

William Blake's legacy in Miguel de Unamuno's mature poetry and poetics

Cristina FLORES MORENO

Universidad de la Rioja
cristina.flores@unirioja.es

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ABSTRACT

It is the main purpose of this article to dive into the nature and extent of William Blake's contribution to Miguel de Unamuno's late poetry and poetics. The initial study of Unamuno's pencilled marks on his own volumes of Blake's complete works, together with the analysis of the essays and poem he devoted to the British author are aimed at providing an accurate dating of Unamuno's reading of Blake's works, establishing thus the period of greatest influence, as well as casting some light as regards those aspects of Blake's thought that most appealed him. Finally, the echoes of Blake's concepts and images will be traced in Unamuno's mature works.

Keywords: William Blake, Miguel de Unamuno, Reception, Poetry, Poetics.

El legado de William Blake en la poética y poesía madura de Miguel de Unamuno

RESUMEN

El propósito principal de este artículo es definir el grado y naturaleza de la contribución de William Blake a la poesía y poética madura de Miguel de Unamuno. El estudio inicial de las marcas realizadas por Unamuno en sus propios volúmenes de las obras completas de Blake, junto con el análisis de los ensayos y el poema que dedicó al autor británico tienen como finalidad establecer el periodo de máxima influencia, así como identificar aquellos elementos del pensamiento de Blake que más le interesaron. Finalmente, se presentarán los ecos encontrados de conceptos e imágenes del poeta en las obras tardías de Unamuno.

Palabras clave: William Blake, Miguel de Unamuno, Recepción, Poesía, Poética.

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction 2. Unamuno on William Blake: Nature, Inspiration and Passion 3. Annotating Blake's Volume 4. Innocence and Experience in Unamuno's *Cancionero* 5. Eternity and Symbolic Synthesis 6. Mystic Visionaries.

1. INTRODUCTION

It has already been sufficiently argued that Miguel de Unamuno's (1864-1936) early reading of William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's meditative poems shaped his poetics and aided him in his resolved attempt to challenge the vacuous, yet

pompous, contemporary verse being produced in Spain at the turn of the century (Flores 2008, 2010a, 2010b, Perojo 2007). Unamuno is rightly considered the precursor of the distinctly new direction taken by Spanish poetry during the first decades of the twentieth century. He introduced a poetic tonality inspired by the Romantic spirit and attributed the change to a rebirth of Romanticism: “es el mismo Viejo romanticismo que renace”, he stated.¹ And he meant British rather than Spanish Romanticism. The lifelong attraction felt by Miguel de Unamuno for the British Romantic poets and their influential role played in the development of his poetry and poetics have been discussed by several authors who have recognised Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron as his major influences (Doce 2005, Earle 1960, García 1959, 1965). However, one poet has not received due attention in this debate: William Blake, whose influence in Unamuno has been understated. Two authors wrote in the 1960s and 1970s about his connection with the British poet. García Blanco (1965) noted briefly that, together with Juan Ramón Jiménez, Unamuno is the Spanish poet who was most attracted by Blake's personality and oeuvre. In addition, this author announced the presence of the visionary poet in some of Unamuno's essays and poems:

Con Juan Ramón Jiménez creo que es Unamuno el poeta español que más se ha interesado por la obra de Blake. Es muy posible que de este ingenio, tan sugerente y extraño, de este visionario ... le atrajese una doble cualidad: la de haber sido un encendido místico, y sus dotes de prodigioso dibujante, actividad que también cultivó el poeta español. Si a ello unimos su tragicismo apasionado, sus trágicas pasiones, no debe de extrañarnos que hacia 1921, comentase Unamuno algunas ficciones en prosa del poeta inglés, y que en los últimos años de su vida, cuando residía en Hendaya, se sintiese atraído por sus poemas. Tres de los que incorporó a su *Cancionero* tienen como lema algún verso de Blake. (García Blanco 1965:154-5)

These claims are basically true, nonetheless I deem it necessary to revisit and dig deeper into them, my main purpose being to identify and discuss this presence in the Spanish author's works so as to cast some light on the extent of Blake's contribution in the development of Unamuno's poetry and poetic thought. Mario J. Valdés (1972) was the first, and last, author to scrutinize one possible link between these two poets. He pointed out the similarities found between their uses of symbolic synthesis by comparing two of their works. Hence, in his article Valdés inquired into the correspondences between Blake's *Jerusalem* and Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno Martir* (1931) in order

¹ Henceforth I will quote from the following edition of Unamuno's works: Miguel de Unamuno, *Obras Completas*, (Madrid: Escelicer, 1969). The abbreviation *OC* followed by number of volume and pages will appear parenthetically in the text. This quote: *OC* III, 1297.

to demonstrate that William Blake (...) gave Unamuno a profound reaffirmation in the development of this symbolism – which can be traced to the last decade of the nineteenth century, *Paz en la guerra* (1887-1897) and *En torno al casticismo* (1895) – and that *Jerusalem* also gave Unamuno a model of symbolic synthesis. (Valdés 1972: 64-5)

He noticed Miguel de Unamuno's use of symbolic synthesis in his earliest works and, consequently, Valdés proposed that rather than being a primal influence, Blake's dialectic symbolism in *Jerusalem* provided Unamuno with a definite reinforcement of a pattern already established. I cannot but agree with the first part of his conclusion since, as the evidence below will show, it can be proved that Unamuno read Blake at a late stage of his career, more than two decades later than the publication of the works Valdés mentions. However, I believe Blake's contribution was not limited to the influence exerted by Unamuno's reading of *Jerusalem*. The analysis of Unamuno's personal marks on his own volumes of Blake's poetry, which are held in his private library in Salamanca, will demonstrate his profound attraction for other works such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, also built upon a pattern of symbolic synthesis. An initial study of Unamuno's references to Blake will allow a more accurate dating of interest and, together with the analysis of his pencilled notes on Blake's volumes, will help discern those aspects of the British author that he found more appealing. Therefore, the present study will not only deal with his dialectic thought and symbolism but it will extend to other topics which also constitute an important part of Blake's legacy to Unamuno's poetry and poetics.

2. UNAMUNO ON WILLIAM BLAKE: NATURE, INSPIRATION AND PASSION

As García (1959) rightly noted, Unamuno wrote three times in praise of William Blake, what demonstrates his admiration for the visionary poet. His first reference to Blake, to whom he addresses positively as “that exquisite poet” and then as “mystic visionary”, appeared in the short essay “El canto de la luz”, published in 1920.

En uno de los *Libros proféticos* de aquel exquisito poeta que fue el dibujante y místico visionario William Blake, en el libro *Milton* hay un pasaje sobre el canto matutino de las aves y especialmente la alondra (...) para la que hay en la poesía inglesa dos cantos inmortales, uno de Wordsworth y otro de Shelley, – ¡afortunado *skylark!*– (In García Blanco 1959: 159)

Unamuno was very well acquainted with the poems the three romantic poets devoted to the skylark. The proof is that he gave extra marks to Wordsworth's poem “To Skylark” on the content pages of his volume of Wordsworth's poetry: *Poetical Works of Wordsworth*. (London: Frederick Warne, 1875), which he held in his private library at Salamanca. Likewise, Shelley's “To a Skylark” is amply annotated in his

copy of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1880). These two poems share a Platonic view of poetic inspiration according to which the creative influxes of Nature enter the bird allowing it to perform gorgeous songs. Miguel de Unamuno stops to comment on Shelley's poem paying special attention to the source of creative inspiration:

¿Es también el rocío calentado por el sol naciente – prosigue – el que hace cantar a la alondra mañanera? ¿No es más bien que la luz canta en ella? (...) Shelley se embriagaba, como la alondra, con el canto luminoso y con la luz canora. Ni el sol ni la luna estuvieron para él callados nunca. (In García 1959: 159, my italics)

The text continues with Unamuno's translation into Spanish prose of an excerpt from *Milton*. In this passage Blake also describes the beautiful song of the lark provoked by divine inspiration: "su pequeña garganta trabaja con inspiración, cada pluma de la garganta y el pecho y las alas vibra con la afluencia divina; toda la Naturaleza la escucha silenciosa" (In García 1959: 159).² Some years later, in 1928, Unamuno wrote, in the style of the British poets, a poem devoted to the birdsong of the lark at dawn:

Déjame estar como la alondra al aire
y anclada en él,
bielando los albores del amanecer...

² The full text of Unamuno's translation:

El de Blake dice, vuelto a prosa española: '¡La alondra posada sobre su lecho terroso, en cuanto asoma la mañana escucha silenciosa, luego lanzándose al ondulante trigal dirige en voz alta el coro del día: zril, zril, zril!, subiendo en alas de la luz a la gran expansión, llegando al hermoso azul y haciendo brillar celestialmente a los cielos; su pequeña garganta trabaja con inspiración, cada pluma de la garganta y el pecho y las alas vibra con la afluencia divina; toda la Naturaleza la escucha silenciosa, y el terrible – *awful* – sol se para sobre la montaña mirando a la avecilla con ojos de blanda humildad y asombro, amor y terror. Enseguida, alto, desde sus verdes guaridas, todas las aves empiezan su canto: la malvis, el jilguero, la cardelina y el reyezuelo despiertan al sol de su dulce sueño en las montañas'. (In García Blanco 1959: 159)

The original text from *Milton*, Book the Second, lines 29- 41, reads as follows:

The Lark sitting upon his earthy bed: just as the morn
Appears; listens silent; the springing from the waving Corn-field! Loud
He leads the Choir of Day: trill, trill, trill, trill,
Mounting upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse:
Re-echoing against the lovely blue & shinning heavenly Shell:
His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather
On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine
All Nature listens silent to him & the awful Sun
Stands still upon the Mountain looking on this little Bird
With eyes of soft humility, & wonder & awe.
Then loud from their green covert all the Birds begin their Song
The Thrush, the Linnet & the Goldfinch, Robin & the Wren
Awake the Sun from his sweet reverie upon the Mountain. (Blake 1907: 235)

Descansa el nido al plomo de sus alas,
invisible cordel,
Llueve sobre el rastrojo la rociada
De su canción...

Le arropa cuando nace con sus rayos,
canta en la alondra el sol. (...) (OC VI, 1042, my italics)

The passage from Blake's *Milton* gave Unamuno additional support for a poetic theory that he had already adopted from his early readings of the Lake poets' "meditative poems" and that found numerous echoes in his poetry of youth, especially in *Poesías* (1907). He always found inspiration in nature, and devoted poems and essays such as, for instance, "Paisajes del Alma" (1918) to the creative influxes received during his walking incursions into natural landscapes, as well as during his ascent of some mountains as pictured in "En Pagazarri" (1893) or "El silencio de la cima" (1911). Given this, it is no wonder that Unamuno underlined the following notebook epigram in the 1914 edition of Blake's complete works: "Great things are done when Men & Mountains meet / This is not done by Jostling in the Street" (Blake 1977: 624). For him, as he once declared: "la poesía es una traducción de la Naturaleza en espíritu" (Unamuno 1951:37). The contemplative theory of poetry that Unamuno so frequently defended implied the poet's exposure to and eventual reception of the spiritual forces at work within Nature, as it happens to the skylark in Shelley's and Blake's poetic pieces. In 1928, Unamuno wrote the following poem which economically summarises his theory of inspiration:

Si has de sacar de tu seno
canto de respiración,
ha de ser después de lleno
silencio de inspiración. (OC VI, 1109)

Also in 1920, the Spanish author translated Blake again in an article he contributed to the journal *El Liberal*. In this case, his concern was quite different:

Blake, William Blake, aquel prodigioso dibujante y poeta místico de quien habréis oído – y si no, es lástima – Blake que unió el siglo XVIII al XIX – nació en 1757, murió en 1827, ¡setenta años de vida! ... ¡era un místico! – William Blake escribió entre otras cosas, esta página admirable: 'Los hombres son admitidos al cielo no porque hayan domado y gobernado sus pasiones o no tenido pasiones; sino porque hayan cultivado sus entendimientos. Los tesoros del cielo no son negaciones de pasión, sino realidades de inteligencia, de la que emanan las pasiones, indomadas en su eterna gloria. El tonto no entrará en el cielo por santo que sea. La santidad no es el precio de la entrada en los cielos. Los que son rechazados son aquellos que no teniendo pasiones propias, por no

tener inteligencia, han gastado sus vidas en domar y gobernar las de otras gentes por las varias artes de la pobreza y la crueldad de todas clases. (In Urrutia 2006: 261)³

Unamuno briefly comments on that excerpt by Blake, entitled “Why Men Enter Heaven”, where passion and intelligence are joined, and agrees with its author, to whom he further describes as “¡Admirable Blake!” He deems highly positive that the British poet had his own passions, great and tragic passions: “¡Pasiones propias! Las tuvo, y grandes y trágicas” (262). In complete agreement with Blake, Unamuno affirms: “Sí, los que carecen de inteligencia no tienen pasiones propias” (262). The Spanish author must have found this idea very interesting and supportive since from the very outset of his poetic career he defended that the union of strong feelings and thoughts was the bases of good poetry. Then, in his poem “Credo poético” (1907), Unamuno proposed as his main poetic motto the following: “Piensa el sentimiento, siente el pensamiento” (OC VI, 168). These feelings upon which Unamuno builds his literary production are predominantly of a tragic character. The Spanish author suffered a deep spiritual crisis in the 1890s which favoured the impact of the romantic poets and his diversion towards more idealist positions. He then started to explore the more tragic side of life which emerges as an endless human struggle between the aspiration to reach eternity and the inevitable end that awaits us humans: “Y la tragedia es perpetua lucha sin victoria ni esperanza de ella; es contradicción” (OC VII, 117). The author of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913), in this his agonist facet, could sense himself identified with Blake who suffered from similar “pasiones trágicas”.

Nine years passed before Unamuno's next reference to William Blake. In February 1929 the Spanish author wrote a short poem entitled “Al volver a escuchar a William Blake”, which was published in the collection entitled *Cancionero*:

Y yo que no sabía, Blake mío,
lo que me ibas diciendo ...
vidente de este cielo, pues no hay otro,
señor de tu sendero.

‘Goce mental, salud mental, amigos
Mentales’ – verdaderos –
‘mujer que quiero y que me quiere’ ‘llena

³ It was first published in *El Liberal*, Madrid, 15th December 1920. The central passage of the text Unamuno translates reads in Blake's original as follows:

The treasures of heaven are not negations of passion, but realities of intellect, from which the passions emanate, uncurbed in their eternal glory. (...) Those who are cast out are all those who, having no passions of their own, because no intellect, have spent their lives in curbing and governing other people's by the various arts of poverty and cruelty of all kinds. (Blake 1907: 252)

La inmensidad un solo pensamiento'
'el gozo empreña, los pesares paren'

Blake, mi compañero!
'Courage, my Lord, proceeds from selfdependence.'
William Blake, King Edward the Third. (OC VI, 1154)

The first stanza of the poem indicates that in the final years of the 1920s Unamuno went back to Blake's poetry acquiring then, through an attentive perusal, a new understanding of his verse. Once more, Unamuno lauds the British poet and expresses his feeling of special closeness to him, to whom he refers as "my Blake" and "my companion". Moreover, the second stanza reveals itself as a pastiche of different quotations from Blake's works that the poet translates into Spanish, and makes Unamuno's close knowledge and preference for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* evident:

I have Mental Joy & Mental Health
And Mental Friends & Mental wealth
Ive a Wife I love & that loves me
Ive all But Riches Bodily
(“I rose up at the dawn of day”, from *Notebook Epigrams and Satiric Verses*, lines 9-12)

One thought fills immensity
(*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Proverbs of Hell*, line 36)

Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth
(*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Proverbs of Hell*, line 29)

Finally, the last stanza is a direct quotation in English from the third scene of Blake's "King Edward the Third", to which Unamuno himself refers in the body of the poem's text. The topics dealt with in these passages which Unamuno borrows literally from Blake's works include the importance of the spiritual versus the material world, the contraries underlying existence, the importance of thoughts, immensity and, again, self-dependence. All these motifs are mirrored in Unamuno's poetics and poetry as we will see later.

3. ANNOTATING BLAKE'S VOLUMES

These articles and poem above show that, in the 1920s, Unamuno possessed a remarkable direct knowledge of Blake's works. This hypothesis is further reinforced if we look inside his private library at Salamanca where he kept two volumes of Blake's poetry: *Poems of William Blake* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1907) and *The Poetical Works of William Blake* (Oxford: OUP, 1914). The first was a Christmas gift from his friend Everett W. Olmsted as the dedication, which is dated

December 17 1907, says. Accordingly, Unamuno had the opportunity to read Blake as early as 1907-8 but no textual evidence has been found of this influence earlier than 1920. Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that Unamuno's first significant approach to Blake's poetry took place around the early 1920s.

Curiously enough, the second volume was also a present, and although the date of publication was 1914, it was presented to Unamuno in 1925, according to the dedication written down on the title page. Valdés (1970: 59) notes that this was one of the books Unamuno asked to be sent to Hendaye where he spent the majority of his political exile from Spain during the years from 1925 to 1930. The numerous echoes found in Unamuno's poetic production during the years 1928 and 1929, together with the composition of the poem devoted to Blake, reveal a second approach to the British poet during those years.

The Spanish author, who was a very attentive reader, used to record the impression produced by the volumes he read by marking on the content pages, annotating in the body of the text and cataloguing on the final blank page those titles and excerpts that he found fascinating. Both volumes of Blake's works reveal undisputable signs of Unamuno's interest as they are amply marked and annotated. Hence, from the strokes he places next to the titles of the poems on the content pages of both volumes, it is manifest that Unamuno read almost all the poems. However, some of them received extra marks or were indexed on the last blank page, signalling thus his preferences.

In the 1907 edition, the first one Unamuno owned, he gave some extra marks to some poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *Poetical Sketches* and *Ideas of Good and Evil*, as well as to *Milton* (from which he quotes in the first article previously cited) and the prose fragment "Learning without imagination", which received the greatest amount of marks. Apart from this, on the last blank page he penned down a series of page numbers where he had underlined specific passages which deal with a great diversity of topics: childhood and innocence, organic unity, dreams, vices, virtues and forgiveness, authority, self-dependence, freedom, and imagination. Two pieces are more heavily marked – underlined and set inside a square – : one of them is precisely the prose fragment commented by Unamuno in the second article from which I have quoted above, that is, "Why Men Enter Heaven"; and the other, entitled "To the Christian", belongs to *Prophetic Books*. In the latter, Blake defends the divine arts of imagination and proposes again a Platonic conceptualization of the universe:

I know of no other Christianity and no other gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the divine arts of imagination, – imagination, the real and eternal world of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our eternal or imaginative bodies when these vegetable, mortal bodies are no more. (Blake 1907: 226)

This passage is related to "Learning without imagination" where, following Emanuel Swedenborg, Blake describes as unworthy those who "shut the doors of mind and of thought by placing learning above inspiration". The Spanish author, who

once stated: “imaginar lo que vemos es arte, poesía” (OC I, 171), defended the faculty of the imagination as superior to the rest of the intellectual faculties in a series of short essays. The main source of Unamuno's view of imagination has been proved to be S. T. Coleridge. His concept of imagination was the aspect of Coleridge's poetics that most appealed to Unamuno, and to it he adhered after perusing *Biographia Literaria* in depth in 1906. Nonetheless, as is well known, in Blake's structuring of the Universe, imagination also holds a central position and Unamuno, a great advocate of this powerful faculty, must have also been interested in Blake's view of it. Therefore, the British poet contributed to reinforce Don Miguel's stout defence of the romantic imagination and, most importantly, provided the Spanish poet with new images to represent this superior faculty – related to childhood and innocence - as we will see below.

In the 1914 edition of Blake's *Poems* which, as already suggested, he probably read around the years 1928-9, Unamuno again marked almost all the poems. Given this, it can be said that he re-read most of them. However, it must be noted that in this second perusal he paid special attention to *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and to two sections dealing respectively with eternity and the union of opposites. To these two I will return later.

4. INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE IN UNAMUNO'S *CANCIONERO*

In the 1914 volume, Unamuno again highlights the poems already marked in the 1907 edition but adds some more. From *Innocence*, he now includes “Introduction”, repeats “Cradle Song”, “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Boy Found”; while from *Experience*, he repeats “The Clod and the Pebble” and “The Little Vagabond”, and signals some new ones, namely, “The Fly”, “The Tyger”, “The Angel”, “The Lily” and “The Garden of Love”. The reading of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* was a great contribution to the development of Unamuno's poetic view of childhood. Infancy receives a special treatment in his poetics and literary production. Blanco Aguinaga (1975: 125-143), in his seminal study on the contemplative Unamuno, discusses the importance of the notion of childhood in the development of the Spanish author's theory of contemplative poetry. He notes that for Unamuno, childhood is not just a lost reality; rather it is the pure view of the world acquired during one's infancy that always pervades the spirit and must be recalled as the object of poetry. Imízcoz Beunza (1996: 44-50) also devotes a section in her insightful work on Unamuno's poetics to highlight the centrality of the notion of infancy in his literary theory and notes that, to the Spanish author, “[e]l verdadero poeta es el que es niño de alma” (45).

The source of this idea is, notably, British Romanticism. Wordsworth's influence appeared early in Unamuno who, in 1885 already admitted his profound admiration for Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems. The Spanish poet highlighted “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” in his 1875 edition of Wordsworth's *Poetical Works*. Moreover, he adopted Wordsworth's sentence “the

child is the father of the man" included in the poem "My heart leaps up when I behold", which he translated into Spanish in 1928, as a summary of his thoughts regarding childhood, and used it as a recurrent motto.⁴ Notwithstanding this undoubted influence, it is also true that William Blake made a significant contribution to Unamuno's view of infancy. The year of publication of the translation of Wordsworth's poem coincides with his reading of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience. Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, where, as Paley has put it, childhood and adulthood represent two "phases in the spiritual development of man and, at the same time perennial ways of looking at the world" (Paley 1969:2). Unamuno translated this idea to his poetics and defended that: "El niño nace artista y suele dejar de serlo en cuanto se hace hombre. Y si no deja de serlo, es que sigue siendo un niño" (OC VIII, 114). Infancy is a spiritual state close to nature and eternity and constitutes the ability to find out something new and sublime in every single object and sense experience, the ability to disclose the essence of nature, the mystery of life: "Sólo conservando una niñez eterna en el lecho del alma (...) se alcanza la verdadera libertad y se puede mirar cara a cara el misterio de la vida" (OC VIII, 156). Unamuno follows Blake in that "innocence is free, as it needs no laws. It is happy, since it is unsophisticated. It enjoys the most spontaneous communion with nature, readily perceiving the divine in all things" (Damon 1924: 39). Childhood is the door to eternity, to the immutable hidden behind the material veil of reality: "Porque un poeta, ¿qué es sino un hombre que ve el mundo con corazón de niño y cuya mirada infantil, a fuerza de pureza, penetra a las entrañas de las cosas pasaderas y de las permanentes" (OC VIII, 963). Further, in a short article published in 1927, the Spanish author declared that he wrote to be read by children, "old children", that is, by those men who still possess an infant innocent soul that allows them to discover something new and extraordinary everyday, and lets them enter deep into their own souls.

Ya sé que no faltará algún lector a quien le parezca todo esto sobrado subjetivo y que hablo demasiado de mí mismo y de lo que me pasa en el fondo del alma; pero no me importa, porque escribo para los niños – para los niños grandes, se entiende – y el lector que así piense nada tiene de niño. Por lo cual le compadezco.

La niña que exclamó: '¡Oh, que gorrión tan gordo!' hizo un descubrimiento dentro de su propio espíritu. Para ella un paisaje es un estado de conciencia. Y para toda alma sanamente infantil un estado de conciencia es un paisaje. (...) Yo para lectores míos busco niños, es decir, hombres. Y no son hombres, esto es, niños, sino aquellos que cada día descubren algún gorrión gordo. (OC VIII, 676-7)

Both Blake and Unamuno represented the naivety and purity of view related to childhood in their poems. It is worth noting that there are some poems in *Cancionero*

⁴ See Flores (2010a: 265-269) for a more detailed analysis of the influence of William Wordsworth in Unamuno's view of childhood.

written in 1928-1929, and meaningfully coinciding with Unamuno's composition of "Al volver a escuchar a William Blake", that display images of children which clearly resemble those in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. This fact is easily noticed in poems number 170 and 502 since in them the innocent children, as the baby in "A Cradle Song", sleep happily and fearlessly, with a smile on their face:

(...) Sombra de nube candada
 por la brisa matinal,
 sobre sus labios corría
 una sonrisa fugaz.
 En qué soñaba la niña?
 su vida no era soñar; (...) (OC VI, 1003)

Unamuno underlines the following lines from "The Cradle Song": "When thy little heart doth wake, / Then the dreadful light shall break" (Blake 19097: 83). The children in *Cancionero* do not want to awaken from their sweet dreams, because as in Blake's "The Land of Dreams", "[t]he Land of Dreams is better far" (Blake 1977: 502).

En la ribera del lago
 la madre lava pañales;
 el niño duerme a la sombra,
 lecho de yerba, de un sauce.
 Y en la ribera del sueño
 del más allá; entre el follaje,
 juega el sol al escondite
 y manda una raza un ángel
 a que le rice los labios
 donde está brincando el aire.
 Guiña los ojos el niño
 por si el sol fuera su padre
 y aprieta el sueño en los párpados
 pues no quiere despertarse,
 que del lago en la ribera
 lava su madre pañales. (OC VI, 1057)

In addition, Unamuno writes a poem, which he ironically entitles "Originalidad" that presents obvious resemblances with "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found" from *Songs of Innocence*. The Spanish poet synthesises the essence of both poems into four lines in which a fragile little boy who is lost and freezing is eventually found and taken to a state of safety:

En cueros, muerto de frío
 al pobre niño encontré
 lo abrigué, vivió, no sé
 que hijo sea sino mío. (OC VI, 1166)

The poem represents the urgent need Unamuno feels to recover his childlike perception because, contrary to innocence, experience represses imagination and creativity, and the freshness of perspective is lost. Nonetheless, paradoxically, Blake's world of innocence is not free from the threats of experience as some poems belonging to *Songs of Innocence*, such as "The Little Black Boy" or "The Chimney Sweeper", show. Similarly, Unamuno wrote a short poem in 1928 where the suffering brought about by the harsh experience of severe illness transforms the infant's smile into a symbol of bitter acceptance:

(...) Sonrisa de niño enfermo,
 sonrisa de la verdad;
 está ya al cabo de todo,
 donde al cabo nada hay ya!
 Sonrisa de niño enfermo;
 maduró en la enfermedad;
 filosofía suprema;
 para qué desesperar? (OC VI, 1046)

According to Blake's doctrine of contraries, these two opposites interact freely to complement each other. Unamuno noticed this and, also coinciding in time with his second reading of Blake's works, he affirmed: "Nacer es una muerte" (OC VI, 1110); "Mi infancia mi primera ancianidad" (OC VI, 1147).

Experience implies, as depicted in Blake's "London", repression and suppression. While innocence is related to nature, experience is related to inhibiting social rules and institutions. The Church, in the form of priests dressed in black in "The Garden of Love", binds "with briars, ... joys and desires" (Blake 1977: 127), and in "The Little Vagabond" the "cold" institution is not able to understand the desires and needs of the little child (127). Both poems were underlined by Unamuno, who declared: "la estúpida urbanidad ha bloqueado el alma" (OC VIII, 116).

The effects of experience are also depicted in Blake's "The Gates of Paradise", from whose epilogue Unamuno underlined the following sentence: "every harlot was a virgin once" (Blake 1907: 102). Two poems written some days after the composition of "Al volver a escuchar a William Blake" are built upon this statement. They are poems number 698 and 699 in *Cancionero*, dated 14 February 1929. Both of them start with a quotation from Blake's works. The first one, describing a pious prostitute who holds a cross, starts with Blake's: "That pale religious, lechery seeking Virginity / May find it in a harlot" and includes the reference "William Blake, *América*" (OC VI, 1157); and the following one, which starts with "Golden Spain, burst the barriers of old home!", followed by "William Blake, *A song of Liberty*" (OC VI, 1157), deals with a prostitute who is going on religious pilgrimage to Rome. The synthesis of innocence and experience is enacted in the last two lines of Unamuno's poem: "romería y ramería / casan ya en común destino" (OC VI, 1157). This apparent paradox constitutes the crux of poem number 689, composed the same day as "Al volver a escuchar a William Blake", where Unamuno states: "virgen es toda madre; toda virgen, / si lo es, es madre" (OC VI, 1155).

5. ETERNITY AND SYMBOLIC SYNTHESIS

“Lo que no es eterno tampoco es real”
(Unamuno 2007: 82)

It has already been noted that there are two passages in Blake's volume of complete works dealing with the concepts of eternity and the reconciliation of opposites that also attracted Unamuno's interest. The first, entitled “Eternity” reads: “But he who kisses the Joy as it flies /Lives in Eternity's sunrise”. It is important to stress how greatly the possibility of apprehending the eternal through the temporal that the Romantics offered through their verses appealed to Unamuno. The British Romantic poets provided him with the possibility of breaking the limits of the tangible world in search of eternity through poetic and spiritual contemplation. Meaningfully, Unamuno marks Blake's “Auguries of Innocence”, where he read the following, widely-quoted, lines:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour. (Blake 1977: 506)

This is related to a passage from *Milton* that Unamuno highlighted in the 1907 volume:

Every time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period and value to six thousand years
(...)
every space smaller than a globule of man's blood opens
into eternity. (Blake 1907: 234)⁵

Unamuno's poem “Tiempo and espacio populares” presents close structural and thematic affinities with this passage.⁶ Furthermore, the Spanish author introduced

⁵ TIME

Every time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period and value to six thousand years.
For in this period the poet's work is done, and all the Great
Events of time start forth and are conceived in such a period,
within a moment: a pulsation of the artery.

SPACE

Every space larger than a red globule of man's blood
Is visionary, and is created by the hammer of Los.
And every space smaller than a globule of man's Blood opens
Into eternity, of which the vegetable earth is but a Shadow. (Blake 1907: 234)

⁶ TIEMPO?

similar statements in some of the poems composed in the year 1929 such as, for instance: “El infinito del punto, / la eternidad del momento” (*OC VI*, 1103); “en un quieto instante eterno / los siglos han de coger” (*OC VI*, 1004); “Todo un siglo creaste, poeta / en un instante de eternidad” (*OC VI*, 1163). Moreover, the Spanish author cited in the poem he dedicated to Blake the following apparent paradox by the British poet: “Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth”. Joy and sorrow, innocence and experience, eternity and moment are contraries that complement each other in Blake’s dialectical thought, which he best expressed in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* where the point is made that “without contraries is no progression”. Miguel de Unamuno was well aware of this aspect of Blake’s theoretical musings. In the 1914 edition of Blake’s works, Unamuno underlined the following: “this life’s (...) made up of contradiction”. Valdés (1972: 64) writes that: “Unamuno’s philosophical position – that contraries are metaphysical poles in a dialectic process which is existence itself– is substantially sympathetic to the Blakeian vision”. The Spanish author once affirmed: “El más genuino producto de la imaginación: la paradoja. (...) Los más grandes imaginativos son los que han sabido ver el fondo de la verdad que hay en las más opuestas ideas. (...) La riqueza imaginativa le lleva al hombre a contradecirse a los ojos de los pobres en imaginación” (*OC III*, 526). For Unamuno, the poetic act consists in the synthesis of opposites: the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal. In this respect, the Spanish poet acknowledged as early as in 1901 his indebtedness to Hegel: “I learned from Hegel to search for the ground where contraries are reconciled”.⁷ Around twenty years later, he found in Blake’s works the best poetic expression of this idea that inspired him to write a number of poems in *Cancionero*, as seen above, based upon the reconciliation of opposites and full of Blakeian images and symbols.

6. MYSTIC VISIONARIES

Unamuno referred to the British poet as “místico visionario” and “vidente”. Both poets, Unamuno surely realised, shared a strong belief in the transcendent mission of their poetic work. Imizcoz (1996: 56) explains that Unamuno believed in the

El tiempo para el pueblo es el que se hace
 O tal vez el que pasa
 ¡Si pudiera dormirlo en donde nace
 Y en propia casa!
 Espacio?
 No lo conoce el pueblo, mas despacio,
 Que las penas se enredan,
 Que es como van las cosas de Palacio ...
 No van ... se quedan! (*OC VIII*, 989)

⁷ Letter to Federico Urales (1901), giving answers to the questions: “qué autores nacionales y extranjeros han influido en su obra”, and “a qué atribuye esa influencia”. Quoted in Abellán, J. L (1998).

visionary nature of the poet; he identified poets as prophets who are allowed a view of the entrails of reality, to see the permanent in the transitory. In his article, dated 1933 and entitled "Yo individuo, poeta y mito", Unamuno defines the poet as follows: "El que revela lo oculto en las honduras presentes" (Quoted in Imízcoz 1996: 56). In addition, in the prologue to *Cancionero*, where more echoes are found of Blake's poetry, the Spanish author announced that his poems were to be read as revelations. However, Unamuno coincides with Blake in the difficulty of their mission, and doubly underlines the following lines from "Ideas of Good and Evil": "He's a blockhead who wants a proof of what he can't perceive, / And he's a fool who tries to make such a blockhead believe" (Blake 1907: 142).

The author of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* was a late acquaintance if compared with Unamuno's early reading of S. T. Coleridge and W. Wordsworth. The visionary poet came to sustain and reinforce some ideas that were already in his mind, and that were initially introduced through other vehicles. It seems that, even though he read Blake earlier, it was not until 1927-1929 that Unamuno thought to have reached a proper understanding of the British poet. The impact of Blake's poetry in Unamuno is disclosed in the concepts and images that the Spanish author translates into his own works, as has been seen above. Certainly, it was a slow process of acquaintance, but nonetheless, Miguel de Unamuno promoted through his works, most especially *Cancionero* and some short essays, the permanence and circulation of Blake, allowing his legacy to live on in the first decades of the 20th-century Spain.

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