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**Whitman's *One's-Self* and *En-Masse* Rewritten.
On the Polish Reception Series of "One's-Self I Sing"***

Translation studies has long been both a separate discipline and a part of comparative literature, always with various tensions. In 1993 Susan Bassnett declared the final victory of “modern” translation studies over “traditional” comparative literature (Bassnett, 1993: 161), while in 2006 Emily Apter saw a need to rethink translation studies and to explore “the epistemological interstices” of a number of disciplines instead (Apter: 6). However, neither researcher devoted much attention to an issue that I believe is central to the intersection between translation studies and comparative literature. What I have in mind is a so-called “series of translations,” a concept which I would like to complement with the concept of a “reception series.” Traditionally, also in Bassnett’s research (Bassnett, Lefevere, 1998: 70–74), a series of translations was understood as a set of different translations of the same text put together by an interpreter. The series was used mostly as a handy analytic tool for demonstrating differences in languages, poetics, or style.

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It was Descriptive Translations Studies that drew attention in the 1970s to the wider cultural sphere in which every translation exists. The aim, similar to mine, was rather to produce descriptions of how translations function in a new culture than to produce speculative entities resulting from preconceived hypotheses. When Gideon Toury studied series of Hebrew translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, he concentrated not only on the translations themselves but also on all sorts of socio-literary factors (Toury: 114–128). All the factors that should be taken into account when a translation is considered were presented vividly by André Lefevere, through his concept of "rewriting." By a "rewriting," Lefevere meant the whole system of interpreting a particular piece of literature: not only its translations (or adaptations), but also all sorts of critical comments on it, the process of its publication, the anthologization to which it was subject – i.e. the manner in which it was included into anthologies of different kinds – and the manner in which a translated work used to be evoked in national literature (Lefevere, 1985). Yet Lefevere did not himself explore the intertextual potential of translations. Instead, he became more interested in translation as a means for the distribution of cultural capital (Bassnett, Lefevere, 1998: 41–56).

The intertextual potential of translations, and, consequently, of a series of translations, has been similarly underestimated by other translation scholars, both traditional and modern, even though it seems obvious that consecutive translations of the same literary work are not only connected with the original and/or with its previous translations but also enter the target language literature in many different ways. Translations are subject to intertextual mechanisms of various kinds, and by being commented on, paraphrased, quoted or alluded to, they create a wider literary sphere that, using Lefevere's concept, could be called "a series of rewritings." The concept of a series of rewritings is, however, too vague and passive. A more adequate term for such a series, encompassing both translations and various texts intertextually connected with both the original and the translations, would be a "series of retextualizations." That term could be employed each time a new text in a new culture is formed on the basis of the original and/or its previous translations. In a given series of retextualizations, relationships among particular texts can become visible through evident signs such as titles, epigraphs, quotations, or paraphrases (of the original/translations),

but they can also be suggested more implicitly, for instance, by intertextual (intercultural) play on the same verse-form or metaphor.

I believe that speaking of a series of retextualizations can lead to a better understanding of the ways in which a foreign text functions in a national literature. Together with all the mechanisms used for presenting new texts to readers – publication, anthologization, advertising, and commentaries – retextualizations constitute a “reception series.” “Reception series” is a concept I would like to introduce in order to make a clear distinction between a series of texts connected with the original/translations (retextualizations) and the ways in which these retextualizations are presented to readers.

One theoretical concept is especially important for my understanding of a series of retextualisations, namely Antoine Berman's reflection on how translations, commentaries and literary criticism are interconnected. Berman saw them all as “metatexts” whose purpose is to “communicate” (Berman: 92). While criticism and commentary seek to communicate the “meaning” of literary texts, translation conveys this “meaning” via another, distinct type of language-use. The concept that unites them all is “reformulation.” According to Berman, every reformulation is translation, and vice versa. Another aspect that seems to bring translation, commentary and criticism together is the fact that any literary work can be subjected to an infinite amount of criticism, commentary and translation: the process of reformulation is always incomplete. However, after a careful discussion – in which Walter Benjamin's thoughts and metaphors played a key role (translation as an afterlife of a literary work, criticism as its mortification) – Berman came to the conclusion that criticism is in fact different from both commentary and translation. While commentary and translation complement each other – every commentary, as Heidegger has shown, is necessarily a translation, and, as Berman adds, commentary begins where translation *falls short* (Berman: 110). While both translation and commentary seek to find the “factual” content of a work of art, criticism seeks the “true” content. Commentary and translation tend to be philological (old-fashioned) and criticism philosophical (modern); the former, just like translation, tends to stick to the letter of a given text, while the latter tends to depart from the letter – often, as Berman demonstrated, to the extent that it hardly ever quotes the original. In fact, criticism builds its own discourse in an attempt to establish

the true meaning of a given text (Berman: 97). Even if the relationships between these three forms of reformulations are even more complicated – as becomes evident at the end of Berman’s essay – I would like to draw on this closeness and demonstrate how translations and commentaries usually go together (often, surprisingly, “mortifying” a literary text), and how pieces of criticism usually enter some other sphere, trying to establish “true” or at least “new” meanings of a given literary text. All of them, however, are retextualisations to me, since they all appear in written form and are all connected with some original text, even if its originality is often mediated by translations.

One more ally of my research on reception series is David Fishelov, who is mostly interested in how works of literature function in world culture. In his *Dialogues with/and Great Books. The Dynamics of Canon Formation*, Fishelov argues that “the source of a literary work’s perceived greatness lies in the dialogues it generates with readers, authors, translators, adaptors, artists and critics.” Fishelov considers translations to be echo-dialogues in which readers of a literary work decide to re-write or “repeat” the text while trying to preserve its important characteristics in the new language (Fishelov: 19). It is obvious that the same holds true for commentary, but also for other acts of re-writing, including complex “dialogical” intertextual relationships. As Fishelov points out, the more unpredictable a translation is, the more we find ourselves in the realm of genuine dialogue (Fishelov: 20).

I shall attempt to clarify the theoretical concept of a reception series by interpreting a number of examples drawn from Polish retextualizations of Walt Whitman’s poem (“One’s-Self I Sing”) generated between 1894 and 2003. While analyzing different Polish retextualizations of the poem I will also point out ways in which the retextualizations functioned in Polish culture. My aim is to provide a picture of the Polish reception of the poem, explore its comparative potential, and thereby demonstrate how a reception series might be used and for what purposes.

The first piece in the reception series is both a commentary and a translation. It is taken from an article by a Polish literary critic Dr. Mścisław Nekanda-Trepka.

M.S. Nekanda-Trepka. *Walt Whitman. Poeta amerykański*
[Walt Whitman. American Poet]. *Świat* 5 (1894): 107

Ażebym zrozumieć istotny nastrój jego ducha, wystarczy przytoczyć pierwszą stanzę jego zbioru – Inwokację. Oto jej dosłowne brzmienie: „Siebie samego ja śpiewam – pojedynczą, prostą jednostkę, a przecież wygłaszam słowo demokracji, masy: śpiewam fizjologię od wierzchołka do samego dna a nie fizjonomię tylko i nie umysł tylko do muzy się nadający; ja twierdzę, że forma całościowa jest tej muzy daleko godniejsza; kobietę też śpiewam porówno z mężczyzną; śpiewam wszechzycie w ogromie swych uczuć, swego tętna, swej potęgi, życie radosne o celach swobodnych pod boskimi prawami; śpiewam nowoczesnego człowieka! Jest to zaprawdę klucz do jego poezji i otwiera wszystkie duchy jego tajniki.¹

The translation, which starts in the second line of the passage, is put between quotation marks, while the comment at the beginning and at the end suggests that it conveys a “verbatim” meaning of the original – which the translation certainly does not do. It is sufficient to point out that Whitman’s original “en-masse” here was turned into a Polish noun denoting the masses (*masy*). No translation, of course, can be “verbatim,” for translation always implies interpretation, and indeed interpretation starts at the very beginning of the Polish version of the poem. In Nekanda-Trepka’s Polish version, Whitman sings himself instead of singing “one’s-self” (it is difficult to find any good equivalent for such a formulation in Polish). This initial interpretation has been repeated in Polish culture, with palpable consequences. For example, a close but false similarity is created between the beginning of the Whitman poem that opens *Leaves of Grass* (“One’s-Self I Sing”) and the beginning of his “Song of Myself” (*I celebrate myself and sing myself*) – in Polish, Whitman tends to sing himself in both poems.

Just like the translator is certain that his translation is “verbatim,” he is certain that his reading of the poem is correct and that the poem is a key to Whitman’s poems as a whole and “opens doors to all his secrets.” None of those secrets, however, are being revealed. Both the translation and the commentary seem to mortify a quite revolutionary poem somewhat; still, the deeper

¹ In order to understand the essential temperament of his soul, it is enough to quote the first stanza of his collection – the *Invocation*. Here it literally reads: “[Translation of Whitman].” This is truly to the key to his poetry and unlocks all the spirits of his secrets.

interpretative potential of the original must have survived, since Whitman's poem evoked many more Polish retextualisations.

Already the next Polish translation seems to affirm the attractiveness of the original, and the variety of the readings to which it can be subjected:

Walt Whitman. *Śpiewam samego siebie* [I Sing Myself].

Trans. Pola Jamajkówna. *Tygodnik Nowy* 17 (1919): 4.

Siebie śpiewam w mej pieśni, siebie, prostą jednostkę –
Mówię słowo, jak Miljon potężne, demokratyczne.
Śpiewam siebie w dół z góry poprzez Samość istnienia
Bowiem mózg ni zewnątrzność nie sądzą mej Muzy –
Jeno Ja – całkowite godne jest mego słowa.
Samcom równe samice wielbię w pieśni mej tonie –
Życie żądzą przepelne, potęgą i mocą,
I radością, co ujście znajduje w praw księdze,
Która wolą do Czynu wolę boską objawia
Śpiewam Chwałę Nowoczesnego Człowieka.

This retextualisation by Pola Jamajkówna differs completely from the first one: what we have here is simply a translation (and certainly not a “verbatim” translation); no commentaries are included. Yet there is a kind of commentary implied in the order in which the translator presents several of Whitman poems on a page of the Jewish-Polish literary magazine *Tygodnik Nowy* (*The New Weekly*). The order suggests how the text may have been perceived just after WWI. In this case, a translation of “For You O Democracy” comes first, followed by “One’s-Self I Sing,” translated in a rather revolutionary manner. The original is treated rather freely in both cases – thus the young female translator gets rid of Whitman’s problematic French (*En-masse, ma femme*), as well as of such problematic terms as “physiology” and “physiognomy.” Instead, rhythmic Polish lines are formed, displaying some inventive solutions like *Samość istnienia* (Selfhood of existence) for Whitman’s “Form complete.” The translator also insists that Whitman sings *Chwałę Nowoczesnego Człowieka* (the Glory of the Modern Man), not “the Modern Man” himself as the original reads. In the context of the whole issue of the revolutionary literary magazine, the poem must have been read as announcing the future glory of a revolutionary of the post-WWI generation.

The Polish poet Julian Tuwim also belonged to this WWI generation. Tuwim was another Polish reader and translator of Whitman as well as the author of a long enthusiastic essay devoted to the poet (published in 1917, written a couple of years earlier). In the essay, meaningfully entitled “Manifest powszechnej miłości (Walt Whitman)” (“The Manifesto of Universal Love (Walt Whitman)”), many poetic pieces by Whitman were translated, described, or adapted. “One's-Self I Sing” was not translated here, but it was paraphrased and alluded to, and also at almost the same time the young poet composed an original poem called “Manifest” (“Manifesto,” 1914). In the poem, Tuwim refers to a number of great poets who “spoke” to him. Whitman, presented as a “giant old man” is one of those poet-speakers, listed just after the Polish romantic Juliusz Słowacki (“thunder”), and before Arthur Rimbaud (“mad ocean”):

Mówił do mnie piorun – Słowacki.	Thunder spoke to me – Słowacki.
Mówił do mnie starzec olbrzymi – Whitman.	A giant old man spoke to me – Whitman.
Mówił do mnie ocean szalony – Rimbaud.	The mad ocean spoke to me – Rimbaud.
Mówił do mnie mędrzec smutny – Staff.	A sad wise man spoke to me – Staff.
(Tuwim: 76)	

It does not seem to be too far-fetched to interpret the beginning of the long poetic “Manifesto” in the context of Whitman’s singing himself, particularly since the first stanza of Tuwim’s “Manifesto” begins with this meaningful declaration:

Śpiewałem, śpiewałem, śpiewałem –	I’ve been singing, singing, singing –
I wyśpiewałem Duszę sobie.	And I have sung a Soul to myself
I wyśpiewałem sobie – Siebie.	And I have sung to myself – My Self.
(Tuwim: 78)	

After this, the speaker of the poem cheerfully admires his own divine humanity (*boskie moje człowieczeństwo*), which is also much in the vein of Whitman’s poem (*Cheerful, for freest action form’d under the laws divine, / The Modern Man I sing*).

One more translation of “One’s-Self I Sing,” to my mind the most interesting one, belongs to the period of Tuwim’s poetical debut. Made by Stanisław Stasiak, a young scholar connected with Polish poetic expressionism and the author of a translation of the whole “Inscriptions” cycle in the early 1920s, it was published in the expressionist magazine *Zdrój* in 1922:

Walt Whitman. *Przypisania do Żdziebeł Trawy*
[Inscriptions to *Leaves of Grass*]

Siebie samego śpiewam [Myself I Sing]. Spolszczył Stefan Stasiak.
Zdrój XIV (1922): 137

Siebie samego śpiewam, odrębną pojedynczą osobę,
A jednak ciskam słowo: M o c L u d u! ciskam: Ł a w ą!

Śpiewam ciało od głów aż do stóp,
Nie sam duch tylko i wyraz jego miłe są Muzie: kształt pełny, powiadam,
godniejszy jej będzie o wiele,
Kobiecość chwale z męskością na równi.

Życie nieogarnięte w szale, tętnie, potędze,
Tchnący weselem, dojrzały w bożem prawie ku najśmielszym czynom,
Nowego śpiewam człowieka.

Stasiak’s Whitman also “sings himself,” but it is worth noting that Stasiak presents his work not as a translation but as a “polonizing” (*spolszczył*) of Whitman. And indeed Stasiak enters into what Fishelov would call a “genuine dialogue” with both the original and the possibilities of the Polish language. His Whitman is the most revolutionary poet of all the former Polish Whitmans – he does not “utter a word Democratic”, but he *throws* a word (even if there are in fact two words in the Polish version): “M o c L u d u” (the Power of People), and the act of throwing is emphasized by extra spaces between the letters. The same emphasis is used for the manner in which the word is thrown – “Ł a w ą”. To understand the latter Polish expression, whose literal meaning would be “like a bench”, one has to imagine people moving forward in one powerful line (in older Polish the cry *ławą!* was used as a call for a military action, especially action performed by the cavalry). The expression creates a powerful image, which is used to stand in for Whitman’s “en-masse.” It also fits the avant-garde tone of Stasiak’s rendition, in which Whitman does not sing a “modern man,” but sings a “new man.”

All of the three earliest Polish translations fell into oblivion, unlike the fourth one, most probably made from French and German sources and carried out by the Polish poet and translator of German and French poetry Stefan Napierski. Napierski's version represents an interesting retextualisation for two reasons: it was published in the second and largest collection of Whitman's poetry, published in pre-WWII Poland in 1934 and reprinted in 1996, and it was quoted directly and indirectly by literary scholars interpreting Julian Tuwim's juvenalia.

Napierski's translation lets Whitman sing not just himself but a "single self" – a solution that might be influenced by Leon Bazalgette's "Je chante le Soi, une personne simple, séparée" (*Feuilles d'herbe*, 1922). Napierski, just like Bazalgette, also leaves the problematic "en-masse" untranslated in his version, using the proper French spelling and adding in a footnote: "French in the original." Furthermore, unlike Bazalgette but like the German translator of Whitman Gustav Landauer, Napierski remains true to the original by not replacing unusual non-poetic words like physiognomy or physiology. However, perhaps driven by the solutions of foreign translators also on this point, Napierski changes the hero of Whitman's poem into a common person (*zwyyczajną osobę*). That alteration proved important for later Polish commentators, who took this commonness of Whitman's persona for granted. That is particularly true of Grażyna Sawicka, who has studied Tuwim's juvenalia. In one of her books she wrote:

Jadwiga Sawicka. *Julian Tuwim*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1986: 53

Bohater Whitmana, podobnie jak bohater Tuwima, wpłątany jest w życie, we współczesność, w konkret, istnieje w świecie współczesnej cywilizacji wielkomiejskiej, w masie innych zwyczajnych ludzi. Sam Whitman pisze:

Opiewam jaźń pojedynczą, zwyczajną odrębną osobę,
Wszelako wymawiam słowo demokratyczny,
Słowo En Masse.²

² Whitman's hero, similarly to Tuwim's, is enmeshed in life, in contemporary life, in the concrete, existing in the world of contemporary urban civilization, in the masses of other common people. Whitman himself writes:

I sing the individual self, the common distinct person,
However I utter the democratic word,
The word En Masse.

Sawicka's initial comment suggests that Whitman's hero, like Tuwim's, is involved in modern city life; he exists in a mass of other common people. The literary critic, quite surprisingly, proves this by "quoting Whitman himself." Yet what she quotes is not Whitman's original, but the first three lines of Napierski's rendition, in which Whitman's hero indeed seems to be just a common person.

Another retextualisation, produced before WWII but published just after it, tells us much about how differently Whitman's persona, such as it was introduced in "One's-Self I Sing", can be perceived. Roman Dyboski, the first Polish Americanist, devoted one passage of a long essay on Whitman to this particular piece. His retextualisation consists of a comment and a translation, the comment framing the rendition of the poem:

Roman Dyboski. "Wieszcz wszechżycia i wszechbraterstwa. Walt Whitman"
[The Seer of Pan-Life and Pan-Brotherhood. Walt Whitman].
Nauka i Sztuka 1 (1945):78–79

Z panteizmem transcendentальnym łączy się – znowu jak u Emersona – sprzeczny z nim zasadniczo pierwiastek indywidualizmu. Najsilniejsza to bodaj nuta w całej twórczości Whitmana. Główną częścią tomu „Żdźbła trawy” jest długi (na pięćdziesiąt jeden rozdziałów podzielony) poemat pod niedwuznacznym tytułem „Pieśń o mnie samym” (*Song of Myself*), a pierwsze słowa książki z całą siłą uderzają w tę przewodnią nutę:

„O własnym Ja [j a] śpiewam, o pojedynczej, odrębnej osobie,
A jednak wypowiadam słowo Demokracja, słowo
En-Masse.
O cielesności człowieka od czuba [czubka głowy] aż do pięty [pięt] śpiewam,
Bo ani zewnętrzne oblicze samo, ani mózg sam nie jest
godnym przedmiotem dla Muzy: ja mówię, że całkowita
osobowość jest daleko godniejsza pieśni.
O niewieście na równi z mężczyzną śpiewam.
O życiu bezkresnym w namiętności, w tętnie, w mocy,
O życiu pogodnym, stworzonym do swobodnego działania
według praw boskich,
O nowoczesnym człowieku śpiewam.

W systemie myślowym Whitmana – zupełnie jak u Emersona – jednostka jest miarą wszechrzeczy i naczelnym moralnym autorytetem. Jest indywidualnym

objawieniem boskiego ducha wszechświata: w tym właśnie punkcie indywidualizm styka się z panteizmem, z którym skądinąd tak trudno go pogodzić.³

In his comment, Dyboski makes "One's-Self I Sing" an individualistic manifesto. His Whitman once again sings himself (sings about himself; more precisely: about his "I"). Dyboski makes Whitman's persona, quite rightly linked to Emerson's philosophical assumptions, the measure of the universe, the highest moral authority and the divine revelation of the universal spirit. Nothing of Napierski's simple commonness is preserved in this reading. In fact, any equivalent of "common" is absent from Dyboski's translation, Whitman's simple person is rendered as *pojedyncza osoba* (single person), and the other epithet ("separate") is rendered as *odrębny* (separate, distinct, individual). Dyboski's complex retextualisation stood in sharp contrast not only to the reading of Napierski and later Polish literary criticism, but also to the doctrinal "socialistic" readings that would thrive in Communist Poland in the mid-1950s. Since the year 1955 was celebrated throughout the whole Soviet bloc as the centennial of "Leaves of Grass" (1855–1955), "proper" readings of literary texts had to be prepared for the occasion. I will quote only one of them, produced by Viola Sachs – first a prominent young scholar in Communist Poland and later a professor at the Université de Paris VIII (France). In 1955 she wrote in one of her popular articles:

³ With transcendental pantheism he blends together – again like Emerson – the element of individualism essentially at odds with it. This is perhaps the strongest note in all of Whitman's work. The main part of the book "Leaves of Grass" is the long poem (divided into fifty-one sections under the unambiguous title "Song of Myself"), and the first words of the book strike the guiding note with all their force:

[Whitman poem]

In Whitman's conceptual system – entirely as in Emerson's – the individual is the measure of all things and the foremost moral authority. It is the individual manifestation of the divine spirit of the universe: at just this point individualism comes in contact with pantheism, with which it is otherwise so difficult to reconcile.

Reprinted: Roman Dyboski, *Wieszcz wszechżycia i wszechbraterstwa. Walt Whitman (1819–1892)*. idem, *Wielcy pisarze amerykańscy*. Warszawa: PAX, 1958, p. 165. [slight changes between the two translations are put into square brackets].

Viola Sachs. "Walt Whitman. Poeta demokracji amerykańskiej"

[Walt Whitman. The Poet of American Democracy].

Wiedza i Życie 6 (1955): 386

W *Pieśni o mnie* poeta daje obraz nowoczesnego człowieka, bohatera jawnego lub skrytego wszystkich utworów Whitmana:

Życie ogromne pełne pasji, tętna i mocy.
Radosne, stworzone według prawa boskiego –
aby swobodnie działać
– Nowoczesnego człowieka sławić.

Człowieczeństwo Whitman pojmował jako dialektyczny spłot jednostki i społeczeństwa. Rozumiał on, że świat postępuje naprzód poprzez przewyżnianie sprzeczności. Przeciwności między jednostką a społeczeństwem zostaną przewyżnione. Wszystkie niemal utwory poety pisane były w pierwszej osobie. Nie był to jednak Indywidualizm prowadzący do „wieży z kości słoniowej”. Albowiem, w mniemaniu poety, „mówiąc słowo «ja» – mówię o masie”.⁴

In her retextualisation, most probably translated by an anonymous Polish translator, Sachs only uses the last three lines of Whitman's "One's-Self I Sing" (though she evokes "Song of Myself" in the first line of her commentary), relating them to the "dialectical nexus of individual and society" and concluding with a univocal interpretation of "the poet's intentions." When Whitman is "saying "I" – she mimics Whitman's voice – he always "talks about a mass." Whitman's "I" continued to be used politically in this way for a long time – even

⁴ In *Song about Me* the poet presents a picture of modern man, the clear or concealed hero of all of Whitman's works:

Życie ogromne pełne pasji, tętna i mocy.
Radosne, stworzone według prawa boskiego –
aby swobodnie działać
– Nowoczesnego człowieka sławić.
(Life immense full of passion, pulse and power
Cheerful, created according to the law divine –
in order to act freely
– to praise the Modern man)

Whitman understood humanity as a dialectical entanglement of the individual with society. He understood that the world progresses through the mastery of contradictions. Oppositions between the individual and society are overcome. Nearly all of the works of the poet were written in the first person. It was not, however, an individualism leading to "an ivory tower". For in the poet's conception, "speaking the word 'I' – I am speaking about the masses."

today Polish translators and commentators have to wrestle with the ideological image of Whitman as the poet of the masses, deprived of both spirituality and corporeality.

A change in the image of Whitman has taken place gradually through many new retextualisations. Since 1966 more short comments on "One's-Self I Sing" have been published, and five more translations of the piece have been produced. One of these comments, published in a foreword to the 1971 edition of selected poems by Whitman, is especially interesting since it makes a point of quoting Whitman's preface, letting the poet actually speak for himself:

Hieronim Michalski. Foreword to: Walt Whitman. *Poezje wybrane* [Selected Poetry]. Warszawa: PIW, 1971: 14–15

„Ogłoszone dotychczas *Żdźbła trawy* – wyznawał autor – są w swoich zamierzeniach pieśnią o wielkiej, złożonej i n d y w i d u a l n o ś c i d e m o k r a t y c z n e j, męskiej i żeńskiej. I dążąc do tego celu, i rozszerzając go, sądzę, że moim zamysłem jest, aby przez te śpiewy przewijał się więcej lub mniej słyszalnym wątkiem.”⁵

As far as later translations are concerned, I would only like to say that the first of these, by Włodzimierz Lewik, was printed in the first post-WWII Polish collection of Whitman's poetry and was reprinted four times; the second, by Andrzej Szuba, appeared at the very beginning of a grand bilingual edition of Whitman's poems (*Pieśń o sobie*. [Song of Myself] Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1992), which was subsequently reprinted twice; the third added new visual elements to the reading of Whitman in Polish culture. When the Polish poet and translator Artur Międzyrzecki composed an anthology of American poetry (1992), which included his translations of several Whitman poems, including "One's-Self I Sing", he made the last line of his own version of that poem ...*opiewam nowoczesnego człowieka* (I sing of the modern man) the title of the whole anthology. By doing so, Międzyrzecki made Whitman into a patron of modernity, especially of modern poetry.

⁵ The hitherto published *Leaves of Grass* – the author held – are in his conception songs of great, complex democratic individualities, male and female. And striving toward that goal and extending it, I feel that my intention is to weave a more or less audible thread throughout these songs.



Source: <http://s.lubimyczytac.pl/upload/books/115000/115834/352x500.jpg>.

Combined with elements of the American flag and its colors, the last line of “One’s-Self I Sing” was made a symbol of both American poetry and modern humanity.

The next translation, produced in 1998 by Stanisław Barańczak, a famous Polish linguistic poets and translator, brought a new refreshing reading of the first line of “One’s Self I Sing”. *Śpiewam Ja Pojedyncze, jednorodną, odrębną osobę* (“(I) Sing a single I, homogenous, separate person”) serves as a fine solution for Whitman’s problematic wording. True, “a single I” is not the same as “One’s-Self”, yet the “single I” in the line that is being sung about by the poet sounds as if it belonged to everybody, just as Whitman wanted his poetry sound. The newest translation, by Krzysztof Boczkowski in this context feels like a step back, for Whitman in Polish again sings just about himself: *Opiewam swoje Ja* (“(I) sing my I”), yet the collection composed by Boczkowski in 2003 has kept the poem alive in contemporary Polish culture.

I would like to end my presentation of the rich Polish series of retextualisations of Whitman’s “One’s Self I Sing” – of which I managed to introduce only the most important items – by reflecting on a piece of literary criticism that dwells on Whitman’s “en-masse”, and puts it into the context of modern American poetry. Contrary to what Artur Międzyrzecki wanted to demonstrate by the cover of his anthology, Czesław Miłosz thought that

Whitman's project had failed, and that it brought about an "opaque" response from American poets:

Czesław Miłosz. *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. Trans. Richard Lourie. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1982: 64

The electric current of Whitman's *en masse* was certainly stronger in America than anywhere else, and that bard, more complicated and more cunningly circuitous than is generally thought, closed the conduits in himself that were too private and refractory and opened those favoring that great current. When the poets of Europe were cursing the *cit  infernale*, populated like Hades with restless specters, Whitman extolled, glorified, and blessed the human element and its irrepressible onward rush. His work has suffered a defeat because, though our experience of collective life is still strong, it has now been seasoned with a bitterness which he forbade himself. The young poets turn to him, the progenitor, the father of their line, crying, "Walt Whitman, come see what's become of your prophecy, your hymn".

Since Miłosz's reflections were first published in Polish, and then translated into Whitman's language, they offer an example of a national retextualisation that crosses the limits of the national culture and enriches the readings of the literary text in its original culture, which in this case was also, due to the global role of English, in the world as a whole.

To conclude, I do think that the concept of a reception series can become a useful tool for examining the functioning of a particular literary text in foreign cultures. Since many literary works were translated into many languages, a particular reception series can shed light on various translation practices and also on different translators' choices and their intercultural connections (something that I was able to demonstrate here only to a small extent). The exploration of a reception series can comprise more than just the study of the differences in the translations of a particular text, it can also concern all the intersections of translation, commentary, and literary criticism as well as, for instance, the intersections of literature and politics. Since literary texts often become illustrated in some way, the study of reception series can also enter an intermedial sphere. A reception series may even include items on the web giving evidence of the "post-literary" life of a literary text. Thus the 1966 translation of "One's-Self I Sing" was posted on a website by someone called Rawena: <http://poema.pl/publikacja/48779-spiewam-samego-siebie>

(no comments so far). The concept of a reception series, therefore, makes it possible to transcend the field traditionally occupied by analytic translations studies and the narrow concept of a “series of translations,” thereby allowing it to enter a much wider field of interdisciplinary and intercultural research.

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**Whitman's *One's-Self* and *En-Masse* Rewritten.
On the Polish reception series of “One's-Self I Sing”**

Summary

The poem “Inscription,” which for the first time opened the 1867 *Leaves* with the dominant image of “ONE’S-SELF,” has become one of the most prominent of Whitman’s poems in the Polish rewritings of *Leaves of Grass*. Although only the final version of the poem (1871) has been translated, paraphrased, quoted or alluded to, its main subject – an exchange between the individual self and the collective self – has been well preserved in the Polish culture. I present Polish rewritings of the poem according to my concept of “a reception series” that encompasses not only translations but also various texts connected with the original as well as with its translations, e.g.: retranslations, paraphrases, adaptations, parodies, commentaries, interpretations, quotations and other texts representing intertextual and intermedial connections. All of these retextualisations, together with the data on how they used to function, that is, on how they were published, republished, or otherwise presented to form a “reception

series,” which is, to my mind, the fullest object of research on the functioning of a given foreign text in a new culture. A reception series always becomes a rich source of knowledge of the possibilities of interpreting a particular original and of the ways in which that original can be used (culturally but also politically). It also helps to capture “the third value” created in the process of intercultural exchange which, in the case of Polish rewritings of “One’s-Self I Sing,” is exceptionally rich and intriguing.

Keywords: comparative literature, reception, translation, Walt Whitman, Polish literary culture

Słowa kluczowe: komparatystyka literacka, recepcja, przekład, Walt Whitman, polska kultura literacka