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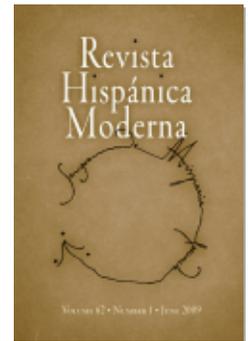
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Writing the Self: What Gómez de la Serna learned from Nietzsche

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Hoy mi egoísmo me ha recomendado la adaptación en el movimiento y en la victoria.

—Ramón, *Morbideces*

The role Nietzsche played in Ramón Gómez de la Serna's (1888–1963) journey toward the avant-garde in the early years between 1907 and 1911 is still unexplored. Confronted with Ramón's eclectic and peculiar writings of this period, readers seldom make out Nietzsche's shadow stirring in the background. It was Gonzalo Sobejano's *Nietzsche en España* and his insightful appraisal of Ramón's "fervor nietzscheista" (considered within the broader parameters of Spain's *fin de siglo* and the country's uneven advancement toward modernity), that drew our attention to the similitude of some of Ramón's more iconoclastic propositions to those of the German philosopher.¹ There is indeed more to Ramón's interest in Nietzsche than first meets the eye: how could there not be when he himself stated in 1909: "Hoy no se puede escribir una página ignorando a Nietzsche" (*Obras* 152). Although Sobejano has opened the door to understanding Nietzsche's influence on Ramón (and this study would have been difficult without his findings), there are still unexplored questions on Nietzsche's role in Ramón's concept of *authenticity* prevalent in his early endeavors, especially as it concerns the autobiographical constructions of authorial presence and self that foreshadow the complex subjectivities of the historical avant-garde. The young Ramón, an insatiable reader and self-described "monomaniaco literario" during these early years, surveyed the nineteenth-century literary and philosophical tradition in a desperate search for the appropriate forms for his own evolving critical-literary praxis and concept of self. The best example of this

¹ Gonzalo Sobejano's study of Nietzsche's influence on Ramón is still today the most comprehensive of its kind. However, it lacks analytical depth on several fronts, which is quite understandable considering Sobejano's aim of providing a complete reference book on the various ways Nietzsche's philosophy entered Spain between 1893 and 1936. His study on Ramón and Nietzsche is divided into two sections: the first has to do with Ramón's more critical and theoretical writings in *Prometeo* (especially issues 1, 3, 6 and 7); the second involves his literary endeavors such as *Morbideces*, *El libro mudo*, *La Utopía* (1908) and *El drama del palacio deshabitado* (1908).

is how in one fell swoop he integrates poetry, philosophy, and social protest in such contrasting figures like Schopenhauer, Darío, Taine, Engels, and Carlyle in the brief manifesto-like prologue to the inaugural issue of *Prometeo*: “Nuestra labor será social y literaria [. . .] Sólo esta confluencia de esfuerzos puede acrecentar la conciencia” (*Obras* 143). Moreover, in 1910, this revisionist posture bore its fruit in the defining expressive form that his avant-gardism was to assume: the *greguería*. What is of interest to us is how the young Ramón found in Nietzsche a symbolic lens through which he could filter the many facets of his own evolving identity and personality, his own nascent *ramonismo* as it were; a lens that projected—sometimes more lucidly than others—all the varying strands of an exploding modernity that he was concomitantly assimilating and dissolving in his writing as he sought his true voice as an artist. As Ramón himself proposed in 1909: “Al decir Nietzsche [. . .] acojo ese nombre como un símbolo. Su influencia filosófica, audaz, heroica, descarada, no es de él, es del período por que pasamos” (*Obras* 152). From this angle we can better appreciate Ramón within a broader European outlook, especially since, as Christopher Forth explains, “Nietzsche would come to be regarded [in Europe] as virtually synonymous with avant-garde experimentation itself” (15).

To begin to get a sense of Nietzsche’s presence in the young Ramón it is imperative to complete two tasks: first, we must gain a clearer idea of what exactly Ramón had read of Nietzsche’s philosophy to articulate a more cohesive vision of how he might have interpreted his works (especially with a self-reflexive philosopher like Nietzsche, whose thoughts are so intertextually mediated); and second, we must return to Ramón’s earliest writings to better appreciate what I term his “predisposition” to Nietzsche. That is, Ramón’s evolving sociopolitical and aesthetic posturing during this early period demonstrate that he was a Nietzscheist in some key concepts. More than a blanket Nietzsche-inspired iconoclasm (in this period traceable in dozens of artists and part of the general post-positivist cynicism of the age), Ramón was concerned with the notion of authenticity in a method of observing the world that permitted him to perceive—and even enter into as evident in his later *rastro* experience—the reality of things. One of the core preoccupations grounding Nietzsche’s oeuvre is the distinction between truth and truthfulness; although not synonymous terms, they both engage the shift from traditional meanings of truth (religion, for instance) to questions of truthfulness in personal authenticity, genuineness, and the self. From his early essay “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” of 1873 onwards, Nietzsche labored to locate the authentic self that remained after all forms of transcendentalism—be they pure reason, the afterlife, political creeds, etc.—had been demystified as falsities. What lied behind this ambitious quest was the revelation that “order and life are valueless modifications of chaos, and so the meaning as well as the value is a human creation” (Rosen xvii). Herein we better understand Nietzsche’s mission to outline a “gay science” that would allow the self to live an authentic life—or mode of being—through a renewed will to truth. In the end, it was the individual articulating the self and serving as his own originator of truth that unveiled what was authentic in the world: only then could the individual freely become, as the subtitle to Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* proposes, “what one is.” There is no better symbol of this authenticity in Nietzsche’s oeuvre than his

alter-ego Zarathustra, the personification of the authentic self in the making. We know that Ramón did not internalize Nietzsche's moral philosophy from the concept of truthfulness per se, but he did extract from it the fundamental need for authenticity—and the Zarathustran personality—which he would adapt to his own aesthetic ideals, as we shall see.

Nietzsche's fame as a philosopher took hold with his definitive psychic breakdown in January of 1889. It was from this point onwards that his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche took it upon herself to organize and disseminate his major works. By 1900, the year of his death, his popularity had reached almost every corner of Europe, and it is even possible to speak of a transnational Nietzsche cult during this time. As Jürgen Krause reminds us, it was nothing less than an obsessive adulation of Nietzsche's Dionysian avowal of irony and satire that owed a great deal to the Danish critic and thinker Georg M. Brandes (a fervent admirer who lectured throughout Europe on his thought as early as 1888), and the French critic—and later translator beginning in 1898—Henri Albert.² In Spain, the first reference to Nietzsche appeared in Cataluña in 1893 in the journal *L'Avenç* thanks to the poet Joan Maragall, who translated and perceptively critiqued (given the little he knew of Nietzsche) sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Despite the scattered references in Madrid during this same period, Nietzsche fully came into the intelligentsia's consciousness in Spain by way of France and Italy in the ill-fated year of 1898: that year, Henri Lichtenberger published *La philosophie de Nietzsche*, Henri Albert and Louis Weisopf/Georges Art translated *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil* respectively, and Ettore Zoccoli published *Friederich Nietzsche, la filosofia religiosa—la morale, la estetica* in Modena. Henri Albert distinguished himself early as a Nietzsche scholar and went on to translate *The Twilight of the Idols* (1899), *The Gay Science* (1901), and *The Will to Power* (1903), as well as publish his own monograph titled *Nietzsche* (1903). Jules de Gaultier published the foundational—and popular in Spain—*De Kant à Nietzsche* (1900), while Jean Marnold and Jacques Morland translated *The Birth of Tragedy* (1901). Although Nietzsche studies flourished in several publications in England and Germany during this period,³ France had succumbed—for various socio-historical and cultural reasons (the Franco-Prussian War, the rise of decandentism, the French publication industry, the nationalist concerns of the Generation of 1890, especially in figures like Maurice Barrès, etc.)—to an intense Nietzsche fad which spilled over into Spain with greater intensity in the final years of the nineteenth century.⁴

One of the key ways Nietzsche's thought entered Spain early on was indeed

² See the Introduction to Jürgen Krause's "Martyrer" und "Prophet."

³ A few notable examples in the flurry of Nietzsche publications in England and Germany include Havelock Ellis's introductory articles published in *The Savoy* in 1896 and 1897 and his piece "Friedrich Nietzsche" in *Affirmations* in 1898; also Theobald Ziegler's *Friedrich Nietzsche* of 1900 and Georg Simmel's *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* of 1907.

⁴ For a full description of Nietzsche's impact in France at the turn of the century and the various socio-political circumstances that carved a propitious environment for his philosophy, see Christopher E. Forth's insightful study *Zarathustra in Paris: The Nietzsche Vogue in France 1891–1918*. Chapter 1 of Forth's book entitled "The Avant-Garde Nietzsche Project—Symbolic Profits and Literary Strategies" deals specifically with avant-garde reception of Nietzsche.

through France, particularly in French periodicals like the seminal *Mercure de France*. In its pages Spaniards learned of Nietzsche in a handful of key articles like Henri Albert's early "Friedrich Nietzsche" (1893), Hugues Rebell's "Sur une traduction collective des oeuvres de Nietzsche" (1895), Ouindot's "Carlyle et Friedrich Nietzsche," (1899), and those that appeared with greater frequency after Nietzsche's death by Jules de Gaultier, Cuassy, Pierre Lasserre, and Claire Richter, among others. If not a subscriber of *Mercure de France*, Ramón knew the periodical well (most likely through his ties to the Ateneo) and had learned of Nietzsche in its pages. Henri Albert's 1909 translation of *Ecce Homo* in the *Société de Mercure de France* was very well received by Ramón, who wrote a review of the work exalting Albert's efforts as the "testamentario de Nietzsche." In it, Ramón alludes to not only Albert's string of translations and articles between 1898 and 1909, but also his 1903 monograph in which he analyzes Nietzsche's peculiar philosophical style: "Albert, este testamentario de Nietzsche, que tanta luz ha hecho sobre la vida y la producción de ese hombre maravilloso [. . .] publicó hace tiempo en el mismo *Mercure* unas páginas que eran para Nietzsche la retórica, la sintaxis y la fórmula de su inspiración" (*Obras* 353). Although Zarathustra had appeared much earlier in Ramón's work and would become a constant presence in his formative years when it came to the concept of self-creation, it is of interest what he tells us in the *Ecce Homo* review of the pervasiveness of Zarathustra in Spain: "Muchos sólo tienen una vaga idea de [Nietzsche . . .] La mayoría sabe el estribillo 'Así hablaba Zaratustra'" (*Obras* 355). Ramón's knowledge of Nietzsche's oeuvre was adequate enough to even recognize its resonance in Unamuno, but his overly deprecating remarks also reveal that he had not penetrated with sufficient care into how each thinker differed: "Unamuno es hijo de Nietzsche. En España tenía que brotar, por ridiculez, ese nietzscheanismo provinciano y paradójico" (*Obras* 355).⁵

Another relevant allusion that appears in *Mis siete palabras* of 1910 is Alfred Fouillée. Fouillée was a French philosopher that was celebrated at the turn of the century mostly for his doctrine of *idées-forces*—a synthesis of Platonism and naturalism in how ideas realized themselves into moments of change and progress. Fouillée surfaces alongside Nietzsche, and it is no accident, for both converged on the question of morality.⁶ More directly, Fouillée had penned *Nietzsche et l'Immoralisme* in 1902, a study that critiqued core concepts of Nietzschean

⁵ Ramón's critique of Unamuno continues in *Morbideces*: "Unamuno [. . .] es pariente de mediocridad y en programa de Ganivet, un caso formidable de tumefacción cerebral, de la que surge su protocolo, árido, anguloso, calvinista y abrumador" (*Obras* 474). Ramón was very critical of the so-called Generation of 1898, but he may have been more of an admirer than he let on, particularly when it came to the lesser-known writer Silverio Lanza. "As one advances in the study of Gómez de la Serna," Cardona points out, "one senses that he has captured from both the generation of '98 and the following generation their most characteristic features [. . .] One might say that he supplies a bridge which connects the Generation of '98 and its continuers with the new generation of avant-garde writers [. . .] The direct link between Gómez de la Serna and the generation of '98 comes through an obscure writer—Silverio Lanza—whom, oddly enough, both Baroja and Ramón have called their 'teacher'" (6–7).

⁶ Texts by Fouillée on morality include *La Morale, l'art et la religion d'après Guyau* (1889), *La France au point de vue moral* (1900), and *Le Moralisme de Kant* (1905).

moral philosophy including its transvaluation of values. Also illuminating is what Ramón tells us of Nietzsche and Victor Hugo: “¡Compararle con Hugo! ¿Qué tiene que ver Nietzsche con Hugo?” (*Obras* 353). Ramón’s consternation here is understandable and illustrates that he was knowledgeable of the core critiques of *The Case of Wagner*, a work in which Nietzsche, clearly demonstrating his trademark aversion for late Romanticism, lambastes Hugo by allying him to Richard Wagner. For Nietzsche, Wagner had pushed romantic sentimentality into the field of decadent theatricality, and he was thus a “liar,” for his music was, in a word, untrue: it was pretentious showmanship, a dramatic mode of expression that resulted in “simply bad music” (29). Hugo comes into play by his association to Wagner in terms of establishing this type of overly maudlin masquerade of the artist. As Nietzsche conceived it: “Victor Hugo and Richard Wagner—they imply one and the same truth, that in declining civilization [. . .] genuineness becomes superfluousness” (39). Hence, a comparison between Nietzsche and Hugo, as Ramón well knew, would be unthinkable by anyone acquainted with the former’s Wagner critiques.

It is clear, then, that when it came to Nietzsche, Ramón was not an admirer from a distance, but was indeed quite familiar with his philosophy and was sensitive to its concept of truth. Aside from those Nietzsche texts I already mentioned, there are several other allusions strewn throughout Ramón’s early writings that show that he was also somewhat acquainted with *Human, All too Human* and *The Gay Science*.⁷ Although his first reference to Nietzsche dates to 1908, he certainly had encountered his work sometime prior: speaking of the year 1900 in *Automoribundia*, Ramón refers to Nietzsche’s death, for example, recalling him as “el filósofo de las anunciaciones” (123). There are several key moments in Ramón’s life and writings between 1902 and 1907 that signal what I described earlier as his nascent concept of authenticity, and how it might have augured his receptivity to Nietzsche’s philosophy. The first key moment relates to his encounter and disenchantment with Anarchism. As Ramón explains it, he succumbed to the anarchist wave so prevalent at the turn of the century in Spain and elsewhere in Europe, but promptly discovered (after a brief incarceration on public nuisance charges) that it was grounded in false and empty rhetoric. “Melancólico—pero ya no frenético,” he remembers, “me volví un monomaniaco literario [. . .] ya sin ideales políticos, ya sólo con el sediento ideal del arte” (*Automoribundia* 174). The brief Anarchist incursion allows him to define a new artistic ideal underscored not by any political ideal, but by an avid desire to gaze inwards and find his true self as an artist. Ioana Zlotescu conceives of this period as one precisely underscored by a spirit of “autoinspección”: a process of self-discovery and affirmation of his identity (*Obras* 388–401). Important in this respect was his first visit to Paris. Although short-lived, the Paris experience was critical in that it

⁷ In “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” Ramón not only references Gustav Khan’s Nietzscheist approach to the leader of French Nationalism Maurice Barrès, but also Nietzsche’s published correspondence (*Obras* 173), and in an article “Hacia el nuevo fanatismo” in *Prometeo*, he clearly invokes Nietzsche’s *Human, All too Human* in a discussion of Truth (*Obras* 217). Also, in an epigraph to *El libro mudo* he employs a very revealing quote from *The Gay Science*: “No se entiende nada de lo que dice el autor y se tiene la ilusión de creer que donde no se entiende nada no hay nada” (*Obras* 539).

infused this newfound artistic ideal with a proclivity (soon to be obsession) for observing day-to-day existence: “no había pasado más que diez días [en París], pero yo ya soy otro y observo mejor las cosas” (*Automoribundia* 179–80). By the appearance of his first book *Entrando en fuego*, written shortly after his return to Spain in 1905, Ramón had gained a unique aesthetic insight through his method of observation (explained as an awakening of sorts) that consisted in stripping away the artificiality of the world to expose what was genuine and truthful in it:

En aquel momento la realidad—estando todo lleno de realidad—era irreconciliable, y destapar lo real—entre lo que se veía y lo escrito había abismos—fue la cosa más ideal y heroica que se puede imaginar [. . .] Fuera de mi arrepentimiento de adolescencia, también lo estoy de la extraña manía de suprimir la ingenuidad del mundo, empeñándome en que las gentes no sean ingenuas porque yo haya dejado de serlo. (*Automoribundia* 191)

In the articles Ramón published in *La Región Extremeña* between 1905 and 1907 it is clear that beyond the anarchist iconoclasm and his budding sociopolitical conscientiousness, his artistic ideal had taken an almost Platonic urgency in its gravitation towards the problem of truth and falsity in almost everything around him. His first article published in the journal is aptly titled “Ante el desengaño,” and it is reminiscent of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in not only form and authorial tone, but also in its underlying pedagogic aims. The wise Mergo—a Zarathustran figure exuding a wealth of life-experience—counsels Ragoser—a tearful youngster lost to an all-consuming pessimism—on how to confront hope (“ilusión”) in terms of a self-judged truth:

[V]eo en tu pesaroso pesimismo, haciendo que te desgastes en la inercia, es efecto de algún desengaño [. . .] Sé que el golpe de sus garras te habrá hecho comprender tu pequeñez [. . .] mal hecho, no te fijes parándote a pensar en él, ríete distraído considerándote a pensar sobre él [. . .] Las victorias del individuo son mayores cuando las alcanza ante sí, admirándolas sinceramente. (*Obras* 939)

This similarity in tone to Zarathustra’s musings was not a passing phase in these early years. Ramón had become acquainted with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at some point (it is quite possible that he had read Nietzsche during his first visit to Paris) and his texts are littered with Nietzsche’s insights: in one article he explicates a passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* on man’s corruption to validate his mordant social critiques and notion of society’s future redemption, while in another he quotes an off-handed blurb from “Of the Bestowing Virtue” referring to Zarathustra’s dictum of finding oneself: “Os ordeno que me perdáis” (“I bid you to lose me and find yourselves”).⁸ In “Hacia un nuevo fanatismo” published in *Prometeo* in 1909, we read a passage that is unabashedly Zarathustran in its almost prophetic spirit of truth:

⁸ “El porvenir” (*Obras* 213); “El concepto de la nueva literatura” (*Obras* 153).

Me he sentido quebrado y para quejarme de mi relajación he comenzado a gritar como un muecín alucinado por la idea de Dios, alucinado yo por mi verdad, que vosotros los perdularios, los desastrados, los deshechos, a quienes iba dirigida, y a quienes he querido enseñar con las palabras más precisas, la trascendencia de vuestra *catástrofe personal*, no habéis escuchado o al pasar a lo largo no habéis entendido. (*Obras* 213)

Ramón returns to the question of falsehood in “Realidad negra” published in *La Región Extremeña* by assailing spurious morality in Spain and by taking aim at the Church and its cult of ignorance, a critique he develops more pointedly in later articles like “Las ironías de la desigualdad,” “En el mitin anticlerical,” and “La mano muerta (las negociaciones con Roma).” A good summation of his reaction to moral falsity can be extracted from “Ante un nuevo curso,” where he articulates what now reads as a superior sensibility for truthfulness based on his meticulous form of observation. Although it is not entirely clear how he came to fine-tune this sensibility to such an exacting degree (we must remember that Ramón is still a teenager at this point), it nonetheless reveals what is specious and fabricated around him. There is no better place for a revelatory exercise of this magnitude than the university:

Viejos filósofos casuistas, repiten veinte veces en cada explicación las palabras Dios . . . , el creador . . . , el fiscalizador . . . , el determinado . . . , la inspiración del poder . . . , la providencia de los miserables . . . , la voluntad de todos . . . Yo sonrío. Mi defensa, lo que me ha hecho pasar por la Universidad incólume, sin contagiarme con su espíritu antañón inhumano, ha sido esta sonrisa que es el antídoto de todo lo falso y feo. (*Obras* 1033)

Nietzsche was famous for claiming not only a similar aversion for academia (in “Schopenhauer as Educator” in *Thoughts Out of Season*, the professor was depicted as a herd-man and a conformist who stifled students’ true creative genius),⁹ but also a similar type of discriminating—and likewise superior in its sardonic drollness—sense for the truth. In Nietzsche, however, a sensory metaphor is often used in these cases: in *Ecce Homo* he states, “my genius is in my nostrils,” meaning that he could smell “tartuffery,” and as Zarathustra worded it: “There is wisdom in the fact that much in the world smelleth badly” (143). In “El atentado”—a short article dedicated to the attempt on Alfonso XIII’s life in Paris on May 31, 1905—Ramón once again flaunts his superior sensibility and his powers of observation when he describes how the masses are duped by the media and react to the incident by only what they read. He acknowledges to his readers that he is beyond this kind of falsity and herd mentality:

Y he salido, recorriendo las viejas calles madrileñas, y he escuchado al pasar junto a la tienda, junto al portal, hablar furiosos, duros fanáti-

⁹ See pages 92–94; 124–25.

cos, a los parias, a los sencillos, a los explotados, del terrible atentado [. . .] Y yo, después de haber observado todo esto me he reído de ello; alegre porque no vivo en la mentira, en la farsa que rodea a esta gente. (*Obras* 946)

The foregoing examples suffice to illustrate that from the beginning, Ramón was very much a Nietzscheist in his unease about truth and falsity. His preoccupation with these matters did not lead him down the path of social protest or political action as it did with so many of his peers (clearly evident in his brief Anarchist phase). Instead, this preoccupation with the truth/falsity dichotomy was tethered to a privileged artistic observation that permitted him an unfiltered access to what was authentic in the world, a position which made him more than amenable to Nietzsche's philosophy later on, particularly *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Yet, this observation, especially if we keep in mind his growing inward gaze as an artist (a product of overcoming his adolescent "ingenuidad") and his two-year sojourn in Paris beginning in 1909 as a public servant (he then fully experienced the Paris of the Belle Époque), was a method of bridging art and life and reintroducing the artist more fully into the social practice of art and day-to-day experience. In the well-known *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger argues that the historical avant-garde had sought ways to liberate art from its ever-increasing social autonomy—the most relevant expression being *l'art pour l'art* aestheticism, for example—and reintroduce it more definitively into a praxis of life (22–25). Although Ramón is not quite at this productive stage in his early writings (his *Pombo* gatherings beginning in 1915 would later serve as the quintessential socio-theoretical space of art and life), his method of observation augured the later avant-garde through what Bürger theorizes as the movement's stage of self-criticism (a stage in which art is turned against itself) in terms of the historical validity of artistic norms and criteria in expressing the self.¹⁰ In a few short years Dadaist experimentation would confirm how any organic sense of the work of art is undermined in this stage—or at the very least becomes exceedingly problematic—and that the aura of artistic creation was destroyed. To get a sense of this, one only has to consider how this self-criticism begins to manifest itself in Ramón's post-1907 work—after his professed awakening—in the implosion of form, linearity, time, and plot of his novelistic self-readings in *Morbideces* (1908) and in the serialized *El libro mudo* (*Secretos*) (1910). However, when it came to any question of self-critical validity, of grounding so to speak, Ramón returned to his early lessons on truth and falsity as a means to write the self—all of the self—down to the very last detail, and thus the subjective superfluity of texts like *Morbideces* and *El libro mudo* (*Secretos*). It was Umbral that noted that this concept of

¹⁰ "The methodological significance of the category 'self-criticism' is that for social subsystems also, it indicates the condition of the possibility of 'objective understanding' of past stages of development. Applied to art, this means that only when art enters the stage of self-criticism does the 'objective understanding' of past periods of the development of art become possible [. . .] with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism. Dadaism, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society" (22).

superfluity brought with it a revelatory thematic arbitrariness, for Ramón had *too much* to say about everything, including himself (51). How does one define the self truthfully in the moment of artistic creation?, or How is subjectivity conceived within the infinite web of everyday “happenings”? These types of questions become very relevant in Ramón’s writing, particularly in a work like *Diálogos triviales* that depicts dialogues based on “palabras auténticas” and “personajes auténticos” from real-life chance encounters. The opening sentences of “Mis sietes palabras (Pastoral)” could not be any clearer in this respect: “He de justificarme. He de bautizarme yo mismo y ponerme desnudo al sol después de ablucionado” (*Obras* 177).

The eruption of this self-critical and increasingly “authentic” subjectivity leads Ramón irrevocably to an autobiographical mode of writing. In “El concepto de la nueva literatura,” he outlines his method of observation and its role in a new type of literature noting that it subverts all manner of conventions and reintroduces life (particularly the experience of “lo cotidiano”) into literature. More importantly, it does so through the practice of (auto)biography: a narrative exercise in mapping one’s self-consciousness and its being in the world, and here is where Nietzsche’s example comes into play once again:

La primera influencia de la literatura es la vida, esta vida de hoy desvelada, corita, contundente como nunca, bajo una inaudita visión de luz [. . .] La irrupción en la vida de Emerson, Stirner, Nietzsche, Gorki, Haeckel, hace muy poco, ha sido decisiva [. . .] La nueva literatura aparece con un criterio sincrético y sereno completamente inédito [. . .] Ante cierta literatura de antaño, y aun de hoy, ha adquirido odio a la frase hecha, al tópico, a lo manido [. . .] Toda obra ha de ser principalmente biográfica [. . .] La labor de la nueva literatura por esto, ha de ser la de irnos reconstruyendo. (*Obras* 149–57)

It is no small wonder why Ramón felt so attracted to autobiography in these early years: it was a malleable mode of writing that established an all-encompassing voice, yet more notably, it provided one with the ideal space to mold a distinct persona (in his autobiographical *Morbideces*, he fashions himself as an “apóstol” no less) who could reconstruct the self with relative proportions of subjectivity and objectivity. This process of reconstruction of the ethos is precisely what Ramón undertakes in his early works, and it is what makes them so illuminative of his later avant-garde trajectory: it is a process, in sum, that will underscore his entire oeuvre as a perpetual self-becoming. As José Camón Aznar has noted, all the biographies Ramón ever penned—Quevedo, El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, etc.—, are very much *autobiographical* in the sense that *all* writing was about the self (*Ramón* 29–75).¹¹ In these matters of autobiography, Ramón returns to Nietzsche as the originator of a symbolic socio-philosophical framework for self-

¹¹ In *Los libros de arte en la obra de Gómez de la Serna*, Camón Aznar tells us: “Podemos decir que Quevedo, Goya y Gómez de la Serna son los tres temperamentos más afines en la cultura española [. . .] La biografía de Goya [de Ramón] es casi una autobiografía. Ramón está como Goya en el borde de dos épocas. Enterrando a una y partiendo a otra” (15).

reconstruction: “Nietzsche no nos ha regalado nada suyo. Ha sido nuestro agente de negocios, nos ha hecho entrar en posesión de nosotros mismos” (*Obras* 152). Ramón owed a profound debt to Nietzsche in the tone and style of his autobiographical *Morbideces*. Although it would be excessive to point out all the textual borrowings and conceptual appropriations, we are immediately struck by how Ramón articulates core Nietzschean themes in his own practice of self-reconstruction:

La negación ha hecho posible mi estoicismo: broquel de mi aquiescencia y de mi reposo [. . .] La moral, según mi parecer, es una ergástula cuyo *cancerbero es el fuerte o el astuto, su sucesor* [. . .] El bienestar personal nunca ha debido admitir el bienestar común ni aun como frase; él sólo debe creer en sí mismo [. . .] El héroe nace uncido a la idea de la autoridad; y la idea de autoridad, “el sacrosanto principio innato” (según los juristas), nació en los seres bajo la primera amenaza del fuerte [. . .] El día en que todos se saneen, es decir, se abandonen a sí mismos, se posean, su cobardía enseñará a sus vidas un principio insustituible de estabilidad. (*Obras* 471–82)

Nietzsche’s autobiography *Ecce Homo* is considered an ideal blueprint on this question of self-reconstruction, and it is clear what exactly attracted Ramón to its pages to the point of considering it a veritable “libro supremo.” For Ramón, Nietzsche’s autobiographical persona firmly grasped the reader’s attention and established an intimacy that was not necessarily literary in nature (conventions of style, form, language, etc.), but it was something more immediate, privative and visceral carried in the authenticity of the speaking voice: “Pero lo más importante de Nietzsche es que no es literaria su influencia, sino alimenticia, testicular, privada” (*Obras* 354). Likewise, his autobiography only rang true for a select and informed readership. Ramón makes explicit how the autobiographical text was exclusivist in that it was conditioned by a dramatic movement that required a modern sensibility to comprehend fully (an argument Nietzsche himself had used often to delineate the proper “digestion” of his oeuvre, as in the “Preface” to *The Genealogy of Morals*).¹² Why exactly? Principally because autobiography was pierced by “una sensación del ineditismo” (*Obras* 356). It was this overarching sense of possibility of the autobiographical mode of writing, its very sense of authorial self-creation as exemplified in Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* (the chapter headings “Why I am so Wise” or “Why I write such good books” demonstrate the perceived unpredictability and forthrightness bolstering its content) that served Ramón as a model for his own writing: a model in which the autobiographical text accessed a new reality in the confessional unveiling of the self in the most abstract and intimate of fashions. For Sobejano, it is specifically this

¹² “It is plain enough, and it presumes only that the reader will have read my earlier works with some care [. . .] As regards my *Zarathustra*, I think no one should claim to know it who has not been, by turns, deeply wounded and deeply delighted by what it says. Only such readers will have gained the right to participate in the halcyon element from which it sprang, with all its sunniness, sweep, and assurance” (157).

peculiar palpability of subjective/objective presentations in Ramón that augurs the compound (and irrational) subjectivity of the historical avant-garde:

Por una parte, se adhiere [Ramón] al vitalismo de este filósofo [Nietzsche] por otra, despoja ese vitalismo de implicaciones morales, re-generadoras, patrióticas, haciéndolo consistir en un fenómeno casi orgánico: pujanza sanguínea sexual, celular, orgasmo creador. Excusado es decir cómo este punto de vista, completamente irracional, presagia el báquico primitivismo de las Vanguardias, al que Gómez de la Serna se mostraría pronto tan sensible. (508)

This approach to the self may explain Ramón's fascination with Futurism, a movement that promised a program for nihilist self-reconstruction and whose manifesto he had translated and published in *Prometeo* in 1909. In the article "El futurismo" on Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, he correlates self-reconstruction with none other than Zarathustra. In addition, Marinetti's own ties to Nietzsche (and what Nietzschean influences Ramón may have extracted from Marinetti's manifestos and his personal correspondence with Marinetti) are also not to be overlooked, particularly as they pertain to the Zarathustran personality. "There can be little doubt," Günter Berghaus points out, "that Marinetti absorbed some of [Nietzsche's] key concepts from an early stage. There are many references to Nietzschean ideas in his early poetry, and his play *Roi Bombance* reveals an intimate knowledge of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*" (23–24).¹³ After exalting the movement's overall vitality and aims, and after quoting a passage from "The Virtuous" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that deals with the metaphor of the sea tearing down false virtue's favorite toys, Ramón admits: "El que no vale nada es un hombre mediocre que ni se rompió, ni se sobrepasó" (*Obras* 299). The reference here to Zarathustra's doctrine of overcoming and the ideal of the Superman ("sobrepasar") is quite clear. The Zarathustra figure in Nietzsche's philosophy is highly complex: he is at once frank and declamatory, and yet also vague and paradoxical, but I believe the underlying argument of the overcoming of the self is that one needs to find the will to power and truth to reconstruct the self (the true identity) after the impossibility of God.¹⁴ Zarathustra proclaims: "Behind thy thoughts and feelings there is a mighty lord, an unknown sage—it is the Self" (19). And in a sense, this is how Ramón had read and interpreted Zarathustra, mining Nietzsche's philosophy (his broader movement of overcoming so germane to Futurism's unflinching dynamism in this case) in the correlation be-

¹³ Berghaus dedicates a section of *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction* to Nietzsche's influence on Marinetti noting an initial and intense fascination with Zarathustra (23–25). For the correspondence between Ramón and Marinetti, see Berghaus's *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (145–52).

¹⁴ In *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, T. K. Seung notes that the self-creationist argument in Nietzsche is rightly counterweighted by a fatalist argument: "These two views, fatalism and self-creationism, are indeed in strife in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Self-creationism belongs to the Faustian individual self, and fatalism to the Spinozan cosmic self. But these two are not equal. The Faustian ideal is Zarathustra's initial ideal of the superman, but it is vanquished by the recognition of the Spinozan self. This is the outcome of the battle between the two selves in Nietzsche's epic of the soul" (200).

tween will and self-creation. Ramón had even gone so far as to imagine a valueless state of Supermans called *Freiland* (free land). The state of *Freiland* was not only located in a far off “beyond,” but it was considered ideal because individuals like himself could establish a lasting peace in their perceived equanimity of irrationalism and violence (and here Ramón belies a superficial understanding of Nietzsche’s theory of violence):

La Australia ideal—¡oh *Freiland* quimérico!—está mas allá, en ese mar a que me he ido y al que sólo pueden ir hombres como yo. Allí en vez de creernos nos veremos, estaremos convencidos de que de nosotros a nosotros solo puede haber una sensación visual—todo lo demás es pederastia—, y en esa visual comprobar vuestra similitud, vuestra camaradería, vuestra irresponsabilidad, vuestra franca violencia y así no hacerse daño. (*Obras* 554)¹⁵

Autobiography carried with it certain dangers, however. Nietzsche himself noted that autobiographical writing could seamlessly transform into fiction, and thus an untruth. In the *Will to Power* he observes that any program of incisive self-reflection opens the door to interpret the self falsely, all the more so if one is an artist and prone, as he worded it, to a detachment from reality (270). Nietzsche’s concept of truth and falsity inherited by Ramón, particularly in questions of writing the self, cleared the way for later thinkers like Roy Pascal and Paul de Man,¹⁶ who would solidly confirm that the mode of writing labeled “autobiography” is not only difficult to properly define—involving various socio-historical exigencies that needed to be accounted for in the text itself—but that the process of writing the self begins precisely “in the building up of a personality through the images it makes of itself, that embody its mode of absorbing and reacting to the outer world” (Pascal 188). Moreover, the autobiographical text, its very truthfulness and textuality (always mediated by the reader), defies clear categorization, making it “a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts” (de Man 70). What we see in the young Ramón is how these very delimitations of self and text—the “building up of a personality”—are compounded and exacerbated in an underlying concept of authentic-

¹⁵ *Freiland* reappears in Ramón’s early writings in relation to how the *rastro* also establishes a type of equanimity, but one among objects: “Ramón ahora aquí siento todo lo definitivo que es el Rastro y cómo todo lo más ‘caro’ guarda su vergüenza como la Venus de Médicis . . . Hasta la pipa se resiente y se hace banal . . . ¿Quizá el *Freiland* está ahí? . . . No está el *Freiland*, pero sí el concepto desvalorizado de todo lo industrioso abatido a sus pies, y terrizo, y desapasionado de todo lo representativo . . . Se nos da desnuda la esfinge, en medio de todo su esfingismo caído, arrollado, como una mujer en gesto de franqueza y de simplicidad” (*Obras* 735).

¹⁶ Other notable works that compliment Pascal’s and de Man’s criticism include William Earle, *The Autobiographical Consciousness* (1972), James Olney, *Metaphors of the Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* (1972), the compilation of essays edited by Olney *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980), Karl Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual Self: Self and Circumstance of Autobiography* (1978), William Spengemann *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (1980), and Marilyn Changler, *A Healing Art: Regeneration Through Autobiography* (1990).

ity, and it is here where we must query what Ramón so painstakingly purports to be the true self. That is, just as Nietzsche attributed himself impossible talents and fell prey in many instances to the “detachment of reality” that he had recognized in artists, Ramón also steps into—and often—a realm of impossibility.¹⁷ In *El libro mudo*, for instance, his self-image is, for a lack of a better term, Zarathustran in character when he himself crafts it in such overtly prophetic terms:

Soy el único que no odia, que no desdeña, sino que desconoce y fuma, es decir vuelve a la nada al que debe volver a ella. El único que sabe la falta de extensión, la sumisión, la inanidad que hay en la fe, en la más pequeña fe, en la más pequeña concesión. (*Obras* 553)

Textually speaking, Ramón’s concept of authenticity pushed the boundaries of autobiography into the sphere of a highly personalized fiction. The uniform self, its very ideal of unitary coherence as conditioned by Western logocentrism, is turned in on itself and fragmented and problematized as a functional artistic/aesthetic concept. As the avatars of autobiography are dissolved in this vigorous decentering of the self (I am referring to the “autobiographical pact” between author-reader that Philippe Lejeune places in the veracity of one’s personal history), they are nevertheless effectively resolved in a narrative praxis that presents the self oscillating between all manner of dichotomies and contradictions while remaining nonetheless within the realms of authenticity. Yet, for the principal reason I listed above (the question of logos), this authenticity is undeniably problematic, as Ramón had intuited: the realm of authenticity, as with the self (for both are intertwined in his writings), has to be reconstructed not within traditional and purportedly bankrupt parameters of truth, but as a truthful expression of something deeper and more personal: one’s “vitalismo.” In the article “La verdad suprema” in *La Región Extremeña*, Ramón declares: “¡Ya no más distracciones ni fanatismos que arrojen sombra sobre la trascendencia absoluta del yo, ni la separen de su objeto íntimo!” (*Obras* 1019). Needless to say, this channeling of the self in this manner connects not only with Zarathustra, as we have seen, but with later works like *El incongruente* (1921) in which a Surrealist fortitude reveals itself in how the self emanated from a deeply hidden and so-called “irrational” state of mind; that is, entering the realm of the subconscious, a state of mind cognizant of the instability of truth claims and considered utterly indispensable to the genuineness of the work of art. Indeed, facts, dates, bearing witness, personal history, linear temporality (as in a privileging of the past and the reconstitution of memory in the present), are not the *sine qua non* of a “truthful” autobiographical mode of writing for Ramón. Instead, and Nietzsche’s example is paramount as I have endeavored to demonstrate, what is truthful cuts

¹⁷ For Hollingdale, this is clearest in the later Nietzsche (*Ecce Homo* especially) when considered as a symptom of his progressive mental and physical degeneration (199–200). When it comes to Ramón, Nigel Dennis is correct to point out that “what is explicitly presented as historical or autobiographical fact sometimes turns out to be a distortion or deflection of the truth. It is in this context above all that Ramón’s *active* role in designing the puzzle that confronts critics today is most clearly seen” (12).

much deeper into the self and entails how it overcomes its circumstance to locate something more authentic in the present moment of experience.¹⁸

From these early writings, then, so attentive to questions of truth and the self, Ramón's advancement towards the *greguería* is understandable. The *greguería*, so indebted to the modern city temperament, wrought a highly esoteric linguistic-metaphorical construction of an object or image that provided a new and fragmentary type of truth of the world. Ramón had always understood this process as tantamount to a "dissolving" unconcealment of reality: "la constitución del mundo es fragmentaria, su fondo es atómico, su verdad es disolvencia" (*Greguerías* 11). Yet what I believe is one of the most significant and overlooked aspects of these early writings leading up to the innovative *greguería* is their indebtedness to philosophy. Although it is true that the avant-garde came into consciousness from a "rejection of the world" brought about by the socio-historic, political, economic and aesthetic pressures of modernity, it is all too common to exalt the movement's radical breaks at the detriment of what exactly it was inheriting from the past and why.¹⁹ Let us make no mistake: Ramón too, in the end, rejected Nietzsche, just as he rejected a long list of movements, thinkers and authors to pursue his own unusual-*ism*. As early as *Morbideces*, he was already showing signs of distancing himself from Nietzsche's philosophy, pointing out—irony of ironies—the "unnaturalness" of his style and his naïve pursuit of an ideal.²⁰ Yet the fact remains that Nietzsche was a revelatory symbol when it came to concepts of truth and self, providing Ramón with symbolic paradigms for selfhood in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo* that were, in the end, as much philosophical as they were rhetorical in character (for example, the autobiographical nature of philosophy itself). In this respect, Ramón displays an uncanny contemporaneity with the European avant-garde—Futurism, for instance—for discerning what exactly in Nietzsche's persona and philosophy could be fruitfully appropriated and personalized in a given historical moment. And without a doubt, Nietzsche wormed his way into the substratum of Ramón's quest for self-realization early on. He deposited there core concerns regarding the very constructedness of subjectivity. For anyone familiar with Ramón's oeuvre, this quest underlies practically everything he ever wrote.

¹⁸ On this question of time, Ramón conceived of every minute as an apotheosis of experience: "Nosotros concebimos el minuto de una manera apoteósica y formidable" ("El concepto" 157).

¹⁹ Luca Somigli has explored precisely this question of inheritance in such iconoclastic movements as Futurism noting that "the past resurfaces in the very language of futurism, in the tropes and figures that are deployed to sketch an outline of the program of the movement. Health involves overcoming of the disease, but the disease leaves its mark on the body. Thus, Marinetti simply reverses the two symbolic poles of Baudelaire's note and Verlaine's 'Languor' and replaces the twilight of a dying empire with the animal like vitality of successive waves of futurist barbarians" (116).

²⁰ "Entre los más conocidos iconoclastas se nota esta inseguridad de sí mismos [. . .] Nietzsche, que pudo haber sido natural, disuelve su acierto en un vano afán de apóstol, de poeta y de admonitor. Además de que con su ultrahumanismo, le pervierte ese ansia trascendental de ideal que a Diógenes, siendo tan íntegro, le hace encender su farol para buscar al hombre, y que a Richepin le hace esperar un Cristo obrero. El resultado de mi negación es, por el contrario, optimista, con un optimismo garantizado, pues habiendo afirmado en justa proporción no tendrá que rectificarse" (*Obras* 470).

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