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SEPARATA

William Wordsworth's *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*: the poems about Basque mountaineers

Hartziz Monreal Zarraonandia

Sumario / Aurkibidea

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William Wordsworth's *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*: the poems about Basque mountaineers

William Wordsworthen *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*: euskal menditarrei
zuzenduriko poemak

Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty de William Wordsworth: los poemas a los montañeses
vascos

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ABSTRACT

At the time of the Peninsular War, William Wordsworth wrote three sonnets urging the Basques to react against the Napoleonic invasion of their land. This essay aims to interpret these intriguing poems, which are approached from a comparative perspective. Basque Studies and the multidisciplinary field of Mountain Studies, particularly research concerned with mountaineering and its literature, constitute the main areas of reference for the analysis. Contrasting Wordsworth's poetic view with our insight of the Basque cultural inheritance will display the extent and character of the Romantic transference of ideas as well as the interrelation of the historical events in a European framework.

Keywords: William Wordsworth; Comparative Literature; Basque Studies; Mountain Studies; Oak of Guernica.

LABURPENA

Napoleondar Gerren testuinguruan, William Wordsworthek hiru soneto zuzendu zizkien euskaldunei, inbasioaren aurka erreakziona zezaten. Artikulu honen helburua da poema horien irakurketa sakona egitea, perspektiba konparatibo batetik. Analisirako erreferentzia nagusiak dira Euskal Ikasketen eta Mendi Ikasketen diziplinarteko arloa, bereziki mendiaz eta mendizale nahiz menditarrez arduratzen den literatura ikasketen esparru akademikoa. Wordsworthen ikuspegi literarioa eta politikoa geure euskal kulturaren perspektibarekin alderatuz, Erromantizismo garaiko ideien transferentzia eta Europako testuinguruan gertakari historikoen interrelazioa agerian geratzen dira.

Gako hitzak: William Wordsworth; Literatura Konparatua; Euskal Ikasketak; Mendi Ikasketak; Gernikako arbola.

RESUMEN

En el contexto de las Guerras Napoleónicas, William Wordsworth compuso tres sonetos exhortando a los vascos a reaccionar contra la invasión. Este artículo pretende estudiar los poemas desde una perspectiva comparativa. Los Estudios Vascos y el campo de los Estudios de la Montaña, particularmente la especialidad dedicada a la literatura de la montaña, los montañeses y los montañeros, constituyen los principales ámbitos de referencia. La comparación de la visión poética y política de Wordsworth con nuestra perspectiva de la cultura vasca revela el carácter y la extensión de la transferencia de ideas románticas y la interrelación de los acontecimientos históricos en el escenario europeo.

Palabras clave: William Wordsworth; Literatura Comparada; Estudios Vascos; Estudios de la Montaña; árbol de Guernica.

1. INTRODUCTION. 2. THE BASQUES, AND MOUNTAINS. 3. WORDSWORTH, THE MOUNTAINEER. 4. WORDSWORTH'S POEMS ON BASQUE MOUNTAINEERS. 5. CONCLUSIONS. 6. REFERENCES.

1. INTRODUCTION

Trying to add anything to the general knowledge of a prolific writer of the magnitude of William Wordsworth is certainly a challenging venture. The poet has been notably well studied by researchers who share with us a fondness for mountaineering and its literature. These scholars have been particularly interested in his passage through the Alps and his mountaineering persona. The Victorian author Leslie Stephen is probably the forerunner in this peculiar academic field, with his comments on the image of the mountain in British Romantic poets. In an essay named «The Alps in Winter», Stephen (1877/1946, p. 213) summarised the Romantics' view within a single line, «Byron's exploitation of the scenery becomes a mere impertinence; Scott's simplicity would not have been exalted enough; Wordsworth would have seen this much of his own image; and Shelley, although he could have caught much of the finer sentiments, would have half spoiled it by some metaphysical rant».

Wordsworth has been considered a pioneer in the discovery of the mountains, a process analysed by remarkable academics such as Claire-Éliane Engel (1930/2009). She defended at the Sorbonne a doctoral thesis in the discipline of Comparative Literature in 1930, which was published that same year under the title *La littérature alpestre en France et en Angleterre au XVIIIe et au XIXe siècle*, a book which lays down the foundation of future investigations in the field of mountain literature. Engel claimed that the interest and a favourable sensibility towards mountains originated in the eighteenth century. Previous ignorance and repulsion were transformed into attraction after naturalists unravelled geologic evolution, philosophers explained the mechanisms of the sublime, and Romantics felt attracted by the delightful horrors of the heights as well

as by the republican liberty and the participatory democracy of the mountaineers. At the end of the 1950s, Columbia University professor Marjorie Hope Nicolson wrote an influential work titled *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959/1997), named thus after Ruskin's treatise. It is also necessary to mention a widely diffused and well-received work such as Cambridge professor Robert MacFarlane's *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* (2003), a suggesting book that consolidates the thesis that the sentiment of the mountain is mainly a modern perception induced culturally. There has been some discrepancy regarding this line of analysis. Significantly, in the book *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-first Century* professors Ireton and Schauman (2012, p. 1) endeavoured to challenge what they felt an, «oversimplified assumption that human interaction with mountains is a distinctly modern development, one that began with the empowerment of the individual, whether in the wake of Enlightenment rationalism or romantic subjectivity». Professor Gifford emphasised in his review of the book (2013) that the work might be seen as a German counterpart of other investigation undertakings such as the one led by French professor Françoise Besson. The proceedings of the conference held in 2007 at the University of Toulouse, *Mountains Figured and Disfigured in the English-Speaking World* (Besson, 2010), might seem to have somehow disregarded the German cultural perspective. In that sense, we feel that the not so peripheral cultural and literary tradition of the Basques might also contribute to broaden the perspective of the field.

Mountain literature studies have ordinarily neglected the ideological implications of the act of mountaineering itself, and the perceptible effect that the example of the political organization of past societies rooted in a mountainous landscape have had over the writers who visited or lived in them, as well as over the scholars who afterwards interpreted both these authors and their subjects. Historians seem to be less prone to disregard the arena of politics than literature researchers are. After First World War, the member of the Royal Geographic Society Douglas Freshfield (1920) saw in the Genevan Benedict de Saussure a third way between the revolutionaries led by Rousseau and the dominant classes of society, whereas we can only find some oblique allusions to past ideological confrontation in the work of Engel, even if she was a declared sympathizer of the extremely conservative Action Française in the bitter Interwar Period. It seems that academic debate is most often concentrated on aesthetic and philosophical matters, which are perhaps more pleasant to deal with; however, it is difficult to avoid historical events and geopolitical questions when analysing Wordsworth's sonnets on the Basques. We need to study the circumstances that lead to the situation unfolding in the poems, and the work of historians such as Schama (1996), Hansen (2013), or Ostolaza (2018) become very valuable references. It also seems indispensable to go back to the authors that had a hold on the poetic and political mind of Wordsworth. In this essay, we will not analyse exhaustively the amply studied influence that certain British authors exerted over him. We may highlight some of the academic works that have examined the impact of the following writers or thinkers: Burke, Cowper, and Thompson (Fulford, 1995, 1996), William Godwin (Roe, 1992), or John «Walking» Stewart (Grovier, 2005, 2007). We should not forget the latest contribution by Professor Simon Bainbridge (2020), a polyhedral analysis that provides a comprehensive picture

of mountaineering and British Romanticism. This essay may modestly complement the work of these clear-sighted scholars.

With respect to Wordsworth's sonnets on the Basque mountaineers, these lesser-known poems have not received proper critical consideration. They have not drawn the attention of English literature researchers, probably because the literary value of the «Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty» in their entirety is not significant with regard to other works of the writer. The unfamiliarity with the subject of the «Biscayan Poems» may also have been a deterrent for their study, but neither the field of Basque Studies has shown a special concern for a thorough analysis. First, we will examine the perception of the Basques of a writer who exerted an acknowledged influence on Wordsworth, the pioneering Pyrenean explorer Ramond de Carbonnières. The Alsatian contributed to recreate and spread the image of the Basques as mountaineers; nevertheless, the relationship of the Basques with their mountains was established many centuries earlier. Some of the sources dealing with the Basques that the explorer consulted, and other contemporary authors that we will present, must have had a weight directly or obliquely on Wordsworth. We will show how some of these references affect not only the poet's artwork but also his self-image, and they interplay with his biographic vicissitudes and changing political views. This approach will be the basis for the final analysis of the essay, in which attention will be focused on the main protagonist of the third of the poems, the Oak of Guernica, living symbol of the Basque mountaineers.

2. THE BASQUES, AND MOUNTAINS

We will study in the first place some of the authors that may have shaped Wordsworth's view on the Basques. Ramond de Carbonnières must have been an important source of inspiration. He found in the Pyrenees a replica of the Switzerland that so much attracted the Cumbrian poet, who used Ramond's translation of William Coxe's letters, *Sketches of the Natural, Civil and Political State of Switzerland* (1778), as a guide when he and his partner visited the country. Ramond became the main expert and publicist of the Pyrenees after the renowned Affair of the Diamond Necklace at the court of Louis XVI led to his exile, escorting cardinal Rohan into the South of France. Ramond explored the Pyrenees following the example of de Saussure in the Alps. Like the Genevan geologist, he was not merely interested in the geographic discovery of the chain, but also attracted by the history, language, customs and ways of life of the mountain people.

The geological enigmas of the central part of the cordillera required Ramond's field-work, but with regard to its inhabitants, although he had a direct acquaintance with the mountaineers of the Central Pyrenees, he seems to have studied the people closer to the seas through literature. In the first of his works on the Pyrenees, *Observations faites dans les Pyrénées, pour servir de suite à des observations sur les Alpes* (1789), written as an appendix of his earlier translation of Coxe's letters, his portrayal of the Basques looks book-based and idealised to some extent. Although we have not come across any direct evidence of Wordsworth's reading of the book, it is certainly a plausible hypothesis that he did. We should keep in mind the repercussion that the works

of the Alsatian explorer had at that time, and remember that the work was published before Wordsworth visited the Alps and stayed in France at the time of the Revolution. The view of the Basques in *Observations* owes much to the image of the Swiss mountaineer made popular by Haller and the German Romantics, to Ramond's own travels in Switzerland, and to his reading of Renaissance historians. His quote of Esteban de Garibay, the Basque chronicler of the Habsburg King of Spain Philip II, mentioned when he reviewed the history of the Counts of Armagnac, attests to his familiarity with the literature of that age. As Ramond had done before with the Swiss work of William Coxe¹, he compared Garibay to other peninsular genealogists, accusing all of them of copying each other, revealed contradictory facts, called attention to exaggerations, and even corrected possible translation errors (Ramond, 1789, pp. 146-150). However, his perception of the Basques as a mountaineer people is certainly influenced by the image created in the 16th century by Garibay and some of his kinsmen at the moment when the kingdom of Navarre was conquered by the Castilians².

Garibay wished for the maintenance of the special status enjoyed by the Basque territories in the orbit of Castile. His *Compendio historial* (1571/1628), which recorded the history of the kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula, aimed to reinforce both the prerogatives of the Basques and the legitimacy of the Habsburg monarchs in the Iberian

- 1 Ramond's translation (1782) has been repeatedly compared with the source text; for instance, Engel (1930/2009, pp. 147-149) pointed out that the translation, a «belle infidèle», retouched the original text liberally, specifying phrases he considered to be ill-defined, correcting errors, and finally summing up more than 200 pages. Schama (1996, p. 485) masterfully summarised Ramond's «parasitic» translating technique: «Sometimes, indeed, the interventions escape their grudging confinement as footnotes and climb mountainously up the paper, driving Coxe's wan generalizations right off the page». We can contribute little to the comparative literature in this field, but Ramond's (1782, p. vi) justification should be kept in mind: «Mr Coxe a voyagé en Anglois: la constitution civile et politique a surtout arrêté les regards; il a voyagé en homme riche: c'est parmi les hommes de son état qu'il a cherché des instructions; mais il ignorait la langue du Pays, et n'a pu observer que très-superficiellement le Paysan des Alps». There was a further anonymous translation into English of Ramond's version of the work, and both versions were certainly known to William Wordsworth. When the English poet visited the Alps, he kept in mind the itinerary suggested in Coxe-Ramond.
- 2 The Castilian Crown received help from within Navarre itself and from the other peninsular Basque territories that had fallen under the Spanish sphere either voluntarily or through conquest (a matter of discussion over the following centuries). Garibay's father had fought with the troops of the Habsburg emperor Charles V in Italy and participated in the Siege of Fuenterrabía in 1521 against the Gascons and the Navarrese. He befriended Ignatius of Loyola, whose military career ended that very same year, after he was injured fighting against a continental Navarrese expedition that tried to regain the city of Pamplona. While the Counter-Reformation had a champion in the founder of the Society of Jesus, the court of the Navarrese monarchs of the other side of the Pyrenees was famously part of the opposite religious movement. Queen Marguerite of Navarre's court became a celebrated haven for humanists and reformers; its glamour appealed to Shakespeare himself (1598/1963, p. 3), who wrote, «Navarre shall be the wonder of the World». Her daughter Jeanne d'Albret, mother of the first Bourbon king of France, Henry IV, after converting to Calvinism, commissioned the translation of the New Testament into Bearnese and Basque. Queen Margerite, a patron of the arts, is renowned for her fondness for the Pyrenean spas. In her work *Heptameron* (1559), some holidaymakers who had fled from summer storms in Caunterets gathered at an abbey where they decided to write stories and share them with the other guests. Another relative of the monarchs, Françoise de Foix Candale, was led by humanistic curiosity to the Pyrenean heights. He attempted to reach the top of the Pic du Midi d'Ossau (2,884 m) in 1552. The chronicle of the ascent was included in the 1904 compilation of mountaineering texts by the American reverend W. A. B. Coolidge, in the significant company of Renaissance Swiss writings that praised mountain landscape and the benefits of mountaineering in the far vicinity of the Habsburg Empire.

realm³. Florián de Ocampo, the former official chronicler of the emperor Charles V had linked Biblical genealogy with the history of Spain, bringing the offspring of Noah to Andalusia, in order to strengthen the antiquity of the kingdom and reinforce the nobleness of its royalty. Garibay moved the lineage of the last of the Pre-Flood patriarchs to the Basque Country. Noah's grandson, the patriarch Tubal, and his descendants had chosen Basque mountains because they did not wish to remain on the plains after the Flood⁴. As they had the consequences of the Lord's wrath fresh in their memory, should God decide to punish humanity once more, it would be better for them to stay close to the heights. The historian, who had in mind the contemporary colonial practices in the designation of places in America, made use of toponymy to prove early immigration: Armagnac in Gascony had a counterpart in Armenia, where Mount Ararat was; Ararat itself he linked with the Basque mountain Aralar; the Armenian river Araxes had an exact Basque analogue, and so forth. Among all the mountains of the world, the patriarch and his kindred chose the Basque ones because of their natural wealth: minerals, medicinal plants, fruit trees, forests, etc.⁵.

Mountains, being the most characteristic features of Basque geography, were depicted in Garibay's work in positive terms, in that they helped form group character, but there seems to be a sensibility towards the beauty of the hills, which cannot be accounted for only in terms of the writer's practical approach. Two mountains close to Garibay's birthplace were deemed so nice that they were like sisters born to embellish each other. There was also a narrow connection between mountains and the men of letters who lived in the sanctuary at the top. Mountains were cultivated realms, not only in an agricultural

3 The kingdom of Portugal was annexed to Spain in 1580 after the Battle of Alcantara. The dynastic union lasted sixty years, until Philip IV decided to lower the position of Portugal, downgrading the kingdom into a royal province, which triggered the uprising of the Portuguese nobility and high bourgeoisie. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Spanish Crown, engaged in the Thirty Years War, along with the revolt of the Catalans supported by the French, the Portuguese regained their independence. Spain tried to reestablish its dominance for the next 28 years, but finally had to desist. The support of England, after a strategic relationship that had started with the Treaty of Windsor (1386) was reinforced by the marriage of Charles II and Catherine of Braganza in 1662, must have been influential. As for the Spanish Crown, an anti-French alliance with Cromwell failed, and finally the French and the Spanish came to good terms with the marriage of the Infanta Maria Theresa and Louis XIV, and the signing of the Treaty of the Pyrenees. A marriage by proxy was held at Fuenterrabia, the Treaty was signed in a nearby island within the river Bidasoa, and the marriage finally took place at Saint-Jean-de-Luz in 1660, all in the Basque Country. The Treaty involved the French annexation of the northern territories of historical Catalonia, and the delimitation of the Lower and Upper Navarrese territories, splitting the territory between France and Spain. The frontiers were finally set in 1856.

4 The theory that identifies Tubal as the founder of Spain, started at least as early as the 13th century. The archbishop of Toledo, the Navarrese Rodrigo Ximénez de Rada, argued that Tubal and his offspring had settled in the Pyrenees. The theory prospered well into the 17th century; Pedro de Agramont, in his *Historia de Navarra* (1632) stated that nobility in Navarre was original, and not a concession, stemming from the mountains themselves, «The mountains of Navarre preserve the nobility, language, habits, and dress of the primitive inhabitants, the origins of the noble houses, and the castles of Spain» (apud Madariaga Orbea, 2006, p. 50).

5 This type of naive historiography should be contextualized in the frame of the Renaissance. We should bear in mind that after Annius of Viterbo's successful fabrications at the end of 15th century, the genealogies of the different European kingdoms started to date back to the Flood. For instance, in the 16th century, William Camden connected the Welsh with Gomer, eldest son of Japheth, and the Cimmerians. As late as 1676, Aylett Sammes traced an early immigration into Britain from Mount Ararat. A decade later, Thomas Burnet's *Telluris Theoria Sacra, or Sacred Theory of the Earth* suggested that the Earth was hollow with most of the water inside until Noah's flood, and the Bible was a trusted source for naturalists well into the 18th century (see MacFarlane, 2003).

sense but also as places of learning and worship⁶. The view from the top of a particular mountain which is slightly lower than the highest one in Britain was described in the 16th century almost with scientific interest and detail (de Garibay, 1571/1628, volume 1, book 4). Most important of all, mountains were certainly associated with the universal nobility and purity of blood attributed to the Basques, already established in the medieval charters of the different Basque territories. Mountains were seen as military strongholds and shelters from external influence and aggression, which made it possible to preserve the virtues of a primeval society: hospitality, patriarchal rule, pastoral life, etc. Something more than a literary conceit, universal nobility had an immediate impact on the life of many people. The masculine heads of a homestead could participate in decision-making at the various territorial councils.

We may conjecture that Ramond might also have made up his idea of the Basque people from a work published just four years before his *Observations*, which adapted the Renaissance classical view of the Basques to the character of the new revolutionary age. Although he did not explicitly mention the work, Ramond could have been acquainted with Barthélemy-Jean-Baptiste Sanadon's *Essai sur la noblesse des basques* (1785). Sanadon, a member of the Convention, was elected as the constitutional Catholic Bishop of the department of Basses-Pyrénées, created in 1790⁷. As in Ramond's case, his backing of moderate views led to his imprisonment under the Terror. Sanadon's history of the Basques is based on a certain Basque humanist tradition: an unpublished twelve volume historical account by Jean-Philippe de Béla⁸, which in turn follows the documents of a 17th century relative, Jacques de Béla⁹.

- 6 Garibay had to counteract centuries of a certain misrepresentation, coming mainly from exogenous sources that depicted the Basques as a barbarian people. The first written records from Roman and Greek geographers described the Basques in an unflattering way. Strabo, for example, represented the mountaineers as long-haired savages who danced promiscuously, lived in continuous warfare and carried out post-war human sacrifices; the mountains themselves, a hindrance for civilizing communication, were the cause for their savage nature. This image did not improve during the Middle Ages: the *Codex Calixtinus* includes a guide for the pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, which depicts the Basques half nude, wearing skirts like the Scottish, of coarse eating and drinking manners, being fond of zooerastia, speaking a language that resembled barking, and the like.
- 7 The centralizing stance of the revolutionaries involved the elimination of local institutions and the erasure of historical boundaries. Basque speaking territories that had particular councils merged into a new department called Basses-Pyrénées, which was included in the region of Aquitaine, and renamed Pyrénées Atlantiques from 1969. The viscountcies of Labourd and Soule –both were under Plantagenet suzerainty until the end of the Hundred Years' War, the city of Bayonne being an English stronghold as late as 1453–, and Lower Navarre were joined to the Bearn.
- 8 Jean-Philippe de Béla had a remarkable military career. In 1727, when he was 18, he joined the artillery in Grenoble. He is credited to have saved the life of the Polish king Stanisław Leszczyński in the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1735), and, in 1745, Louis XV entrusted him with the creation of a military company that would be mainly engaged in mountain warfare, the Royal Cantabres.
- 9 The late Renaissance Béla, after receiving a doctorate in Law at the University of Toulouse, had defended the Bearnese, who professed Calvinism like himself, in the aftermath of the Huguenot rebellions. Against the ensuing edicts, he also defended his majoritively Catholic Basque countrymen when there was an attempt to annex the territory of Soul to the Bearn, substantiating his defence on the premise that Catholics could not be tried by Calvinist courts. He wrote two lengthy texts, the *Tablètes du sieur de Béla* (1615), the first of which was a miscellaneous dictionary on Theology, Ethics, Medicine, and Science in general, defending humanistic values (freedom of conscience, tolerance, solidarity with the sufferance of heretics, rejection of torture and revenge, etc.), and the second dealt with the local law of the territory of Soul.

The main objective of Sanadon's essay was to denounce the attack on the Basque institutions and self-government that the Bourbon monarchies of both sides of the Pyrenees were perpetrating at the end of the 18th century¹⁰. The French Royal Exchequer was trying to extend taxes to lands traditionally free from feudal duties, and Sanadon argued that the allodality that excluded the Basques from taxation was based in the fact that they had not been conquered, they bore no mixture of exogenous blood, and had maintained their original language, councils and freedom. Keeping in mind that under original natural law there were no titles or ranks, the later relationship between nation and king depended on a voluntary contract. The monarch should not be a tyrant, but, rather, the person responsible for the maintenance and improvement of local rights and laws. Nothing ought to be decided without the consent of the people. Local privileges were just the continuity of the original laws granted by nature itself (Sanadon, 1785, pp. 250-251).

Ramond dedicated the last chapter of the second volume of *Observations* to the description of the mining resources and the inhabitants of the Pyrenees. At the beginning of the work he had already mentioned the Sieur de Candale's attempt to climb the Midi d'Ossau, establishing thus an illustrious precedent with regard to the exploration of the range, and underlining the Renaissance explorer's consanguinity with the Albret monarchy of Navarre. Henry IV is depicted as a man close to his country people, an image already given by Sanadon, who contrasted the first Bourbon king of France with the absolutist despotic descendants of the 18th century. The king was born among one of the friendliest people on Earth, the Bearnese, «où le gentilhomme et le paysan, l'un comme l'autre propriétaires, vivent, selon leur condition, du produit de leurs champs. Rien de si intéressant que ce peuple, libre par son caractère bien plus que par ses fors et privilèges» (Ramond, 1789, p. 11). The Pyrenean inhabitants, who had a culture of equality in the heights, provided free hospitality when Ramond explored the range, and treated him like a peer, a fellow mountaineer. Ramond had in mind, as a constant reference, the Swiss shepherds and Ossianic Scots. This pastoral image was derived from the Bible, the classical Golden Age, and from the historical republics of Greece. The Pyrenean institutions, originating from Pre-Roman Aquitanian Novempopulonia, or before, were a model for the prosperity of the Gauls, «la prospérité est en raison directe de l'équité du pacte social et de la simplicité des lois» (Ramond, 1789, p. 93). Ramond suggested that the Basques had maintained primordial perfection, goodness, and almost Pre-Adamite innocence, stemming from the simplicity of the man of Nature. This quality transcends to other spheres like language, as Basque was considered to be perfectly «simple and

10 The offensive against the sovereignty of the institutions of the peninsular Basque territories started with the coming of the first Bourbon monarch Phillip V, grandson of Louis XIV, despite having backed him in the War of Succession financially and with a military contingent. The first centralist measure was to transfer Customs from the limits of the Basque inland territories to the seaports. Under Charles III, the Biscayan filiation or naturalisation started to be determined in the Council of Castile, villages in Biscay were obliged to give account of their revenue and expenses to the Royal Exchequer, undermining the administrative autonomy of the local council, and the monarchy asserted its authority in other particularly sensitive issues. Gripped between Paris and Madrid, the Basques held an ambivalent stance in the wake of the conflicts between the Spanish enlightened absolutism and French Jacobinism.

radical», or the pure uncorrupted blood, which would be the spring for the purification of a new France (Ramond, 1789, p. 434).

It is indeed significant that Ramond finished his work putting forward that Basque society, closer to the primeval, was a source for the regeneration of France, a shining example that ought to be widely imitated. In line with the Basques' constitution, the humble would understand their importance and dignity; the great, in order to feel great, would see that they needed their people's suffrage and approval. The republic of the Gauls would be reborn with a consensual tender authority. Love of the fatherland and civil virtues would free French citizens from discord created by foreign barbarians.

3. WORDSWORTH, THE MOUNTAINEER

When Wordsworth made his long walking tour among the Alps in 1790, following Ramond's trail, he was almost answering a natural tendency. Both writers considered themselves to be mountaineers in both senses of the word: they thought of themselves as climbers, and at the same time, they felt themselves to be native to the mountains. All the more so in the case of Wordsworth, having been born and raised in mountainous Cumbria.

It is well-known that Wordsworth described his mountaineering experience in his earlier poetry in a manner that differs considerably from his later texts. The poem *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) started with a justification for an apparently purposeless summer vacationing in the Alps: the excursionist excused his taking delight in an idle venture, with the fact that the poet and his partner shared table with the poor. Crossing revolutionary France, at the doors of the mountainous country, they found the monastery of Chartreuse, whose severe frown once awed sober reason, now powerless. In the past, the reign of silence was only broken by the chanting of holy rites. Alpine scenery still had spiritual attributes, but religious imagery was not associated any longer with the tightening of chains, rather conveying a libertarian message: along the Cross planted by angels in the aerial rock, we would find blessed golden villages that would remind us of ancient blissful times, or torrents shooting from the clear-blue skies. Alpine people are described as a society that keeps its primeval state of grace. Like the patriarchs in their simple age, in April the shepherds moved their flocks up the mountain, leaping gracefully on the rocks from where honey seemed to flow, and at the season when the milk-thistle covered the land, herders milked their sheep. In this holy land of milk and honey, the patriarch catechised his children, told them of the human guilt that brought the anger of Nature, which avenged her God, but where uncorrupted hearts still received its joys.

Another source for his early representation of the Alpine people is the Helleno-Latin classical Golden Age. The Swiss were men who from ancient days had borne a sober Spartan life, slaves to none, keeping their original dignity and freedom, walking unrestrained, only led by their own laws, and careful to keep their rights. Swiss folk heroes fit into this imagery well. The aetiological myth of the Swiss Confederacy, the tale of the expert shooter and mountain climber William Tell, defier of Habsburg tyranny, his Marathonian cross-country flight, all connect Switzerland to ancient fabled lands, and to

Wordsworth's own native Cumbria, where he might find many similarities. All these facts brought to the poet's mind some writers who had influenced him, such as Robert Burns. Wordsworth acknowledged in a footnote that he was indebted to Ramond's observations to Coxe about some of the images of the high Alps, worlds where life, voice, and motion sleep. There, death-like stillness is torn asunder when the avalanche breaks loose like an avenging angel. The poem, which opened with the symbolism of water running from the mountains, shaking the woods with a loud voice, or sleeping in quiet lakes, ends with a fluvial metaphor. The poet demands that Pharaoh-like sceptred child of clay, who cries presumptuous, «Here the flood shall stay», ought either to redress his resistance to the flow of nature, or sink into biblical waters. Finally, after a night's rest, the British mountaineers set off once more, renewing their course, like pioneers printing the mountain dew with their footsteps, that is to say, writing with their feet on the Book of Nature.

The critics have often underlined that the disillusionment with the French revolutionaries may already be perceived in *Descriptive Sketches*. The disappointment with the advance of the Revolution towards totalitarianism, at the time of the Terror, was aggravated when Napoleon crowned himself Emperor. It was disheartening for Wordsworth to see that even Switzerland fell under the oppression of French troops, and was transformed into a centralized Helvetic Republic, a satellite state of the Empire. In *The Prelude* (1850), Wordsworth exculpated himself for his former revolutionary leanings. The poet presented himself as a moderate enthusiast, compelled to aid the just cause, whose actions did not differ greatly from the radical patriots who had carried forward the Glorious Revolution just a century before. Wordsworth seems to be suggesting his attachment was to the Girondists who had been guillotined for their opposition to the centralization of power in Paris. In the poem, he celebrated the golden hours of the 'federal day' when king Louis XVI swore fidelity to the new constitution.

The course of events took Wordsworth home. He found England favouring the French royalists, and a conflict of sensations led him into his well known intellectual and moral crisis. He suffered from nightmares and dreamed of being persecuted by the Terror, when in fact he was being followed by a government spy, as he was suspected of fraternising with the revolutionaries. When he returned to his native hills in 1799, he found solace in the familiar landscape of the Lake District, and its people, who still kept their bond with nature, so organically attached to the land that, in the 1810 introduction to Joseph Wilkinson's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, published anonymously, Wordsworth described the humble dwellings of his countrymen as natural outcroppings of the native rock, saying that they had grown rather than been erected. Wordsworth had in mind as a standard for comparison the landscapes of Switzerland, Scotland and Wales continually. In 1822 he published an extended version of the introduction, dissociated from Wilkinson's work, entitling it *A Description of the Scenery of the Lakes in the North of England. With Additions, and Illustrative Remarks upon the Scenery of the Alps*. The historical account of his native land begins with the aboriginal Celtic colonists, who had little connection with the mountains, and were replaced by Saxons and Danes. The real character of the land got underway with the Normans. Their feudal policy had no effect in the mountainous area, because the high-born and powerful felt little attraction for the land; therefore, the territory would be shaped as a free republic inside a mighty empire:

a perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturists, among whom the plough of each man was confined to the maintenance of his own family, or to the occasional accommodation of his neighbour. Two or three cows furnished each family with milk and cheese. The Chapel was the only edifice that presided over these dwellings, the supreme head of this pure Commonwealth; the members of which existed in the midst of a powerful empire, like an ideal society or an organized community whose constitution had been imposed and regulated by the mountains which protected it. Neither Knight nor Squire nor high-born Nobleman was here; but many of these humble sons of the hills had a consciousness that the land, which they walked over and tilled, had for more than five hundred years been possessed by men of their name and blood – and venerable was the transition when a curious traveller, descending from the heart of the mountains, had come to some ancient manorial residence in the more open part of the vales, which, with the rights attached to its proprietor, connected the almost visionary mountain Republic which he had been contemplating with the substantial frame of society as existing in the laws and constitution of a mighty empire (Wordsworth, 1822, pp. 64-65).

This picture of mutual helpfulness in a harsh environment, traditional sovereignty and mountain liberty, an image that he would probably have liked to extend to England as a whole, reminds us inevitably of Ramond's vision of Alpine and Pyrenean societies. When Napoleonic rule was being spread all over Europe, Wordsworth started contemplating England as the only sanctuary for real liberty. The poet's growing identification with the policies of his country has been perceived as an ideological shift towards conservatism. It is well known that some of his contemporaries were aware of his internal struggle and difficult quest for coherence. Significantly, when literary critic William Hazlitt (1818, p. 318) described wittily the poetry of the Lake School, which he considered not to be sacred from judgment¹¹, he felt obliged to «screen either its revolutionary or renegado extravagances».

The events of the Peninsular War (1807-1814) marked another turning point for Wordsworth's veering towards patriotic feeling. Of all the episodes of the Napoleonic Wars, the poet followed with special attention the development of the military conflict

11 Hazlitt (1818, p. 256) had earlier criticised Wordsworth's effort to «get [Robert Burns] out of the unhalloved clutches of Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own». Although Wordsworth acquainted Burns' influence and favoured his poetry, the English literary critic considered their poetry to be different or hostile in spirit. Hazlitt thought that Burns understood real countrymen, who exalt the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship, whereas Wordsworth made a separation austerly pronounced from «bed and board». It seems that Leslie Stephen drew part of his artillery against Ruskin from Hazlitt, who took Wordsworth as a prim poet, whose exclusivity distanced him from the popular, «It is because so few things give him pleasure, that he gives pleasure to so few people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!» (Hazlitt, 1818, p. 262). In Hazlitt's opinion, Burns had a closer intimacy with nature, and apprehended the old national character of Scottish peasantry. Oddly enough, after censuring the puritan asexuality of *Lyrical Ballads*, Hazlitt brought forward the examples of the gargantuan appetite of Archbishop Herring in the mountains of Wales, and the passage of *Don Quixote* where the noble and his squire, looking for Dulcinea, ask their way from a countryman who was driving his mules to plough while singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles. Hazlitt's exemplification might arise a question similar to Sancho's, «but what has Roncesvalles chase to do with what we have in hand?».

in the Iberian Peninsula, showing particular concern for the involvement of the British armed forces. Wordsworth was among those outraged by the lack of British commitment, which he denounced in his renowned pamphlet published in the conservative newspaper the *Courier*, where he expressed his indignation about the terms of the Portuguese convention¹². Significantly, in the pamphlet, published as a separate tract when British forces were already operating in Spanish territory, Wordsworth was particularly incensed because the pro-French agitators, spies, informers and other 'jackals' who had been made prisoners were returned without exchange. British troops had been used to protect Portuguese traitors from punishment by the laws of the country (Wordsworth, 1915, p. 88). He did not feel in any way identified with late French sympathisers. In his opinion, there had been a sharp contrast between previous British hostilities against liberty in the American war and early stages of the French Revolution, on the one hand, and the struggle for liberty against the Napoleonic army, on the other. The main point in Wordsworth's arguments in defence of British intervention was that the peninsular nations (Spain and Portugal), being sovereign, endowed jointly by nature with a particular personality in a diverse universal order in which each great country would hold a certain purpose, both deserved to be freed from the yoke of foreign invaders. Wordsworth, assuming the role of a statesman, proposed the sending of 200,000 troops to aid the people of the 'Pyrenean peninsula'.

4. WORDSWORTH'S POEMS ON BASQUE MOUNTAINEERS

When Wordsworth started to arrange his miscellaneous poems in separately titled sections in the work *Poems, in Two Volumes*, published in 1807, civil liberty and national independence were to be the unifying subject for the poems collected under the heading «Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty». Wordsworth published his next anthology in 1815, and annexed some later compositions to the liberty sonnets, three of them dedicated to the Basque people, oppressed by the Napoleonic army¹³. The poems dealing

12 We have used the 1915 version of the 1809 publication of the tract, named *Concerning the relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to each other, and to the common enemy, at this crisis: and specifically affected by the Convention of Cintra*. It was edited and introduced by British jurist and constitutional theorist A. V. Dicey, cousin of Leslie Stephen. A liberal unionist, one of his main concerns when publishing Wordsworth's work was to discern how the poet's view might affect local policies in the isles, particularly, the disruptive effect that the spirit of the so-called nationalities might have on the unity of a nation (cf. Wordsworth, 1915, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii).

13 The poems on the Basques might form a group by themselves. Stopford A. Brooke, royal chaplain of Queen Victoria, reprinted the liberty poems in 1897 in a separate book named *Poems Dedicated to National Liberty and Independence*, a special edition on behalf of the Greek struggle for the independence of Crete at the end of 19th century. Brooke considered that the poems concerning the Peninsular War were not especially remarkable, and the «Biscayan sonnets» –except for the one on the Oak of Guernica– below the poet's usual standard (1897, p. 25). Wordsworth did not modify his Basque poems in the subsequent editions of 1820, 1838, and 1840. It is significant that Brooke decided to reprint the poems taking into account a situation that has many similarities with the events addressed by Wordsworth at the time of the Convention of Cintra. Brooke censured the ambitious extensions of territory for the sake of commerce or national pride, and regretted seeing his country sitting hand in hand with despotic powers such as Russia, with the Germany of that time, with an imperial adventurer like Napoleon III or with the sultan of Turkey. He thought that the British, who were not of the family of the other powers, had sacrificed the principles of justice and freedom to expediency and for fear of war, and that they had insulted Crete by the gift of an autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty.

with the Biscayans¹⁴, composed in 1810, at the time when Wordsworth was observing the evolution of the Peninsular Wars closely, are the following: the unnamed 22nd sonnet (entitled in later editions «In Due Observance of an Ancient Rite»), «Feelings of a Noble Biscayan at one of these Funerals», and «The Oak of Guernica. Supposed Address of the Same» (1815, pp. 248-250).

All three poems are in some way elegiac. The first sonnet describes a Biscayan funeral rite for an innocent child, who was dressed in garlands of pure rose white and borne uncovered to the grave. The mother of the deceased child was comforted from the coral songs of her country folk, and by her Christian faith. She feels ambivalent sentiments of pity and joy. The second sonnet contrasts with the first: the ancient rite of the rude Biscayans is watched by a noble countryman, who seems to reject Christian resignation, and exhorts his people to meet their foes with firmer souls. He condemns the apathy and fear of the Biscayans against the not explicitly mentioned Napoleonic enemy. The venerable mountains «enclose» a people in despair, unable to rise up, who had better cover the infant's bier, because a slave father is unable to guide his child towards the light of heavenly innocence. Guilt and shame will extend to the blood of all their offspring. In the third poem, it is the Oak of Guernica that the poet imagined receiving a merciful stroke, if, in the future, its branches were to fail to give protection to the law-makers who gather under its shade and guard the ancient liberty of the land:

Oak of Guernica! Tree of holier power
 Than that which in Dodona did enshrine
 (So too fondly deemed) a voice divine
 Heard from the depths of its aerial bower,
 How can thou flourish at this blighting hour?
 What hope, what joy can sunshine bring to thee,
 Of the soft breezes from the Atlantic sea,
 The dews of morn, or April's tender shower?
 -Stroke merciful and welcome would that be
 Which would extend thy branches on the ground,
 If never more within their shady round
 Those lofty-minded Lawgivers shall meet,
 Peasant and Lord, in their appointed seat,
 Guardians of Biscay's ancient liberty.

We quote the sonnet in its entirety, because the focus of our analysis is on Wordsworth's view of the Biscayans. We believe that the subject of the poem, the Oak of Guernica, as a living symbol of a country, is particularly clarifying in order to grasp the image of the Basques, while it also reflects English people's traditional imagery of their own nation. Wordsworth must have seen his country mirrored in the fate of the Biscayans.

14 The demonym *Biscayan* may describe either the people of the territory of Biscay, or all the people of the Basque Country. In Cervantes' time, for instance, it comprised the generality of Basques.

The first question that comes to mind after examining the poems is the relationship apparently suggested between the death of a child and that of the tree. Conjoining the field expertise of a botanist and the living experience of a peasant, Wordsworth showed a close knowledge of the natural elements of his country. In his guide to the Lakes he took pains to discriminate the native trees from the exotic, and deemed England superior to the Alps in their variety. The local poet underscored their vital relevance for country people: holly trees fed the sheep, ash trees browsed the cattle, alder and willows provided fences for the mountain enclosures, etc. Similarly, while Wordsworth was in Germany, he wrote a poem on his love for nutting when he was a schoolchild. The young boy had fed from hazels and received spiritual nourishment from the woods.

Wordsworth was well acquainted with the pagan tree lore of his country and the popular symbolism of certain trees; especially, because he had the powerful reference of his literary heritage. For instance, following the traditional symbolism of ballads, in his poem «The Thorn», the tree was associated with illegitimate birth or child murder. In the first issue of *Romanticism*, professor Fulford made an insightful analysis of the symbolism of trees in Wordsworth's poem «Yew-Trees», which was completed in 1814 and significantly first published as a Poem of the Imagination in the same 1815 collection that contains the Biscayan sonnets. The relatively impersonal narrative voice, similar to the one used in the introduction to Wilkinson's *Select Views*, seems to confer an aura of inevitability upon the political views Wordsworth derived from the landscape, which in Fulford's account were formed in response to the Napoleonic war and to the writings of Burke and Cowper on the French Revolution. The voice of the narrator, a trustworthy local authority rooted in the landscape, like the trees themselves, relinquishing the narratorial recourse of the first person, aligned with the spirit of the place: a landscape of valour and independence, a defining characteristic of Englishness. The yew and its native landscape contributed to the heroic English character, furnishing the material for weapons against the Scots in medieval battles and against the French in the Hundred Years Wars (Fulford, 1995a, pp. 272-287). The martial character of the yew was absent in an earlier poem like «Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree which stands near the Lake of Esthwaite» published in *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798¹⁵.

Fulford's evocative essay shows how the poem is significantly linked to other texts. In the first place, in 1810 –the same year Wordsworth was engaged in the composition of «The Oak of Guernica»–, he seems to have been especially concerned with the matter of death. The yew tree, almost antedating biblical Flood, is linked to the Judeo-Christian tradition, associated to both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. In that sense, the allusions to the Miltonic narrative of authority and rebellion in

15 The yew tree has strong martial connotations in the Basque tradition. The Cantabrians are said to have poisoned themselves to death with the leaves of the tree, when they faced the prospect of being conquered by the Romans. Three yew-trees stand at the coat of arms of the territory of Guipuscoa, recalling the valour against Rome. The crest also included from the 16th century some cannons used against the Navarrese, but those were removed in 1979 as a gesture of good will toward the neighbouring people of Navarre.

Paradise Lost convey an ambivalent message. On the one hand, the unchanged tree is an example of rooted historical continuity, a living death, a guiding monument coeval with the English nation, symbol of national lineage. On the other hand, the allusions to Milton's poetic narrative connect the tree to the Satanic fallen hero, to the sinful and rebellious warrior-angel, and to the hellish dark fig-tree where fallen Adam and Eve found shelter.

Probably more opposed than complementary to the image of the hellish tree, the main personality of the yew tree is closer to the character of the traditional English oak, as an emblem of the particularity of the land, appropriate also for a country that aims to extend its power overseas. The oak was the very core of the Royal Navy, whose official march was «Heart of Oak» from 1760. The belligerent lyrics of the march emphasise not only the defensive might of a navy which would prevent the invasion and enslavement of Britannia, but also the offensive muscle to rule the seas and conquer. Fulford brings forth another important aspect of the symbolism of the oak. Wordsworth's tree follows the pattern of Burkeian ideology; as the English constitution, the tree, «epitomizes nature and Englishness as “a living thing / Produced too slowly ever to decay”. It is an organic tree of Englishness opposed to (and subduing) the unrooted Liberty tree of France and its Napoleonic scion» (Fulford, 1995a, p. 279). Wordsworth seems to have been deeply influenced by the conservative aesthetics of Burke and Uvedale Price, and by the materialization of Price's theories of the picturesque on the ground. In 1810, Wordsworth visited the baronet's estate, where the greater trees had an important role as visual evidence of the benefits of the protection provided by powerful landlords.

The image of the Basque oak in Wordsworth's poem corresponds to the symbolism of English trees to a large extent, and to the social structure favoured at the time of the composition of the sonnet. The closing stanzas of «The Oak of Guernica» depict a large tree under whose shade lofty minded lawgivers meet, a kind of outdoor parliament formed of peasants and their lord, each in their respective places, guarding the country's old liberty. The poem retains some uncertainty about the character of that liberty. It has an ambiguous stance to questions that were not of small importance to the Basques, and it is difficult to think that Wordsworth was totally unaware of the implications of certain words he used. The Basques almost always stressed that the authority of the lord was accepted as long as he swore the maintenance of the *fueros*, which in Wordsworth's introduction to the poem are translated as *privileges*. The word *privilege* may be understood in two senses, as in Spanish, which has been the main language of Law in the Basque Country until the 20th century: it may mean either the right of a particular or private place –in that case, the people of the land have the capacity to decide and define their own constitution, to rule themselves–, or it may be understood as a special favour granted by the ruler. In this essay we have given numerous instances of the immediate consequences of this terminological differentiation. Another term in the poem that gives rise to some doubts about the character of Biscayan liberty is the meaning of the adjective *appointed*, referred to the seat that lord and peasant occupy under the oak. It is unclear whether that position is fixed and predetermined, or whether it is something that can be arranged or decided upon. From the description

of Basque liberty as ancient, as something that has to be guarded, we might deduce that Wordsworth had the constitution of his own country in mind, which was based not only on the dominion of Common Law, established by custom, and the particular institutions of British constitutional monarchy (such as the two distinct houses of the parliament), but it also confirms that he favoured the introduction of slow changes, rather than abrupt revolutionary transformations.

There is a further issue that may display the poet's ideological stance at the time: the social stratification of Biscayan society which can be deduced from the sonnets, taking the three Biscayan poems as a whole. In the first piece, rude Biscayans go along with the family of a deceased child, showing sympathy through their company, and singing as a united chorus. Only the cross of Jesus, which goes before the collective body, seems to stand above, just like the chapel in Wordsworth's Cumbrian perfect Commonwealth. In the second piece, a noble Biscayan –who could as well have been a Biscayan noble– stands out, and censures his people for the lack of stamina to meet their foes. The reason for the child's death remains unclear. As for the third sonnet, peasants and their lord meet under the oak, in a very diffuse hierarchy. The social structure seems very plain: it is a society of peasants, with no villagers nor other prominent figures but the lord. It is also striking the importance Wordsworth concedes to religious rites and ceremonies, the relevance of the ancient funeral rite first, then the preliminary hearing of mass by the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella, and finally the religious significance of the ceremonial oath under the tree. The tree rises above them all, and embodies and stands for the whole society. As an intermediary between God and its people, a parallelism may be established between the cross of the first sonnet and the oak tree of the third. As a matter of fact, in many later Basque poems the tree shares the religious symbolic role of the cross¹⁶.

Another obvious indication of the theological qualities of the tree stems from the poet's comparison of the Oak of Guernica with its Greek counterpart in Dodona. It is difficult to imagine that the similarities between the old Greek tree cult and the Basque traditions might have gone unnoticed to any person well educated in the classics. Today there is a small neoclassical temple next to the Basque oak. The present platform where the authorities take their oaths, which replaced a similar 17th century construction, dates back to 1828. During the following decade, the Biscayans built their territorial Assembly Hall, also a neoclassical building, which substituted the chapel where

16 The coat of arms of Biscay holds an oak tree whose trunk is prolonged into a cross. Perhaps the most important poetic composition on the tree is the well-known song «Gernikako arbola» ('The Oak of Guernica'), by the late Romantic Basque bard Jose María Iparragirre. The song is the unofficial anthem of the Basques of all the territories, and the verse «Eman ta zabal zazu» ('give and spread [your acorn or fruit]') is the motto of the University of the Basque Country. Iparragirre composed the song at the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, after he had been expelled from France at the time of the events of the 1848 Revolution. He has been said to be heavily indebted to Alphonse Lamartine's poetry, but his «Oak of Guernica» holds also many resemblances to Wordsworth's Biscayan poems: the sacredness of the tree, the imagined felling of the tree and the related doom of the country, and it is indeed significant that Iparragirre wished that the tree will remain forever like an immaculate springtime flower.

assemblies were held previously¹⁷. Moreover, a few years later, in 1839, the same year in which the Spanish monarchs swore the oath to the charters for the last time, Christopher Wordsworth published his work *Greece*, which described his visits to valleys and ascents to symbolic mountains, and gave an account of his discovery, or at least identification, of the true site of the Dodonaean oracle. The young Wordsworth (1851, pp. 6-7), who would become the literary executor of his uncle's *Memoirs*, defined the poet of the time of composition of the sonnets as «a vigilant observer of public affairs, who did not sequester himself from the world, in order to forget its concerns, but to study them more profoundly [...] being thus commissioned, as a poet, to execute, as it were, a prophetic, and almost sacerdotal office, for the benefit of society». That was the frame of mind in the family. It would not be hard to imagine the poet considering himself endowed with the gift of divination of the pagan soothsayers, interpreter of God's will through the messages conveyed by natural elements, establishing meaningful links between events gone and coming, and reasoning the divine arrangement and present order of domestic and foreign matters. It must have necessarily been a bad omen for him to see the oak stand improperly upright and flourish when liberty and independence were at stake. From the distant apprehension towards a French invasion of Britain, he must have felt tempted to bestow a merciful stroke to the tree in order to warn the Biscayans. The analogous image of a fallen tree that lies flat on the earth after the impact of an admonishing thunderbolt has well-known precedents¹⁸.

The Dodona tree is almost a conventional motif in a successive line of national epic tales. It had a role in the Homeric saga and in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes, in whose poem the Argonauts' famous ship contained a bough of the tree of Dodona on the prow, which led them to the Golden Fleece. Apollonius was an important referent for Virgil's *Aeneid*, with which Wordsworth must have been acquainted, as he had translated the first books of the Roman heroic poem into English. He seems to have disliked Dryden's translation of Virgil's work. In the Autumn of 1805, after ascending Helvellyn, third-highest mountain in the Lake District and in England, escorted by the scientist and poet Humphry Davy and the writer Walter Scott, Wordsworth wrote a letter to his Scottish mountaineering companion about Dryden, whose work «the Wizard

17 It is not clear whether it is the tree or the chapel which led to the choice of the final site for the Assembly Hall (Monreal, 1974, p. 368). The religious temple was needed for the monarchs', lords' and their representatives' oath. Laws were promulgated and statements taken under divine scrutiny, and consequently it might be expected that justice would also be exerted from above.

18 A congregation of dirty ascetics took care of the Dodona tree, whose temple was on the foot of Mount Tomaros. They were the interpreters of the message of Zeus, who spoke through the leaves, and also through the waters that descended from the numerous springs and torrents on the mountain. Nicol, who studied the cult of the tree in depth, suggested that Dodona was a nyad, offering clear connections between oaks and shipbuilding. The priests seem to have had the privilege of felling the sacred oaks. Significantly, Nicol (1958, pp. 133-135) pointed out that, «a picture described by Philostratos represented the prophetic oak of Dodona near the temple, and lying under the axe of Helios, Pindar's woodcutter, with which he struck the tree until a voice from it ordered him to desist». The Greeks sought in Dodona solutions to national problems; for instance, when they needed to know to what gods or heroes they had to offer sacrifice in order to reach agreement among themselves. The Athenians departed on the devastating Sicilian expedition relying on the oracular powers of the tree (Nicol, 1958, p. 132).

of the North» was about to edit¹⁹. Wordsworth criticised the translation on the grounds that, «whenever Virgil can be fairly said to have his eye upon his object, Dryden always spoils the passage».

A significant part of the *Georgics* deals with trees, which are catalogued and described by agricultural use. However, from careful observation of the natural elements more profound lessons might be received, «Happy the man, who, studying Nature's laws, / Through known effects can trace the secret cause» (Dryden, 1697/1885, p. 83). We may conjecture that the *Eclogues* could have influenced Wordsworth's ideas about trees more deeply. The oak is a conveyor of omens in at least two of the pastorals: those dealing with the dispossession of Virgil's estate, after Augustus had rewarded the veteran troops with the lands of the people who had sided with his enemies. Virgil recovered his lands through the intercession of Maecenas, but most of his Etrurian neighbours did not share the same luck. In pastoral I, Meliboeus, as a representative of the dispossessed, complains that the loss had been foretold by the gods, and that he should have seen the disgrace coming, if he had not been blind to divine will, shown in the health of a certain oak and on the pattern of flight of the raven; in Dryden's translation, «Yon riven oak, the fairest of the green, / And the hoarse raven, on the blasted bough, / By cracking from the left, presaged the coming blow» (Dryden, 1697/1885, p. 14). Pastoral IX gives an account of another unfortunate event in Virgil's life. When the poet tried to recover his estate, the centurion to whom his lands had been awarded almost slew him. In the pastoral, Moeris, Virgil's bailiff, recalls how Phoebus himself had advised against seeking confrontation with the officer, «by the croak / of an old raven from a hollow oak» (Dryden, 1697/1885, p. 46). Both birds and oak trees disclose the favourable or unfavourable auspices from the gods. Unlike Virgil, his neighbours were condemned to relinquish the fruits of the plants they had sowed and cultivated, to say farewell to their pastures, to their paternal stock. Unable to see their goats climbing the cliffs in the future, they were punished to, «among the Britons be confin'd; / A race of men from all the world disjoin'd» (Dryden, 1697/1885).

We have saved it for the end Wordsworth's main source of inspiration to develop the Basque poems, Alexandre de Laborde's collection *Itinéraire descriptif de l'Espagne* (1809), which was translated into English in the same year it was published in French.

19 More than thirty years later, Wordsworth still maintained his bardic prophetic mood. When he recalled the ascent to Helvellyn in the poem «Musings near Aquapendente», he still remembered the vigour with which Scott had scrambled along a horn of the mountain. Although analysing the poem exhaustively would be beyond the scope of this article, meaningful parallelisms with the sonnets may be established. In the description of his voyage to Italy, the elderly Wordsworth associated the mountains of his native Lake District and the Apennines, «pride of two nations». The poet symbolically amalgamated mountains, trees, temples and men. From the brow of the hill, the poet noticed «skeleton arms», the trunk of the mountain, and 'primeval energies' setting them in action: the purifying dew, the storm that shook the cedar's top, «enabling the blind roots / Further to force their way, endowed its trunk / With magnitude and strength fit to uphold / The glorious temple». Wordsworth recalled immortal Horace and Virgil, Rome's legendary bards, Mount Calvary, epitaphs of virtuous citizens, and he linked England with a glorious Christian tradition, originating in the Holly Land and Rome. And, perhaps feeling that he might be identified with some Romish ultramontane Jesuitical priest, he distanced himself, «It is not my office to pass judgment on questions of theological detail; but my own repugnance to the spirit and system of Romanism has been so repeatedly and, I trust, feelingly expressed, that I shall not be suspected of a leaning that way» (Wordsworth, 1896, pp. 43-57).

Laborde was attached to Lucien Bonaparte's embassy in Madrid in 1800, and his immediate knowledge of the land inspired the work, which was completed with a team of writers and illustrators among whom Chateaubriand stands out. Wordsworth recognised that he had made use of Laborde, from which most of the introducing paragraph for «The Oak of Guernica» seems to be taken, almost word-by-word (de Laborde, 1809, p. 345). Laborde depicted the Biscayans within the conventional mountaineer frame of the Caledonians, which inevitably reminds us of the perfect Cumbrian society Wordsworth had described in his 1810 introduction to Wilkinson's *Select Views*: surrounded by beautiful and picturesque mountains, the Basques are conveyed as the Classical self-sufficient people, «We every where meet with detached houses, which yet appear to depend on a principal habitation, a picture of the first establishments of the family of the patriarchs, and which we may compare to that happy state of man, such as he is described in the golden age» (de Laborde, 1809, p. 359). Like the Swiss shepherds portrayed in Wordsworth's *Pedestrian Tour*, lightness of foot in the mountains is a distinctive Basque feature, «The modern Biscayans are represented as still preserving strongly marked traces of the character of their ancestors, but considerably softened by civilization. They are equally robust and strong, brave and active. Very light in running, they climb the mountains with the greatest facility» (de Laborde, 1809, p. 381).

Nevertheless, it is not movement and strength, but rather inability to take action, which the English poet highlights in the poems. Laborde (1809, pp. 382-383) regrets that the Basques do not seem to demonstrate much concern for anything that goes beyond their own land, and that their sight does not extend, «farther than the enclosure of their mountains», and Wordsworth (1815, p. 249) condemns the introspection, «this venerable mountains now enclose / a People sunk in apathy and fear». The English poet reprehends the self-absorbed Basque. He contrasts the dignity in the observance of ancient funeral rites of children, with the dishonour of living like slaves under a non-explicit French oppressor, which makes them undeserving of the noble act of carrying a child to the grave. Heavenly innocence was tarnished by guilt and shame. Fatalism and resignation, which might be viewed as comforting and positive in the first poem, are censured in the following verses.

Wordsworth follows Laborde's ethnographic explanations with a striking closeness, to the degree that the poem «In Due Observance» seems a versified variant of the *Itinéraire*:

Music, and the appearance of gaiety likewise accompany the funeral of children. When these die before the age of reason, they are carried uncovered to the burial place, dressed in white, with a crown of white roses on their heads; musicians go before, a young chorister carries the cross, and the followers tumultuously proclaim their joy at the happiness of innocence. The mother subdues her grief, resigning herself to heaven. Whatever pain a Biscayan suffers, his faith renders him patient, and he calmly says *Dios lo quiere*, it is God's will (de Laborde, 1809, p. 385).

From a Basque perspective, it is noticeable that Wordsworth did not include the Spanish colloquialism, nor anything of Laborde's following paragraph that deals with the Basque tongue and its antiquity in the land. There is nothing about the Basque language

or other particularities in the whole tract on the Convention of Cintra, written the same year. Those peculiarities were conveniently forgotten or silenced, as the main point in the argumentation of the political writing was that the «Pyrenean Peninsula» was a sovereign country, with a distinct personality, a mission in the world, and spoke one only language, a particular one. Paradoxically, in Wordsworth's introduction to the poem about the Oak of Guernica (1815, p. 250), he finished the opening paragraph remitting the reader to the poem itself, in order to understand the significance of the tree for the Basques, «What other interest belongs to it in the minds of this People». The poet spoke in place of the Basques.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have framed Wordsworth's poems about the Basques in the light of the historical events at the time of their composition, of the poet's life and political thought, and of the projection of his thinking on the image of this south-western European people. The Basque poems were written at a critical juncture of the poet's biographical and ideological evolution. Special attention has been paid to the literary tradition that deals with mountaineers, and we have endeavoured to show the likely influence of literary works prior to the 18th century, and of some contemporary texts from outside the British Isles. These possibly minor works have sometimes exerted an acknowledged bearing on the poet; at other times, similar views permeate the Romantic epoch, and it is difficult to ascertain a direct influence. In any case, the resonance of French and Swiss works on Wordsworth's poems on the Basques may contribute to establish new links in the analysis of his poetry. We think that contrasting the history and culture of the West of the Pyrenees to Wordsworth's view of his native country gives another evidence of the European dimension of British Romanticism. Wordsworth's view of the Basque society, rooted in their mountainous land, and his understanding of the symbolism of the tree of Guernica may be particularly interesting for Romanticism studies, but it also helps the Basques understand their own country.

This article has also endeavoured to demonstrate, through the evident connection that may be perceived in the source material that we have presented, that the theory that establishes the modernity of the discovery of mountains needs revision. Voices that lie outside the Anglo-French academic tradition deserve attention and recognition.

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