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Introduction

“I KNOW NOT who was the first lying author to construct the seventy cells at Alexandria, in which they were separated and yet all wrote the same words,” wrote Jerome in “Preface to the Pentateuch” of the Vulgate, his Latin translation of the Bible.¹ He referred here to the famous case of the Septuagint, the erstwhile primary Greek version of the Hebrew Bible commissioned in the third century BCE to a group of seventy Jews of Alexandria. Jerome debunked what later became the core element of its myth: namely, the claim that all the learned translators would under divine inspiration come up with entirely identical translated texts, word after word, sentence after sentence, despite working simultaneously and independently in seventy isolated cells. There are more caveats to the legend as known and subsequently circulated. In fact, the number of Jews was not a round seventy but seventy-two (six men of each of twelve tribes); they did not translate into standard Greek but its spoken vehicular variant, Koine; they originally did not render the entire Old Testament but only its first five books (the Pentateuch); and so on.

The crucial aspect of this widely shared lore, questioned by Jerome in the fourth century CE, is the alleged convergence of seventy-two translation solutions that were said to be produced individually and in isolation. “For it is one thing to be a prophet, another to be an interpreter,” soberly argued Jerome,² well aware of the translator’s convoluted chains of decisions and arduous work, and later chosen as the patron saint of translators. To his mind, rather than being the result of miraculously synchronized interpretations from dozens of different people, the eventual Septuagint came into being as a product of the translators’ collaborative work. The latter scenario actually corresponds to the earliest known record of the legend, a letter by Aristéas. It was only centuries later that Philo Judeus—the “first lying author” at whom Jerome pointed the finger—tacked the image of separate cells onto the story in order to strengthen the claim of the

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translation's divine inspiration.³ And it indeed made quite a difference to say that a few dozen translators did not cooperate over the final product, but somehow their individual readings cohered into what could be nothing else but one true and authorized translation of the Bible.

Besides its obvious scriptural significance, what was accomplished by this meeting of seventy-two translation minds into one? What consequences does it have on translation history and our contemporary understanding of what translation entails? It is safe to say that it could be one of the first moments in the history of textual practice when the "equivalence" between two texts in completely different languages is firmly established, legitimized, and justified with sufficient rhetorical power. Since a few dozen authorities, seventy-two competent interpreters approaching one text, reached exactly the same conclusions in their renderings, the identical fruit of their work must constitute the only faithful and authentic translation, supported by the highest authority imaginable. Radical as this case of imposing Equivalence with the capital *E* might sound from today's perspective, it is by no means an isolated one in translation and textual history. In principle, it finds its solid continuation in any institutional, political, or cultural mechanism of establishing the one and only translation equivalence in different historical contexts. These occurrences range from bilingual dictionaries with fixed interlingual one-to-one equivalents, to sworn authorized translations, to broader publishing practice and audience expectations making translators merge all potential variations into one ready-to-go translation product: a single finite text substituting for the original.

This book revolves around literary translations and conceptual works that do not conform to such norms and embody the exact reversal of the Septuagint's story. Instead of demonstrating how seventy-two translation attempts coalesce into one sanctioned rendering, the present discussion aims to turn the tables and swap the two sides of the equation. The question at stake here will be rather: how an original literary text can possibly diverge into seventy-two different variants. And when it does, how can such an unconventional multiplicity be displayed and embraced; in what way can it still be read as a coherent text, be it by one translator or poet or a team of several? And what follows: How can readers deal with similar instances of literary works with plural translatorial voices; is it possible to redefine our reading habits to be able to take full advantage of their rich reservoirs of meanings?

These questions are more pressing now than ever before. Translation multiples, this newly emerging genre of writing, has even developed its own artistic form and literary texture. These days, the multiples reside in conceptual books

with plural translations or poems composed of different renderings of the same original. Translators, poets, and artists alike have come to expose the act of translation by producing different parallel variants, placing them next to each other as legitimate versions of the original, and presenting them as stand-alone artistic works. While doing so, the creators of multiples also want to tell their own story. The story can be deeply personal, visual, critical, or political; it can reflect on the nature of translation itself, its multiplicity, or any other artistic themes they set out to explore. A whole literary universe can be easily encapsulated in what might look like a series of dispersed translations—multiple translations that have been put together alongside each other for seemingly no reason.

This is of course not to say that the multiplicity of translation as such is something very unconventional. In fact, if we look a little bit closer, the tale of translation multiples is as old as time: plural variants lie dormant in any revised version by the same translator and every single retranslation of one work in a given language by different translators. There are translators who could ponder over alternative versions of their own rendering until doomsday—unless, of course, put under some external pressure (time, financial situation, next project, etc.) to cast what should ultimately be its final version on paper. Consecutive retranslators, too, tend to approach and reinterpret the original text differently from their predecessors; their varied readings of one work fork into multiple different paths depending on their personal and cultural background, interpretative lens, ideology, individually projected audience, and many other factors. This is partly why David Bellos humorously remarked: “Give a hundred competent translators a page to translate, and the chances of any two versions being identical are close to zero.”⁴ Bellos’s assumption clearly jars with the Septuagint-like convergence, shaking and turning the concept of one true equivalence upside down. It is rather the infinite and inevitably multiple nature of translation that comes into play and ought to be treated as a default option. But still, even though such multifarious outcomes are in theory recognized or even taken for granted by literary and translation critics, the actual norms of translation production are a completely different matter. Hardly ever do several different renderings of the same work appear in print simultaneously, alerting readers to various possibilities and alternative translation solutions as well as manifesting how tentative and arbitrary each of them is. With a minor exception of scholarly editions and critical anthologies, the status quo rather leans toward the Septuagint convergence. For a range of reasons, it is more convenient to nourish the illusion that a given translation wholly represents the original it stands for. As many people before have pointed out, despite ongoing efforts to change this state of affairs, the function

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of translations and their mode of being in the majority of publishing cultures is still to be produced and read as substitutes for their originals.⁵ And so this cultural status of translations, along with the respective pursuit of translation equivalence, governs prevailing praxis, apparently leaving little room for multiple variants and divergent readings of the original. A constant friction between the potentially plural and the prescriptively singular lies at the heart of literary translation.

In *Translation Multiples*, I discuss a wide range of contemporary literary works that against all odds fight for a different form of expression and display plural renderings of the same source text both in parallel to and on a par with one another. The examples of such multiples span the past few decades, beginning in the late twentieth century, and this book discusses several key examples focusing on two different contexts. First, it takes a broader outlook on the Anglophone literary scene. Translation multiples can offer a special shock therapy to the contemporary lingua franca, whose largely monolingual lens makes it necessary to debunk the myth of translation as a transparent medium and an unoriginal, secondary form of writing. Only the oft-quoted “three percent” of all books published the United States are translations, and a roughly matching number of translations are released yearly in the United Kingdom and Ireland.⁶ With this lousy translation record as well as its expansive status of a global language, English is often lampooned for being oblivious to the creative resources of translation, let alone to translation coming in larger numbers and repetitions. This is also where authors of translation multiples and their gestures of pushing the envelope of the print format come into play most forcefully. Meddling with the audience’s expectations, projects displaying plural renderings of one original lift the veil on the very act and process of translation, alert readers to its transformative powers, and expose different artistic idioms and language variants at play.

Second, this book zooms in on the minor culture of an emerging democracy, post-1989 Poland, where projects introducing multiplied translation variants with different ideological readings offered an essential platform for a pluralist political discussion after the transition from a totalitarian system. In these two literary cultures, a more globalized and a local one, translation activity occupies a completely different place. The almost proverbial “three-percent” figure does not really hold a candle to Poland’s one-quarter of translated titles published yearly, a proportion closer to that of other European countries.⁷ At the same time, while the English-language and Polish book industries are both governed by free-market publishing, the translation culture of post-1989 Poland needs to be seen in relation to its previous communist counterpart. What translation multiples flesh out

in this context is a strong quantitative tension between two successive literary orders: the authoritative legacy of the state-driven publishing monopoly before 1989 on the one hand, and a more decentralized system from the 1990s onward on the other. The first often favored canonization, officially anointed translations, and often reeditions of the same translations rather than soliciting new renderings. The latter has provided—even if in theory and with some caveats—similar technical conditions for a larger number of translations to emerge and more interpretations to be voiced without imposing any ideological priorities. Translation multiples in post-1989 Poland, I argue, are a touchstone of the transition between these two literary orders. Abolishing the communist legacy in favor of a more pluralist system brought about a move from singularity to plurality, from one authoritative interpretation to multiple renderings treated as potential alternatives.

In the same vein, these globalized and local literary contexts do not really lend themselves to comparison in terms of geographical and linguistic scope. Languages involved in English translation multiples span a much wider and more diverse range: from Ancient Greek to French, German, and Italian, to Chinese and Japanese. Among contemporary translation multipliers, we find quite a mixed crowd: not only American and Canadian poets and writers but also a Norwegian French artist (Caroline Bergvall) and two Italian writers and editors (Eugenia Loffredo and Manuela Perteghella), all three based in the United Kingdom, as well as a German-born poet (Rosmarie Waldrop), a Japanese poet and translator (Hiroaki Sato), an Indian-born professor (Aijaz Ahmad), and a Uruguayan artist (Alejandro Cesarco), the last four based in the United States. It does not really matter whether the originals they wished to multiply come from iconic authors such as Ibycus, Wang Wei, and Dante, or more recent (avant-garde and modernist) poets such as Ernst Jandl and Chika Sagawa. What still links the authors of translation multiples is the gesture of welcoming and embracing the creative potential of translation in English. While speaking from the linguistically privileged end, they refract originals through the prism of the global language but also position themselves somewhat against the grain. Their multiples aim to expose the appropriative medium of global English and rebel against institutional and cultural efforts to standardize language. For this reason, some of the multiples explicitly aim to open up the translation scene to very different ways of using of English or writing in various types of Englishes.

Within this power relation, the postcommunist examples should be placed on the other side of the spectrum. They often underscore the Eastern European experience after the fall of communism, anchoring it in a very local political

situation. At the same time, however, their creators also transgress the Polish local and ostensibly homogeneous context. In fact, one author, Stanisław Barańczak, was a dissident poet and US émigré who created his political multiples when teaching at Harvard. Another, Robert Stiller, was a Polish Jewish polyglot and translanguing visionary. Others were translators affiliated with a liberal “world literature” magazine, which disseminated Western literature in multiplied translation before 1989. Yet, the postcommunist multiples are striking in how they position themselves against major languages and major political forces. In particular, they concentrate on the powerful European triad of English, French, and German, with some presence of Russian added to the mix, and take works originally written in these languages as the starting point of a pluralist discussion. This positioning against major cultures and translatorial intervention into their literary texts will also be key to understanding the subversive element in post-1989 projects. The multiples stray from the beaten pathway of either “assimilation” or “differentiation”—the two possible strategies identified by Pascale Casanova in the history of “small literatures”⁸—and look for a third way out. While they are vibrant and critical voices that come from a “minor literature,” it is not the kind of minor literature that is written by minor writers fully in a major language (Deleuze and Guattari) nor fully in a minor language (Kronfeld).⁹ The oppositional force of these “minor” projects of translation multiples lies in their linguistic in-betweenness. In generating diverse renderings of a work from a major Western language, the postcommunist translation multiples enter a polemic with the originals across languages, dismantle their alleged authority, and offer their own plural interlingual responses.

While these two distinct contexts pose a set of different questions for our understanding of translation multiples, this curious literary practice has emerged on the wave of similar artistic forces. Both these literary milieus treat the texture of translation multiples as an artistic and subversive idiom in its own right—even if to quite a different effect in some instances. Regardless of the geographical location, translation multiples have coincided with broader cultural trends: the gradually changing perception of literary translation and its recognition as a creative domain by both writers and academics. As most of the examples I focus on in the book span the past three or four decades, I also will discuss how these trends have informed the shift in thinking about the artistic potential of translation multiples. The practice of generating plural translation variants has not been so uncommon in other editorial contexts. In particular, scholarly publishing is known for its academic anthologies that present plural translations for pedagogical reasons: they place different renderings one after another to illuminate

the original from different hermeneutic angles or to trace the reception of translated works or authors in multiple translations over time. While acknowledging the legacy of these editorial strategies, the translation multiples discussed in this book have entered a more artistic and experimental realm. They no longer see originals as the final anchors of meaning but rather treat them as a starting point into a much wider narrative. The critical reflection on the multiple nature of translation that they offer is no longer a by-product of scholarly exegesis but rather a creative principle binding all different variants together and turning their diversity into an artistic conceit.

In the first part of the book, I discuss the notion of translation multiples in the Anglophone context, placing them alongside other experimental practices in modernist and contemporary translation tradition. Whereas some experimental translations, in Sawako Nakayasu's words, "behave, or 'pass' as normal, traditional translations,"¹⁰ the genre of creative multiplications and reiterations does not follow suit, resisting easy or passive reception. By subverting the usual one-to-one relationship between the original and its translation, the practice of multiplying translations rather tends to knock readers out of their routine of equating these two and taking one for the other. As translation multiples expose the process and act of translation by producing different parallel variants, their self-referential nature will also inform their longer literary lineage. Drawing on Oulipo-inspired ideas, I argue that the task of translation multiples is in accordance with that of metaliterature. While breaking the original into plural variants, they alert readers to the mediating subject and the act of creative transformation in the process.

The idea of translation ethics that underpins this understanding, discussed more thoroughly in chapter 2, will have a slightly different twist. A lot has been written about the ethics of translation, understood as fidelity toward original authors and source texts. This time, however, the ethics of the multiple will concern the receiving end of translation production: the reader. Instead of asking how to be "true" or "faithful" to the original, this book will open up literary translation to a range of reformulated questions testing in what way the literary genre of translation multiples can be valid for contemporary readers. Is it possible for a translator to signal to their audience the infinite spectrum of possibilities and so the tentative nature of a single translation choice? How can a translator break through the translation's "fourth wall" and the long-cherished illusion of treating translations as providing direct access to original meanings? How does acknowledging more than one legitimate reading of the original change the way we think about language—and global English with its many different varieties—and about

society, on today's culturally diverse map? What does it mean to interpret and translate differently from someone else and accept this other reading, and what do these distinct ideas about the original tell us about our own position in the world?

Especially with an eye to these issues, I will move on to discuss in much more detail three instances of translation multiples in postcommunist Poland in the second part of the book. In chapters 3, 4, and 5, respectively, I will highlight how translation multiples could become a pluralist gesture in a newly emerging democracy drawing on the following examples: homophonic multiples of "La Marseillaise," the French anthem (1991); a double/triple rendering of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* published as a novelistic tie-in (1999); and a quadruple book with Bertolt Brecht's poetry in distinct readings by four translators from *Literatura na świecie* (Literature in the World), the leading Polish magazine on world literature in translation (2012). These three case studies, outlined chronologically, have made their way into this book for a number of reasons. First, they are particularly compelling manifestations of the art of translation multiples in Polish with its core idea of reading one original text from different interpretative and ideological angles. Second, they also map out the most prominent and controversial figures and translation experiments in the local literary practice of the past decades. Third, their creators have strongly been invested in the literary translation culture. As such, they had their say in shaping it through their own translation works, debates, and criticism, and their artistic personas have incarnated some of the most interesting features of this tradition. Finally, all of these translators and authors have in one way or another dealt with the country's communist past, often taking a stance through their translation practice on the political and cultural situation at the turn of 1989 and beyond.

It is probably no coincidence that these pluralist translation multiples came to fruition in the postcommunist world and often served as a form of artistic liberation and critical reevaluation of the past. At this juncture, I will suggest how in each of these cases a multiplicity of interpretative perspectives in translation could also be read in pluralist or democratic terms: as opening a forum for discussion and introducing different viewpoints in opposition to the communist legacy. Depending on the case, the idea of translation pluralism manifest in post-1989 translation multiples will also put forward agendas pertinent to recent cultural discourse in the country. These include, for instance: an ethical suspicion of language and an urge to pursue individual perspectives against totalizing discourses, a critical engagement with different political systems and the cyclical nature of history, an intellectual protest against partisan tribalism and political polarization

with an emphasis on the totalitarian mindset with “either/or” and “friend or foe” binaries typical of the Cold War era, a revision of ideologically encumbered images, and an activist role of acknowledging multiple voices and viewpoints.

These themes, one by one, permeate consecutive literary works, but they also nourish the notion of translation multiples more broadly. With special reference to these cases and broader themes, I hope to demonstrate that this newly emerging literary genre, besides simply inviting the diversity of artistic articulations, activates and responds to broader social and ethical issues. Translation multiples that treat different readings, worldviews, and visions of society on a par with one another might be a remedy against totalized ideas in our times. This remedy is particularly necessary in the face of not only the antagonizing rhetoric in the ongoing bloody conflicts all over the world but also the rising tide of political tribalism more generally. These phenomena form the underbelly of Western democracies as well as of a country like Poland, which until recently was seen as part of central Europe’s “illiberal revolt”¹¹ and is still very much torn by partisan divisions. As translation multiples promote polyphony and an open forum for discussion around various ideas, they equip their readers with a crucial critical tool for approaching textual and ideological difference. In the grand scheme of things, they also demonstrate how every act of translation and retranslation, reading and interpreting in different ways, is inherent to the human condition and to coexistence in a democratic society.

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