

NATURE IMAGINED IN S. T. COLERIDGE'S "MEDITATIVE POEMS" AND MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO'S *POESÍAS*: A STUDY ON RECEPTION

CRISTINA FLORES MORENO
University of La Rioja

ABSTRACT. *This paper aims at exploring some aspects of Miguel de Unamuno's engagement with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry. The Spanish author wrote in 1907 his first collection of poems, Poesías. A non-negligible number of poems in the collection bear significant resemblances with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "meditative" poems. It is my purpose here to analyse these similarities so as to prove that they are not mere chance, but the result of Unamuno's attentive reading of Coleridge's poems, which he frequently praised. Hence, a study of the Spanish author's readings of the 1893 edition of The Works of S. T. Coleridge, now held in Unamuno's private library in Salamanca, and the annotations he penned on its pages, will be offered first.*

1. MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO AND ENGLISH ROMANTICISM

Miguel de Unamuno's high regard for British literature and culture is a well-known fact. It has already been pointed out by Sánchez Barbudo (1950), Earle (1960), García Blanco (1959, 1965) and, more recently, by Doce (2005) and Perojo Arronte (2007). His reading of British literary works was extensive.¹ Yet, among

1. In his article on the reception of British poets in Unamuno, García Blanco (1959) identifies some to have exerted certain influence upon him, namely, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, William Cowper, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, John Keats, William Shakespeare, John Milton, William Blake, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Meredith, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and William Butler Yeats. Moreover, García Blanco (1965) also noted that Unamuno translated Herbert Spencer's essays and wrote some critical articles on Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Jonathan Swift, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, William Cobbett, George Borrow, and Charles Dickens.

British authors, he felt the deepest fondness for Romantic poetry as it is clearly seen in the following statement, belonging to a letter, dated May 1899, Unamuno sent to Rubén Darío (1926: 166): “ningún poeta francés moderno me produce la hondísima impresión que los musings de Coleridge o de Wordsworth o las monótonas melopeas de Browning”; or later in 1901 when he claims: “he sufrido la impresión de poetas, del gran Leopardo [sic] (me lo sé casi de memoria) ante todo, y de la lírica inglesa (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Burns, etc.) que es la que prefiero”² (Unamuno in García Blanco 1959: 89). This preference is easily recognisable in the volumes held in his private library in Salamanca.³ There, Unamuno kept the poetical works of William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron⁴ as well as some critical volumes on English poetry totally or partially devoted to Romantic poetry.⁵

I feel compelled to go beyond the unquestionable fact of Unamuno’s reading of the Romantic authors, which has for long been rightly admitted, and further explore the reception of certain Romantic ideas and poetical patterns and images in the Spanish author and their recognizable echo in his production. This study is limited to Unamuno’s first collection of poems, *Poesías*, which presents some arresting points of contact with Coleridge’s early poems.

Poesías appeared in 1907 as Unamuno’s determined attempt to contribute a fresh poetic vein to the, from his viewpoint, artificial and baroque verses produced in some early manifestations of Modernism. In his particular literary battle against contemporary technical excess and elaborated rhetoric, he found in the English Romantics, especially in Coleridge and Wordsworth, sound allies. The poetical experiments, as they called them, undertaken by the Lake Poets deeply attracted the Spanish author a century after their publication. Their turn to natural

2. Unpublished letter.

3. I want to express my deep gratitude to the librarian at the “Casa-Museo de Miguel de Unamuno”, for her useful help.

4. The following poetical works by Romantic authors are found in his library: *Poetical works of Wordsworth*. London: Frederick Warne, 1875 (reprint of the 1827 edition); *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*. London: John Murray, 1905 (edited, with a memoir by Ernest Hartley Coleridge); *Poems of William Blake*. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1905 (edited by W. B. Yeats); *The poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1880 (edited with an introductory memoir by William B. Scott).

5. The following works are also found in Unamuno’s private library: Francis Jeffrey. *Essays on English Poets and Poetry: from the Edinburgh Review*. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1900; Julio Calcaño. *Tres poetas pesimistas del siglo XX: estudio crítico por Julio Calcaño*. Caracas: Tipografía Universal, 1907; Thomas de Quincey. *Reminiscences of English Lake Poetry*. London: J. M. Dent, 1907; John Trelawny. *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*. London: George Routledge & Sons, 1878.

conversational language, and the simplicity in the structure of their poems, was found profoundly appealing by Miguel de Unamuno.

Besides, the Spanish author found highly interesting and promising the new conceptualisation of the universe and poetics that the English authors proposed by way of their poems. In his first recorded mention of the English Lake poets, dated as early as 1885, Unamuno (1966: I, 171) wrote: "Desde el balcón se ve un hermoso paisaje, pero no soy poeta *lakista* y dejo al cuidado ajeno el imaginarse tal paisaje, asegurando que es más hermoso lo que se adivina que lo que se ve". Nature and imagination are key terms in this first reference to Romantic poetry by Unamuno. These two terms combined in the phrase "nature imagined" encompass the main innovations in poetics endorsed by the Romantic authors. It goes without saying that Coleridge was the leading theorist of the English Romantic movement, and chief responsible for the re-evaluation and exaltation of the powers of the imagination and the defence of the symbolic nature of the outward world, which can only be rightly interpreted by means of that excellent faculty. His poems and prose works, which were well received by Unamuno, bear ample testimony of his poetics.

The Spanish author read and annotated Coleridge's *Poetical Works*, *Biographia Literaria* and *Essays & Lectures on Shakespeare & some other old poets & dramatists*. These three works are held in Unamuno's private library, in Salamanca. A fairly accurate chronology of the Spanish writer's readings can be established. He first read Coleridge's poems in some Spanish translation, probably as early as 1885, and later approached them again in the 1893 English edition which he owned. Then, in 1906 he turned to *Biographia Literaria*. This is Coleridge's masterpiece, the work where he intended to give a comprehensive exposition of his poetics and the philosophical tenets on which it was based. Unamuno carefully marked in pencil some passages in his copy of *Biographia Literaria*, which proves his attentive study of the volume.⁶ His reading of Coleridge's work further enhanced Unamuno's enthusiasm for the Romantic poet. Thus, in 1907, Unamuno (1966: III, 398) expresses his admiration for "that marvellous Coleridge" in an article entitled "Soliloquio:"

¿No te acuerdas lo que dice aquél, tu muerto amigo, aquel maravilloso Coleridge, en su *Biographia Literaria*? Tú has querido siempre a Coleridge [...]. Tú has querido siempre a esta águila del espíritu y hasta has traducido alguna de sus poesías colocándolas entre las tuyas originales, para que las realce.

6. Coleridge's marks in *Biographia Literaria* had already been studied in Bautista (2000) and re-evaluated by Flores Moreno (forthcoming).

This same year he acquired an edition of Coleridge's *Essays & Lectures on Shakespeare & some other old poets & dramatists*. The two years going from 1906 to 1908 are probably the period when Unamuno's reception of Coleridge's ideas is most easily distinguishable in his poems and short articles.

Nonetheless, Coleridge's influence on Unamuno is not limited to that period; a couple of decades later his admiration for Coleridge had not faded away. Unamuno's collection of poems *Rimas de Dentro*, published in 1923, includes some poetical pieces, namely, "Caña Salvaje", "Incidente Doméstico", "La Nevada es silenciosa", and "Viendo dormir a un niño", which present significant resemblances with some of Coleridge's conversation poems.⁷

In 1929 Unamuno devotes a short poem to the English poet entitled "Cuna de noche Coleridge en sueños", published in *Cancionero, Diario poético 1928-1936*, as an open tribute to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. The starting image of the dream in Unamuno's poem reminds us of the famous Preface of *Kubla Khan*, and the images of the moon, the chasm and the bursting fountain seem to recreate the central lines of Coleridge's most popular poem.

2. UNAMUNO'S READING OF COLERIDGE'S POEMS

It has already been stated that Unamuno's first statement about English Romantic poetry took place in 1885. Nonetheless, he could not read English until approximately 1890, when he was twenty-six. Therefore, his first encounter with Coleridge must have probably been, Earle (1960: 25) suggests, through Vicente de Arana's Spanish translation of Coleridge's poems. Unamuno devoted in 1890 a short article to Vicente de Arana, published in *El Noticiero Bilbaíno*, where he praised the works of his friend and recounted how he had enjoyed Arana murmuring poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁸

7. The analysis of these poems remains beyond the limits established in this paper due to a question of space, but could be the subject of a further study.

8. Unamuno (1966: III, 1252) wrote: "[Vicente de Arana] Quiso infiltrar en nuestro rudo pueblo algo de la delicadeza de la clase culta de Inglaterra; basta ver sus obras. Gustaba con el alma de la literatura inglesa y a él debemos las más lindas traducciones de Tennyson. Muchas veces le he oído murmurar a solas versos de Wordsworth o de Coleridge". It is difficult to ascertain whether Vicente de Arana published or not any translation of Coleridge's or Wordsworth's poems. He may have published them in some local journals, but a more exhaustive research work must be undertaken to state any conclusion. He certainly published poems by Tennyson, Keats, Byron and Longfellow. Some of Arana's translations were published in his volume *Oro y Oropel*. To know more on Arana's translations see José Miguel Santamaría (1982).

Later, once he could read English confidently, Unamuno purchased the 1893 edition of Coleridge's *Poetical Works*,⁹ which is now held in his private library in Salamanca. This volume is based on the text of the 1829 edition, which was selected by James Dykes Campbell for his 1893 collection of Coleridge's poems. Later editions were based upon the 1834 text, arranged by H. N. Coleridge, but with some variations introduced by the author himself. One of the modifications introduced had to do with the overall organisation and classification of the poems which followed strictly the chronological order of composition.

It is interesting to note that in the edition of Coleridge's poems owned by Unamuno, the poetical pieces are classified according to various criteria, thematically as well as chronologically. For instance, one of the headings is "Early poems", in which "Composed at Clevedon", "Reflection on Having Left a Place of Retirement", "Religious Musings" and "The Destiny of Nations" are included. Yet, what is more important for this study is that there is a section entitled "Meditative Poems" which include, in this order: "Hymn before sunrise in the vale of Chamouni" (1802), "Lines written in the Album at Elbingerode in the Hartz Forest" (1799), "Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath" (1802), "A tombless Epitaph" (1809), "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison" (1797), "To a friend who had declared his intention of writing no more poetry" (1796), "To William Wordsworth" (1806), "The Nightingale" (1798), "Frost at Midnight" (1798), and "The Three Graves" (1798).

Unamuno frequently referred to his favourite poems as Coleridge's "meditative poems". The source of this denomination is most probably the heading of that section in that edition. It is also worth noting that Unamuno's first collection of poems, most of them written during the year he was perusing *Biographia Literaria*, includes a section entitled "Meditaciones". Moreover, the volume is profusely annotated with words and phrases in Spanish that translate those in English, as well as some marks which highlight specific passages from the poems. This is the irrefutable proof of Unamuno's attentive reading, or rather, study of the poems. In addition, the Spanish author also wrote down some marks – short vertical lines crossed by a longer horizontal one – next to the title of the poems in the content pages, as well as next to the text of the poems. As I see it, these marks may probably signal the number of times he perused each poem. Hence, if I am right, the poems that he read more frequently, according to the number of marks, are those under the heading "Meditative Poems", and some individual poems such as "Religious Musings", "Fears in Solitude" and "Reflections on Having Left a Place of

9. *The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge*. London: Frederick Warne, 1893.

Retirement". The latter seems to be Unamuno's favourite poem by Coleridge since he translated it into Spanish in July 1899 and published it in 1907 in *Poesías*.

In May 1899, Unamuno (in García Blanco 1954: 10) had already announced, in a letter addressed to his friend Pedro Jiménez Ilundáin, his intention of including a translation of one of Coleridge's poems in his future volume of poetry: "Mi propósito es publicar en un tomito mis poesías, con dos traducciones: una de Leopardi y otra de Coleridge".¹⁰ One month later, he (11) penned another letter where he announced his desire of introducing his collection of poems with a preface: "en que, por vía de comentario a mi traducción de *La Ginestra* de Leopardi, y de algunas poesías de Coleridge, hable de los principios estéticos de que mis composiciones son trasunto".¹¹ Eventually, he did not include this preface; instead, as Coleridge had done in his youth, Unamuno used his verses to transmit his poetic principles.

Coleridge's poems were built upon a deep philosophical basis. He (1956: I, 137) stated: "I cannot write without a *body* of *thought* – hence my *Poetry* is crowded and sweats beneath a heavy burthen of Ideas and Imagery". His views of poetry and the poetic act can be discerned behind the lines of his early poems, especially in those Unamuno labels "meditative poems". This is probably one of the features the Spanish author most admired in Coleridge's poetry. Unamuno (in García Blanco 1954: 17) declared: "Guardo, a la vez, reflexiones acerca de la Poesía meditativa, sugeridas por mis frecuentes lecturas de Leopardi, de Wordsworth, de Coleridge".¹²

According to all this evidence, Unamuno seems to have felt more interest in the poems by Coleridge that have been labelled "conversation poems". Obviously, Unamuno could not have used this title because it was first coined in 1925 by Harper in his paper "Coleridge's Conversation Poems".¹³ One of the main features of these poems is their easy conversational tone, that of someone intimately

10. Unpublished letter.

11. Unpublished letter.

12. Unpublished letter.

13. Harper adopted the label from the subtitle of "The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem" and following the epigram quoted from Horace to "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement": "Sermoni propiora", that is, "More fitted to conversation or prose". As it is well-known, the so-called "conversation poems" are: "The Eolian Harp", "Frost at Midnight", "The Nightingale", "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison", "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement" and "Fears in Solitude". According to the marks done by Unamuno in *Coleridge's Poetical Works*, only "The Eolian Harp" seems not to have received special attention. Nevertheless, there is a poem by the Spanish author entitled "Caña Salvaje", written around March 1908, which bears clear resemblances with it, as has been pointed out by Perojo Arronte (2007).

talking to a close friend. G. M. Harper (1975: 189) observed that: "even when they are soliloquies the sociable man who wrote them could not even think without supposing a listener".

These poems are also characterised by an initial detailed description of a particular place, natural surrounding, and events that, at some specific time, provoke some extraordinary feelings. To Coleridge, these poems have a relevant *noetic* function; they are the means to obtain absolute knowledge of the spiritual power functioning inside every tangible element of the universe, as well as in his own inner self. Then, an eventual epiphanic moment of recognition of the harmonious universe, in which the communion of self and nature is achieved, is depicted at the core of the poems.

Although Coleridge's "meditative" poems have also been labelled "poems of nature", in them the poet does not remain at the sense level. The contemplation of the natural scenery is the departure point for higher meanings since natural phenomena are symbols of infinity. Coleridge frequently expressed this idea. For instance, in a well-known letter, Coleridge (1956: I, 349) declared:

I can at times feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, and for themselves – but more frequently all things appear little [...] My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great – something one and indivisible – and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty! – But in this faith all things counterfeit infinity!

Following this, Coleridge includes a passage from "This Lime-Tree Bower" as an explanatory instance. The recognition of the invisible spirit within tangible nature is also present in some other poems of those marked by Unamuno, as in "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni";

Oh dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee,
Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,
Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer
I worshipp'd the Invisible alone. (Coleridge 1994: 377)

Or in "Lines written in the Album at Elbingerode, in the Hartz Forest", also included under the title "Meditations", where Coleridge (315) writes: "That outward forms, the loftiest, still receive / Their finer influence from the Life within".

In addition, these poems show relevant theological implications as it is best seen in "Religious Musings" and "Fears in Solitude". The following illustrative passage belongs to the latter. After a strenuous ascent to the top of a hill, an

outburst of emotion takes place in front of the vision of higher religious meanings in the landscape:

Here he might lie on fern or withered heath,
While from the singing lark (that sings unseen
The minstrelsy that solitude loves best),
And from the sun, and from the breezy air,
Sweet influences trembled o'er his frame;
And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,
Made up a meditative joy, and found
Religious meanings in the forms of nature! (257)

Similarly, in "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", the most intense feelings are provoked by the recognition of God's omnipresence in the universe. Unamuno noted down nine marks next to the line in which the moment of highest emotion is expressed, the last one in the following passage:

It seem'd like Omnipresence! God, methought,
Had built him there a temple: the whole World
Seem'd imag'd in its vast circumference:
No wish profan'd my overwhelmed heart.
Blest hour! It was a luxury, – to be! (107; my italics)¹⁴

In this particular view of the organisation and functioning of the universe, the poet plays an important role to Coleridge, that of disclosing first, and further rendering in verse this sublime reality the powerful spiritual forces working within nature. Coleridge (265) provides for the first time some pieces of advice to write good poetry in "The Nightingale", also profusely annotated by Unamuno:

And many a poet echoes the conceit;
Poet who hath been building up the rhyme
When he had better far have stretched his limbs
Beside a brook of mossy forest-dell,
By sun or moon-light, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! So his fame
Should share in Nature's immortality,

14. Unamuno (1966: VI, 330) translated these lines as follows: "¡la omnipresencia en torno! ¡Dios parece / que aquí se ha alzado un templo; el mundo entero / de su vasta extensión en el contorno apréciame imagen en pintura! / Ningún deseo al corazón henchido / me profanaba impuro. ¡Hora bendita! / ¡era entonces un lujo la existencia!".

A venerable thing! And so his song
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
Be loved like Nature.

According to what he expresses in the poem, the task of the excellent poet is to extend both his body and mind to nature, and prepare to receive its influences. Each sensible element in the landscape must first be appreciated in itself, but soon the awareness of another spiritual dimension emerges. The poet bewails that real nature is usually misinterpreted and hence further misrepresented by those poets who create poems artificially, devoting all their potentialities to elaborate complex verses, instead of opening their minds to the essence of the natural world. No doubt, these ideas were found truly appealing by Miguel de Unamuno as is proved by the echo they find in his poems, as I aim at showing next.

3. MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO'S *POESÍAS*

"Aquí os entrego, a contratiempo acaso, / flores de otoño, cantos de secreto" (Unamuno 1966: VI, 168). These are the first lines of "¡Id con Dios!", first poem in *Poesías*. In them, the author overtly exposes his awareness of the surprise that his first collection of poems was going to provoke among contemporary literary men. The cause of the surprise was that this volume came to disclose a hidden facet of the forty-two year old Unamuno, that of a poet.

The plan of publishing a collection of poems came up some years earlier than its eventual publication; some of the poems belong to 1899. However, Unamuno composed more than half of the poems that make up the collection in 1906. In several unpublished letters dated that year, Unamuno (in García Blanco 1954: 74) affirms that he is totally devoted to poetry: "Ahora estoy en vena poética y no hago sino versos".¹⁵ Some months later, he (74) stated: "Ahora me ocupo en corregir y arreglar mis poesías. Más de la mitad son de este año".¹⁶ His intention was to publish the collection in May 1906 but he felt such an intense poetic creativity that he decided to extend his project from fifty poems to a hundred and, as a result, the publication was delayed until spring next year.

The fact that he wrote most of the poems in 1906 is of utmost importance for the present study since, as already stated, Unamuno acquired and read *Biographia Literaria* in the course of that year. Additionally, at that time he already had a

15. Unpublished letter to Federico de Onís, 24 April 1906.

16. Unpublished letter to Federico de Onís, 2 November 1906.

profound knowledge of Coleridge's poetry, especially of those poems labelled "meditative".

In *Poesías*, Unamuno gathers the poems under different headings.¹⁷ An initial superficial analysis reveals some traces of Coleridge's influence in this collection. In this respect, five of these sections require some attention. First, "Introducción", where Unamuno includes, among others, the poems "¡Id con Dios!", "Credo Poético" and "Denso, Denso", which serve as a sort of poetic manifesto. Besides, the poems in the section "Meditaciones" are especially interesting for the reasons already cited. In addition, those under the headings "Incidentes Afectivos" and "Incidentes Domésticos" reveal another feature that is easily comparable with Coleridge's poems: a common incident as the subject-matter of poetry, and as the departure point for higher meanings. And finally, in the section devoted to his translations of some of his favourite poems, "Traducciones", Unamuno included his translation of Coleridge's "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement".¹⁸

A first reading of the poems, particularly of those labelled "meditations" and "incidents", discloses some traces which easily remind us of Coleridge's early poems: the conversational tone, and the development of the poem departing from an incident or particular natural surrounding described in detail. These features have already been pointed out by some authors, even though the connection with Coleridge's influence has not been done. First, the conversational tone of Unamuno's poems illustrates, in González's words (2003: 27, 27n): "la conciencia precisa del interlocutor necesario", "en busca de un diálogo íntimo". In his poems, Unamuno frequently addresses an absent individual to whom he discloses his inner feelings.

Moreover, Francisco Yndurain (1974: 346) explains that Unamuno's lines were born out of a punctual or concrete experience. Unamuno accurately noted down the date of composition, together with the precise circumstances in which the inner voice has emerged: a journey, a visit, a domestic incident, etc. Therefore, Unamuno's poetry is a true diary.

But most important, they show a certain view of poetry which he had consciously received from English Romantic authors. In fact, Unamuno (in García

17. "1. Introducción, 2. Castilla, 3. Cataluña, 4. Vizcaya, 5. Cantos, 6. Salmos, 7. Brizadoras, 8. Meditaciones, 9. Narrativas, 10. Reflexiones, amonestaciones y votos, 11. Incidentes afectivos, 12. Incidentes domésticos, 13. Cosas de niños, 14. Capricho, 15. Sonetos, 16. Traducciones".

18. Unamuno translated the title as "Reflexiones al tener que dejar un lugar de retiro". He also included in this section his translations of two poems by Carducci: "Sobre el monte Mario" and "Miramar"; "La retama" by Leopardi; and "La vaca ciega" by Juan Maragall. Jordi Doce (2005: 139-144) gives an insightful analysis of Unamuno's translation of Coleridge's poem, and shows some of its weaknesses.

Blanco 1954: 75) confessed that in this collection of poems he purposely aimed at emulating English lyrics:

En breve pienso publicar un tomo de poesías líricas, especie de musings o meditaciones, a que no sé si me lleva mi familiaridad con la lírica inglesa o mi educación en mi nativo país vasco. Lo que sobre todo gusto es de la filosofía poética o la poesía filosófica, no de la simple mezcla de la poesía y filosofía, no de los versos conceptuales en que el esqueleto lógico asoma sus apófisis y costillas por entre la flaca carne poética, no, sino de aquellos otros en que poesía y filosofía se funden en uno como en compuesto químico. Yo no siento la filosofía sino poéticamente, ni la poesía sino filosóficamente. Y, ante todo y sobre todo, religiosamente.¹⁹

The Spanish author acknowledges that he intends his poems to be “musings” or “meditations” – the terms with which he often referred to the poems by Coleridge and Wordsworth –, in that they fuse philosophy and verse. The passage quoted above immediately leads us to a well known statement by Coleridge (1983: II, 25), which was marked in pencil by Unamuno in his copy of *Biographia Literaria*: “No man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher”.²⁰

Then, in the quotation above, Unamuno seems to be more concerned with the metaphysical skeleton and the religious significances of these poems rather than with their formal aspect. In fact, some years earlier, in 1899, he (in García Blanco 1954: 16) had stated: “mi poesía aporta algo a las letras españolas de hoy [...] en cuanto al fondo se parece a los musings ingleses, a la poesía meditativa inglesa, la de Wordsworth, Coleridge, Browning, etc.”.²¹

Poesías includes some poems which could be considered, as already noted, Unamuno’s poetic manifesto, they are “Credo poético” and “Denso, denso”. These two poems are significantly the second and third poems in his first collection, placed after the introductory “¡Id con Dios!”, which functions as *captatio benevolentiae*. Their position is by no means a trifling issue, because they are intended by Unamuno to express his views on the principles that rule the poetic act. The first overall principle is the union of feeling and thought in poetry:

Piensa el sentimiento, siente el pensamiento;
Que tus cantos tengan nidos en la tierra,

19. Unpublished letter to Zorilla de San Martín, 6 May 1906.

20. For the quotations taken from *Biographia Literaria* I have used the most authoritative edition, the 1983 edition in the Bollingen series of Princeton University Press.

21. Unpublished letter to Ruiz Contreras, 24 May 1899.

Y que cuando en vuelo a los cielos suban
Tras las nubes no se pierdan. [...]
Lo pensado es, no lo dudes, lo sentido. (Unamuno 1966: VI, 168-169)

Unamuno (VI, 169) repeats this idea in “Denso, denso:”

Mira, amigo, cuando libres
Al mundo tu pensamiento,
Cuida que sea ante todo
Denso, denso.

Y cuando sueltes la espita
Que cierra tu sentimiento,
Que en tus cantos éste mane
Denso, denso.

Hence, the Spanish author follows Coleridge in that he wholeheartedly defends the union of feeling and thought as the required ingredient for a good author; “¡Admirable pensador y sentidor, y, por consiguiente, admirable escritor Maquiavelo!” (IV, 1109), he exclaimed. Unamuno could have read this idea expressed in *Biographia Literaria*. There, Coleridge (1983: I, 25) pays tribute to Bowles and Cowper who, according to him, were: “the first who combined natural thoughts with natural diction; the first who reconciled the heart with the head”. He could also have come across it later in *Biographia*, where Coleridge (II, 144) claims that the second excellence of Wordsworth’s poetry is: “a correspondent weight and sanity of the Thoughts and Sentiments, – won, not from books; but – from the poet’s own meditate observation”. However, Unamuno did not necessarily have to read *Biographia Literaria* to find this idea since in “Frost at Midnight”, which he had previously perused, Coleridge (1994: 257) writes: “And he, with many feelings, many thoughts, / Made up a meditative joy, and found / Religious meanings in the forms of nature”.²²

The avoidance of excessive phraseology and rhetoric is strongly supported by the Spanish author. Then, the intended renewal of poetic language by means of the return to the language used by common men, so frequently preached by the English Lake poets,²³ is defended in “Credo Poético:”

22. See Vallins (2000) for a profound study on the intercommunion of thought and feeling in Coleridge’s poetics. This principle was an essential one in his literary thinking.

23. In the “Advertisement” to the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Coleridge (1994: 106) wrote: “The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure. Readers accustomed to the

No te cuides en exceso del ropaje,
De escultor y no de sastre es tu tarea,
No te olvides de que nunca más hermosa
Que desnuda está la idea.

No el que un alma encarna en carne, ten presente,
No el que forma da a la idea es el poeta,
Sino que es el que alma encuentra tras la carne,
Tras la forma encuentra idea. (Unamuno 1966: VI, 169)

Unamuno proposes that the chief task of the poet must be the pursuit of the ideal in the real. He is, therefore, subscribing to the transcendental noetic function of poetry so strongly defended by Coleridge. This transcendental search is not, however, a rejection or dismissal of the materiality of the external world that surrounds the poet. As to Coleridge, to Unamuno (VI, 169) the tangible world is the threshold that leads to the spiritual, and must not be totally rejected.

Que tus cantos sean cantos esculpidos,
Ancla en tierra mientras tanto que se elevan,
[...]
Sujetemos en verdades del espíritu
Las entrañas de las formas pasajeras,
Que la Idea reine en todo soberana.

In Unamuno's poems, as Coleridge had done in his, the Spanish author presents a double view of nature; physical but, at the same time, spiritual, though only for those privileged minds that can perceive it through contemplation. His poem "Por dentro", in the section "Meditaciones", depicts this twofold nature of the universe, and maintains the existence of another world inside the one we can see: "Calla, que hay otro mundo / Por dentro del que vemos" (VI, 241).

Similarly, the poem "Nubes de misterio", included in the section "Meditaciones", recognizes a certain living spiritual energy in nature which reminds us of the plastic intellectual breeze depicted in Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp": "protoplasma; / de etéreo concebir que se difunde / por los celestes ámbitos del alma" (I, 252). This is a highly interesting poem where Unamuno dramatises the poetic principle: "Piensa el sentimiento, siente el pensamiento". The thoughts and feelings provoked, in this order, by the view of an autumnal scenery in which the sunlight is reflected in a lake, whose waves are gently moved by the wind, leads again to a meditation on

gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness".

eternity revealed in nature. In a letter to Ruiz Contreras dated June 1899, Unamuno (in Ruiz Contreras 1943: 166) wrote on the composition of the poem:

Respiro a mis anchas cuando puedo volar por las regiones nebulosas del pensamiento protoplasmático, sin ideas ni conceptos definidos, por aquellas alturas en que se funden el sentimiento, la fantasía y la razón, en que se amalgama la Metafísica y la Poesía. Mi poema “Nubes de misterio” es una pintura de este estado.

As González (2003: 31) notes, the great amount of poems that Unamuno devotes to specific natural sceneries do not attempt at depicting this outer reality in itself. Rather, they are an excuse to describe an intimate meditation, a way of expressing his own concerns and personal preoccupations by making nature symbolic. In this, Unamuno’s poems clearly resemble Coleridge’s. González (30) describes the Spanish author’s poems as: “Búsqueda trascendente y que se quiere expresión de la unicidad inalienable del individuo y de su experiencia vital”. Poetry is then the mediator between the inner self, the external self and the transcendent. This is the ground on which Unamuno builds his theory of “contemplative” poetry.²⁴ He declared: “prefiero la poesía poética, la revolución del alma de las cosas. Para mí, la poesía es una traducción de la Naturaleza en espíritu” (Unamuno 1951: 37). If we compare this passage with the following statement by the mature Coleridge (1957-2002: III, 4397), the resemblances emerge clearly: “The artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols – the Naturgeist or spirit of nature”. This idea pervades his poems, and it is explicitly stated in “The Nightingale”, as we have previously seen. In “En Pagazarri”, a short essay first published in *Eco de Bilbao* in 1893, Unamuno (1966: I, 510) writes:

los paisajes, [...] mundo que se despierta y se revela al hombre mostrándole los tesoros escondidos de su espíritu. [...] En las obras del arte divino y puro, el reflejo de este mundo misterioso escondido en el alma del artista y hallado por él en ella con labor paciente, imagen más real del mundo real que la que nos da la conciencia ordinaria, nos revela el alma de las cosas de fuera.

24. Blanco Aguinaga (1975) was the first author to identify and exhaustively describe the “contemplative” aspect of Unamuno’s personality and art. Before him, scholarly attention had been chiefly focused on Unamuno’s religious “agony” (‘Unamuno agonista’). Blanco Aguinaga exposes the relevance of both aspects, which complement each other, in the author’s personality. Unamuno’s “contemplative” facet is best recognized in his poems and some short essays dealing with natural landscapes such as “En Pagazarri” (1893), “El silencio de la cima” (1911) or “Paisajes del alma” (1918), to mention just a few.

He feels an urgent need to enter the abstract reign of the spiritual, where the apprehension of universal harmony is obtained, but the departing point is only to be found if one is immersed in nature. The poem entitled "En una ciudad extranjera",²⁵ also under the section "Meditaciones" depicts this anxiety. The poem moves from the description of the paradoxically isolating crowd in the city²⁶ to the private shelter under a lime tree, where he recalls memories of his childhood in nature and, eventually, finds the unity of nature and man. The comparison with Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison" seems to me unavoidable. Coleridge (1994: 179) addresses the poem to his friend Charles Lamb, who feels confined to London and longs for nature:

My gentle-hearted Charles! For thou hast pined
And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity!

The poem depicts Charles and Mary Lamb's walk in the natural surroundings of Coleridge's cottage. The latter, who has suffered an accident that has prevented him from walking, remains secluded under the lime-tree, his "prison". Nonetheless, the initially restraining lime-tree eventually comes to be the passport to abstract musings and the apprehension of the spirit of Nature:

A delight
Comes sudden on my Heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower. (180)

In "Una ciudad extranjera", the lime-tree leads the speaker to a gentler environment; his mind turns back to his roots in nature:

Voy a sentarme aquí, bajo este tilo,
Que me recuerda al tilo de mi pueblo,
Aquel que alza su copa
Donde rodó mi cuna
Y es él cuna de pájaros
Que cantaron los juegos de mi infancia.

25. The city is Oporto. In the summer of 1906, Unamuno travelled to this Portuguese city where he composed the poem which he dated 1-2 July.

26. "Ve aquí que me hallo solo / dentro del mar humano, / mar de misterio" (Unamuno 1966: VI, 266).

Memorias su perfume
Me trae de aquellas gentes
Que son las mías,
Que conmigo se hicieron;
¡la patria resucita! (Unamuno 1966: VI, 269)

There, “mecido en el aroma de los tilos” (VI, 271), he overcomes the isolation of the cold and impersonal city, and dreams of human fraternity and universal harmony. He feels that nature joins us all: “Lo que nos une / son las yerbas, los árboles, los frutos / y son las bestias” (VI, 270).

“This Lime-Tree Bower” is not the only poem studied by Unamuno where Coleridge contrasts the barren intellectual state produced by being enclosed in a city with the intellectual outburst produced in nature. Also in “Frost at Midnight”, he compares himself, who “[...] was reared / in the great city, pent ‘mid cloisters dim, / and saw nought lovely but the sky and stars”, with his son, who thanks to his upbringing in nature will:

[...] see and hear
the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself. (Coleridge 1994: 242)

Coleridge’s “The Nightingale” also finds echo in *Poesías*. In “Canta la noche” Unamuno (1966: VI, 271) draws upon the motif of the nightingale’s birdsong to symbolise the language of nature:

Asomándose al cielo de la selva
Escuchan las estrellas en silencio,
Del ruiseñor el canto, voz alada
De las entrañas de la noche augusta.

As in Coleridge’s poem, in “Canta la noche” the song of the nightingale advances the recognition of nature’s harmony:

Sombra no se hacen entre sí los seres,
Ni luchan por la luz, todos se abrazan
En el regazo de la buena madre. (VI, 271)

A further trait Unamuno’s *Poesías* shares with Coleridge’s poems is the introduction of a simple incident as the departing point for abstract meditations,

as it has been already suggested. This characteristic is best seen in the poems under the titles "Incidentes afectivos" and "Incidentes domésticos".

In the former, Unamuno includes two poems that should be read together: "Veré por ti" and "Tu mano es mi destino". These two poems describe the process of self-recognition of a blind woman guided physically and spiritually by the speaker. Along the path towards the top of a hill, he guides her until the moment where she can open her eyes, see and obtain self-knowledge. This ascent to the summit of a mountain is frequently used by Coleridge as symbolic of the progressive apprehension of (self-) knowledge. Some examples are "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni", "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison", "Fears in Solitude", or "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", all of them annotated by Unamuno. In the latter, Coleridge (1994: 107) writes:

But the time, when first
From that low Dell, steep up the stony Mount
I climb'd with perilous toil and reach'd the top,
Oh! What a goodly scene!

Likewise, in Unamuno's poems the strenuous path towards the top of the hill parallels the progressive knowledge of the inner self. Yet, the recognition of the soul of nature is necessary as well: "nadie se conoce hasta que no le toca / la luz de un alma hermana que de lo eterno llega / y el fondo le ilumina" (Unamuno 1966: VI, 293). Eventually, at the summit of the mountain:

Y allí en la luz envuelta, se te abrirán los ojos,
Verás cómo esta senda tras de nosotros, lejos,
Se pierde en lontananza
Y en ella de esta vida los míseros despojos,
Y abrírsenos radiante del cielo a los reflejos
Lo que hoy es esperanza. (VI, 294)

The next poem in the section, entitled "Tu mano es mi destino", describes the same incident from the perspective of the lady who is guided until: "a su luz el sendero / se me abre a todos los lados" (VI, 295).

In the short article entitled "Paisaje Teresiano. El campo es una metáfora", Unamuno (I, 497) writes: "el universo visible es una metáfora del universo invisible; es una metáfora que conciencia de lo eterno, del ansia de inmortalidad". In addition, in the essay "Los naturales y los espirituales", he (V, 195) claims: "El poeta, si lo es de verdad, no da conceptos ni formas; se da a sí mismo". The poems "No busques la luz, mi corazón, sino agua", "Alborada espiritual" and "Nubes de misterio", all of them included in "Meditaciones", illustrate Unamuno's

view of nature as a metaphor of the inner self. In “Alborada espiritual”, for instance, the identification of nature and his soul is enacted. The fields illuminated by the moon are identified with his melancholic soul:

Su lumbre melancólica y lechosa
Bañaba a mi campiña
En lividez de resignada muerte;
Bajo ella parecía que mis campos,
Los campos de mi espíritu,
Con pesar aspiraban a la nada,
Temiéndola a la vez. (VI, 247)

The section “Incidentes domésticos”, also deserves some attention. The influence of Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” can be disclosed in two of the poems included in that section. Coleridge’s poem (1994: 240) starts as follows:

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owl’s cry
Came loud- and hark, again! Loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.

The first lines of Unamuno’s poem (1966: VI, 298) “I”²⁷ show striking resemblances with the lines above cited from “Frost at Midnight”:

Cuando he llegado de noche
Todo dormía en mi casa,
Todo en la paz del silencio
Recostado en la confianza.
Sólo se oía el respiro,
Respiro de grave calma,
De mis hijos que dormían
Sueño que la vida alarga.

Moreover, this initial image is used again in the next poem, “II”:

Tendido yo en la cama,
Como en la tumba,

27. The poems in the section “Incidentes domésticos” were not given titles by Unamuno. In his edition of Unamuno’s poems, Manuel García Blanco (1954) numbered them with roman figures.

A la espera del sueño;
Y junto a mí, en su cuna,
Yacía el niño. (VI, 299)

This incident provokes in Unamuno's poems the same intellectual response, which is different from the one that occurs in "Frost at Midnight". In "I" and "II", the image of the child in the cradle leads to a reflection on sleeping as anticipating the state of eternal calm in death: "vida pura que respira / debajo de lo que pasa" (VI, 298); "Sentí la eternidad ... luego la nada" (VI, 300). In death, Unamuno believes, time and its effects are defeated.²⁸ Once more, the poem moves from an initial "domestic" image, apparently unimportant, to a reflection on eternity.

Eternity is related to his anxiety towards death and its related religious concerns. We cannot forget that he understood poetry philosophically and religiously. Hence, in most of the poems here analysed Unamuno expresses how God's presence is disclosed in the universe, as Coleridge did in his "meditative poems". In addition, also following Coleridge, Unamuno compares human art with Divine art, his creation, the world that surrounds us, in "Incidentes Domésticos, IV". This short poem starts with the description of a child who is drawing a primitive man:

Y mientras animaba
Los rasgos del dibujo prehistórico
Cantaba bajo:
– "Soy de carne, soy de carne, no pintado,
soy de carne, soy de carne, verdadero". (VI, 302)

A sudden revelation is then produced by the view of the child drawing:

¡Maravilla del arte,
hacía hablar al tío
y proclamar su realidad viviente!
¿Hace acaso otra cosa
el Artista Supremo,
al recrearse, niño eterno, en su obra? (VI, 302)

Coleridge expressed this idea frequently, he (1957-2002: III, 4287) asserted once: "Nature is to a religious Observer the Art of God". Through his creation, God reveals himself. This belief is present, whether implicitly suggested or

28. In "Elegía eterna", Unamuno (1966: VI, 265) concludes: "Quiero dormir del tiempo / quiero por fin rendido / derretirme en lo eterno / [...] / donde el alma descansa / sumida al fin en baño de consuelo / donde Saturno muere; / donde es vencido el tiempo".

explicitly declared, in most of the poems by Coleridge that Unamuno annotated. It is especially noticeable in “Religious Musings”, where the world is said to reveal God’s creativity. In addition, and significantly, in “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement”, the omnipresence of God in nature is revealed and celebrated, and nature is said to be God’s creation, His temple.

Thus, Unamuno’s attentive reading of Coleridge’s poems provided him with motifs, images, narrative patterns, and a new view of poetry at large, which helped him construct his own poetics and found wide echo in his *Poesías*. In the essay “País, paisaje y paisanaje”, Unamuno (1966: I, 705) states: “Imaginar lo que vemos es arte, poesía”. In this, the Spanish author emulates the English Lake poets. His *Poesías* illustrate his belief in the hidden spirituality of reality, and in the value of meditative poetry as the conciliator between the external world and the inner self. Every single incident or natural scenery may reveal a higher reality, of one’s soul, of eternity and universal fraternity because, as Unamuno (I, 171) suggested, following the spirit of the “*lakistas*”, “es más hermoso lo que se adivina que lo que se ve”.

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