

AFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS TO NATURE IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BLAKE AND CLAUDIO RODRÍGUEZ

MARIA ANTONIA MEZQUITA FERNÁNDEZ
Universidad de Valladolid; GIECO-Franklin-UAH

1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic poetry is often viewed through the lens of Ecocriticism and ever since this trend emerged, academic interest in literary works analysing the connections between nature and human beings has become more commonplace. Ecopoetry —or nature-oriented poetry— raises environmental awareness and can draw our attention to how our world is being damaged and devastated by the modern, technological society we inhabit. If the Romantic authors rejected escalating industrialisation, this precept was also adopted later by some 20th-century poets. Writing about the harmful effects of industrialisation and modern advances involves being critical of the Anthropocene and advocating the urgent need for a more sustainable way of living. For Bate, “[t]he fall from the Golden Age comes with deforestation (...), with empire (...), with the building of cities, with war, agriculture, mining, property and money” (2001, p. 28). Social ecology has also called for the regeneration of society based on the welfare of nature founded on environmental care.

Considering this, the following paper focuses on the works of English poet, painter, and engraver William Blake (1757-1827) and the poetry of Spanish author Claudio Rodríguez (1934-1999) and their affective connections to nature. The two authors, whose contribution to literature has been highly recognized by critics, shared an abiding interest in nature and examining their verses and opinions will help us to observe the coincidences between them. The six years Rodríguez spent in England –

as a Lector in Spanish at the Universities of Nottingham and Cambridge— provided him with the opportunity to become familiar with English Literature.

From an ecocritical perspective, mainly based on the idea of sense of place, we will demonstrate that they shared the same emotional and sentimental concept of nature. Analysis of several poems mainly belonging to Blake's *Poetical Sketches* (1783) and *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* (1789) and Rodríguez's *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), *Conjurings* (1958) and *The Flight of Celebration* (1976) will prove the two poets have some themes in common such as imagination, a sacred or religious perspective of nature, and the way they dismiss industrialisation and certain social behaviours taking place in the city. Imagination is the force that transforms the natural world into something sacred and makes us see what nature hides and what only a visionary—or a prophet—can reveal to ordinary men, since Romanticism enhances the unification of imagination and nature, bestowing nature a sacred aura. Moreover, most of the poetry written by these two authors, which can be considered ecopoetry, exemplifies how the natural world is the most valuable treasure human beings possess. Romantic poems, and Rodríguez's poems as well, display deep compassion for nature while they reject the city as a symbol of the place where a lack of morality causes a crisis in disadvantaged social groups. Romantic appreciation of the natural elements and the philanthropic spirit characteristic of this period, which is shared by Rodríguez, forces the poet to turn his eyes upon the simplest things in nature, such as birds, flowers, or insects.

2. THE CONCEPT OF SENSE OF PLACE: NATURE IN ROMANTICISM AND CLAUDIO RODRÍGUEZ

In Ecocriticism, whose main concern is to study the relationship between humankind and nature and its representation, sense of place is defined as any perception and/or experience of people in a specific place and the attachment to it either by affection or for other reasons. As specified by Axel Goodbody and Carmen Flys, “[s]omething of th[e] Romantic notion of intuitive perception of the spirit of a place by particular individuals with a developed aesthetic faculty still resonate

in today's usage of the term 'sense of place' (...)" (2016, p. 15). They also make mention of the "psychic attunement with a place through the emotions and memories it arouses in the observing subject, where these memories are collective or merely personal" (2016, pp. 15-16). Furthermore, Thomashow affirmed that "[s]ense of place is a search for ecological roots. (...) It is through the place we live that we construct our personal identities, relate to the landscape, and determine what is important in our lives" (1996, pp. 193-194). According to Jennifer Cross, the connections to a place are due to biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commodified, and dependent reasons (2001).

The idea of sense of place brings these two authors into dialogue with their conception of nature. In their view, nature was tinted with sacred connotations and their precepts can relate to those of Rousseau dealing with the natural world as the best place to inhabit and his affection for it. For Rigby, Romantic authors were the topographies of the sacred and

[o]ne of the most influential models for the romantic resacralization of the natural world was provided by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in "Creed of the Savoyard Priest" in *Émile* (1762). Rousseau's unconventional cleric has grown sceptical of the claims of his own religious tradition to represent the one and only true path to God. (2004, p. 46).

The Romantic notion of "resacralization of the natural word" inherited by Rousseau is evinced, as we will see, in the poetry of William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez, for whom nature also had a consecrated aura.

Romanticism meant a turning point in the relationship between individuals and nature. The relevance of such movement lies in the fact that it changed how the Western World thought. Berlin states that Romanticism is "the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred (...)" (1999, p. 2) and goes on to state that it influenced to greater or lesser extent all other shifts occurring in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (p. 2). When comparing these two authors—distant in both space and time—we assume the fact that there exists a kind of eternal Romanticism whose ideas still survive today. Clark explains that in the seventies numerous movements appealed 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” (2011, p. 13). Rodríguez himself acknowledged that his poems were akin to those of the English Romantics (Demicheli, 1993, p. 72). In fact, he did not allow any connivance with his own generation of poets. Natalia Carbajosa adds that it was proved that Rodríguez’s approach to the English Romantics—with special interest in Blake, the most visionary of all—started after writing his two first books: *Gift of Inebriation* and *Conjurings* (2011, p. 58).

Indeed, the relationship between the natural world and men deepened during the Romantic movement, whose authors demonstrated an increasing interest in this relationship.

Even since this Romantic idea of a direct (if “secret”) organic correspondence between human emotions and the objects of the natural world, imaginative writers in English have sought to explore and explain the connections between humans and nature for literary effect. (Nichols, 2011a, p. 26).

No doubt nature was one of the main topics in the works of William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez and they devoted part of their works to it. In their view, natural landscapes were conceptualised as sacred, emotional, and even sentimental. Furthermore, nature conditions their poems and helps them to avoid industrial society and the city and feel that “a deeply personal love of reverence for the non-human, led, over time, to a deeply protective feeling for nature” (Buell, 1995, p. 137). As for Eric Prieto, there are two ways of representing a place: “from a depersonalized “outside” perspective, for example, a point or shape on a map; and from a subject-centered “inside” perspective, as a kind of enviroing milieu within which we move” (2013, p. 19). Probably, if we take into account this “subject-centered inside perspective”, places may produce several types of feelings, as they are “seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, [or] revered” (Walter, 1988, p. 142).

It is necessary to point out that both William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez made clear that industrialisation destroyed the natural world. In Löwy’s view, “[f]or the industrial civilization, the *qualities of nature*

(beauty, health) do not exist: it takes into consideration only the *quantities* of rough material it can extract from it” (1987, p. 894). Blake witnessed how industrialisation was flourishing in his country due to the Industrial Revolution. In Britain, several cities led the way in global capitalism. The economic growth which began to take place in the sixteenth century was developed in the eighteenth. In spite of this economic growth, Romantic postulates disregarded industrialisation and capitalism and advocated for a simpler life in contact with nature. For Löwy, “[t]he first critics of modern bourgeois society, of the capitalist civilization created by the Industrial Revolution were –more than half a century before Marx— the Romantic poets and writers” (1987, p. 891) and Blake’s theses were against industrialisation too.

As for Claudio Rodríguez, when he published his first book, *Gift of Inebriation* (1953), Spain was suffering the consequences of a devastating Civil War which had led to an impoverishment of the country. Zamora and its landscape were imprinted on Rodríguez’s poetry. The situation in Zamora –where he was born— was that of prevalence of rural areas where the rise of industrialisation had not yet reached. The Spanish social situation was a complex one, as it was being ruled under Franco’s dictatorship and industrialisation and economic growth seemed to be far away. Therefore, in terms of industrialisation, there exists a clear difference between the two countries of England and Spain. However, the feeling of rejecting the escalating industrialisation prevailed in both William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez. When mentioning the correspondences between both poets, Natalia Carbajosa states the fact that:

[The Romantics] belong to the world after the Enlightenment rationalism or are contemporary with it. They are aware of the consequences, which are irreparable for the life of the spirit, of positivist thought and industrialisation. This does not mean that they reject the material and social progress. What they reject is the lack of moral progress. Concerned by the excess of reason in the *episteme* of each one’s time, or the overwhelming force of the empirical opposed to the symbolic –to the world of imagination—, (...) they turn towards the transcendent. And yet, Claudio Rodríguez, belonging to a rural society that was gradually ceasing to be so, might be the disciple left behind or the last great

voice thus far capable of singing in such terms. (Carbajosa, 2011, p. 59)⁹⁰

According to William Blake, London was the place in which poverty and social inequalities could be observed properly. His poetry book *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* (1794) constitutes a perfect example of that statement. The contrast between the country and the city is manifest here. The English Romantics were able to corroborate this dichotomy, which was increased with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution. Romantic dichotomy and hostility to the urban places and the willingness to protect sublime landscapes are also present in Rodríguez's poems, where nature was a "mysterious and magical place".

Wilderness means something different to those who come upon it from a modern city. The English Romantics lived at the dawn of the industrial era, and for Blake, and Coleridge, and Keats, the green world of field and forest was a remote, mysterious, and magical place that existed in sharp disjunction from the smoke, crowded streets, and noisy machinery of London, where they lived for most of their lives. To be sure, such a contrast between country and city life has existed in some form since the dawn of civilization, but this dichotomy has taken on new dimensions of meaning in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. (McKusick, 2010, p. 1)

As already mentioned, even though Zamora was not a fully industrialised city, Rodríguez preferred to spend the very earliest days of youth in the family's country house where he could walk close to nature, "observing the cultivation of the fields, the steady and yearly sowing, watering, fertilizing, growing and harvesting of grain" (Ingelmo & Smith, 2008, p. 13). This observation had an influence on his oeuvre to the extent that Castilian landscape –and especially Zamoran landscape— would shape most of his poems.

Both William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez were committed to searching for a more ecological and organic way of living far from capitalism and industrialisation. Romantic authors apperceived "the sense that

⁹⁰ My own translation.

the[ir] revolution entails a reuniting of man with nature in the Rousseausque style” (Bate, 2001, p. 214). Within this frame of reference, Ecocriticism seeks to identify the solution to all the damage inflicted on the natural world. Subsequently, Romantic poetry has become “one of the most important terrains for the development of ecological literary criticism” (McKusick, 2010, p. ix) and, due to the relevance nature has in his works, the same might be said of Rodríguez’ poetry.

3. AFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS TO NATURE IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BLAKE

Poet and engraver William Blake firmly believed in the concept of the poet as a visionary who “had been granted visions by God and (...) could translate and interpret those visions as designs which merged picture and words” (Sanders, 2000, p. 353). In 1803, he wrote a letter⁹¹ to his friend Thomas Butt in which he gave a definition of his own poetry such as: “allegory addressed to the Intellectual power it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding” (1982, p. 730). It is obvious that imagination plays an important role in the poetry of this English author. In *All Religions are One*, he claims: “The true Man is the source [of all Religions] he being the Poetic Genius” (1982, p. 2). However, such “Poetic Genius” is not available to all of us, and it is granted by imagination or spiritual vision. Through imagination, the visionary poet can unravel the secrets hidden in the objects of nature in a kind of mystical experience in which knowledge can be reached. The human mind is chained by the tyranny of reason—and by the precepts of philosophers such as Hobbes, Hume, Voltaire, or Bacon too—and by the senses, which means that the human mind must be released. According to Frye, Blake could be considered a mystic author whose extraordinary experiences are unique to visionary poets: “[i]f mysticism means primarily the vision of the prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the human mind just described, then Blake is one of those mystics” (1974, p. 432). In *There is no Natural Religion* (1788), he wrote about the concept of the Poetic Genius in the following terms: “If it were not

⁹¹ Blake’s letters constitute a perfect example of his ideas on concepts such as imagination.

for the Poetic or Prophetic character, the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again” (1982, p. 3). Hence, the previous concept deals with the fact that our senses do not allow us to understand our presence in the world, being surrounded by the objects of nature. Only in this way could we realize that imagination is a necessary and relevant force. It is generally accepted that “modern poetry (Romanticism) is the result of a more prodigious sublimation of imagination than Western poetry from Homer through Milton had to undergo” (Bloom, 1997, p. 125).

When, in 1793, Blake published his *Poetical Sketches*, his vision of nature had positive and pure connotations. Envisioning nature was the poet’s comfort and the way of finding peace of mind. Every element of nature was full of beauty and harmony and had sacred traces. In his letters, he made clear that the poet, or the visionary, was able to lift the veil covering the objects of nature to unearth the very essence of them. In this sense, imagination helps us to reach knowledge. The ordinary man, endowed with reason and the senses, is incapable of perceiving what the visionary contemplates, as the human senses constitute an obstacle when seeing the truth and, thus, Blake incorporated his notion of nature and imagination in a letter to Dr. Trusler on August 23, 1799:

Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all but to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers. (1982, p. 702).⁹²

Moreover, in a letter to Thomas Butts, on October 2, 1800, he asserted: “My Eyes more & more / Like a Sea without shore / Continue Expanding / The Heavens commanding” (1982, p. 713), which proves to be determining for demonstrating the idea of the poetic bard touched by a heavenly messenger or a divine force. In the poem, “To Morning”, one of the “Miscellaneous Poems” included in *Poetical Sketches* (1783), the light that shows the veracity of everything that shapes nature is por-

⁹² Blake’s punctuation and original script are retained in all quotations.

trayed with religious connotations. White and gold prevail in the composition as symbols of purity, chastity, and religiousness. The morning light is the one in charge of opening heaven's doors and then "the honied dew" will appear on earth. The adjective "honied" confers dew a new colour, different from the transparent dew drops, and makes the landscape more vivid and appealing:

O holy virgin! clad in purest white,
Unlock heav'n's golden gates, and issued forth;
Awake the dawn that sleeps in heaven; let light
Rise from the chambers of the east, and bring
The honied dew that cometh on waking day.
(1982, p. 410)

In this poem, the poet casts his gaze upwards so that the light coming from heaven bequeaths the objects of nature a new vision: "O radiant morning, salute the sun, / Rous'd like a huntsman to the chace; and, with / Thy buskin'd feet, appear upon our hills." (1982, p. 410). Blake, indeed, acts here as the bard inspired by a divine force and whose fate is to transmit the splendour of elements of nature to the rest of the world. In fact, "Blake may have distrusted "nature" in visionary terms, but celebrates its physical beauty, its sensuous details, and its crucial role in our awareness of human place in the cosmos" (Nichols, 2011b). His first stage as a poet was based on a conception of nature tinted by imagination and humanized.

The tendency to view nature in humanized terms is particularly strong throughout Blake's canon. If we consider the more purely descriptive passages on nature as comprising the first level in an increasingly subtle and complex hierarchy of poetic response to the object world, then those passages most clearly suggestive of what I have called "nature humanized" would represent the second level of response. (Lefcowitz, 1974, p. 123)

Poetical Sketches comprised the germ of the Romantics' viewpoint of nature and their passion for all the elements included in the natural world. Such passion will prevail in contemporary poetry and in that of Claudio Rodríguez, as we will see. The contact with nature symbolizes knowledge and the encounter with authenticity in the process of searching for the truth of things. In "To Spring", also included in the "Miscellaneous Poems", Blake calls on spring to cover everything with its pure

light: "(...) all our longing eyes are turned / Up to thy bright pavilions: issue forth, / And let thy holy feet visit our clime." (1982, p. 408). Spring is the season in which the renewal of the natural world takes place and, with such renewal, everything radiates beauty. The light covers all the objects giving them a special charm and sacred tints of regeneration.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence of Experience. Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794) deals, as the title indicates, with innocence and experience, or what is the same, immaculateness and impurity. It also refers to the positive and negative parts of human beings and their behaviour whether they are in contact with nature or in the city. In "The Ecchoing Green", Blake depicts –thanks to imagination– the image of a consecrated meadow full of beauty while the reader witnesses the joy of children's games and the visual splendour of the landscape during the springtime. Even the birds' songs accompany and bring more contentment. The poet turns his eyes to the smallest elements of nature as part of the philanthropic spirit of the era. In this case, these elements are the sky-lark, the thrush and the birds of the bush whose songs boost the bliss. The light of the sun arising is also a symbol of delight. The poem is filled with a colour scheme that makes it more intense:

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush
Sing louder around,
To the bells chearful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green
(1982, p. 8)

Blake introduces a proper noun in the poem to make it more specific: Old John, who is not a child, but a mature man with white hair. He has already overcome all the circumstances life has provided him and, at the end of his days, he laughs under the oak with people, watching the children play, while the memories recall their youth-time and their games in the same place. The picture Blake paints is so idyllic and there

is no room for unfortunate or dreadful situations which tend to happen over the years. The contrast between innocence and experience is shown here by the colours “green” and “white”, which evinces how time goes by and childhood turns into adulthood. The following lines are focused on the ageing people who sit around indulging in nostalgia.

Old John, with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say.
Such, such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Ecchoing Green.
(1982, p. 8)

Bearing this idea in mind, it is noticeable that Blake felt an enormous love of nature which is proved in his first compositions. Nature is the place which he feels attached to and the place in which he finds peace of mind, calmness, joy, and purity. Innocence prevails in the natural world, and everything has religious connotations. In fact, “he projects a world of total spirituality not dissociated from the concrete, but exchanges its energy” (Caracciolo, 2019, p. 14).⁹³ In the case of William Blake, the relationship with nature –according to Cross’ classification of the different types of the connections to a place— might be spiritual. Cross states that the spiritual relationship has an emotional and intangible bond, in which the author feels “a sense of belonging, simply felt rather than created” (2001). Although Blake was born in London, the literary context when he wrote his poems was the beginning of Romanticism and the historical context was that of the Industrial Revolution which he –like most Romantic authors— refused. Subsequently, Blake felt a sense of belonging to the natural world and his first poems constitute a clear example of that. What he admired most was the idea of children playing and singing in the green and sacred valleys and their

⁹³ My own translation.

innocence. After the publication of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, he lived in a cottage in Felpham from 1800 to 1803.

On the contrary, the positive connotations that the poems of *Songs of Innocence* distil are different from the negative connotations of those in *Songs of Experience*. As an example, the poem "London" displays an image completely obscure and hard that moves the reader. According to Blake, people in London are repressed by law, and weakness and woe are seen in their faces. There are no more plays and songs but instead, the poet walks down the streets and finds people suffering because of the social, religious, or political laws which oppress human beings and make their lives suffocating. Blake criticizes here the Government, the Church and the King and finds them guilty of misleading, exploiting, and annihilating little chimney sweepers and soldiers. The difference between places in the part of innocence and the part of experience is explicit.

I wander thro' each charter'd street.
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear
How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blanking Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Run in blood down Palace walls.
(1982, pp. 26-27)

4. AFFECTIVE CONNECTIONS TO NATURE IN THE POETRY OF CLAUDIO RODRÍGUEZ

Claudio Rodríguez's first work, *Gift of Inebriation*, was awarded with the *Adonais* Prize in 1953. Rodríguez himself made clear that the poems were composed while walking at a family's country house where he was close to nature and could observe the farming labours. His contact to nature began after his father's death. Looking for the peace of mind he needed, he sheltered in a country house his family owned and that

was what made him write while walking (Pavón & Mateos, 1989). “There he was in direct contact with nature, with a sense of a rhythm in life that originated from observing the cultivation of the fields, the steady and the yearly sowing, watering, fertilizing, growing and harvesting of grain” (Ingelmo & Smith, 2008, p. 13). After being granted the *Adonais* Prize, the critics made public that the poet José Hierro, one of the members of the panel of judges, was completely astonished when he read the book, and said about *Gift of Inebriation* that:

He spoke to us about something which is within arm’s reach (...) but somehow it was as if he was pulling our leg. And yet, he refers to something deeper, more intense. He is a magician, talking about something and then turning it into a symbol. He has an incredible gift. He is a rare, unique poet. Claudio does not have distinctive traits, but everything in him is distinctive. (Hernández, 1999a, p. 14).⁹⁴

No doubt the gift Rodríguez had was that of the visionary artist who is able to unravel what is hidden behind the appearance of the objects and what cannot be seen with our senses, since they do not allow us to understand the truth inside everything. Such a task can only be accomplished by the visionary poet. The first lines of *Gift of Inebriation* show how clarity, coming from the sky, provides a new perspective after settling in the elements of nature as it is written in the poem that opens the book, “Song I”: “Clarity always comes from the sky; / it is a gift: it is not found among things / but very high up and it occupies them” (2008, p. 33). The light coming from sky, as in the first two line of “Song I”, is similar to “To Spring” or “To Morning” by Blake, when the light of the sun or the sky covers everything. Thus, the words “gift” and “inebriation” represent the sense of inspiration coming from a force and are the essential key in his oeuvre and offer sacred tints. The main difference with William Blake, however, is that the English poet believes that the gift of vision is given by a divine force while, for Rodríguez, such gift comes from the sky, but it is not necessarily something provided by God. Regarding the process of inspiration, Rodríguez added the following statement:

⁹⁴ Translated by Ingelmo & Smith (2008, p. 15).

The person who said this best is Saint John of the Cross. “God dictates the poems to you”, some people told me. “No. Maybe some words. But the rest are given to me by the dictionary”, [I answered]. There is the unconscious process and, at the same time, the rational one. The poet is both conscious and unconscious; he has control, and, at the same time, he does not have it. He knows and does not know what he is going to say. (2004, p. 225-225)⁹⁵

Gift of Inebriation did not allow any connivance with the poetry written by the '50s generation in Spain. Rodríguez's poetry differs from the group of his contemporaries in the fact that he can be considered a visionary poet, like Blake, who is able to perceive the truth that the ordinary man cannot distinguish. This can be also seen in “Song I”: “And this is a gift. Who makes beings / less created each time? What high vault / contains them in its love? It is already coming” (2008, p. 33). The poet wonders what divine force “makes beings less created” and the word “vault” confers traces of the revered as it reminds us of the church vault. One of the main topics of *Gift of Inebriation* is nature and Rodríguez celebrates the glory of the creation of the natural world, which receives the poet to conform his symbolic worldview. Rodríguez is absolutely certain that nature is his shelter and the place he belongs to. He identifies himself with the elements of nature and longs for the day in which he would be part of them. In “Song III” of the first book of *Gift of Inebriation*, the poet has no difficulty conveying his thought about being part of the natural world to the audience:

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.
It would reach as far as the sky if it were not
because its season is still that of a tree.
There will be days it may reach. Meanwhile it listens

⁹⁵ My own translation.

to the noise of the birds' flight,
the delicate one of the linnet, that of the full wing
of the bustard, alert and clear.
Just so am I. (...)
(2008, pp. 35, 37)

The main character in the previous lines –the holm oak— wishes it would reach the sky and join it. The literary device of personification provides the tree with the ability to imagine “a great tableland for its dreams” and to listen to “the noise of birds’ flight”. As in Blake’s poems, the birds’ songs and flights play a relevant role in the poem as a symbol of bliss and elevation of the human soul to heaven. The vocabulary represents the philanthropic spirits, like the Romantics, of Rodríguez. He looks at the two types of birds –the linnet and the bustard— and describes them as “delicate” and “of the full wing”. He probably had contemplated them quite often at the family’s country house and, owing to his enduring love of nature, he decided to immortalize them in their oeuvre. Fernando Yubero describes in more detail the visions Rodríguez displays in his poem and indicates that:

In Claudio Rodríguez, the celestial and telluric symbolic worldview stems from the Man-Nature dialect, which is understood as an integrated cosmos that allows the contemplation and knowledge of the Truth. A truth which is shaped in the search for the mystery of matter and in finding the transcendent meaning of human life and in the uniting of the poet with everything created. Claudio Rodríguez not only seeks the knowledge of things, but fundamentally “the knot that binds and gives meaning; that is to say, life that beats in each thing and in each reality. (2003, p. 53)⁹⁶

The concept of nature as emotional and affective is clear in the poem “To Breathing on the Plain”, from *Conjurings*, which explains the passion Rodríguez feels for the natural world and the elements forming it. The poet explains how he wishes he were part of nature and melted with it. Light and earth inspire Rodríguez bringing him calmness, and subsequently, his desire is to stay there forever. The essence of the poem lies in imagination and is full of positive connotations. Even death is manifested as something positive, as if by dying there, he would be part

⁹⁶ My own translation.

of nature and would vanish into it. It seems that nature had religious connotations.

Stop breathing and let the earth
breathe you, let it burn you in its marvellous
lungs! However many
people look, will they not see in the seasons
a trace as of air that inspires?
Death would be natural here.
It would not be taken into account
like light, like space, Death
just by breathing! I wish it were day
now and I would fall senseless
in these fields, and I would breathe
deep like these trees, soundlessly.
(2008, p. 79)

Contemplating nature and walking provided the poet with the inspiration required to write his works. In “A manera de comentario”, Rodríguez admitted that he was not aware of the fact that contemplation entailed morality and it was walking that modified his point of view on things and life in general (1984, p. 15). *Conjurings* also exhibits the cultivation of the fields he had witnessed at his family’s country house. Considering these labours was “of crucial importance in the development of the poet’s symbolic poetic consciousness, so close to the Castilian landscape” (Ingelmo & Smith, 2008, p. 13). So, the poem “The Harvesting of Grain” is focused on working in the fields and how he was nurtured by words and symbols: “See, see our furrow / advancing like a wave, / see it breathing against the immense reef / of time! (...)” (2008, p. 95).

As for the notion of sense of place, Rodríguez’s nature is his object of and, at the same time, his avenue of escape from the problems and the stifling atmosphere he experienced at home after his father’s death. Most of his poems show the influence of the author’s background and his passion for nature. Taking this into consideration, it can be affirmed that Rodríguez’s relationship to place, following Cross’ theory (2001), is biographical and spiritual. He was born in Zamora; however, he was in close contact to nature at the family’s country house and that was where his passion for nature –a feeling developed over time— began.

The spiritual relationship to nature has to do with the sense of belonging Rodríguez always demonstrated. As aforementioned, he considered himself part of the elements of nature and was willing to fade as in “Song of Walking”, included in *Gift of Inebriation*:

A concert of wheat-ear-against wheat-ear
comes with the sunrise. So much
space in which to die! So much vivid blue,
so much threshing floor-like yellow for the scraping!
(...)
What a time: launching the body up high!
(2008, p. 53)

With reference to the city, it is worth asserting Claudio Rodríguez had a special relationship with Zamora, and he also affirmed that “we all have a city inside. The city of our soul. A city that redeems us. (...) I know myself and I recognize myself best in the need of my land, of Zamora. (...) Not for benefit, of course, not for esteem, but for an air of redemption, of salvation (...)” (Hernández, 1999b, p. 5)⁹⁷. He did not approve of industrialisation at all and advocated for craftsmen who made everything using only their own hands or working in the fields. Like Blake, he criticised exploitation and tried to combat it. The poem “The Contract of Young Men” describes a situation in the middle of the marketplace in which young men are hired to work in the fields, though Rodríguez believes this is now a “servile exchange” or a “theatre of dishonour”. Again, as in Blake’s poetry, the difference with nature is palpable:

(...) Prosperous
was our merchandise in another time,
when the land bought everything from us.
Then, far from this market place, then,
in the market of light. See now
how those goods ended up. Contract,
servile exchange, theatre of dishonour.
(2008, p. 133)

⁹⁷ My own translation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the previous assumptions, it is relevant to enhance the impact nature had on both the thinking and the works of William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez. The emotional bond with the natural world is experienced by the two authors in a positive way. Blake and Rodríguez shared a love of the natural world and the rejection of industrialisation. The sacred natural world constituted the primary source of inspiration when composing their poetry. As we have seen, the first works of William Blake —*Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*— constitute a good example of how Blake displayed his passion for nature as a place full of joy and purity. The poems included in *Songs of Experience*, however, were inspired by other sentiments. Blake acknowledged that experience and devastating time changed human beings and innocence became extinct. Through the lens of Ecocriticism and sense of place, the bond linking him to nature is a spiritual one, as, when he wrote his first poems, he felt that he belonged there and not to a city that damaged people, above all, children. Claudio Rodríguez avowed his profound passion for the natural world from his early years. When he composed *Gift of Inebriation*, it was contemplating nature while walking that provided him with the inspiration that enabled him to write a book which differed from those of his contemporaries. Thus, the connections to nature were biographical and spiritual. The Castilian landscape was imprinted on his poems and on his heart too. Such connections lasted in the subsequent books he published. And though he felt a profound love for the city he was born in, Zamora, he definitely found peace of mind in the natural world.

Despite being separated in both space and time, William Blake and Claudio Rodríguez declared their preference for places where human beings were not exploited. In this sense, they rejected escalating industrialisation and promoted what now is called social ecology, which stands for the regeneration of society through the welfare of nature. As we have seen, their poems analysed here encapsulate a defence of the natural world against a world which was harmful to human beings due to social, political, or religious laws. Should ecopoetry make us understand how beautiful nature is, the poems studied here can be considered

part of such trend. Blake and Rodríguez, as visionary poets and with the help of imagination, understood that the light and purity of nature must prevail for the welfare of all human beings.

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