

# Literary Spaces: Visions of Nature and Sense of Place in the Poetry of William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez\*

## Espacios literarios: visiones de la naturaleza y sentido del lugar en la poesía de William Wordsworth y Claudio Rodríguez

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**Resumen:** A pesar de la distancia espacial y temporal, las obras del poeta británico William Wordsworth (1770-1850) y del español Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999) comparten elementos comunes. Sin embargo, el principal es el amor a la naturaleza. El siguiente artículo analizará, desde una perspectiva ecocrítica, cómo entienden la naturaleza ambos autores y cómo se sienten unidos a ella. Sin duda, este amor por la naturaleza tiene su origen en la infancia, lo cual se muestra en las obras de ambos. Por tanto, el objetivo de este artículo será comparar las visiones de la naturaleza de ambos autores y cómo esta es para ellos no solo el lugar que aman sino el lugar al que se sienten unidos.

**Palabras clave:** sentido del lugar, ecocrítica, naturaleza, William Wordsworth, Claudio Rodríguez.

**Abstract:** In spite of being distant in both space and time, the works of the British poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and the Spanish poet Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999) share some common elements; however, the main element linking them is their love of nature. The following paper will analyze, from an ecocritical stance, how these two poets understand nature and how they feel attached to her. No doubt this love of nature has its roots in childhood and this fact is clearly shown in the works of both poets. So, the aim of this article will be to compare both visions of nature and how nature is for them not only the place they love, but also the place they feel attached to.

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**Keywords:** sense of place, Ecocriticism, nature, William Wordsworth, Claudio Rodríguez.

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## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the Spanish poet Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999) shared some elements with the poetry of the Romantics and especially with the poetry of William Wordsworth (1770-1850). In spite of being distant in both space and time, when reading their works, it can be evinced that the love of nature William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez felt was very similar. For the Romantics, the influence of nature was thought to begin during childhood, or the period when children feel united to nature and could colour her with their imagination. Therefore, the vision children obtain is purer than the vision contemplated by ordinary mortals. Bearing in mind these ideas, the aim of this study is to show all these common elements in the poetry of the two poets. The paper will also focus on their perceptions of nature and on the concept of mysticism — since nature is considered to be a sacred element and the link both poets have with her is that of participation. In addition, it will attempt to show how nature constitutes a fundamental topic and the place they feel attached to. Using the discipline of Ecocriticism, which studies the representation of nature in the Arts, we will observe how these places are conceptualized as affective and sentimental. Consequently, their understanding of nature and its elements, seen from an ecocritical stance and through an analysis of the most relevant elements and topics — such childhood or imagination — connected to nature in their poetry, will be interwoven throughout my whole argument.

In literature there have always been some social, cultural or historical reasons that lead us to believe there emerge certain similarities between the works of two poets from different places and eras. Even though those poets never met, they might share points of view and attitudes towards their poetic creation. Harold Bloom revealed that “there is no end to influence” (1997: xi). And yet, in the case of William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez, it is fairly obvious that the overlapping elements are those that deal with the concept of nature. Bloom also asserted that Wordsworth was “the inventor of modern poetry” (125) and such poetry had a connection with Claudio Rodríguez, since the latter admitted that the breathtaking and captivating experience in contact with nature and the cosmic union the romantics felt was unparalleled in contemporary Spanish

authors (García Jambrina, 1999: 103). Conforming to Löwy and Sayre, the term “Romanticism” could be applied to other periods. In the Twentieth Century, artistic movements were not called “romantic” but, in fact, they were. Romanticism was born as an opposition to capitalism and it endures and is eternal (1992: 23-29). In light of this, Rodríguez’s works were closer to several romantic postulates and his poetical ideas owed quite a lot to the theories of this period.

It is also, since the 1970s, a basis of the numerous forms of countercultural and alternative cultural movements appealing to notions of nature and the natural as norms of health, vitality or beauty and as precisely what commercial/industrial society represses or destroys, both in the human psyche and in the surrounding environment. (Clark, 2011:13)

Claudio Rodríguez, who was born in Zamora, always denied any influence on his poetry, although he finally admitted that his works were similar to those of Wordsworth (García Jambrina, 1999: 21). During the six years he spent in England, as a Lector in Spanish at the Universities of Nottingham and Cambridge (1958-64), he was rather surprised when told that his poetry had something in common with that of Wordsworth. Strange as it may seem, at the time Rodríguez published his first book of poems, *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), he was eighteen years old and had probably never read any English Romantic poet or been in contact with the poetry of Wordsworth. If his job in England was crucial in his reading and understanding the poetry and the language of the Romantic writers, not until he read their works was he able to understand to what extent the statement that they had something in common was correct. Eventually, Rodríguez had to agree with the fact that his poems had a close connection to those of Wordsworth, especially with those that had to do with nature. He justified such affinity by adding that poets’ reactions towards the universal world are similar. Rodríguez called them, quoting Goethe, *elective affinities* (García Jambrina, 1999: 20). In fact, they are undoubtedly considered poets of nature par excellence; as they created poetry from the simplest element they found in nature and felt a comforting sensation whenever they were close to the natural universe.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Given that the critics have made mention of the relationship between the poetry of Wordsworth and Rodríguez, and yet no complex, in-depth study has so far been published, it will be interesting to compare both authors.

## 1. TOWARDS A METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The political and social issues forced romantic writers, and in particular William Wordsworth, to focus on nature and landscape, avoiding the experiences of both disenchantment and dislocation they felt. Romantic authors tried to escape from the city, modern capitalism and the escalating Industrial Revolution in the pursuit of a more natural and ecological way of living. Nature, at that time, was thought to have opened a new door to elude the weariness and melancholy of the city. According to Bate, “[u]sually in Wordsworth the city is a place of alienation (...)” (2000: 220) and has nothing to do with the beauty of the British landscape. In the case of Rodríguez, he published his first book of poems in 1953, a time when Spain was being ruled under Franco’s dictatorship and industrialization had not completely appeared on the social scene. According to Prieto de Paula, despite being included in the Generation of `50, *Gift of Inebriation* did not allow any connivance with the authors of this generation (1995: 25) to be established.

We could definitely affirm that love of nature, for the romantic poets, has its roots in the spirit of philanthropy prevailing at that time. It was a period when poets turned their eyes to the commonest and simplest elements of nature, since one could find pleasure and joy in such elements and not in ordinary life. All these poets preferred nature to cities and, as a result, they dedicated their compositions to animals, flowers, mountains, rivers and all those elements that can be found in the natural world. In addition, the huge growth of towns and the consequences of industrialization — which destroyed the beauty of the landscape — forced them to feel attached to her and also to develop an enormous enthusiasm and passion for nature and her cycles. “Wordsworth’s cardinal standard of poetic value is nature” (Abrams, 1953: 105) and “physiognomy into the landscape is one of the few salient attributes common to most of the major romantic poets” (Abrams, 55). In this regard, Ecocriticism can be easily identified in the works of the Romantics, as “it often seeks to address perennial questions concerning the relationship between humankind and the natural world [and] has become one of the most important terrains for the development of ecological literary criticism” (McKusick, 2010: ix). Moreover, “Ecocriticism intially sought to restore nature to Romanticism after its marginalization by new historicist critique” (Ottum and Reno, 2016: 3).

The thesis that most of the romantics defended the idea of children as blessed creatures — capable of seeing the world in a purer, more innocent way — must not be forgotten. Moreover, the two authors were also marked by childhood memories and this fact showed in their poems, as their remembered visions of nature conditioned their creative process. Regarding this idea of youthful memories, the ancient philosopher Plato stated, in his “Reminiscence Theory of Knowledge”, that only someone who was gifted could contemplate a different universe from that which all other human beings saw. For the Greek philosopher, there were two realms: that of abstract forms and that of physical forms. In this distinction, Plato made clear that both realms were not equal at all and, regarding the physical — or the material — form of the objects, he thought that the human being was not able to unravel the true reality and lift the veil covering it. As a result, he reached the conclusion that our senses do not allow us to see the true reality, but just a cruder or blurred one. In Plato’s view, children — and those adults provided with a special power — were endowed with a capacity to perceive what is hidden inside the objects of nature and to find the truth. Eventually, the Romantic poets took this idea, indicating that children could glimpse reality as it is, and not as it seems, since children were not influenced by the evils of society.

Before analyzing the works of these two poets, it is necessary to add that, according to Wordsworth, childhood was extremely relevant, given that it is the period when our conscience is beginning to form itself and, at the same time, he believed children were not spoilt and corrupted by society. When affirming that the creative power in children was enormous, he was referring to the idea that they were also helped by a powerful element consisting in an undiminished imaginative force. Wordsworth’s long poem *The Prelude* (1799, 1805, 1850) includes the following thought: “Our childhood sits, / Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements” (Wordsworth, 1979: 178). So, it is clear that children possess the creative force of imagination, which helps them to appreciate and be aware of the world they live in. French philosopher Rousseau defended the idea that our senses were given at the moment of our birth, and yet it was during childhood that we experience other faculties and interests and start rejecting civilization in favour of nature. For Bate, nature is opposed to socialization and he adds that:

The word “nature” is notoriously difficult to define. Rousseau uses it in two principal senses, which are best understood in relation to their opposites.

One sense is that of innate disposition of inherent constitution, though for Rousseau this includes not only that with which we are born but also that which we develop in response to our infant and childhood environment. Nature in this sense is opposed to that which we learn through the process of socialization. (2000: 32)

In the Twentieth Century, Thomashow maintained that, for critics such as Joseph Chilton Pearce, Rogert Hart, Edith Cobb and Paul Sephard, during childhood people “establish their connections to the earth, forming an earth matrix, a terrain symbiosis, which is crucial to their personal identity” (1996: 11).

As far as space is concerned, it is necessary to mention that according to the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, “[s]pace” and “place” are familiar words denoting common experiences (...) [e]xperience is a cover-term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs reality” (2008: 3, 8) and a place is “an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present” (2008: 154). In this sense, the poetry of these two writers was influenced by their experiences in nature and the love of the place they belonged to. Both celebrated the beauty of the landscapes they beheld and made that beauty a central topic in their poetry. Moreover, talking about nature means talking about our consciousness or, what is the same, “to write about nature is to write about how the mind sees nature and sometimes about how the mind sees itself” (Cameron, 1985: 351). In the Romantic Movement, the mind was decisive when understanding the processes of nature and, “(...) by contrast with the posthumanist (...) orientation (...) most romantics remained committed to a markedly anthropocentric version of that marriage of mind and nature that, following Francis Bacon, they hoped to bring about” (Rigby, 2004: 17). Wordsworth, indeed, alleged that our mental processes were associated to those produced in nature. So, the mind and its mental states were reflected in the landscape and the outer storm was a symbol of the inner storm the poet was suffering. This association — of the mind and the natural world — can be perceived in the following words, included in Kroeber’s *Ecological Literary Criticism*:

[W]e dehumanize ourselves most perniciously when we use our consciousness to separate ourselves from nature. The separation is disastrous because the natural environment is both the source and the primary sustainer

of our singularly human power of consciousness, supremely manifested in our imagination. (1994: 138)

What connects the poet to nature leads us to Ecocriticism as well. Thus, in Ecocriticism, *Sense of Place* is defined as the feeling of attachment and belonging to a concrete place or region by means of affective or emotional links. This place can be the one where we were born or somewhere else we have visited or lived in our life. The reasons to justify such links are only explained by our thoughts, our feelings and, mainly, by our mind. For modern critics, i.e. Thomashow, “sense of place is a search for ecological roots” (1996: 193) and it is also a mark of identity determining the most relevant place in our life:

This is best accomplished when we have a relationship to the land on which we live, when we can place ourselves securely in a tangible place. It is through the place where we live that we construct our personal identities, relate to the landscape, and determine what is important in our lives. Sense of place concerns our home and region, feelings about land and community, kindred species, community niches, and sacred places. To have a sense of place is to merge our personal geography with the ecological landscape, incorporate maps of memory with how we dwell in a bioregion. (1996: 193-4)

## 2. A COMPARISON OF BOTH POETS

Recalling and recollecting all the experiences and moments of his childhood formed a part of the process of Wordsworth’s poetic creation. He was, unquestionably, a poet of nature — against industrialization and its consequences — who would feel the tranquillity of remembering the places in which he was joyful and lived without any problems derived from politics or society. Besides, the time he spent in Cumberland and Hawkshead, in the middle of the countryside, had an enormous influence on the way he worked as a poet and also on his poetry. The landscape of the Lake District marked his works and awakened his imaginative force and, as a consequence, he coloured such landscape with his imagination. In the light of recent studies, “[i]n their thinking of the poetics of place, the romantics conjoined a sense of the power of memory of imagination to refashion reality with an appreciation of the power of place to alter human moods and sensibilities” (Rigby 2004: 12). James McKusick, in his book entitled *Green Writing. Romantic Ecology*, pointed out that “[h]is is a

poetry of place, rooted not only in a concrete awareness of geographic location, but also in the significance that attaches to particular places as a result of childhood memory” (2010: 53). From Wordsworth’s point of view, all these places have a specific meaning: his own home and, thus, “[t]he child Wordsworth seems not only at home in nature. (...) He [just] heard nature, not other people, not society” (Johnston 1998: 41). In fact, “Wordsworth valued the Lake District not as landscape or “scenery” (...) but as a dwelling place” (Rigby, 2004: 87). He was aware that natural objects had an influence on ourselves and on our way of thinking and acting and, thus, during our childhood we came closer to imagination. The poem “Influence of Natural Objects” is a good example of this:

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!  
 Thou Soul that art the Eternity of thought!  
 And giv’st to forms and images a breath  
 And everlasting motion! not in vain,  
 By day or star light, thus from my first dawn  
 Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
 The passions that build up our human soul,  
 Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man;  
 But with high objects, with enduring things,  
 With life and nature: purifying thus  
 The elements of feeling and of thought.  
 (Wordsworth, 1996: 11)

Subsequently, it is indisputable that the imaginative power children have is derived directly from nature and it is the only aid to the poet in discerning what is helping the poet to discover the truth inside all the elements of the natural universe. Only a human being gifted with a peculiar and unusual power is able to accomplish this task. The religious language Wordsworth used in his poetry was highly relevant and it never decayed. As time went by, the visionary power increased and never abandoned him. It was during the moments of intensity that he experienced the need to express and extol, in a very sublime and ecstatic way, the beauty of nature. Looking at the next example, belonging to *The Prelude*, we can understand how such visionary power allowed the poet to “breathe an elevated mood” or distinguish the real and hidden language and meaning of nature. The impact of the landscape on the poet’s mind and *vice versa* is noticeable here:



(...) for I would walk alone,  
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time  
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,  
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are  
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.  
 Then did I drink the visionary power;  
 (Wordsworth, 1979: 83)

Wordsworth, then, defended the idea of a sacred natural universe, whose unity constituted, like in Holistic philosophy, a world full of harmony and perfection. As reported by Clark even “[m]odern ecology (...) could be read as a retrospective endorsement of Romantic conceptions of nature as a holistic living agent or spirit in which all participate and interact (...)” (2011: 16). Mind and memory, in Wordsworth’s poetry, interact and make every vision and experience unique. David Harley’s principles of Association of Ideas, included in his *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty and his Expectations* (1749), helped to constitute his doctrine of imagination. “[T]he associationist creed (...) gripped Wordsworth and enabled him to reveal how the mind of the poet develops from the state of infancy to that of manhood, from sensation to imagination, and, finally, to the perfect moral state in good” (Kallich, 1970: 131). And yet, Wordsworth accepted Plato’s “Reminiscence Theory of Knowledge” in which the soul, due to its pre-existence, remembered what it had seen before. There was also an invisible force, a hidden one, which covered all the elements in nature and surrounded them. This force was a sacred one and provided his works with an aura of mysticism. The poem “Tintern Abbey” is a clear example of this soul-centred memory:

(...) For I have learnt  
 To look on Nature, not as in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 The still, sad music of humanity,  
 Nor harsh nor granting, though an ample power  
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.  
 (Wordsworth, 1996: 129)

However, childhood experiences were not pleasant all the time. *The Prelude* contains examples in which nature appears as something terrifying or threatening. One of these is the boat-stealing scene, where Wordsworth confessed to being scared of what he had in front of him. In Shaw's view, "whenever the power of an object or even is such that words fail (...), then we resort to the feelings of the sublime" (2017: 2). Likewise, the sublime — which has been defined by Rozelle as "transport[ing] literary figures from an apprehension of the natural world to a fear of its greatness" (2006: 3) — had negative connotations and, indeed, nature was not a shelter. What the poet contemplates appears to frighten him now more than anything else he has ever seen before:

And as I rose up upon the stroke my boat  
 Went heaving through the water like a swan—  
 When from behind that craggy steep, till then  
 The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,  
 As if with voluntary power instinct,  
 Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,  
 And growing still in nature, the huge cliff  
 Rose up between me and the stars, and still  
 With measured motion, like a living thing  
 Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned  
 And through the silent water stole my way  
 Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.  
 (Wordsworth, 1979: 50)

On the other hand, Claudio Rodríguez's love of nature began when he was a child. His father's death, when he was a thirteen-year-old boy, led him to escape from Zamora, the city where he had been born and lived during his childhood. He then found shelter in the countryside and, at the age of eighteen, published his first book, *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), which

deals with the love of nature and the relationship between human beings and the natural universe. In Rodríguez's view, a poet's early years and contemplation of the land play an essential role in the development of the poetic mind:

Critics agree that these early formative years were of crucial importance in the development of the poet's symbolic and poetic consciousness, so closely linked to his Castilian landscape.

(...)

(...) the young man resorted to getting away from both his family and the town into the countryside, where he felt more at ease. Within time, what began as a means of flight from family conflicted with a search for peace of mind and this turned into a habit, something the poet himself referred to as his "walking craze". (2008: 13)

Like Wordsworth, Rodríguez asserted that childhood was a blessed age. Taking all this into account, it can be affirmed that, in his view, children were able to contemplate nature with purer eyes, as society has still not damaged them and thus their look was an innocent one. The topic of innocence is also recurrent in the poetry of both men. For Rodríguez, like Wordsworth, children coloured their world with imagination and the world that emerged did not have anything to do with that of adults, since experience had not yet damaged the innate purity they possess. "More importantly, the kind of knowledge to which Rodríguez seems to subscribe is one that can only be attained through contemplation, be it in a child-like manner, through the senses, or thanks to a sudden gust of inspiration (...)" (Ingelmo and Smith, 2008: 23). That reminds us of Wordsworth's theory of imagination, in which children use that power to colour landscape. "What Doesn't Wither", included in the book entitled *The Flight of Celebration* (1976), illustrates how children use imagination to create and what emerges from such creation is a vision of a world full of charm and splendour:

These children who call the sky the sky  
because it's very high  
and who have seen dreams,  
sky-blue, white-spotted,  
dance with a mouse amid childhood's  
furniture, (...)

(Rodríguez, 2008: 287)<sup>2</sup>

Whenever children come into contact with nature, they are able to unravel the secrets and to lift the veil that covers the objects in the universe so that the real truth is revealed. However, if an adult looked at the world with the eyes of a child, negative connotations would be transformed into positive ones. The previous idea can be glimpsed in the poem entitled “Ode to Childhood”, from *Alliance and Condemnation* (1965), where the poet enhances this blessed period of time. It is the same concept of the purity of childhood’s perspective that we find in Wordsworth’s works. Moreover, Rodríguez’s interest in children as being one the most relevant topics in his poetry was manifest:

And our streets,  
clear as if they led to the countryside,  
where are they leading now? Why is everything childhood?  
But now the light mixes,  
it reddens gradually, the wind warms up  
and a grain of alliance  
vibrates in its harvests, a swaying  
of the immense pastures of the future.  
(Rodríguez, 2008: 239, 241)<sup>3</sup>

From Rodríguez’s point of view, if we manage to understand nature, we will be able to understand our mind, which is that part of a human being that participates in nature and melds with her. This amalgamation represents the comprehension of our psyche in which, through clarity, human beings will comprehend nature as well. Like Wordsworth, he searched for the relationship between the natural world and the poetic subject; a relationship that, in both cases, was modified by time, observation and sensitivity and also by their concepts and perceptions of nature. This Romantic idea of an association between the poet’s emotion

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<sup>2</sup> As the article is written in English, we will use the translation of Rodríguez’s poems into English. However, the original version will be also included: Estos niños que al cielo llaman cielo / porque es muy alto, / y que al sueño lo han visto / azul celeste, con lunares blancos / bailar con un ratón entre los muebles (Rodríguez, 2001: 254).

<sup>3</sup> Y nuestras calles, / claras como si dieran a los campos, / ¿adónde dan ahora? ¿Por qué todo es infancia? / Mas ya la luz se amasa, / poco a poco se enrojece, el viento temple / y en sus cosechas vibra / un grano de alianza, un cabeceo / de los inmensos pastos del futuro (Rodríguez, 2001: 209).

and the objects of nature tried to explain the links between humans and nature (Nichols 2011: 26) and continues in Rodríguez's works. If truth be told, Rodríguez himself insisted on the importance of understanding nature and her processes and he asserted that a proper knowledge of landscape means a proper knowledge of the human soul and, of course, of human relationships (2010: 341). An example of this is the poem "Sand", included in the *The Flight of Celebration*, where the poet contemplates the sand and imagines the grains flying and being part of his mortal body:

Fly, fly, you  
 my little sand,  
 sing in my body, in every pore, enter  
 into my life, please, now when I need  
 your cadence, now much pulsating in light,  
 with the mystery of the melody  
 of your serenity,  
 of your deep tenderness.  
 (2008: 265)<sup>4</sup>

As human beings, we participate in and meld with the environment. Aristotle considered the world a total entity where every part is basic in order to have a whole. Neo-Platonism later stated that there existed a brotherhood among all the things in the natural elements. And for the holistic philosophers, the world was a complete totality in which all the parts are fundamental and needed. In his essay "The Oeconomy of Nature", Isaac Biberg defines the world as a "harmonious-self regulating system" (2008: 161), so from that we can infer that all the elements are linked as in a chain and if one is lost, the totality will be destroyed. More modern critics, such as Karl Kroeber, have argued that: "Essential to this perspective is the recognition of each specific element of the whole, not as equal to every other but as equally necessary in its special fashion to the integrity of the entire system" (1994: 55). As mentioned above and regarding the relationship between human beings and nature, Claudio Rodríguez maintained that human beings should take part in nature so as to mix with all the elements forming the universe. In this sense, human beings would meld with nature and would be turned into part of her.

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<sup>4</sup> Vuela tú, vuela / pequeña arena mía, / canta en mi cuerpo, en cada poro, entra / en mi vida, por favor, ahora que necesito / tu cadencia, ya muy latiendo en luz, / con el misterio de la melodía / de tu serenidad, / de tu honda ternura (Rodríguez, 2001: 233).

Rodríguez points out here the idea of every part of nature identified with each human being and knows that every single part — no matter how simple it is — participates in the glorious cycle of life and in the communion of man and the natural world. For that reason, the poet claims:

The holm oak, which preserves a ray  
of sun more than a whole month of Spring,  
does not feel the spontaneity of its shadow,  
the simplicity of growth; it scarcely  
knows the terrain in which it has sprouted.  
with that wind which in its branches leaves  
what has no music, it imagines  
a great tableland for its dreams.  
And with what haste it identifies itself  
With the countryside, with the entire soul  
of its luxuriance and of myself.  
(Rodríguez, 2008: 35, 37)<sup>5</sup>

The ultimate theme of the previous verse is participation in nature. However, it is also implicit that nature is hostile, although enormously bright. In spite of the fact that there are dark areas, nature is something that draws interest in the poet. Nature scares Rodríguez too and that reminds us of Wordsworth again and his boat-stealing scene. It is sublime, but appalling and terrifying and, above all, he cannot avoid feeling comforted and relieved. This is depicted in the “Song VIII”, included in the Third Book of *Gift of Inebriation*, where the poet claims what he sees now is different and maybe frightening. His senses are an obstacle and the vision is not there anymore:

How I see the trees now.  
Not with falling leaves, not with branches  
subject to the voice of growth.  
And even the breeze that burns them in gusts  
I feel it not as something of the land  
or of the sky either, but lacking

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<sup>5</sup> La encina, que conserva más un rayo / de sol que todo un mes de primavera, / no siente lo espontáneo de su sombra, / la sencillez del crecimiento; apenas / si conoce el terreno en que ha brotado. / Con ese viento que en sus ramas deja / lo que no tiene música, imagina / para sus sueños una gran meseta. / Y con qué rapidez se identifica / con el paisaje, con el alma entera / de su frondosidad y de sí mismo (Rodríguez, 2001: 17).

in that pain of life with destiny.  
 And the fields, the sea, the mountains  
 well above the clear form  
 I see them. (...)  
 (Rodríguez, 2008: 73)<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, Rodríguez's works contain the same mystical and spiritual aura we find in Wordsworth's poetry. *Gift of Inebriation* has religious traits due to its mysticism, its idea of participation and joining with nature and also with human beings. Although in this process, the body is just an impediment which does not allow the poet to ascend and become fused with the sky and nature. For Jonathan Mayhew: "[i]n the ethical scheme (...) the integrity of the body is an intrinsically immoral state, a "sacrilege". The poet's voice, equated with poetry itself, has the capacity to separate itself from his body and thus become one with the rest of nature, renouncing to its origins (...)" (1993: 270). The poem "As if it had never been mine" shows clearly the thesis of longing for union with the natural world:

As if it had never been mine,  
 give my voice to the air and in the air  
 let it be everyone's and let them all know it  
 Like a morning or afternoon.  
 (...)  
 Above the voice digging a river-bed  
 what a sacrilege the body is, the  
 not being able to be a host to give oneself up.  
 (Rodríguez, 2008: 47)<sup>7</sup>

On the subject of *Sense of Place*, definitely it is nature for the two poets being studied here, since they do not feel any attachment to the city at all and, what is more, the city is, for them, almost pernicious and morally corrupt. As has been said before, the Romantics were against

<sup>6</sup> Cómo veo los árboles ahora. / No con hojas caedizas, no con ramas / sujetas a la voz del crecimiento. / Y hasta la brisa que los quema a ráfagas / no la siento como algo de la tierra / ni del cielo tampoco, sino falta / de ese dolor de vida con destino. / Y a los campos, al mar, a las montañas, / muy por encima de su clara forma / los veo (Rodríguez, 2001: 58).

<sup>7</sup> Como si nunca hubiera sido mía, / dad al aire mi voz y que en el aire / sea de todos y la sepan todos / igual que una mañana o una tarde. (...) Sobre la voz que va excavando un cauce / qué sacrilegio de este cuerpo, este / de no poder ser hostia para darse (Rodríguez, 2001: 29-30).

industrialization and the growth of cities, and Claudio Rodríguez unquestionably shared this thought. The second half of the twentieth century in Spain was a time of change; it was a time when agriculture, after the Civil War, was increasingly giving way to industry and this is essentially what Rodríguez loathed. Industrialization destroyed the beauty of the landscape; a beauty that enables the poet to bring to light his subjective side and to take part in the landscape itself. At the same time, it is fairly obvious that romantic authors “revitalized religious ideas and feelings in the wake of the disenchantments of the world” (Rigby, 2004). The following idea about Wordsworth and his spiritual sphere, included in the book by Hess entitled *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship*, can also be applied to Claudio Rodríguez: “Nature, in short, has been defined as a special aesthetic and spiritual sphere identified with the individual in opposition to society, rather than as implicated in our social and economic structures and our everyday social and material practices” (Hess, 2008: 4).

In terms of landscape and the attachment to it, Wordsworth defended that nature could teach more than any book and, when surrounded by her, he felt completely secure and full of joy. This is observed in one of his most celebrated poems, “Lines written in Early Spring”, focused on how nature brings thoughts to his mind which awaken his memory:

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sate reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair work Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.  
(Wordsworth, 1996: 203)

Besides, in one of Wordsworth’s most celebrated poems, “Lines written about a few Miles above Tintern Abbey”, he depicts how mind and nature are joined. And yet, “(...) he offers not a view in the manner of the picturesque, but an exploration of the inter-relatedness of perception and creation, a meditation on the networks which link mental and environmental space” (Bate, 2000: 148). It seems that nature and mind are



almost correlative elements and the following verses constitute a good example of this: “The mind that is within us, so impress / With quietness and beauty (...)” (Wordsworth, 1996: 130).

Wordsworth and landscape had a kind of dialogue which was almost the same as the one to be found in the poetry of Claudio Rodríguez. The Spanish poet’s first book, *Gift of Inebriation*, witnessed this kind of “conversation”, where the poet addressed nature directly as if she was a living force. It seems that nature had a life of her own and would be able to interact with the poet. In fact, this is part of the process of participating in nature and contributing to being close to her. Such is the case of the third poem found in his first book:

Oh, clarity thirsty for a form,  
for a matter to dazzle it  
burning itself on completing its work.  
Like me, like everything that waits.  
If you have taken all the light away  
how am I to expect anything of the dawn?  
(Rodríguez, 2008: 33)<sup>8</sup>

Several poems by William Wordsworth, such as “Tintern Abbey” or “Mont Blanc”, contain the same idea of participation we find in the poetry of Claudio Rodríguez. In fact, there always seems to be an endless dialogue between nature and the poet. In “Tintern Abbey”, “The personifications characteristic of the earlier forms here diffuse into a “speaking” landscape — by means of the “pathetic fallacy” of attributing to natural phenomena human intentions and feelings” (Kroeber, 1994: 68). The following lines constitute a clear example of how the poet has turned to the natural world on many occasions and how the sublime here provides positive connotations to the poem:

Oh sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,  
How often has my spirit turned to thee!  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
(Wordsworth, 1996: 128)

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<sup>8</sup> Oh, claridad sedienta de una forma, / de una materia para deslumbrarla / quemándose a sí mismo al cumplir su obra. / Si tú la luz te la has llevado toda, / ¿cómo voy a esperar nada del alba? (Rodríguez, 2001: 13).

And yet, in the long poem *The Prelude*, Wordsworth, like Claudio Rodríguez, deals with the concept of being part of the environment and declares that he was content in such a state. Nature is the force that turns him into something purer and this greatness can be felt throughout the whole poem. Wordsworth is fully aware it was during his youth when he felt and experienced the joy of these “modest pleasures” that comforted himself:

If in my youth I have been pure in heart,  
 If, mingling with the world, I am content  
 With my own modest pleasures, and have lived  
 With God and Nature communing, removed  
 From little enmities and low desires,  
 The gift is yours;  
 (Wordsworth, 1979: 88)

Rodríguez usually confessed that the act of walking helped him to write his first book of poems and to provide the poems with a specific rhythm. His steps — being a physical act — influenced his verses and conditioned the musical tone. The imaginative force, as a fundamental power in order to reveal the hidden truth in nature, is so relevant in the creative process; that is to say, if our senses do not give us a proper image of what an object is, the poet will do it. And he will do that either by using his imagination or through a force coming from the sky. In Claudio Rodríguez’s view, this force is clarity, which is the only one capable of unravelling the secrets of the objects forming nature. However, it is only when the poet discovers the truth that he experiences a kind mysticism and, consequently, we can adhere to the belief that this contemplation is a mystic one and the poet is a visionary or a bard who will reveal the secrets of the universe to the rest of the world. So, “the gift of poetry (...) gives access to the gift of nature” (Ingelmo and Smith in Rodríguez, 2008: 27). For James McKusick, Wordsworth’s works “evoke a dynamic world through the vivid sensory imagery of its beholding by an engaged participant” (56). “Composed upon Westminster Bridge”, by William Wordsworth, and “Song of Walking”, by Claudio Rodríguez, included in *Gift of Inebriation*, constitute a perfect example of this idea. Only the gifted one, the one who possesses a special capacity to look inside the

objects forming part of nature, will participate and mix with the natural universe:

Earth has not anything to show  
                                           more fair:  
 Dull would he be of soul who  
                                           could pass by  
       A sight so touching in its  
                                           majesty:  
       This city now doth, like a  
                                           garment, wear  
       The beauty of the morning,  
                                           silent, bare,  
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres,  
                                           and temple lies  
 Open unto the fields, and to the  
                                           sky;  
       All bright and glittering in the  
                                           smokeless air.  
 Never did sun more beautifully  
                                           steep  
       In his first splendour, valley,  
                                           rock, or hill,  
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm  
                                           so deep!  
       (Wordsworth, 1995: 269)

I had never known that my  
                                           footstep  
       was different on red earth,  
 that it sounded more purely dry  
       just if didn't carry a man,  
       standing, in his dimension.  
                                           Through that noise  
                                           perhaps some boundaries  
                                           remember me.  
       Not for anything else. The  
                                           clouds change  
 form an anticipate their change  
       dazzling in it, like the stream  
       within its flow; the springs  
       contain their silent outwardly.  
                                           (Rodríguez, 2008: 51)<sup>9</sup>

In times of weariness and melancholy, nature and memories about her contain, for these two poets, a soothing effect. The statement is based on the Platonic “Reminiscence Theory” of the soul recalling the places it has previously seen. So, whenever they were far away from the countryside, the act of remembering all the places they had been to offered them a sweet and calming sensation which softened their souls and their hearts too. This can be seen in “I wandered lonely as a cloud”, one of Wordsworth’s most popular poems, and in “March continues”, by Claudio Rodríguez. In both

<sup>9</sup> Nunca había sabido que mi paso / era distinto sobre tierra roja, / que sonaba más puramente seco / lo mismo que si no llevase un hombre, / de pie, en su dimensión. Por ese ruido / quizá algunos linderos me recuerden. / Por otra cosa no. Cambian las nubes / de forma y se adelantan a su cambio / deslumbrándose en él, como el arroyo / dentro de su fluir; los manantiales / contienen hacia afuera su silencio (Rodríguez, 2001: 35).

poems, the memory brings back the joy, silence and calmness of those sweet days, especially those of childhood:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
 In vacant or in pensive mood,  
 They flash upon that inward eye  
 Which is the bliss of solitude;  
 And then my heart with pleasure  
 fills,  
 And dances with the daffodils.  
 (Wordsworth, 1995: 187)

If in the midst of these hours  
 these images  
 were to become alive in others,  
 and with them  
 the memories of a day now past  
 were to return hiding that of  
 today,  
 (Rodríguez, 2008: 63)<sup>10</sup>

However, contact with nature was indeed something more than just physical. According to these two poets, the human mind was closely connected to nature and men or women had to be able to discover the concealed truth. Due to the fact that our senses do not allow us to see everything properly, we need to make use of our imagination. As a consequence of this idea, we should not use our senses when trying to uncover the hidden truth. The poem “Expostulation and Reply”, by William Wordsworth, shows how the eye is blind and needs a superior creative force; that is to say, imagination:

The eye —it cannot chose but see,  
 We cannot bid the ear be still;  
 Our bodies feel, where'er they be,  
 Against, or with our will.

Nor less I deem that there are powers,  
 Which of themselves our minds impress,  
 That we can feed this mind of ours,  
 In a wise passiveness.  
 (Wordsworth, 1996: 201)

As for Claudio Rodríguez, the same idea of not being able to contemplate the real truth of the elements of nature is included in the poem “Because We Don’t Possess”, from his book *Alliance and Condemnation* (1965). Our senses are unable to really see what the world offers us and

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<sup>10</sup> si en medio de estas horas las imágenes / cobrarán vida en otras, y con ellas / los recuerdos de un día ya pasado / volvieron ocultando el de hoy (Rodríguez, 2001: 46).

everything we see without using another force, i.e. imagination, is just a lie. So, we “see”, but do not “understand” what we have in front of us:

Because we don't possess,  
we see. The combustion of the eye at this  
time of day, when the light, so truthfully  
cruel, hurts  
the gaze, no longer brings me that  
simplicity. I no longer know what it is that dies,  
what it is that resuscitates. But I look,  
I become eager, and the gaze becomes  
a kiss, I no longer know whether loving or betraying.  
(Rodríguez, 2008: 161)<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

All things considered, the research conducted here reveals that nature is the main element that the works of these two writers have in common. And, obviously, throughout the analysis of the concept and meaning of nature, several topics emerge; the most important are those of childhood and imagination. Both poets believed the natural universe to be the force that provided them with the necessary inspiration when composing their works. Though nature can also be considered a teacher from which they learnt more than from any book or other teaching. William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez knew that our senses on their own could not show us the concealed truth which is included in every object of the natural element. And yet, if there is someone who could see the purest world and reveal the truth, this is the child. Since one of the most relevant qualities in children is innocence, their eyes contemplate the purity and limpidness an adult cannot see. Children were not corrupted by an evil and degraded society. Besides, the creative power of imagination helped them to colour and draw a world full of beauty and splendour, and, therefore, children were blessed creatures for them. This topic connects the two poets to that of the purity, brightness and cleanliness of nature found in Rousseau and his idea of the natural world as the perfect place to live in.

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<sup>11</sup> Porque no poseemos, / vemos. La combustión del ojo en esta / hora del día cuando la luz, cruel /de tan veraz, daña / la mirada ya no me trae aquella / sencillez. Ya no sé qué es lo que muere, / qué lo que resucita. Pero miro, / cojo fervor, y la mirada se hace / beso, ya no sé si de amor o traicionero (Rodríguez, 2001: 141).

Concerning the relationship with nature, it is worth mentioning that the correspondence between the poetic subject and nature, which evolves and moves from real objects to meditations and mysticism. So, the complexity of their vision of the natural universe and the interrelationships with human beings is such that it is beyond the bounds of possibility to comply with just one notion. Nevertheless, it is patent that nature is the backbone which unites their works. From the beginning, both poets longed to meld themselves with her in a kind of mystical experience where human beings participate and speak with her as well. Nature was a mother transmitting them more knowledge than any book could. Being part of the universe meant participating in it and melding with it, but it also meant a deeper feeling: that of attachment to it. This is the reason why the bond that joined them to nature was never broken. Regarding the concept of participation in nature, it is evident that in these authors there is a mystical aura and, because of this type of aura, the objects of nature are surrounded by a sacred and invisible presence. In both cases, this mysticism does not necessarily refer to the Christian God but just a divine presence penetrating the elements of the natural universe. Thus, these objects, as “Reminiscence Theory” states, are remembered by the soul, since it has memories of a previous life. As we have seen, the two poets share this theory. It is, however, not the only one they share, since they have in common the topics of childhood, imagination and, of course, the love of nature. In this idea of participation, in which imagination or even clarity played a fundamental role when discovering the concealed truth of all the elements of nature, the poet — being gifted or a visionary — was able to unravel the truth. If our senses lied to us, we would need something else. This is the gift that the poet has: to be able to decipher what is inside all that surrounds us and transmit this legacy to humanity. Likewise, the preceding concept is a prevailing one in the poetry of the two poets studied here.

Both poets felt at home in nature and they knew they were attached to nature with a bond that would never break. There, they found their inspiration and they felt calm. In addition, although the sublime in the natural universe had negative connotations as well, these two poets knew that such connotations were necessary since a totality is composed of positive and negative parts. Separated in both space and time, it is rather appealing the way they have shared these topics. It seems that Rodríguez was influenced by the poetry of Wordsworth. In fact, their works have more things in common than Claudio Rodríguez himself thought when he was told his poems were similar to Wordsworth’s. They shared topics of

nature, children and imagination and such topics are connected and lead to their love of nature. In short, William Wordsworth and Claudio Rodríguez were poets who wrote about nature; that is to say, they were mainly poets of nature and poets who loved nature and even when they were separated from her, they felt close to her “knowing that Nature did never betray / The heart that loved her” (Wordsworth, 1996: 130).

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