Editors' note

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10.2478/abcsj-2023-0016

Being // Non-being as Vectors of Thought and Expression

The inspiration behind the present issue was a unique, unorthodox volume authored by Ana Agud: Los poemas del ser y el no ser y sus lenguajes en la historia: Antología plurilingüe con textos de *Rigveda,* Parménides*, Upaniṣad, Bhagavad Gītā*, Lucrecio, Shakespeare, Hegel, Goethe y A. Machado / The Poems of Being and Non-Being and Their Languages in the Course of History: A Multilingual Anthology of *Rig Veda,* Parmenides*, The Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita*, Lucretius, Shakespeare, Hegel, Goethe and Antonio Machado *(2017). Starting from meticulous linguistic and philological analyses of previously published translations, supplemented by the author's new translations into Spanish from the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, English and German originals, Agud's volume unravels an all-encompassing web of connections constitutive of the cultural, religious and social aspects underlying the work of each individual thinker and surrounding each text from this thought-provoking list. All these voices, speaking for both Eastern and Western horizons of knowledge and spanning from the earliest Antiquity to the present day, ultimately coalesce into an organic, revealing story of perhaps humanity's greatest quest: coming to terms with what is and with what is not, be that in an ontological and gnoseological key (probing into the nature of 'reality' and what may lie beyond it), in psychological mode (confronting the anguish and terror of Being turning into Non-being), or moral scope (turning Non-being into a vector of transformation, tamed expression of a human ideal – aspiring to become what one is not, to become what one should be).*

Agud foregrounds 'Being' and 'Non-being' as hyper-ordinate vectors of meaning-creation which oversee and epitomize a wide range of concrete issues of the deepest concern for us humans – as individuals facing inevitable death, as members of the social and cultural communities we build and destroy, and, last but not least, as temporary inhabitants of a world that will most certainly outlive us as a species.

This thematic issue was conceived as a germinating ground for the seed-thoughts set forth in Los Poemas. *The eleven contributions that follow Ana Agud's*

proemial study bring to bear theoretical standpoints and methodological frameworks from various disciplines in the fields of linguistics and language philosophy, discourse studies, literary and cultural studies, aesthetics, translation and translation analysis – thus unfolding and highlighting one or another of the perspectives engaged in Los Poemas. *Cultural semiotics and the study of the socio-cultural impact of technology round up the scene of this trans-disciplinary dialogue. The authors explore various forms and modes of manifestation of Being // Non-being (existence / non-existence; life (survival) / death (extinction); creation / destruction; presence / absence; visibility / invisibility; overspecification / underspecification) and different types of relationship in which the two terms have been placed (Being // Non-being as complementaries, as opposites, as mutual substitutes situated on the same or on different ontological levels – Non-being as an alternative form of Being, Being as an illusory form of Non-being). In each contribution, the main point of focus, situated in the domain of the English language itself or in the sphere of Anglophone literatures and cultures, is contextualized through multi-faceted relations with other cultural-linguistic domains, along a broad historical timeline.*

The threads of coherence that link together the twelve texts selected for this issue are laid out in Ana Agud's proemial study "'To Be or Not to Be': Was That the Question? On My Book Los poemas del ser y el no ser y sus lenguajes en la historia*" – a study which also includes two new, original translations into English of Antonio Machado's poems "Al Gran Cero" and "Al Gran Pleno o Conciencia Integral." Agud views Hamlet's monologue "as a historical step" between two modalities of formulating and dealing with the problem of Being and Non-being. On the one hand, we have the ancient poems listed in the book's subtitle, which start from the level of extreme (philosophical or speculative) abstraction, but then cannot avoid addressing "the real conflict of understanding life and death." On the other hand, we have the texts of Goethe, Hegel and Machado, "which approach the subject from the new awareness elaborated by Shakespeare" through Hamlet's words: never again content with merely escaping into metaphysical abstraction, but bold enough to question each and every 'certainty' about ourselves and about the world we live and die in. Ultimately, Hamlet proves that the old metaphysical contraposition "to be or not to be" is not the real question that consumes us humans. "With Hamlet's monologue," emphasizes Agud, "the being and the non-being of Western metaphysics have 'entered existence' (Hegel) and have become embodied and existential." From this perspective, Shakespeare's text acquires a profound significance that by far overrides its literary-poetic value: it marks a turning point in the history of thought, as part of a long tradition of texts that are not "purely poetic," but represent "an effort to reach the liberty of poetic language in order to organize speculative thinking beyond the presuppositions and constrictions of [philosophical] prose." Moreover,*

Hamlet's monologue instantiates the very essence of human language: it is speech "conscious of being only part of an integral scenic language composed of bodies, movements, gestures, gazes, lights and shadows, cries and whispers, all of which completes and profiles the words, and roots them tangibly in the complexity of a single human being here and now."

The first section of this special issue, "Revisiting the question: Insights from linguistics, semiotics, philosophy", opens with Giovanni Gobber's contribution, "'To Be or Not to Be' in Translation: Ay, There's the Point." Examining in minute linguistic-philological detail multiple versions of Shakespeare's Hamlet *translated into Italian, French, Romanian, German, Polish, Russian, Finnish, Chinese and Japanese, the author aims to verify whether "investigating translations is a key to a better understanding of Hamlet's dilemma outlined in the original English text." Focusing on each linguistic component of the monologue's first utterance (sentence type, the disjunctor or, the infinitive mode of the verb to be, the lexical meaning encoded in this verb itself), Gobber interprets how the dyad Being // Non-being is construed via the expressive means of each language under consideration. This detailed comparative analysis of the translated versions suggests that the interpretation of the contrast between to be and not to be may indeed be influenced by modes of lexical and grammatical conceptualization that characterize the languages in which it is formulated. By way of consequence, the activity of translation appears as much more than a practically-oriented form of cultural mediation: it is "a form of knowledge," possibly the only one capable of providing us "access [to] a truly interlinguistic level."*

In his essay "Triangle(s) of Being. Linguistic (Coserian) and Semiotic (Peircean) Perspectives," Dumitru-Cornel Vîlcu cuts directly to the core of the matter: in what way do we, humans, build the 'objects' of our (experienced) reality, and how do these 'objects' or "types of being" then coalesce into a coherent – though dynamic and ever-changing – thinkable and therefore livable world? Charles Sanders Peirce's 'participants' in the process of semiosis (sign, object and interpretant) are re-valued by a proposed correspondence with Eugenio Coseriu's linguistic contents (significatum, designatum, sense), and reinterpreted by inclusion in a line of Western philosophical thought that encompasses Humboldt, Husserl and Heidegger among others. Vîlcu argues that the individual meaning created in each genuine discourse act (Coseriu's "sense") represents "being as the surplus to the already existing universe, brought by each and every subject through his or her active living and his or her creative (as far as we are here concerned, linguistic) contribution." "[I]t is in sense that something truly new and personal is at the same time brought into the universe," and "it is only via sense that each and every one of us actually and actively participates in human life, society and the universe."

In contiguity with the theme of 'Being in/through language,' the second section of the issue is entitled "Words matter: Being // Non-being in language(s) and text(s)." Four contributions explore how the dyad Being // Non-being is conceptualized in the lexical and grammatical system of English in comparison and contrast with other languages, and how the corresponding units and devices contribute to the constitution of textual sense, again with a special view to the challenges encountered in the process of translating those textual configurations from and into English.

Toshiyuki Sadanobu's "Grammatical Number from an Ecological Perspective, Focused on the 'Here-Now-I-Real'" demonstrates, using the example of number agreement in English, Chinese and Japanese, as well as related phenomena of self-expressiveness, transitivity and esteem (respect language), that "a holistic view that emphasizes the close connection between language and situation of the utterance ('here-now-I-real')" can more accurately explain the differences in grammatical conceptualization among individual languages, and also help to identify "commonalities above and beyond such differences." Sadanobu discovers an underlying principle that unitarily justifies the above-mentioned grammatical phenomena: the way in which the speaker views/conceives the hierarchy of animacy according to his own frame of reference, centered on the situation of the utterance ("things with a high feeling of reality have high animacy while other things have low animacy"). In other words, situation-relatedness and the speaker's perspective, for which Sadanobu uses the inspired phrase 'here-now-I-real,' do not make their appearance on the scene of language only at the level of text/discourse, but are built into the very fabric of grammatical significata with their variants-in-use (what Coseriu calls "Sprechbedeutungen").

An analysis of the deliberate use, for the purposes of textual sense-construction, of the presence / absence of certain grammatical categories or phenomena (such as number agreement, verbal tense morphemes, negative constructions and other basic sentence patterns) in a fashion that breaks the grammatical rules or deviates from the norms of the language in question, is undertaken by Keita Ikarashi in his contribution, "When Anomalous Language Is Acceptable: Suspension and the Motivations Behind Breaking Convention in Shaun Tan's Cicada*." Using Eugenio Coseriu's concept of suspension (sublation) of incongruence or incorrectness through textual adequacy, Ikarashi's nuanced analysis identifies different types of suspension, including cases of multiple or manifold suspension, and shows how they each contribute differently to the constitution of the text's strands of meaning, in particular the characterization of the protagonist, Cicada. A revealing comparison with the way these sense strategies can (or cannot) be replicated in the Japanese translation of Tan's picture book once again highlights how the presence/ absence of*

certain categories in the language system can influence the avenues of textual sense construction, especially in creative texts.

Magdalena Ciubăncan explores Being // Non-being in the form of textual over- vs. under-specification in her paper "Explicitation and (In)directness in Literary Translations from Japanese into English and Romanian: A Contrastive Analysis." Choosing two contemporary Japanese novels (Kikuko Tsumura's There's No Such Thing as an Easy Job *and Genki Kawamura's* If Cats Disappeared from the World*), Ciubăncan compares how ordinary realities, or common designations from ordinary life, are rendered in translation, in light of Edward T. Hall's high-context culture vs. low-context culture distinction. She thus compares "the degree to which the context created by the Japanese authors is explicitly specified, and the level of directness of the discourse" in the two target languages, finding that the low-context orientation does not appear in the Anglophone space(s) and in the Romanian cultural-linguistic space to the same degree. Rather, Romanian – as manifested in the translation of the novels – displays more signs of a high-context culture type of discourse than English, thus positing itself closer to Japanese.*

The fourth essay of the section is Kehan Liu's "'In the Midst of Chaos There Was Shape': Formalist Aesthetics and Ekphrasis in To the Lighthouse*." The focal point of the analysis is the character Lily Briscoe's constitution and completion of her painting of Mrs. Ramsay. The author connects significant passages from Virginia Woolf's autobiographical novel with explicit aesthetic statements of both Woolf herself and her artist peers, in order to substantiate a reorientation of reading: Woolf's aesthetic aim is to reconcile formalist abstraction with 'everyday life', more specifically with its revelatory "moments of being," nevertheless "embedded in largely portioned moments of 'non-being' – Woolf's private shorthand for time lived not attentively or consciously, as if being 'embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool.'"*

Along the thematic thread of 'making the invisible visible, and the absent present,' Kehan Liu's article also bridges the transition to the next section of the issue, "More than meets the eye: Being // Non-being in the performing arts," dedicated to exploring representations of Non-being, or of the opposition Being vs. Non-being, in visual texts, films and dramatic performances.

Cristian Paşcalău's "Representations of Non-Being in David Lynch's Eraserhead*, Edmund Elias Merhige's* Begotten*, and Darren Aronofsky's* Pi*: A Comparative Analysis from Indian Philosophy Perspectives" examines how the films of the three American directors artistically construct and convey notions such as "reality, illusion, emptiness, and the interconnectedness of all existence," highlighting their potential connections to Indian philosophical perspectives. Similar to Ana Agud's poems of philosophical resonance, Paşcalău argues that the three films "demonstrate how artistic expression can serve as a powerful medium for*

philosophical inquiry. . . . By challenging perceptions of reality, the films prompt viewers to question the authenticity of the perceived world and contemplate the nature of appearances and deeper truths."

"Towards a Historical Be(com)ing into Universal Benevolence: Anastasia and Geopolitical Reconfigurations in Late Modernity" by Maria Grajdian focuses on two iterations of the Anastasia topos – the American animated musical movie from 1997 (dir. Don Bluth and Gary Goldman) and the theatrical musical live performance from 2020 staged in Japan by the all-female Takarazuka Revue, whose aesthetic guiding principle is to offer its audiences "the illusion of luxury through surplus." While the American version's "major contribution to mainstream media rests in its depiction of female identity as a self-quest for self-understanding, self-development and self-expansion," i.e. in proposing a personal ideal of the "liberated empowered lady, able to pursue her own pathway in life," the Japanese production aims at something bolder, but more elusive and risk-fraught: to posit Japan, or the Japanese 'solution,' defined by socio-cultural parameters such as harmony, compassion, cooperation and moral integrity, as an alternative to the failure of the 'Western' social model and the loss of the "American dream" – or at least to subliminally reinforce this view in the minds of Takarazuka's loyal (Japanese, predominantly female) audiences. The new (Japanese) dream that Anastasia *puts forward is the vision of a "more feminine, pluri-centric or rhizome-like" global world order, a socio-political shift towards a paradigm of "universal benevolence, peaceful harmonization and creative permission for the organic manifestation of events" – something that will no doubt echo, in the reader's mind, Ana Agud's final words in the proemial study, interpreting Hamlet's dilemma: "to face our real existential problems, to shape good desires, and to allow mankind to conquer its own paradise, that of responsible and intelligent beauty."*

The exploratory path delineated in this special issue comes full circle with Manuela Mihăescu's contribution "Big Data and (the New?) Reality." Written in a style that makes complex technological notions and debates easier to grasp even by non-specialists, in the spirit of genuine trans-disciplinary dialogue, this essay is an eye-opener that stands in a category of its own, which I named "A Glimpse into the Future." The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the processes of Big Data analysis, and the ever more extensive use of AI and the algorithms behind it in areas that used to be a prerogative of human creators raise concerns about the unpredictable ways in which data processing could affect the way we relate to the world, and possibly even replace our human reality, which is "continuous, infinite, ever-changing" – the reality of embodied, unquantifiable and self-probing experiences of the self – "with the illusion of a reality provided by algorithms that humans can no longer control." We should perhaps emphasize that the 'digital world' Mihăescu meticulously

portrays, "a world made up of enormous amounts of data received from us and from the sensors in objects around us . . . processed by AI and provided to us as 'a reality,'" is not out there equally, for all, like 'real' (empirical) reality: digital 'reality,' or most of it, emanates from, and in a sense is owned by a few technological giants born on American soil and firmly grounded in American entrepreneurial values, with the US also leading by far in the number of "data warehouses" (massive data storage centers) by country. The future, however, is still in the making, and it remains to be seen whether humankind will be able to avert, or at least placate, the emergence of utterly dystopic variants of algorithm-controlled 'realities.'

The final section, "Postcards," brings to life the organic approach advocated throughout the issue, with the help of original translations into English from Andō Shōeki and Ernesto Cardenal – a selection of texts whose sense is constituted simultaneously on the threefold axis of poetic – scientific – philosophical discourse modes.

Roman Paşca's "'The myriads of people are all one': Andō Shōeki's Self-with-others" foregrounds the creative use of language for the aim of illuminating philosophical reflection on man's place in the universe. The fragments selected from the mysterious early 18th century Japanese thinker's work Shizen shin'eidō *("The Way of Functioning of the Truth of Nature") delineate in powerful metaphors "a vision of the world of nature which is completely non-anthropocentric, thus providing numerous clues and hints for environmental ethics and ecology." This is not a human-less world, but, rather, a world inhabited by fulfilled humanity. The ultimate harmony between all humans can be reached by a proper understanding of the "mutually embedded natures" ("we all contain the other within ourselves and, in turn, are contained within the other"); the ultimate harmony between humans and Nature can be reached by finding the Way of "direct cultivation." Paşca explains: "once you find the Way, you understand that you, as an individual, are but a part of the intricate system of nature – a* homo naturalis*, as it were."*

Under the title "Evolving to Science Poetry: Three Poems by Ernesto Cardenal," Jonathan Cohen elaborates on the Nicaraguan poet-priest's epic poem Cántico cósmico *(*Cosmic Canticle*), with its "avant-garde use of science and its language, as he [the poet] contemplates the entire cosmos and issues of being and non-being." The three fragments selected for this issue bring into focus "the origin of our planet and life on Earth," and can be read as a sequel and answer, over millennia, to* Rig Veda*'s "Poem of non-being" interpreted by Agud in Chapter 3 of* Los Poemas. *At the same time, the fragments can be viewed as a poetic enactment of Peirce's hierarchical construal of our universe, with the material world of objects as a Prime, the world of subjectivity and sentient life as a Second, and "any mental or conceptual treatment of either as a Third," because only "in small portions*

of the living world (and, most probably, infinitesimal parts of the actual universe) does intelligence, in the human sense of the word, manifest itself" (Vîlcu).

With this intertextual reading key, however, the reader will also find in Cardenal's verses a striking confirmation, in the mode of poetry, of Vîlcu's radical reinterpretation of Peirce via Coseriu: the final line of "Evolution" and the whole excerpt entitled "Elements" intimate nothing less than the fact that, to borrow Vîlcu's words, "from the point of view of semiosis itself it is the Sign [the domain of culture and symbolic objects] that acts as a Prime."

In the process of putting all these contributions together and designing the sections that best reflected the purport of each, I realized that the end result is a macro-text whose global sense-configuration emerges as a polyhedral lens – each essay should be read, and its implications deciphered, 'by way of' its connections with other essays.

I can only hope that, by accepting the reading key suggested here, the reader too will find inspiration to raise his/her own new questions about the multifarious manifestations and forms of Being // Non-being, and possibly also a few tentative answers to the hardest question of all – the question that was not *"to be or not to be."*

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