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## Jorge Guillén - Entry 1

Eva Núñez-Méndez

*Portland State University, enunez@pdx.edu*

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not only the tales of the so-called Four Branches of the *Mabinogion* proper, namely *Pwyll*, *Branwen*, *Manawydan* and *Math*, but also the Arthurian and other romances found in the *Red Book of Hergest*, such as *The Lady of the Fountain* and *The Dream of Rhonabwy*.

The title *Mabinogion* is notoriously a mistake on the part of Lady Charlotte, who wrongly adopted, perhaps because *-ion* is a common Welsh plural ending, what seems to have been a scribal error which occurs only once in the whole of the original text. The correct form is, in fact, *Mabinogi*. The meaning and origin of the term itself is still in dispute by Welsh scholars, but it seems to indicate the story of a hero's maturation, the word obviously being cognate with *mab*, the word for son, boy or youth.

The tales of the *Mabinogion* are tales of wonder and fantasy, which have their origin in a long oral tradition. Though the *Red Book of Hergest* dates from the late 14th century, the tales are certainly of much earlier origin, perhaps the mid-11th century, while the tale entitled *Culhwch and Olwen* is earlier still. Apart from their enduring fascination as literature, these tales are also remarkable in the canon of medieval literature for being couched in prose, rather than verse, which would have been the normal medium for imaginative expression.

Lady Charlotte's translation was highly influential during the Victorian period. It was a direct and acknowledged source of inspiration both for Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1856) and for Matthew Arnold's *Lectures on Celtic Literature* (1865). Lady Charlotte undertook no further translations, however. In later life, after her second marriage in 1855, when she became Lady Charlotte Schreiber, she concentrated her manifold energies on her extensive collections of art objects, publishing two books inspired by these. She also kept a lively and fascinating journal throughout her life, leaving a record of a formidable Victorian Englishwoman who performed a valuable service to the culture of Wales in her time.

KATIE GRAMICH

#### Further Reading

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## Jorge Guillén 1893-1984

Spanish poet

#### Biography

Born in Valladolid, 18 January 1893. He was first educated in Valladolid; he spent two years after secondary school in Switzerland (1909-11), was a student in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at Madrid University (1911-13) and received his first degree from the University of Granada in 1913. He spent the next year in Germany, then returned to live in Spain until 1917. He taught Spanish as a lector at the Sorbonne in Paris (1917-23) and at Oxford University (1929-31). In 1936 he had political problems arising from the circumstances of the Spanish Civil War; Guillén found it

impossible to compromise with dictatorship and finally was imprisoned in Pamplona. After his release the Ministry of Education prevented him from holding teaching posts of any kind - so in 1938 he left Spain for North America, where he taught Spanish literature until 1958, with frequent trips to South America and Europe. After receiving many literary prizes, awarded by both European and American bodies, and after his second marriage (1961; his first wife had died in 1947) he returned to Spain. In 1976 he was awarded the Cervantes Prize (1977). He died in Málaga, 6 February 1984.

## Translations

Poetry (selections and anthologies)

di Giovanni, Norman Thomas, *Cántico: A Selection*, with an introduction by Guillén, London: Deutsch, and Boston:

Little Brown, 1965

Gibbons, Reginald and Anthony L. Geist, *Guillén on Guillén:*

*The Poetry and the Poet*, with an introduction, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979

Guillén, Jorge, in his *Language and Poetry: Some Poets of Spain*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1961

Matthews, Elizabeth, *The Structured World of Jorge Guillén*, Liverpool: Cairns, 1985 (contains 12 poems from *Cántico* and *Clamor*)

Palley, Julian, in his *Affirmation: A Bilingual Anthology, 1919-1966*, with an introduction by Guillén, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968

Turnbull, Eleanor L., in her *Contemporary Spanish Poetry: Selections from Ten Poets* (bilingual edition), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945

The poets of Jorge Guillén's generation were concerned with achieving exact forms of expression: technical ability was sought after, for it was necessary to express ideas with clarity and precision. Guillén was careful to make clear, however, that here was no "empty formalism". His use of Spanish metres did not arise through mere imitation but was the result of detailed study and comprehension of the significance of certain verse forms and literary devices. In particular, the cultivation of the metaphor was of supreme importance in Guillén's poems. He had a strong faith in the power of words, not merely to give aesthetic pleasure but to communicate. He always rejected "pure poetry" in favour of "el poema con poesía y otras cosas humanas" (the poem with poetry and other human things) and it is this human dimension and his positive attitude to the world that are characteristic of the whole of his work. There is little or nothing of conventional religious belief in his poetry, but there is notable reference to both the natural world and to human beings.

His basic poetic production consists of *Cántico* [Canticle], eventually subtitled "Fe de vida" (i.e. a document that proves one is alive - a proof of existence), which took him about 30 years to complete and was published in 1928, with enlarged editions in 1936 and in 1945, and a complete edition in 1950; *Clamor* [Clamor], with the subtitle "Tiempo de historia" [Time of History], in three volumes published in 1957, 1960 and 1963; and *Homenaje* [Homage], subtitled "Reunión de vidas" [Reunion of lives] (1967). These three were published together in 1968 as *Aire nuestra* [Our Air]. His last two major volumes were *Y otras poems* [And Other Poems] (1973) and *Final* [Finale] (1981). After 1936 Guillén's work was published outside Spain, but in the late 1970s, with the involvement of the Barral publishing house of Barcelona not only in *Final* but in the re-publication of the four previous main volumes of Guillén's poetry, full recognition of the great poet began. In 1976 (Franco had died in 1975) the first official Spanish homage to the internationally honoured Guillén was paid, with the award to him of the Cervantes Prize.

*Canticle* has been the most translated volume of Guillén's poetry. Italian translations are very numerous in comparison with those in French, English and German. *Canticle* is a hymn of

praise, of joy, to the natural world of creation and its essential goodness. There is a "dialogue" between man and the world and man uses his senses and intellect to participate creatively in that dialogue. Guillén exalts man and his relationship to the natural world. If the vision of man in *Canticle* is ideal, the vision of man in *Clamor* is realistic but positive; here chaos and disorder appear as part of man's existence. The principal theme of the poem is embodied in an exhortation "to be human"; in being human we find our salvation. *Homage*, as the title implies, is a homage to the creative writers and philosophers who have contributed to man's existence by means of the written word.

None of Guillén's volumes of poetry has been translated in its entirety; translations are based on anthologies and selections of his poetry. In *Language and Poetry* (GUILLÉN, 1961) the author himself provides the reader with comments on and translations of his poems and gives an excellent summary of his poetic aims. He also wrote an introduction to the translation of the selection from *Canticle* by DI GIOVANNI (1965) and to the *Anthology* by PALLEY (1968).

TURNBULL's translation (1945) of a selection from *Canticle* is close and accurate, respectful of the source text; it has Spanish originals and reminiscences of the poets by Pedro Salinas.

GIBBONS & GEIST's *Guillén on Guillén* (1979) was assembled out of several hours of tape recordings of Guillén reading an anthology, selected by himself, of poems from the books then available, with commentaries by him. The Spanish text of both poems and commentaries is translated into English with a succinct and stimulating introduction.

MATTHEWS's translation (1985) of 12 major poems from *Canticle* and *Clamor* provides the reader with a substantial example of these two first books of poetry. She does not introduce unnecessary interpretation, seeking always to render the Spanish as directly as possible, with occasional changes in word order according to the requirements of English syntax. She does not translate the titles.

EVA NÚÑEZ MÉNDEZ

## Further Reading

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