Agud, Ana, *Los poemas del ser y el no ser y sus lenguajes en la historia: Antología plurilingüe con textos de Rigveda, Parménides, Upanisad, Bhagavad Gītā, Lucrecio, Shakespeare, Hegel, Goethe y A. Machado*. Madrid: ABADA Editores, 2017, 318 pages. ISBN 978-84-16160-86-0.

Ana Agud's book, *The Poems of Being and Non-Being and Their Languages in the Course History: A Plurilingual Anthology with Texts from the Rigveda, Parmenides, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gītā, Lucretius, Shakespeare, Hegel, Goethe, and A. Machado* stands out as both original and inspiring. From the very first pages, readers will recognize that they are engaging with a less ordinary book, a thought-provoking work, written with genuine sincerity. The book's limited print run makes it challenging for scholars with an interest in its subject to easily access it, which calls for a somewhat special, thorough and more detailed presentation. In this case, considerable attention has been given to highlighting the content of each chapter, providing readers with a comprehensive overview of the book's core ideas. This approach is also motivated by fact that the book is written in Spanish, a language that, despite its global significance, occupies a less prominent place in contemporary academic discourse, where English tends to dominate. As a result, this linguistic factor can act as a barrier, limiting the reach of the book to a broader, international audience. However, the themes Ana Agud explores – ranging from ancient philosophy to modern literary reflections – are universal in nature. They transcend linguistic boundaries, making this work highly relevant to scholars and readers from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds, even if they are not fluent in Spanish. This universality makes it all the more important that the book receives the recognition it deserves across the global academic community.

The book is structured into twelve chapters that explore the theme of *being* and *non-being* across a vast historical timeline, with poetic language emerging as the preferred medium for engaging with the issue. The first two chapters of the book – the *Prologue* and the *Introduction* – are important for understanding the book' structure, the author's motivations and objectives, and the scientific domains it encompasses. In the *Prologue*, the author confesses that the book is a product of her intellectual journey in the quest for "seeking the truth". This detail is *phenomenologically* relevant: the volume is a testimony of her lived experience as a linguist, incorporating the questions she has pondered throughout her career, both those she encountered early on and those that arose subsequently. Furthermore, the book embodies the full maturity and culmination of a

humanist's intellectual development, marked by a commitment to "critically reflecting on the presuppositions concerning our language and ideas in order to build a better and more humane humanity" (45; emphasis in original).[1]

Ana Agud's volume is intellectually challenging, prompting readers to confront some of the most uncomfortable questions. It transcends the confines of any single domain, positioning itself at the crossroads of multiple disciplines, including linguistics, philosophy, literature, translation studies, among others. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the book, offering a multifaceted perspective on the complex issues it addresses.

Overall, the book is *primarly* a *linguistic book* that delves into the issue of human language, its nature and fundamental role in shaping human thought and knowledge. Early in her career as a linguist in the 70s of the last century , the author became aware of what she terms the "epistemological paradox" of linguistic science: the paradox of having "to rely on the very language it seeks to investigate", to "take for granted what it aims to uncover" and, respectively, to "use language as a tool for its own investigation, without questioning it from the outset" (16, 15).[2] Confronted by the lack of "philosophical reflection" within the linguistic theories and models of the time, the author took on the demanding task of refusing to accept "the assumptions of any linguistic school" without first subjecting them to a rigorous "epistemological critique" (16, 20).[3] Thus, the volume is much more than a standard book of linguistics; it is a work of *critical philosophy of language*.

Ana Agud' s *The Poems of Being and Non-Being and Their Languages in the Course of History* can also be seen as a *philosophical work*, as it tackles a subject central to countless philosophical debates: the concept of "being". Agud underscores that even in philosophical reflection the issue of language cannot be ignored. For instance, she astutely notes a recurring confusion throughout the history of philosophy between *the concept* of "being" (a pure abstraction of human objectual thinking) and *the signified* "being" (a historical and language-specific way of understanding and relating to the world). This confusion has been the source of many misunderstandings and obscurities that have plagued metaphysical speculation over time. With some notable exceptions, much of the

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[1] «*reflexionar críticamente sobre los supuestos de nuestro lenguaje y nuestras ideas*, con el fin de *construir una humanidad mejor, más humana*».

[2] «paradoja epistemológica»; «confiar en el mismo lenguaje que pretende investigar»; «dar por conocido los mismo que pretende descubrir», «investigar su objeto usándolo desde el principio, y sin cuestionárselo, como herramienta de esa misma investigación».

[3] «reflexión filosófica»; «no dar por bueno ningún supuesto de ninguna escuela lingüística sin someterla a una concienzuda critica epistemológica».

metaphysical thought has neglected one crucial factor when dealing with the concept of being – what Hegel later coined "the haste of language" ('Voreiligkeit der Sprache'). Even after "the linguistic turn in philosophy", the full impact and implications of language in shaping philosophical concepts have yet to be fully grasped. In this respect, Ana Agud refuses thus to treat "being" as a self-evident or self-understood philosophical concept. Instead she invites the reader to join her in a *critical* exploration that seeks to understand it beyond "what seems obvious or convenient". In this way, her book is also a book *of critical philosophy* (*of consciousness*).

As indicated in the title, the volume is also an anthology, featuring texts translated by the author from a variety of languages: Greek, Sanskrit, Latin, English and German. In this regard, the volume contributes significantly to the field of *translation studies*. It is important to note that at least some of the texts included, such as those in Sanskrit, represent a particular category of texts: they originate from cultures that are distant both in time and space, and some are exceptionally concise, making their interpretation highly dependent on cultural, ideologic, mythologic and religious contextualization and disambiguation. These factors pose unique challenges for the translator – challenges that are not typically encountered in other texts. Beyond the complex task of attempting to convey the "aesthetic ideal" of these works in our Western cultures – an effort that itself requires considerable skill – there is also the difficulty of "re-constructing of *the full range of semantic and communicative intentions*" (54; emphasis in original)[4] of these texts in a way that resonates with modern, non-specialist reader. Ana Agud's contribution to translation studies is notable because she addresses both the theoretical and practical aspects of translation. She enriches the translated texts with very pertinent comments and fine philological and linguistic analyses, demonstrating her expertise in these fields. As such, her book also serves as *a philological study*, showcasing her deep knowledge and competence in classical philology, linguistics, and Indo-Iranian literature. In addition, since her analyses focus on texts where the "medium of expression and reflection" (44)[5] is poetic language, the book is also relevant to *historical-comparative cultural studies* and *literary studies*. However, the book does not engage in literary criticism in the traditional sense, as the author does not aim to create new meanings starting from the original text. Nor does she intend to give true and subject-independent/objective descriptions of chosen

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[4] «de reconstruir el complejo de la intención semántica y comunicativa».
[5] «medio de expresión y reflexión».

textual sequences. On the contrary, Ana Agud critiques comparative literature approaches that apply methodologies unsuited to the sciences of culture or *Geisteswissenschaften*. She emphasizes that human sciences are fundamentally hermeneutic in nature, and can only be explained through the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. The comparative studies she conducts are thus grounded in the *hermeneutic principles of interpretation and understanding*. From this hermeneutic perspective, she poses and seeks to answer key questions such as: Why did authors of poetic texts like *Rigveda*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Upanishads*, and even philosophers like Parmenides and others choose the form of poetic language over the argumentative prose typical to philosophical discourse to express speculative ideas? How does poetic imagery contribute to the construction of philosophical speculation? The answers she provides to these questions offer valuable insights into the elaboration of a *poetics*, that extends and develops significant ideas from Humboldt, Coseriu, and Machado. These figures, along with Hegel and Josef Simon, are the thinkers whose ideas, conceptions or philosophical systems have enlightened her reflection on the texts collected in this anthology and definitively shaped her intellectual journey throughout her professional activity.

The third chapter, "'Neither non-being nor being was then': The radical scepticism of Rigveda's 'Poem of non-being'" presents Ana Agud's translation of the "defiant" poem referenced in the title, which forms part of the tenth book of *Rigveda*. After providing a brief introduction to the historical context and the topics approached by the poems of Rigveda, Ana Agud argues for an interpretation of this hymn as a "singular" and "unique" work of art. She contends that it cannot be aligned with the "ritual culture of the other poems of *Rigveda*" nor with the "doctrinal elaboration [found] in later speculations of *Brahmanas* or *Upanishads*" (68).[6] The author's interpretation is innovative, diverging from the well-established canonical readings, which often impose later Indian philosophical frameworks onto the poem. While traditional interpretations rely on philosophical ideas developed much later than the poem's creation, Ana Agud approaches the text on its own terms. She engages deeply with the poem's poetic imagery, seeking to understand how these images articulate and create a "message of an unusual conceptual density, in opposition to the ritual and mythological explanations of its time and culture"

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[6] «la cultura ritual de los demás poemas del *Rigveda*»; «su elaboración doctrinal en las posteriores especulaciones de los *Brāhmanas* y de las *Upaniṣad*».

(79). [7] She observes that the poet's choice of poetic expression is not arbitrary, and it is linked to a quest for an ultimate foundation for everything that is or can be thought, including thought itself and its concepts. This quest, Agud argues, could not be realized through the argumentative or doctrinal discourse, which already existed in Indian literature at that time. This is the case because the poem's focus is on a moment preceding any conceptualization, where any concept and even the opposition between concepts had not yet emerged: "neither non-being nor being was then". Because poetic language can present, through imagery, ideas that argumentative prose would express through chains of concepts, the poet is able to place *"the beginning of factual reality beyond the explicative potential of any concept or of any conscience, where knowledge may be possible, but is neither certain nor necessary"* (77; emphasis in original).[8] This approach leads her to interpret even the poem's final lines in a radical new way. The figure of "the guard who abides at the highest heaven" is not a god or a divine being, as this would imply to be thought as "posterior to the emergence of universe" (78).[9] Nor is he "omniscient", since the text concedes that, the guard "maybe knows" "the origin of all this", "but maybe even he does not know". What makes Ana Agud's interpretation (and translation) remarkable is her decision to remain faithful to the text and the images crafted by the poet. Rather than imposing external frameworks, she allows the poem to reveal itself as a *"poem of uncertainties"* (81; emphasis in original):[10] one that is not intended *"to explain anything"* (80; emphasis in original),[11] but "only opens questions that can no longer be closed", and that "places human being before the most radical uncertainty, against all cultural strategies to neutralize it" (80).[12] This is certainly a daring and unconventional interpretation, offering a refreshing perspective that stands in contrast to the dominant readings of many renowned scholars in the field.

In addition to her fine observations and (etymological) explanations that justify her translation and interpretation choices, Ana Agud reveals that she aimed to capture in her

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[7] «un mensaje de insólita densidad conceptual, a la contra de las explicaciones mitológicas y rituales de su época y de su cultura».

[8] «situar *el comienzo de la realidad fáctica más allá del potencial explicativo de cualquier concepto o de cualquier conciencia*, allí donde el conocimiento tal vez sea posible, pero desde luego *no es seguro ni necesario*» (77).

[9] «posterior a la emergencia del universo».

[10] «un *poema de la incertidumbre*».

[11] «*reconoce no explicar nada*».

[12] «solo abre interrogantes que ya no podrán cerrarse»; «que sitúa al hombre ante la incertidumbre más radical, a la contra de todas las estrategias culturales de neutralizarla» (80).

translation "the dramatic inner rhythm" (82)[13] articulated in the poem – from the abrupt and unsettling opening line to the liberating and "universes-opening" verses at its end (77).[14] This approach is one that Ana Agud consistently applies throughout the entire volume, adding a personal touch to each of the translations included in the book.

The fourth chapter focuses on the translation of one of the most influential poems from Presocratic Greek world: Parmenides' cosmological and metaphysical poem, usually referred to as "On nature". The chapter begins by highlighting the significance of Parmenides's poem for Western thought and culture. Many scholars and philosophers, including Hegel, have recognized this poem as a pivotal moment in the history of philosophy, often referring to Parmenides as "the father" of Western philosophy. Ana Agud takes a step further, identifying Parmenides' concept of Being ("Being alone is, and Nothing is not") as the foundation for a "philosophy of identity", a framework that continues to have deep repercussions to this day. She argues that "it compels us to revisit the topic of being and non-being in a new context, with a renewed sense/horizon of *responsibility*" (10; emphasis in original).[15] One of the translator's most notable achievements in this chapter is her recognition of the importance of Parmenides cosmological proem for the understanding of the whole epic poem, which many interpreters have overlooked or dismissed. Traditionally, scholars paid little attention to the proem, because it does not directly address the philosophical problem of being. When acknowledged, it has often been considered "confusing" and even "mysterious", seemingly incompatible within Parmenides' doctrine of being, as it "accounts" of "things his own reasoning is supposed to have shown do not exist" (Palmer 2020; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983: 262). However, Palmer (2020) points out that a number of interpreters[16] have confirmed the significance of the proem within Parmenides' overall view, advocating for a more substantial role "for the cosmological portion of the poem". Ana Agud aligns with this perspective, and argues that a close examination of this "mystical" or perhaps "mythological" journey – where Parmenides is portrayed as an initiate, ready to receive a revelation about "the true reality" –, is not only relevant but also "open up very suggestive interpretative horizons" (85).[17] Her central argument is that

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[13] «su dramático ritmo interior» (82).

[14] «su final es de los que abren universos».

[15] «que obliga a volver sobre el tema del ser y el no ser desde un nuevo contexto, y con un nuevo horizonte de *responsabilidad*».

[16] Palmer mentions here the works of Minar 1949, Woodbury 1958, Chalmers 1960, Clark 1969, Owens 1974, Robinson 1979, de Rijk 1983, and Finkelberg 1986, 1988, 1999, and Hussey 1990.

[17] «abren horizontes de interpretación muy sugerentes».

Parmenides, through the use of the hexameter – the traditional meter of great Greek epic poetry – "aims" to give expression to an "intellectual leap from mythology and cult to a rational explanation of the universe" (96).[18] In doing so, he undertakes "one final", yet significant "effort to bridge the gap between the world of religious and mythical language" – which evokes the authority of Homeric epic – "and the radical rational thinking" (96),[19] characteristic of argumentative prose.

After establishing that Parmenides adopts a position of "radical monism", which starts from a description of a "dualistic vision of the cosmos", Ana Agud moves on in chapter five to present an alternative solution illustrated by the philosophical poem *Katha Upanishad*. This text rejects the duality between being and non-being, "transcendence and immanence", "life and death", and "the individual and the absolute" (125).[20] The chapter carefully outlines the Upanishadic doctrine showing both its similarities and differences with *Rigveda* and Parmenides' poem. In *Rigveda*, being and non-being serves as "examples" of what "it has not been at the very beginning". By contrast, in *Katha Upanishad* these concepts form "*the key itself to 'explaining' death*" (128; emphasis in original).[21] Both *Katha Upanishad* and Parmenides' poem share a structural (introductory) similarity, starting with a journey into the world beyond. In the case of *Katha Upanishad*, this journey involves the young son of a *Brahman* travelling to meet Yama, the god of the death, with the expectation that the traveller will attain "true knowledge" or a kind of "superior knowledge". This journey establishes the "thematic unity" of *Katha Upanishad*, respectively "*the topic of being and non-being in explicit and direct contact with death*" (130; emphasis in original).[22] The entire poem is thus a poetic exploration of questions such as: "Are we or are we not after death?" and "If we still are, *what* and *how* we are?" Discovering the answers to these questions is equivalent to receiving the revelation that grants access to true knowledge. Like Parmenides' proem, *Katha Upanishad* begins with a duality or opposition between apparent and true knowledge. However, unlike Parmenides's vehement or "furious" rejection of the former, *Katha Upanishad* adopts a more serene approach, affirming the calm superiority of the second: the true knowledge is presented as the ultimate goal, something to be pursued through the "*denial and*

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[18] «salto intelectual desde la mitología y el culto hacia la explicación racional del universo».

[19] «un último esfuerzo por vincular el mundo del lenguaje religioso y mítico con un pensamiento racional absolutamente radical».

[20] «[de separar] transcendencia e inmanencia»; «vida y muerte»; «el individuo y lo absoluto».

[21] «de lo que no había en el comienzo absoluto»; «el ser y el no ser son ya la clave misma para 'explicar' la muerte».

[22] «el tema del ser y el no ser en contacto explícito y directo con la muerte».

overcoming of all distinctions and the attainment of absolute unity of being" (137; emphasis in original).[23] Overcoming the differences between opposites – whether between self and others, or between reaching absolute being and ceasing to exist –, is the path of wisdom revealed by Yama. Yama's goal is to convince the Brahman' son that no distinction is real if one seeks to achieve *nirvana* and end the "terrifying" cycle of reincarnations. To do so, he employs „a series of '*variations on the topic of truth*'" (158; emphasis in original).[24] These "variations", according to the translator, qualifies *Katha Upanishad* as a kind of "argumentative poem".

The sixth chapter continues the argumentative line of the *Katha Upanishad*, tracing a progression from the *Rigveda*'s "poem of uncertainties" – which explores the moment prior to the emergence of any opposition between concepts, thereby raising countless questions about human existence in the face of death – to the *Katha Upanishad* – where life and death are seen as mere opposing concepts "distinguished by humans themselves", holding no real consequences for the wise who succeeds in neutralizing this opposition while embarking on the path of "salvation". Suggestively titled "Never is born nor dies, never ceases to be the one who has been: the deceptive work of Katha Upanishad in the Bhagavad Gītā", this chapter characterizes more closely the ultimate "scope" of Upanishadic doctrine, namely the unconditional "devotion" to a monotheistic god, no matter how paradoxical and challenging this devotion might be. Ana Agud's Spanish version of the *Bhagavad Gītā* focuses on the dialog between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, particularly the sequences that "quote" and "gloss" the fragments from *Katha Upanishad* already translated in the previous chapter. These sequences are intended to provide further nuance or clarify the fragments within a new context. Beginning with the announcement of an impending battle that poses significant moral challenges for the protagonist, Arjuna, the poem swiftly transitions into a metaphysical doctrine that urges an exploration of the darkest and most terrifying "passions" of the human nature, all while emphasizing the essential requirement of "detachment from the fruits of one's action" (183).[25] In this view, distinctions such as bad and good, death and alive, glory and defeat are mere illusions, they are not real distinctions, and the only true reality is the "unity of being". Ana Agud notes that Kṛṣṇa's answer to Arjuna's moral dilemma reveals "a real monotheist theology", in which every being is "an eternal being, indestructible and immune to death and birth"

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[23] «negar y superar toda diferencia y afincarse en la absoluta unidad del ser».
[24] «una secuencia de 'variaciones sobre el teme de la verdad'».
[25] «pero desapegándose por entero de los frutos de su acción».

(180, 181).[26] In her interpretation, "the eternal being" in *Bhagavad Gītā* is close to Parmenides view of "absolute being", as it represents "an universal and homogenous condition of everything that is", "which is neither born, nor dies, nor affected by the circle of birth and death" (181; emphasis in original).[27] At the end of her translation and interpretation of this masterpiece of Indian culture, Ana Agud also attempts to uncover the reasons why the poet(s) composed such a "*disillusioning and critical* epic story" (184; emphasis in original).[28] In her view, this story does nothing but emphasizes human decay in the face of vanity, pride and other passions. She characterizes the battle in the epic as "a mere *moralistic interlude*" (184; emphasis in original),[29] disconnected from the more "sublime" moral doctrines that glorify the integrity of the human being in the "songs" that follow: "What prompted the anonymous author or authors of the *Bhagavad Gītā* to incorporate into the national epic of the Indians a vibrant treatise of metaphysics, religion and morality, one that encompasses the most sublime abstractions of humanistic reflection, only to serve as a warlike adventure that is merely the outcome of the most turbulent passions of men, and will result in nothing but suffering, destruction, and death?" (183-184).[30] By questioning the motivation behind the insertion of a metaphysical and moral treatise into an otherwise martial narrative, the author adopts a hermeneutic approach, aligned with Coseriu's position (see Coseriu 1981) that understanding the anonymous poet(s) intentions play a crucial role in articulating and interpreting the global meaning of *Bhagavad Gītā* and possibly the entire *Mahābhārata*, of which it is a part.

With chapter seven, dedicated to "the redemption through science", Ana Agud shifts from the abstract heights of metaphysical speculation to the tangible realm of materiality, and mortality of the human body and soul, as depicted in Lucretius'epic poem *De rerum natura*. Ana Agud characterizes Lucretius' poem as "a poetic uprising against the metaphysics of fear" (192).[31] Her translation focuses on the fragments where Lucretius addresses being and non-being in relationship with death, highlighting his contrasting view

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[26] «una verdadera teología monoteísta»; «un 'ser' eterno, indestructible e inmune a la muerte y al nacimiento».
[27] «*la condición universal y homogénea de cuanto es*, una condición de suyo eterna, que no nace ni muere, ni es afectada por el nacer y el morir».
[28] «un vasto relato épico, *desengañado y crítico*».
[29] «un mero *interludio moralista*».
[30] «¿Qué movió al anónimo autor o autores de la *Bhagavad Gītā* a introducir en la epopeya nacional de los indos une vibrante tratado de metafísica, religión y moral, que recoge las mas sublimas abstracciones de la reflexión humanística, para ponerlas al servicio de una aventura guerrera que no es sino el resultado de las mas turbias pasiones de los hombres, y que no producirá otra cosa que sufrimiento, destrucción y muerte?».
[31] «[esta] rebelión poética contra el metafísico del miedo».

compared to the metaphysical doctrines of *Rigveda* and *Upanishads* and Parmenides. Lucretius does not entirely dismiss the idea of an absolute unity of being. However, unlike the Upanishadic doctrine that emphasizes the fundamental anxieties that stir the human mind, particularly the fear of death, Lucretius views the unity of being as the foundation for the regularity of nature – a regularity of causes and effects devoid of a "transcendent" and separate realm which would otherwise be considered the origin of everything that is. His cosmology brings the gods down to earth to dispel fears of an afterlife and to liberate humanity of existential dread. In Lucretius' "realist" perspective, being and non-being becomes "concrete notions, *generalizations of physics*: they are primordial bodies and void" (212; emphasis in original).[32] This perspective accommodates change, unlike Parmenides' eternal and immobile notion of being. Lucretius argues that "if the matter is eternal", "the existence must experience cycles of creation and destruction" and "thus it is impossible to conceive an immovable 'being' that remains identical to itself at all times" (207).[33] But why choose poetic language for a scientific discourse? Why does Lucretius not use philosophical prose, which is more suited to the argumentative expression? In a relatively recent book dedicated to Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, Marković (2008) offers insights into this choice, distinguishing between "argument" and "demonstration". Marković (2008: 83) considers "argumentation" "an essential rhetorical phenomenon" or "proof", while "demonstration" is argued to be "a logical proof": "unlike demonstrations, which may use artificial language (in logic or mathematics for example) to present objectively true conclusions, regardless of an audience, arguments always use natural language, present relative truths, and are addressed to an audience". Ana Agud notes that Lucretius' poetry paradoxically exhibits "*a spirit of* clear, transparent and luminous *scientific prose*" (214; emphasis in original).[34] She offers a partially alternative interpretation that introduces a refreshing linguistic perspective. Her interpretation is linked to the idea of "*the aesthetic dimension of language as a whole*" (190; emphasis in original).[35] The aesthetic language reaches the "the heart of the other" (190) and persuades "not by 'tricks and cunnings', but through a formal charm that should reflect the beauty of its own content" (191).[36]

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[32] «nociones concretas, *generalizaciones de la física*: son cuerpos primordiales y vacíos».

[33] «siendo eterna la materia, la existencia ha de conocer *ciclos de creación y destrucción*»; «por lo tanto no cabe imaginar un 'ser' inmóvil y siempre idéntico a sí mismo».

[34] «un *espíritu de prosa científica* clara, transparente y luminosa».

[35] «la dimensión estética de todo lenguaje».

[36] «corazón del otro» (190); «pero no mediante 'trucos y ardides', sino mediante un encanto formal que debe reflejar la belleza del proprio contenido».

In chapter 8, titled "What is the Question? The Fallacy of Abstraction in Shakespeare's 'To Be or Not To Be'", Ana Agud offers a distinct interpretation of Hamlet's soliloquy. The originality of this interpretation stems firstly from the way the author situates the famous monologue within the broader context of the book's examination of the concepts of being and non-being. These themes serve as a connecting thread throughout the work. In this sense, the author asks: "Is 'to be or not to be' really the question for Hamlet?" (217).[37] What does "to be" or "not to be" signify for Shakespeare in this instance? Can we still understand these terms as they were conceived in ancient metaphysics?

According to Agud, the question cannot be answered without considering, secondly, the specific historical backdrop in which Shakespeare's masterpiece was written. She highlights the influence of Western European Christianity and the development of philosophy as a discipline separate from Christian theology. These factors shaped modern Western man's self-reflection, particularly his perception of himself as an individual endowed with a consciousness of his own individuality "which resides in a mortal body" (226).[38]

In the face of this new conception of humanity, the epistemological challenge of ancient metaphysics falls silent or better fades into the background, shifting into a "vital and all-encompassing" issue: „being and non-being are choices marked by a decision no human can make without experiencing profound anguish" (227).[39] Hamlet's soliloquy, therefore, addresses being and non-being, but now as an existential dilemma of an individual wrestling with the conscious decision between life and death, caught between "the calamities of existence" on the one hand, and the "terror of the unknown" that comes with non-being on the other.

Unlike the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which uses the most general categories of metaphysical thought to justify behaviour and societal norms, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* descends from the heights of these abstractions into the sufferings of the flesh and the uncertainties brought by both "the being of human being" (225)[40] and non-being, and confronts them with human consciousness. The drama of being and non-being in Hamlet's monologue is thus about

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[37] «¿Es 'ser o no ser' realmente la cuestión para Hamlet?».
[38] «que tiene su sede en un cuerpo mortal».
[39] «vital y total»; «ser y no ser son alternativas separadas por una decisión que ningún ser humano puede tomar sin la más profunda de las angustias».
[40] «el 'ser' del ser humano».

making a personal, conscious choice regarding life and death and bearing the weight of that decision.

Hamlet does not reject the discussion of non-being, as Parmenides does, nor does he, like Lucretius, see it as a concrete concept that grounds and "guarantees the regularities of natural phenomena" (212).[41] Lucretius, as discussed earlier, aimed to free human existence from the fear of what comes afterlife through a materialist view. In contrast, for Hamlet, the thought of "non-being" brings *the uncertainty about the how of this 'not being'* (230; emphasis in original).[42] Non-being "seems like a dream, but it cannot be: even in sleep, the human mind continues to think. But what would the thoughts of a consciousness without a body be like? [...] In Christian Europe, even for someone like Hamlet, who is not overtly religious, it is no longer possible to imagine the absolute end of consciousness when the body dies" (230).[43] Therefore, for Hamlet and modern European man, not even "the 'not being' is truly empty: Who can say what nightmares await in that conscious sleep, once the body no longer accompanies it?" (226).[44]

Hamlet's monolog has been analysed by Lakoff & Turner (1989) among others in the context of their cognitive poetics. The American scholars propose that Shakespeare employs here the conventional metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP commonly found in everyday language: "Just as death is a particular sort of departure, a one-way departure with no return, so sleep is a particular form of sleep, an eternal sleep from which we never waken" (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 19). The only distinction in the poetic metaphor is that the poet extends the metaphor from everyday language by introducing an additional, seemingly non-essential or "optional" element of "a dream". Looking back at Ana Agud's interpretation of the same Shakespearean play, it becomes evident that her proposed alternative is not only more intricate but also more original compared to the analysis offered by the American scholars. Agud's approach delves deeper into the philosophical dimensions of the text, offering a nuanced understanding that surpasses the more conventional reading of her counterparts. Her arguments are grounded in a broader

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[41] «garantiza la regularidad de los fenómenos naturales».
[42] «la incertidumbre sobre el cómo de ese 'no ser'».
[43] «parece un sueno, pero no puede serlo: también al dormir el ser humano sigue pensando, pero ¿como serían los pensamientos de una consciencia sin cuerpo? [...] En la Europa cristiana incluso alguien tan nulamente religioso como Hamlet ya no puede imaginar el final absoluto de la consciencia al morir el cuerpo».
[44] «el 'no ser' está realmente vacío: ¿quién sabe cuáles serán las pesadillas de ese sueño del ser consciente cuando ya no lo acompañe un cuerpo? ».

historical and intellectual context, which adds a richness and depth to her interpretation that sets it apart, making it both more compelling and innovative.

Chapter nine brings to the forefront, somewhat unexpectedly at first, the only work that does not address being and non-being in poetic form: Hegel's *Science of Logic*. The author, however, immediately clarifies the decision to include this "prose interlude". One reason is the logical nature of Hegel's reasoning and his ambition to "construct a true *science*" (241; emphasis added – E.F.),[45] something that could no longer be achieved in verse. Secondly, the author highlights the importance of introducing this chapter because it represents a significant moment in the history of philosophy. It illustrates the context of "Protestant Germany, enlightened and critically revising its own 'rationalism'" (243)[46] and reflects Hegel's influence on the subsequent evolution of thought on being: "He is the first philosopher to conceive of philosophy as 'the time grasped in thought', *an intellectual endeavour that not only engages with its own historical moment* but does so using the tools inherited from tradition, while simultaneously subjecting that tradition to a critical review of its historical phases and its development over time. With Hegel, philosophy becomes, simultaneously, *the history conscious of its own concepts*" (244; emphasis in original).[47] Without delving too deeply into the complexities of Hegel's philosophical system, the author focuses on his theory of being and aims to highlight the novelty of Hegel's dialectical perspective, both in constructing the forms of his logic in contrast to classical logic and in understanding the relationship between being and non-being (nothingness, in Hegel's case) as opposed to ancient metaphysics. Like ancient metaphysics, Hegel begins with the notion of pure being as the most abstract genus, defined by its lack of any determinations, as its definition is made independently of any other concept. However, Hegel diverges from ancient metaphysics by arguing that fixation on the pure abstraction of being is merely an illusion, because as soon as we affirm being, we realize that it is "equal" to nothingness. The only difference between them is that, while being is "bare presence", nothingness is mere "absence" (Maybee 2020). This is where the dialectical moment occurs: the lack of determinations in being causes it to "sublate itself" and "pass into the concept of nothingness" (*ibid.*), giving rise to the speculative, positive moment of

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[45] «construir una verdadera '*ciencia*'».
[46] «la Alemania protestante, ilustrada y en pleno proceso de revisión crítica de su proprio 'racionalismo'».
[47] «Es el primer filósofo que concibe la filosofía como 'su tiempo aprehendido en ideas', esto es, como *un trabajo intelectual en un cierto momento histórico*, que se refiere a este mismo momento y lo hace con lo medios heredados de la tradición, al mismo tiempo que somete esa tradición a una revisión criticas de sus fases históricas, de su desenvolvimiento en el tiempo. Con Hegel la filosofía se convierte siempre al mismo tiempo en *historia consciente de sus propios conceptos*».

a unified concept that integrates both – becoming. This new concept replaces the two opposing notions while preserving them within the new synthesis. The brief Spanish translation of Hegelian fragments on Being, Nothing, and Becoming (**1.1.1.**) that Ana Agud offers in this chapter aims, in my view, to draw attention to Hegel's idea of the movement of thought: "*It is the movement of thought* that reveals both its coherence (opposing being and nothing) and the contradiction that they are the same, despite being opposites, which for Hegel constitutes the 'truth' of opposition itself. In other words, 'being' and 'nothingness' are not two 'things' or two 'realities', but *the two conceptual poles between which thought moves*" (245-246; emphasis in original). They are "the result of a movement of our thinking, *for which we must take responsibility in every instance*" (247; emphasis in original).[48]

The last two chapters of the book return to the poetic approach to the concepts of being and non-being, examining how Goethe and Machado understood and expressed this sense of responsibility in the poetics they have passed down to us.

Thus, chapter ten, titled "'Everything will come to nothing / if it insists on clinging to being': the 'eternal making' in Goethe's 'Eins und alles' and his palinode 'Vermächtnis'", focuses on Goethe and the two poems published in *Gott und die Welt*. *Eins und alles* revisits the ancient metaphysics of being but offers a completely new interpretation, one that is Heraclitean in essence and incorporates movement (both of reality as a whole and of consciousness itself): Being and non-being exist together in constant motion, both now and eternally. Movement represents the true nature of being; without it, being ceases to exist. In this context, Goethe retreats into the realm of philosophical abstractions, while also refusing to "freeze" being into "*compulsive identities*" (264; emphasis in original).[49]

His conception of Being does not engage directly with the Hamletian tragedy or existential anguish that accompanies every conscious human decision as it grapples with the complexities of concrete existence. The chapter poses a critical question that Ana Agud seeks to address: why does Goethe completely omit Hamlet's monologue from his own works, even though he creates his own interpretation of Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meisters*

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[48] «Es el *movimiento del pensar*, que descubre tanto su coherencia (de la oponer ser y nada) como la contradicción de que sean lo mismo pese a estar opuestas, lo que para Hegel constituye la 'verdad' de la oposición misma. O sea: 'ser' y 'nada' no son 'cosas', ni dos 'realidades', sino los dos *polos conceptuales entre los que se mueve el pensamiento*»; «son resultado de un movimiento de nuestro pensar *del que habremos de responsabilizarnos en cada caso*».

[49] «en identidades compulsivas».

Lehrsjahre? Furthermore, it is notable that during Goethe's era, this monologue served as a focal point in discussions about Shakespeare's works. Agud suggests that Goethe's aim was to craft a philosophical poetry that "aspires to *an aesthetic idealization* of human life" (265; emphasis in original).[50] To realize this vision, he felt it necessary to set aside elements associated with suffering, pain, and anguish. As Agud articulates, "this radiant poetry of the 'one and all' should be understood as an alternative solution to the existential anguish expressed by Hamlet" (266).[51]

Chapter eleven marks the concluding section of the anthology, presenting a reflective discussion on Antonio Machado's book *Los complementarios*, which uniquely intertwines poetry and prose. In this chapter, Ana Agud focuses on two significant texts: *Al gran cero* and *Al gran pleno o conciencia integral*. These works delve into Machado's metaphysical and aesthetic reflections on poetry, framing his insights as a poetic response to broader metaphysical discourses surrounding being and non-being, thereby enriching the anthology's thematic exploration.

The first text implicitly critiques any metaphysical framework that seeks to confine being within rigid identities and abstract concepts, which ultimately prove to be empty and merely serve only to conceptually capture being. Conversely, the second text serves as a liberating ode to individuals who have moved beyond thinking in abstractions and the separation of subject from object. Instead, these individuals immerse themselves freely in the "flowing waters" of life, blending with its essence. Agud observes a remarkable similarity between this poem and the *Upanishads*, noting how both texts strive to articulate and transcend the oppositions between concepts through a language filled with paradoxes.

Additionally, it is important to highlight one of Agud's insightful observations regarding the texts chosen for this final chapter. She elaborates on Machado's decision to express his philosophical ideas in both prose and poetry, arguing that the prose does not diminish the inherently poetic quality of the work. She contends that Machado's philosophy "is the kind of philosophy that understands *it cannot be validated through its own terms and definitions*, nor through any language *reduced* to terminology, but rather *by critically transcending all definitional discourses and seeking truth in a logic or 'dialectic' that lies beyond them*. To realize this, Machado had *to think poetically*,

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[50] «aspira a una idealización estética de la vida umana».

[51] «Y así, creo yo, hay que leer esto luminoso poema de 'uno y todo': como una solución alternativa a la angustia de Hamlet».

balancing his expression between verse and prose, allowing his critical thought to develop in *an integral manner unbound by either form*" (293; emphasis in original).[52]

In the rich interpretive passages dedicated to this author, there remains an opportunity for Ana Agud to explore many of his ideas about poetic language as explicit elements or foundational premises for establishing a poetics that she herself implicitly supports.

The *Epilogue* provides an overview of significant moments in the investigation of being and non-being throughout history and across various cultures. It highlights "a very sensitive divide between ancient philosophical poems on the one hand, both Indian and Greco-Roman, and those of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Machado on the other" (311).[53]

Ana Agud's book stands out as a genuinely original contribution, showcasing a mature line of thought in which ideas have crystallized into remarkably deep personal reflections. Her analysis offers a profound exploration of how metaphysical ideas have shaped, and been shaped by, the language of poetry, bridging the abstract and the tangible in a multifaceted dialogue that deepens our understanding of these enduring themes.

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[52] «es la clase de filosofía que sabe ya que *no se puede legitimar por su términos y definiciones*, por ningún lenguaje *reducido* a terminología, sino por *rebasar críticamente todos los discursos definitorios y buscar su verdad en una lógica o 'dialéctica' sin ellos*. Para lograr esto, Machado tenía que *pensar poéticamente*, y dividir su expresión entre el verso y la prosa, para poder desplegar su pensamiento crítico *de un modo integral, no constreñido por ninguno de los dos géneros del escribir*».

[53] «censura muy sensible entre los poemas filosóficos antiguos, por un lado, tanto indios como grecolatino, y los de Shakespeare, Goethe y Machado por el otro».

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