

Words That Breathe: An Interview with José Manuel Marrero Henríquez

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Abstract



"Words That Breathe: An Interview with José Manuel Marrero Henríquez" explores ecocriticism, its growing presence in Spain and Latin America, and the transbordering potential of the "poetics of breathing" that inspires Marrero Henríquez's theoretical reflections, critical work, and creative writing.

Keywords: Marrero Henríquez, transbordering ecocriticism, poetics of breathing, literary landscapes, hispanism.

Resumen

"Palabras que respiran: una entrevista con José Manuel Marrero Henríquez" explora en el campo de la ecocrítica, en su creciente presencia en España y Latinoamérica y en el potencial transfronterizo de la "poética de la respiración" que inspira la especulación teórica, la práctica crítica y la escritura de creación de Marrero Henríquez.

Palabras clave: Marrero Henríquez, ecocrítica transfronteriza, poética de la respiración, paisajes literarios, hispanismo.

I was regretfully unable to conduct the following interview with José Manuel Marrero Henríquez in his homeland of Gran Canaria, one of the Fortunate Islands of Macaronesia (from the Greek *macáron nésoi*, Islands of Fortune). His home is a one-minute walk from the beautiful Las Canteras Beach and overlooks an abundance of cerulean sky and deep-blue ocean. Let me be global, at least virtually global, and accept Skype as the next-best medium, albeit lacking a contemplative sunset and seaside espresso to accompany our conversation on the field of ecocriticism, its growing presence in Spain and Latin America, and the ecological awareness residing in Marrero Henríquez's critical work and creative writing.

As a brief introduction to our meeting in cyberspace: José Manuel Marrero Henríquez is the author of *Documentación y lirismo en la narrativa de Ignacio Aldecoa* (*Documentation and Lyricism in Ignacio Aldecoa's Works*, 1997) and various articles on Spanish and Spanish American literatures, generic conventions, ethics and criticism, literature and ecology, that have appeared in publications such as *Plural*, *Cahiers de narratologie*, *Anales Cervantinos*, *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana*, *Insula*, *Syntaxis*, *Revista de Literatura*, *Tropelías*, *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, *Ecozon@*, and *ISLE*. He revived the nearly-forgotten work of Francisco González Díaz by editing a

collection of articles originally published in 1906 entitled *Árboles. Una campaña periodística* (*Trees. A Journalist's Campaign*, 2005) and a book from 1910 *Cultura y turismo* (*Culture and Tourism*, 2007). He has been the editor of various works dedicated to the study of literary landscapes, *Pasajes y paisajes: espacios de vida, espacios de cultura* (*Passages and Landscapes: Spaces of Life, Spaces of Culture*, 2006), *Lecturas del paisaje* (*Landscape Readings*, 2008), *Literary Landscapes and the National Imaginary* (2011), and *Literatura y sostenibilidad en la era del Antropoceno* (*Literature and Sustainability in the Anthropocene Era*, 2011). He has also published *El paisaje literario* (*On Literary Landscape*, 2008), a comprehensive study, bibliography, and anthology of literary landscapes in Hispanic literatures. Coeditor of *Ecocríticas. Literatura y medioambiente* (*Ecocriticisms. Literature and Environment*, 2010), he is currently preparing an edition of collected essays *Transatlantic Landscapes. Environmental Awareness, Literature and the Arts*. Marrero Henríquez is a graduate of the University of La Laguna (Tenerife). In addition, Washington University in St. Louis, Trinity College (Connecticut), the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and The School of Criticism and Theory (at Dartmouth College, 1996) have played a prominent role in his academic career. A member of the ecocritical research group GIECO in the Franklin Institute at the University of Alcalá, Marrero Henríquez served on the advisory board of EASLCE from 2010 to 2014 and is a member of the advisory board of *Philologica Canariensia* and of *Ecozon@*. His current research interests focus on ecocriticism, the representation of literary landscapes, and the impact of tourism and environmental politics on these landscapes. With respect to his literary endeavours, José Manuel Marrero Henríquez published his first short stories in 1985 in the pages of the Canary newspapers. In 1990, "Fumando en tránsito" ("Smoking in Transit") was a finalist in the First International Competition for Humorous Short Stories organized by *Prólogo. Revista del Lector*, and in 1993, he received the Canary Island's Montblanc Literary Award. His narrative fiction includes *Por venir de la nada* (phonetic reasons in Spanish allow two possible translations: *Coming from Nothingness* and *The Future of Nothing*, 1995), and his work has been published in journals such as *Encuentros, Revista de Literatura, Postmodern Notes, La Plazuela de las letras, Anarda, Al-Jarafish*, and *Ecozon@*. His fiction has also appeared in various interdisciplinary art projects and exhibition catalogs. In 2010, he published *Reversos ejemplares*, his first book of poems. He has recently finished *Paisajes con burro* (*Landscapes with Donkey*), a second book of poems. José Manuel Marrero Henríquez is a tenured professor of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

ELLEN SKOWRONSKI. *How would you describe the current state of ecocriticism in Spain?*

JOSÉ MANUEL MARRERO HENRÍQUEZ. Ecocriticism is a growing critical movement in Spain. Nevertheless, although Hispanic awareness is expanding, ecocriticism is witnessing its most energetic growth in Anglo-American research fields.

ES. *What do you think is the reason for the limited presence of ecocriticism in the Departments of Spanish Literature in Spain?*

JMMH. First, the term “ecocriticism” derives from Anglo-American literary studies and, secondly, there is not an area of study in Spanish comparable to what is referred to as “nature writing” in English; these are certainly two powerful explanations. In addition, if we agree with Latin American critics that ecological awareness in literature cannot come from the Christian tradition that places the world at the service of the human being, nor from the Western capitalistic idea of progress that envisions nature as a source from which to extract raw materials, but rather from the indigenous cosmologies of the Americas, then it is perfectly understandable that ecocriticism has a limited academic presence in Spanish Universities.

ES. *Do you share the opinion that Christianity and the Western idea of progress are incompatible with an ecological sensibility?*

JMMH. To some extent, yes, and in other respects, no. Christianity can be linked to the idea of a world put into human service, but it can also promote the brotherhood between beings, universal justice, and solidarity. Remember that the first stage of Genesis was vegetarian and promoted equality between sexes. Although progress—understood as the growing need to produce and consume—brings about economic and cultural catastrophe, progress also provides knowledge of the medium that promotes the consideration of the planet Earth as an ecosystem in danger of extinction. Neither Judeo-Christian tradition nor technological progress has a reason to be necessarily against the development of ecological awareness nor its literary and critical manifestations.

ES. *Do you consider your interest in ecocriticism an exception in the Spanish university landscape?*

JMMH. I began to introduce myself to ecocriticism at the end of the 1990s. I still remember the interest with which I read the 1995 anthology *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-first Century* edited by George Sessions and the 1999 issue of *New Literary History* on ecocriticism. Then came my affiliation with EASLCE, the opportunity to talk and exchange ideas with Serenella Iovino, Christa Grewe-Volpp, Serpil Oppermann, Hannes Bergthaller, Catrin Gersdorf, and then came ASLE and the conversations with Heather I. Sullivan, Ursula Heise, Paul Outka and others. It has proven very significant that, since that time, my primary academic contact in Spain has been developed with GIECO, a very active ecocritical research group directed by Carmen Flys Junquera and connected to the Franklin Institute at the University of Alcalá. The majority of its members belong to the field of Anglo-American studies, although there is also a presence of Francophone literature, children’s literature, and post-colonial and cultural studies. One curious point is that, with the exception of Niall Binns, who lives and works in Spain, my contact with Hispanic ecocriticism at the university level has primarily developed in the framework of ASLE congresses held in the United States where Ursula Heise was a key connection for me. I am thinking of Juan Carlos Galeano, Jorge Marcone, Gisela Heffes, Roberto Fornas-Broggi, Laura Bharbas Rhoden, Mark Anderson, Ignacio Valero, Alicia Rivero and Luis I. Prádanos and, from there, my discovery of the work of

Jennifer French, Scott M. DeVries, Beatriz Rivera Barnes and others. And it is significant that recently two Hispanists from Germany, Elmar Schmidt and Monika Werheim, have contacted me. As you see, except for these few Spanish exceptions, Hispanic ecocriticism is to be found above all in the United States and, to a lesser degree, Germany.

ES. *Because your field of interest is not widely present in Spanish Departments in your own country, do you feel like you are, shall we say, rowing against the current?*

JMMH. I have to admit that perhaps it is odd that someone who was going to give a class on Cervantine poetry in the Spanish Department at the University of Oslo ended up being interested in the figures of Arne Naess and the Deep Ecology Movement. Moreover, without a doubt, belonging to a Spanish Department presents an added challenge to the promotion of a current criticism that has, above all, representation in the English Department. And yes, perhaps I am a type of *rara avis* that has the audacity to incorporate certain specific themes dedicated to ecocriticism into the area of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory in the context of a Spanish Department. I must point out, however, that the Spanish Association of Literary Theory (ASETEL, Asociación Española de Teoría de la Literatura) in its VII Symposium “Discusiones sobre la lectura” (“On reading”) held at the University of Barcelona in January 2013 was very receptive to ecocriticism and invited me to give a plenary lecture. I presented “La lectura en tiempos de crisis” (“Reading in Times of Crisis”). This invitation was a boost to my work, and I would like to think that this conference was indicative of the penetration of ecocriticism in Spain.

ES. *Are you optimistic about the growth of ecocriticism in Spain?*

JMMH. Ecological awareness has come to stay and will end up influencing all areas of life in not just the twenty-first century, but the coming ones as well. The criticism of Spanish literature and theory undertaken in Spain will not be able to remove itself from a mindset that will characterize an era. It is a question of time.

ES. *Please elaborate on your work in the field of ecocritical studies in Spanish Literature.*

JMMH. My most recent work is not dedicated to the study of literature that is consciously imbued with an ecological claim, but rather explores the analytic and hermeneutical possibilities that are revealed in literary texts when an ecological reading is applied. Theoretical speculation and critical creativity play a very important role in justifying alternative readings of literary texts, whether canonical or emerging; for example, the decadent Spain of 98 (1898) can be read in Machado’s *Campos de Castilla* (*Fields of Castilla*) as the consequence of environmental deterioration from the indiscriminate tree-felling and soil erosion from rain and run-off. The existential depression in Gamoneda appears frequently linked to urban contamination. Delibes has explained his work in light of the first comprehensive study of the production system and capitalist consumerism in *Los límites al crecimiento* (*The Limits to Growth*). Finally, compared to the interior closure of the area from Castilla to the Pyrenees, the Atlantic

Ocean can be understood as a revitalizing symbol, promoting a Spanish literature open to dialog and permeable to democratic ideas.

ES. *Could you give an account of contemporary poetry in Spain that is inspired by ecological awareness?*

JMMH. I could mention Niall Binns, Jorge Riechmann, as well as part of the work of Julia Barella; I would also refer to the need to come to an understanding with nature in the poetry of Carlos Mestre, Vicente Valero or Manuel Rivas. Similarly, I would talk about the communication sought in the trees of Julia Uceda, the Eastern consideration of life in Miguel Ángel Bernat and Chantall Maillard, or nature as a source of cultural and linguistic identity in César Antonio Molina. I could look to the sewers of Spain during the cement and concrete “boom” in the narrative of Rafael Chirbes, to the nature longed for after urban emigration in the works of Llamazares, Vila-Matas, J. Á. González Sáinz, and Luciano G. Egido, or the detailed urban descriptions of Javier Marías. However, before reading authors by the ability of their poetry or narrative to reveal present ecological interest, I prefer to search for texts that illustrate my theoretical speculations and my critical and historical hypotheses. For example, I state that the ‘strategic’ position of the Canarian Archipelago in the commercial Atlantic trade routes was key to making the poetic motifs of the Atlantic in *Los poemas de la gloria, del amor y del mar* (*Poems of Glory, Love and the Sea*, 1908) by Tomás Morales and *Cultura y turismo* (*Culture and Tourism*, 1910) by Francisco González Díaz serve as an introduction of modernity in the Spanish poem and essay. For example, in 1926, in his prologue to Saulo Torón’s *El caracol encantado* (*The Enchanted Snail*), Antonio Machado declares that thanks “to the sea [...] we can heal our lyrical of the Manchego dryness and courtliness from which it suffers and something, also, of its provincialism, two evils that are accentuated in our literature after Lope” (“al mar [...] podemos curar a nuestra lírica de la sequedad manchega y cortesana que padece y algo, también, de su provincianismo, dos males que se acentúan en nuestra literatura después de Lope”). Beyond the traditionalism of the literary waters of the fountains, streams, and rivers that drained the dry and exhausted Castilla of the imperial dream, the waves of the Atlantic of Morales and González Díaz gave new life to national literature. Before Juan Ramón Jiménez published *Animal de fondo* (1948), Pedro Salinas *El contemplado* (1946), Vicente Aleixandre *Ámbito* (1928), Saulo Torón *El caracol encantado* (1926), Miguel de Unamuno *De Fuerteventura a París* (1925), Rafael Alberti *Marinero en Tierra* (1925), before Manuel Altolaguirre and Emilio Prados made the Mediterranean a vanguard icon in the magazine *Litoral* (1926), and even before Juan Ramón Jiménez published *Diario de un poeta recién casado* (1917), Ramón Pérez de Ayala *El sendero innumerable* (1916) and Juan Ramón Jiménez *Poemas májicos y dolientes* (1909), Francisco González Díaz and Tomás Morales had turned the Atlantic waters into an intellectual and ideological poetic motif of openness and modernity.

ES. *As a representative of ecocriticism, how would you describe your location in Spain?*

JMMH. My location is culturally and geographically eccentric. I live in the Spanish autonomous community of the Canary Islands, very far from the European continent and very close to the northwestern coast of Africa. I also live in one of the nine ultra-peripheral regions of the European Union, together with five French overseas departments: Guadalupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Reunion Island and Mayotte; the French overseas collectivity of Saint Martin; and the autonomous Portuguese regions of the Azores and Madeira. Together with the Azores, Madeira and Cabo Verde, I live in Macaronesia.

ES. *Has your islander's perspective influenced you in your approach to ecocriticism?*

JMMH. Without a doubt. The dominant economic discussion always speaks of growing and consuming, but you cannot increasingly grow and consume in a limited territory, whether it be a small island in Macaronesia, or the planet Earth as a whole. The Fortunate Islands represented in the classics have traditionally been represented as islands of paradise by canonical island authors such as Cairasco de Figueroa, Antonio de Viana, Abreu y Galindo, Viera y Clavijo, and in the descriptions of travellers and naturalists like Olivia Stone and Alexander von Humboldt. This tradition of paradise that without doubt responds to the aspects of the biological and climatic reality of the islands coexists with another that bursts forth with the development of mass tourism. I refer to the urban speculation and cement nightmares that David Lodge portrays in *Therapy*, to the impersonality of the landscape of hotels that Ernst Junger alludes to in his journals, or the noise imposed on a beautiful beach in the poems of Eugenio de Andrade. From these critical literary landscapes of the development of the Canary Islands, my interest was nourished by the relationships between ecological thought and literary criticism, and from there my newspaper articles were born through more of an activist disposition than an academic one, and they included titles such as “El desarrollo insostenible” (“The Unsustainable Development”, 2001) and “Política territorial y literatura” (“Urban Politics and Literature”, 2002).

ES. *Please describe the path that led you to your academic interest in ecocriticism.*

JMMH. Although it has been a long and winding road, I can now make an ordered narrative of what, in the moment, appeared to be coincidences and unconnected events. The key words of this narrative, expressed in chronological order, are: the Spanish social novel, binary oppositions, literary landscape, and ecocriticism. In my doctoral thesis on Ignacio Aldecoa, I attempted to argue that rather than seeing the ‘literariness’ and the social commitment of his work as competing elements, they should be understood as complementary. In fact, the resulting book from that dissertation, *Documentación y lirismo en la narrativa de Ignacio Aldecoa (Documentation and Lyricism in the Works of Ignacio Aldecoa, 1997)*, dismantles the binary oppositions of literary criticism in post-war Spain to study the way in which the exhaustive documentation of Ignacio Aldecoa’s narrative contributes to the lyrical effect of his reading, and the way in which his stylistic choices and subject treatment of language contribute to his social denouncement.

ES. *It seems strange that your attempt to abolish binary thought in the study of the socially-committed novel in post-war Spain first led you to the study of landscape and then to ecocriticism.*

JMMH. Dispensing with the ethical and moral aspects in the reading of these literary works is equivalent to ignoring the relevant sources of the aesthetic experience. No wonder why, in the idea of Platonic Beauty, the ideas of Good and Free Will played an important role that was eliminated in the Kantian aesthetic and whose erasure has had polarizing effects in theory and criticism in the twentieth century. And the polarities not only impoverished the perception of literature, but also reduced the complex issues of everyday life to broad strokes. Because of this, from the realism of the Spanish post-war novel, I became interested in the theoretical concept of the relevance of 'extraliterary' aspects in the analysis and interpretation of the aesthetic experience of the literary reading, or in other terms, to vindicate what I have called the "estética de la transitividad" ("aesthetics of transitivity") in works such as "Poetics of Beauty in a Virtual Millennium" (2005) or "La interpretación literaria ante el nuevo milenio" ("Literary Interpretation Before a New Millennium", 1999).

ES. *Following the progression of your research, where does landscape end and ecocriticism begin?*

JMMH. Landscape is something that is out there, and it is also a linguistic construct, a space of life and a space of culture. Landscape is, therefore, an excellent place to deal with the biological and cultural relationships that are embodied in the literary text and are reflections of the biological and cultural relationships that sustain life. I live in a place where Paradise is evoked time and time again to sell a rich biodiverse territory and enviable climate. It is no coincidence that the classical Greeks such as Plato, Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy located the Fortunate Islands beyond the Herculean Pillars in the Canary Islands to the northwest of the African coast. There are two realities that are lived simultaneously here: that of a landscape transformed by tourism and that of a paradise that tourism invokes to attract tourists. A place devoid of historicity, Paradise helps to intervene, sometimes on harmful occasions, in the real and concrete place that serves to support the literary cliché of paradise; it is a paradox that can very well remind us of Jean Baudrillard's idea of simulation, the brand or the label that finds in itself its own reason for being, the map that superimposes the territory. I, of course, claim the power of the map to preserve the territory, not to hide its ruin.

ES. *Are you attempting to link the evolution of literary landscaping with the concrete transformations that economic developments cause in a specific place and disregard the literary tradition as a source of its renewal?*

JMMH. A literary cliché can evolve not only as an answer to a fossilized literary motif, but also in response to a real-life event. To illustrate this idea, I tend to draw upon the preface of *The Green Studies Reader* in which Laurence Coupe clearly and concisely insists on the necessity to maintain the criticism of a literary landscape in the equidistant place of what he calls the "referential fallacy" and the "semiotic fallacy"

because a literary landscape is not strictly a cultural product nor a reliable copy of a natural landscape. In my own words, I could argue that a literary landscape is *simultaneously* nature and culture. Laurence Coupe rightly pointed out that remaining in this equidistance between both fallacies is difficult, and it certainly is; just as Bart Kosko asserts in his *Fuzzy Thinking* (1994), binary thinking is a type of natural habit of the mind. The boundaries are not black and white dividing lines, but ample spaces full of shades of grey. Ecocriticism should take a risk and venture into those spaces where a thing can be, in part, its opposite.

ES. *Do you suggest a transborder agenda for ecocriticism?*

JMMH. If ecocriticism wishes to respond to the global dimension of human beings' ecological responsibility, it must aim to establish itself in the area of analysis and interpretation of literary texts, creating objectives and a general methodology that trains it to read texts from diverse traditions as localized and different as the circumstances and interests that inspire them. Examples of concepts that move within completely different contexts include: Christianity, with which Rodó vindicates Latin American spiritualism, and which is also used by Max Weber to explain Anglo-Saxon materialism; in Sarmiento's civilization, there is barbarity, but within his barbarity, there is civilization; Pachamama's warning is displayed via satellite through the withdrawal of the glaciers and ice caps; the common good that is sought in the economy that Christian Felber establishes in the European democratic constitutions is also searched for in the indigenous uses of the land that Mariátegui defends, Leonardo Boff's ecotheology, the natural contract of Michel Serres, and the biopolitics of Enrique Dussel.

ES. *What can be the common denominator for a theory able to support the literary criticism of texts originating from such disparate traditions as the Anglo-Saxon and the Hispanic and, within this, as divergent as the European and neo-indigenous discourses?*

JMMH. The fundamental hypothesis by which I currently work is to consider that written words breathe, and as a consequence, criticism will have to search, analyze, and interpret the procedures through which literary texts breathe, regardless of the tradition to which they belong. To a certain degree, ecocriticism is by necessity "Aerial Ecocriticism".

ES. *Can you explain your idea of "Aerial Ecocriticism" in greater detail?*

JMMH. Global ecological awareness calls into question the epistemological value of binary oppositions and reveals the methodological weakness of their oppositional matrix, the one that places culture against nature. And it is in this blurred matrix where ecocriticism finds its method and goals in the Anthropocene. If culture forms part of nature, complex forms of literary writing seek to capture the immediate knowledge of nature that Walter Ong studies in the societies of primary orality, or that Bruno Latour describes as the paradoxical movement of scientific laboratory investigation that distances itself from reality in order to approach it. Whether they be American or European texts, part of the oral tradition or fully inserted in the literate tradition, akin

to indigenous cosmogonies or Western mindsets, ecocriticism should explore the transbordering possibility of revealing the processes by which words breathe or, in other words, the processes by which literature proves to be the ultimate result of the natural evolution that rewards those who are able to grasp its beauty, that is, its regularities in time as well as its regularities in space.

ES. *It seems that with your “words that breathe” you attempt to erase the opposition between orality and writing?*

JMMH. I would not say “erase”, but rather diffuse the sharp clarity of its difference.

ES. *Once more, there is a way of thinking beyond binary thought?*

JMMH. Indeed. The binary oppositions of structuralism whose value, not in truth, but in methodology, Derrida highlighted in the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, must, in the Anthropocene, give way to a mindset sensitive to the perception of the complementary relationships that serve as a methodical way to increase the complex vision of reality. Breathing and poems are neither a pair of irreconcilable differences nor the extremes of a paradox without resolution; on the contrary, just as nature and culture, sensual perception and aesthetic elaboration, orality and literacy, breathing and poems belong to the same being and share the common goal of revealing, discovering, and creating knowledge about the relationships binding the universe. At the very end, any literary quest for aesthetic completion implies erasing arbitrariness and making poetry capable of investing literature with the perfection that a pre-linguistic breath or an onomatopoeic sound gives of nature.

ES. *So, in accordance with these suggestions, what is the transborder principle of ecocriticism?*

JMMH. Although breathing and poems are radically divergent inasmuch as the former depends mostly on the material experience of the world and the latter depends mostly on the knowledge of poetic conventions, both share the common goal of attaining a motivated expression, precise and non-arbitrary, “natural” to speak in Cratylus terms, for poetic signs are perfect signs of their own significance, even of fuzzy ideas, vague feelings, or obscure uncertainties. The deep breath that expresses the experienced in front of a beautiful sunrise is the sensual relative of its cultural elaboration in a literary landscape. Simple and complex, physiological and cultural, immediate and elaborated, orality and literacy, breathing and poems are the two extremes of the same gold piece, the two parallels that, at the point of infinity, will intersect.

ES. *Could you give me an example of your hypothesis at work?*

JMMH. Any poem would do, but I will give you two very different examples. Azorín, one of the principal writers of the Spanish Generation of 98, a generation devoted to the study and understanding of a country that, after centuries of decline, finally lost its last remaining colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898, heard the answer to an entire generational question about the nation in a simple deep breath. The bulk of

philosophical, literary, artistic, and scientific production of the Generation of 98, including that of such prominent writers as Antonio Machado, Miguel de Unamuno, and Pío Baroja, painters like Zuloaga, musicians such as Granados and Albéniz, and scientists such as Ignacio Bolívar, Salvador Calderón, and Odón de Buen, was in a breath, that simple breath that Azorín heard exhaled by Doña Isabel's lungs the day he left to travel Don Quixote's route:

Then she puts her hands together with a painful gesture, arches her eyebrows, and sighs:

--- My Lord!

And immediately this breath that I have heard from these good old ladies dressed in black so, so many times in the old towns, in the rambling ancient houses; this breath immediately brings me a neat, deep vision of the authentic Spain.

Modern geography could not be understood other than as the consequence of that primal aesthetic breath incarnated in Humboldt's ability to see beauty in the regularities of the Orotava Valley in Tenerife, Canary Islands, and immediately after, once he departed to Venezuela, in the South American landscapes. His work gave way to modern geography, for Humboldt explained his feeling of beauty before beautiful landscapes not only with diagrams, taxonomies, and scientific hypotheses about the forms of the ecosystems observed, but also with deep, poetic interpretations deriving from his exquisite capacity of perception.

ES. *And your poetry, does it breathe?*

JMMH. My poetry is an extension of my ideas and feelings. I would be happy if the readers breathed along with the words that breathe in *Reversos ejemplares* (2010). And I maintain a similar wish for the forthcoming *Paisajes con burro* (*Landscapes with Donkey*).

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