

# Representing and (De)Constructing Borderlands



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Edited by

Grzegorz Moroz and Jacek Partyka

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## INTRODUCTION

GRZEGORZ MOROZ AND JACEK PARTYKA

The present volume of papers in cultural and literary studies has been prepared on the assumption that broadly-understood borderlands (as well as peripheries, provinces or uttermost ends of different kinds) are abodes of significant culture-generating forces. From the academic point of view, their undeniable appeal lies in the fact that they constitute spaces of mutual interactions and enable new cultural phenomena to surface, grow or decline, which is worth thorough and constant scrutiny. However, they also provide the setting for radical clashes between ideologies, languages, religions, customs and, as we sadly learn from the media every single day, armies or guerrilla units. Living within such areas of creative dynamics and destructive friction (or visiting them, even vicariously as the contributors to the volume do) is tantamount to exposing oneself to a *difference*. Our response to this *difference* – either in the form of rejection or, more preferably, acceptance (or a mixture of both, i.e. reserve) – is not merely an index of our tolerance (a platitudinised term itself that all too often hides an attitude of comfortable indifference), but an affirmation of our humaneness. Borderlands are paradoxical, if not aporetic, *loci*. They simultaneously connote territories on either side of a border (in a literal sense) and a vague intermediate state or region (in a metaphorical sense). Encapsulating the idea of *border*, the term indicates both inescapable *nearness* and unavoidable (or perhaps unbridgeable) *separateness*. Its semantic load, then, offers two distinct, apparently mutually exclusive, *ideas*. This contradiction ceases to be a logical “snag” only when we resort to the strategy of *double focus*, i.e. when we accept the aporetic core in our definition of borderlands as a precondition for our being able to define them at all. In brief, thinking in the spirit of borderlands does not allow for forgetting about the enrichments they offer and the conflicts they provoke; on the contrary, all these always exist as potentialities, especially in regions where arbitrarily drawn state borders divide ethnic communities.

Some of the articles included in the volume were originally delivered as papers at the International Conference *Representing, (De)Constructing and Translating Borderlands*, organized by the Faculty of Philology at the

University of Białystok, Poland, together with the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Warsaw University, Poland, and the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, Poland, in May 2014. The conference venue, Krasnogruda, a small village situated close to the Polish-Lithuanian border, is in all probability one of the most suitable sites in Poland for organizing an academic event dedicated to discussing the problems of borderlands. All the conference lectures, debates, sessions and meetings took place in the Manor House, a complex of old buildings that used to belong to relatives of the notable Polish poet Czesław Miłosz<sup>1</sup> (1911-2004), and which are now the home of the International Centre for Dialogue, an important ongoing educational project initiated by Krzysztof Czyżewski, a Polish essayist, social activist and laureate of the Dan David Prize in 2014. Both institutions with which Czyżewski is engaged, i.e. the Borderland Foundation and the Centre for Dialogue, keep emphasizing yet another feature of borderlands, namely that they are *loci* in which the past and the present (history and memory) cannot be separated – a fresh and most adequate *spatial-temporal* definition of the key term. Setting up a museum collecting the multicultural (Polish, Lithuanian, Russian and Jewish) heritage of Sejny, creating a documentation centre of borderland cultures, publishing borderland literature, and organizing concerts and soirees, etc. are all initiatives that aim to remodel our thinking about what *was* and what *is*.

Albeit unofficially, Czesław Miłosz became the spiritual patron of our conference and its subsequent publishing undertaking. Born into a Polish family living in Szetejnie (Šateiniai), a small town in rural Lithuania, at the time part of the Russian Empire, the future author of *Rescue* (1945), *City Without a Name* (1969) and *In Search of a Homeland* (1992) was exposed to a kaleidoscope of multi-ethnicity from the earliest days of his childhood. Later, as a man of letters living in exile in France and the USA, Miłosz would stress the borderland dimension of his national identity and, somewhat provocatively, consider himself the last citizen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (a European state existing from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until 1795), an assertion which did not endear him to the right wing part of Polish society. His East European experience was recorded in a 1955 fictionalized autobiography, *The Issa Valley*, a collection of autobiographical essays, *Native Realm* (1959), and was much later

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<sup>1</sup> The use of diacritical marks in the spelling of the poet's name and surname differs throughout the present volume: the Polish 'Czesław Miłosz' in the Introduction, and 'Czeslaw Milosz', as it is spelled on the covers of English language editions of his books and in English academic discourse, in the chapters that follow.



reconsidered in his late volumes of poetry (e.g. *Chronicles*, 1989; *Further Surroundings*, 1991; *Facing the River*, 1994). Two years before his death, in 2002, Miłosz, along with three other legal inheritors of Krasnogruda properties, entrusted the dilapidated Manor House with the surrounding park to the Borderland Foundation. After substantial renovation the house became the site of a cultural and educational centre.

The conference held in Krasnogruda was honoured by the presence of two special guests: Ruth Padel, an award-winning British poet, novelist and essayist, the author of *The Mara Crossing* (2012), and more recently *Learning to Make an Oud in Nazareth* (2014); and Eva Hoffman, a Polish American writer and university lecturer living in London, the author of *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989), and *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004). The conference organizers openly admit that while looking for the conference's main idea, they were directly inspired by Hoffman's widely regarded *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997). Granted, something like a Polish-Jewish borderland *per se* has never existed. Nevertheless, as we have already noted, the term is a most problematic one, reaching as it does far beyond geographical and/or political considerations. Until World War II Polish Jews lived either in shtetls, delimited town or city districts, or became partly or fully assimilated members of local communities. *Shtetl*, written by the daughter of Holocaust survivors, is a brief but thoroughly researched outline of uneasy Polish-Jewish borderland co-existence and, in a larger part, is a gripping case study of the development and disappearance of the Jewish community in Bransk, a little town near the pre-war borders with the Soviet Union and Lithuania. Delivered at Krasnogruda's International Centre for Dialogue, Hoffman's restrained and subtle musings on the predicaments of living in exile (her own experience, too), which opened the conference proceedings, and Padel's outstandingly energetic paper on wildlife migrations (regrettably not included in the volume), which concluded the whole event – both topics being distinctly peripheral to the conference's main problem – were, in fact, examples of impressive academic *tours de force*, the memory of which will surely remain for a long time with all the conference participants.

The studies included in the volume focus on various aspects of borderland art and literature, on analyses of selected works and, last but not least, on the peculiarities of cultural and literary representations. Thus, the borderland landscape (both literal and metaphorical) comes to be seen as a factor contributing to the emergence of new, distinct and identifiable themes and motifs, as well as theoretical frameworks. The volume has

been divided into fifteen chapters, each of which throws some new light on the problem under consideration. In a short meditation that opens the book, **Eva Hoffman** returns to her personal history and ponders the drawbacks and assets of radical dislocation into a new culture, calling herself “inescapably hybrid” (“Out of Exile: Some Thoughts on Exile as a Dynamic Condition”). As if directly responding to this claim, **Urszula Zaliwska-Okrutna** interprets Eva Hoffman’s fiction and non-fiction prose from the standpoint of varying perspectives (cultural, linguistic, national, and historical) so as to present the reader with her own analysis of the writer’s struggle to work out a new identity in a new language (“Eva Hoffman’s Borderlands: A Personal Account”). **Annette Aronowicz** focuses her main point on, and takes issue with, *The Land of Ulro*, an extensive eschatological essay, in which Czesław Miłosz, following in the footsteps of Swedenborg, Blake, and his own relative Oscar Miłosz, famously put forward the necessity of rejecting the hegemony of modern science (“The Imagination Between Centre and Periphery in Miłosz’s *Land of Ulro*”). **Tomasz Markiewka** takes the reader to Silesia – a borderland region along the Odra river, a place that is now located mostly in Poland, with small parts in the Czech Republic and Germany – which was, as the author convincingly argues, subjected to deplorable homogenizing efforts by Polish Communist authorities in the wake of World War II (“Re-voicing Silesia: Comparative Literature and (Re)Constructing of the Silenced Land”). Dedicated to the history of the same area, **Aleksandra Kunce** reconsiders the Silesian past through the mediation of concrete, material objects that trigger the workings of individual and cultural memory (“Living on the Border: The Silesian History of Place and Things”). In his strongly polemical text, **Grzegorz Moroz** undermines the validity of Ryszard Kapuściński’s somewhat over-idealized representation of Pińsk, his home town in Eastern Poland. More importantly, he presents the author of *Travels with Herodotus* as one who resorted to the concept of borderlands to promote his own narrative *persona* – a born interpreter of cultures, particularly suitable to do the job because of his childhood experience in multicultural Pińsk (“Borderlands as Intercultural Arcadias in Ryszard Kapuściński’s Travel Books”). Making use of postcolonial theory, **Ewangelina Skalińska** retrieves from obscurity the *oeuvre* of Olga Dauksza, a Polish poet of Latvian descent, and offers a thorough interpretation of her verse dedicated to Inflanty (Livonia), borderlands with strong Polish and Lithuanian historical connections (“Olga Dauksza and the Borderlands of Polish Livonia”). The short sequence of papers on Polish borderlands ends with **Viviana Nosilia**’s analysis of literature about Gdańsk (largely Paweł Huelle’s and

Stefan Chwin's fiction), with a strong emphasis put on the importance of its humorous elements and underpinning irony ("Gdańsk/Danzing, Borderlands and Humour in Contemporary Polish Fiction"). Choosing a different geographical and literary context, **Barbara Klonowska** demonstrates that Lawrence Norfolk's 1996 historical novel refers to borderlands in at least two ways: firstly, while representing 16<sup>th</sup>-century Rome, it strangely shifts its focus of attention from the centre of Christianity to the distant fringes of Europe, e.g. the Baltic sea; secondly, in purely formal terms, the text, as is aptly shown, transgresses the borders of the historical novel as a genre ("Reconfiguring the Borderlands of Civilisation, Romance and History: Lawrence Norfolk's *The Pope's Rhinoceros*"). Favouring the same British literary frame of reference, **Katarzyna Więckowska** regards Ian Banks's two "border" novels, one of them published in the aftermath of the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum, which attempt to radically revalue and/or problematize traditional notions of personal and national identity in the context of contemporary Scotland ("Other Borders: Nation, Gender and Genre in Ian Banks's *The Wasp Factory* and *Dead Air* "). Concentrating on the situation across the Atlantic, **Anna Maszewska**'s article draws upon Pat Mora's distinction between a Chicana poet and a *curandera* (an "indigenous healer") to get an insight into the contemporary borderlands between Mexico and the USA. In particular, her interpretive efforts aim to clarify the plight of Chicana women, who are disadvantaged both by the traditional Chicano culture and the American mainstream ("Pat Mora's Poem "1910": Crossing Borders with the *Curandera*"). Touching upon the Kurdish issue in Turkey, **Aysun Kiran** examines the political ramifications of multiculturalism in Yeşim Ustaoglu's and Özcan Alper's films (mainly translation strategies, such as subtitling or no-translation), paying special attention to those aspects of the problem that are often belittled or silenced by state propaganda ("Rendering Visible or Blurring the Boundaries: Presence or Absence of Subtitles in the Multilingual Post-1990s Films of Turkey"). Assuming the framework of a historical account and drawing upon the representation of history in Edwidge Danticat's fiction, **Anna Maria Karczewska** retells the origin and the progression of the Parsley Massacre, a carnage of thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic in 1937, a significant part of which occurred in the borderland territory along what is now known as the Massacre River ("The Parsley Massacre: Genocide on the Borderlands of Hispaniola in *The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat"). Multiplying its critical perspectives, **Malgorzata Poks**'s article investigates the phenomenon of so-called cargo cults – millenarian movements and prophetic rituals

practiced in the South Sea – as represented in the poetry of Thomas Merton. In the course of her analysis the cults come to be perceived as peculiar forms of contact, enabling the Occident and the Orient to meet and reflect one upon another (“Borderlands of Cultures, Borderlands of Discourse: Cargo Cults and Their Reflection in Thomas Merton’s Poetry”). Finally, the theoretical study by **Patrick Suter** and **Corinne Fournier Kiss** meticulously explores the semantic richness of the key terms of reference for all the articles included in the volume, providing a useful, illuminating typology and hinting at the non-obvious character of certain concepts, concluding one book and, it is to be hoped, inspiring the publication of another (“Towards a Literary Hermeneutics of the Borders and the Borderlands”).

# OUT OF EXILE: SOME THOUGHTS ON EXILE AS A DYNAMIC CONDITION

EVA HOFFMAN

Exile is often seen as a permanent condition. “An exiled writer” tends to be always and forever identified as an exiled writer. An immigrant remains an immigrant. Sometimes, the writer too gives in to this conception. “Exiled” is a strong marker of identity, a handy and rather sexy sobriquet. But to keep it forever as part of one’s self-image surely involves a kind of mis-description, or at least over-simplification. The upheaval of exile is undoubtedly dramatic, and often traumatic; but one’s relationship to it does not remain static, any more than any other aspects of identity or existential condition are static in the *longue durée*.

My own immigrant trajectory has, by now, encompassed several chapters. When I was not quite 14, my family emigrated from Poland to Canada; a few years later, I left for the US to study, and stayed in that country for much of my adult life. Then, about fourteen years ago, I came from New York to London, in what I thought of as a kind of halfway return to Europe.

There is no doubt that that my first emigration was a deeply formative experience, on the order of other fundamental and primary events – first love, first witnessing of death, the first sensations of childhood itself. I feel myself to be shaped by the rupture of that uprooting as deeply as I do by my parents, say, or my historical background. There were lessons that followed from it which, in their wider implications, have affected much that I think and write. Basically, these have to do with the extent to which language and culture construct us; the degree to which they are not only supra-personal entities, but are encoded in our selves and psychic cells. For a while, I was in effect without language, as Polish went underground and English remained a *terra incognita*; and what that brief but radical interval brought home to me was how much our perceptions and understanding, as well as our sense of presence and even life – aliveness – depend on having a living speech within us. When we don’t have words

with which to name our inner experiences, those experiences recede from us into an inner darkness; without words with which to name the world, that world becomes less vivid, less lucid. On the other hand, the ability to name things precisely, to bring experience to the point of conscious articulation, gives nuance and color to our perceptions, our sense of others, and of ourselves. In a very real sense, language constitutes our psychic home. As with language, so with culture: What that first period of radical dislocation brought home to me was how much we are creatures of culture (or at least have been so through much of history), and how much incoherence we risk if we fall out of its matrix. By "culture", of course, I do not mean only the shaped artifacts of literature or art, but the entire web-work of visible and invisible habits, of psychological codes and conceptual assumptions – a kind of symbolic system of shared meanings that structures our perceptions from early on, and that, within each culture, shapes the very shape of personality, and of sensibility.

For a long time, I was simply, and above all, an immigrant. This was how I was perceived by others, and this was how I perceived myself. I may have been progressing through the paces of the American educational system quite smartly; but although I was truly grateful for the opportunities that offered, my subjectivity stubbornly resisted being molded into new shapes. And, as long as I did not fully inhabit the new language in which I was destined to live, I was indeed in a state of psychic exile.

And yet: Translation is possible; and so is self-translation. Eventually, through some gradual and elusive alchemy, the new language begins to drop into the subjectivity, and inhabit the psyche. Aspects of one's adopted environment which were initially a cause of sharp surprise – whether tinged with skepticism, or pleasure – begin to seem perfectly ordinary. After a while, it becomes absurd to think that one is "in exile."

Where is one, instead? That question, of course, is much harder to answer. Is the counterpoint to exile defined as being "at home", or "belonging"? These too are terms awaiting fuller and deeper decoding. And "at home" where, in which frame of reference? Exile and emigration are usually thought of as political circumstances, in which one leaves a nation, or is expelled by the state. And yet, one also leaves a particular place, village, or city; a web-work of non-ideological memories and affinities. On the other end of the journey, I find the notion of "place" a good antidote to the idea of nation. It is difficult to take on a new national identity completely if part of your life, and all your longer history, has taken place elsewhere – for national identities have to do precisely with history, and its interpretations. But it is possible to develop palpable

attachments to a place where you actually live, which you come to know through your own senses and motions, and with which you develop countless ordinary, or extraordinary connections

The enigma of arrival is more difficult to analyze than the drama of departure. It is much easier to define one's position in reference to something else than by a definite location. Indeed, physicists think that in the molecular realm such a feat is impossible unless a particle is stationary; and particles – perhaps like humans – never are. The formative lessons of exile will never leave me; and my first language and cultural formation are inescapably part of my psychic storehouse. But by now, I have been formed by my subsequent cultures and experiences just as strongly. I have become inescapably hybrid, with new elements undoubtedly still to be added.

Such shifts may be difficult even to notice; but I think it's important to acknowledge them, if only to avoid the idealization of exile – its, so to speak, theoretical seductions. Historically, “exile” used to be thought of as a tragic or a pitiable condition; but recently it has been redefined as somehow interesting, morally heroic, even glamorous. The exilic position is congruent with exactly those qualities which are privileged in a certain vein of post-modern theory: marginality, alterity, the de-centered identity. On a more lived level, the situation of the outsider, while hardly easy, has its consolations, and even its comforts. It provides not only a ready-made identity, but an explanation for one's existential condition, and its discontents. For a writer, there are the considerable advantages of the oblique vantage point, a perspective from which nothing can be taken for granted, and everything is strange and new. Indeed, the position of the writer – at least the modernist writer – maps easily onto the position of the outsider, and some writers have famously chosen exile, precisely for the bonus of that sharp angle of vision, the bracing coolness of distance and de-familiarization.

For a while, exile can be a wonderful stimulus to perception and imagination. It can also be an existential challenge and a moral task. But I have come to think that if the “exilic position” is maintained for too long, it can become not fertile, but arid; not a prod to creativity, but an instrument of fixity. The Israeli writer, A. B. Yehoshua (1986, 15-35), indicated some of the dangers in the title of an essay, “Exile as a Neurotic Solution.” In that essay, he speaks of the collective temptations, for a group (in his example, the Jews in their long Diaspora) to remain displaced, and marginal to the society at large. Such a location allows you to look back, or forward, with longing, towards an ideal home; but it leaves you free to be un-implicated in the mundane problems and conflicts

of the place where you actually live. On the individual level, too, the posture of detachment can turn into a kind of willful separatism; the energy of critical distance into a mannerism. The habit of dividing the world into “before” and “after” can render one oblivious to the changing realities both in the country one has left behind, and in the world of the present.

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The very possibility of writing in exile and observing one culture from the perspective of another – indeed, the very processes of translation and self-translation – are enabled by the underlying elements of commonality among diverse cultures; a kind of common palette of human perception and experience. Cross-cultural contacts, or literary exchange, would be impossible without such underlying similarities, or foundational universals, which enable us to attempt to understand each other, despite and across the tensions and the interest of cultural difference. And eventually, I think, every writer wants to – or needs to, if the imagination is to be kept alive – address such underlying existential or ethical questions, or to confront the broader realities of the human world, no matter how much they are inflected by particular locations, or languages, or cultures. Indeed, one way to arrive at this stratum of character, or perception, or the human situation, has always been through a full and deep exploration of the particular. Witness, for example, the work of Czeslaw Milosz, which, through sending deep probes into particular landscapes and memories, converted his localities into a universal vocabulary.

The social realities of our world, in the meantime, and the conditions of cross-cultural movement, have been changing so radically as to transform the very meanings of exile and of home. Since my own, Cold War emigration, and the “strong” forms of exile generated by the geopolitics of that period, the Iron Curtain has lifted, the Berlin Wall has fallen, borders within Europe have opened up, and differences between East and West are blurring very fast. I think it can be safely said that (barring some unforeseen developments) the era of European exile is over. Not so in other parts of the world. There are countries which eject their citizens forcibly, or make it impossible for them to stay. There are still refugees streaming from various parts of the world in the forlorn hope of finding safer or better places, and people fleeing their countries of origin for fear of their lives. I do not mean for a moment to underestimate the hardships of such circumstances. But even in such extreme situations



the changing nature of our world is changing the character of cross-national movement. Even when people emigrate ostensibly for good, they usually know that they can eventually go back, that friends can visit, that they can avail themselves of all the means of contemporary travel and communication. At the same time, the sheer amount of cross-cultural movement has been increasing exponentially. Migration, dislocation, various kinds of nomadism are becoming the norm rather than an exception. It sometimes seems that it is lives rooted in one place and in a sort of narrative continuity which are becoming the interesting aberration. But the extreme mobility which characterizes our world relativizes even the most stable identities. Even if we stay in one place, we know how easy it is to leave. Even if we live in countries with long histories and traditions, we are inescapably aware of the world's multiplicity; and in most cases, the heterogeneity of our own cultures. We know we are not the only centers of legitimacy. There are certain words which used to be a routine part of our vocabulary, and which no longer seem to apply. "Native country", "foreigner", "alien": None of these sit easily with our perceptions, or slip naturally off the tongue. The strong contrasts between home and elsewhere, the native and the stranger, have given way to something less polarized and more fluid. In a sense, everyone's subjectivity is becoming hybrid. And, whatever I have become, I can no longer think of myself as the Other – the outsider to some putative insider. But then, in the new fast-changing circumstances, these positions themselves are increasingly mobile. Yesterday's outsiders are today's insiders – and sometimes, vice versa.

We are living in a perpetually mobile, nomadic, and intermingled world. We also live in an increasingly globalized culture – the matrix of digital technologies, Facebook, Twitter, and 24/7 whole-world news. It seems quite possible that such a world will create a more mobile personality – less rooted in a particular place, history, or tradition, but also more flexible and playful. It is possible that the shaping force of distinct national cultures itself will lessen, and that the very intensities of feeling experienced by the Cold War emigrants on being prized out of their original culture may come to seem quite strange. The younger generation of immigrants and voluntary nomads is likely to tell us to lighten up.

How do these changes affect the literary imagination? It certainly seems to me that the changing topography of the world profoundly alters our consciousness of the world. The task, for a certain kind of writer, is precisely to catch these deeper shifts – to imagine the present, so to speak, in all its flux and unfamiliar strangeness. How to grasp it, articulate it, narrate it? What forms are sufficient to the distinctly non-linear

circumstances which increasingly define us? Certainly, the writing coming out of various diasporas, and cross-cultural lives, has moved from the literary margins to center-stage. What styles, or stories, or genres will be invented to describe a world which is no longer divided between peripheries and centers, but in which movement is multi-directional and no center privileged; in which the individual self is shaped less by history or culture than by other factors entirely; in which the very idea of the “cultivated”, stable self may be losing its significance and hold; in short, what kind of literature we need to represent our fast-changing present and rapidly approaching future, and interpret these for ourselves and others remains to be seen. But one thing which seems clear is that in our current, globalized conditions, a global – or a world – literature is not only possible; it is, surely, both necessary and inevitable.

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# EVA HOFFMAN'S BORDERLANDS: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

URSZULA ZALIWSKA-OKRUTNA

## **Eva Hoffman's Borderlands: Justification**

The usual understanding of “borderlands” as areas or spaces near the border is of a geographical nature. First, a certain dividing line is indicated and differences implied; secondly, lands close to each other are presupposed, with their distinct similarities or affinities resulting from this closeness. The obviously geographical nature of the borderlands may, and usually does imply, however, differences, similarities and affinities related to culture and language, particularly interesting for a recipient trained in linguistics, psychology, or culture-related studies. If the recipient has ever experienced being exposed to different cultures and different languages, he/she will be able to truly appreciate the way in which Eva Hoffman has expressed her feelings on becoming a bilingual speaker and functioning as one (Hoffman 1998). The texts by Eva Hoffman that may be taken as referring to “borderland identity” are, however, more numerous than a single publication. In the first of her two novels the dilemmas of a person striving to define her origin are explored (Hoffman 2003). In the second one the lives, life purposes and passions of representatives of different cultures are confronted and opposed (Hoffman 2009). The individual fates assume a more global character in the books about common Polish-Jewish history and relationships, and about the experience of 'the second generation' of Holocaust survivors (Hoffman 1997, 2004). In this context *Time* (Hoffman 2011) may appear the least personal and the most popular scientific piece of Eva Hoffman's prose. It reviews time and sleep patterns, individual for each species, metabolism, longevity, mortality, and changes in the modern, Western perception of time. It is relevant, however, for the identity-correspondent questions since it depicts consciousness of time as a characteristic feature of human identity, and it is personal in terms of being written by a mature and inquisitive researcher, conscious of cultural differences in time perception, as well as of experience- and age-related

attitudes to time. The last book on the list (Hoffman 1993) deals with Poland and other countries of 'the Eastern bloc' after the events of 1989, and shows how 'witnessing history in the making' may be different from its perception at a distance in time. One may interpret this as evidence of 'borderlands' formed as a result of experience and learning – moving to different 'lands' of understanding within the same area of influences.

A more detailed discussion of Eva Hoffman's borderlands will follow the order above – thematic rather than chronological – to facilitate the discussion and borderlands' identification.

### **Biological, Linguistic and Socio-Cultural Borderlands**

The thrill accompanying the first reading of *Lost in Translation* (Hoffman 1998) is still quite vivid in my memory. Its source was probably the comforting discovery that I was not alone in my feelings of alienation when trying to speak, but not yet think, in a foreign language, and my then unverballed belief that communicating successfully in a foreign language requires a great deal more intricate knowledge than the knowledge of a foreign language system and culture. Equally vivid is my memory that the language and culture-related parts of the book, "Exile" and "The New World", appeared far more exciting than the Polish-based "Paradise", about the post-war years in Poland, known to me from the recollections of my family members and, in due course, my own experience. Only from the perspective of a domiciliated 'new reality', tentatively compared to the view from across the ocean, may the post-war order in Poland, as well as the familiar daily routines of the past, have assumed for Eva Hoffman an air of attraction and allowed for unveiling the complicated and confusing modes of functioning in the then Poland. Listening to Radio Free Europe in search of a true interpretation of events, distrusting officials and authorities, reconciling the official versions of Polish history with the unofficial ones, simulating teaching and learning Russian in Polish schools may have all contributed to a faux aspect of life in Poland. The true aspect of life was realized in the family and among friends, through reading, socializing, and attending music lessons and concerts. The arduous task of accommodating both the false and the true in the yesteryears in Poland was, in the case of Eva Hoffman, even more demanding because of her Jewishness, feeling native and alien at the same time, the consequences of which are revealed in the following excerpt:

No, I am no patriot, nor was I ever allowed to be. And yet, the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love. It lives within me despite my knowledge of our marginality, and its primitive,

unpretty emotions. Is it blind and self-deceptive of me to hold on to its memory? I think it would be blind and self-deceptive not to. All it has given me is the world, but that is enough. It has fed me language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind. (Hoffman 1998, 74)

At the age of thirteen Eva Hofmann became an émigré in Canada. The exile began. The borders delineating identities assumed new qualities. One of the first changes to be accepted was the change of her name. Two days after their arrival Eva and her sister landed in an English class for foreigners and were given English names: “Ewa” was changed into “Eva” and “Alina” into the close enough “Elaine”:

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, disembodied 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 1998, 105)

With names that made the sisters 'strangers to themselves', a part of their identity was taken away and substituted in a way intended to help them accommodate to the new environment, to facilitate assimilation. But assimilation is not only about labels – it is about what the labels label: envy, happiness, kindness, femininity, and the recognition that full assimilation comes with being able to “read” those labels properly, otherwise language functioning could be frustrating and disheartening; at one point Eva Hoffman (1998, 108) admits: "I'm not filled with language anymore, and I have only a memory of fullness to anguish me with the knowledge that, in this dark and empty state, I don't really exist." Assimilation also involves knowing language registers, speaking with a proper accent, accepting the foreign sense of humour. Finally, it is about finding one's place in the new society – locating oneself in the complicated structure of strata defined on the basis of unfamiliar rules and dependencies, learning to function among people with different modes of thinking and behaviour to those so far acquired, to the extent allowed by one's age and adaptability, and trying to convince oneself that one's life has “changed for the better” in spite of the obvious signs of being declassed. The burden of losses might have been, in the opinion of the young and ambitious Eva, at least in some measure relieved by concentrating on “internal goods”, that is “perfecting” herself – physically, intellectually, spiritually, and creatively – and having different, more

audacious aspirations from those of the immigrant women of her parents' generation:

From the perspective outside, everything inside looks equally impenetrable, from below everything above equally forbidding. [...] As a radically marginal person, you have two choices: to be intimidated by every situation, every social stratum, or to confront all of them with the same leveling vision, the same brash and stubborn spunk. (Hoffman 1998, 157)

There can be no doubt which of the possibilities Eva favours upon entering the New World, with Rice University in Houston, Texas, at its threshold. The university's "social landscape", uniform and homogeneous at first glance, proves a mosaic of ideologies, planned futures, and manners, and thus, again – a challenge to understand; the intellectual landscape, however, is conducive to building Eva's self-esteem:

Much of what I read is lost on me, lost in the wash and surf of inexactly understood words. And yet, chagrined though I am by this, I soon find that I can do very well in my courses. I believe this happens not only despite but also because of my handicap: because I have so little language. Like any disability, this one has produced its own compensatory mechanisms, and my mind, relatively deprived of words, has become a deft instrument of abstraction. (Hoffman 1998, 180)

Eva Hoffman's self-esteem and belief in herself peak with further achievements: studies at the Yale School of Music and a Ph.D. in literature from Harvard, her career as a professor of literature, and then as a writer and editor. Language, its contents and sound, play such an important role in Eva Hoffman's (1998, 219) life that she admits: "When I fall in love, I am seduced by language. When I get married I am seduced by language." One can hypothesize that marriage ends in divorce because language attraction is no longer present. Still, the question of identity lingers in the background: "In a splintered society, what does one assimilate to? Perhaps the very splintering itself." (Hoffman 1998, 197) Interactions with American friends and acquaintances pose different demands from interactions with Poles. The experience of people living a settled life can hardly be compared to the life of "children who came from the war" and lived in "several worlds", as "You can't transport human meanings whole from one culture to another any more than you can transliterate a text" (Hoffman 1998, 175). This leads to the conclusion that one is "the sum of one's languages", once the domestication of the foreign has taken place:

Perhaps I've read, written, eaten enough words so that English now flows in my bloodstream. But once this mutation takes place, once the language starts speaking itself to me from my cells, I stop being so stuck on it. Words are no longer spiky bits of hard matter, which refer only to themselves. They become, more and more, a transparent medium in which I live and which lives in me - a medium through which I can once again get to myself and to the world. (Hoffman 1998, 243)

At this point one might have concluded that Eva Hoffman's borderland dilemmas were successfully reconciled. *The Secret* (Hoffman 2003), however, makes one dubious about this. The novel is precisely about what its title suggests: a secret that a little girl senses in her family, and about her efforts to uncover its nature, in spite of how well guarded it is by her mother. There is no father in the family, but this particular child is quite aware that in 21<sup>st</sup> century Western societies there are families with no fathers around:

So many kids I knew had no daddies, or had daddies who were not real daddies, although the children tried to treat them as if they were, and to believe they were as good as the real ones would ever have been. Good-enough daddies. Almost real daddies. The nuclear family – the nuke – was dead as the dodo by the time I came along. (Hoffman 2003, 5).

However, even if the fathers belong to one of those disparate categories, the children are fully aware of who their real father was or still is. And even if one lives in times when parents who met before their children were born and who never divorced are 'rarities left over from the late twentieth century', the child with no family history of her father is singular and attracts attention. The efforts of the main character are rewarded and the truth is revealed: she is her mother's clone. The truth of discovering that one is "the product of the world's ethical expertise" is perplexing and very hard to accept, if acceptable at all, to Elizabeth-cloned Iris: "To speak in the first person is in my case a fiction. It is an act of hubris, or of strange illusion. But it seems that the illusion has to be maintained if I am to speak at all." (Hoffman 2003, 120) The "borderland" identity is this time not primarily linguistic, but biological and cognitive, combining quandaries about one's conception, origin, and one's attitude to these issues: how to understand the decision to give life in this unusual way, how to live not feeling fully human, how to treat one's relatives and accept their reservations in treating you as 'contingent and double', how to feel about your cloned brethren.

The quandaries continue, assuming different referents in *Appassionata* (Hoffman 2009), published in the United Kingdom as *Illuminations*. It is

seemingly the story of an American concert pianist, Isabel Merton, perceiving the world through music, feeling, for example, "beneath the white noise of an airplane, phrases of Schubert", or, on another occasion, having her fingers move "through a Chopin Nocturne of their own will" (Hoffman 2009, 2, 213). It is a story portraying Isabel's voyages: concerts and encounters, one of which becomes particularly important – with Anzor, an exile from Chechnya, secretly preparing an act aimed at drawing attention to his cause and at avenging his people. Isabel and Anzor are kindred spirits in that they are both driven by their passions and very much determined to achieve their goals; at the same time they are different, coming from different cultures and distant in their goals and beliefs, occasionally displayed due to divergent understanding of the social scripts of situation-appropriate conversations:

"I always thought..." Sheila [Isabel's American friend] begins, and then looks a bit desperate. "I mean, if we could just have been smarter about it... If we could just have been... well, nicer to them."

"Nicer to whom?" Anzor sounds as though he is merely asking for clarification.

"Oh, you know. Them. The Soviets. If our government didn't go around saying those stupid things about the Evil Empire. I mean, how provocative can you get? And childish."

"You wanted to be nicer to the Soviets?" Anzor asks, with a more candid incredulity. "You think that would have helped?"

"Well, you know, I study psychological dynamics," Sheila explains eagerly, "and studies definitively show – I mean, really definitively – that if you treat people as if you expected the best from them – and if you trusted them – they'll respond more trustingly. I don't see why that shouldn't apply to politicians too." (Hoffman 2009, 145-46)

The differences between the two main characters prove too big to form a lasting bond, and the relationship reaches a dramatic finale; its heroes seek solace in their native and familiar environments, but one is not discouraged by the author from venturing into the new and unknown, as "You can only know the world through yourself. But if you don't know the world outside yourself, you will have no self." (Hoffman 2009, 247).



## Social and National Borderlands

One's biological, linguistic, psychological and socio-cultural identity is axiomatically rooted in one's national and racial identity, though attitudes towards it may vary and range from the naturally accepting to the inquisitive. The inquisitive attitude is understandably displayed by those whose past is overshadowed by some dramatic events or whose links with their ancestry have been in some way severed. In the case of Polish Jewry the events were not only dramatic but tragic and inconceivably traumatic, since the Holocaust frequently resulted in the extermination of whole families and the emigration of many. In *Shtetl* (1997) ["small town" in Yiddish], exemplified by Brańsk in the north-east of Poland and mirroring, in fact, what was happening in most parts of Poland, Eva Hoffman presents Polish-Jewish relationships throughout history in an attempt to accommodate the Polish, Jewish and Western interpretations of what happened in Poland during World War II and after. The Jewish opinions are referred to in psychological terms: "Our psyches are associative: because the Holocaust happened there, because so many people were tortured and murdered on its soil, Poland became scorched earth, contaminated ground" (Hoffman 1997, 3). The dominant element of Polish memories of the Holocaust is viewed as silence, due to the political atmosphere in postwar Poland:

The amnesia was undoubtedly caused in part by the extremely disturbing nature of what needed to be remembered, by incomprehension, psychological numbing, and guilt. But the repression of memory was greatly aided and abetted by the falsifications of Communist history and by the fact that under its aegis, discussion of many politically charged issues was stifled. (Hoffman 1997, 3-4)

The "incompatibility" of these interpretations has not been resolved by the Western perspective, since "[i]n the West, knowledge of what happened in Poland was simplified to begin with, and clouded by Communist propaganda to boot" (Hoffman 1997, 4). An endeavor to resolve it on the part of an individual of Polish-Jewish origin living in the West is understandable and inspiring, particularly if motivated by "a sense of solidarity":

If we are to live together in multicultural societies, then in addition to cultivating differences, we need a sense of a shared world. This does not preclude the possibility of preserving and even nurturing strong cultural, spiritual, and ethnic identities in the private realm, nor does it suggest collapsing such identities into a universal "human nature". But if

multicultural societies are to remain societies – rather than collections of fragmented, embattled enclaves – then we need a public arena in which we can speak not only from and for our particular interests, but as members of a society, from the vantage point of common good. (Hoffman 1997, 256-57)

Apparently, however, the explanations arrived at in *Shtetl* have not been sufficient for Eva Hoffman in her search for identity. Seventeen years after the publication of *Shtetl*, the legacy of the Holocaust is presented from a different angle in *After Such Knowledge* (Hoffman 2004). The title of the book is a part of the line “After such knowledge, what forgiveness?” from “Gerontion”, a poem by T. S. Eliot. The reasons for writing the book are explained by Eva Hoffman herself: the uneasiness caused by the “manifestations, and proliferations, of the *memory cult*” and the death of her parents and other survivors, coupled with the willingness to preserve the memory of the Shoah and the willingness “to understand the significance of the Holocaust inheritance for those who come after” (Hoffman 2004, xi). This last point appears to be central to the book – the experience of “the second generation”, the “transmission of trauma”, “victimhood drunk with one's mother's milk”. The children of the Holocaust survivors may only now, as adults, talk about their parents' silence about the events from the past, about their being either too protective or too demanding and how it influenced the children's lives. Generally, Eva Hoffman remarks that it was not passing on to their offspring enough “identity”, complicated for some even more by emigration. One gets a deeper understanding of Eva Hoffman's “being lost in language” and “the secret”. The author, however, includes references to the German “second generation”, their relationships with parents and their traumas, and wonders why there is no 'second generation' in Poland. In Poland, the dividing line may not have been generational, but political and ideological, separating the supporters of the Polish political system after World War II and those who were against it; the latter could not talk about their traumas openly and freely, for example the former members of *Armia Krajowa* [Home Army], and their relatives. The “borderlands” are valid not only in the context of 'the here and the now', as some would like to convince us; the history of the family and of larger social groups cannot be ignored.

## Temporal and Historical Borderlands

“The here and now” approach to identity is definitely outbalanced by well documented evidence of the significance of other identity determinants, presented in *Time*, which, according to Eva Hoffman herself, “[...] arose out of one chronophobic's – and chonophilic's –

concern with time" (Hoffman 2011, 11); this concern results from the objective experience of living in different cultures and being exposed to their different treatment of time, as well as the subjective sense of time, or sensitivity to it, due to "the presence of mortality" in the mind of this post-war child. Humans are temporal creatures: "We live in our bodies and psyches, in families, landscapes and nations; but above all, we live in time. It is the one dimension of experience we cannot leap out of, at least until the final act" (Hoffman 2011, 10). We live in our bodies, on planet Earth, and therefore we are adjusted to its terrestrial rhythm. We function best when we do not disrupt the natural cycle of sleep or exert ourselves. And although we are conscious of the fact that "Mortality is the prerequisite of meaning [...]" (Hoffman 2011, 59), we are often restless in our efforts to fight physical decline and extend life expectancy, starting with proper diet and exercise, and resorting, in more extreme cases, to pharmacology, transgenic transplants, cryogenics and cloning.

This is partly due to our dual nature of functioning: not only bodily but also mental, the latter being a real challenge for philosophers, psychologists, psychoanalysts, and, recently, neurobiologists.

The basic spatio-temporal template of the brain is laid down early in our development, but its topography is subsequently modified throughout our lives. Each new experience or piece of information alters the neurological patterns we carry inside ourselves, and the specific encoding of each new impression depends on the context of what is already there. The brain selects, categorises and assigns different 'values' to memories continuously, in the light of its own neurological history. But it is also continuously changed by the new input, or experiences, entering its domain. (Hoffman 2011, 75)

The modifications of the brain's neural network, occurring constantly, with each new input, is accompanied by an exclusively human ability to conceive past and abstract events, not subject to our direct experience. On an individual level, the way one learns to accommodate one's internal and external time may be significant for one's interactions with others – being socialized into dependency or independency translates into a dependent or independent mode of time functioning, meeting the time demands of the people around or, on the contrary, expecting them to meet one's demands. Disorders of time perception are symptomatic of psychiatric disorders, for example BPD, borderline personality disorder, defined not only as a "disorder of time" but also "of the times". Traumas may result in "the fixation on a painful past", independently of one's preference for a time dimension, past, present, or future, and, as in the case of Holocaust survivors: "Many are haunted by nightmares in which frightening episodes

surface with a piercing vividness; for others, the present is blanced of all meaning, as the past keeps returning with an overwhelming presentness" (Hoffman 2011, 99). These may have a "cross-generational" impact – first by sensing the feelings, then learning about the past of the previous generation, and "[i]f we do not want the past to overwhelm us, or fall into a permanent melancholia, then we need to grapple with its meaning, and absorb it into our self-understanding" (Hoffman 2011, 115).

Temporal "moulding" of our bodies and minds is naturally subjected to all types of cultural influences:

Like language, time is one of the fundamental dimensions of human reality; and like language, it mediates between interior experience and the external world. We construct a lived sense of time within, but we are also constructed by it and by the shared temporal order in which we live. (Hoffman 2011, 117)

The patterns may vary and be differently positioned on the axes of rural-urban, economically advanced-economically deprived, living according to event time-closely observing clock time. The major question that arises from the confrontation of these traditional patterns and modern temporal requirements, connected with developments in technology, is about the transformations that the patterns have to undergo and their impact on the people involved, the need to cope with "the pressures of lived time", "the overcrowding of each moment", "the deterritorialisation of time", "hurry sickness", and the remedies available.

The mode of coping with time, in its biological, psychological and cultural aspects is crucial in individual identity formation, reflected in one's "narrative identity". Individuals simply tend to personalize their temporal continuity through reference to their own lived time: "[...] for the full achievement of a personal narrative, we need a kind of perspectival mapping of our own lived time, a balanced vision of its internal topography" (Hoffman 2011, 115). Following the events of 1989 in Eastern Europe, Eva Hoffman took it upon herself to travel, in 1990 and 1991, across Eastern Europe to compare, or confront, the official "meta-narratives" of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, with the narratives of the people there and, possibly, to reshape her own narrative. The general climate of change, detailed in *Exit into History* (1993), was relished differently in each of the former Eastern bloc countries, the single most potent flavours probably being: Hungarian entrepreneurship, Czechoslovakian bitterness, Romanian accepting of the unbearable, Bulgarian feminism, and Polish "stoical sobriety". In Poland, Eva Hoffman visited a number of places – Warsaw, Cracow, Sopot,

Szczytno, Gdańsk and Tykocin among them – and talked to people from different walks of life. This varied set included Polish friends, American friends, Polish friends of American friends, activists, journalists, editors, politicians, and ex-politicians like Krzysztof Kieślowski, Agnieszka Osiecka, Zygmunt Matynia, Janusz Głowacki, Edward Szwajkowski, Helena Łuczywo and her father Ferdynand Chaber, Adam Michnik, Konstanty Gebert and Bronisław Geremek. The stories of ordinary people and reports of everyday life in Poland intermingled with comments by and on the elite of the day and their lives. One cannot help reflecting on how the political atmosphere and the composition of the Polish elite have both changed and diversified, and how many of the former elite are now identified as 'apparatchiks' children' (Pol. *resortowe dzieci*). Other former Eastern bloc countries have similarly not been immune to the diversification of the former simple division into "Us and Them" and the proliferation of different views and affiliations. "History in the making" has again proved not to be replicable in the form of "history made", with the temporal and historical borderlands undergoing twists and turns difficult to forecast, and alliances, group and individual, being challenged.

### **Eva Hoffman's Borderlands: Validation**

The insight into individual borderlands presented above – ranging from biological and linguistic ones to those of a social, cultural, national, temporal and historical nature – have become accessible not only due to Eva Hoffman's experience and acumen, but also by virtue of her exceptional literary skills and the sensitivity of one musically gifted, combined with the unique ability to express the dilemmas of a "borderland" person. As early as in her first book, *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman voiced her conviction that "[h]uman beings don't only search for meanings, they are themselves units of meanings" (Hoffman 1998: 279). It is a powerful statement, validated by the theories investigating language from the individual and contextual angle and, at the same time, a statement validating those theories. The two classic ones have been authored by two eminent Polish scholars, Jan Niecisław Baudouin de Courtenay and Bronisław Malinowski. As early as in 1915, Baudouin de Courtenay contrasted average "language as fiction" with an individual "real language", specifying further that each individual language has its own history, 'from the cradle to the grave of its bearer', and that there are as many individual languages as there are individual "heads" containing the particular language-specific type of thinking, or heads "lingualised" in a particular way. Each new type of lingualisation, i.e. "acquisition of a new

language” in modern terminology, firmly based in experience, introduces into these heads a new quality of thinking (Baudouin de Courtenay 1984a, 1984b). This individually-oriented approach to language received contextually-related support from Malinowski, who, in his anthropological and ethnographic studies, recognized the importance of a “context of situation” (Malinowski 1946) and postulated supplying the analysis of customary routines and forms of their realisation with the users' mental “commentaries” on them, asking rhetorically:

But is this possible? Are these subjective states not too elusive and shapeless? And, even granted that people usually do feel or think or experience certain psychological states in association with the performance of customary acts, the majority of them surely are not able to formulate these states, to put them into words. (Malinowski 1922, 22)

Malinowski's (1922, 22) requirement “to cut or untie this Gordian knot” has been successfully met in the writings of Eva Hoffman.

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