

Echoes of Literary Travel

Editor's Note:

Literary travel is an important theme of world literature and a frequent subject in comparative literary studies. With this in mind, we have decided to establish a column in *CL&WL* called “Echoes of Literary Travel.” We are interested in publishing essays that chronicle the footprints of writers between cultures and national boundaries and examine their contemporary resonance. The style of the essay for this column is less formal than other articles in *CL&WL*. The column, inaugurated with Prof. Keith Ellis’s essay, will appear periodically in the future issues of the journal.

Nicolás Guillén, the Cuban Sage, Goes to Wuhan

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Abstract:

Months after the victory of the Cuban Revolution and Nicolás Guillén's return to Cuba from exile, he was invited by the Chinese People's Cultural Association to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Chinese Revolution. During a trip down the powerful Yangtze River, on October 20, later to become the Day of Cuban Culture, Cuba's prolific National Poet was inspired to write "Voy hasta Uján" [I Am Going to Wuhan], merging inextricably and in friendship salient aspects of Cuban and Chinese culture. As is frequent in Guillén's poetic practice, the poem is in the dramatic mode and involves a decision as to whether the Cuban visitor will realize his desire to go all the way to Shanghai or whether the native boatman's plan to go to Wuhan will influence the visitor to make that city his destination. The dialogue between the two is sparse but friendly. The reader will find fruitful allusions to key aspects of Guillén's poetic art that provide resonance to the characters' words. They are testimony to the potency, economy and durability of Guillén's poetic expression, making it refer discreetly to the past and prophetically to the future.

Keywords: Nicolás Guillén, poetry, humanitarianism, Cuba, China, history, Wuhan, prescience, colonialism, imperialism, science, solidarity, paratext

In my book, *Cuba's Nicolás Guillén: Poetry and Ideology*, of 1985, I commented briefly (155-156) on the poem "Voy hasta Uján" (Guillén, "Tengo, 1964," 137) [I Am Going to Wuhan], in which Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), as the poetic voice, had written in 1959 about how he came to choose to know that city on the great Yangtze River. My comments arose in synthesis from my observing or imagining a host of experiences involving biography, national history, geographical determination, education, cultural formation, political influence, economic stress, work experience, as all these are underlying factors in the meeting portrayed in the poem "I Am Going to Wuhan" of a Chinese man and a visiting Cuban man in China in 1959.

The process by which the visitor arrives at his decision to prefer Wuhan over Shanghai as his destination employs centrally, and as is frequent in Guillén's poetry, a variation of the dramatic mode. In this case there is sparse dialogue between two protagonists who seem to be proponents for the different cities; but subtle allusions to Guillén's poetic practice and societal preferences, taken together, pronounce in favour of Wuhan, a decision which earns validity not only at the time of the poem's composition, 1959, but which also, in an act of seeming prescience, based on the poet's unerring sense of history, makes it apply to the world of today as well.

Guillén had travelled to revolutionary China in 1952 and again in 1953, during his time of exile from Fulgencio Batista's Cuba. On both visits, while he traversed long distances, he wrote nostalgic popular Cuban poetry, featuring the *décima*—a ten-line octosyllabic poem usually rhyming abbaaccddc—widely-practised in Cuba, with its popularity ensured throughout the Hispanic world by its versatility and the extension of its encompassing democratic reach. The *décima* may stand by itself conveying themes of every mood and style, recited or sung accompanied by the *tres* or other forms of the guitar. It is also compatible with theater and with public celebrations. The men, women and children who spontaneously, magically create *décimas*, sometimes in contexts of feigned hostility with each other, are adored in Cuba, especially at the time of the triumph of the Revolution when there are many feats to be sung.¹

In a brilliant speech on José Martí (1853-1895), Cuba's National Hero, given in Beijing, on September 27, 1953, Guillén guides his Chinese audience, and all readers who subsequently have come to know the speech, to understand how Martí's thoughts and deeds contained the popular basis for the making of the Cuban nation and its history (Guillén "José Martí" 158-166). The speech, given two months after the July 26, 1953 attack, led by Fidel Castro, on the Moncada Barracks, on units of the Batista regime's forces in Santiago de Cuba, is a lucid explanation of the necessity for, and the inevitable triumph of, the Cuban Revolution. The speech also gives an indication of Guillén's command of history as a basis of his literary writings in both prose and poetry.

With the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, the value of Guillén's cultural work became freely recognized, as by acclamation throughout the island he came to be Cuba's National Poet. In September of that year, the nation was making preparations for the founding meetings of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (to be held eventually in 1961), meetings that led to Guillén being voted President

1 The *décima* is also a fundamental pillar of another popular genre, the *glosa* (Ellis, "The Glosa: A Genre to be Noticed for its Constructive Values.")

of UNEAC. All its sessions were attended by Fidel Castro, and the final one was historic for being the occasion on which he summed up what had been discussed in the sessions concerning the new role of artists and writers in the Revolution. A month after this important planning conference ended, Guillén paid his third visit to China. This time he was invited, as Ángel Augier, Guillén's peerless biographer, tells us (Guillén *Obra poética 1958-1977 II*, 501), by the Chinese Peoples' Cultural Association for Relations with Foreign Countries, to join in the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Peoples' Republic of China. It was during this visit, on October 20, 1959, that he wrote the poem "Voy hasta Uján":

Por el Yang-tse, río abajo,
por el Yang-tse, Yang-tse kiang,
¿de Chunking vienes tal vez,
rumbo a Shanghai?

—No voy tan lejos, mi amigo,
voy hasta Uján.

Pero el Yang-tse kiang
sigue hasta el mar.

Por el Yang-tse, río abajo,
tu barca va;
llévame, amigo, en tu barca,
voy hacia el mar.

—No voy tan lejos, mi amigo,
voy hasta Uján.

Pero el Yang-tse kiang
muere en Shanghai.

Por el Yang-tse voy soñando,
por el Yang-tse, Yang-tse kiang,
arriba, el cielo sin nubes,
lejos, el mar.
¡Por el Yang-tse kiang

voy hasta Uján!

(Escrito el 20 de octubre de 1959)

[I Am Going to Wuhan

Along the Yangtze, downstream,
Along the Yangtze, Yangtze Kiang,
¿are you perhaps coming from Chongqing,
heading for Shanghai?

—I'm not going that far, my friend,
I am going to Wuhan.

But the Yangtze Kiang
continues on to the sea.

Along the Yangtze, downstream,
your boat sails;
take me, friend, in your boat,
I am going down to the sea.

—I'm not going that far, my friend,
I am going to Wuhan.

But the Yangtze Kiang
dies in Shanghai.

Along the Yangtze I go dreaming,
along the Yangtze, Yangtze Kiang,
up above, the cloudless sky,
in the distance, the sea.
Along the Yangtze Kiang
I am going to Wuhan!

(Written on October 20, 1959)]

Trans. Keith Ellis

During his trip down the mighty Yangtze River, the Cuban speaker of the poem is in buoyant mood, a mood that has nature as setting and as participant, with sunshine as far as can be seen and beyond in liberated Shanghai. The mood is enhanced by the developing social relationship between the Cuban visitor and the native Chinese boatman, to whom the garrulous Cuban demonstrates proudly his knowledge of China by describing the route of the Yangtze River that he thinks or hopes the boatman is taking. By repeating his query about the destination of the boat, the visitor makes it clear that he wants to enjoy the whole trip and come to know a substantial part of China, all the way to the well-known far-eastern port city of Shanghai. The occasion for his trip down the mighty river—the celebration of the tenth anniversary of China’s Revolution—is for him a thrilling, friendship-promoting event that makes him think with satisfaction of his own new national status. The cities he names, Chongqing and Shanghai, now free, are historical allusions which explain his joy. Hence the prominence of words expressing cordiality or cultural compatibility in the poem from its beginning: fundamental and uncomplicated words, the word “amigo” for instance, used by both the Chinese and the Cuban protagonists of the poem. Also, there is no preliminary sorting out of social status between them. They both go directly to the use of the intimate familiar form of pronoun (tú) and adjective (tu).

In this sense it is useful to know other Guillén poems in which he refers to his Chinese experience. In an earlier poem, “La canción del regreso” (1952) (“La paloma de vuelo popular, 1958,” *Obra poética 1958-1977*, 13-14) [The song of return], he celebrates the recently triumphant Chinese revolution that he has come to know and report on to his people. He emphasizes, as he does in “I Am Going to Wuhan”, getting full measure for Chinese place names, the musicality of Chinese cultural references:

Yo vengo de Pekín.
Pekín
sin mandarín,
ni palanquín.
Yo vengo de Shanghai:
no hay
ni un yanqui ya en Shanghai.

¡Canta conmigo, amigo,
y di como yo digo!

No hay
ni un yanqui ya en Shanghai.

[I am coming from Peking.
Peking
without mandarin,
or palanquin.
I am coming from Shanghai:
there isn't now
a single Yankee in Shanghai.

Sing with me, my friend,
and say as I say!
There isn't
a single Yankee now in Shanghai.]

This poem was written just before Guillén defended the Kikuyu people of Kenya from the terror and the propaganda of British colonialism with his poem “Mau-maus” (also of 1952).² He was always unwavering in his opposition to colonialism.

On this same 1959 visit he wrote other poems in which he shows open support for China's well-being. In the poem “Primero de octubre” (1959) (“Tengo, 1964”, 137) [First of October] he celebrates the new day when, thanks to China's revolutionary victory, the humiliations, deprivations and impositions of its colonial past are definitely of the colonial past. The poem shares the emotional charge of the poem “Tengo” [I have] and of many other Guillén poems that were soon to be collected in his celebratory book of the Cuban Revolution, *Tengo* (1964). The high degree of psychic comfort that Guillén feels in China is revealed in other poems he composes on this visit. For example, in the poem “Wu Sang-Kue” (“Tengo, 1964”, 138), he feels free to delve into Chinese seventeenth-century history to take sides against, and regard as traitor, the warrior Wu. This ideological activism is to be contrasted with Guillén's reluctance and ultimate polite refusal to endorse, in different circumstances, a candidate for the presidency of Chile in 1946. When pressed in Santiago, the capital, by a crowd led by his Chilean good friend, host and fellow poet, Pablo Neruda, to vote for Gabriel González Videla, he would go no further than saying, “Amigos, les agradezco la invitación, pero no puedo aceptarla,

2 See my analysis of Guillén's poem “Mau-maus” (Ellis, “Caribbean Identity and Integration in the Work of Nicolás Guillén”).

porque soy un extranjero en este país. Sin embargo, si fuera chileno mi voto sería por González Videla” [Friends, I thank you for the invitation, but I cannot accept it, because I am a foreigner in this country. Nevertheless, if I were Chilean my vote would be for González Videla] (*Páginas vueltas, Memorias*, 161). Guillén was at that time in the first decades of his extraordinary lifetime record of showing good judgement in the political matters that informed his poetry. All these poems exemplify a prominent trait in Guillén’s poetry: the aggressive and unyielding opposition he shows to colonialism and imperialism.³

The Chinese interlocutor, quickly and firmly identified by the visitor as a friend, ultimately prevails. The Cuban visitor announces emphatically that he -- like his Chinese friend, both of them with their people’s progressive and sovereign victories clear in their minds (China’s on October 1, 1949 and Cuba’s on January 1, 1959) -- is going to heroic Wuhan. At this point of presumed logical convergence on Wuhan, let us intrude on and expose the reasoning of the two protagonists, based on the historical reality of Wuhan as the favoured locus of their Chinese experience: the native’s on what he has lived and learned, the visitor’s on what he has learned and imagined.

Part 2

Before the steadying hand of Mao Zedong (1893-1976) arrived to definitively calm the city’s relationship to the Yangtze and ensure the end to foreign predatory incursions and frenzied local squabbles, Wuhan had to develop and rely on its extraordinary recuperative skills to bring itself safely to our day.

In the minds of the two travellers of the poem there would be thoughts concerning the relative attractions of the two destinations: Wuhan and Shanghai. As could have been fresh in their minds, and moreso in that of the Chinese speaker, Shanghai’s coastal location had made it vulnerable to foreign attack and largely uncontested imperialist intrusion and humiliation, such as that city had known firsthand in the course of its history. Paul French, quotes the British historian, Robert Bickers, as follows: “After the First Opium War the British annexed Hong Kong as a colony and opened Shanghai, on the coast at the head of the Yangtze in eastern China, as a treaty port. Sixteen years later they understood the importance

3 It turned out that González Videla, having won the election, was very soon to contradict radically his campaign pledges. Neruda himself had to leave Chile, disguised and on horseback for Argentina to escape likely grave physical harm, at the beginning of a long exile spent mostly in Europe and in Mexico.

of inland China better and so zeroed in on Wuhan, as well as Tianjin.”⁴ This quote tells us a great deal when it receives a close reading. In the first place, the nature of the military action is formed by a war which lasted for three years (September 1839-August 1842). The war itself, we learn from Bickers who is a prolific writer on pre-1949 foreign military incursions into China, was conducted as a series of mainly naval engagements initiated by the British who could rely on their traditional dominance of maritime warfare. The aim of the war was to expand, on British terms, imperial Britain’s intervention into China, which was under the Qing dynasty. Opium was the commodity of choice. It was widely used by Great Britain at this time, by all social classes. There is evidence that some of the leading English poets and essayists (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet of “Kubla Khan,” and the essayist Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*) were prominent members of the dreamy Romantic school who indulged in the habit.

But the regular customers—those to whom laudanum (a tincture of opium) was available at corner shops, the ones we heard about in the colonies where the production and consumption of cannabis were illegal—were the workers, many still children of the most oppressed classes, who suffered the brunt of the burdens brought on by Britain taking the lead in the industrial revolution and adopting at home a policy that was liberal in the extreme (Berridge). It was important for the large profiteers of the foreign enterprises not to risk incurring excessive domestic expenses. By drugging more and more Chinese people as well, the imperialist enterprise, with its predatory nature, thrived.⁵ Ellen Castelow in her essay “Opium in Victorian Britain” has shown concisely the wreckage wrought on a society by the effects of opium. Nevertheless, the British found the gains from the First Opium War to be insufficient, even though they had the prize of Hong Kong as an obedient colony and five treaty ports as well, including Shanghai, with the treaties governing their trade with China being notoriously unbalanced in favor of the imperialists.

In order to impose the necessary changes and expansions, Great Britain, the

4 As quoted in Paul French, “A History of Wuhan: From One-time Chinese Capital to Coronavirus Epicentre,” *CNN*, Jan. 22, 2020. Thanks to Paul French for sketching out the history of the West’s knowledge of Wuhan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, on the part of Guillén scholars, for helping to give present relevance to the great poet’s words.

5 “By the early 19th century, more and more Chinese were smoking British opium as a recreational drug. But for many, what started as recreation soon became a punishing addiction: many people who stopped ingesting opium suffered chills, nausea, and cramps, and sometimes died from withdrawal. Once addicted, people would often do almost anything to continue to get access to the drug. The Chinese government recognized that opium was becoming a serious social problem and, in the year 1800, it banned both the production and the importation of opium. In 1813, it went a step further by outlawing the smoking of opium and imposing a punishment of beating offenders 100 times.” (Hayes).

lead imperialist country of the time, with arms and the willingness to use them, declared the Second Opium War (Oct. 8, 1856 - Oct. 18, 1869) against the Qing Dynasty (China). While the imperialists feasted themselves on the riches to be found in China's lucrative coastal ports, the Chinese administrators began to be faced with rebellion from peasants who were put under unusual stress from measures introduced by the Qing administrators to cope with the British demands. A stage of armed conflict or rebellion was reached between the Hakka people and the Qing Dynasty;⁶ and the valiant but losing Hakkas had to accept rude refuge provided by the British and other colonialists in countries as far away as Jamaica,⁷ newly liberated from slavery, but with no compensation given to the former slaves for their centuries of hard labor.

Hence we have at this time the interesting coincidence of two types of appeal on the basis of morality to the British Queen Victoria. Lin Zexu, a scholar and appointed official of the Qing emperor, saw the drug pushers as the problem and wrote against the imposition of opium on the Chinese population (1839). With emancipation from slavery occurring in their country in 1838, groups of Jamaican former slaves—impoverished by the increasing lack of work on the plantations, by their lack of political power (due to discriminatory poll taxes) and their poor economic and health conditions—wrote petitions to the same obstinate “Missus Queen”(1865), whom they had been led to believe had kindly given them their labor freedom and their land. One of these petitions, from “peasants of St. Ann Parish,” received an answer known as the “Queen’s Advice,” written by the Colonial Office and publicized by Governor Eyre, callously recommending hard work and thrift as the only solution to their misery (Craton, 327-328). Since all these conflicts are occurring during the government of the highly educated and empathetic first president of Paraguay (1811-1840), Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, and his

6 A peasant rebellion known as the Taiping Rebellion against the Manchu-controlled Qing dynasty, which took control of Wuhan from 1852 to 1864, had weakened both the urban and rural areas of the lower Yangtze River with the constant fighting. Some among the diaspora of the defeated Hakka forces would later be found fighting in Cuba's revolutionary wars and, still later, participating in Cuba's support of African independence struggles. (Personal note from Keith Lowe, a Hakka researcher and educator (<http://torontohakkaconference.com/keith-lowe/>) May 30, 2020.

7 The Hakka diaspora had another consequence, a personal one, with which I associate Wuhan's scientific bent. The son of the shop owner in my home village, Allan Chung, a good friend of my father, helped him to teach me, in what we called our river, a more scientific form of the breaststroke, which made me second fastest in the stroke when I entered high school at age eleven. I also used it to win freestyle and backstroke competitions in my age group in my high school and some years later to beat one of the famous Nash brothers, Gary, in a 100 yard extramural breaststroke race.

immediate successors, there is little doubt that these Paraguayan leaders would have been steeled, by this atrocious British conduct, in their decision to give no quarter to British trade representatives who kept showing up seeking deals in Asunción.

The terms of the settlement of the Second Opium War (1856-1860), exacted from the Qing Dynasty, gave the imperialists access to China's multiple interior trading routes via the Yangtze and some of its tributaries and led to new imperialist goals being set and new conflicts being stirred affecting the development of China and Wuhan. The British had promptly shown an interest in a group of three riverside ports collectively known as the Three Towns of Wuhan: Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang; the British demanding that they be opened.⁸ From this conglomeration, industrious and inventive, Wuhan emerged to be the rapidly expanding home to an entrepôt, receiving a range of products--commodities and manufactured goods--from the hardworking interior of China, and sending them on to the port cities and other destinations designated largely by the imperialist countries to be centers of high margins of profit.⁹ China was good business, in which Wuhan was strategically involved as China's largest inland transshipment center, a distribution point for commodities, such as tea, meat and tobacco, and manufactured goods, such as iron, steel and silk, to the coastal port cities (French).

In 1911 Wuhan was again the site of an anti-Qing rebellion, the final one that eventually ended the 267-year-old Qing dynasty and established the Republic of China. On October 10, 1911, followers of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) launched the Wuchang Uprising; and in 1927 Wuhan became the capital of a leftist Kuomintang government, in opposition to Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) and the nationalist government in Nanjing. Wuhan, like the rest of the Republic, was in the early stages of industrialization and modernization when it was caught up in the conflicts involving the Chinese Nationalist Party, the Communist Party of China, local warlords and the Empire of Japan. The full-scale Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945 moved Chiang Kai-shek's government to retreat back up the Yangtze to Wuhan which was temporarily a wartime capital of China ("Wuhan,"

8 I must expose my embarrassment at using the verb "to open" without making explicit how firmly rooted in the etymology of this verb is the practice of opening up an economy or parts of it to imperialist exploitation, so firmly indeed that people tutored by the imperialist media or propaganda may even be victims of the inverse application of the terminology. I give a Caribbean example. Almost from the beginning of its revolutionary era, Cuba has been subjected to a U.S.-imposed economic embargo, so strictly enforced that it is being justly called a blockade. Yet in neighboring Jamaica it has not been unusual over the years to hear even university educated people ask when is Cuba going "to open up"?

9 Foreign traders (British, German, French, Japanese, Belgian, Russian and American) moved their trade centers up the Yangtze, making Wuhan a well known industrial city (French).

Wikipedia). When Wuhan fell to the Japanese in 1938, much of the city moved further up to the final Nationalist capital of Chongqing, forming the backbone of China's wartime heavy industry. As a key center on the Yangtze, Wuhan became an important base for Japanese operations in China, posing for the Chinese leadership the problem of how to destroy the enemy without ruining China's former capital city. The Chinese leadership in Chongqing, including Chiang Kai-shek, approved the tactic of strategic firebombing of the enemy-occupied Wuhan. Firebombing at this time was treated by some almost like sport. In December 1944, the war in Europe being near its end, the city was largely destroyed by U.S. firebombing raids conducted by the Fourteenth Air Force. For the next three days, Wuhan was bombed by the Americans, who went in with fury, destroying all of the city's docks and warehouses, as well as Japanese air bases in the city, and killing or injuring more than 20,000 Chinese civilians (French). The widening opposition between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party made a coalition government impossible, resulting in a resumption of the Chinese Civil War, in 1946, shortly after the Japanese surrender to the Allied Powers in September, 1945 ("Chinese Civil War"). With the end of World War II and with the achievement of the People's Republic of China in 1949, even with greatly reduced exports and foreign business gone, Wuhan, demonstrating firm recuperative powers, eventually resumed its position as central China's political, economic, financial, commercial, cultural and educational centre.

Today's reader of Guillén's 1959 poem will recognize the realization of the Chinese boatman's quiet confidence. In 1957 the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge connected three major rail lines, making Wuhan once again the country's major transshipment center. The Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest power station in terms of installed capacity since 2012, brought China a much needed source of green power, seasonal flood control for the cities along the periodically dangerous Yangtze River and transportation by 3,000 ton ships from Shanghai to Chongqing ("Three Gorges Dam"; Peter Ford;).¹⁰

10 Peter Ford indicates that a 2011 government report stated: "Although the Three Gorges project provides huge comprehensive benefits, urgent problems must be resolved regarding the smooth relocation of residents, ecological protection, and geological disaster prevention." In reaction to the heavy flooding in the Yangtze River basin, starting in June 2020, Qingfeng Zhang announced two important initiatives («China Must Act Now to Prevent Yangtze Floods Getting Worse,» *Nikkei Asian Review*, July 22, 2020: 1) "To build back better, protect and restore the ecosystem services on which China's economic growth and jobs depend, [...] a national green development fund with total registered capital of \$12.7 billion, focusing on key areas of green development along the Yangtze River Economic Belt, was established in Shanghai on July 15" and 2) "[...] the Asian Development Bank has invested about \$2 billion to support the Yangtze River Economic Belt program to address environmental, social and economic issues."

Wuhan had been for decades a traditional manufacturing hub and was growing into one of the areas promoting modern industrial changes in China (“Globalization in China”). This is the Wuhan of Nicolás Guillén’s Chinese interlocutor, whose warm, contented focus the Cuban observes and by which he is eventually moved to choose to go to Wuhan. This Chinese boatman is welcoming and purposeful, confident in the future. His Wuhan will by 2020 consist of three national development zones, four scientific and technological development parks, over 350 research institutes, 1,656 high tech enterprises, numerous enterprise incubators and investments from 230 Fortune 500 firms (“Wuhan” *Wikipedia*). The city will become home to multiple notable institutes of higher education, including Wuhan University and the Huazhong University of Science and Technology. With Wuhan’s renewal and the advent of globalization, foreign business has returned. Honda, Citroen and GM will become major investors in the city, in a joint venture with one of China’s longstanding major automotive manufacturers, Dongfeng Motor Group (founded as Dongfeng Motor Corporation in 1969) (“Dongfeng Motor Corporation,” *Wikipedia*). Wuhan was designated as a UNESCO Creative City in the field of design in 2017 (“Wuhan, A Creative City of Design”) and is presently classified as a Beta world city by the Globalization and World Cities Research Network (“Wuhan” *Wikipedia*).

This is the Wuhan whose Institute of Virology (“Wuhan Institute of Virology: Brief Introduction”), founded in 1956, specializing in virology, viral pathology and virus technology, among nineteen other biological and biomedical research institutes of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, whose BSL-4 (biosafety lab level 4), the first in China (2015), would become famous in December 2019 for identifying the emergence of a new Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2; and whose researchers and international collaborators, would hopefully put China, Cuba, and the world on the path to the research and development of therapies and vaccines to disarm its lethal and fast-spreading illness, COVID-19. This knowledge would result in the imposition of a strict 76-day lockdown on January 23, 2020, aimed at stifling the disease’s spread in Wuhan and in China in general, and, in multiple efforts, some in collaboration with Cuba (Sameh), would help the world to deal with its spread (Simiao Chen et al.), which has resulted in worldwide health, economic and food crises. In its effort to contain future outbreaks, Wuhan, China’s ninth most populous city of 11 million people, tested 10 million residents in only 19 days.¹¹ On June 3, 2020,

11 The big media in the West will almost certainly apply the word they reserve and teach to their acolytes, in their effort to diminish the true impressiveness of such an achievement, the word “draconian,” implying that people from the socialist world are forced to do whatever good thing they do. On the other hand are those who are grateful for the fact that literary criticism and other branches of the humanities may extend to these regions of usefulness.

300 positive cases were identified, all with no symptoms, and with no infections among the 1174 close contacts of those who had tested positive, suggesting that those asymptomatic cases were not spreading the virus by casual contact to others.¹² The careful, preventive measures being taken in Wuhan and elsewhere in China have taken place, as the New York Times explains, because President Xi “is pushing to restore the pre-pandemic agenda, including his signature pledge to eradicate extreme poverty by this year, while cautioning against complacency that could let a second wave of infections spread (Myers).” Cuba likewise is taking careful measures to guarantee both the continued success of its prevention, containment and therapeutic policies against COVID-19 in order to save its tourist economy and the development of new medical technologies for export or transfer (Marsh “Cuba to test...”).

Part 3

Guillén wrote his poem “Voy hasta Uhán” in Wuhan nine months after he had returned to Cuba from nearly six years of exile. In his absence, the dictatorial Batista regime had collapsed on January 1, 1959, in the face of the revolutionary movement led by Fidel Castro. Guillén returned precisely on January 23 from Argentina where he had been able to find safety for the last period of his exile and had eagerly joined the revelry organized by local and foreign cultural figures, renewing old friendships established in different parts of the world. On his return to Cuba, the demand for the renewal and acceleration of his personal cultural participation in the revolutionary process that had been suspended in 1953 was huge and comprehensive. Cuban cultural activities now being open to the whole population, the new inclusiveness broadened the relevance of Guillén’s role as poet, journalist and cultural leader.

His popular presence and the powerful voice with which he read his sometimes stirring, sometimes moving, sometimes witty verses, always conveyed with rich musicality and with scrupulous attention to history what was on the tips of the tongues of the vast majority of his people. His first mass poetry reading upon

12 See Hernández, “After New Coronavirus Outbreaks, China Imposes Wuhan-Style Lockdown” and also “Wuhan Tests Nearly 10 Million People in 19 Days, Finding Just 300 Coronavirus Infections” by Associated Press-Time, which concludes: “[Finding just 300 coronavirus infections in 10 million people] is a potentially encouraging development because of widespread concern that infected people without symptoms could be silent spreaders of the disease. There is no definitive answer yet on the level of risk posed by asymptomatic cases, with anecdotal evidence and studies to date producing conflicting answers.”

his return was at the invitation of Che Guevara, who presided at a reading of Guillén's poetry at the headquarters of the rebel army in Havana on March 2. This was followed by several such events in different parts of Cuba, all with massive attendance by a people who were developing a growing sense of ownership of the salient aspects of Cuban life. Guillén, having already articulated in his poetry the need for change that would accommodate this new national reality, was himself eminently capable of leading the thoughtful celebration of its realization. He thus became for the people a cultural icon, expressing in poetry and prose many of the essential concepts arising from or that guided the practical work of Fidel and other leaders of the Cuban Revolution. By ably carrying out this work, a fact acknowledged by his appointment to membership on the Central Committee of Cuba's Communist Party, he became one of his country's leaders.

Nor was this admiration for the Revolution and for Guillén restricted to Cuba. The Revolution and Guillén's poetry also resonated with people in many countries with respect to matters that were central to their material and spiritual lives, especially to those vast sectors of humanity that had suffered or were suffering the privations and humiliations imposed on them by colonialism and imperialism. Cuba soon set up what would become the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (ICAP) [the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples], Casa de las Américas, the already-mentioned Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), all of them involved in strengthening ties with other countries. In the European and Asian socialist worlds, the counterparts of the new Cuban institutions were well established, so that Guillén, who had also been involved in founding ICAP, was, in addition to his work within Cuba, busy with extending and assessing invitations. It is in this context that he was invited to Beijing in 1959 and made the trip down the Yangtze Kiang that became the subject of the poem that is now occupying our attention.

It is important to point out a detail in Guillén's presentation of his poem dealing with Wuhan that infuses the poem with a deep Cuban identity and therefore tightens the ties between Cuba and China. Guillén is careful to include the date on which he wrote the poem in Wuhan: October 20, 1959. When "Voy hasta Uján" was first published in the Havana journal *Trabajo* [Work] in March 1961 and before it was collected in Guillén's book *Tengo* of 1964, it bore, in addition to the title, the heading "Sobre el río Yang-tse, el 20 de octubre de 1959" [On the Yangtze River, October 20, 1959]. This is another example that shows how the Cuban master's inventive skills allowed him to make original and structurally meaningful his usage of paratextual devices (Ellis, "Before and Beyond Genette: Cuba's Nicolás Guillén

and the Empowered Paratext”).

October 20, 1868 is recognized in Cuba as the day on which the first victory of the independence struggle against Spanish forces was achieved in Bayamo in eastern Cuba. The victory inspired Perucho Figueredo, a nationally recognized musician, poet and composer to write the anthem then known as “La Bayamesa” and which has become Cuba’s national anthem. This creation gave special significance to the 20th of October; and in 1980, by an act of the Cuban parliament, that day would become officially the Day of Cuban Culture. It is highly probable that Guillén’s poem, bearing that date as a paratext, would also be endowed with special national Cuban significance. By considering on October 20, 1959, the significance of that October 20 ninety-one years earlier, in one of his very important first creations as National Poet of Cuba, Guillén imbued his poem “Voy hasta Uján” [I Am Going to Wuhan] with extraordinary significance, significance that is both solemn and cordial between Cuba and China, and from which have sprung and are springing creative treasures for Cuba, China and humanity. These treasures have been coming both in the humanities, as in this poem, “Voy hasta Uján”, for example. and in the sciences.

With regard to the sciences, let me go to the lead therapies of the moment for the treatment of COVID-19, the “pneumonia of unknown cause” that was detected in Wuhan and that has caused a pandemic that is challenging the resources of the whole world (Prashad, “CoronaShock and Socialism”). A March 31, 2020 article on the website of *China Global Television Network* (GGTN) points to scientific collaboration between China and Cuba, with respect to both effective treatment and hopes for a preventive vaccine (Chirino).

... A highly promising Cuban drug for COVID-19 called Interferon alfa 2b, produced by Cubans during the 1980s, is currently being developed in China through a joint Cuban-Chinese venture.

Doctors in the Asian country reported positive results when it was used on recent COVID-19 patients and the drug tops a list issued by the Chinese Pharmaceutical Association to treat the respiratory disease.

Interferon alfa-2b was produced by the Havana-based Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology Center and over the years has been used for diseases from dengue fever to hepatitis and HIV.

Scientists assure that current reserves and production of Interferon alfa-2b allow for the treatment of an indefinite number of COVID-19 cases in Cuba and also export to other countries.

Jorge Valdés, Biotechnology Centre scientist and deputy director, said that in his view the drug's success in China was due to its proven antiviral action and its administration at early stages of the disease, along with some antiretroviral drugs.

The scientist also confirmed that there is movement toward a Cuban vaccine for COVID-19 : “Out of several candidate vaccines, we have one to be submitted to trials in humans soon in order to administer it in the current circumstances.”

In line with global efforts to fight the new coronavirus, Cuban scientists are playing an active role in the search for new weapons to stop its spread here and around the world.

Two more recent articles (May 13, 2020 and May 22, 2020), produced for Reuters by Susan Marsh, “With Castro-era biotech, Cuba seeks to compete in coronavirus treatment race” and “Coronavirus: Cuba says 2 drugs have reduced its death toll”, show further successful treatments developed by Cuba and China:

[Cuba] says it has been successful in treating the novel coronavirus at home and in China, and that 80 countries have already expressed an interest in buying its interferon alpha 2b.

[...] China, where the pandemic emerged last year, included interferon in its treatment guidelines for COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus. One of the interferons it used is produced by a joint Cuban-Chinese venture Changheber, Cuban authorities said.

Cuba [...] says it has treated nearly all of its patients with interferon injections and credits the medicine for helping it achieve a lower mortality rate among its 1,804 confirmed COVID-19 cases - 4.1% versus an average of 5.9% for the rest of the Americas.

In a separate trial at Union hospital in Wuhan, China, COVID-19 patients who inhaled interferon in an aerosol formulation had faster improvement in respiratory symptoms and clearance of the virus from their blood than patients who did not receive interferon, according to another informal report by Chinese, Australian and Canadian researchers [...] Cuba [...] is [...] starting to use interferon nose drops for infection prevention in medical workers.

BioCubaFarma President Eduardo Martínez gave a presentation last week on a raft of drugs Cuba is testing and developing to strengthen the immune system against COVID-19, prevent a worsening of symptoms and help patients recover. It is developing its own version of AbbVie's Kaletra, an HIV therapy being tested in combination with other drugs, including interferon, against COVID-19. Martinez said Cuba's efforts were garnering interest abroad, and he anticipates high demand.

* * * * *

[...] Cuba said this week that use of two drugs produced by its biotech industry that reduce hyper-inflammation in seriously ill COVID-19 patients has sharply curbed its coronavirus-related death toll.

Health authorities have reported just two virus-related deaths over the past nine days among more than 200 active cases on the Caribbean's largest island, a sign they may have the worst of the outbreak under control.

[...] [The Cuban government], which hopes to increase its biopharmaceutical exports, has touted various drugs it produces for helping prevent infection with the new coronavirus and treating the COVID-19 disease it causes.

It ascribes the recent reduction in deaths of severely ill COVID-19 patients largely to the use beginning in April of two drugs that appear to help calm the "cytokine storm," a dangerous overresponse by the immune system in which it attacks healthy tissue as well as the invading virus.

One is itolizumab, a monoclonal antibody produced in Cuba and elsewhere. The other is a peptide that Cuba says its biotech industry discovered and has been testing for rheumatoid arthritis in Phase II clinical trials.

"Some 80 per cent of patients who end up in critical condition are dying.

In Cuba, with the use of these drugs, 80 per cent of those who end up in critical or serious condition are being saved,” President Miguel Diaz-Canel said on Thursday [May 21, 2020].

Cuba’s experimental treatments have helped it achieve an overall COVID-19 death rate of 4.2 per cent, compared with the regional and global averages of 5.9 per cent and 6.6 per cent, respectively, health authorities say.

Sadly, it is already being demonstrated that due to no fault of the Cubans, and that for ideological reasons, a considerable part of humanity is not yet allowed to benefit from this Cuban-Chinese scientific partnership, which has discovered a range of therapies that are applicable to the disease, from immunity boosters for the early stages of the disease to, most recently, urgent care for patients in critical condition (Andy Robinson, “US sanctions...”). On the contrary, a powerful and influential presidential voice belonging to a succession of persons has been around these many years making it known to other countries that their favourable reception of Cuban advances in science or anything else, however life-saving they may be, is not to be countenanced. So this issue is becoming part of a growing confrontation between overt and direct use of social resources to respond to clear and urgent human need, on the one hand, and adherence to a theory of gradual enrichment of the whole society (the trickle-down theory) with the enrichment to be administered by a traditionally privileged sector of this society that always jealously protects its own privilege. Making its way into the crux of the ensuing debate is the idea of human rights, a debate that is ongoing with intervals of violence erupting with increasing frequency. At the same time, paths are being sought to justice and friendship while heavy-handed authorities and their schemes are being evaded. Nicolás Guillén has been one of these dignified peacemakers. His poetry and his essays are surviving him in this humanitarian quest.

This study has pointed to his abundant artistic qualities. Always the master musician, Guillén reports to his people that, as in the poem “La canción del regreso” [The Song of the Return] he has found a harmonic beat with the Chinese people (“¡Canta conmigo, amigo/ y di como yo digo!/ No hay/ ni un yanquí ya en Shanghai.”). Similarly, he will find a harmonic cadence between an epigraph he selects from a poem by François de Malherbe to refer to the longed for relief from the inconsolable pain of lost love (“Time is a doctor who gives good results;/ his remedy is slow, but very sure”) and Martin Luther King’s hopeful longing for painfully evasive justice, expressed in his well, widely-known and elegant

adaptation of Theodore Parker's words ("The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice").¹³ Then there is Guillén's subtle metaphoric language, the variety of forms, many of which are his own inventions, all of them fitted harmoniously to the broadening repertoire of themes, creating another level of musicality that in the course of his poetry has become *sui generis*, in addition to the extraordinary validity of his judgements, a validity so constant that it extends to the prescience displayed in "Voy hasta Uján". We are accustomed to settings of his poetry in readings of history that are correct in his assessments of currents and trends, as well as in his citings of precise details; and since he does this so frequently without missing the mark, as may be seen also in this poem, he achieves a prescience that comprehends various fields of knowledge and justly acquires for himself the designation of sage.

He leads us to this truth: if you really know history, prescience comes naturally. His fidelity to history is a cardinal asset in his brilliant poetic career. In this poem, for example, everything is set in the context of the historic change that has been brought about in China and in Cuba. The fortuitous meeting of two travellers, the immediately recognized substratum of friendship between them, the preconceived destinations that are along the same route—one knowing at which point along the route he would have arrived at his destination and the other wanting to go on this trip to confirm immediately what his touring mind had imagined to be the full length of the route—illustrate the readily achieved harmony between two newly liberated countries. The conclusive and emphatic vow by the Cuban traveller that he will take the route known to the friendly Chinese boatman comes after the Cuban has desisted from proffering superficial images in favour of Shanghai that do not go to the heart of any essential issue and may well be a matter of mere vogue, as shown in a song popular in the Caribbean and the U.S. on the charts of those times: "Why

13 See my analysis of Guillén's poem "¿Qué color?" in "Before and Beyond Genette: Cuba's Nicolás Guillén and the Empowered Paratext" (12-15). Guillén's use of cadence to indicate his identification with poets and cultures is a striking aspect of his poetic work. He begins his firm identification with his own culture by bringing the popular Cuban rhythm, the *son*, to poetry in his *Motivos de son* (1930) [Son Motifs]. Subsequently, we find his evocation of Langston Hughes' work tied to the blues and Rubén Darío's linked to biblical or Whitmanesque rhythms, functioning within the Nicaraguan master's exemplary multiple styles.

did I tell you I was going to Shanghai” (Hilliard).¹⁴ His final emphatic declaration--“I am going to Wuhan!”--includes the joy of finding confirmation of the definitive direction of the route he had already been taking to a meaningful life.

From the outset the relationship between the two characters in this drama is decidedly cordial.¹⁵ The visiting Cuban feels comfortable enough to initiate the conversation, manifesting his garrulousness by directing at the native boatman a question that in certain socio-political settings could yield some variation of the answer: “Why are you so interested in my route?” The islander’s history is replete

14 Bob Hilliard, “Shanghai” (1951).

Why did I tell you I was going to Shanghai
 I want to be with you tonight
 Why did I holler I was going to Shanghai
 I want to be with you tonight
 It was just a little misunderstanding
 That a kiss on the cheek could patch
 I need you so badly
 I’d gladly start all over from scratch
 Why did I tell you it was bye-bye for Shanghai
 I’m even allergic to rice
 Why don’t you stop me when I talk about Shanghai,
 It’s just a lover’s device
 Now who’s going to kiss me
 Who’s going to thrill me
 Who’s going to hold me tight
 I’m right around the corner in the phone booth
 And I want to be with you tonight.

15 This mode also figures as a criterion in his appreciation of the work of some of his contemporary creators for whom he has a special regard. For example, Guillén was in Paris at the time of the funeral of César Vallejo (1892-1938); and, having summed up on that occasion the life and work of this outstanding Peruvian poet, he closed his commentary with the words: “Admiro mucho su dramática poesía” (Guillén, “Mariátegui, Vallejo”) [I really like his dramatic poetry]. I dare say, as a reader of Guillén’s poetry and prose, Vallejo’s “admirable” and “dramatic poetry” would comprise for Guillén a long list of dramatic poems, at the top of which would almost certainly be the masterly prison poem “Trilce XVIII”. I believe this, given too, Guillén’s enthusiastic appraisal of another of his contemporaries, the Spanish poet, Miguel Hernández (1910-1942), who produced some of his best poems from a Franco prison. In the cases of both poets, the humanitarian impact of the message of the poems is intensified by the circumstances of their composition. Guillén himself suffered two brief detentions in prerevolutionary Cuba (1936 and 1952) and one in Ellis Island, New York (1949) (Guillén, *Obra poética 1958-1977 II*, Compilación, prólogo y notas por Angel Augier, 494, 497, 499). If to this adherence to history with a pronounced humanitarian interest is added Guillén’s penchant for engaging in dramatic tone and musical attractiveness, one has the core of the Cuban master’s contribution to world poetry. I wish to thank Nicolás Hernández Guillén who helped me to overcome some COVID-19 communication obstacles by sending me his grandfather’s article on Vallejo and Mariátegui, punctually and electronically, from Havana.

with atrocious violations of his country's sovereignty that have continued even in the months since January 1, 1959. If he looks also to his wider region he can see that not only now but from the first attempts of his fellow new countries to be independent and prosperous, as with Paraguay, the most vicious fury has been unleashed on them ("Cuba-Paraguay" 294-296 and "Poder sin responsabilidad: las palabras en *Yo el Supremo*" 225-250).¹⁶ So that remembering the cause of his mission, his being in China to celebrate its ten years of freedom after hundreds of years of imperial interference and chaos, the Cuban visitor is disposed to turn his eyes to Wuhan as the intimate partner emerging out of a general setting of friendship. Having by now, by this stage of the journey, identified the boatman, with his steadfastness and purposefulness, as a real model and not something that is as fickle as the complexion of the sky, our Cuban visitor declares his decision to go not where the Yangtze dies but to shout out resolutely and vigorously, so that one and all may hear, "I am going to Wuhan!", to the heart of China, where its great artery, the Yangtze, is in salubrious flow. There is Wuhan, ready to play a central recuperative role if the whole homeland suffers any wound.

The full role played by the Cuban visitor, in which the first preferences shown by him are seemingly contradicted by his ultimate choice, may lead a reader to postulate as a necessary condition, the presence of irony in the visitor's early words. But there is a certain openness, a certain candor in his manner--which we have called "garrulousness"--that would make us reluctant to ascribe to him ironic usage. What is clear is that the rush at the end of the poem to the emphatic "Voy hasta Uján!", with an exclamation sign, washes away almost with the force of the Yangtze any possible trace of contradiction, any irony.

In the generation preceding Guillén's, another Cuban poet, Julián del Casal (1863-93), also developed an attachment to a great Chinese river, the Yellow River; but, true to that generation, his attachment remained in the realm of dreaming, just as Guillén's river experience would have done had he remained fixated on going to Shanghai. The whole last stanza of Guillén's poem and the poem itself would have stayed under the influence of its first line: "Por el Yang-tse voy soñando" [Along the Yangtze I go dreaming]. This is the perpetual state in which Casal finds himself. Everything is in the conditional, the solution by which a productive status may be realized is never declared. And so, in the case of Casal's poem "Nostalgias"

16 See Nicolás Guillén, "Cuba-Paraguay" and my essay "Poder sin responsabilidad: las palabras en *Yo el Supremo*," in which I discuss the problematic value of the aesthetic and historical misrepresentations of Paraguay under the leadership of Dr. José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia.

[Longings], there is no connection with the present reality and no suggestive future. What is remarkable is the writing itself, particularly its phonic properties: alliterative and rhyming phrases such as “Iría al río amarillo” [I would go to the Yellow River].

The visitor’s itinerary in Casal’s poem is governed by fanciful, unproductive dreaming made up of dreams that produce images that are familiar to readers of the airy exoticism exemplified by many Modernist Spanish-American poets, it being clearly understood that Rubén Darío did not stay transfixed in that state and José Martí never lingered there.¹⁷ Guillén here is in the drama, active, on the move, en route along the famous Yangtze River to its mouth at Shanghai, widened as in a long enervating yawn, indulged as it spends its sleepy self in the sea, in the placid surroundings at the end of its exhausting journey. To make this his final view, would be disappointing to the visitor, who would ask “And now what?”

The mind of the Guillén visitor character who is never a laggard can now be cast on a strong rival. Wuhan is a busy place; defined by a river of choppy, dangerous waters, flowing in full force on its slight downward slope, and demanding alertness rather than dreaming or sleeping. The use of poetry to rouse to productivity, or at least activity, is another constant in Guillén. Think, for instance of his book, *La rueda dentada* (1972) [The Gear Wheel]. He gives poetry this invigorating mission even in children’s poetry, precisely, for example, in his “Canción de cuna para despertar a un negro” [Lullaby to awaken a black child], with his subversive inventiveness also capturing the epigraph, which he takes from his contemporary Emilio Ballagas (1908-1954), as he converts

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Dórmiti mi negre | [Go to sleep my black child |
| mi negre bonito | my beautiful black child...] |

17 In some of his very early unpublished poetry, compiled in “Cerebro y corazón”, Guillén acknowledged a kinship with Darío. In a poem which he dedicates “A Rubén Darío”, he writes:

Señor Rubén Darío: por eso es que mi lira
también tiene entre sus cuerdas la que suspira
con el temblor alado de un blanco madrigal.
[Rubén Darío, Sir: that’s why my lyre
like yours has among its strings the one that sighs
with the wind trembling of a tender madrigal.

In his later full maturity, Guillén portrayed a Darío with whom he could be seen to bear a clearer relationship, the one shown in his essay titled simply “Rubén Darío” and published in 1967, on the centenary of the great Nicaraguan’s birth (Guillén, *Páginas escogidas* 613-19).

into

| | |
|--|--|
| --¡Upa, mi negro, que el sol abrasa! Ya nadie duerme, ni está en su casa... (<i>Obra poética</i> II, 13). | [Get up, my black child for the sun is blazing! Nobody is still sleeping, or is still at home...] |
|--|--|

The alertness and readiness to create, which form a tone of urgency, continue through to the exclamation with which the poem “I Am Going to Wuhan” ends.

The liveliness of Guillén’s poetry is typically sustained by the prominence of mixture, propelled by restlessness. The mixture of fields (poetry and science), mixture of genres (adult and children’s poetry)—bespeaks also a characteristic of the Cuban approach to science that Guillén acknowledges and promotes. I have been told by scientists at some of the top research centres in Havana, in the Polo Científico, of the happiness they have felt when President Fidel Castro thought of bringing with him to their Center, so that they could meet him and converse with him, even if they arrive late at night, his friend, the Caribbean Colombian Nobel laureate, Gabriel García Márquez, a writer sufficiently well known to them for them to call him Gabo. Or similarly, their active participation when the leader of the Revolution organizes a Symposium that brings together scientists, artists and writers to speak about matters of health and education experienced by children in Cuba and elsewhere. The result of such sessions is that science comes to be coupled with tenderness in the thinking of the population, and of goodness and kindness as the inspiration for work.¹⁸ The operation of this purposeful link between all kinds of creative work, whether in the arts or the sciences, whether in a small country or a large country, whether between the leaders or the population as individuals, is demonstrated in Guillén’s “I Am Going to Wuhan”. The poetic voice (or choice) is guided by the discipline of his host’s response in the same way that the determination of China and Cuba to serve their people has brought them to respond to a grave world problem, the COVID-19 crisis, by heeding the information for which their search for science and the practice of cooperative self-discipline will have prepared them.

The subtle drama of this poem demonstrates and celebrates, with its gift of

18 I have treated this subject elsewhere: “Tenderness and Science: The Pillars of Revolutionary Cuba.” *BIM* (special issue on “Cuba in the Caribbean”). George Lamming, the kind mentor of many English Caribbean writers, clearly wants readers to know this article. In a note to me he says: “Your science article is superb. It justifies the entire issue.”

foretelling, the humanitarian work that Cuba equips itself to share with China; and sixty-one years after its creation, the poem evokes, at the outset of Cuba's revolution, the rewarding emotional fruit of the growing success of the individual and joint efforts of these two countries in protecting, treating and saving the lives of their people and others. The manner in which the national epic is undertaken stimulates in the people of both nations a responsible and empathetic spirit that blossoms into an appealing internationalism. Guillén's poem, as is often the case with the works of this great poet, provides an elevated, prophetic level of metaphor, allusion and meaning, giving to itself and therefore to us a new kind of richness.

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