

**‘Over my boundless waste of soul’:  
Echoes of the Natural World, or a Feminine *Naturphilosophie*, in the Poetry of Emily  
Brontë and Mathilde Blind(1)**

By **Paula Alexandra Guimarães**, University of Minho (Braga), Portugal

*Tall ferns, washed down in sunlight,  
Beckoned with fingers green;  
Tall flowers nodded strangely,  
With white and glimm’ring sheen;*

*They sighed, they sang so softly,  
They stretched their arms to me;  
[...]  
(M. Blind “Entangled”)*

<1>Victorian women poets were confronted with the need to reassess the Romantic concepts on Man and Nature and to ‘re-present’ the natural world as also a feminine realm or domain. Poets such as Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind – themselves professing a sort of nature religion – have not only questioned the notion of Creation as a male myth but also challenged the prevailing anthropocentric view of life on Earth. Brontë and Blind have not only generally reconsidered the place of feminine consciousness in the ecological web but also responded to their bioregional sensibilities, namely by expressing a strong sense of place/space. In their respective and diverse attempts to ‘translate’ Nature into Language, the two women poets seem both to cooperate with the natural realm by ‘writing with’ it and to diverge from it, thus subverting the traditional conceptions. They see themselves as fundamentally divided between creative imagination and natural reality, dramatically confronting Nature and Text.

<2>These poets’ lines abound with vivid, deliberately placed depictions of the environment: weather, landscape and the seasons, communicating an excess of vital stimulation. But besides exalting community with a living, breathing Nature, Brontë and Blind expound an existential philosophy that, in spite of its implicit pantheism, is concerned with the ultimate destination of the human soul. In their often sudden and fleeting visionary flights, they see themselves as self-taught philosophers or prophets, imbued with Shelleyan ardour, whose audacity signals their refusal to subscribe to a particular religious or political system. Both Brontë and Blind denounce

human competition and violence and both seek ways of coming to terms with human redemption through love and the imagination. By analysing the constraints that are general to humanity, their respective poems assume a sort of universal relevance and appeal.

## 1. Nature as Feminine and Goddess Worship

<3>Throughout our history, nature has been portrayed as feminine and women are often thought as being closer to nature than men. Western patriarchal thinking is based on a set of dualistic opposites: Mind is split from body, spirit from matter, male from female, culture from nature. One concept in each pair is deemed superior to the other and this 'other' is often demonised and discriminated against. Some theorists, namely eco-feminist Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, have suggested that this degrading of the 'other' is driven by fear of nature and mortality. "For what is death", Ariel Salleh asks, "but the other end of lived time where humanity recedes ambiguously back to nature? Mothers, wives and daughters know this well" (242). Eco-feminists also argue that though there is a deep connection between women and nature, it is often socially created.(2) They consider that most religions are patriarchal and mainstream religions are thought to portray God as a transcendent being, somehow beyond this world. Instead, goddess spirituality typically believes in an immanent Deity.

<4>According to Riane Eisler, prehistoric societies – worshipping the Goddess of nature and spirituality represented in 'Venus figurines' – had "what we today call an ecological consciousness: the awareness that the Earth must be treated with reverence and respect" (23). In the earlier societies, the world was viewed as the great Mother, a living entity who in both her temporal and spiritual manifestations creates and nurtures all forms of life (26).

[...] And it is Gaia, the primeval prophetess of the shrine of Delphi, who in Greek mythology is said to have given the golden apple tree (the tree of knowledge) to her daughter, the Goddess Hera. Moreover, the Greek Fates, the enforcers of laws, are female. And so also are the Greek Muses, who inspire all creative endeavor (Eisler 31).

In such societies, Eisler concludes, there is no need for a false dichotomy between a masculine spirituality and a feminine nature (32). In ceremonies devoted to the Goddesses Demeter and Persephone, Mara Keller explains, ancient Greek peoples expressed their joy in the beauty and abundance of nature and in the rebirth of the human spirit, even through suffering and death (41). Keller stresses though that "The Mother Earth religion did not glorify the sacrifice of her children, but celebrated their birth, enjoyment of life, and loving return to her in death" (41).

<5>For Christine Downing, the Great Mother, like any primordial archetype, provokes profound ambivalence: "her cruelty is no less salient than her benevolence. The nurturing goddess is also the devouring one" (12). The fertility goddesses are thus always also goddesses of the underworld, the realm of death. "To die is to return to the receptive, generative mother. The earth is womb" (13). But the underworld, Downing adds, is also the realm of the soul, of the unconscious, where death and new vision are closed intertwined and where the goddess is the giver of dreams and omens (13). In fact, in the earliest traditions she is both feminine and masculine, representing an androgynous unity of opposites. Although worship of the goddess

persisted among the early Hebrews, in Christianity it was officially suppressed, leaving only the residual devotion to female saints. “Once upon a time”, Downing summarises, “the goddess was thus the most potent exemplification of divine power” (13).

## 2. Emily Brontë, Gondal and the Mother-Earth archetype

<6>Emily Brontë (1818-1848) has become mythologised both as an individual and as one of the Brontë sisters. She has been cast as Absolute Individual, as Tormented Genius, and as Free Spirit Communing with Nature. In fact, nature with its perennial process of life and death reflects the poet’s major internal conflicts and has a universal appeal because it is elemental and timeless. The more concrete details are evocative of the Yorkshire scene, “essences of the spirit of place” (Stanford 31), in particular of the West Riding moors. And it is when Emily recalls the landscape of Home that her lyricism most soars:

High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending  
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars  
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending  
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending  
Man’s spirit away from its drear dungeon sending  
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars  
(*The Poems* 1-6)

For Christine Gallant, the private myth of Gondal underlying her poetry, arbitrarily created in childhood and stubbornly maintained through adulthood, is “solidly within the traditions of the great chthonic world religions: hers is a matriarchal mythology” (80). If Emily’s personal poems “search for meaning in the individual self”, the Gondal compositions “seek the archetypal experience of the Feminine which, as C.G. Jung suggests, is associated with all that is emotional, maternal, and chthonic” (Gallant 81). Gallant suggests that Emily resisted the experience of the contemporary womanhood which others around her were obliged to undergo. The poet rambled around the moors with her huge mastiff when she wished and stayed up at night to write poetry (82). For Gallant, Gondal is “a mythic world emphatically excluding the real world known then by women” (83). The speaker is usually either a woman or a lover remembering a woman at some key dramatic point in the story. In the face of external dissociation (separation from Nature through imprisonment, betrayal, treason or death) and inevitable extinction, the speaker tries ultimately to preserve the feeling or his/her capacity to feel (Gallant 83). Most of the poems’ images from nature show this effusion: “evening sheds its silent dew”, “winds sigh as you are sighing” and “Winter pours its grief in snow” (*The Poems*).

<7>The first poem preserved by the teenaged Emily is the descriptive sketch of an uninhabited expanse of landscape seen from afar and with cosmic dimensions, the preamble to the arrival of man(*woman*)kind to her poetic universe:

Cold, clear, and blue, the morning heaven  
Expands its arch on high;  
Cold, clear, and blue, Lake Werna’s water

Reflects that winter's sky.  
The moon has set, but Venus shines  
A silent, silvery star.  
(*The Poems* 1-6)

For Lawrence Lipking, this poem represents “the birth of an identity”; it “functions as a ‘birth stanza’ for A.G.A. and claims ‘her birthright as a daughter of Venus’” (98). The poet describes the cold English climate with Sapphic clarity and imagines the world dominated by an ascendant female star; no male progenitor of Augusta is mentioned (Lipking 98-99). In fact, Venus presides over all great heroines of poetry, including Sappho, and the excerpt resembles a literal translation from the Greek (99).

<8>According to Jung, the Great Mother archetype is characterised by “orgiastic emotionality” and “Stygian depths” (59) and, for Gallant, Gondal’s women act very much like her, whose realm is the underworld and whose subservient male consorts always head for death after the consummation (84). She states that “Queen Augusta’s love usually has distinctly chthonic overtones”, namely because “her lovers frequently call on her from the grave” (84). Significantly, Gallant sees in Emily’s poem “Cold in the earth” Persephone’s epithalamion to Pluto after their separation (84).

<9>Nature too seems often almost a separate character, usually with a maternal role: “it is the maw which devours the dead and the womb which produces life [...] dissolution and death are the grounds for life” (Gallant 85). Ultimately, Lady Augusta escapes to the underworld herself to become “the Dweller in the land of Death” and one with Nature in the end. She is now imaged as the mother who “nourishes” her children through her body’s decay: the bee draws honey from “the heather-bells that hide my lady fair” and “the wild deer” feed from the enriched grass growing “above her breast” (*The Poems* 45-48). Gallant believes that the personal poem “No coward soul is mine” expresses rather Emily’s desire for a unity as yet unrealised (with Nature) than her faith in a conventional God (88). The concluding lines of “Often rebuked, yet always back returning” epitomise, for Gallant, Emily Brontë’s search for the chthonic Feminine within herself (89): “The earth that wakes *one* human heart to feeling / Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell” (19-20).

<10>As Richard Benvenuto argues, a major problem of Emily’s poetry arises from a crucial principle of life; namely that “nature releases the soul from its confinement to itself, [...] but while the physical world presents only what is material and visible, the soul yearns for the invisible and the spiritual” (61). Although Emily may seek the traditional help of Christian faith, she reaches further on for something strictly personal: a God/ Gods of her own – both tangible like Nature and original and extra-mundane like man’s consciousness (Benvenuto 62). The poet is incessantly ‘torn apart’ hesitating between interpreting the self as the only known objective reality and/or as a transforming principle in the independently existing world of Nature outside the self.

<11>Frequently, as “In Summer’s mellow midnight” (1840), the natural element is an inlet into the world of the transcendently accepted mind beyond. Occasionally, as in “I’m happiest when

most away”, the speaker is carried into the extra-temporal and non-chronological realm of eternity, a universe devoid of its primary constituents: “When I am not and none beside – / Nor earth nor sea nor cloudless sky – / But only spirit wandering wide / Through infinite immensity” (5-8). Still, the magnanimity of the Holy Spirit is in Nature that never expires but esoterically reproduces itself in various forms – man being a metamorphosed particle of it:

And thou art now a spirit pouring  
Thy presence into all –  
[...]  
A universal influence  
From thine own influence free;  
A principle of life, intense  
Lost to mortality. (*The Poems* 19-23).

The poet’s perception of immortality is connected to her chthonian dimensions of time and space. There are many examples of poems where the physical grave is but the threshold or way out into a world of its own, where the soul unites with its true spirit, a shelter from all socially grounded strains. For instance, all the characters of the Gondal saga are given the chance of a reunion with their native land (and true self) at death, as in “Lines by Claudia”. In “Shall Earth no more inspire thee” and “I see around me tombstones grey” (1841), the lyrical speaker craves for “a Heaven more like this Earth” and is not willing to “leave our native home / For *any* world beyond the Tomb” (40-42). Ultimately, the poet’s thirst for a reunion with (Mother-) Nature can only be accomplished in death when the body gradually and literally merges with the soil whence it came: “rather on thy kindly breast / Let us be laid in lasting rest; / Or waken but to share with thee / A mutual immortality” (43-46). Although Nature does seem to imprison the soul within the body, yet it affirms the poet’s belief that to man the act of existence alone remains more relevant than the notion of salvation after one expires. The traditional Christian conceptions of purgatory or hell are replaced by the idea of a lasting rest or a union with nature.

<12>In Emily’s works the traditional monotheistic Christian model of the Universe is ousted by a polytheistic system of symbols, in which man’s existence proves still more unique and where death is a mechanism and condition for existence. In “No coward soul is mine”, the eternal Spirit is viewed through Nature: “Atom” and “Breath” are physiological terms being made into absolutes, and its actions resemble closely the ones being operated generally by Mother-Earth: “With wide-embracing love / [...] Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears” (17-20). Emily builds up an intricate *modus vivendi*, which speaks of a Nature that possesses purposiveness, a universe where one should always be able to see through the superior creative power the actively non-finite variety of the created (Benvenuto 64).

### **3. *Fin-de-siècle* receptions of Emily Brontë and Mathilde Blind’s poetic career**

<13>Around 1877, Emily Brontë had apparently found a champion in the controversial poet Algernon Charles Swinburne.<sup>(3)</sup> He seems to have praised Emily’s nature worship and found her as exciting as the sadistic goddesses in his own erotic poetry. As Lucasta Miller states, “A novel which satirized religion in the form of a mad sermon and whose heroine rejected heaven in

favour of earth was bound to appeal to Swinburne” (234). As a critic, he praised Brontë in an essay as “a lineal daughter of the earth-born giants”, admiring her “dark unconscious instinct as of primitive nature-worship” and her “passionate great genius” as “antichristian” (qtd. in Miller 235).(4) What Swinburne liked about *Wuthering Heights* were precisely those things that had troubled Brontë’s earlier readers: its emotional primitivism, violence and lack of conventional moral standpoint (Miller 235). He saw it as a pantheist allegory by a “lover of earth for earth’s sake” (235). But, as Barbara Gates pertinently observes, “Victorian/Edwardian fabrications made it difficult for nineteenth and early twentieth-century women to speak with authority [...] on the subject of nature” (3).

<14>Another fin de siècle admirer, the young poet Mary Robinson (1857-1944), was no doubt swayed by Swinburne’s enthusiasm but became committed to present a purer and more exonerating vision in her biography in the Eminent Women Series, one that would privilege Brontë’s “integrity and passion” (237). According to Miller, “Robinson’s aim was to humanize Emily, while acknowledging her as a free spirit”, to show a picture of “an active, genial, warm-hearted girl, full of humour and feeling to those she knew” (qtd. in Miller 237). But Robinson also endows her with an aura of religious mystery and pathos: “her dying heroine with the pre-Raphaelite hair has a more medieval poeticized flavour” (Miller 239). Her biography of Brontë, published in 1886, was an international success, serving to set Emily up as a symbol of unaffected, natural energy and “sexless purity”; as Miller states, it “reached out to women” (one of them was Emily Dickinson, in America). Within just a few years, young women were confessing their “pious enthusiasm” for Emily; in particular, forward-thinking New Women began to regard Emily as a symbol of female freedom from social conventions.(5)

<15>One of these may well have been Mathilde Blind (1841-1896), a poet who had not only certainly read Robinson’s biography of Emily but had also herself written, in 1883, another famous woman writer’s biography, George Eliot’s, in the same series. In her youth, Blind might have read Charlotte Brontë’s edition of *Wuthering Heights* (1850), which contained ‘Selections from Poems by Ellis Bell’ and the myth-making ‘Prefatory Note’. Given Blind’s later connections with the Pre-Raphaelite movement and Swinburne, it is also very probable that she read the poet’s enthusiastic assessment of Emily’s work and that her imagination was fired by the mythical portrayal.(6)

<16>In her formative years, spent at the Ladies’ Institute, St. John’s Wood, this daughter of German political exiles had shown a determination to refashion herself as an Englishwoman.(7) Like the Brontës, she read extensively the works of those Romantics she most admired, Byron and Shelley and, like the sisters, she also wrote juvenile novels, verses and journals. It was while attending that girl’s school that Blind developed a curiosity for geology and mythology, which questioned and ultimately challenged her orthodox religious beliefs. She could not reconcile the strange discrepancies between the account of Creation in Genesis and the history of our globe as revealed to us by the ‘rocks and stones’. Experiencing a keen relish in exercising her brain on the arguments that proved Christianity a myth, she deliberately chose to abandon religious faith, being expelled from school for her atheism.(8)

<17>Soon after (1858), Blind moved to Switzerland, settling in her uncle's house, to take courses in Middle German, Gothic and Latin at the University of Zurich. She was then introduced to a wider circle of Swiss intellectuals and radicals, with whom she became very intimate. Blind's reimmersion in the European radical community of her mother and stepfather freed her from the constraints she had experienced at the Ladies' Institute and allowed her to reinvent herself in the manner of the English Romantic poets she most admired at this time. The remarkable independence that would characterize her entire adult life began to emerge and some passages in her autobiography reveal her solitary walks through the Alps, that she calls "Mothers of Europe". Like William Wordsworth and P.B. Shelley before her, Blind experiences the same kind of spiritual epiphany via nature:

[...] for once I felt truly free! My body pliant to my soul moved rhythmically to the sound of the rushing stream [...] I felt then to the utmost the poetry of the road. The charm which gypsies, vagabonds and outcasts of all times must feel in that kind of existence ("Memoir" qtd. in Symons 3-4).

And like her own contemporary Swinburne, Blind would later on struggle to imagine a form of poetry that might capture the resonances between human individuals and the natural world.

<18>As evolution shifted from being a speculative hypothesis to a scientific doctrine, the natural world became for many Victorian poets a correspondingly more disturbing place. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" and the poems by Thomas Hardy all charge science with draining the natural world of spiritual and metaphysical meaning.(9) Other poets, such as Swinburne and Meredith, somehow managed to divest the concept of nature of most of its supernatural and transcendental character, at the same time retaining an intense interest in nature as a force surcharged with poetical possibilities. As for the 'evolutionary epic', there must have been flamboyant calls from the secular wing for a panegyric on the 'ascent of man'.(10) But no one in the nineteenth century really rose to the challenge, with the possible exception of Mathilde Blind.

<19>In 1867, Blind published her first volume of poems in dedication to the Italian revolutionary, Joseph Mazzini, under the pseudonym of 'Claude Lake'. Blind's love for the male Romantic poets heavily influenced her earlier writings and is responsible for the imaginative, mystical and exploratory component there present.(11) In 1886, Blind published a lecture entitled "Shelley's View of Nature as Contrasted with Darwin's", which foreshadows her growing interest in evolutionary theory. Moreover, Blind chose to explore such themes as antitheism, patriarchy, sexual liberty and the imprisoning space that women occupied in the Victorian society.(12) From the 1850s and 1860s onwards, as Barbara Gates observes, "the insidious equation of women with nature – [...] – [had taken] on a new twist with the introduction of evolutionary ideas about natural selection" (4). And, in 1889, Blind published her third lengthy poem that became her most accredited and accomplished one – *The Ascent of Man*, a poetic epic that summarises Charles Darwin's evolutionary process.(13) Here, she uses the naturalist's evolutionary theory as a means of reflecting upon various social issues, particularly gender relations.(14)

#### 4. Brontë and Blind interpreting and writing the natural world

<20>Without that radical political and religious background but, rather on the contrary, with a conservative Tory and evangelical religious education, Emily Brontë had also experienced both the early mastering of the masculine voice, through Byron and Shelley, and the moments of ecstatic revelation in nature.<sup>(15)</sup> Gates refers that in the 1830s and 1840s, “women joined men in the widespread enthusiasm for natural history” (3). Brontë’s seeming limited experience of the world, in contrast with Blind’s blatant cosmopolitanism, did not dismay one who was so conscious of her inner resources as Emily. The concrete details evocative of the Yorkshire scene, Brontë’s native landscape, are not just intrinsically important but function as a pretext for a deeper exploration of problems that tortured her. As Derek Stanford has shown, they are not just “the symbols of regionality – essences of the spirit of place” (47) but the starting-points of her thought. Unlike Blind’s later tendency, Brontë did not write poems as an objective observer, either for mere naturalistic pleasure or aesthetic achievement, but as a subjective interpreter. She wrote poems, Enid Duthie suggests, “through which runs [...] a dialogue between the physical universe and the human soul” (206).

<21>In childhood and early youth, before “shades of the prison-house” began to close upon her, Emily had enjoyed the freedom of the moors; Eden was still inviolate. Later she became acutely aware of the disharmony between joy in nature and the problems of human life. And in Brontë’s earliest recorded poems, dating from 1836, nature itself is no longer a paradise full of unshadowed sunlight: the joyous song of a bird (“Redbreast, early in the morning”) is changed to a “shriek of misery” in the listener’s ear. Her periods of forced exile from home (at Roe Head and Law Hill) lead to the expression of a profound disillusionment:

‘Twas grief enough to think mankind  
All hollow, servile, insincere;  
But worse to trust to my own mind  
And find the same corruption there.  
(*The Poems* 21-24)

In these solitary moments of deep dejection and confinement, a visionary power comes to her rescue, bringing with it a sense of liberation from the trammels of ordinary existence. Then, as in “High waving heather ...”, “she glories in manifestations of the strength of natural forces, seeing them not as agents of chaos or destruction but as expressions of the dynamic energy essential to the functioning of nature” (Duthie 209).

<22>As a Northerner, she finds mountain winds, rushing torrents and whirling snow even dearer to her than summer sunshine and green valleys. The intimate ties that united her to this physical world are best detected in the imagined dialogues present in “The Night-Wind”, a poem in which the soft breathing of the wind becomes an attempt to distract her from sorrowful thought, and in “Shall Earth no more inspire thee”, in which her consciousness of the spell that nature has always exercised over her is acknowledged at the same time as its limits. Although Brontë desires no after life unless it is “a mutual immortality” to be shared with the maternal earth, she knows it cannot offer lasting protection from personal sorrow or the ills of this world. Her poem

“I see around me tombstones grey” (1841) builds on a radical opposition between heaven and earth, also present in *Wuthering Heights*, which has been seen as an unorthodox and feminist statement of rejection of the Christian heaven or patriarchal religion in favour of Mother Earth or a female deity, anticipating the goddess movements of the twentieth century.(16)

<23>Likewise, in the poems inserted in *The Prophecy of St Oran* (1881), an anti-dogmatic rewriting of a Scottish religious tale in which death gives access to Nature and not to God, and in which the love between a man and a woman is a natural instinct and not a sin,(17) Mathilde Blind uses natural invocations (‘winds’, ‘dews’, ‘birds’, ‘flowers’), as well as the sea and the moors, to communicate an excess of vital stimulation:

Lit showers flashed golden o’er the hills,  
And trees flung silver to the breeze,  
And, scattering diamonds, fleet-foot rills  
Fled laughingly across the leas.  
 (“Love-Trilogy” I)

In “Pauper Poet’s Song”, which can be interpreted as a pantheist’s hymn, she suggests that there is an immanent entity that moves all things in nature (‘sun’, ‘moon’ and ‘stars’) and rejoicingly concludes: “The earth, our myriad-bosomed nurse, / This whole miraculous universe / Belongs to him who loves it!” (10-12) As Brontë’s early loss of faith in the desires and hopes common to most, present in her poem “Riches I hold in light esteem” or “The Old Stoic”, Blind similarly argues that those who truly love Nature and, most importantly, whose heart “chim’st with golden verse” (16), have no need for riches, fame or bliss because they possess the most important gift of all.

<24>Nevertheless, as Brontë knew and expressed in her poem “Stars” (1845), about binary cosmic oppositions, Blind suggests that the poet often has trouble facing a new day; the masculine light of the sun can be aggressive because it represents the harsh realities of the world: “[...] the red sun flaring low, / [...] drags me back shuddering from sleep each morning to life with its woes” (“Love-Trilogy” 53-4), and can even imperially reclaim ‘feminine’ night back, with its realm of dreams: “Shut out day’s wintry beams! / Sleep, brood upon my brain! / For sweet sleep bringeth dreams / And love again!” (“Love’s Phantom” 1-4). Significantly, in her sonnet “Sleep”, Blind sees Night as a “star-eyed” comforting mother that cradles “Earth’s ill-used step-children” (7-10). Furthermore, while all diurnal nature is rejoicing with Spring splendours, the speaker is often and paradoxically the only one grieving: Blind’s lines “Resplendent in glory, / The earth meets her lover, / [...] the Sun/ Must I alone sorrow, / Despairingly languish?” (“In Spring” 14-17) seem to echo precisely Brontë’s words in that poem: “The soul of Nature sprang elate, / But *mine* sank sad and low!” (23-4).

## 5. Feminine views of Creation and the transcendence of the soul through love

<25>The figure of the outcast worn traveller, paradigmatic of the human condition in Brontë’s poetry and novel, re-emerges in Blind’s work in a female form, namely in “The Abandoned”, through the allegorical image of the woman sitting “by the wayside”, cursed by the loss of Youth,

Hope and Love. But here a cold bleak Nature is in consonance with the subject's feelings and its elements appear to imitate the woman's hopeless cry:

She sat by the wayside and wept; far over the desolate plain  
A noise as of one that is weeping re-echoed in wind and in rain,  
And the long dim line of the spectral poplars with dolorous wail  
Nodded their bald-headed tops as they chattered with cold in the gale. (5-8)

Although the poem seems to suggest that this is a fallen woman, "wasted and withered and sere, like her life and its ruined delight" (2), Blind's own experience of rejection and exile may also have contributed to the overall tone of doom and fatalism. These and the loss of hope are recurrent themes in Brontë's poetry, which states that "Hope was but a timid Friend" who "Stretched her wings and soared to heaven / [...] and never returned again!" (8-10). In her sonnet "To Memory", Blind uses a very similar image to describe her utter state of dejection ("this dearth and winter of the soul"), one in which "even Hope, still wont to soar and sing, / Droopeth, a starveling bird" (2-3). Like hope, Despair is also represented as a bird, "whose shadow seems to brood" over the speaker "With chasms of vacuous gloom" (2-4). But, characteristically, Blind is determined not to let herself "yield" "to grief", stating ever as bravely as Brontë that she is not ready to "abdicate turbulent life's control" (11) and that "No pain on earth has power to crush my soul." (13-14). The importance of one's 'own soul' for both Brontë and Blind may derive from the Romantic obsession with the figure of Psyche(18) but is also a sign of the strong spiritual independence that both women poets shared.

<26>The courage before the prospect of death and the belief in the transcendence of the soul is another theme in common. While Brontë has famously stated that "No coward soul is mine" because she is "Undying Life" (1 and 8) and has presented a union that goes beyond death in *Wuthering Heights*, Blind has similarly seen the communion of two souls in love as the best way to overcome death. The poem entitled "Perfect Union" is an example of this belief: Blind's poetic image is of a life setting with the sun – "bright as brief" – and the atheist's determination to "Front[ing] the dumb unfathomed grave / With unintimidated eyes" because of "that invincible belief / Of Man's august supremacy" (11-15); but at the moment his eyes close in death and his wife holds his hand "his life of life then flow[s]/ Through [hers]" and she feels "new powers upheave and glow [...] in her", revealing that "In [their] strong love death hath no part" and that "he shall live while [she] [has] life" (27-30). In *The Ascent of Man* (1889), it is also the faith in the power of "Saving Love" that may redeem us from misery, destruction and death. In this mystical union, like the one of Catherine and Heathcliff, Blind seems to find a new religion based on the transcendent power of human love.

<27>Blind's songs in her collection *Love in Exile* (1893) speak very emphatically of a supreme attachment of this kind, in which the female speaker addresses her beloved as a soul-mate:

Fused in the fullness of immortal passion,  
A passion as immortal as the stars.

There was no longer any thee or me;  
No sense of self, no wish or incompleteness;  
The moment, rounded to Eternity, [...] (VI. 16-20)

The union in death of Brontë's famed lovers, including the joint burial and mingling with the earth, is again evoked in another love song in these terms:

'Were it not sweet to die now side by side,  
To lie together tangled in the deep  
Close as the heart-beat to the heart – so keep  
The everlasting sleep?' (XI. 7-10)

Song VIII, in particular, is reminiscent of Lockwood's spectral dream and evokes Heathcliff's words in the novel regarding Catherine's haunting of him after death:

When you wake from troubled slumbers  
With a dream-bewildered brain,  
And old leaves which no man numbers  
Chattering tap against the pane;  
And the midnight wind is wailing  
Till your very life seems quailing  
As the long gusts shudder and sigh:  
Know you not that homeless cry  
Is my love's, which cannot die,  
Wailing through Eternity? (1-10)

Blind's Shelleyan invocation in the Prelude to her *Ascent of Man* is significantly addressed not to God or to another conventional deity or muse but to her own soul (duly capitalized). She implies that, for the epic task that she has ahead, her soul will need 'wings' ("Ascend, oh my soul"), will require the elevation from "chaos and welter of struggle and pain" (11-14). As in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, the poet asks for the assistance of the natural elements – the 'wings' of the lark and of the wind, but also for the songs from the past – "choral strain", "thoughts of the Dead", to communicate a rapture of communion. She feels a Presence in both Nature and Man which is the proof of a common provenience: "Haunting echoes of an infinite whole / Moan and murmur through Man's finite soul" (Part I, 3-4). But in Blind's Darwinian account of Creation in "Chaunts of Life", she not only sees Life – a female divine force – creating and generating itself spontaneously, without the help of God, but as a process in which death, violence and oppression are also inevitably and intrinsically involved:

War rages on the teeming earth;  
The hot sanguinary fight  
Begins with each new creature's birth:  
A dreadful war where might is right;  
Where still the strongest slay and win,  
Where weakness is the only sin. (40-6)

This relentless logic is worded again and again by Blind, exposing that which on the surface appears to be a natural paradise – Earth – but which is in fact a living hell for many creatures: “A hell where there is none to save, / Where life is life’s insatiate grave” (53-4).

<28>In her poems and novel, Emily Brontë had expressed the same sense of strife, struggle and death involved in Man’s existence on earth and her personal view of Creation was not very different from Blind’s, as the passage from her Belgian *devoirs* may prove:

It was summer [...] All appeared happy, but for me, it was only an appearance. [...] All creation is equally mad. [...] Nature is an inexplicable problem; it exists on a principle of destruction. Every being must be the tireless instrument of death to others, or itself must cease to live, yet nonetheless we celebrate the day of our birth, and we praise God for having entered such a world. (Brontë, 1842: 176)

Brontë’s *devoir* (“The Butterfly”) seems to anticipate both Darwin’s and Blind’s view of life on earth, as well as Tennyson’s “Nature, red in tooth and claw” but, according to Hillis Miller, her vision of the forest’s chain of endless cruelty “matches the traditional Christian description of the state of nature ... after the fall ...” (164-5), namely Wesley’s sermons. The poet’s bitter realization is also present in some poems, as when she asks in “A Day Dream”: “And why should we be glad at all? / The leaf is hardly green, / Before a token of its fall / Is on the surface seen!” (9-12); in *Wuthering Heights*, the fallen Heathcliff becomes the tireless instrument of death to others, after having been subjected to the same torments in the chain of power; he thus changes from oppressed to oppressor.

<29>In her 1886 lecture on “Shelley’s View of Nature as Contrasted with Darwin’s”, Blind had already detected the main problem or contradiction in both moral idealism and Romanticism: excessive idealisation of both nature and human society.

But is it true that all things in Nature, where man is not, speak “peace, harmony, and love”? Why, if we open our Darwin, the very opposite fact meets us at every turn. Yes, in the very vegetable kingdom, amid the gentle race of flowers so dear to Shelley, precisely the same forces are at work, the same incessant strife is raging, the same desires and appetites prevail, which he so abominated in the world of man. [...] *from the lowest semi-vital organism to the highest and most complex forms of life battle is being waged within battle for the right to breath, to eat, and to multiply on the earth.* [...] So that the reckless competition, the selfishness, the cruelty to which to Shelley appeared as essentially the result of bad government, nay, as almost an accident of human society, might have been traced by him feature by feature throughout the animal kingdom (Blind 14-15 my emphasis).

She criticises the lack of historical realism in *Prometheus Unbound*, lamenting that Shelley was “debarred from casting into poetic mould the modern scientific conception of evolution and the struggle for existence” (16).<sup>(19)</sup> Furthermore, Blind questions Shelley’s argument regarding the problem of good and evil; instead of stating like the Romantic poet that Man will gradually improve by returning to Nature and to his origins, rather she affirms that “Man himself gains in

moral value, when [...] with infinite pain and struggle he has slowly risen above the thralldom of physical nature” (18-19).(20)

## 6. Mathilde Blind’s feminine rewriting of Darwinian evolution

<30>In her own poetry, Mathilde Blind tries to imagine a form that might capture the resonances between human individuals and the natural world. “The poet only truly lives”, she writes in 1893, “when he feels the rapture of communion”, a flash of sympathetic confederacy (qtd. in Rudy 154). According to Jason Rudy, Blind’s poetry reflects on and participates in her lifelong desire to strengthen sympathetic relations among individuals, but the “pulse of a collective life” (154) seems increasingly difficult to access in a world of violence and indifference. Blind’s complex ideal of rapturous communion from the perspective of Darwinian thought focuses in particular on the poet’s nuanced juxtaposing of poetic form and evolutionary thought (Rudy 155).(21) *The Ascent of Man* lays out what is required for human redemption, when humanist love, the animating force embedded in evolutionary processes, begs for a transfigured life, “Oh, redeem me from my tiger rages, /reptile greed, and foul hyena lust” (II. 237-8), and for an innovative poetic language that suggests a plastic transformation, through a “vocabulary of movement and coalescing vitality” (Armstrong 376).

<31>Divided into three sections, each with a different style of versification and tone, Blind’s *Ascent of Man* became quite popular and notorious for its use of “varied metrical structures, driving rhythmic impulses, and vivid imagery to portray the drama of human evolution” (Armstrong 376). (22) The first section, entitled “Chaunts of Life”, deals with the evolution from inorganic matter, man’s development and the progress from savagery to civilisation, giving a sweeping outline of terrene history from geological and botanical through animal evolution, as well as three phases of human cultural development: primitive society, the cycles of empire to the fall of Rome and modern history from the Middle Ages through the French Revolution.

<32>Blind, the poet, exerts her structuring power over nature’s pulsating overflow in bold hexameter lines; her meter echoes Homer’s line (five dactyls followed by a spondee), emphasising the epic nature of the evolutionary scene:

Struck out of dim fluctuant forces and shock of electrical vapour,  
Repelled and attracted the atoms flashed mingling in union  
primeval,  
And over the face of the waters far heaving in limitless twilight  
Auroral pulsations thrilled faintly, and, striking the blank heaving  
surface,  
The measureless speed of their motion now leaped into light  
on the waters. (I. 15)

The section opens, as Helen Groth suggests, with images of “flux and frisson” as the earth and sky pulsate and the sea heaves with volcanic explosions (334). Blind depicts various forces, electrical and otherwise, that combine to form the world as we know it, referencing the field-

theory hypothesis of scientists such as Faraday and Maxwell.(23) Through a sequence of birthing images, the poet compares the earth to a massive maternal body (Brown 130):

And lo, from the womb of the waters, upheaved in  
volcanic convulsion,  
Ribbed and ravaged and rent there rose bald peaks and  
the rocky  
Heights of confederate mountains compelling the  
fugitive vapours  
To take a form as they passed them and float as clouds  
through the azure.  
Mountains, the broad-bosomed mothers of torrents and  
rivers perennial,  
Feeding the rivers and plains with patient persistence,  
till slowly,  
In the swift passage of æons recorded in stone by  
Time's graver,  
There germ grey films of the lichen and mosses and  
palm-ferns gigantic,  
And jungle of tropical forest fantastical branches  
entwining,  
And limitless deserts of sand and wildernesses  
primeval. (I. 8-15)

Groth states that “Blind offers a heavily feminized account of the creation myth charged with galvanizing images of natural power, modern electrical technology, and industrial machinery” (335), in which life weaves herself into a web:

And vaguely in the pregnant deep,  
Clasped by the glowing arms of light  
From and eternity of sleep  
Within unfathomed gulfs of night  
*A pulse stirred in the plastic slime*  
Responsive to the rhythm of Time.  
Enkindled in the mystic dark  
Life built herself a myriad forms,  
And, flashing its electric spark  
Through films and cells and pulps and worms, (I. 22-30 my emphasis)

<33>A change from free verse to lyric stanzas marks the beginnings of human life on earth. ‘Man’ is here described as rising from the primordial mud in complete human form, entering the scene and the text notably without metrical regularity, with graphic dashes emphasising the rhythmic breaks:

And lo, 'mid reeking swarms of earth  
Grim struggling in the primal wood,  
A new strange creature hath its birth:  
Wild – stammering – nameless – shameless – nude;  
Spurred on by want, held in by fear,  
He hides his head in caverns drear. (I. 72-77)

This “new strange creature” still has to learn its place within a metrically ordered universe. Only after considerable development, Blind suggests, does the human race begin to discern structure behind the apparent chaos of nature.

For Man, from want and pressing hunger freed,  
Begins to feel another kind of need,  
And *in his shaping brain* and through his eyes  
Nature, awakening, sees her blue-arched skies;  
The Sun, his life-begetter, isled in space;  
The Moon, the Measurer of his span of days;  
The immemorial stars who pierce his night  
With inklings of things vast and infinite.  
All shows of heaven and earth that move and pass  
*Take form* within his brain as in a glass. (I. 150-159 my emphasis)

The natural world begins to make formal sense as the periodical rhythms of sun, moon and sea are seen as belonging to a grander metrical scheme. Man’s “shaping brain”, Groth suggests, “evolves an androcentric vision of the world shaped by his own aesthetic tastes” (335). Thus, imagination becomes the civilising agent that expands man’s potential. Poets in particular represent the highest stage of development away from the reigning unruly spasms of violence and death, assuming messianic proportions:

The poet, in whose shaping brain  
*Life is created o'er again*  
With loftier raptures, loftier pain;  
Whose mighty potencies of verse  
Move through the plastic Universe,  
And fashion to their strenuous will  
The world that is creating still.  
[...]  
From the depths of life upheaving,  
Clouds of earth and sorrow cleaving,  
*From despair and death retrieving*, (I. 350-361 my emphasis)

## 7. Feminine utopian resolution through poetry and the imagination

<34>But fratricidal violence on a larger scale and the horrors of civil war are also described in very similar terms by the two women poets. Both Brontë and Blind had been subject directly or

indirectly to this experience (the Napoleonic wars, industrial strife and the revolutions of 1848); as we approach the war scenery in both poems, nature is deceptively serene and there seems to be nothing wrong, but we soon realise that this is not so. Brontë's speaker ironically emphasises both the harvesting or killing season and the latent hypocrisy of men who pray to God and kill:

Men knelt to God and worshipped crime,  
And crushed the helpless even as we

But they had learnt from length of strife –  
Of civil war and anarchy  
To laugh at death, and look on life  
With somewhat lighter sympathy.  
[...]  
The crops were garnered in the field –  
Trod out, and ground by horses' feet  
[...]  
And kneaded on the threshing-floor  
With mire of tears and human gore.  
[...]  
Charred beams, and lime, and blackened stones  
Self-piled in cairns o'er burning bones  
And lurid flames that licked the wood  
Then quenched their glare in pools of blood –

("Why ask to know the date – the clime?", 1846)

This passage can be compared to Blind's description of the result of a war siege of an Alpinian town in *The Ascent of Man*, in which we will find parallel images of destruction, harvest waste and its dramatic effects on people:

Fallen lies the fair old town, its houses  
Charred and ruined gape in smoking heaps;  
Here with shouts a ruffian band carouses,  
There an outraged woman vainly weeps.  
In the fields where the ripe corn lies mangled,  
Where the wounded groan beneath the dead,  
Friend or foe, now helplessly entangled,  
Stain red poppies with a guiltier red.  
[...] ("The Leading of Sorrow")

<35>In the end of Blind's account of the 'Ascent of Man', the Soul runs away to Exile unable to cope with what she has witnessed regarding the evolution of mankind, which in all its miseries does not represent an 'ascent' in moral terms but rather a 'descent'. As Herbert Tucker has pointed out, "To the material mechanism of evolution [...] Blind [...] applies a moral leverage exerted from outside the cruel neutrality of the natural" (505). Apart from a faith in Love, in

Blind's utopian vision, Man can only redeem himself through the transforming power of his Imagination and, like Shelley, she exalts precisely the figure of the Poet: his creations alone will have the power "From despair and death retrieving, / [...] / Lift you at one rhythmic bound / From the thralldom of the ground" (85-8). Like Emily Brontë, Blind sees the creative imagination as the liberating force that releases the soul or spirit of man and, like Shelley, the power that allows a sympathetic communion or confederacy:

Till no longer cramped and bound  
By the narrow human round,  
All the body's barriers slide,  
[...]  
The supreme, undying, sole  
Spirit struggling through the whole,  
And no more a thing apart  
From the universal heart  
Liberated by the grace  
Of man's genius for a space,  
Human lives dissolve, enlance  
In a flaming world embrace.  
(103-14)

The language of this passage is reminiscent of several other statements in Brontë's poems that refer to the conflicting duality of body and soul and to the rare privileged moments of merging or fusion with nature and the universal spirit. It is, in many senses, a language of motherly love:

With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears.  
("No coward soul is mine", 17-20)

Brontë is known to have read Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) and he wrote in *The Libation Bearers*, "Yea, summon Earth, who brings all things to life / and rears, and takes again into her womb" (qtd. in Lipking 98). "The Mother Earth religion", as Lynn Keller states, "did not glorify the sacrifice of her children, but celebrated their birth, enjoyment of life, and loving return to her in death" (141). The belief of ancient peoples in the resurrection of life was closely related to their experience of nature, their experience of love. Namely, the Demeter/Persephone myth was seen as a symbol of the human soul's return, after the death of the body, to its universal origin (Keller 48). As Helen Groth suggests, it is also important to recognise the relevance of Christian ideology in *The Ascent of Man*, and more specifically "The idea of a feminine soul that transcends the body and earthly struggle" to offer "the only hope in Blind's bleak Darwinian narrative." (336). Although it may not be immediately evident, the focus of her criticism is really the brutality and orthodoxy of institutionalised religion, which together with political oppression is responsible for most human suffering. In her vision, the creative feature of the soul of man is symbolically rescued in the Greek island of Delos, a utopian *topos* where Man can reside and the

female soul may be influenced by the confluence of thought and beauty in art. The boundaries of gender, identity, nation and form are removed and life is transformed into a harmonious temporal continuum. Rather significantly, it is human art (in particular, poetry) and not God that grants this eternal life. This art-inspired ascension of the human soul is obviously connected with the “Prelude” to the *Ascent*, in which Blind the poet had begun by exhorting her own soul to “Ascend [...] with the wings of the lark” and “of the wind” in “a rhythmical chain / Reaching from chaos and welter of struggle and pain / Far into vistas empyreal receding from time” (1-6, 16-17).

<36>The poetic statement by Brontë which simultaneously best summarises and latently informs Blind’s words of utopian resolution in *The Ascent of Man* is “Aye there it is” (1841); according to Ingrid Hotz-Davies, a “stance of a fusion of the divine with the material, the eternal with the temporal [...] a poem which effects these ... fusions on a number of different levels” (170):

[...]  
And thou art now a spirit pouring  
Thy presence into all –  
The essence of the Tempest’s roaring  
And of the tempest’s fall –

A universal influence  
From Thine own influence free –  
A principle of life intense  
Lost to mortality –  
[...] (*The Poems*, 13-20)

The opposition between mind and matter becomes obliterated and other seemingly opposite phenomena are contained in one unifying embrace. Through all these doublings, Brontë and Blind create a view of mystical fusion that is quite extraordinary because they postulate a happiness that, in Hotz-Davies’s words, “is both intensely emotional, materially ‘felt’, and transcendent, a new condition which is both spiritual and material” (173) –“a theology of material spirituality” (175). And I would add, a feminine theology too. According to the ecofeminist ‘Starawk’, earth-based spirituality allows you to understand the universe as a living being, to find spirit not only in the natural world but also in ourselves, and to see religion and science as one (qtd. in Eisler 34). In their respective works, Brontë and Blind appear thus to have converted Victorian spirituality and scientific analysis into a deeply personal existential philosophy – a feminine *naturphilosophie*.(24)

(1)Parts of this article have been presented in two international conferences: *Poetic Ecologies* (Brussels, 2008) and *Fin de Siècle Women Writers* (London, 2010).(^)

(2)Many, like Judith Plant (*Women and Nature*), Vandana Shiva and Starhawk (*The Spiral Dance*), believe that there was a time before written history, in pre-patriarchal societies, when cooperation, not competition, was valued. During this period female deities were widely worshipped and societies were more women-centred.(^)

(3)A self-conscious rebel from an aristocratic background, everything about Swinburne, from his atheism to his overexcited interest in flagellation, was designed to affront bourgeois values. His provocative aesthetic had been read, as well as intended, as a full-frontal assault on Christian morality.(^)

(4)The first new material supplied to supplement Mrs Gaskell's *Life* was contained in *Charlotte Brontë: a Monograph*, by T. Wemyss Reid (1877). This book inspired A.C. Swinburne to issue separately a forcible essay on Charlotte and Emily Brontë, under the title of *A Note on Charlotte Brontë* (1877). Swinburne was the critic who perhaps most perceptively synthesized the poetic and fictional halves of Emily's creative aptitude. He referred to *Wuthering Heights* in a 16 June 1883 article as "essentially and definitely a poem in the fullest and most positive sense of the term."(^)

(5)In 1889, a biographical anthology, *Some Eminent Women of our Time*, was published by Millicent Fawcett, a well-known campaigner for women's education and the female suffrage movement. Charlotte and Emily Brontë were included in this book explicitly intended as an encouragement for young working women; in a different line from earlier authors, the biographer's portrait of the sisters as pioneering working women treated their writing as their real work and not as mere household 'accomplishment'.(^)

(6)Blind was, in fact, among Swinburne's friends and intellectual correspondents: They exchanged letters and volumes of poetry. Blind reviewed Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* in 1871, inspired by his passionate lyricism and republican politics.(^)

(7)Blind was born Mathilde Cohen in Mannheim, Germany, to an elderly retired banker, who died in her infancy. Her mother, Friederike Ettlinger, became involved with the movement for a united and democratic Germany and, in 1849, married Karl Blind, a radical political writer and activist. He was one of the leaders of the Baden insurrections during the revolutions of 1848, the suppression of which led to his exile from Germany. After being expelled from France and Belgium, the family was granted asylum in England, having settled west of Regent's Park. For the next thirty years their household became both a haven for Europe's radical exiles and an influential intellectual salon.(^)

(8)This decisive turning point in her life caused an emotional trauma because she fell out with her best friend, Rosa Carey, who was very religious.(^)

(9)The survival of the fittest, of “nature, red in tooth and claw” (*In Memoriam*), became a grim prospect, as was the thesis that man is but the fortuitous product of blind natural forces.(^)

(10)Winwood Read, in *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872), bellowed his affirmation that the biological history of man is “a splendid narrative, the materials of which it is for science to discover, the glories of which it is for poets to portray” (*apud* Morton, 1984: 32).(^)

(11)Although Blind enjoyed editing Lord Byron’s letters (1886), her deepest love and admiration was for Percy Shelley. During her stay in Zurich as a youth she had also gained the sort of education that no English schoolroom could provide, studying philology, Latin and Old German and developing a knowledge of Goethe, Heine and Schiller.(^)

(12)Specifically, her friendships with several gentlemen from the Pre-Raphaelites (namely, the Rossettis, Ford Madox Brown and Swinburne) exposed her to the ways in which the ‘female subject’ became the centralised focus for ‘adult art’. These influences became the impetus for Blind’s decision to explore sexual desire in several of her writings.(^)

(13)In 1881, Blind had published *The Prophecy of St Oran* and, in 1886, *The Heather on Fire*. Both of these long poems signify Blind’s religious and political radicalism, exposing the patriarchal institutions of Christianity and marriage.(^)

(14)Blind died in 1896, bequeathing her estate to the Newnham College, a women’s university, in the hope to increase educational opportunities for women.(^)

(15)See my article entitled “Representations of Power and Transgression: The idea of Byron and the Byronic Character in the Poetry of the Brontës” (2008) for a more detailed analysis of these poets’ influences on both Emily and Charlotte Brontë.(^)

(16)The Goddess movement is a loose grouping of social and religious phenomena growing out of second-wave feminism, predominantly in North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s, and the metaphysical community as well. Spurred by the perception that women were not treated equitably in many mainstream religions, many women turned to a Female Deity, as more in tune with their beliefs and spiritual needs. Masculine gender and male imagery were, at the time, attached to deity to the exclusion of female gender and female imagery. A unifying theme of this diverse movement is the *female*-ness of Deity (as opposed and contrasted to a patriarchal male god).(^)

(17)The poem about an Irish Christian monk (Oran) who breaks his chastity vows with a local Scottish girl and as a punishment and example is buried alive by his religious order, becomes in Blind’s hands a transgressive tale about religious and sexual freedom. It not only proclaims the non-existence of God but criticizes the Church’s view that women are naturally evil.(^)

(18)In her youth, Blind assumed the fictional name of ‘Alma’ (soul in Latin). In Greek mythology, Psyche was the deification of the human soul. She was portrayed in ancient mosaics

as a goddess with butterfly wings (because psyche is also the Greek word for 'butterfly'). The Greek word psyche literally means "spirit, breath, life or animating force". (^)

(19)Such realism, she argued, would depict humanity “emerging from semi-brutal barbarous condition, and continually progressing into higher stages of moral and mental development” (Blind, 17).(^)

(20)For Blind, “the true conflict consists in man’s struggle with the irresponsible forces of Nature, and the victory in his conquest over them, both as regards the subjection of his own lower animal instincts and his continually growing power through knowledge of turning these elemental forces, that filled his savage progenitors with fear and terror, into the nimblest of servants” (Blind,1886:19).(^)

(21)In his book chapter on “Rapture and the Flesh, Swinburne to Blind”, Jason R. Rudy proposes to use electrodynamic theory to analyse the ‘electric’ effects of Blind’s poetry.(^)

(22)This eclectic lyric style led a critic in the *Athenaeum* (1889) to describe the poem as a dithyramb, rather than an epic due to its boisterous and celebratory style and tone.(^)

(23)Michael Faraday developed the mathematical concept of the 'electro-magnetic force field' (1832) as a way of mathematically describing action-at-a-distance for charged particles (i.e. electrons and protons). When James Clerk Maxwell used this field theory to assume that light was an Electromagnetic Wave (1876), and then correctly deduced the finite velocity of light, it was a powerful logical argument for the existence of the electromagnetic force field, and that light was a wave-like change in the field (electromagnetic radiation) that propagated with the velocity of light through the ether.(^)

(24)*Naturphilosophie*, often referred to as Romantic science, was a school of thought characterized by a speculative, idealistic, and holistic approach to the study of nature that had its origins in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. *Naturphilosophie* combined a version of Neo-Platonism with a reading of Immanuel Kant. From the former, came the belief that all the forces we perceive in the world are manifestations of one basic force. From the latter, the idea that the mind imposes its categories such as space, time, and cause and effect on nature. Friedrich Schelling, who wrote his influential *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* in 1797, is regarded as the founder of the movement. For Schelling, nature consisted of opposites or polarities: positive and negative for electrical phenomena, north and south for magnetic, acids and bases for chemical. In each case, the opposing forces resolved and unified in new phenomena and new forces on a higher plane. *Naturphilosophie* spread beyond Germany. It inspired some natural philosophers, particularly those working on problems in electricity, chemistry, magnetism, and anatomy, namely Humphry Davy's and Michael Faraday's exploration of electrochemical and electromagnetic phenomena. In the life sciences, *Naturphilosophie* postulated that the succession of higher life forms on earth was the outcome of opposing forces present in lower forms. Although suggestive of modern evolutionary thought, this succession was not evolution in the sense of genetic descent, but rather a process of ascent toward a pre-ordained ideal, comparable to embryological gestation.(^)

## Works Cited

Armstrong, Isobel and Virginia Blain. *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian, Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*. London and New York: Macmillan, 1999. Print.

Benvenuto, Richard. *Emily Brontë*. English Authors Series, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982. Print.

Blind, Mathilde. *The Prophecy of Saint Oran and Other Poems* (1881), in Perry Willet (general editor), *Victorian Women Writers Project: an Electronic Collection*, 9 May 2010 <<http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/blind/oran.html>>. Web.

--- "Shelley's View of Nature as Contrasted with Darwin's" (1886), in Perry Willet (general editor), *Victorian Women Writers Project: an Electronic Collection*, 23 May 2010 <<http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/blind/shelley.html>>. Web.

--- *The Ascent of Man* (1889), in Perry Willet (general editor), *Victorian Women Writers Project: an Electronic Collection*, 17 April 2010 <<http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/blind/ascent.html>>. Web.

Brontë, Emily. "The Butterfly." *The Belgian Essays. Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë. A Critical Edition*. Ed. and trans. Sue Lonoff. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996. 176-9. Print.

---. *The Poems of Emily Brontë*. Eds. Derek Roper and Edward Chitham. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.

Brown, Susan. "A Still and Mute-born Vision: Locating Mathilde Blind's Reproductive Poetics." *Victorian Women Poets. Essays and Studies*. Ed. Alison Chapman. Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2003. 123-144. Print.

Darwin, Charles. *Evolutionary Writings, including the autobiographies*. Ed. Oxford World Classics. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Downing, Christine. *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*. New York: Continuum, 1996. Print.

Duthie, Enid. *The Brontës and Nature*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986. Print.

Eisler, Riane. "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto." *Reweaving the World. The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990. 23-34. Print.

Gallant, Christine. "The Archetypal Feminine in Emily Brontë's Poetry." *Victorian Women Poets*. Ed. Tess Cosslett. London and New York : Longman Critical Reader, 1996. 44-54. Print.

Gates, Barbara T. *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Print.

Groth, Helen. "Victorian Women Poets and Scientific Narratives." *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian, Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*. Ed. Armstrong and Blain. London and New York: Macmillan, 1999. 325-351. Print.

Guimarães, Paula. "Representations of Power and Transgression: The Idea of Byron and the Byronic Character in the Poetry of the Brontës." *Op. Cit. Uma Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / A Journal of Anglo-American Studies* 10 (2008): 75-100. Print.

Hotz-Davies, Ingrid. *The Creation of Religious Identities by English Women Poets from the Seventeenth to the Early Twentieth Century. Soulscapes. Studies in Women and Religion*, Vol. 42. New York and Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001. Print.

Jung, Karl. *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Vol. 9 of *Collected Works*. Ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953-1978. Print.

Keller, Mara Lynn. "The Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone: Fertility, Sexuality and Rebirth." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol 4, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 41-51. Print.

Lipking, Lawrence. *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988. Print.

Miller, J. Hillis. *The Disappearance of God. Five Nineteenth-Century Writers*., Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1963. Print.

Miller, Lucasta. *The Brontë Myth*. Anchor Books, New York: Random House, 2001. Print.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Roper, Derek and Edward Chitham, eds. *The Poems of Emily Brontë*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.

Rudy, Jason R. "Rapture and the Flesh, Swinburne to Blind." *Electric Meters: Victorian Physiological Poetics*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2009. 137-169. Print.

Salleh, Ariel, ed. *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: women write political ecology*. London and New York: Pluto Press / Melbourne: Spinifex, 2009. Print.

Spark, Muriel and Derek Stanford. *Emily Brontë: Her Life and Work*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1966. Print.

Symons, Arthur, ed. *The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind with a Memoir by Richard Garnett*. London: Fisher Unwin, 1900. Print.

Tennyson, Alfred [1850]. *In Memoriam A. H. H. (The Works)*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994. Print.

Tucker, Herbert. *Epic. Britain's Heroic Muse, 1790-1910*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Wallace, Alfred Russell. "Introductory Note to *The Ascent of Man* by Mathilde Blind." London: Fisher Unwin, 1899. Print.