

The Orbitals of Ontology: A Chemical Approach to Jorge Guillén's *Cântico*

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When one reads what Jorge Guillén has either written or said about the circumstances of his own literary development—his participation in the supposed *Generación de 27*—it is apparent that Guillén, objectively one of the best poets to emerge from Spain in the 20th century, has a modesty that runs counter to his reputation. At a conference at Harvard in 1957-1958, when asked to speak about his generation, he began by excusing himself from the first person (and thus possibly from the temptation to anecdote, an element decidedly absent in much of his *obra*): “Para evitar el yo protagonista, «le moi haïssable,» hablemos de «nosotros»: el grupo de poetas que, con los rasgos de una generación, vivió y escribió en España entre 1920 y 1936” (Guillén, “Una Generación” 73). Guillén, known for the nearly scientific precision of his poetry, gives in this case a definition of his cohort worthy of his reputation. However in another interview, Guillén leaves aside his academic formalism, and speaks instead of “la Generación de la amistad,” of which he took part: “Éramos amigos, y con una comunidad de afanes y gustos que me ha hecho conocer por vía directa la unidad llamada generación . . . Sólo nos unen las tendencias comunes, la voluntad de elaborar una poesía que

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una al rigor del arte la intensidad de la creación" (Díaz de Castro 51-52).

Bearing these statements in mind, one can discern why so much attention has been paid to the appropriateness of the "generational" nomenclature. Guillén himself refuses to settle into a canonical concept of the generation, preferring instead to focus on what was a very human coalition of friendship, mutual support and aesthetic ideals. Yet he recognizes the convenience of the generational label, and gives it credence. It would seem that if the very participants of this group do not consider themselves a generation, it would be amiss for scholars to do so as well. However, the issue is a minor one when we consider the simple magnitude and quality of what was produced during those years, the *Edad de Plata* in Spanish literature. Guillén was one of the prime movers among this group of young artists. After the rise of Franco in the late 1930s, Guillén went into exile; instead of being artistically frozen by the disaster that befell Spain with the Spanish Civil War, Guillén continued to produce an abundance of poetry until he died in 1984. Guillén's works include *Cántico* (1928-1950), *Clamor* (1957), *Homenaje* (1967); after writing these collections of poetry, "el poeta cree definitivamente concluida su obra y le otorga un título general...: *Aire nuestro*" (Díez de Revenga 16). But Guillén went on to publish two more volumes, *Y otros poemas* (1973) and *Final* (1981). The great vitality and stamina of Jorge Guillén as a poet shows in this bibliography alone—the man was completely dedicated to his craft and spent his whole life nurturing his poetic oeuvre as if it were a living thing.

One particular edition of the work has emerged as the leading candidate for definitive representation—that of José Manuel Blecua, initially published in 1970 in Spain. Blecua chose for the object of his study the 1936 edition of *Cántico*, although he echoes the words of Pedro Salinas when he acknowledges the existence of *Cántico* as a work "todo orgánico en pleno desarrollo, como un árbol" (Blecua 27). The editor does not give a conclusive reason for his choice of the 1936 edition, but he does refer to the appearance of the poem "Más allá" for the first time in 1936 as being essential, "porque constituye de hecho una introducción explicativa; casi una condensación de todo el libro; como una llave para introducirnos en el meollo de la posición del poeta frente a la realidad" (Blecua 29). It is precisely this

relationship between the poetic “yo” and its surrounding reality that is of present interest. *Cántico* has at its core a thematic unity so resolute that the entire book seems to be held in a gravitational lock around it. It is unwavering and solid; the aim of the present study is to draw attention to the poetic mechanisms that contribute to the process of the creation of the subject—the “yo” of *Cántico*—using the metaphor and vocabulary of chemistry. In so doing, I hope to create a vision of the processes in the work through which the “yo” moves from an unstable entity to being a fully realized poetic voice capable of reflection upon and praise of *la realidad circundante*.

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The first half of the 20th century was characterized by new evaluations of subjectivity and the relation of the subject to its surroundings. Perceptions of reality and the agency of the subject were called into question, along with the standing notions of art and aesthetics. Of much influence during this time were the ideas of José Ortega y Gasset whose series of essays titled *La deshumanización del arte* appeared in 1925. What emerged from Ortega’s treatment of the New Art was a concept of a contemporary poetry that was “el álgebra superior de las metáforas” (Ortega y Gasset 73). Art was to be deprived of its elements of anecdote, of sentimentalism, of displaced emotion and extravagance. Ortega writes:

El arte no puede consistir en el contagio psíquico, porque éste es un fenómeno inconsciente y el arte ha de ser todo plena claridad, mediodía de intelección. El llanto y la risa son estéticamente fraudes. El gesto de la belleza no pasa nunca de la melancolía o la sonrisa . . . Yo creo que es bastante discreto el juicio del artista joven. El placer estético tiene que ser un placer inteligente. (68-69)

It is not at all surprising then, that the description of this form of “pure art” found its most comfortable analogy in the vocabulary of the sciences—math, chemistry, physics—all of which, as disciplines, were booming in the 1920s. But what does it mean that poetry should be “the superior algebra of metaphors”? How can we understand the use of science in this formulation? *Cántico* indeed offers some answers to this question. On the one hand it possesses a wealth of

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precise, calculated metaphors as prescribed by Ortega, and addresses abstract themes—space, time and light—subjects that were being studied by some of the most brilliant scientists of the day. Just as important were Guillén's experiments with poetic form, which he theorized in terms of chemical and mathematical processes. Guillén formulates in the following passage the idea of a poetics that decants and distills poetry down to its finest and least contaminated state—art for art's sake. In a letter to Fernando Vela in 1926, he wrote of science and its relationship to poetics:

No hay más poesía que la realizada en el poema, y de ningún modo puede oponerse al poema un «estado» inefable que se corrompe al realizarse y que por milagro atraviesa el cuerpo poemático: lo que el buen abate llama confusamente «ritmos, imágenes, ideas,» etc. Poesía pura es matemática y es química—y nada más—en el buen sentido de esa expresión lanzada por Valéry, y que han hecho suya algunos jóvenes, matemáticos o químicos, entendiéndola de modo muy diferente, pero siempre dentro de esa dirección inicial y fundamental... Poesía pura es todo lo que permanece en el poema después de haber eliminado todo lo que no es poesía. *Pura* es igual a *simple*, químicamente. (Díaz de Castro 50)

Guillén's statement confirms the affinity, at its most basic, between the principles of chemistry and the procedure and formulation of a pure poetry. Therefore, extending the connection between the two realms of knowledge could be a beneficial hermeneutical paradigm. In addition, through the use of the chemical model, it is possible to put aside the imprecision of philosophical terms that may or may not apply to *Cántico*. What is fascinating, however, is that by employing the chemical model and investigating the process of *plenitud* (the result of the stabilizing of the "yo" and its coming into being as *ser*), we can gain some insight into why these existing philosophical models are perhaps inadequate to the task of understanding the tenets of pure poetry as a phenomenon, and its relationship to the rise in scientific achievement in twentieth-century Spain.

An unfortunate side effect of assuming the aesthetic principle of Pure Poetry was that the resulting product was seen as frigid and

devoid of emotion. Jorge Guillén was accused of this coldness, an allegation which emanates from his desire for exact composition and accurate metaphors. "More than any other poet Guillén was thought to confirm Ortega's controversial theory about the increasing dehumanization of art" (Havard 9). When one reads *Cántico*, it is not difficult to understand how Guillén came to have this reputation: the work exalts pure form and clarity, emphasizing light, space and line, to the seeming detriment of the poetic subject. However, this is little more than an illusion. In fact, the world of *Cántico* and its poetic subject are bursting "with their jubilantly physical celebration of human life" and constant affirmation of the goodness of the world in which the human subject finds itself (Havard 9). It is in this human content, the joy of being, that we will come to understand the nature of Guillén's vision of a world that is, in essence, a beautiful creation, one that he feels compelled to praise through verse. This praise, however, can only be evinced through a subject—one who perceives, contemplates and participates in this reality, influencing and being influenced by it. Guillén's poetic subject is one that is constantly in motion: he is in the process of becoming, and it is this becoming that serves as the gravitational pull of the book, its core. But perhaps instead of speaking of "gravity," it would be in order to use the word "electromagnetic," as the model upon which this analysis is based on the principles of chemistry.

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To begin with the scientific metaphor for analysis, an outline of some principles of basic chemistry: when speaking of how matter is formed, one uses the terms "elements," "atoms," "electrons," "ions" and "compounds" to explain its nature and how its interactions with self and surroundings. Guillén's work is no different in that it espouses a poetics of singularities influencing each other, all with the aim of becoming a stable entity. Some fundamental chemical concepts must be explained in order for this metaphorical mechanism to be illuminative. These are the principles under consideration:

1. All matter is composed of atoms. These atoms are entities that are composed of a balance of forces, positive and negative, and are always seeking to become more stable.
2. What determines an element's stability is generally their valence—that is, the outer shell of electrons (an orbital).

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It is this outer shell that will interact with the outer shells of other atoms, either forming covalent (equally shared and stabilizing) bonds, or ionic (charged in excess) bonds between them.

3. An ion is an atom with extra charge. It is made by either losing an electron to another atom, or is formed when that atom “plucks” off another electron from a nearby atom.
4. In order to become an ion, energy is required. When a bond is formed, energy is frequently released.
5. Any bond that is made, either covalent or ionic, means that the outer valence of the atoms have been filled, and the compound (two or more atoms joined together) is more stable than the individual atoms.
6. Covalent and ionic compounds not only have internal bonds, but are bonded to each other as well. Covalent compounds are joined to each other by weak intermolecular forces, usually forming a liquid or a gas. Ionic compounds are joined by stronger electromagnetic forces, usually allowing the compound to form a crystalline solid (think NaCl—sodium chloride, or table salt) that cannot be converted into any other state—liquid or gas—except at extremely high temperatures. This is due to the strength of the attraction between the ions themselves, but more of the attraction of the ionic compounds to each other.
7. The most stable atom is a noble gas (xenon, neon). Noble gases have the full eight electrons in their outer valence and are so stable that they are virtually nonreactive. It is very difficult to reverse the stability and ionize a noble gas.¹

Thus, if we speak of the “yo” as an ion, it would mean that the “yo” as subject is not necessarily fragmented, as is frequently said about the modernist subject, but rather unstable and looking for a means by which to complete its energy. We can view this completion of valence as perhaps a movement towards Guillén’s concept of *plenitud*—the fullness of being, its completion by its *circunstancia*.

If the “yo” of the poetic voice is ionic, and therefore unstable, with which element in *Cántico* does it “bond” in order to become what I will term “the noble subject”—(that is, the subject in harmony

with its environment, complete and nonreactive)? I have mentioned “reality” previously as the central thematic principle, but *Cántico* is not a book that deals with this concept in a simple manner. Guillén’s reality is composed of many distinct “elements,” all of which are found in reaction with the “yo” throughout the text. These outside elements have valence, that is, they are capable of reacting with the ionic “yo” to stabilize it and allow it to become the noble subject. The result of this bonding between the ionic “yo” and the outside elements is unequivocal: the subject comes to be—it is full in itself, and this is the harmonious climax of the living being, to be both itself and an intrinsic part of its context. The noble subject is in Guillén’s represented in the simplicity of the word “*ser*,” often juxtaposed with “*estar*,” which is the embodiment of *ser* in its fully realized and activated form.

Of the elements or forces that urge the “yo” into a reaction there are many, some more apparent than others. The principal relationships that create the crystalline whole of *Cántico* are the following:

1. The relationship between the “yo” and the things which surround it (*yo-cosas*).
2. The relationship of the “yo” to the Other or to the Amada (*yo-tú* or *nosotros*).
3. The relationship of the “yo” to its temporal and spacial functions (the delimitation of the subject).
4. The relationship of the “yo” to death, seen only in a few poems.

There are a few occurrences in which the “yo” forms *no* significant bonds, and the results of the ensuing moment are very interesting to note, in that they confirm the essential instability of the poetic subject.

As previously mentioned, the poem which opens the first part of *Cántico*, “*Más allá*” is of the ultimate importance, providing as it does a sort of primer for the rest of the book. “*Más allá*” is a poem so blatantly important and so extensively commented, that it would be redundant to restate what many critics, especially Joaquín Casaldueño, have written before.² It is most representative of the elemental forces at work in *Cántico*. Its first stanza provides us with a forceful introduction to Guillén’s ontology:

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(El alma vuelve al cuerpo,
Se dirige a los ojos
Y choca.)—¡Luz! Me invade
Todo mi ser. ¡Asombro!³ (2, 85)

Much is happening in this one stanza—an affirmation of the soul and its relationship with the body, the importance of sensory perception, the first recognition of being, and the forging of an emotional state for the subject. But what is most noteworthy is that this is the first exposure of the subject (and our first exposure as readers) to one of the most essential substances in Guillén's work: *light*. Light figures into a stunning number of poems throughout the book; all of these poems have as their basis this initial reaction of light and being. The light has a role in evoking the "yo" of the poem. Juan Montero writes:

La luz, que no ha faltado a su cita con los ojos y con el nombre, tiene valor ejemplar, porque en ella descubre el hombre que el mundo no es un ser-en-sí, sino un ser intencional, un ser-para-mí que, por medio del lenguaje, se convierte en propiedad constitutiva del sujeto mismo (mi ser). (162)

The "yo" is in a state of disorder as the poem begins, soul and body separate, unstable—*ionic*. The light is, as the Montero states, is the element that brings the subject into focus. In the chemical paradigm, this could be seen as the very energy that is required to ionize an element, forcing it into the path of transition towards stability and *plenitud*. That the following sentiment expressed by the poetic voice is the word "*asombro*," goes to show that this poetic subject is in effect ionized, charged with uncertainty and fear in the face of that which is larger than *mi ser*, a *más allá* of a fully actualized reality. Light, in this sense and throughout the book, is the principle of life, and the means by which the subject is able to become a subject. It does more than simply provide a means for perception; it serves as the energy which will launch the "yo" into the relationships with other stabilizing elements.

"*Más allá*" presents us with one of said elements, one which will remain pertinent throughout the book—this is the world of *las cosas*, things. The relationship between the "yo," *las cosas* and light is developed in the second, third and fourth stanzas of the poem.

Intacto aún, enorme,
Rodea el tiempo... Ruidos
Irrumpen. ¡Cómo saltan
Sobre los amarillos

Todavía no agudos
De un sol hecho ternura
De rayo alboreado
Para estancia difusa,

Mientras van presentándose
Todas las consistencias
Que al disponerse en cosas
Me limitan, me centran! (2, 85)

Guillén writes of this moment in which the relationship between the ionic “yo” and its surrounding reality fuse together to form a more equilibrated compound. He says: “Ese hombre [el “yo”] se conoce así, gracias al contacto con un más allá que no es él. Nada sería sujeto sin esa red de relaciones con el objeto, con los objetos” (Guillén, *El argumento de la obra* 91). The metaphor of the *red* or web is appropriate, and also fits with our chemical apparatus in that it serves to describe the larger substance, as all of the relationships come together to form a crystalline whole.

Eventually, in a later moment in “Más allá,” the poet will go on to exclaim “dependo de las cosas!” (2, 90). This exclamation comes after the subject has already passed through the ionic moment and into a covalent, shared bond with his reality. Blooming from this is the actual *ser* of the poetic voice. The first part of “Más allá” concludes with the following stanzas:

Todo me comunica,
Vencedor, hecho mundo,
Su brío para ser
De veras real, en triunfo.

Soy, más: estoy. Respiro.
Lo profundo es el aire.
La realidad me inventa,
Soy su leyenda. ¡Salve! (2, 87)

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Interaction with reality has called a subject into being, a subject which is then able to breathe in and inflate himself with the vigor of the newborn. Here we see for the first time the juxtaposition of the verbs *ser* and *estar*, which happens several times in *Cántico*, and whose significance never varies. *Ser* is to exist, to be in relationship with the world, whereas *estar* brings the connotation of *plenitud*, a way to be that is possessed of all faculties and is immanently *present* in all that occurs within the subject's environment. And thus through this single poem, comprised of six parts, we are presented with a creationary force strong enough to actually invoke a subject, and a light which illumines a being still in development, on its way to actualization through interaction.

If the relationship between the poetic subject and the environment is the principle at the heart of *Cántico*, the secondary relationship that defines the work is that of love. The presence of the "tú" that forms a bond with the "yo" to become a "nosotros" is undeniable. Most frequently, critics comment on the large poem "Salvación de la primavera" as the finest example of this interaction in process, but I am choosing a smaller poem that shows not the subject completely developed into the encompassing "nosotros," rather one that shows the "yo" in its most ionic phase. "Los amantes" actually begins from the standpoint of a similar reality that we saw in "Más allá":

Tallos, soledades
Ligeras. ¿Balcones
En volandas? Montes,
Bosques, aves, aires.

Tanto, tanto espacio
Ciñe de presencia
Móvil de planeta
Los tercios abrazos.

¡Gozos, masas, gozos,
Masas, plenitud,
Atónita luz
Y rojos absortos!

¿Y el día?: lo plano
 Del cristal. La estancia
 Se ahonda, callada.
 Balcones en blanco.

Sólo, Amor, tú mismo,
 Tumba. Nada, nadie,
 Tumba. Nada, nadie.
 Pero...—¿Tú conmigo? (9, 101)

Although the formative and positive relationship between the “yo” and its environment is clear—the word *plenitud* appears, for instance, and again the light comes into play as an energy capable of evincing a complete being of *gozos* and *masas*—, there are several elemental relationships at play here that threaten the possibility of a stable “yo.” These energetic forces are that of time, space, and death.

Time is an element not overlooked by Guillén, especially not when it is capable of being directly tied to a spatial reality as we see here. Space is bounded here, tied to the form of the planet itself, and it is the planet which gives rise to the day, a day that the poetic subject sees fit to question. “¿Y el día?”: the doubtful tone of the question is met with silence—the “yo” reaches out into space and time to find its compliment among the things that have caused it to be. What the subject finds is love, and yet this love he finds is specifically tied to death and the tomb. The doubt that filled the day is now a doubt that fills eternity, and the ionic “yo” seeks to stabilize itself through the only presence it can corroborate, which is love. This love must erect itself in the face of nothingness and no one. The repetition of the phrase “Nada, nadie” and the reiteration of “tumba” in association with this is expressive of the desperation and panic of a subject in formation, looking for its way to be actualized. While it would seem that this panic is invincible, in the last phrase, the subject utters a “pero” that admits the possibility of a new formation.

While the idea of *la amada* is only suggested in this poem, through the doubtful voice of the subject we can come to appreciate the very importance that this *amada* will have once she appears. In this way, the ionic “yo” in its search for stability manages to attract all the possible forces that could complete it. In the case of “Los amantes” there are too many forces working upon the “yo” at the

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same time, serving to destabilize it even further—they “pluck off” too many metaphorical electrons from the “yo,” causing it to conclude in a state of uncertainty, maintaining itself in the realm of the theoretical and the undetermined. Love, could it be possible? “¿Tú conmigo?” is an absolute affirmative, an assertion of the ionic subject’s isolation and its willingness to form an alliance that will break up the domination of nothingness and the tomb, allowing the force of light to again come in and encourage a reaction towards *plenitud*. When love does come in “Salvación de la primavera” it is with plenary force, love being thus capable of bringing the “yo” into its full being:

¡Amor: ni tú ni yo,
Nosotros, y por él
Todas las maravillas
En que el ser llega a ser! (27, 133)

This is perhaps an opportune moment to discuss the important role of punctuation in the poems of Guillén. The poet is not sparse with his use of frequent interrogatives and exclamatory phrases. In a world of relations as complex and dynamic as that of *Cántico*, the interrogative and exclamatory functions are representative of the themes of the work. As we have seen in the poem “Los amantes,” the presence of the interrogative phrase belies an ontological uncertainty experienced by the poetic subject. Throughout *Cántico*, interrogatives function curiously, drawing attention to the “yo” in its ionic formation as it attempts to interact with its surroundings. In one of the few poems that truly focuses on this uncertainty, “La rendición al sueño,” the poetic voice moves from the usual assessment of the exterior to a dreamlike state, in which the specificity of the images perceived by the “yo” gradually dissolves into a fog, and logic disappears in favor of a more instinctive theology.

Una pululación amable de Invisibles
En el vaho se espesa.
Sucesiones de suertes profundizan espacios.
Niebla.
¿Hay grises de altitudes?
Barajas, nubes,
Caos.
¿Caos de Dios? (104, 245)

The interrogative betrays a “yo” that is settling into a world of energies in wild fluctuation. An ordered world of things devolves into a world of chance that can only be determined by a divine principle, not through any effort of the individual. Chaos and God, we are brought backwards through evolution to the moment of Genesis, which is unintelligible to a very human “yo.” The questions formed in these stanzas are so vague and surreal that the “yo” actually becomes lost, subsumed within the presence of the primal force of God.

If we continue with this poem, it is possible to see how the indeterminate poetic voice manages to recuperate itself in a moment of awakening similar to that encountered in “Más allá.” The next stanza reads:

Caos. Lo informe
Se define, busca la pesadumbre.
Atestada cabeza
Pesa.
Avanzan, se difunden
Espesores.
Robustez envolvente, noche sólida,
Apogeo de las cosas,
Que circundan, esperan, insisten, persuaden. (104,
246)

The chaos is remodeling itself, and the poetic voice is reawakening into a world of forms and things, all of which have a very precise weight. We sense not only the weight of the poetic body—the dreaming mind in the process of awakening—which stands at the center of this evolution, but the weight of the entire inchoate world, of which the poetic voice is a part. The relationship becomes explicit in the following stanza:

¡Oh dulce persuasión totalizadora!
Todo el cuerpo se sume,
Con dulzura se sume entre las cosas.
¡No ser, estar, estar profundamente!
¡Perderse al fin! (104, 247)

The interrogatives have disappeared and have been replaced by a vigorous poetic voice in the process of exclaiming the perfection of

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the forms surrounding it. The ionic “yo” filled with questions has disappeared, and now the exclamatory function takes over, and it is this exclamatory “yo” that is in direct connection with *plenitud*, that is a totalized *ser*, exemplified by the word *estar*, as was previously established. If we were to examine this process according to the chemical concepts outlined earlier, it could be said that the exclamatory function, sown throughout *Cántico* with shocking frequency, is a way of expressing the energy that is released when one substance (the “yo”) bonds with an element in its surroundings, in this case, the world of shape and form. Exclamatory phrases in themselves carry much force, but when viewed through this framework, they take on added significance as being a product of the evolution of the poetic subject. As much as the poet would try to divorce a completely humanized voice from a poetry meant to be pure and precise, the constant exclamations betray the insistent humanity that lies beneath the polished surface of *Cántico*. This is exaltation at its best, a joy in being and a joy in being-in-the-world that defies the usual classification of Guillén’s work as typifying the aseptic aesthetic of *poesía pura*.

The forces that work to define the “yo” throughout the individual poems of *Cántico* also work macroscopically between poems which have clear affinities to each other. The trajectory of their totality also defines a process: we begin with the awakening and cycle through night, sleep and dreams, only to emerge in the last moment of the book, triumphant, with the light-as-energy principle making a dramatic reappearance as an awakening into ontological fullness, one bonded to reality, bonded to love, united with the very mass of being.

Bajo Agosto van los seres
Profundizándose en minas.
¡Calientes minas del ser,
Calientes de ser! Se ahíncan,
Se obstinan profundamente
Masas en bloques. ¡Canícula
De bloques iluminados,
Plenarios, para más vida!
Todo en el ardor va a ser,
Amor, lo que más sería.
—¡Ser más, ser lo más y ahora,

Alzarme a la maravilla
Tan mía, que está aquí ya,
Que me rige! La luz guía. (125, 280-81)

Excerpted from the section of “El cielo que es azul” subtitled “Ardor,” this final fragment is emblematic of the preceding argument. The poetic voice here assumes a true lust for life that is called into being through the elements of mass, space, time (*agosto*) and love. Light appears at the end as the absolute apogee of the possible, providing a glance outside of the scope of the book itself, to the world in which we may find our own selves if we only allow ourselves to be energized and harmonized with our surroundings.

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In illustrating the principles of basic chemistry as parallel to the poetic presence of *Cántico*, I have hoped to narrow the gap between the sciences and the arts by a small margin, and provide an alternate lens through which to view the Pure Poetry movement. When considering the poetics of Guillén and his contemporaries, bearing in mind their desire for exactitude and precision, as well as metaphors that serve themselves as independent of their humanity, it was easy to merge one vocabulary (that of chemistry and science) with the other (the rhetoric of poetry and art). One could choose to view the neutral concepts of chemistry as being the apex of dehumanization, artistic or otherwise, but I choose to believe the opposite. Chemistry is a life-affirming force, filled with affinities, relationships and intense reactions that we all echo as we move through the world. Using chemistry—or physics or biology, any science—can only enrich our understanding of poetics and aesthetics, since no concept can exist in a vacuum. We must react with our surroundings and assume new and strange positions, as awkward as they may be initially. In doing so, if we strive to exceed our borders, perhaps we can become, ourselves, “noble.”

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Notes

1. The aforementioned principles are synthesized from the first six chapters of Linus Pauling's classic textbook, *General Chemistry*, in particular Chapter 6 "The Chemical Bond."
2. For a detailed discussion of the work, see Joaquín Casaldüero's "*Cántico*" de Jorge Guillén y "*Aire nuestro*."
3. All poems cited are from Blecua's edition of *Cántico*, indicated above. The number of the poem and its corresponding page will be given in parenthetical notations with the parts quoted above.

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