

“Into the Space of Borderless Possibility”:

Eva Hoffman and the Effect of Immigration from Poland to North America on Identity

Eva Kilian

“Into the Space of Borderless Possibility”:

Eva Hoffman and the Effect of Immigration from Poland to North America on Identity

By

Eva Kilian

A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Spring 2000

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not reach its unique, finished form without the help and encouragement of many people. I express my sincere gratitude to Professor Bauland, who my freshman year inspired me to choose English as my major. As my thesis advisor this past year he supported and encouraged my writing through every stage. His careful reading, suggestions, and thought-provoking questions proved essential to this project. I'd also like to recognize the support of my thesis class, especially Professor Keizer, who insightfully read my numerous thesis drafts, patiently answered questions, and somehow calmed everyone's fears. I'd also like to thank Khara for discussing my thesis topics with me until the early morning hours, and Doug for his ability to listen, give valuable advise, and help me put things in perspective. Most of all I'd like to thank my family -- Barbara, Wojciech, and Adam Kilian -- who supported and encouraged me through this thesis and throughout my life. My parents taught me about the strength it takes to immigrate, the importance of living in both our native Poland and in America, and the rewards and insights immigration brings. My mom invested many evenings this past year telling me about our immigration, and insightfully commenting on my work -- these discussions proved invaluable both for this project and as dear memories. Thank you all for your support and for the lessons you've helped me understand.

Abstract

This thesis argues that immigration changes characteristics that influence a person's identity and leads to a reworking of one's self. It concentrates on Eva Hoffman's account of her immigration from Poland to North America. I propose that Hoffman captures the experience of being an immigrant and how it shapes who one becomes in the New World. My thesis then explores how Hoffman relates her experiences and her emerging identity to the reader through her personal narrative Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language.

The thesis opens with background information on the history of Poland, immigration, and immigrant writing. To illustrate the changes in immigration and writing that preceded Hoffman I briefly discuss the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz and Anzia Yezierska. This section places Hoffman's narrative in historical perspective and emphasizes the work's importance and uniqueness both as historical information and as literature.

After this introduction, I follow Hoffman's journey in Lost in Translation and focus on aspects of Hoffman's life that she finds relevant to her change in identity. The First Section briefly relates the importance of personal narrative and how Lost in Translation physically houses Hoffman's written self. The Second Section proposes that Hoffman's loss of location within language leads to a loss of identity. It reveals how Hoffman regains her self through her dual Polish-American perspective, her stable points of music and Jewish heritage, and her construction of a meeting point for her two languages which allows her to build a new self. The Third Section further explores Hoffman's changes through her internal conversations. The Fourth Section demonstrates that Hoffman moves past the language barriers of her childhood to create a hybrid meaning of womanhood and to further incorporate two cultures into her self. The Fifth Section chronicles how Hoffman's immigration and constructed identity effect her relationships with other women, men, and her family. The Sixth Section proposes new meanings for geographical locations constructed from her journeys and identity, including Hoffman's belief that immigration is a geographical place.

Finally, the thesis concludes that the reader learns from an immigrant's experiences because the attempt at integrating separate parts of the self acts as a complex mirroring of identity formation in the general public and bridges the gap between the immigrant and the native.

CONTENTS

Preface	1
Placing Hoffman in Context	2
Personal Narrative	7
Language	
i. Hoffman Loses Her Self	9
ii. Hoffman Finds Her Self	16
iii. The Universal Language of Music	19
iv. The Stability of Hoffman's Jewish Heritage	21
Interior Conversations.....	23
Gender Identity	29
Influences of Identity on Relationships	
i. Hoffman's Relationships With Other Women	32
ii. Hoffman's Relationships With Men	36
iii. Family Dynamics.....	40
Immigration as a Geographical Place	42
Conclusion.....	45
Works Consulted	47

PREFACE

One of my first memories consists of walking through the gates at the Warsaw airport and looking back at the faces of my family members, wondering whether I should stay in Poland, my safe home. In my moment of hesitation I finally decided to see my dad in the new country called Canada where the w in my name has one less dent. I turned around and walked through the gate, onto the plane, holding tight to my mother's hand. And later, I remember getting off what looked to me like a flying metal bird and hearing a new language that reminded me of birds singing – something enchanting but not quite understood.

Now at U of M others frequently ask me where I came from. This common question remains difficult for me to answer because of my immigration. My answer usually begins with my birth in Gdansk, Poland, then my move at age five to Ontario, and later at age fifteen to Michigan. Yet this answer merely lists countries I've lived in; it does not answer where I come from because it does not include the different cultures I took part in, who I was within them, and how the geographical movement molded my identity. It does not include my memories of leaving my extended family, of travelling with my parents, or how these events affected my development as an individual.

My thesis is an exploration of Eva Hoffman's movement, of where she comes from and how a Polish immigrant's identity changes with her immigration. I follow Hoffman through her geographic, linguistic, and inner journeys, analyzing how these movements affect the written self she shares with the reader. The thesis is, in part, an attempt to answer the questions of where I came from, which immigrants came before me, which paths they traveled, and which paths I am headed toward.

PLACING HOFFMAN IN CONTEXT

“It is extremely rare that a writer emerges ... who is still rooted deeply enough in his native language to realize the problem’s significance” (Baranczak, 223)

One cannot understand the historical and literal importance of Eva Hoffman’s personal narrative without knowing some history of her Native Poland, as well as the paths of change that other immigrants before Hoffman traveled. Gaining an understanding of Poland and the history of immigration allows the reader to place Hoffman’s constructed narrative of her self in context and see its importance.

Two major historical events in Polish history create a unique background for Polish immigrants, which influences their immigration. First, three divisions of Poland occurred, in 1772, 1793, and 1795. After the third division Poland disappeared from the map as a separate country and remained divided into parts of Russia, Prussia, and Austria until the end of World War I. Even though the government prohibited every part of Polish culture and language, the Polish people kept their culture and history alive during 122 years of foreign rule, until Poland reappeared as a country once again (Moscinski, 4-5). For many immigrants, this aspect of Polish history acts as an example of upholding the Polish culture that they strive to accomplish in their new land. It also emphasizes pride in their native Poland, which exists today only because of its population’s determination, which immigrants wish to hold on to and instill within their children.

Poland became an independent country again in 1918 and then fell under communist rule. Citizens’ rights of freedom, including free speech, freedom of religion, and access to uncensored materials did not become reality under communism. In the 1950’s “the communist leadership made a concerted effort to eradicate trends in Polish

tradition and culture that impeded progress toward a socialist society” (Ramet, 129)¹.

The search for their rights and the ability to freely practice Polish traditions became a primary reason for people to leave Poland. As immigrants, these people are more likely to keep their Polish traditions if they immigrate for the freedom to express them.

The history of immigration also influences immigrant writing. In the Nineteenth Century poor peasants in search of a better life left Poland with no knowledge of what the American culture held (Polzin, 25-40). In this early immigration, Polish immigrants searched for their basic needs of food and shelter instead of forging a new identity. Sienkiewicz’s After Bread: a Story of Polish Emigration to America acts as an example of early Polish immigration. It relates the fictional account of a father and daughter whose journey to America in the late Nineteenth Century proves futile and absurd because of their ignorance and language barriers. The book follows the characters on their search for basic survival needs, while the end also comments on their lack of information and lack of self. The father dies in a flood and without a funeral, illustrating that the immigrant drowns in the overbearing expanse of two cultures. His daughter goes insane and thinks her Polish lover will come to America; she remains unable to break from her past. No one can recognize her after her death, which reinforces that the inability to find one’s basic needs and live in a new culture can, in the extreme, lead to the loss of every part of the immigrant: name, body, and mind.

Throughout the Twentieth Century immigrants attained increasingly higher education, economic status, and more accurate information about what America can truly offer them (Polzin, 59-85). This increased awareness led to greater skills, more success in meeting basic needs, and time during which they could begin to think how

¹ For further reading about Poland’s history refer to Sabrina Ramet’s Eastern Europe, and to Theresita Polzin’s The Polish Americans for the history of Polish immigration to America.

immigration affected how they changed as individuals. Anzia Yeziarska immigrated in 1890 from the Russian part of Poland and wrote about her immigration experience in the 1920's. In a short story entitled "How I found America," Yeziarska writes:

I didn't come to America to turn into a machine. I came to America to make from myself a person. Does America want only my hands – only the strength of my body – not my heart – my feelings – my thoughts? (Yeziarska, 115)

Yeziarska's stories illustrate characters who struggle with thoughts of identity closer to those that Hoffman depicts; however, their thoughts don't have time to reach completion because at this time immigrants spent full days working in sweat shops to support their family. The early Twentieth Century America needed immigrants' labor, not their individuality.

Therefore, Hoffman's narrative remains unique because Lost in Translation is the only book written by a Polish immigrant, available in English, which explores the topic of immigration and the changes of identity that occur. Only one source in a thesis that explores the changes on an immigrant's identity results from several reasons. First, as seen from the works of Yeziarska and Sienkiewicz, immigrants could not construct a complex identity out of their immigration until probably about the mid-Twentieth Century. By Hoffman's immigration her parents found work, while their children went to schools equipped with language programs. However, this only leaves a narrow time period during which to immigrate, write an account of one's experiences, and publish the work. Second, immigrants must overcome language barriers and feel sufficiently comfortable within both their cultures to write about their immigration experience and the changes that occurred through it. This once again limits the potential immigrant works of writing. Baranczak observes that:

The immigrants themselves are obviously those who might have most to say about the losses suffered in this sort of "translation" ... the irony is that they also

are, naturally enough, the least competent to express the multiple dimensions and subtle degrees of the loss in the language that is appropriated by them rather than owned by birthright. It is extremely rare that a writer emerges among them who is still rooted deeply enough in his native language to realize the problem's significance, while at the same time feeling sufficiently at ease in his adopted language to convey the problem's complexity to those who should realize it: his new countrymen (Baranczak, 223).

Therefore the only people capable of writing about the changes in their identity are those who held on to and developed both their Polish and American identities, and can articulate this experience through writing.

Furthermore, Europe contains a unique history, language, culture, and value system. To cover immigration from multiple countries without going into great detail about their cultural differences would result in a homogenization of European immigration. Fjellestad elaborates on this notion by writing:

“Eurocentrism” is the naïve yet stubborn belief that Europe is a cultural – if not political – unity. This lumping together of all countries in Europe ignores the fact that in the forty-five years of post-war Europe at least two generations of Central and East Europeans have grown up in a political and social system which created specific cultural techniques for constructing, monitoring, and controlling the self (Fjellestad, 133).

Fjellestad goes on to observe that the homogenization of European immigrant writers results in part from these writers' white skin color, which allows their assimilation into the majority of the American population (Fjellestad, 133). Reading Fjellestad's essay motivated me to write only about Polish immigration and its effect on identity – a topic familiar to me because of my own Polish background and immigration. Moreover, I chose to write about Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation for an English thesis to

demonstrate that the writing of immigrants not only contains historical and social value, but should also be seen as important literature. Through this thesis I also contend that the reader can understand a different perspective on identity formation, the importance of individuality, and what it means to live in America by reading Hoffman's Lost in Translation: a Life in a New Language.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

“It’s only when I retell my whole story ... that the person who judges the voices and tells the stories begins to emerge” (Hoffman, 272).

According to Tiefertalder, “autobiographies are documents of self-authentication and self-determination of immigrants who have resisted the temptation to subscribe to a uniform, homogeneous view of America” (Tiefertalder, 49). The personal narrative can therefore serve as a template from which to learn about the immigrant’s identity in numerous ways. Unlike research studies, the narrative includes one person’s story of immigration – here that of Eva Hoffman – as well as the thoughts, beliefs, and changes that the immigration caused. The individuality and uniqueness inherent in each narrative is important because each “forms a new message or a new reading of the old one” (Boelhower, 6). Hoffman’s narration, because of its author’s gift of language and the determination with which she writes her and her family’s story, demolishes stereotypes and speaks to the reader at an individual level. The medium of autobiography reinforces Hoffman’s theme of identity formation because the pages relate a true account instead of using fictional characters.

Hoffman uses the personal narrative as a vehicle for reconstructing her identity that in turn creates a written self. Hoffman constructs this written self through the words she uses in the personal narrative. This allows the reader to glimpse first hand Hoffman’s identity, which consists of all the parts that Hoffman is aware of, able to translate into words, and willing to portray to others.

Hoffman also uses the personal narrative to impose order on her experiences and allow her identity to surface:

It’s only when I retell my whole story, back to the beginning, and from the beginning onward, in one language, that I can reconcile the voices within me

with each other; it is only then that the person who judges the voices and tells the stories begins to emerge (Hoffman, 272).

For the reader, the narrative therefore not only tells the story of how this transformation occurs, but acts as the means for Hoffman's re-ordering of her self. It remains the most first hand window into the author's linguistic identity.

Structurally, Hoffman composes Lost in Translation into three parts: Paradise, Exile, and the New World. "Paradise" describes Hoffman's experiences in Poland. Although Hoffman writes about many negative aspects of life in Poland, the title illustrates that she also feels safe in and proud of her homeland. "Exile" denotes the time of Hoffman's initial immigration, her alienation from Poland through geographical distance, from others through an inability to communicate, and from her self through her loss in translation of cultures. "The New World" tells of her re-construction of identity and her assimilation into both the Polish and American culture.²

However, the narrative itself does not follow strict guidelines; each section contains overlapping experiences, time periods, and conclusions. The coherency of the narrative results from the overlapping theme of loss and gain of identity present in each part of Lost in Translation. The personal narrative then connects Hoffman's non-chronological experiences, provides order for her thoughts, and acts as a physical container for her written self.

² Hoffman immigrates first to Canada, then to the United States. I use the term "Canadian" to refer to experiences only in Canada and the term "American" to incorporate experiences from both Canada and the United States, which for the author create a North-American culture.

LANGUAGE

Hoffman Loses Her Self:

“I fell out of the net of meaning into the weightlessness of chaos” (Hoffman, 151)

Hoffman is first of all a storyteller. She wants to relate everything, every detail that constitutes experience; that leads to truth. As a child, she can only come close to this complete storytelling through the use of nonsense words such as “Bramaramaszerymery, rotumotu pulimuli” (Hoffman, 11). However, even at this young age she comes to two obstacles. First, she finds that even in her nonsense syllables “there is a hidden rule ... that the sounds have to resemble real syllables, that they can’t disintegrate into brute noise, for then I wouldn’t be talking at all” (Hoffman, 11). This limitation changes the sounds she wants to pronounce in order to fit the general norm of the Polish language and leads to her conclusion that any noise that doesn’t resemble an understood language has no meaning -- or meaning equal to not speaking. The second obstacle occurs when Hoffman realizes that no one actually understands the message she wants to convey. Instead, her mother asks her “What are you talking about?” (Hoffman, 11). These early problems within language parallel and enhance her struggle with language as an immigrant. In turn, through immigration these experiences gain special importance to Hoffman and became lodged in her memory. One can understand Hoffman as a storyteller not because of memories she alludes to but because her experiences drive her to create a narrative of her life, to share this narrative with others, and in so doing to create a written self.

She begins this written life with memories that involve language because these past experiences provide her with some of the basis and skills to learn the new nonsense language of English and make it her own. In Canada, Hoffman must

overcome the fact that the words she hears differ from any real syllables she is used to, yet do not “disintegrate into brute noise” for everyone. In this new language -- to her not a language at all -- Hoffman loses her placement within herself because she loses her ability to communicate her experiences to both herself and to others, she loses her ability to be a storyteller.

Hoffman’s loss of location within language leads to a loss of identity. Hoffman explains that the loss of her self results from her previous beliefs that “nothing fully exists until it is articulated” (Hoffman, 29). At the age of thirteen she finds herself in a New World in which the “language” spoken contains no meaning for her. Baranczak deals with this problem at a preliminary level by writing:

What throws an Eastern European émigré off balance ... is that his semantic system itself seems not to correspond to American reality. A word that in his system of thinking referred to a nicely rounded object denotes here something like ‘an egg or, for example, a torpedo’” (Baranczak, 22).

In his example, Baranczak deals with the word football that, although the same in both languages, denotes a football in English and a soccer ball in Polish. However, this example only copes with the confusion that results from usual problems with translation. Hoffman addresses translation in a unique way by illustrating the problems that ensue even when translation remains linear, when a second language offers a word with the “same” meaning as the native language. Hoffman writes that in Canada English words she learns cannot connect the same picture in her mind that words in her native tongue are capable of evoking. As an example, Hoffman uses the word “river” which in Polish “was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers” (Hoffman, 106).³ This word

³ In Polish the word river is written as *rzeka*. Hoffman probably does not include its translation in her narrative to emphasize her inability to translate between languages at this point in her life.

denotes so much meaning to Hoffman because it connects to her the experience of rivers. In contrast, experiences which involve rivers after learning English are few and result in an English label which remains “cold – a word without an aura” (Hoffman, 106). Hoffman’s different interpretation results not from the problem of translating words, which Baranczak presents, but of translating emotions associated with these words. Hoffman goes on to say that the tearing away of words from their meaning drains the world “not only of significance but of its colors, striations, nuances – its very existence. It is the loss of a living connection” (Hoffman, 107). Through this example, Hoffman vividly reinforces that the act of translation is not the simple changing of labels, but also the accumulation of new experiences with which to define/connect the words that describe them.

Hoffman’s self-analysis coincides with the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis that a language one speaks affects one’s thinking. Sapir proposes that different languages create different worlds:

The “real world” is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.⁴

Seen in this way, without the ability to speak or understand English Hoffman lives in a different reality of Canada than that of native born Canadians. Furthermore, she interprets her experiences in Canada through the Polish language, the Polish way of thinking.

⁴ The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis was first presented in my Anthropology class by Jim Herron. This quotation appears in The Collected Works of Ed Sapir.

By understanding the displacement of Hoffman's physical and mental universes, one can also understand why the author equates loss of meaning with loss of existence. The physical world no longer fits her linguistic explanation and therefore does not exist in her thinking – or seen from a different perspective, Hoffman doesn't exist. Before she can enter into the Canadian reality she must not only learn English but also integrate the components of this language into her way of thinking. Baranczak writes that Hoffman's narrative illustrates "a mind's transition from one language system to another, and its assimilation to the new kind of perception and outlook that the new language entails" (Baranczak, 224). During her early immigration Hoffman experiences a feeling of exile from both Canada and Poland because she cannot translate her thinking to the language of the country she lives in.⁵

Understanding this complication of translation, one can begin to see the trauma that changing of Ewa's name to Eva held for the author. Hoffman emphasizes in her narrative that her name change led her to another form of exile: exile from her physical self. Hoffman describes the scene of her name change as a "careless baptism" (Hoffman, 105) which accentuates the discomfort and foreignness by connecting this change to a Catholic practice unfamiliar to her Jewish religion. Changing her name from Polish to English held the same effect as the translation of other words – except on a much deeper and more susceptible level. While the translation of "river" from Polish to English separates Hoffman from a true vision of a river, the translation of her name separates her from herself:

⁵ Hoffman concentrates almost exclusively on her loss of identity through lack of communication. However, she doesn't deal as much with its other effects, such as alienation from others, and the fear of everyday tasks that it promotes. In contrast, my mother once told me of how scared she became every time the telephone rang and she knew she wouldn't understand what the person on the other line was saying. I include several of my family's experiences to emphasize that every immigrant's path to a new life and new identity differs.

The twist in our names takes them a tiny distance from us – but it’s a gap into which the infinite hobgoblin of abstraction enters. Our Polish names didn’t refer to us; they were as surely us as our eyes or hands. These new appellations, which we ourselves can’t yet pronounce, are not us. They are identification tags, disembodies signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself. We walk to our seats, into a roomful of unknown faces, with names that make us strangers to ourselves (Hoffman, 105).

This name change marks the beginning of Hoffman’s misplacement within language -- the foreign name creates a physical separation of Hoffman within language.

It is also interesting to note the particular translation of Ewa to Eva. The name shortens by half a letter (the changing of “w” to “v”) and can mark a taking away of her identity. The letter “v” is the only letter in the English language that doesn’t exist in Polish. Therefore, her new name is not only other and unpronounceable, but non-existent in her native tongue. However, the letter “v” sounds the same in English as the letter “w” does in Polish; in some ways her name must change in English to remain similar to her birth name just as she must change her self to keep her Polish identity alive. Furthermore, this name change could also reveal a positive addition to her identity. From this point on, Hoffman takes part in two worlds – her native Poland and North America – it seems necessary for her to have an English and a Polish name to exist within both languages.⁶

Hoffman becomes lost within language not only because translation does not occur simply by re-labeling, but because her Polish language atrophies before she can communicate to herself in English. This atrophy leaves her suspended between two

⁶ It’s interesting to read of an author’s change in name identical to my own. In this case our experience diverge. I was prepared for the change in my name, which my mother presented as very positive, a second name to match my new country. Now my name acts as a mental flag for which language to speak – if

linguistic cultures without meaningful words to hold her to either. Hoffman demonstrates this suspension through her inability to think to herself:

Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences, they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private conversation could proceed ... I have no interior language, and without it, interior images – those images through which we assimilate the external world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own (Hoffman, 108).

As seen in this passage, the lack of translation creates a rift between Hoffman's Polish past and American future. She cannot forge an identity out of her past and present experiences if language separates these experiences. Hoffman describes this lack of identity as faceless:

But now I can't feel how my face lights up from inside; I don't receive from others the reflected movement of its expressions, its living speech. People look past me as we speak. What do I look like, here? Imperceptible, I think; impalpable, neutral, faceless. (Hoffman, 147)

Therefore, the lack of identity is not only bound by language, but once again filters into Hoffman's physical self. Through this statement one can also understand that the written narrative reveals Hoffman's life to the reader because the author sees language and the physical world intimately intertwined.

Without the outlet of language, Hoffman cannot undo the damage caused to her identity. She describes her anger as something that "only turns back inward, building and swirling like a head of steam – building to an impotent, murderous rage"

someone calls me Ewa I automatically answer in Polish, if Eva I speak English. These two names truly denote two languages, cultures and countries in which I take part.

(Hoffman, 124). As her anger turns inward, Hoffman calls her discomfort with the English language a Neurosis and “speech dis-ease” with the connotation that she must find a cure.

Hoffman Finds Her Self:

“This language is beginning to invent another me” (Hoffman, 121)

Hoffman takes the first step to merge her two languages and find a cure for her “speech dis-ease” by writing in a diary. Given the diary, she faces the dilemma of whether to write in Polish or English, eventually choosing the English because she must “write in the language of the present, even if it’s not the language of the self” (Hoffman, 121). This important step enables Hoffman to understand English language in a purely written form, at her own pace, and without the obstacles of pronunciation. Because writing presents the English language in an abstract form, it allows Hoffman to learn it from a safe distance, begin to construct a new identity in the “sphere of thoughts and observations” (Hoffman, 121) and locate a written self that emerges with the completion of this autobiography.

However, Hoffman’s identity is not complete at this early point; she writes only in English instead of combining her thoughts into both languages and refers to herself as “you” instead of “I” (Hoffman, 121). Hoffman cannot combine Polish and English at this stage because she doesn’t feel familiar enough with the English language to combine it within her psyche. Through writing Hoffman can understand English, become ready for the translation of two languages and the formation of a new identity within them. Hoffman’s personal narrative acts as the end result that began with her diary. While her diary prepared her for an identity within both languages, her narrative provides a unique medium for this written self to live and to share her life with others. In other words, Hoffman’s diary reveals the first step to a “linguistic construction of her self” (Fjellestad, 137).

Before Hoffman can create an identity that lives in both cultures she must find a way to communicate between them. Her previous attempts of translating languages

and writing in a diary allowed an increased familiarity with English but did not allow cross communication. Hoffman finally develops the ability to communicate between two cultures out of the duality of her Polish-American perspective. Hoffman realizes that her immigration gives her a double perspective when a teacher in her ninth-grade class prompts a discussion on Communism. During this discussion, Hoffman's experiences within a communist country give her a different perspective that she tries to share with her classmates. As she tries to explain that in Poland "there is life ... water, colors, even happiness ... People live their lives" (Hoffman, 131) she is met by looks of incomprehension. From this experience, she begins to understand that while she can see a different perspective of a situation because of her Polish heritage, others see the side that they understand from the culture they know. Hoffman reinforces this experience by writing about her classmates' lack of knowledge about Poland's location. While she describes Poland as "the center of the universe" (Hoffman, 132) her classmates see it only as a "small square on the map, wedged in between larger blocks of other colors" (Hoffman, 132).⁷ From this experience, Hoffman realizes that she cannot convince her classmates of her perception because she cannot translate her experiences to them. However, from her unique standpoint of an immigrant, she gains the ability to add to her Polish perspective that of her Canadian classmates:

Until now, Poland has covered an area in my head coeval with the dimensions of reality, and all other places on the globe have been measured by their distance from it. Now simultaneously, I see it as my classmates do – a distant spot, somewhere on the peripheries of the imagination, crowded together with

⁷ I remember that once a friend of mine in elementary school asked if Poland was one of the states. I also remember the anger that silently erupted inside me as I came to understand for the first time that other people had no idea where I came from. The ignorance of friends of an immigrant's past location, both geographically and culturally, is one obstacle that many immigrants must overcome. Hoffman's solution is to see both perspectives to gain the common ground she needs.

countless other hard to remember places of equal insignificance (Hoffman, 132).

This duality of perspective, the ability to draw from both her Polish and American experiences, begins to form a meeting place between her two cultures. This meeting point allows Hoffman not only to be “aware of the relativity of the languages in which [she] lives [and] open to the possibility that each language may render fully and in some sense absolutely, a particular, unrepeatable world” (Besemeres, 337) but also to move between them, regain communication with her self, and re-form her identity.

Hoffman allows the reader to see both the perspectives she gains through her immigration and search for self by writing italicized Polish words in Lost in Translation. By using italics Hoffman makes these words stand apart from the rest of the narrative, belonging within it yet containing a different kind of identity. Hoffman writes them in when she cannot find a translation for the experiences and feelings these words evoke. For example, the Polish word *tesknota* which Hoffman explains “adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing” (Hoffman, 4) remains in Polish because it depicts her emotion more completely than any English counterpart. Including these Polish words shows that Hoffman is aware she cannot completely translate Polish – and her self – to her American audience. This awareness allows her to use both languages instead of remaining hindered by their translation to understand her identity, its possibilities, and limitations. In this way, immigration enables her to break the rules of language she held as a child and to create out of her two languages a more comprehensive story in her personal narrative.

The Universal Language of Music:

“Music is the medium of my self” (Hoffman, 159)

Amidst Hoffman’s loss of her self in translation, music remains the only section of her thoughts that she can understand in any language. This universal medium for self-expression overcomes translation barriers and opens a channel of communication.⁸ During times when Hoffman begins to see her dual perspective but is overwhelmed and doesn’t know “How, with this bifocal vision, does one keep one’s center? And what center should one try to keep?” (Hoffman, 213) music acts as a stability within language. Although Hoffman’s friends cannot understand the feelings she expresses, playing piano allows Hoffman to communicate with herself and never completely lose herself in translation: “[Music] speaks to me about everything in pearly, translucent sounds” (Hoffman, 68). Furthermore, Hoffman sees aspects of music that attract her and incorporates them into her linguistic ability instead of stopping her growth as an individual with this medium. For example, Hoffman incorporates the meaning of the word *polot* which she describes in English as “a word that combines the meanings of dash, inspiration, and flying” (Hoffman, 71) into Lost in Translation.

Hoffman overcomes her final barrier within language as an adult, when she prepares to teach “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” to a class of freshmen. After years of analyzing the English language from her safe, alienated distance – her exile – Hoffman understands the “melancholy of that refrain, the civilized restraint of the rhythms reining back the more hilly swells of emotion, the self-reflective, moody resignation of the melody” (Hoffman, 186). In other words, she gains an understanding of language based on her understanding of music. The connection

⁸ Art held a similar role in my immigration – I developed and enjoyed drawing as a child in part because the language barrier did not influence my work and allowed me to freely express my emotions.

between language and music allows her to live once again amidst language. When Hoffman includes the English language into her identity she can finally express her experiences through words:

Words become, as they were in childhood, beautiful things – except this is better, because they’re now crosshatched with a complexity of meaning, with the sonorities of felt, sensuous thought (Hoffman, 186).

The Stability of Hoffman's Jewish Heritage:

“Being Jewish is something definite; it is something that I am” (Hoffman, 32)

While analyzing the effects of Hoffman's immigration one must remember that the author belongs to both Polish and Jewish cultures. Hoffman states that “the Polish and Jewish parts of my history, my identity – my loyalties – refuse either to separate or to reconcile” (Zaborowska, 254). This dual heritage gives Hoffman unique qualities that assist her immigration and ability to fit into a new culture when her world of language falters.

Hoffman's Jewish heritage exposes her to the duality of belonging in two cultures from a young age and leads to her ability to belong to multiple worlds, even though many Catholic Poles tend to see Jews of their country as Jewish, not Polish. In other words, Hoffman is used to being seen as ‘two in one.’ Proefriedt observes that the collisions of these cultural forces lead to her hybrid intelligence and transculturalism (Proefriedt, 126). For example, from childhood Hoffman is aware of the Holocaust and the awful fate of her family:

My mother wants me to know what happened, and I keep every detail of what she tells me in my memory like black beads. It's a matter of honor to remember, like affirming one's Jewishness (Hoffman, 24).

When her Polish classmates talk to Hoffman about their Catholic faith, Hoffman does not sway away from her own faith and sees their religious actions as make-believe that “isn't really real” (Hoffman, 31). Moreover, Hoffman can take these “black beads” of her Jewish past, integrate them into her identity, and understand that “being Jewish is something definite; it is something that I am” (Hoffman, 32) at the same time understanding and accepting that she is Polish. Her ability to accept two distinct

histories and traditions into her identity that “refuse to separate or reconcile” parallels her ability to accept both her American and Polish duality.

While growing up in Poland, Hoffman also copes with her difference from the Catholic majority and the discrimination some Polish people feel toward their Jewish neighbors. Her early struggles breed tolerance and a belief in equality. Hoffman reveals that “to be Jewish, in my mind, is to stand against distinctions, to uphold everyone’s equal personhood, pure and simple” (Hoffman, 144). Hoffman’s belief illustrates her ability to turn her status in a minority group into a positive attribute, understanding of others and the strength to be proud of whom she is. This strength is also present in her pride of her immigration, family, and Polish background throughout her personal narrative.

Hoffman’s Jewish culture also acts as a stable base upon her immigration to Canada. Unlike her Polish self, who remains woven in with the Polish language, her Jewish identity is not tied to one language and can exist in any country. Canadian government allows the author to practice her religion without the discrimination her family felt in Poland. In her narrative Hoffman does not deal with any changes in her Jewish identity following immigration. This absence suggests that the transition from Poland to Canada does not require the transplantation of her Jewish self that her Polish self needs. Her Jewish heritage, similarly to music, transcends language and culture barriers and acts as a stable point that bridges her past and present, her Polish and American identities.

INTERIOR CONVERSATIONS

“How, with this bifocal vision, does one keep one’s center?” (Hoffman, 213)

Hoffman’s dual perspectives become most apparent through her interior conversations. In these conversations two separate voices emerge, each with a separate language – one Polish, one English – and different opinions, ideas, and conceptions about Hoffman’s surroundings. Besemeres states:

The way in which the phenomenon of voice presupposes connection between language and an individual, lends itself to Hoffman’s use of metaphorical voices for conflicting selves, or for different cultural holds on the self (Besemeres, 331).

In other words, Hoffman’s belief of the intense connection between language and the physical self enables the creation of these voices – the creation of two physically separate linguistic selves. During these sections of Lost in Translation the text changes from paragraph form to a conversation between two speakers, reinforcing this interconnection between language and the individual to create separate elements of Hoffman’s identity.

When the first conversation takes place, Hoffman cannot connect the change of her identity through immigration to her experiences. She does not yet see the dual perspective of an immigrant and therefore her conversation does not take place between a Polish and American voice. Instead, a scared and hollow Hoffman takes on both voices. Similarly to her diary entries, she refers to herself as you, as a being separate from her self. Because Hoffman is both and yet neither voices, the conversation lacks coherency. However, through its incoherence and hollowness this conversation mirrors Hoffman’s lack of self, confusion over her identity, and questions about who she might have become in Poland:

If you had stayed there, your hair would have been straight, and you would have worn a barrette on one side. But maybe by now you would have grown it into a ponytail? Like the ones you saw on those sexy faces in the magazine you used to read?

“I don’t know. You would have been fifteen by now. Different from thirteen” (Hoffman, 119).

Both concentrate on what Hoffman would look like in Poland instead of trying to integrate the Polish and American self together. Zaborowska writes that the emphasis on the physical appearance of the fictional Polish Eva allows a point of comparison: “As long as the interrogating voice can imagine Ewa’s hairdo, the two girls can be compared; they can coexist as bodies” (Zaborowska, 243-244). Therefore, by concentrating on appearance Hoffman holds on superficially to her Polish self and her Polish culture. Moreover, the voices simply agree and rephrase what the other said; they don’t develop a separate identity and serve only to emphasize Hoffman’s fear to accept her new self and inability to follow her past identity. In this conversation Hoffman does not acknowledge her past Polish identity as a part of her and refers to her former self as “she”:

And you prefer her, the Cracow Ewa.

Yes, I prefer her. But I can’t be her. I’m losing track of her. In a few years, I’ll have no idea what her hairdo would have been like.

But she’s more real, anyway.

Yes, she’s the real one (Hoffman, 120).

However, “the past ... Polish identity [which inhabits] the increasingly English body in the present is an act of self-misrepresentation” (Zaborowska, 244) because Hoffman now lives in a different country, and her immigration experience constantly influences

her outward appearance, her thinking, her identity. Hoffman illustrates her undeveloped her new identity by writing that at this point in her life she believes that a non-existent extension of the Polish self she thought up is the “real one.”

The second conversation occurs much later, when Hoffman forms two solid and separate identities. Instead of revealing the chaos that results from Hoffman’s unformed identity, these conversations prove constructive. Each voice gives a different perspective to the situation – one Polish, one American – and listening to these voices allows her to see her different options:

Should you marry him? The question comes in English.

Yes.

Should you marry him? The question echoes in Polish.

No (Hoffman, 199).

This conversation parallels Hoffman’s experience in her classroom where she saw both Polish and American perspectives. The Polish voice represents the opinion of Hoffman’s Polish background and experiences. The English voice represents Hoffman’s present American experiences. Tensions are present as the voices disagree and Hoffman does not know which perspective to take. The voices’ disagreement illustrates Hoffman’s separate and coherent identities she did not yet integrate into her psyche, as well as the overwhelming burden of seeing two perspectives of her experiences. These voices remain like separate beings which Hoffman cannot please. In the case of marriage the American voice seems to grow stronger at the end:

Go away. You’re becoming a succubus.

I won’t be so easy to get rid of.

I don’t need you anymore. I want you to be silent. Shuddup (Hoffman, 199).

However, Hoffman's marriage collapses, suggesting that Hoffman needs the agreement of her two selves to make the correct decision, that she still needs her Polish voice. Hoffman illustrates this idea very subtly even in this conversation, when the American voice says "shuddup." This is the first word the author heard and understood in Canada. As she shuts up the Polish voice a role reversal develops; the American side gains the power of language and therefore the power to silence another. However, Hoffman's power and command of the English language remains linked to translation and to her native tongue. Hoffman illustrates this by writing the word "shut-up" in the way she first understood it in Polish. It seems ironic and futile for the American voice to say "I don't need you anymore" if Hoffman remains tied to both voices by the languages they command and merge together.

Hoffman emphasizes the tension between her separate selves through a conversation near the end of Lost in Translation focused on her divorce. Hoffman's contemplation of divorce hints that this conversation acts as a continuation of the previous, allowing the reader to glimpse further into Hoffman's different characteristics. Both voices agree that the marriage is unhappy, the debate lies over the American option of divorce and the Polish belief in staying together:

If you were in Poland, you'd be making a sensible accommodation to your situation. You've seen people live perfectly happily within their less than perfect unions. They just have affairs, they don't go around blowing their lives apart (Hoffman, 231).

However, the conversation moves past a difference of opinion based on cultural backgrounds and into Hoffman's freedoms as an immigrant as the voices disagree about whether Hoffman can apply what she learned in America to her dual self:

I've acquired new ideals, do you mind?

You're an immigrant, you can't afford ideals.

I'm trying to live as if I were free. At least I can have that dignity.

Free. You're playing a dangerous game. A charade (Hoffman, 231).

The Polish voice doesn't believe Hoffman should divorce not because it disagrees with the Polish belief, but because Hoffman's status as an immigrant hinders the American options she sees around her. In this way, the debate between the two voices shifts from Polish versus American perspectives to the immigrant perspective that both allows their existence and prohibits their practice.

In the end, Hoffman decides to divorce, saying to the other voice, "But I don't have to listen to you any longer. I am as real as you are now. I'm the real one" (Hoffman, 231). If Hoffman didn't cope with her unique status as an immigrant earlier in the conversation, one could understand this last line as a repetition of Hoffman's ignorance of her duality. However, because both voices focus on immigration, one can also read the last line as the immigrant Hoffman talking to both her Polish and American voices, demonstrating that she finally formed a whole identity out her duality and immigration. Furthermore, Hoffman writes:

It's only when I retell my whole story, back to the beginning, and from the beginning onward, in one language, that I can reconcile the voices within me with each other; it is only then that the person who judges the voices and tells the stories begins to emerge (Hoffman, 272).

Through this statement, Hoffman illustrates that the formation of an identity does not involve a sudden change that occurs through this one conversation but that through the writing of these conversations and her whole story her true identity emerges. This true Hoffman existed in the shadows of her consciousness the whole time, integrated the Polish and American voices into her identity, and through this integration makes an informed decision about her life's goals.

The awkwardness that remains by representing her self-awareness through two voices illustrates her connection to Polish, a language that can never be articulated fluently in English and “denies her continuity and order” (Proefriedt, 126). Baranczak writes that if an immigrant remains a writer “he must never leave [the] cage ... of his native language. There, he was gagged; here, he is tongue-tied. The ultimate irony: those who are the most tongue-tied may have the most to say” (Baranczak, 238). Therefore, Hoffman connection to Polish results in both awkwardness and motivation to write. Without this subtle connection, Lost in Translation would turn from a unique narrative that bridges two worlds into an identity, to the stereotypical discovery of a new identity to match a new country.

GENDER IDENTITY

“I can’t become a ‘Pani’ of any sort” (Hoffman, 189)

Hoffman immigrates to Canada at the age of thirteen, during a time when she begins to change from a girl into a young woman. At this age of experimentation and searching she must decide between differing cultural norms to discover what becoming a woman means for her. Similarly to her search for her identity within language, her redefinition of womanhood begins with a lack of information, follows with an overloading of cultural norms, and ends when Hoffman creates a definition of femininity that allows her to use experiences and information from both cultures.

In Poland, American magazines serve as Hoffman’s only information about the American version of womanhood. Hoffman and her mom try to imitate the fashionable clothes the American models wear, clothes which are not available in Poland:

We pore over the clothes shown in those magazines – we make no distinctions between advertisements and other pictures ... we then show pictures of our chosen items to our dressmaker, who tries, to the best of her abilities, to imitate them (Hoffman, 22).

With only these magazines as a window into American culture, Hoffman does not know the extent to which female norms differ, where these boundaries begin or end. Once in Canada, other women try to train Hoffman in ways to be a woman in American terms. They shave her armpits, pluck her eyebrows, and change her wardrobe from play-clothes to bras and high-heeled shoes. These changes occur rapidly and sometimes without Hoffman's consent; others just assume that she wants to change her appearance to fit this new norm:

Mrs. Lieberman, in the bathroom of her house, is shaving my armpits. She has taken me there at the end of her dinner party, and now, with a kind of decisiveness, she lifts my arms and performs this foreign ablution on the tufts of hair that have never been objectionable to anyone before. She hasn't asked me whether I would like her to do it; she has simply taken it upon herself to teach me how things are done here (Hoffman, 109).

Just as the translation of language alienates Hoffman from her self, this physical transformation creates another identity before Hoffman can accept it. Not knowing how to stop these changes, Hoffman obeys "passively, mulishly, but [feels] less agile and self-confident with every transformation" (Hoffman, 109). As a result Hoffman feels especially awkward and alienated from others; she cannot fulfill the Polish view of beauty she grew up with, nor can she comfortably pull off the new look expected of her:

This clumsy looking creature, with legs oddly turned in their high-heeled pumps, shoulders bent with the strain of resentment and ingratiation, is not myself. Alienation is beginning to be inscribed in my flesh and face (Hoffman, 110).

While the translation of her name creates a new linguistic self, the differing gender norms mask the physical self into a foreign object.⁹

Hoffman binds the identity of a woman once again to language, and writes that the Polish word "*Pani*," a combination of woman and lady, has no English complement:

The allegory of gender is different here, and it unfolds around different typologies and different themes. I can't become a "*Pani*" of any sort: not like the

⁹ The American and Polish definitions of womanhood have converged in the last thirty years. For example, shaving armpits and legs is practiced in both countries. Furthermore, with equal educational opportunities for both genders, many women work and take care of children. This convergence lessened the shock of immigration for my family because gender roles now differ little in Poland and America.

authoritative Pani Orlovska, or the vampy, practical Pani Dombarska ... none of these modes of femininity makes sense here, none of them would find corresponding counterparts in the men I know” (Hoffman, 189).

To become comfortable with her own femininity Hoffman must translate her gender identity. Because no English word exists to match the Polish definition, Hoffman creates her own meaning, one which results from her combination of experiences in Poland and Canada. The lack of exact translation of the word *Pani* forces Hoffman to step beyond the boundary created by words and create a nonsense language similar to that of her childhood, but with meaning to her. Fjellestad describes Hoffman’s creation of a new definition of femininity as fictional and caused by her awareness of rules and boundaries:

[Hoffman] becoming a woman in the American grain can never end in a return to “nature” – Eva’s destiny is an awareness of culture-generated rules, principles, constraints, boundaries and borders which mark emotional life and relationships, especially between the sexes. Thus Hoffman’s book registers a recognition not only of the impossibility of such a “return” but also of the fictionality of every construct of nature (Fjellestad, 137).

However, Fjellestad’s use of fictionality goes against Hoffman’s belief that ideas exist once they are articulated. Because of her belief, Hoffman’s new definition femininity is real and natural to her because she articulates her ideas through her actions and through the language in her personal narrative. Hoffman’s re-definition marks her understanding that because she lives in both languages she must create a hybrid meaning to explain her self and her experiences.

RELATIONSHIPS

Hoffman's Relationships with Other Women:

“Hello silly little Polish Person” (Hoffman, 169)

Growing up in Canada, Hoffman not only encounters different criteria for becoming a woman, but also different ways of interacting with other women. In a group of her peers, Hoffman feels different, foreign, and uncomfortable. Her discomfort with language bars conversations that could lead to intimacy and friendship. Observing groups of her peers who feel comfortable and have an enjoyable time instills a “finicky distaste” in Hoffman as she feels her “lips tighten into an unaccustomed thinness – which, in turn, fills me with a small dislike for myself” (Hoffman, 117). Her dislike stems from her wish to be included in these group gatherings more intimately, yet not knowing how to transcend her fears and barriers.

Even after Hoffman's friends include her into their more intimate gatherings, she still feels like an outsider because the outings and get-togethers differ from those in Poland and act as a barrier for friendship:

I'm flattered at being invited to this intimate, insider gathering, but as usual, I'm sitting at a slightly oblique angle to the proceedings. I don't have a silk slip, don't like to put on makeup, and these elaborate preparations are somehow disturbing to me (Hoffman, 129).

Because of these obstacles, Hoffman begins her interactions with her peers as an observer. This role allows her to gain knowledge about interaction between women, which gestures are acceptable, which she will accept. One difference Hoffman observes is the different meaning of friendship in English and Polish. In Polish the word friendship holds “connotations of strong loyalties and attachment bordering on love” (Hoffman, 148). Meanwhile, Hoffman defines its meaning in English as “a good-

natured, easygoing sort of term, covering all kinds of territory, and acquaintance is something an uptight, snobbish kind of person might say” (Hoffman, 148). With the knowledge gained by observing others Hoffman slowly enters into friendship with her American peers – first by the American, then by the Polish definition.

Hoffman’s friendships prove rocky at times because she holds different perspectives and opinions from her peers. These differing opinions lead to discussions that sometimes bring her closer to others, and sometimes destroy companionship. For example, an argument ensues when Hoffman’s roommate Lizzy says, “People get what they deserve” (Hoffman, 176). Hoffman responds by saying:

“Do you think everyone starts out with the same amount of opportunity?” ... my voice knotting with frustration. “Do you think everyone starts out even? And what if people are stupid, or untalented or sick? Do you just want to throw them to rot, to end up in a ditch? (Hoffman, 177)

The anger that boils within Hoffman and provokes her outburst originates from her and her family’s immigration and her family’s Jewish history of the Holocaust. From these experiences Hoffman knows what it’s like to start with less opportunity and overcome different obstacles. Unlike Lizzy, Hoffman understands her anger, thinking to herself:

I have my pride too, and I don’t say, “And what if you’re a new immigrant starting out with nothing?” but of course it’s my family I’m defending in this quarrel, and it’s the thought of my parents that makes my temperature rise so high (Hoffman, 177).

Hoffman can understand the motivation for her outburst, and in hindsight can also see why Lizzy sees a different picture of the world they talk about. Hoffman explains their difference by saying that Lizzy’s mind “has been stocked with different images, and just as I can’t see the pictures of her childhood, she can’t leap outside them, can’t imagine what’s not in her head” (Hoffman, 178). Hoffman’s later ability to understand why

her friends hold different ideas stems from her ability to see different perspectives of the world, and allows her to keep friendships with people who don't agree with her opinions. Her capacity to understand her own and others' motivations leads to her development into a mature adult capable of empathizing with people who go through very different experiences from her own.

The first true friend Hoffman describes in this narrative is Miriam, whom Hoffman knows as an adult. Hoffman's previous friends wanted her to belong to their group, but required her to change in order to belong. For example, her high-school friends didn't ask how Poland's dances differed, and Lizzy didn't seem to realize that Hoffman's different experiences lead to her different beliefs. This friendship seems deeper than Hoffman's childhood or college friendships because Miriam accepts Hoffman's Polish background, sees that her nationality makes her different, and feels that this difference is positive. Miriam shows her feelings toward Hoffman through her simple greeting of "Hello, silly little Polish person!" (Hoffman, 169) which Hoffman responds to by saying the tone "carries complexities of affection" (Hoffman, 169). Miriam's words, said in a different tone, would sound insulting; instead they emphasize Hoffman's individuality and her Polish heritage. By illustrating this use of tone Hoffman once again moves beyond word meanings to emphasize the emotions that words represent.

Her close friendships with other women also depict Hoffman's internalization of some American values with which she can gain common ground with others.

Besemeres writes:

The common ground Eva finds herself on with these friends, the 'larger territory of affection' which assures her of their liking ... has partly grown out of a body of shared beliefs and agreements which she has gradually internalized (Besemeres, 342).

Besemeres takes her interpretation a step further to say that this common ground not only sets up ground for friendship, but also illustrates Hoffman's translation of her self:

It is this movement of internalization, ideally happening by 'slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase' (Hoffman, 211) that constitutes the process of self-translation (Besemeres, 342).

Therefore, relationships with friends remain intricately linked to language and the rebuilding of Hoffman's identity. By getting closer to others and communicating with them, Hoffman can take from the broad spectrum of American ideas those that are common for her and her friends, internalize them, and slowly translate her self. This slow process of translation allows Hoffman the control she lacked in her early relationships and gender questions; it occurs through relationships she chooses instead of interactions and ideas thrust upon her by others.

Hoffman's Relationships with Men:

"We don't speak exactly the same language" (Hoffman, 190).

Along with different interactions with women come new criteria for the proper interactions with men. Many of Hoffman's memories in Poland concentrate on Marek, a childhood friend that Hoffman loved and wanted to marry in her childish, eleven – year-old way. In her memories Hoffman idealizes this relationship, which in her eyes no other relationship can live up to. She even writes she has no identity left "except that most powerful one of first, private loves" (Hoffman, 88). In Canada she faces the awkwardness of getting to know the opposite sex at parties in which girls line up on one side of the room, boys on the other. She describes one such party as "unnatural" and her own primness as a simple reaction to the situation:

So much of the behavior around me seems "unnatural" – strained and overcautious despite the cheekiness ... my own primness is a reaction to a discomfort in the air, a lack of ease between the boys and girls, in which this early sexuality is converted not into friendliness but into coy sexiness (Hoffman, 130).

Hoffman compares the situations between genders that she observes in Canada to her own experiences with Marek. However, Marek and Hoffman separated at age eleven, a little before the onset of puberty and awkwardness with the opposite sex. This leaves Hoffman without a Polish comparison to make with the relationships she observes and experiences in Canada. Although she defines them as cultural differences, they result more from different age groups; she contrasts the discomfort she feels in Canada during puberty with a pre-pubescent relationship. Hoffman may criticize these relationships so strongly because the alienation she feels as an immigrant blurs her ability to see the difference in age. To help through her alienation from both males and

females, Hoffman idealizes Marek and their relationship into something superior than the Canadian boys can offer her. Throughout her life in Canada, Hoffman fantasizes about meeting Marek again and falling into his arms, but fantasy never develops further into a life together. When Marek visits the United States on a business trip Hoffman is reunited with her childhood friend. With this reunion she realizes that her fantasy lover never existed and her childhood friend turned into a stranger through the many years they spent apart:

Of course, I would have wanted to marry my fantasy lover, but Marek isn't the figment of my imagination anymore. He has grown more substantial, more mysterious, more himself. Really, I no longer know who he is. He has escaped me (Hoffman, 229).

Even with this fantasy gone, Hoffman thinks Marek is the only man who understands her.¹⁰ She has no male counterpart because of her hybrid definition of womanhood. This unique definition of her gender, shaped by her experiences from two cultures, holds no "corresponding counterparts in the men [she] know[s]" (Hoffman, 189). This statement sheds further light on the conversation about marriage Hoffman holds between her Polish and American identities. The Polish voice discourages Hoffman's marriage because she cannot see a suitable partner in a non-Polish man. Incidentally, a Polish man would prove unacceptable to her American self, and a marriage with him would also probably fall apart.

Hoffman further observes that "each culture shapes both genders to be recognizable to each other in their difference" (Hoffman, 189). Hoffman's awareness of her increased distance from the opposite sex results in a greater concentration on

¹⁰ A while after Marek returns to Israel he commits suicide. Hoffman doesn't cope with the effect of his death in her personal narrative. Perhaps she did not wish to disclose this part of her life to others, or has not yet dealt with the effect of his death. One cannot learn how Marek's death influenced Hoffman's identity without more information; however, this tragic event leaves Hoffman without an understanding partner.

cultural boundaries, which in turn influences her interaction with men. Instead of viewing interaction between herself and a man based on their common ground as individuals, she pays attention to the cultural distances between them. To illustrate this cultural boundary to the reader Hoffman refers to a man she dates as “The Texan” instead of sharing his actual name. With this title, a geographical location becomes his identity. The fixation of Hoffman’s identity in her immigration also parallels what men think of her. Hoffman states that men “are curious about what I have to say, and fascinated by the fact that I’m a ‘European,’ which in their minds guarantees some mysterious and profounder knowledge” (Hoffman, 179) yet which excludes Hoffman’s unique identity. As Hoffman and her Texan become more familiar to each other their differently created identities continue to generate a barrier through which they cannot connect on an intimate level:

We learn to read each other as one learns to decipher hieroglyphs. But we never meet in that quick flash of recognition, the intuitive click which comes from knowing the play and surfaces of each other’s personalities... He is just himself, this specific form of strangeness. He becomes familiar, only increasing the wonderment that the familiar should be so unfamiliar, the close so far away (Hoffman, 190).

These same factors influence her marriage, which crumbles in part because Hoffman created her self by merging two cultural identities into one. Hoffman turns again to language to denote the gulf of culture that separates her from men, writing in her narrative, “we don’t speak exactly the same language” (Hoffman, 190). Through this gulf of culture, language, and experience Hoffman reveals to the reader that the two cultural parts of her identity remain equally strong and that both need satisfaction to produce a lasting marriage. The only suitable partner seems to be one that also

emigrates from Poland to America and keeps both cultural identities alive within himself.

Family Dynamics:

“There is only the tiny cluster, the four of us” (Hoffman, 145)

Hoffman’s family’s immigration serves the dual role of both bringing her family closer together and tearing them apart. Because they left all extended family, friends, and familiarity in Poland, they remain each other’s only support. Hoffman writes that she wants to “defend our dignity because it is so fragile, so beleaguered. There is only the tiny cluster, the four of us, to know, to preserve whatever fund of human experience we may represent” (Hoffman, 145). Hoffman’s personal narrative is in part her attempt to acknowledge and preserve her family’s experiences. Defending and supporting each other brings this family closer, especially in the initial stages of immigration when they truly have only each other.

Living in another country also increases the distance between parents and children by adding cultural differences to those of age and time. Hoffman’s parents see their two daughters dealing with situations they never experienced and don’t know how to react to. At the same time, their own experiences no longer fit as a proper example for their children. Hoffman’s mother tells her daughters: “In Poland, I would have known how to bring you up, I would have known what to do” (Hoffman, 145). Hoffman states that her mother doesn’t know how to adapt to the changes of rules, people, situations, and surroundings in Canada and “has lost her sureness, her authority” (Hoffman, 145). This lack of authority results in less communication as Hoffman and her sister’s lives diverge from those of their parents. Furthermore, tensions ensue as Hoffman merges into the American lifestyle and inadvertently leaves some Polish traditions and ways of life behind her. In these situations her parents are caught between happiness at their child’s successful assimilation into a new life, and sadness at the absence of valued characteristics.

Language once again plays a vital role in Hoffman's relationship to her family. In her attempt to learn the English language and live successfully within it she acquires mannerisms of speaking different then those of her parents. Zaborowska states that:

[Hoffman] feels trapped by "cultural differences" when her mother accuses her of becoming "English," of taking on the mannerisms of restraint that coincide with speaking the new language and that separate Eva from the "storming of emotion" prevailing in her family. She is thus trapped between trying to sound good to her peers and alienating herself linguistically from her parents (Zaborowska, 241).

Therefore although the alienation from others bonds Hoffman's family, linguistically they travel farther and farther away as the children learn English fluently and the parents continue to retain their accents and the mannerisms of speech they learned in their native country. In her world of language, Hoffman's ability to linguistically jump between cultures keeps the connection between her family alive.

IMMIGRATION AS A GEOGRAPHICAL PLACE

Being 'an immigrant' is considered a sort of location in itself" (Hoffman, 133)

Through her immigration Hoffman's sense of place becomes distorted; she at once belongs in two continents and in neither. Hoffman's loss of location in a literal geographical sense and within language result from this distorted placement. While on a train heading for her home in Canada, Hoffman parallels her movement to "scissors cutting a three-thousand-mile rip through my life. From now on, my life will be divided into two parts, with the line drawn by that train" (Hoffman, 100). After moving first from Poland to Canada, and then to different parts of the United she feels "as disoriented as a homing pigeon that has been blindfolded and turned around too many times, and now doesn't know the direction of home" (Hoffman, 201). Through her journeys within language as well as her stability of music and her Jewish heritage Hoffman must create a sense of location for the identity that she develops.

Hoffman creates this stable location through her movement inward, her journey into the interior of herself. Written in her personal narrative, this inner journey marks each phase of her immigration and labels the act of immigration into a home. Her personal narrative then becomes another location because it acts as the physical container for her linguistic ideas, housing her written self. Zaborowska states that Hoffman's narrative "create[s] a perpetual present, a fiction in which time does not move and the past is continuously being relived within the present" (Zaborowska, 237). This intertwining of the past and present in Hoffman's personal narrative mirror her own ability to move between the tenses of her languages and cultures, allowing the narrative to act as a body for her language. In Hoffman's words, immigration "is considered a sort of location in itself" (Hoffman, 133). By labeling the act of movement into a location, and then housing the movement within her narrative, Hoffman takes

the positive aspects of location, language, relationships, and identity and inserts “the self into the space of borderless possibility” (Hoffman, 219).

Furthermore, Hoffman’s immigration increases her awareness of social and cultural boundaries. Besemeres observes that Hoffman insists “any language implies a cultural universe, whose contours remain invisible as long as they are shared but which become unmistakable upon collision with another such world, another language” (Besemeres, 331). Hoffman’s ability to see the contours of different cultures allows her to find a space between them, communicate with both, and create a self out of their combination.

Hoffman writes, “within the limits of my abilities and ambitions, I can go anywhere at all, and be accepted there. The only joke is that there’s no there there” (Hoffman, 196). This statement illustrates her ability to accept America as a real geographical community, not as a metaphor for idealistic dreams of golden streets and complete equality. Hoffman accepts the immigrant dream as a dream -- not reality. She cannot escape the geographic knowledge that her immigration gave her, just as she cannot escape the location of her bicultural self.

This knowledge presents no problems for Hoffman because she doesn’t need to escape. Instead, she finds a location within herself and within moving and changing and no longer needs a “there.” She can fit in anywhere because she fits into her identity, fits into her body, and can describe her self and her journey to this location in her personal narrative. With an identity based on change and movement she will more easily adjust not only to new geographical locations, but also to new locations within her self because she already found her home. Hoffman best describes this journey by saying:

Its only after I’ve taken in disparate bits of cultural matter, after I’ve accepted its seductions and its snares, that I can make my way through the medium of

language to distill me own meanings; and it's only coming from the ground up that I can hit the tenor of my own sensibility, hit home (Hoffman, 276).

This paragraph links Hoffman's idea of culture to her "medium of language," her journey through personal narrative to retrace her steps of immigration, and the music, or "tenor" that Hoffman linked to language to create a home for her written self. Only Hoffman's words are left, but these words breathe the music of culture, change, and movement that created Hoffman's identity.

CONCLUSION

Through her personal narrative, Hoffman relates the loss of her identity within language and the construction of a written self that allows her to live within two cultures. The reader follows Hoffman through several important methods of constructing her identity. She begins by breaking the strict laws of language she held as a child, interpreting her surroundings through both Polish and English. She also communicates to herself through the stability of music and her Jewish heritage. The communication then evolves to include Polish and English languages, resulting in a dual perspective that connects her to two cultures. This dual perspective permits a journey to the core of her identity. During this journey, she explores the values of her past and present, deciding which she wants to incorporate into who she is. Her eventual decision to incorporate both Polish and American values influences her thoughts and actions: the personal narrative that she writes in English contains the Polish idea of *polot*, her definition of womanhood holds aspects of Polish and American culture, her interior conversations develop discrete Polish and English voices. These examples illustrate that Hoffman belongs to two distinctly different worlds, travels between them, and controls what she incorporates into her self. Furthermore, Hoffman's identity surpasses a mere mixing of cultures because she combines different aspects of her identity while keeping them individual. For example, Polish words are present in Hoffman's narrative and her Polish accent remains even after fluency in English.¹¹

Because the process of immigration remains active in the United States, many obstacles Hoffman overcomes apply to other people. Although immigrants may come

¹¹ My mother saw Hoffman speak and thought her accent was more pronounced than that of others who immigrated at about age thirteen. Perhaps Hoffman keeps her accent to keep her Polish self alive.

from different countries at different times, they share common experiences such as learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, and interacting with different people. By reading Lost in Translation immigrants can see similarities between their different experiences, and perhaps even understand their own immigration at a deeper level. Hoffman's narrative brought back many memories of my own journeys, while her analysis forced a re-evaluation of my past and my journeys.

Moreover, Americans can better understand older generations' struggles of immigration by reading this narrative. In this way, every analysis of immigrant writing increases our knowledge of what it means to be an immigrant in the United States. By generating a more complete understanding between residents and aliens, immigrant writing bridges the gap between these groups. For example, Hoffman's feelings often coincide with the experiences of an adolescent American:

I share with my American generation an acute sense of dislocation and the equally acute challenge of having to invent a place and an identity for myself without the traditional supports. It could be said that the generation I belong to has been characterized by its prolonged refusal to assimilate – and it is in my very uprootedness that I'm its member (Hoffman, 197).

Therefore Hoffman fits into society because her immigration results in similar emotions and obstacles in identity formation to the American public. Zaborowska elaborates on the similarity between the immigrant and the native by proposing that all people are “a crowd of foreigners desiring communication, trying desperately to express their otherness privately and publicly” (Zaborowska, 226). Lost in Translation then relates to the public not only as a narrative of an immigrant, but also as the story of one woman's quest to communicate her identity to herself and to others.

Works Consulted

- Baranczak, Stanislaw. Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Besemeres, Mary. "Language and Self in Cross-Cultural Autobiography: Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*." Canadian Slavonic Papers Vol. XL (Sept.-Dec. 1998): 327-344.
- Boelhower, William. "The Brave New World of Immigrant Autobiography." MELUS 9 (Summer 1982): 5-24.
- Cuddy, R., ed. Contemporary American Immigration Interpretive Essays. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.
- Fjellestad, Danuta. "The Insertion of the Self into the Space of the Borderless Possibility: Eva Hoffman's Exiled Body." MELUS 20 (Summer 1995): 133-140.
- Heydenkorn, Benedykt, ed. A Community in Transition: The Polish Group in Canada. Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1985.
- Hoffman, Eva. Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1989.
- Holte, James. "The Representative Voice: Autobiography and the Ethnic Experience." MELUS 9 (Summer 1982): 25-46.
- Jacobson, Matthew. Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States. London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Kott, Jan. Four Decades of Polish Essays. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990.
- Knippling, A. New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Literary Heritage. London: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Mehta, Purnima. "The Emergence, Conflicts and Integration of the Bi-Cultural Self: Psychoanalysis of an Adolescent Daughter of South Asian Immigrant Parents." South Asian Liaison Committee. Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute, Troy. 20 Dec. 1997.
- Moscinski, Sharon. Tracing Our Polish Roots. Santa Fe: John Muir Publications, 1994.
- Neidle, Cecyle, ed. The Immigrant Heritage of America Series. Boston: Twayne Publishes, 1982.

- Polzin, Theresita. The Polish Americans: Whence and Whither. Pulaski: Franciscan Publishers, 1973.
- Proefriedt, William. "The Education of Eva Hoffman." The Journal of Ethnic Studies (18:4): 123-134.
- Pula, James. Polish Americans: An Ethnic Community. London: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
- Radecki, Henry. Ethnic Organizational Dynamics: The Polish Group in Canada. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979.
- Ramet, Sabrina. Eastern Europe Politics, Culture, and Society Since 1939. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Renkiewicz, ed. The Poles in America 1608-1972: A Chronology & Fact Book. New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1973.
- Rodriguez, Gregory. "A Look at ... Assimilation; It Only Takes a Generation or Three." Washington Post 4 July 1999: B03.
- Sienkiewicz, Henryk. After Bread. New York, 1897.
- Tiefenthaler, Sepp. "The Search for Cultural Identity: Jewish-American Immigrant Autobiographies as Agents of Ethnicity." MELUS 20 (Winter 1985): 37-52.
- Vecoli et al., eds. Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America. New York: Gale Research Inc., 1995.
- Wankowicz, Melchior. Polacy i Ameryka. Great Britain: Montgomeryshire Printing CO., LTD., Newton, Mont., n.d.
- Wytrawal, Joseph. America's Polish Heritage. Detroit: Gerald J. Rickard, 1961.
- Wytrwal, Joseph. Behold! The Polish-Americans. Detroit: Endurance Press, 1977.
- Yeziarska, Anzia. How I Found America. New York: Persea Books, 1985.
- Zaborowska, Magdalena. How We Found America: Reading Gender Through East European Immigrant Narratives. United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995.