"Trees in the poetry of Rosalía de Castro" (1837-1885 Galicia, Spain)  
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• If a poet uses a word you don't know, how important is it to look it up?  
→ The kind of image the word is used in will indicate how deeply you can profitably delve into the meanings, but the more you know, the better!

"Fun nun domingo" (It happened on a Sunday) Cantares gallegos (1863)  
Dempois a aurora  
co seu sembrabrente  
feito de rosas  
ven a alumbrarme,  
e vin estonces,  
anter o ramaxe  
de olmos e pinos,  
acobexarse  
branca casiña  
con palomare,  
donde as pombiñas  
entran e saien. (Ins.35-46)  

Later the dawn  
with its visage  
all made of roses  
iluminated me,  
and then I saw,  
through the boughs  
of elms and pines,  
nestling there  
the little white house  
with the dovecote,  
where the little doves  
come and go.

"Del antiquo camino a lo largo" (All along the ancient road) En las orillas del Sar (1884)  
No lejos, en soto profundo de robles,  
en donde el silencio sus alas extiende,  
y da abrigo a los genios propicios,  
a nuestras viviendas y asilos campestres,  
siempre allí, cuando evoco mis sombras,  
o las llamo, respondenme y vienen. (Ins.13-18 fin)

"Jamás lo olvidaré!" (I will never forget!) En las orillas del Sar (1884)  
Y sin embargo...  
¡nada allí quedó en pie! Los arrogantes  
cedros de nuestro Libano, los altos  
gigantescos castaños, seculares,  
regalo de los ojos; los robustos  
y centenarios robles, cuyos troncos  
de arrugas llenos, monstruos semejaban  
de ceño adusto y de mirada torva  
que hacen pensar en ignorados mundos;  
las encinas vetustas, bajo cuyas  
ramas vagaron en silencio tantos  
tercos, impenitentes soñadores;...  
¡todo por tierra y asolado todo! (Ins.32-44 elipses sic)

And nevertheless...  
Nothing there remained standing! The arrogant  
cedars of our Lebanon, the lofty  
gigantic chestnuts, age-old,  
a sight to behold; the robust  
and ancient oaks, with trunks  
full of wrinkles, seemed monsters  
of frowning brow and crooked gaze  
that made one think of unknown worlds;  
the hoary holm-oaks, beneath whose  
boughs wandered in silence so many  
stubborn, impenitent dreamers...:  
All felled and all laid waste!

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• The fact that she found inspiration in an oak grove not a garden distinguished Castro from her female contemporaries; that the grove was close to human dwellings differs from the Romantic Sublime.  
• But why an oak grove? Other tree-names would fit the rhyme and meter just as well...  
→ Milne Library has several Dictionaries of Symbolism—there you find the deep meaning of oaks, Kings of the Forest for the Celtic peoples; your study of Spanish history will add that the Celts populated northwest Spain and traces of their culture survive there.  
• When Castro calls out to her shadows, is she speaking to the trees, the Celtic wood-gods, her Celtic ancestors, or some other embodiment of her muse?

"Del antiquo camino a lo largo" (All along the ancient road) En las orillas del Sar (1884)  
Not far off, in the deep oak grove,  
where silence extends her wings,  
and shelters the propitious spirits  
and our dwellings and shelters,  
always there, when I invoke my shadows,  
or call them, they respond to me and come.

images from Los árboles, text by Mercedes Alcina and drawings by Rafael Aburto ( Madrid: Penthalon Ediciones, 1985)