Is There a Third Text in Zeina Hashem Beck's Duets? Translingual Poetics in *O*

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Abstract: This article traces Zeina Hashem Beck's development of a new poetic form called the "duet." Duets include equal parts written in two different languages, English and Arabic for the Lebanese poet whose recent collection, *O*, includes six such duets. The ideal bilingual reader brings sufficient context in both languages to the understanding of the dialogue between the two duet halves. This study argues, however, that access to the third text hidden in this dialogue is not exclusive to those equally familiar with the different represented languages. Close readings of "daily كل يوم" and "blue أزرق" identify the characteristics and variations of the new poetic form. Analysis of "prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار" centers around translingual poetics. Scrutiny of "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل," and "Ode to Leaving غربة" highlights the impact of projected audiences on the duet development. Relying on a comparative analysis of these six examples, the article discusses the benefits of ever improving machine translation, the availability of native speaker consultations, as well as a growing polyglot imaginary as extensions of traditional tools conducive to poetry exegesis.

Keywords: Arabic, duet, multilingualism, poetry, translingual poetics, Zeina Hashem Beck

1. Introduction

The recent collection, *O*, by Zeina Hashem Beck begins with a "Note on the Bilingual Poems, the Duets" (2022: vii). Readers learn there that "the poems in English and Arabic exist separately and in relationship to each other." They further learn that the two languages "should also form a poem when read together." Via close readings of the six duets gathered in *O*, this article seeks to treat the third text resulting from the dialogue between English and Arabic as a new opportunity for poetry exegesis. It argues that access to the hidden third text is not exclusive to bilingual readers, but that it may be arrived at in much the same way that an understanding of any poetry is achieved. Readers unfamiliar with the Arabic language will require more research to understand the Arabic passages and those less versed in English will take longer to gain access to the passages not written in Arabic. In the end, however, while addressing arabophone[1] as well as anglophone and translingual audiences, the duets invite members of the three groups to approach a concealed, third text.

Hashem Beck grew up in Tripoli with Arabic and French, during the Lebanese Civil War, until English was introduced in sixth grade (Elass 2022). She completed a BA and an MA in English at the American University of Beirut and started publishing poetry after her departure at the onset of what became known as the "Second" Lebanon War. Her oeuvre includes three poetry collections, *To Live in Autumn* (2014), *Louder Than Hearts* (2017) and *O* (2022), as well as two chapbooks and a growing number of essays. Hashem Beck was a founding member of the spoken word collective PUNCH in Dubai during the decade preceding the COVID pandemic. When a return to Lebanon seemed impossible (Elass 2022), she moved with her family to California's Bay Area. Her first collection, a tribute to Beirut, includes poems like "To Hamra" or "Fresco," which feature Arabic or French words and phrases, but it was not until after the second collection that the duet form emerges. The form has pioneering character in its distribution of equal parts to two different languages. This article studies "daily كل يوم", "blue أزرق", "prophecy نبوة", "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار", "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل," and "Ode to Leaving غربة" in detail to identify the ways in which this new poetic form opens up diverse innovative avenues for poetry interpretation in its appeal to a combination of different audiences. Drawing on postcolonial theory, it further argues that the new form is an excellent illustration of what Homi K. Bhabha has termed "third space."

The section following the literature review and methodology traces the development of the duet form and situates it in a legacy of translingual poetry. Hashem Beck has discussed some of the processes at stake in the conception and crafting of her duets (Alyan 2022; Elass 2022; Elkamel 2022; Fountain 2022; Saad 2023), emphasizing that they do not follow a single scheme, and that the general interest in her return to the Arabic language was aided by preparations for the podcast *Maqsouda*, a discussion of Arabic poetry in Arabic, co-hosted with Farah Chamma. A mini history of the form should begin with "daily كل يوم", as it was the first duet written (Elkamel 2022). A look at "blue أزرق" in the same section suggests itself because of thematic parallels even though the latter was prompted under contrasting circumstances. Section five of the study brings together readings of "prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار" since both illustrate the linguistic focus of this section very effectively. "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" and "Ode to Leaving غربة", finally, lend themselves to considerations of projected audiences, since the former juxtaposes an aggravating literary scholar with close friends, and the latter revolves around friends at different stages of their friendship. The comparative analyses ultimately demonstrate the potential of the innovative poetic duet form for plurilingual poets and their readers. The concepts of exile and cultural hybridity, as they are scrutinized in postcolonial theory, are crucial for the development of the translingualism from which the duet form emerges. It should become clear that access to the text, which opens up in the dialogue between the two different languages, Arabic and English for Hashem Beck, can be gained even by readers not fluent in either of the represented tongues.

2. Translingual Poetics and Postcolonial Theory

The study of creative multilingualism has gained momentum in particular within the context of comparative literature, migrant studies, and postcolonial theory. Major recent publications, which testify to this development include *Code-Switching in Arts* (2023), edited by Marianna Deganutti, Johanna Domokos and Judit Mudriczki, *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism* (2022), edited by Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich, *Multilingual Literature as World Literature* (2021), edited by Jane Hiddleston and Wen-Chin Ouyang, *Multilingual Currents in Literature, Translation and Culture* (2018), edited by Rachael Gilmour and Tamar Steinitz, and *Languages of Exile: Migration and Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century Literature* (2013), edited by Axel Englund and Anders Olsson. However, poetry in general is the least represented genre throughout these collections that feature diverse scholarship on a variety of authors from across the world. A predominant focus on prose also occurs in a number of special journal issues dedicated to literary translingualism, for example the special issue of *L2* (7:1) on "Literary Translingualism: Multilingual Identity and Creativity" (2015), edited by Natasha Lvovich and Steven G. Kellman, the special issue of *Journal of World Literature* (3:2), edited by Michael Boyden and Eugenia Kelbert, on "Literary Translingualism" (2018), and the special issue of *Dibur Literary Journal* (7), edited by Chen Bar-Itzhak and Vered K. Shemtov on "Literary Multilingualism: Representation, Form, Interpretation" (2019). The special issue on "Polyglot Art Practices" (2022) of the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* (49:3) offers at least three of seven contributions entirely on poetry. Only two of the listed publications concern themselves with the work of Zeina Hashem Beck. *Multilingual Literature as World Literature* includes a chapter in which Claire Gallien reads one of Hashem Beck's duets alongside texts by other translingual Arab authors. "Polyglot Art Practices" includes a comparative study of translingual poetry by Hashem Beck and Julia Alvarez. This article considers the Lebanese author of *O* central to the arguments made regarding language choices in literature as influenced by postcolonialism, migration, and exile.

Leonard Forster's pioneering *The Poet's Tongues* (1970) as well as the *Routledge Handbook* emphasize that translingualism in literature has an ancient legacy. Translingual practices in the new millennium, however, originate mainly in the colonial histories of recent centuries. Much of the mentioned scholarship therefore turns to postcolonial theory for approaches to the work of contemporary translingual authors. Edward Said's reflections on exile as well as Bhabha's concept of third space are particularly useful for an understanding of the duet form at the center of this article. Global English was Hashem Beck's third language, after Arabic and French, yet, it dominates her publications that appeared only after a physical departure from the home, Lebanon, which provides a recurrent theme. Comparable to Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zone" and Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderlands," Bhabha's "third space" designates a location between cultures and beyond borders. Unlike Pratt and Anzaldúa, both situated at the intersections of

migrant and Hispanic studies, Bhabha establishes his perspective from the vantage point of an Indian background. Developed in his seminal *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha's idea of third space is that it opens up avenues for innovative creation informed by hybridity. The positive energy he envisions in this process can easily be connected to the effects Hashem Beck's new duet form offers for translingual poetics.

3. Methodology

This article situates Zeina Hashem Beck's duets within the field of translingual poetics. In order to understand the third text created by the new duet form within contexts of global anglophone studies on the one hand and arabophone multilingualism on the other, this qualitative study needs to rely on content analysis of the six duets published by the poet to date. In the process, the third text is linked to Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "third space," to emphasize the postcolonial angle. The six respective poems are further grouped in twos to focus on three crucial elements of the study, the emergence of the duet form out of preceding translingual experiments, the linguistic intricacies of the form, and the role of projected audiences. These three focal points constitute sections 4-6 of the article. They are followed by a conclusion that summarizes the findings of the close readings along with their relevance for translingual poetics in the context of comparative literature, migrant studies, and postcolonial theory.

4. Development of the new *duet* form: "daily كل يوم" and "blue أزرق"

Hashem Beck's first collection, *To Live in Autumn*, is divided into five parts. "The Language of *Salaam*" is the title of the central part, and the title poem of this part revolves around a woman, maybe a relative or a friend of the speaker, who migrated to the United States. "Her English emails from the States / began with *Marhaba* …" (Hashem Beck 2014: 36) we read in the beginning of this poem. The meaning of "marhaba," "hello," is explained in the "Notes" at the end of the book along with the translation of "peace" for "salaam" (p. 83). The last of the poem's four stanzas summarizes the extent of the polyglot identity that can easily be held accountable for the invention of a form such as the duet:

> She counted in French, wrote in English,
> was nostalgic, like us,
> this Lycée, this American-University
> generation, for Arabic,
> and when she spoke the language of
> *Salaam*, words melted in her mouth
> like the setting sun." (Hashem Beck 2014: 36)

In a conversation with Carrie Fountain, during the virtual launch of *O*, Hashem Beck admits that the duet form reflects an existence at the intersection between worlds and languages (Fountain 2022). The closure of "The Language of *Salaam*" aptly describes such an existence. The woman writing emails from the US

routinely uses three different languages for different purposes. Presumably, Arabic functions as "first" language, suggested through the reference to nostalgia. The other two languages, French and English, evoke connotations of postcolonialism. They represent attempts of recent colonial powers, namely Great Britain and France, to occupy territory well beyond their borders and to impose worldviews as expressed through the respective languages. In his elaboration on the "third space" concept (Bhabha 1994: 53), Bhabha emphasizes that the space "in-between" cultures, as expressed through languages, caters to the constant re-negotiation of culture beyond borders (p. 55). In his vision, the hybrid space opens up opportunities for innovation (p. 54). Hashem Beck's duets are apt illustrations of this vision. Access to a combination of languages challenges homogenizing policies.

Following Yasemin Yildiz's argument made in her pioneering *Beyond the Mother Tongue* (2013), Sarah Dowling emphasizes that monolingualism is "an ideology, a structuring principle that touches every aspect of social life" (Dowling 2018:3). This definition applies to the community as well as to the individual. Hashem Beck has underlined in her various discussions of *O* that switching languages implies switching perceptions (Elass 2022; Elkamel 2022; Fountain 2022). It may afford a certain freedom, as the use of French did for T.S. Eliot when overcoming a writer's block (Ramazani 2020: 230). It may lead to thematic reconciliation. "Perhaps in English I'm kinder to Lebanon," Hashem Beck responds to a question about translation and contradiction in her duets (Elkamel 2022). In *The Translingual Imagination*, Steven Kellman writes that a positioning between languages enables authors "to challenge the limits of their own literary medium" (2000: 8) and that for translingual authors "no utterance can be automatic" (p. 45). As a result, the perception and representation of topics and subjects becomes challenged as well. Presumably, resulting complications for translingual poetics would increase the more removed incorporated languages are from each other in sound and in script.

It is safe to assume that from the moment poetry was recited, there have been examples of translingual poetry. From Enheduanna of Mesopotamia (Kellman and Lvovich 2022: 20) to the Old High German *De Heinrico* (Forster 1970: 10) to Derek Walcott and Bernadine Evaristo (Ramazani 2020: 202), poets have relied on second or third languages, the mixing of different languages, or at least different variants in their work. Only the last two, Walcott and Evaristo, however, belong to the literary period in which a single language, as a consequence of colonialism, was established as "global" or "universal" (Walkowitz 2022) language. This status of English and the socio-political circumstances, which fortified this status (Mufti 2016), have arguably led to different approaches to, as well as to diversification of translingual poetry. Scholarship has accelerated in recent decades, as is evident in titles such as *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Translingualism* (2022) or *Multilingual Literature as World Literature* (2021), to name only the most recent, as well as in special journal issues discussed in section two and the establishment of a new journal, the *Journal of Literary Multilingualism* (Brill 2021). While much

of this scholarship revolves around Indo-European languages, other language families are not ignored. Part VII of the *Routledge Handbook* is dedicated to "Literary Translingualism in Middle-Eastern Languages" (Kellman and Lvovich 2022: 428-467), for example.

In his contribution to Part VII of the *Handbook*, Paul Starkey pursues a chronological approach when he distinguishes between four phases of Arabic literary translingualism, pre-Islamic times to the thirteenth century, "Islamic Spain," the "pre-modern, or transitional, period (p. 1250-1850)," and the late nineteenth century onwards (Starkey 2022: 430). This last phase, to which Hashem Beck can be counted, includes four categories, the Mahjar referring to migrants leaving the Ottoman-ruled region known as the Levant for the Americas, French North Africa, "Arab literary translingualism in the twentieth and twenty-first century diaspora," and Palestine/Israel (p. 436-437). Hashem Beck fits the third category only in the broadest sense of the term "diaspora," having moved out of the Arab World only a few years ago, long after she developed her own forms of translingual writing, culminating in the duet. Yet, her lyrical speaker's identification with anglophone diasporic communities plays an important role for the dynamics in most of the duets.

Figure 1. Hashem Beck 2022: 11

Figure 2. Hashem Beck 2022: 33

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate visually what Hashem Beck explains in the interview with Elkamel, that "each of the Duets in the book had its own process" (Elkamel 2022). The process began with "daily كلّ يوم" (Fig. 1), which presented itself in Arabic at first. The ways in which Hashem Beck discusses her writing processes make the interaction between intuition and craft very clear. About "Ode to Leaving غربة", for example, she states in the same interview passage that she started with English text until she realized that "the poem felt incomplete" and "wants to be a Duet." For "daily كلّ يوم", in contrast, she started with an Arabic text and arrived, via experiments with translation, at an interweaving of Lebanon impressions in English, the language associated with departure, or diaspora. Arabic

is typically associated with return (Elass 2022). Like "daily كلّ يوم", "blue أزرق" (Fig. 2) revolves around Lebanon, but unlike the former, the latter zooms in on Beirut and the coastline. In contrast to the first venturing into the duet form, "blue أزرق" was commissioned. Its development was prompted by the editors of an anthology titled *And We Chose Everything* (El Mekkawi/Smiley 2018). In contrast to the other five duets studied here, "blue أزرق" does not present the English passages on the left side of the page. It inserts them, instead, into the Arabic text on the right margin, the Arabic margin, if you will. It is also the only duet that begins and ends with Arabic lines. "daily كلّ يوم" begins and ends in the center of the page, with translated lines. "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" begins in English and ends in Arabic. "prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Leaving غربة" begin in English and end in centered, partly translated lines. "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار" begins in Arabic, but ends in English. This contrast suggests that the Arabic voice dominates the duet dialogue in "blue أزرق", and a closer look at selected scenes confirms this fact.

Only the Arabic half of "blue أزرق" relies on the concept of dreams (Hashem Beck 2022: 33-34). With one exception, "lift me on your shoulders," the Arabic speaker identifies as "we." The poem begins with the ambivalent statement that, "we see the sea and do not see it / except in a dream."[2] It is easy to imagine this group of insiders, experts on the Lebanese context and its language as the same group that closes the poem with the harsh, maybe defiant, "we have sworn to stop worshipping this city." They may be the same group who admit, when speaking English, that they no longer love but still worship the city. They confess in both languages that they still love, though no longer worship the sea. Besides these two exceptions, however, there is a first-person singular point-of-view that dominates the English half of "blue أزرق". The English voice reveals physical distance with questions about the color and the pollution of the sea. It further engages in concrete experiences from the past and present. When juxtaposing the lyrical "I" of the English half with the "we" and more abstract scenarios of the Arabic half, a possible third text that opens in the dialogue describes a physical departure from the group that shares misgivings about socio-political circumstances hinted at in references to death and the idea to burn the city. Possibly due to such misgivings, the Arabic plural voice refuses to mention natural beauty, such as the proximity to the sea. "We have no sea here and no strength," in the Arabic half is followed by "sometimes I forget the sea / is this close" in the English half.

While there are more concrete images in the English half of "blue أزرق", the opposite can be said about "daily كلّ يوم", where the Arabic speaker carries a black handbag and passes the hospital in which she was born. The bilingual repetition of "my little country is not enough" sets a tone of regret or melancholy in this duet. On both sides of this poem, there is a longing to return. Despite all the differences mentioned, both duets studied in this section testify to Hashem Beck's extraordinary skill to combine two very disparate languages in a rhythmical flow without making either language feel "affected" (Elkamel 2022). Such achievement would hardly be possible without impeccable command of both languages concerned, even if the poet herself laments the shortcomings that result from

continuous code-switching. Linguistic shortcomings and superpowers are at the center of the following section.

5. Linguistic exile: "prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار"

The Arab friend or relative writing from the US in "The Language of *Salaam*," quoted in the beginning of the preceding section, uses three languages for different purposes. She counts in French, writes in English, and muses in Arabic. The three languages signal at least two forms of exile. The nostalgia in Arabic is the result of physical exile outside the Arab World. French and English evoke a concept of spiritual exile, away from Arab heritage. Hashem Beck dwells on a sense of estrangement in the linguistic realm when she describes herself as "an exile in both languages" in a conversation with Shirin Saad (Saad 2023). Reference is made in this conversation to Edward Said who emphasized that the condition is both fascinating and terrifying (Said 2000: 173).[3] Just like the physical exile, the linguistic exile offers new forms of freedom as well as constraints. Consequently, a topic appears different when written about in a different language. As mentioned in the preceding section, Bhabha stresses the creative potential afforded by what he terms "third space" (1994: 54). The comparison of perceptions juxtaposed in the third text of the duet confirm the benefit of such innovation. Hashem Beck assesses her Arabic considerations of Lebanon as less apologetic than the English ones. An example for this kind of contrast may be seen in the closure of "blue أزرق", where the English speaker still worships the city while the Arabic speaker identifies with a group that is determined to stop worshipping Beirut. A similar contradiction occurs in the end of "prophecy نبوة".

"Prophecy نبوة" is the shortest of the six duets included in *O*, counting a total of only sixteen lines. It is also unique in that the English and Arabic halves function almost like an actual conversation, for example about habits like smoking and listening to music. The first of three centered passages translates "my daughter thinks that all singers i [sic] listen to are dead" into Arabic. The second centered passage translates "we will cross this street in our sixties, hand in hand, on a sunny sunday [sic] morning" from Arabic. The last centered passage, however, which concludes the poem, presents a contradiction. An Arabic line corresponding to "and I have stopped looking for you" is followed there by "& I have not stopped looking for you" (Hashem Beck 2022: 48). Again, the English voice is the hopeful one, who lives up to the title by predicting a reunion in the future. In "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار", the opposite occurs. While the English voice declares, "I don't love my body," the Arabic voice admits, "I love my body sometimes" (p. 80). Where the English voice sounds resigned because "no one knows / what anyone else is saying," the Arabic voice forgives a waiter a mistake with the order because "it is enough for me that he welcomes me in some language." These lines demand an inquiry into this duet's title. Unlike "daily كلّ يوم", "blue أزرق", and "prophecy نبوة", this duet presents different titles in English and Arabic. The literal translation of the Arabic title is "waiting song," although it is the first English line that reads, "on every floor, someone waits," while the opening three Arabic lines attribute functions to different floors, different levels of a building (p. 79). The English side

of this poem connects the concept of waiting with language and misunderstanding, which explains the Babel reference.

Besides the duet discussed in this section, "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار", and that in the following one, "Ode to Leaving غربة", there are other odes in the collection. In the interview with Elkamel, Hashem Beck states that, "the odes in *O* are often odes for what one might consider unworthy of praise: the afternoon, disappointment, fear, leaving, hunger, and my body" (Elkamel 2022). Three of the themes mentioned apply to the "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار". There is a sense of disappointment towards the end when "no one calls" and "another wall is built in the city" in the English half of the text, but also in the Arabic question, "have you forgotten the time that brought us together?" (Hashem Beck 2022: 80). The closing line, in English, signals both fear and departure. "I look up at the airplanes" (p. 81) corresponds to information given earlier in English that, "the people who look up at airplanes are not from here" (p. 79). This sense of exile that ends the duet connects to the issue of language, an issue predominant in the English half of the poem, although it is introduced in the only centered passage of this duet, in the translated lines, English to Arabic, that reveal, "I don't understand what my neighbor asks every morning." The Arabic translation uses the verb "to know" rather than "to understand" and "every day" instead of "every morning," but these small discrepancies hardly alter the discomfort of miscommunication. The lack of understanding culminates in the ultimate Babel scenario when the English voice realizes, "It doesn't matter because no one knows / what anyone else is saying." In this duet, in contrast to the other three discussed so far, the Arabic voice sounds more optimistic. On the Arabic side, there are thoughts of the family tree, the mother, and a handsome waiter's welcome. Despite the fear of forgetfulness and the "familiar sadness," this side ends in the reminder of a reunion that someone else may have forgotten. As in all duets, the two halves alternate in a fascinating rhythm.

Eugene Ostashevsky distinguishes between "base language" and "inset language" (2023: 77) in the context of the kind of translingual poetry published by Hashem Beck prior to the invention of the duet form. The base language in those earlier poems is English, and among the inset languages are Arabic, French, and Spanish. In the duets, however, Arabic and English both function as base languages. They receive equal amounts of space and connect occasionally via the centered translation passages. The centered passages are mostly faithful translations. At times, the translations divert slightly, as seen above. Very rarely, a centered translation may present a contradiction, as seen in the ending of "prophecy نبوة". Relying on psycholinguist research, Ostashevsky emphasizes that different languages used by translinguals are never developed "in parallel" (2023: 175) and that, therefore, "crosslinguistic interference between one's languages is the norm, as are attrition and the experience of difficulty in everyday translation!"[4] Mismatches in the centered translation passages may recall such difficulties. They may also emphasize contrasting perceptions, and they may signal attrition.

To conclude this section, I want to focus on the fear of attrition as a driving force for translingual poetics. In her introduction to a special issue of *Dibur Literary*

Journal, Chen Bar-Itzhak demonstrates the unique traits of polyglot poetry with the reading of a poem by Almog Behar (2019: 3). Behar's short text, in which each line, except the last, includes a Hebrew as well as an Arabic half, expresses a fear of forgetting the latter language. In a very different political context, Hashem Beck also laments her distance to her first language, Arabic, in "Bulbul." Addressing the Arabic language itself, the speaker in this poem begins by saying, "forgive me. I've come back to you / without letters" (2022: 31). Like the email-writing friend in "The Language of *Salaam*," the speaker of "Bulbul" counts in French. "Prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Leaving غربة" express a different connection to French, which is music. Both these duets refer to the French singer Charles Aznavour, as is discussed in the following section. It is "Ode to Babel تشيد الانتظار", however, that most explicitly addresses linguistic intricacies. The third text here revolves around connections between language and landscape, between language and memory, as well as between language and belonging.

6. Projecting audiences: "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل," and "Ode to Leaving غربة"

In "The Missing Link: Modeling Readers of Multilingual Writing," Rainier Grutman starts out with the observation that there has been little overlap so far between reader-oriented criticism and studies in literary multilingualism (2023:16). Insisting that "readers can make sense out of nonsense," Grutman goes on to show how "multilingual texts both do and do not program multilingual skills on behalf of their readership" (17). Unlike the critics, poets are very focused on potential effects their mixing of languages might have on projected audiences. In every response to questions concerning the development of the duet form, Hashem Beck mentions readers of English alongside readers of Arabic (Alyan 2022; Elass 2022; Elkamel 2022; Fountain 2022; Saad 2023), and the "ideal" heterolingual[5] reader. She thus confirms Bar-Itzhak's assessment of readership in the statement that "the multilingual text generates different levels of meaning and has different effects on different kinds of readers" (Bar-Itzhak 2019: 4). Based on analysis of the six duets featured in *O*, this article argues that these levels of meaning and effects change in the same way that the understanding of a poem written in a single language changes through re-reading, scrutiny, and contextualization. The third text emerging in the dialogue of languages is thus as "unrepresentable in itself" (Bhabha 1994: 55) as Bhabha's third space, and just like the third space, it also reveals that "meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity and fixity." They continue to be negotiated in the creative process. The imagining of different kinds of readers and their potential efforts to make sense of the hidden third text, then, influences the crafting of polyglot poems, just like it influences the publication of any text. The two texts that address the idea of projected audiences most closely, "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" and "Ode to Leaving غربة", are the subject of this section.

"Ode to Leaving غربة" appeared as "Estranged غربة" in *Modern Poetry in Translation* and forms part of Claire Gallien's chapter "The Heterolingual Zone: Arabic, English, and the Practice of Worldliness" in *Multilingual Literature as World Literature*. Gallien's analysis there that "both poems [Estranged/khariba] are

reformulations of one another and have different ways to present how estrangement feels" (2021:76) needs elaboration in light of the poet's discussion of this duet, as well as in light of the changed title. "Ode to Leaving غربة" now joins the other duet discussed in this section, as well as "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار", in presenting different titles in the different languages. The English half of "Ode to Leaving غربة" consists of WhatsApp or, more generally, chat messages written in the present tense by physically separated friends, while the Arabic half takes place in the past, when these friends were together in Beirut (Elkamel 2022). The texting is recognizable via the use of "r" instead of "are," "u" instead of "you," or "b" instead of "be" (Hashem Beck 2022: 61-64). The imaginary time travel is emphasized in the fourth centered passage, where the Arabic line reads, "I prefer my present self to my future self." This is followed by the English line, "though I like the me I am now more than the me back then" (p. 63). The Arabic present self refers to the speaker who is together with a friend in Beirut, but already thinking of departures and exile. The English present self, "the me I am now," refers to the exiled speaker texting the friend from an airport. The seeming contradiction may be understood as a longing for physical proximity in the Arabic voice, combined with an appreciation of the more mature personality in the English voice, and these considerations mark the hidden third text throughout this duet.

Most of the Arabic half of "Ode to Leaving غربة" describes shared activities, like meeting at "Barometre" (p. 61), a coffee shop near the American University of Beirut, or singing songs by Aznavour, a recurring reference throughout Hashem Beck's oeuvre. The English half is dated precisely on the day of this French singer's death, in October 2018, and the English voice remembers missing the friend, whose company the Arabic voice celebrates, during a summer visit to Beirut. In the English half, it is revealed that this friend now lives in Amsterdam (p. 63). Although the Arabic half indulges in face-to-face friendship, departures are projected, to "the first world" or "the oil country" (p. 62). In juxtaposing forms as well as phases of friendship through time and place, the third text invites readers to consider an individual's participation in friendships in relation to stages of life. Although this duet gives preference to face-to-face experience of friendship, it also pays tribute to the kind of friendship that survives departures and physical separation. It ends in a centered passage, which imagines the transcendence of physical distance, "One day I will open my door & walk over. / & the distance between continents won't be tiring, or long" (p. 64). This closure evokes the idea of a portal, a metaphor Hashem Beck has used for poetry in general. In the interview with Elkamel, she states that the conceit of poetry as portal also contributed to the choice of the book title, *O* (Elkamel 2022). The friend with whom the speaker of "Ode to Leaving غربة" feels connected as if through a portal certainly qualifies as the "ideal" reader, not only trilingual like the lyrical "I" and the email-writer in "The Language of *Salaam*," but also, like them, very familiar with the socio-political context of Lebanon and the Lebanese diaspora. This friend could be the friend addressed in the Arabic half of "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل". At

least, the person could be one of the friends expected to visit at the end of this poem, the English half of which addresses the opposite of such an ideal reader.

In a recent study of multilingual poetry, Nadia Niaz examines the role of translation and distinguishes between audiences that are intended and those that are not (2021: 35). The "white critic" (Hashem Beck 2022: 15) clearly belongs to the latter group. In fact, he or she gets banished in the end of Hashem Beck's duet. Although, as has been discussed in the preceding sections, all duets include centered translation passages, these do not always present accurate translations. Otherwise, *O* offers very few translations. It does not, like *To Live in Autumn* and *Louder Than Hearts*, feature explanatory notes or a glossary. Because the Arabic text is no longer transliterated, however, even a reader completely unfamiliar with that language is able to do what is recommended for the "white critic, to "go google" (p. 17). A variety of fast-improving machine translation services will give a workable approximation of an Arabic passage's meaning. Better yet is, of course, a consultation with a native speaker, and the chances for those have, likewise, become more attainable. The "white critic" seems to have shown no such efforts, though, to provoke the hostility of the last duet studied here.

Of the six duets brought together in *O*, "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" speaks to the postcolonial context most explicitly. It is underlined in the first centered passage, in both voices, "I'm tired of knocking on the doors of empires" (p. 15). The imperialistic and xenophobic attitudes of the addressee is identified in the fourth English passage, "Yes the earth turns & there is time between us, / but my universe is neither corner / nor as dark as you've called it. Do you believe me?" The English speaker's resentment builds up to the mentioned banishment, a banishment preceded by a line that revolves around audience projection, "this is the first & last poem I speak to you" (p. 17). Although the "white critic" has obviously read the poet's work, it was not intended for him or her. Instead, it was intended for the kind of friend addressed in the Arabic half of the duet. The Arabic title of "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" literally translates into "my friend in departure." This could indicate a friend who has also departed from Lebanon or from the Arab World in general. It could imply a friend who has helped with the experience of departure. This friend in the title could be considered a synecdoche for the group of friends arriving in the end of the poem after a centered passage bids farewell to the professional life to which the critic is confined in the English half. The Arabic half, in contrast, presents memories of home, prayers, and a connection between the heart and language, both seen as "a muscle" (p. 15). The third text here seems to suggest that comfort in the private sphere can battle the worst frustration at work. "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" begins in English, with a confrontation of the hostile literary scholar or reviewer, but it ends in Arabic, with the projected arrival of friends. The first language, spoken among friends, has been discussed as "comfort language" in relation to this duet elsewhere (Hambuch: 281-282). An added language provokes estrangement. In the writing and reading process, this can be seen as alienation effect or as a form of defamiliarization.

Many scholars have elaborated on the alienation effect of polyglot art practices, for example in reference to the "ostranenie" of Russian Formalism

(Kellman 2000: 45; Ostashevsky 2023: 182) and to Berthold Brecht's concept of "Verfremdung" (Ostashevsky 2023: 182). Monika Schmitz-Emans compellingly demonstrates how such alienation or defamiliarization is heightened by the use of different scripts in her contribution to *Literature und Vielsprachigkeit* (2004; literature and plurilingualism). In reference to scholarship that has highlighted the significance of visual characteristics in literature, Schmitz-Emans compares the script of the written text to the sound of the performance as equally effective tools of defamiliarization (2004: 167). Seen in this light, the duets could be classified as "visual" or "concrete" poetry. They certainly emphasize the playful potential of the genre, a genre possibly more conducive to translingual experiments than prose. As Ramazani put it in *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English*, "poetry – a genre rich in paradox and multivalent symbols, irony and metaphor – is well-suited to mediating and registering the contradictions of split cultural experience" (2001: 6). Analysis of Hashem Beck's duets has shown awareness of both the shortcomings and superpowers granted by plurilingualism. This section has demonstrated, in particular, the effects of audience projection in this regard.

7. Conclusion

This article studies the six duets included in the new poetry collection, *O*, by Zeina Hashem Beck in relation to three areas of inquiry. The development of the new poetic form begins with "daily كل يوم" and looks at "blue أزرق" for contrasts in conception and crafting. "prophecy نبوة" and "Ode to Babel نشيد الانتظار" are read alongside in the section focusing on translingual poetics as related to the concept of exile. Close readings of "Dear white critic, رفيقي في الرحيل" and "Ode to Leaving غربة", finally, illustrate the extent to which changing languages means to change perception due to the projection of different audiences. Confirming Ramazani's observation that "postcolonial poetry is [thus] hybrid not only in language but also in form" (2001: 17), Hashem Beck's use of different languages, predominantly English, Arabic, and French, is situated within a context of postcolonial studies, global anglophone studies, as well as translingual poetry. Within these fields, the "duet" emerges as a pioneering form for polyglot poets. As Niaz has aptly put it, "multilingual poetry grows out of a complex and sophisticated negotiation of context and culture and addresses multiple audiences in multiple ways" (2021:35). It is beneficial to consider the hybridity of cultures within the context of postcolonial theory.

This study focuses on Homi K. Bhabh's concept of "third space" to understand Hashem Beck's "third text" emerging within the dialogue of English and Arabic in the six duets published to date. As the comparative analysis in this article shows, the duet is well suited to reflect a negotiation between cultures and beyond borders, as theorized by Bhabha. Furthermore, it still invites readers unfamiliar with a represented language to understand the hidden third text evolving from the poem halves in dialogue.

To answer, then, the title question, not only are there third texts in Zeina Hashem Beck's duets, they may become accessible to readers less versed in or

unfamiliar with one of the two represented languages, English and Arabic. Even ideal polyglot readers require differing lengths of time to consider and possibly re-consider the ways in which the halves of a duet interact and lead to meaning based on their dialogue. A reader unfamiliar with either of the two languages involved needs additional time to make sense of either of the halves, but will eventually, with the help of machine translation and consultation of native speakers, for example, gain access to a hidden third text nevertheless.

Endnotes

[1] Gallien uses "Anglophone-Arabic" instead of "Anglo-Arab" in order to signal "a shift in emphasis from
ethnicity to language" (Gallien 87, note 3). However, while "anglophone" signifies "English-speaking," "Arabic" signifies the language itself. I introduce "arabophone" to remedy this imbalance, as well as to remind of the fact that Arabic, like English, is spoken across the world in many distinct variants.
[2] Translations are my own.
[3] Said's "Reflections on Exile" begins with the sentence, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (Said 2000:173).
[4] Grutman convincingly argues against the use of the sociolinguist term "code-switching" in literary studies (Grutman 2024). Ostashevsky avoids resulting confusion by specifying "literary code-switching." Ramazani provides an alternative with the pun "code-stitching" (Ramazani 2020:198).
[5] See Grutman 2023:20-21 and Gallien 2021:69-71

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