

N.º 3 diciembre 2016

POÉTICAS

Revista de Estudios Literarios



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Revista de Estudios Literarios



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Antonio Machado en el Café de las Salesas

REALITY, IDEALISM, AND THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DIVIDE: ANTONIO MACHADO AND THE MODERNIST CRISIS OF KNOWLEDGE

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RESUMEN

PALABRAS CLAVE { Antonio Machado, Filosofía, Orientaciones epistemológicas,
Proverbios y cantares, siglo XIX }

Este artículo tiene dos objetivos: primero, situar la preocupación temprana de Antonio Machado con la naturaleza de la realidad dentro de las orientaciones epistemológicas que se plantearon en Europa a finales del siglo diecinueve y principios del veinte concernientes a la relación sujeto/objeto y las ya consolidadas doctrinas idealistas, realistas, y objetivistas; y segundo, demostrar cómo Machado logró poetizar la problemática esencial de la realidad a través de una de las partes más desvalorizadas y fundamentales de su obra: los «Proverbios y cantares».

ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS { Antonio Machado, Philosophy, Epistemological questions,
Proverbios y cantares, Nineteen century }

This article has two aims: first, to frame Antonio Machado's early preoccupation with the nature of reality within the epistemological questions that were being raised in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century concerning the subject/object divide and established accounts of idealism, realism, and objectivity; and second, to demonstrate how Machado poetized the core question of reality through one of the

most undervalued and fundamental areas of his work: the “Proverbios y cantares”.

To comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it but to find ourselves in an affective disposition. To comprehend being is to exist.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Is Ontology Fundamental?* (4)

In a letter to Miguel de Unamuno in 1903 shortly after the publication of *Soledades*, Antonio Machado took the opportunity to share a concern that had been nagging at him for some time: “Tengo observado, en la experiencia propia y ajena, que hay dos medios de seguro engaño: y es el primero pensar que todo sea lo que parece ser; y el segundo pensar lo contrario” (*Prosas* 176). With his characteristic sobriety and penchant for philosophical reflection, Machado put his finger on one of the fundamental problems he would wrestle with for the rest of his life: the fundamental nature of reality. Much of his poetry and poetic-philosophical musings engaged this age-old and slippery problem in some fashion, which manifested itself in his oeuvre not only as a deep-rooted unease about the correspondence between the external world and the individual’s subjective experience of it, but also as a skepticism regarding how adequately logic, science, and language could chart this external world. From his first poems in *Soledades* to the poetic fragments and writings of the apocryphal Juan de Mairena and Abel Martín of the 1930s, he never tired of ruminating on the constitution of objective reality and the subject/object divide. He attempted, likewise, to trace that elusive frontier that divided what he called “el mundo como ilusión” and “el mundo como realidad,” and he discovered that regardless of what metaphysical or idealist outlook one takes or how profoundly one espoused the tenets of a philosophical system, the world of objects surrounded and confronted the self with a concrete, tangible materiality that conditioned its understanding of existence:

El mundo como ilusión... no es más explicable que el mundo como realidad. No será el trabajo de la ciencia el que me obligue a creer en él... Las cosas están allí donde las veo, los ojos allí donde ven. Lo absoluto está para mi tan inabarcable como el ayer. Pero mi relación con lo real es real también. ¿No equivaldría esto a un despertar? Sería ello —se dirá— un retorno a la creencia del sentido común, del hombre ingenuo que no hizo nunca del conocer un problema. (*Antología* 103)

While this facet of Machado's poetry and thought has not gone unnoticed in the critical literature, I believe we can add further insight into its complexity if we approach it from the modernist crisis of knowledge that comes about in the late nineteenth century with a systematic critique of reason and the idealist philosophical tradition. More often than not, Machado's preoccupation with the nature of reality has been interpreted within a local frame of reference, so to speak, that has included the project of *regeneracionismo* (the reformist struggle to rehabilitate Spain's cultural life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), national history (the diagnosis of Spain's past and present socioeconomic ills as seen through the mythopoetic construct of Castille in *Campos de Castilla*), personal reflections mediated by biographical experiences (Machado's travails in Soria, Baeza, Segovia, and Madrid), and fragmentary and folkloric musings on day-to-day rural life and *el pueblo* (the primacy in Machado's work of the popular forms of the *copla*). What has been regarded as secondary in his oeuvre is how the complementarity of his poetic and philosophical thinking dialogued with the larger epistemological controversies that were shaping modernist intellectual culture across Europe during this period. The problem has been twofold when it comes to evaluating Spanish modernists like Machado within a broader transnational framework of this sort: firstly, Modernist Studies has suffered from a blind-spot, to put it mildly, with respect to the contribution and role of "other" modernisms within the broader transnational context of modernism;¹ and secondly, Spanish criticism and historiography,

1. To touch upon a few of the more popular anthologies and introductions to

through the consolidation of generational models of literary interpretation, labored for decades to stress Spain's difference with respect to the rest of Europe in terms of its cultural landscape and traditions.² To say that the appreciation of Machado's oeuvre has suffered greatly on both counts is an understatement. Within the domain of Modernist Studies, Machado is rarely, if ever, acknowledged in histories of modernism. Indeed, his absence from these histories speaks volumes on the center/margin logic that informs discussions of modernism in academic and cultural circles today.³ Seen from the vantage point of Spanish criticism and historiography, his oeuvre was strategically coopted and deployed for all sorts of propagandist purposes by progressives, conservatives, communists, and fascists both in Spain and abroad during the Francoist years between 1939 and 1975. What was most often applauded about it was not its philosophical bent, but rather,

modernism circulating today we can refer to Lawrence Rainey's *Modernism: An Anthology* (2005), which makes no reference not only to Machado, but to any Spanish writer for that matter. Pericles Lewis's *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (2007) likewise makes no mention of Machado, nor does Peter Gay's *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (2008) or Michael Levinson's *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (2011).

2. See C. Christopher Soufas's *The Subject in Question: Early Contemporary Spanish Literature and Modernism*. As Soufas explains: "Spanish criticism has excluded itself from such debate [on modernism] in the wider profession, stressing Spanish nonparticipation in a vaguely defined *vanguardismo* and largely leaving it at that. To speak about Spanish literature of the early twentieth century, it is necessary to do so in the fragmented context of the literary generation. Nevertheless, the similarities between the strongly nationalistic Spanish literary generation and nation-centered European avant-garde groups offer an opportunity to address the inadequacies in the literary generation model as well as to point out problems in opposing the historical avant-garde against modernism" (20).

3. The center/margin logic I am referring to is amply explored in Anthony L. Geist's and José B. Monleón's comprehensive volume *Modernism and its Margin: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*. For Geist and Monleón, the center/margin logic raises the notion that modernism, as a movement, a period, a sensibility, and a set of values was somehow underdeveloped and derivative in geographical and cultural spheres like Spain situated beyond the so-called original centers of modernity and modernization like England, France, Germany and the United States (xviii). In her recently published study on Machado, Xon de Ros reflects upon Machado's total absence from histories of modernism, particularly Bradbury and McFarlane's *Modernism 1890-1930*, noting: "Omissions should not be taken for exclusions... yet the glaring absence of Machado from Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's compendious account of modernist literature looks like a deliberate decision... a similar disregard can be found in anthologies of European poetry, where a 'customary omission of the Spanish' is noticeable" (180-181).

its autochthonous character and nationalist tenor (*lo castizo*) that painted—depending on who was doing the theorizing—a highly politicized and warped vision of Spain.⁴

Against this backdrop, I have two aims in what follows. My first is to frame Machado's early preoccupation with the nature of reality within the epistemological questions that were being raised in Europe concerning the subject/object divide and established accounts of idealism, realism, and objectivity. My second aim, bound to the first, is to demonstrate how Machado poetized the core question of reality through one of the most undervalued and fundamental areas of his work: the "Proverbios y cantares". More concretely, I will attend to one of the longer fragments Machado published under the title "Apuntes, parábolas, proverbios y cantares" in 1916 in *La Lectura*.

MODERNISM AND THE IDEALIST ARGUMENT

When first approaching the protean concept of modernism it is productive to conceive it through an accommodating lens not only as a complex cultural expression of modernity that takes recognizable shape in Europe in the late nineteenth century and extends to roughly 1940, but also as a powerful "mode of reform" in which all manner of social, corporeal, aesthetic, temporal, and ideological relations were appraised and found wanting (Armstrong 64). Yet, the truth is that no matter how broadly or narrowly we wish to conceive the concept of modernism, we can be certain that one of its defining characteristics is its probing of knowledge systems and those forms of epistemic authority that the rationality of science and philosophy both problematized (e.g. religious dogma) and enriched (e.g. positivist reasoning). Patrick Diggins put it succinctly: "Modernism

4. Pablo A. Cobos's *Humor y pensamiento de Antonio Machado en la metafísica poética* (1963) and Juan García Bacca's *Invitación a filosofar según espíritu y letra de Antonio Machado* (1967) represent some of the first serious studies on Machado's philosophical thinking.

may be defined in a number of ways, but each definition returns to the problem of belief and the limits of cognition” (7).

It is well established that the fundamental relationship between subject and object, and the body of concepts, ideas, and theories associated with the nature of perception and belief, were subjected during the modernist period to a number of revisionist analyses rooted in an orienting struggle for greater freedom, self-determination, personal expression, and subjective meaning. We could ask: what was Nietzsche’s overarching philosophical project—the resolute assessment of power and its legitimation that informed the modernist ethos so powerfully—if not a systematic inquiry into how and why the individual internalized the epistemic norms that were complicit in, or responsible for, his subjugation and oppression? For modernists and avant-gardists alike, it was Nietzsche’s unflinching critique of epistemology and its attendant transvaluation of values that most resonated with their skepticism and thirst for reform, and it was precisely this strategy of critique that transformed him shortly after his death in 1900 into what Ramón Gómez de la Serna called a “symbol” for a new, youth-driven period bent on revolting against the legacies of Cartesian rationalism and its subject/object dualism (*Obras* 152). What modernists and avant-gardists like Filippo Marinetti, Pío Baroja, Thomas Mann, Musil, Francis Picabia, and Tristan Tzara, to name a few, inherited from Nietzsche was the overarching idea that if the individual ever aspired to be truly *free* he had no choice but to unburden himself from the epistemological heritage of the past (or at least a good part of it). More than writing off previous cultural traditions and fortifying the triumphant self as Gómez de la Serna advocated, and more than fantasizing about the obliteration of museums and libraries and extolling the aesthetics of a sporty four-cylinder Fiat, as Marinetti proposed in his 1909 manifesto, this type of unburdening implied something far greater. That is, one had to come into a critical awareness not only of the cultural assumptions by which power was transformed into so-called objective knowledge, but also the day-to-day practices (those that structure the domain of science, religion, etc.) by which ideology further fragmented objective

knowledge into a constellation of so-called subjective truths. Said otherwise, the most elementary relationship between subject and object, including how this relationship has evolved and shaped the metaphysics of subjectivity, had to be revisited for the individual to make true sense of the world. In a number of passages in *The Will to Power* dealing with the subject/object divide, Nietzsche laid out what can be read as the core tenets of modernist epistemology:

The biggest fable of all is the fable of knowledge. One would like to know what things-in-themselves are; but behold, there are no things-in-themselves! . . . Coming to know, however, is always “placing oneself in a conditional relation to something” . . . The question “what is that?” is an imposition of meaning from some other viewpoint. “Essence,” the “essential nature,” is something perspective and already presupposes a multiplicity. At the bottom of it there always lies “what is that for *me*?” (for us, all that lives, etc.) . . . The origin of “things” is wholly the work of that which imagines, thinks, wills, feels. (301-302)

The larger inquiry into the subject/object divide during the modernist period was critical to the radical reassessment of everything from aesthetics to social theory to phenomenology to theories of embodiment and time. It was also relevant, particularly as it pertains to Machado’s preoccupation with the nature of reality, with regard to the silent rebellion against idealism. We cannot lose sight of the fact that neo-Kantianism had come into vogue in German universities at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to Herman Cohen, Wilhelm Windelband, and Heinrich Rickert, among others, and spread quickly across Europe. A rethinking of Kant’s disquisitions on the category of reality greatly informed modernist thought, and there is little doubt that it aroused interest in the propositions of metaphysics and forms of subjectivity and objectivity that could accommodate new and practical approaches to the self-world dialectic. José del Perojo, Ernst Mach, Edmund Husserl, and Paul Natorp would employ aspects of Kantian philosophy to valorize and recast the idealist critique of empiricism. In early twentieth-century Spain, José Ortega y Gasset was instrumental in shifting the cultural

status of neo-Kantianism. As a student of Paul Natorp in Marburg between 1906 and 1907, and again in 1911, he eagerly embraced neo-Kantianism and delved headlong into Kant's *Critiques*, yet soon came to the realization around 1912 that the primary idealist argument of the unknowability of the world was at root unsatisfactory. As he would later refer to it:

[c]on gran esfuerzo me he evadido de la prisión kantiana y he escapado a su influjo atmosférico... De la magnífica prisión kantiana solo es posible evadirse injiriéndola... Kant no se pregunta qué es o cuál es la realidad, qué son las cosas, qué es el mundo. Se pregunta, por el contrario, cómo es posible el conocimiento de la realidad, de las cosas, del mundo. ("Reflexiones" 25-28)

Ortega y Gasset's impression was that neo-Kantianism forced conclusions about the nature of reality without taking into account what he called the fundamental "truths" of subjective experience that bound the individual to his vital circumstance in concrete and meaningful ways. He disowned Kant's version of reality—and idealism more generally (although never completely)—as something of an abstract thought experiment about knowledge. In *En torno a Galileo* penned some years later he put it as follows:

el error terrible de la época moderna consiste en estar en la creencia de que el ser primario del hombre consiste en pensar, que su relación primaria con las cosas es una relación intelectual. Este error se llama 'idealismo.' La crisis que padecemos es la multa que pagamos por ese error. El pensamiento no es el ser del hombre. (124)

Needless to say, his foray into neo-Kantianism was pivotal in his later reorientation toward *raciovitalismo*, a philosophical project that aspired to synthesize rationalism and vitalism in order to safeguard subjective experience from falling into the bog of idealist reductionism.

The young G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell are worth highlighting in this respect to fill out the picture. Both Moore and Russell spearheaded a pioneering epistemological project against idealism at Cambridge between 1897 and 1910 that profoundly

resonated with modernists. Furthermore, their dialogue with idealism—and with the British Idealists such as F. H. Bradley whose *Appearance and Reality* of 1893 set the philosophical community ringing with his idea that the Thing-in-Itself can be understood as self-contradictory from the standpoint of subject/object relationality—effectively cleared the path for modern analytic philosophy. In “Seems, madam? Nay, it is” of 1897, Russell homed in on the essential problem of reality that had occupied neo-Kantianism and was being addressed by a number of philosophers: the subject/object divide. More concretely, he confronted the distinction between what he labelled “Appearance and Reality,” which ultimately set him on a path to his investigations into mathematical logic in *The Principles of Mathematics* of 1903 and the more ambitious three-volume *Principia Mathematica* (co-authored with Whitehead) that appeared between 1910 and 1913. Much like Machado would argue some years later through the framework of transcendental idealism, as we shall see in the following section, Russell claimed in “Seems, madam? Nay, it is” that if we are to follow idealist reason in the fundamental unknowability of the Thing-in-itself and propose that reality is in the end inaccessible to our mind except as appearance, then all our “metaphysicizing” about its qualities does little if anything to advance our knowledge of it (55). In fact, our “metaphysicizing” has the unfortunate consequence of molding an ulterior and abstract world so divorced from our immediate world of appearance that it has absolutely no bearing upon it. “[I]nstead of really explaining this actual palpable sensible world,” Russell argued, “metaphysics constructs another fundamentally different world, so different, so unconnected with actual experience, that the world of daily life remains wholly unaffected by it, and goes on its way just as if there were no world of Reality at all” (56). While for Russell “metaphysicizing” could prove to be fruitful in allowing us to elaborate a certain aesthetic disposition or a unique perspective on life (religious belief, for instance), it distracts us from the enterprise of defining a practical knowledge of appearance. “The gulf fixed between Appearance and Reality is . . . profound,” Russell

concluded, adding: “The desire to find comfort in metaphysics has, we must all admit, produced a great deal of fallacious reasoning and intellectual dishonesty” (58).⁵

Echoing Russell, Moore elaborated on the gulf between what he labelled the “Idealistic view” and “the ordinary view of the world” in his 1903 essay “The Refutation of Idealism” (a title that invokes Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism,” a section that was added to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* where he defended and clarified transcendental idealism in relation to the noumenal physical world). However, Moore went about the question of reality differently than Russell. Rather than taking aim at the burdens of metaphysics writ large, he set his sights on George Berkeley’s *esse est percipi* doctrine that he believed dwelled at the heart of idealist reasoning. Moore drew a sharp distinction between the Thing-in-itself and the object of perception and argued that the Thing-in-itself *does* exist independent of consciousness of it. The relation between subject and object is not a relation based on predication: the subject perceives, yet the object perceived is not an inherent component of the perceiving, although it is clearly associated to it in the moment of perception:

I am as directly aware of the existence of material things in space as of my own sensations; and *what* I am aware of with regard to each is exactly the same – namely that in one case the material thing, and in the other case my sensation, does really exist. The question requiring to be asked about material things is . . . What reason have we for supposing that material things do *not* exist, since *their* existence has precisely the same evidence as that of our sensations? (44)

5. In 1911, Russell admitted that “there is one great question: Can human beings *know* anything, and if so what and how? This question is really the most essential philosophical of all questions” (*Letters* 391). His preoccupation with knowledge and “fallacious” reasoning continued in *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* of 1914 where he revealed the limitations of the “classical tradition” of philosophy (as filtered through Kant and Hegel) and evolutionism (as filtered through Darwin, Spenser, James, and Bergson). He upheld the preeminence of logic and argued for logical atomism, or what he also referred to as knowledge of logical forms; that is, “a general knowledge not derived from sense . . . some of this knowledge is not obtained by inference but is primitive. Such general knowledge is to be found in logic” (46).

While Russell and Moore sought to firm up the subject/object divide beyond the epistemological constraints of idealism during these early years with the implements of logic and mathematics, their ultimate aim of plumbing the fundamental nature of reality influenced modernist artists and writers, especially the Bloomsbury Group who would explore several of their philosophical precepts in their literary works (Banfield 1-55). The truth is that Russell's and Moore's work fueled an increasingly critical debate on whether knowledge *itself* was at all possible, a question Machado had been struggling with since 1903 when he began his correspondence with Miguel de Unamuno and first took interest in Kant's philosophy. In their study on the coincidences and intersections among Relativity Theory, Cubism, and modernist fiction in the early twentieth century, Thomas Vargish and Delo E. Mook propose that a generalized "epistemic trauma" undergirded this larger question of the possibility of knowledge during the modernist period (14). As they describe it, this trauma grew out a particular set of socio-historical conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as artists, intellectuals, scientists, philosophers, and thinkers labored through the problematics of space and time from new points of entry. That is to say, the advances—and indeed, shortcomings—of various knowledge systems and positivist paradigms in the arts and sciences (the idealist theory of knowledge being one of them) destabilized received concepts of spatial and temporal order, which had significant ramifications across the board. The ramifications Vargish and Mook refer to include the expanded definitions of gravity, force, and matter that Einstein's theories of Special Relativity brought to the fore in 1905; the shifting concept of perspective that propelled the Cubist movement beginning in 1907; and the erosion of realism as conceived through the indeterminacy and relativism of avant-garde literary experimentation during the 1910s and 20s. While there was clearly a host of complex factors implicated in this offensive on convention and tradition that must be accounted for (the avant-garde's reaction to, and fascination with, society's burgeoning modes of commodity production and its fragmented temporalities, to name one key factor), what emerges from all of this is "a kind of primary or

initial difficulty, strangeness, opacity; a violation of common sense, of our laboriously achieved intuitions of reality; an immediate, counter-intuitive refusal to provide the reassuring conclusiveness of the past” (14). There surfaces, moreover, a new preoccupation with observing the world, a way of *seeing* that could lead to a deeper understanding of the subjective element—or what we could call subjective bias—in what was apprehended, which had profound, and certainly liberating, implications on the very possibility of true objective knowledge:

Modernism devalues the realist premise of an external universe conceived as independent of human perception and supplants it with the primacy of observation and measurement... Modernism *wanted* the logical confusion consequent on what often seems the collapse of distinction between object and observer to remain unresolved ... modernist physicists, artists, and writers derived considerable opportunity and effect from *not* resolving it. (104)

MACHADO AND THE KANTIAN LEGACY: BEYOND IDEALISM

My remarks thus far on modernism provide merely an outline of a transnational dialogue on knowledge in which the subject/object divide and the very concept of reality underwent significant revision in various fields during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we turn to Machado, it becomes apparent that he was keenly aware of the “epistemic trauma” of the period and the larger crisis of knowledge associated with it. He had dedicated a great deal of careful study to articulating a solution to the radical and at times all-consuming subjectivism—what he called over the years “el cantarse a sí mismo,” “el culto al yo,” “lo individual humano,” and “la corriente individualista”—that diminished the notion of objectivity and had its origins, as he understood it, in the discoveries of idealism. Thanks to his folklorist and progressive father Antonio Machado “Demófilo,” as well as his liberal education at the Krausist Institución Libre de Enseñanza whose curriculum was largely founded upon a

dynamic panentheistic worldview combining German idealism and *Naturphilosophie*, he appreciated from the beginning the inherent philosophical difficulties associated with examining the subject/object divide. In truth, the idealism disseminated at the Institución Libre de Enseñanza was a strongly reformist and ethical idealism characterized by the idea of “el hombre nuevo... [y] la regeneración espiritual en sus prójimos y en las masas,” and it would leave its mark on Machado’s entire oeuvre (Cardwell 72).

Machado first voiced his concerns with the subject/object divide in 1903. He expressed his unease with the radical subjectivity that dominated the literary sphere when he considered the distinction between “Arte” and “Vida,” which involved conceiving not only how it was possible for the individual to know the world, but also in what ways it could be rendered poetically. From his letters to Unamuno beginning in 1903 it is evident that he had grown concerned with *l’art pour l’art* movement—particularly in relation to *modernismo* and French Parnassianism and Symbolism that were all the rage in Spain at the time—and shared his fervent desire to gaze out into the world and poetize something authentic “torn,” as he put it, directly from reality. He confided in Unamuno: “Aborrezco esto que usted llama *arte de arte*... y aunque tal no fuera del todo despreciable, habríamos de convenir en que es algo muy inferior a la obra del verdadero artista; la cual se arranca directamente de la vida” (*Prosas* 177). By 1905 he had come to the firm conviction that modern poetry, while not ignoring the subjective and lyrical experience, had to engage the world beyond the self through “la directa contemplación de la vida” (*Prosas* 202). By this stage, he was committed to expanding his poetic voice, yet he was no quite sure how to go about it. He had said as much when he reiterated: “La mejor intención de un artista [es] arrancar un poco de verdad de la vida” (*Prosas* 187).⁶ It must remain clear that

6. As early as 1904 he had shared with Juan Ramón Jiménez his desire to broaden his horizons and explore new directions in his poetry: “No estoy muy satisfecho de las cosas que hago últimamente. Estoy en un período de evolución y todavía no he encontrado la forma de expresión de mi nueva poesía” (*Prosas* 194).

Machado's quest for a more expansive poetics did not imply that he outright rejected his early views on poetry for a more realist and committed aesthetic as has often been claimed. His quest had to do with acknowledging and incorporating into the poetic act the brute facts of existence and the individual's basic lifeworld (what his early mentor Unamuno believed was a return to the concrete *hombre* and his day-to-day social environment), as well as overcoming romantic notions of the subject/ object divide and its marked subjectivism. From these early years onward, he would deepen his examination of objectivity and would eventually come to understand it as "una constante *desubjetivación*" (*Los complementarios* 43).

Machado's preoccupation with the nature of reality had a complex genealogy that brought together various interests and influences as we have seen, including folklore, philosophy, and poetry. Yet, it also mirrored the more encompassing crisis of knowledge that was stimulating modernist aesthetics and philosophy. As I have endeavored to show, the intense scrutiny of the subject/ object divide that came about with new approaches to metaphysics and reason was on the minds of many modernists who both struggled with, and benefited from, the "logical confusion", as Vargish and Mook refer to it, that such an enterprise generated (104). Machado was no different. He arrived at the conclusion that modern poetry, if it was to be considered as such, had to eschew radical subjectivism and take into account subjective *and* objective standpoints, yet he learned quickly that actually defining—much less poetizing—the boundary between these categories was fraught with difficulties. He meditated further upon the chasm between what Russell and Moore labelled "Appearance and Reality" and "Idealistic view... and the ordinary view of the world." He immersed himself in Benito Pérez Galdós's realist novels, he read Unamuno's *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* that probed faith and immortality, and he assimilated Henry David Thoreau's *Walden or the Life in the Woods*, which he found very much to his liking. However, it was through his reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* during these years that he delved deepest into the phenomenal and noumenal distinction and intuited that the

very concept of objectivity required considerable rethinking. What becomes apparent from Machado's notes and correspondence from this period is that he grew convinced that Kantian idealism and its privileging of the metaphysics of pure reason had failed to acknowledge that our *experience* of the world—as Russell and Moore had argued—provides us with a particular evidence of the Thing-in-itself that cannot be so straightforwardly dismissed.

While Machado sharpened his philosophical thinking much more systematically after 1910, he began his forays into philosophy during this early period, particularly Kantian metaphysics. In July 1909, for instance, he admitted: “Me separé hace tiempo de las doctrinas de Kant” (*Prosas* 235). Clearly, Kant was not the only influence on Machado's thinking with respect to the problem of reality. As has been amply demonstrated, Henri Bergson was also influential, but not as influential as Kant on this particular question of reality.⁷ Machado would return to Kant repeatedly over the years to develop his understanding of the subject/object divide, and the German philosopher came to represent a Janus-faced figure in his poetry and thought both inspiring him and serving as a target for his criticisms of idealism and its stand on the fundamental unknowability of the Thing-in-itself. Kant's philosophy evidently exerted considerable influence on Machado well beyond 1909 when he alleged to have distanced himself from Kantian metaphysics. In early 1912, for instance, he stated that he had become engrossed in the problems of Kant's transcendental idealism and had retreated into the creative sphere of his poetry to find some form of resolution: “Mi pensamiento está generalmente ocupado por lo que llama Kant *conflictos de las ideas trascendentales* y busco en la poesía alivio a esta ingrata faena” (*Prosas* 346).

7. See also Philip G. Johnston who argues rightly that the concepts of “intuición” and “concepto” in Machado's work that are often attributed to Bergson's influence could in fact derive from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (498). Nuria Morgado's also argues that “las inquietudes [de Machado] sobre el tema del conocimiento le llevaron a una exposición de su pensamiento con marcados tintes kantianos, afirmación que se demuestra si se tiene en cuenta las nociones de ‘intuición’ y ‘concepto,’ elementos claves de la teoría de conocimiento de Immanuel Kant” (314).

Furthermore, he dedicated fragments xxxix of *Campos de Castilla* of 1912 and lxxvii of *Nuevas canciones* of 1924 to ironizing Kantian metaphysics (fragment lxxvii in particular takes a sardonic poke at Kant's epistemological arguments by conjuring up a Rodin-like brooder and thinker: "¡Tartarín en Koenigsberg! / Con el puño en la mejilla / todo lo llego a saber"). In 1916, Machado acknowledged his great debt to Kant's philosophy, yet he was quick to point out that "la vuelta a Kant no puede ser la resurrección de un sistema, sino de un método de severo pensar sobre el estado actual del conocimiento" (*Los complementarios* 47). It also often goes unnoticed that the oft-cited prologue of the 1917 edition of *Campos de Castilla* admonishes readers on the pitfalls of Kantian metaphysics and puts them on guard regarding the subject/object divide that a number of poems in the collection explore:

Si miramos afuera y procuramos penetrar en las cosas, nuestro mundo externo pierde solidez, y acaba por disipársenos cuando llegamos a creer que no existe por sí, sino por nosotros. Pero si, convencidos de la íntima realidad, miramos adentro, entonces todo nos parece venir de fuera, y es nuestro mundo interior, nosotros mismos, lo que se desvanece... ¿Seremos meros espectadores del mundo? (*Poesías* 79)

And in a letter to Ortega y Gasset in 1919, Machado confirmed the spell Kant's first *Critique* had over him: "He leído los grandes filósofos... Ninguno me agradó tanto como Kant, cuya *Crítica de la razón pura* he releído varias veces" (*Prosas* 437). Even in Machado's *Proyecto de un discurso en la academia española* penned in 1931, Kant still haunted his thinking when he appraised nineteenth-century idealism and its crusade against the knowability of the Thing-in-itself, the very topic that had concerned him almost three decades earlier:

Casi todo [el siglo xix] milita contra el objeto. Kant lo elimina de su ingente tautología, que esto significa la llamada *revolución copernicana* que se le atribuye. Su análisis de la razón sólo revela la estructura ideal del sujeto cognoscente. Los desmesurados edificios de las me-

taffísticas postkantianas son obra de la razón racionante, de la razón que ha eliminado su objeto. (*Prosas* 693)⁸

In February and May of 1909, Machado published a series of “Proverbios y cantares” in *La Lectura: Revista de ciencias y de arte* in which many of the epistemological quandaries he was wrestling with during this early period concerning idealism and the subject/object divide were unified and to some extent resolved. In effectively synthesizing the sententious and philosophical *proverbio* and the expressive and lyrical *cantar*, Machado discovered a means to expand his poetic voice and put into practice that objective “contemplación de la vida” he had mentioned to Unamuno some years earlier (*Prosas* 202). García Wiedemann said it well: “Machado, al menos desde 1908, persigue la objetividad, teme el solipsismo y huye del individualismo. Ahora bien, está salida solo se puede hacer por medio de una marcha consciente hacia lo objetivo, saliendo fuera de sí. Los ‘Proverbios y cantares,’ de 1909, sería un ejemplo de esta búsqueda de objetividad, de abandono del agujero del sujeto” (165). In both form and content, Machado integrated in the “Proverbios y cantares” the fluid indeterminacy of objective and subjective standpoints in which philosophical precepts, popular truisms, age-old sayings, and universal folk wisdom were integrally bound to personal experiences, wistful voicings, and intimate poetic symbolism. As I have argued elsewhere, Machado developed his own unique aesthetic-philosophical fragment in the “Proverbios y cantares” that affirmed the dynamic nature of the subject/object divide as he came to understand it (*Poetics* 17-50). Much in the spirit of Friedrich Schlegel’s aphorisms, G. A. Bécquer’s *rimas*, Nietzsche’s maxims, or Gómez de la Serna’s *greguerías* later on, Machado’s

8. Juan de Mairena’s *Sentencias* are likewise littered with references and allusions to Kant. A few excerpts suffice to demonstrate that Machado continued to reflect upon the subject/object divide through Kantian metaphysics and Thing-in-itself well into the 1930s: “Si nada en es en sí más que yo mismo, ¿qué modo hay de no decretar la irrealidad absoluta de nuestro prójimo? Mi pensamiento borra y expulsa de la existencia —de una existencia en sí— en compañía de esos mismos bancos en que asentáis vuestras posaderas. La cuestión es grave” (212); “Las tan desacreditadas cosas en sí...La cosa en sí ¡tan desacreditada!.... Asusta pensar hasta dónde puede llegar el descrédito” (217).

“Proverbios y cantares” fused expressive lyricism, philosophical wit, conciseness, contradiction, irony, humor, and an unflinching critical self-reflexivity to give form to a dialogic poetics in which the line between subject and object was repeatedly blurred.

THE DIALOGIC POETICS OF OTHERNESS

One of the fragments in which Machado poetized his understanding of the subject/object divide in relation to his preoccupation with the nature of reality appears in 1916 in *La Lectura* under the title “Apuntes, parábolas, proverbios y cantares”. It is a fragment that has received little critical attention, yet it is by far one of the most revealing fragments when it comes to charting the philosophical coordinates of his thinking on this topic during the 1910s and thus worth a closer look. The poem reads as follows:

Pensar el mundo es como hacerlo nuevo
de la sombra o la nada, desustanciado y frío.
Bueno es pensar, decolorir el huevo
universal, sorberlo hasta el vacío. 5
Pensar: borrar primero y dibujar después,
y quien borrar no sabe camina en cuatro pies.
Una neblina opaca confunde toda cosa:
el monte, el mar, el pino, el pájaro, la rosa.
Pitágoras alarga a Cartesius la mano. 10
Es la extensión substancia del universo humano.
Y sobre el lienzo blanco o negro, la cifra o la figura.
Yo pienso. (Un hombre arroja una traíña al mar
y la saca vacía; no ha logrado pescar.)
“No tiene el pensamiento traíñas sino amarras,
las cosas obedecen al peso de las garras,” 15
exclama, y luego dice: “Aunque las presas son,
lo mismo que las garras, pura figuración.”
Sobre la blanca arena, aparece un caimán
que muerde ahincadamente en el bronce de Kant.
Tus formas, tus principios y tus categorías, 20
redes que el mar escupe, enjutas y vacías.
Kratilo ha sonreído y arrugado Zenón

el ceño, adivinando a M. de Bergsón.
 Puedes coger cenizas del fuego heraclitano, 25
 mas no apuñar la onda que fluye, con tu mano.
 Vuestras retortas, sabios, sólo destilan heces.
 ¡Oh machacad zurrapas en vuestros almiércoles!
 Medir las vivas aguas del mundo..., ¡desvarío!
 Entre las dos agujas de tu compás va el río.
 La realidad es la vida, fugaz, funambulesca, 30
 el cigarrón voltario, el pez que nadie pesca.
 Si quieres saber algo del mar, vuelve otra vez,
 un poco pescador y un tanto pez.
 En la barra del puerto bate la marejada,
 y todo el mar resuena como una carcajada.⁹ 35

The fragment opens with the abstract realm of mind and inaugurates the basic division between subject and object: that is, “pensar” (mind and self) and “mundo” (substance and world). The act of thinking is correlated in the first verses with the verbs “hacer,” “decolorir,” “sorber,” “borrar,” and “dibujar,” and it would appear that the realm of mind allows the autonomous subject to mold objective appearance to its liking. As Machado will propose in other areas of his oeuvre, this type of abstract thought is calculating and detached and only bargains with appearances devoid of life (“desustanciado y frío,” “decolorir el huevo / universal, sorberlo hasta el vacío”).¹⁰ The abstract thought of the autonomous subject outlined in the first verses is confronted in verses seven and eight with the outer world of physical objects (or “cosas”): “el monte, el mar, el pino, el pájaro, la rosa.” After establishing

9. It should be noted that this fragment was part of an even larger fragment published in the journal *Cervantes* in the same year of 1916 under the identical title “Apuntes, parábolas, proverbios y cantares”. Machado divided the fragment in two separate works in subsequent publications. The *Cervantes* fragment adds twenty verses corresponding to the poem that begins “Sobre la limpia arena, en el tartesio llano / por donde acaba España y sigue el mar.” This poem extends the fishing metaphor and tackles a similar cluster of themes.

10. Machado’s poem “Al gran cero” reads: “*Fiat umbra!* Brotó el pensar humano. / Y el huevo universal alzó, vacío, ya sin color, desustanciado y frío, / lleno de niebla ingrávida, en su mano” (5-8). In *Los complementarios* he adds: “Pensar: vaciar el huevo / universal, sorberlo hasta el vacío, / para pensar lo nuevo / lleno de sombra, desustanciado, frío” (30).

this basic division and frame of reasoning, Machado tackles Western metaphysics on the topic of the subject/object divide that will unfold throughout the fragment in a fishing metaphor, which in turn will be extended in three distinct and chronological phases that correspond to the philosophies of Descartes, Kant, and Bergson.

The speaker takes on Cartesian dualism first and introduces the concept of extension (“sustancia del universo humano”) in relation to the physical world or objects, as well as the Cartesian cogito (“*Yo pienso*”). The thinking mind that engages the physical world of objects is conceived through a fishing metaphor; that is to say, it is conceived as a fisherman casting a net from terra firma into a sea brimming with life. The sea acquires a complex symbolism in Machado’s oeuvre beginning with *Soledades*, and in his more philosophical reflections, poems, and writings over the years it was associated with everything from the life-death continuum to the Absolute.¹¹ However, considering verses thirty and thirty-one in which reality is analogized to the capricious carpenter bee and the unfishable fish in the sea (living organisms belonging to the same physical world of objects outlined in verse eight), it stands to reason that the sea and its life signify the concrete world beyond the thinking mind. The fisherman, we are told, who casts his net of thought (“*Yo pienso*”) into this concrete and living reality (“la mar”) is powerless to capture anything vital and distinct. With Descartes’s radical doubt of the *Meditations* serving as a foothold, the speaker expounds upon the fisherman’s misfortune in verses fourteen through seventeen remarking that fish (the physical world of objects) cannot be captured reliably with the net of thought given that they could very well be nothing more than appearances (the “pura figuración” that can always be doubted). As Descartes proposed in his dream argument in the *Meditations*, even

11. See Kessel Schwartz’s foundational “The Sea and Machado,” as well as José Ángeles’s “El mar en la poesía de Antonio Machado.” Ángeles divides Machado’s sea imagery in a more coherent fashion than Schwartz: “Hay un grupo de poemas en que se la usa en la forma tradicional, manriqueña, vida-río, muerte-mar. Otro grupo, mucho más numeroso, lo forman las distintas acepciones de la metáfora general, y extraordinariamente significativa de la poesía y de su pensamiento” (30).

the most basic sense perceptions and the beliefs associated with them can be doubted since there is no assurance that they originate from anything other than an “imaginary” realm (14).

At this juncture a caiman appears on scene, yet this is no ordinary caiman: it is a symbolic representation of Kantian understanding including its forms of intuition (“formas”), principles (“principios”), and twelve *a priori* concepts (“categorías”). Although it would appear that the caiman is well suited to the water environment and the hunting of prey, it too fails to capture anything vital and distinct from the sea. In fact, the complex partitions of the Kantian understanding are each imagined as fishing nets that are pulled empty from the living sea. We arrive thus at Bergson, whose philosophy not only is incapable of fishing anything from the sea (“no apuñar la onda que fluye, con tu mano”), but also seems to ironically confound Cratylus and Zeno of Elea, or the most renowned representatives of the Heraclitean and Eleatic schools of thought respectively who sustained—much like Bergson—that the universe was animated by a continuous stream of change.¹² In *Los complementarios*, Machado had reconciled Kant’s and Bergson’s philosophies on the particular forms of intuition noting that Bergsonian intuition represented a continuation of the insular and subjective premises of transcendental idealism: “Con la intuición Bergsoniana se sigue rindiendo el culto a las potencias tenebrosas y místicas del siglo XIX. De ella se pretende extraer la luz que alumbra lo esencial” (54-55).

In the poem’s final verses, the speaker presses the indictment of Western metaphysics even further. The three “sabios”—Descartes, Kant, and Bergson—offer no insights into the fundamental nature of reality, or what can be conceived as the living sea that their nets are incapable of penetrating (“La realidad es la vida, fugaz, funambulesca, / el

12. With the word “onda” Machado in all likelihood is invoking the image of a wave (sea), but he also might be alluding to Bergson’s numerous clarifications of *élan vital* as a wave: “From our point of view, life appears in its entirety as an immense wave which, starting from a center, spreads outwards, and which on almost the whole of its circumference is stopped and converted into oscillation: at one single point the obstacle has been forced, the impulsion has passed freely. It is this freedom the human form registers” (266).

cigarrón voltario, el pez que nadie pesca”). What the speaker proposes when it comes to knowing reality is that the autonomous subject must abandon its solipsistic cage and acknowledge the intricate web of relationships, interactions, and engagements that bind subject and object. The thinking mind, moreover, must not fall into the error of assuming that the subjective self exists somehow divorced from the living world of objects and things as the “sabios” suggest in their own ways (and, indeed, the fragment frontally addresses the disentangling of self and world that gains momentum with Cartesianism and endures through the idealist turn to self-consciousness and beyond). On the contrary, the thinking mind does nothing if not insert the subjective self into the fluid relations of existence (“la vida”) in which thinking mind and substance connect in a number of untold and unexpected formulations. Thus, the speaker’s parting dictum on bridging the subject/object divide: “Si quieres saber algo del mar, vuelve otra vez, / un poco pescador y un tanto pez.”

At the root of this fragment lies the problem of reality that so preoccupied modernists, and it would seem that Machado saw no real solution to it in the metaphysical deductions and speculations of philosophy, or the type of “metaphysicizing” Russell alluded to in “Seems, madam? Nay, it is” that wrote off “this actual palpable sensible world.” Yet, Machado was also articulating his own clarifications on the topic, his own evolving sense of knowledge and reality. To approach the fundamental nature of reality, he contended, we must burrow our way out of the epistemological crisis Ortega y Gasset would later diagnose in *En torno a Galileo* with respect to idealism in which the real is reduced to its subjective composition; that is, reduced to nothing more than cognition, appearance, and an assemblage of perceptions and representations. The concerns Machado raised in this fragment were much more than passing asides on the nature of reality in that they shaped various strands of his thinking including his defining concept of *otredad*, which by this time was becoming a significant poetic-philosophical theme in his work, especially in the “Proverbios y cantares”. His ambition to bridge the subject/object divide and approach any formulation of self through otherness and

difference (“un *otro* real”) was channeled into his quest to elaborate the dialogic poetics he alluded to in the preceding fragment. Over the years, he referred to it in various ways, yet returned to the fitting expressions “radical heterogeneidad del ser” and the more enduring “diálogo amoroso,” which the apocryphal Mairena defined as “la dignidad pensante de nuestro prójimo” (*Juan de Mairena* 118). It goes without saying that Machado’s enduring preoccupation with the fundamental nature of reality had a profound influence on Spanish modernism during the 1920s and 30s and even anticipated essential features of the intersubjective phenomenology that would come about after the Second World War with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas. To be sure, it left key questions about exactly how we live in the world echoing throughout the recent history of Spanish poetry and philosophy.

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