilac" with the "lily", which can also have the same colour. What we can be sure of is that Guillén sees lilacs.

And how does Guillén "paint" poppies? Let us examine 'Amapolas' ('Poppies') from the collection Y otros poemas.

"Amapolas como... No.
Jamás ni 'sangre' ni 'fuego'.
Rojos pétalos silvestres,
Indecibles. ¿No son únicos?
El nombre a la flor señala.
Esas amapolas, esas:
Amapolas, amapolas."

"Poppies like... No.
Never either 'blood' or 'fire'.
Wild red petals,
Indescribable. Are they not unique?
The name indicates the flower.
Those poppies, those:
Poppies, poppies."

Guillén, in fact, does not "paint" the poppies. They are inexpressible, they are not "blood" or "fire". They are only "wild, red petals". It would be dangerous to mention the stamens and pistil, from which we get opium, which in its turn promotes dreams (and Guillén does not want to dream). The name is enough—"Amapolas, amapolas"—but in English they are "poppies", in French "coquelicots", in Italian "papaveri",
and "ababoles" in Aragon. However, again, Guillén is writing in Spanish, and the Spanish names are enough.

Guillén has revealed to us in the first poem of Cántico, 'Más allá' ('Beyond'), what the basis of his philosophy is, the starting point of his poetry: if we love things, if we give ourselves to them with passion, they will give themselves to us in return, and the universal interrelation will be accomplished—that is to say, the network which connects things to other things, including among those things the self ("el yo").

But the self has the virtue of being the only entity capable of naming the other things. If the first poem of Cántico is devoted to things, to the beyond ("el más allá"), the second must be devoted to the "más acá", to the denominating or naming self. That second poem is 'Los nombres' ('Names'):

"Albor. El horizonte
Entreabre sus pestañas
Y empieza a ver. ¿Qué? Nombres.
Están sobre la patína
De las cosas. La rosa
Se llama todavía
Hoy rosa, y la memoria
De su tránsito, prisa,
Prisa de vivir más.
A largo amor nos alce
Esa pujanza agraz
Del Instante, tan ágil
Que en llegando a su meta
Corre a imponer Después.
Alerta, alerta, alerta,
Yo seré, yo seré.
¿Y las rosas? Pestañas
Cerradas; horizonte
Final. ¿Acaso nada?
Pero quedan los nombres." (36)

"Daybreak. The horizon
Opens its eyelashes
And begins to see. What? Names.
They are on the patina
Of things. The rose
Is today still
Called rose, and the memory
Of its passage, haste,
Haste to live more.
Through long love let that
Sour thrust of the Moment
Raise us up, so agile
That once it reaches its goal
It hurries to impose an Afterwards.
Alert, alert, alert,
I will be, I will be.

And what of the roses? Eyelashes
Closed; final
Horizon. Perhaps nothing?
But the names remain.”

In this poem the self appears to be hardly anything at the outset because the day (life) is dawning, but its future lies ahead of it. The horizon from which the first light of day is coming is personified, it has eyes, but it is not the self. (The self is half-asleep and knows that it has the horizon in front of it.) What does the horizon see on opening its eyes? Things? No, names. They are presumably things, but only recognizable because they have a name. There is the familiar rose before our eyes. What would happen if the horizon, or the recently awoken self, closed its eyes? The rose would disappear, but its name would remain, its name would stay behind before the eyes of the mind, stored in the consciousness, which is closed now, but will open later. A magician has made the rose disappear. The problem with which we are now presented is serious: when the magician dies, what will remain in the beyond? Things or names? Guillén, the poet, has no doubt: names will remain.

The justification that we can concede to Guillén is that, since names are the material with which he works in his art, he wants those names to be a “true fulfilment” (“fie1 plenitud”) through which things arrive at the height of their existence. The height of existence for things is Poetry.

I find that Guillén’s Nominalism can be perfectly explained by studying a poem from the collection Homenaje. This is the important composition ‘Sospecha de foca’ (‘Suspicion of a seal’):

“El mar murmura grandeza.
¿Un punto negro en el agua?
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Adivino la cabeza
De una foca. No la fragua
Mi magín, que nunca empieza.
Ondulación de oleaje
Sobre el dorso de une foca.
¿Encontré lo que yo traje?
A la realidad ya toca
Con su potencia el lenguaje.” (1229)

“The sea is murmuring greatness.
A black spot in the water?
I guess at the head
Of a seal. It’s not being forged
By my imagination, which never initiates.
Undulation of waves
On the back of a seal.
Have I found what I brought with me?
Language is now touching
Reality with its power.”

“It’s not being forged by my imagination, which never initiates” means that what Guillén sees, or rather, what he guesses at, is not a product of the imagination, for this Guillén disdains. Similarly, “Have I found what I brought with me?” asks if the concept “seal”, taken from the intellectual storehouse, corresponds to the thing which the poet glimpses in the distance.

In this poem there is an excellent picture of the sea: “El mar murmura...”, “Ondulación de oleaje...”; it is the dark sea of the north of the United States, breaking on the shores of the State of Maine. But the shift from shadow to mass and from mass to form is hesitant, because one sees only outlines, dark and blurred, confused with the swell of the waves in the distance. A seal, far off in the distance, is the most distinct of shapes. If in ‘Desnudo’ we have an absolute presence, in ‘Sospecha de foca’ we have a very relative presence. And what if it were a marker buoy, or a sea lion, or any other sea creature? But the mould imposes itself. It is a seal, as its name implies.

Maybe Guillén has violated a form to allow the language to dominate with its power. Moreover, if almost nothing remains of the somewhat indistinct form which is seen in the distance, at least the poem remains, which, since the poet has to be noble and honourable, is entitled ‘Suspicion of...’ with the explanatory subtitle ‘Maine’, a region where the sea is dark and mysterious.
I cannot help seeing a slight touch of irony and even of resignation in such rotund phrases as “A la realidad ya toca con su potencia el lenguaje” or “Pero quedan los nombres”.

In the collection *Y otros poemas* there is a similar poem in which Guillén describes a whale swimming in the Pacific Ocean; the whale is merely “glimpsed”, just like the “suspected seal”. Likewise, one sees only some “mobile colour with dark tones”, a “very tenuous bulk”; and as from that bulk there shoots up a spout of water, Guillén concludes it must be a whale. In this poem we do see a slight touch of humour in Guillén’s amazement at the marvels of the world, of that New World in which this Castilian gentleman from Valladolid came to live after the Spanish Civil War.

But Guillén is sincere, and very careful about imposing his language: “Suspicion of a seal”, a “glimpsed” whale; or, in the same poem about the whale, he sees a flock of birds which “judging by their flight”, must be seagulls. In ‘Las tentaciones de Antonio’ (‘The temptations of Antony’ [1023-37]) he witnesses other birds which “to judge by their song, seem to be blackbirds”. Language is made to dominate, but with honesty and sincerity, which in turn reach their highest level when he says: “Fir tree? I don’t know. Cedar? Forgive me, I don’t know.” (‘Admiración de las aparencias’ from *Homenaje*. [1369]) It is night-time, very little is visible, and our poet does not know much botany either. Despite his limited knowledge, he loves plants, trees, flowers; he observes all these things with attention and pleasure, and even wants to paint them with words.

In this last book, *Final*, there is a detailed depiction of ‘Una margarita’ (‘A daisy’):

“Es una margarita
Que tiene quince péntalos,
Grupos de tres en tres
Con reverso azulino,
Y hacia la luz del sol,
Extensa, bien abierta,
Dirige su energía.
Y ya desde la tarde,
Cuando empieza la sombra,
La flor va recogiéndose
Cerrada por la noche.

"It is a daisy
That has fifteen petals,
Groups of three by three
With bluish underside,
And toward the sunlight,
Extended, wide open,
It directs its energy.
And from afternoon on,
When the shade begins,
The flower starts folding up
Closed by the night.

A nature. A marvel. Without a lesson."

A botanist could not give more exact a description of this flower. We already know that Guillén has no wish to see symbols in concrete things, that he is afraid of metaphors because, once one sets loose the imagination which constructs them, these metaphors get tangled up and end by obscuring the object from which they originated.

In this poem, written at the end of the poet's life, the last line leaves us puzzled. Why "Sin lección"? Why is there no lesson? Guillén is probably thinking that this flower, which opens up at daybreak and closes at nightfall, resembles human life, which occurs between the opening of the eyes and their closing again.

Has Guillén felt tempted to make a symbol out of the daisy?

If, when analysing the poem 'Candelabro' we adopted a very literal or materialist approach, I want to insist once more on adopting that stance. Why should we add an implicit meaning to the words "Sin lección"? Must we look for a lesson, a symbol, at any cost? Does the life of the daisy end with death, as does that of a human being? Yes, but one is not obliged to look at it that way.

The life of the daisy coincides with that of the human being in something more attractive and more optimistic: when day breaks, we open our eyes, and when night falls, we close them to rest, to sleep. Surely nature is marvellous enough, without a lesson? This marvel is what Guillén has tried to show in all his work, from Cántico to Final. The fact that the rose dies does not mean the end of its beauty; it is a simple and natural phenomenon:

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11 Aire nuestro, quinta serie, Final (Barcelona, 1981), p.35. Remaining references to Final are to this edition.
"Florece el jardín en torno
De la que agoniza a solas
Y bien descubre ante el sol
Los estambres que amontona,
Mustios, el centro que fue
Tan íntimo. A su hora,
Sumisa a la primavera,
Muriéndosa está la rosa."

"The garden is flowering around
The one dying alone
And discovers under the sun
The stamens piling up,
Withered the centre that was
So intimate. At its hour,
Submissive to the spring,
The rose is dying."

('Muerte de la rosa' ['Death of the rose'] (764))

"Nature. A marvel. Without a lesson." Thus the poet looks at life and death.

Guillén thought about death, but not as an obsession. His attitude was set in Cántico, in 'Muerte a lo lejos' ('Death in the distance'), and it did not change much as he got nearer to it. Close to meeting death, he was to make a few allusions, as we shall see, in his last book, Final. But long before, in that second part of Clamor that he entitled 'Que van a dar en la mar' (1960), there is a long poem, 'Lugar de Lázaro' ('Lazarus's place') (734-51), which lends itself to the expression of the poet's ideas. These are repeated as he deals with the subject. The first is that of "our air" ("Aire nuestro"), which Lazarus no longer breathes; the second is the "concordancia venturosa/Del ser con todo el ser" ("fortunate harmony/Of being with all one's being") (734), which has been broken: Lazarus, or what is left of Lazarus (his matter, his bulk), is alone, without being subject to the universal interrelation between the individual being and other things. Furthermore, we see the reversal of the order to which Guillén had made us accustomed: it is no longer the shift from shadow to mass and mass to form; now the form is mass (stone) on its way to being shadow. In 'Desnudo' we noted how "Yacente en el verano de la casa/Una forma se alumbra"; now, in the case of Lazarus, "Yacente en el verano de la casa/Una forma se difumina" ("Lying in the house's summer/A form dissolves"). Nevertheless, it is a
good time to see if the name survives the man. Yes, Lazarus is his name and no longer means anything.

In the third part of the poem, Lazarus has returned to his family, a new “Lazarus” who has passed through an interlude, or “adventure”, of which he knows nothing. If he has earned anything, he learned it when no longer a man. If they ask him, he is silent. Lazarus exists once more, he is there, he breathes; he lives together with his sisters in the house, with the trees which give shade and the flowers which give fragrance, with the sun, with the wind, with the water; Lazarus lives “the appointed hours” (“las horas situadas”). He lives “Right here”. He revives every morning.

The fourth part is very dramatic, a monologue or a plea, directed at God. He accuses himself, before God, of a sin. He believes in the resurrection of the flesh but he cannot “conceive of God’s Eternal Life”. He, Lazarus, wants the Heavens to be like a sort of Bethany (“Que la sacra excelsitud/Como una Betania sea” [750]). He does not understand the immortal part of man. He believes in it blindly, and hopes that divine light will be his guide.

This, then, is the conclusion—the limitation of man to his terrestrial existence, to his being in one place: for Lazarus, Bethany; for Guillén, the planet Earth.

“¿La Creación sería transición
Preliminar, insuficiente sierva?
Sin lugares, sin horas, ¿qué es el hombre?”

“Will creation be a preliminary
Transition, an insufficient handmaid?
Without places, without hours, what is man?”

The end of Final is a serene good-bye. The poet has always considered himself to be a Christian, because that has been his culture and his world. But his philosophy never had a “theology” nor a “metaphysics”; he confessed to knowing nothing of that. His “faith” was placed in the world, and if the world occasionally goes wrong, it is man’s fault. For that reason it seemed to him doubtful that man was made “In God’s image and likeness”. In an epigram he is quite explicit:

“Hay quien a Dios le pone muchos peros.
Yo menos. Aunque digan lo que digan,
El universo es quien ‘está bien hecho’.” (Final, p. 175)
"There are those who thrust at God a lot of 'buts'.
I don't. Let them say what they will,
The universe is what 'is properly made'."

God and the universe may coincide, but Guillén neither explains it nor wants it explained. His attitude as a human being is the modesty and humility of a true Christian, which God may understand. This is humility, modestly expressed in the following gloss upon a line of Lope de Vega and published in *Final*:

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"¿Qué tengo yo que mi amistad procuras?"

¿Aquel Motor Primero
Podría en mí fijarse,
En mí, tan diminuto,
Entre infinitos seres
Del tiempo y del espacio?
Humildemente yo me siento indigno
De atraer su atención.
¿Me necesita a mí?
Esta pregunta suena y me anonada.
No interpondré ambiciones de orgulloso.
'¿Qué tengo yo que mi amistad procuras?'

¿El Primer Móvil necesitaría
Cánticos, alabanzas, oraciones
Precisamente los elogios míos,
Sonantes en espacios tan enormes?
¿Cómo hacerme escuchar del Primer Móvil?
Y yo, con poca voz... Yo nada sé.
Feliz quien eso logre o que lo espere.
¿La Creación sería transición
Preliminar, insuficiente sierva?
Sin lugares, sin horas, ¿qué es el hombre?
¿Espléndido universo material
Va sucesivamente transformando
Su energía en un vértice de espíritu
Para acabar en coro de fantasmas,
Sobrantes las inútiles estrellas?
¿Y yo al final en reunión de espectros?" (*Final*, p. 343)
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'What do I have that makes you seek my friendship?'

Could that Prime Mover
Notice me
Me, so diminutive,
Among infinite beings
Of time and space?

Humbly, I feel myself unworthy
Of attracting its attention.

Does it need me?
This question echoes and overwhelms me.
I shall not interpose the ambition of a proud man.
“What do I have that makes you seek my friendship?”

Would the Prime Mover need
Hymns, praise, prayers,
My eulogies in particular,
Echoing in such enormous spaces?

How can I make the Prime Mover hear me?
And I, with such a little voice... I know nothing.
Happy is he who achieves or who hopes for such a thing.

Would the Creation be a preliminary
Transition, an insufficient handmaid?
Without place, without time, what is man?

Is the splendid material universe
Gradually transforming
Its energy into a vortex of spirit,
To end up as a chorus of ghosts
With the useless stars no longer needed?
And me at the end at a meeting of spectres?"

We seen that Guillén has thoughts, but he never crystallizes them into dogma.

I referred in passing to the "Castilian gentleman from Valladolid", who had to live in a "new world" because of exile, not because he wanted to. Although he was always proud of being Spanish, he was no typical Spaniard. He is more universal, more European than, say, Lorca or Juan Ramón Jiménez. By his own wish, he was a professor in England and in other places outside Spain. His first wife was French and his second Italian. His children have not married Spaniards. He knew Spanish literature very well, but his book Homenaje shows evidence of fondness for authors of various nationalities. Perhaps, among the Spaniards, those that he resembles most are Gabriel Miró and Azorín, both of whom came from Spain's eastern coast.

He was a gentleman in the best sense of the word.
Many times he gave thanks for everything he had received. At the very end of Final he has but one request:

"Peace, let us ask for peace."

May he rest in peace.