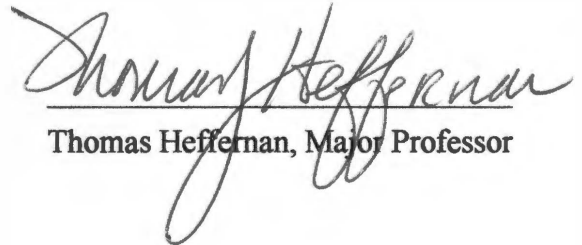


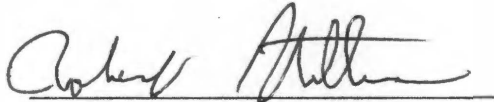
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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Joy Bracewell entitled *The Language of the Self: Translating Autobiographical Identity*. I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

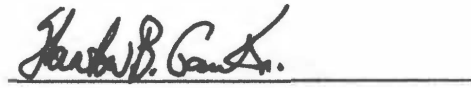


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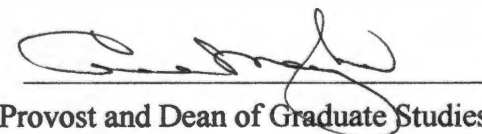


Professor Robert Stillman



Professor Stanton Garner

Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SELF:
TRANSLATING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IDENTITY

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joy Claire Bracewell
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ABSTRACT

Autobiography involves the rewriting of the self into textual form, and in this form, language plays a vital role in the construction of the self. In many of the memoirs written in the twentieth century, particularly those by multilingual individuals, language is not only the medium through which the textual self is fashioned, it also provides a starting point from which to explore and reflect on how language itself facilitates changes in the self. In this type of memoir, language is the central motif from which the autobiographer explores the cultural world that language constructs around each community of speakers, and in turn, the ramifications of that constructed world on the individual autobiographer.

This thesis focuses on two autobiographies, Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1990) and Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons: A Memoir* (1994), in an exploration of how these authors, as bilingual women, reflect on and use language in order to construct an understanding of the self through time—a time that spans differing cultures and languages. Both Hoffman and Kaplan include a multitude of stories—personal, familial, ancestral, etc.—in their textual representation of their lived experience. But each author must fashion her own integral narrative of personal identity within the context of a new and unfamiliar culture encountered during adolescence and adulthood. Each writer must translate her story of self into a new language.

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I. Introduction

I whispered, "let me be
let me at least be their witness," but she said
"what you have seen is beyond speech,
beyond song, only not beyond love;

"remember it, you will remember it"
and I heard her say but she was fading fast
as we emerged under the stars of heaven,
"there are not many of us; you are dear

"and stand beside me as my own daughter.
I have brought you here so you will know forever
the silences in which are our beginnings,
in which we have an origin like water"

—Eavan Boland (95-6)

Eine Fremdsprache ist für denjenigen, der sie beherrscht, nicht fremd. Jede Sprachgruppe hat ihre eigene Sicht von der übrigen Welt. Wenn wir versuchen, in die unterschiedlichsten Betrachtungsweisen einzudringen, erweitern wir das eigene Denken um eine neue Dimension. In unserer Welt, auf der Insel, auf der wir alle leben, wird es immer wichtiger, Kultur und Sprache der Nachbarn und damit ihre Art des Denkens zu verstehen.

—Charles Berlitz (115)

One day I will pause on the forest edge at nightfall, the evening sun will make me squint, and I'll shelter my eyes with feverish hands and see before me a fertile clearing, green fields, a fenced orchard, and a house among the trees, with barns and a sunken bed in a depression of hay.

Then and only then will I find my peace, close my eyes, lean on my comrades, and wander into the wild like a sleep-walker on a roof, stuttering incoherently as if from a vision:

"When one finds the land, why seek the sky?"

—Edvard Kocbek (78)

Narrative is the language of life. People tell stories to inform, to entertain, and to argue. Stories give a context for life, and color situations in such a way that they can be processed and understood on an individual level. In this way, stories function like language itself. Just as a story can call to mind a multitude of connecting relationships, one word can spark off a host of associations. As philosopher J. Mitchell Morse observes, “The peculiarly and distinctively human element in our nature, the differentiating overplus beyond our generic animality, the specific quality of our species, cannot be expressed without some communication of minds: we need *verbal* communication. *Homo sapiens* is the word-using species” (17). Importantly, individuals understand and construct the story of the self through language. Indeed, language is essential to existence, not only for survival, but for an understanding of the self through time. As Morse goes on to note, “The adjective *infant* originally meant speechless” (17). A split in language can cause a split in self, as the narrative flow of the individual, the story of personhood, no longer flows from one undivided medium. In his study, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin further explains this phenomenon: “It is language that triggers the child’s ‘revelation’ of the extension of experience and self across time, and with it the proto-autobiographical possibility of repetition of the past with the experiencing self at its center—‘I shall be able to think about myself now, thinking this’” (104).

Like translation, autobiography is a negotiated process, not a closed system; constructing a self through autobiography “with the experiencing self at its center” is an extremely complex undertaking. In her interpretation of Jane Gallop’s theories, literary critic Valerie Rohy explains that “individual subjectivity is thoroughly indebted to

projections into the past and future: it is ‘a succession of future perfects, pasts of a future, moments twice removed from ‘present reality’ by the combined action of an anticipation and a retroaction’” (229). In autobiography, the intricacies of verb tenses, such as those Rohy points out, are emphasized in multiple ways. In rewriting the self into textual form, the autobiographer can choose from a variety of representational methods for past and present selves, each of which carries its own shade of meaning for the interpretation of the self through time. As Patricia Hampl notes in her short piece on autobiography, “Memory and Imagination:” “personal narrative always includes a fictive aspect that is created by the tension between the ‘I’ who writes and the ‘I’ being written about” (Adams 173).

Autobiography by multilingual individuals is an even more intricate endeavor. In this type of autobiography, constructing a textual self through time is further complicated and enriched by the effort of using language to reflect on and draw conclusions about language. Oftentimes, the continuity of the self is interrupted for the second language learner, as the syntax, or even the simple vocabulary, to connect past and present is not immediately available for cognitive processing. For this reason, autobiography can also create a healing space to connect the splinterings of the self which are caused by multiple languages. In *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* and *French Lessons: A Memoir*, Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan reflect on the split they experienced in their conceptions of self in connection with their second languages, American English and French, respectively.

For Hoffman writing of her past, the English language represented an exile from her self—a break from the childhood she left behind when she was forced to leave

Poland. This second and unfamiliar language exemplified a threat to her ability to connect her past to her present, and in turn, to envision a future for her self. In writing of her life in a new language, Hoffman eventually comes to terms with living in English and her translated self:

There's no returning to the point of origin, no regaining of childhood unity. Experience creates style, and style, in turn, creates a new woman. Polish is no longer the one, true language against which others live their secondary life. Polish insights cannot be regained in their purity; there's something I know in English too. The wholeness of childhood truths is intermingled with the divisiveness of adult doubt. When I speak Polish now, it is infiltrated, permeated, and inflected by the English in my head. Each language modifies the other, crossbreeds with it, fertilizes it. Each language makes the other relative. Like everybody, I am the sum of my languages—the language of my family and childhood, and education and friendship, and love, and the larger, changing world—though perhaps I tend to be more aware than most of the fractures between them, and of the building blocks. (273)

While Hoffman was thrown into the world of English at thirteen years old, Kaplan sought “the ritual of France” and the French speaking world when she was fifteen (102). As Kaplan explains, however, as a young girl she eagerly welcomed the exile that French offered from her childhood in Minnesota—a pattern that would continue into adulthood. In her understanding of her self in *French Lessons*, by speaking French, Kaplan attempted to arrest the flow of her life story, and construct a new beginning, “a myth about my own rebirth and isolation” (58). As she questions and then acknowledges at the

end of her memoir, “Why did I hide in French? If life got too messy, I could take off into my second world. Writing about it has made me air my suspicions, my anger, my longings, to people for whom it’s come as a total surprise” (216).

In rewriting her experiences, each author fills in the exiled space created by her second language; both authors retell and construct a multitude of stories within the narrative of language and self. Embedded within their autobiographies are stories of Hoffman’s and Kaplan’s childhood in Poland and the United States, the trials and traumas of sexual maturation, and their struggles to find their own unique form of expression as adults. As Anita Norich, an academic and child of Holocaust survivors, notes, “We no longer have apologies for lives lived well but not quite well enough, or lived badly but redeemed at last. Nor do we, for the most part, have exemplary lives or archetypal ones” (145). Hoffman, born into the changing boundaries of Poland just after the end of World War II, shares a common Jewish heritage with Kaplan. She too was a postwar baby, but her first experiences of place were very different from those of Hoffman. Kaplan had the luxuries that Hoffman would read about in American magazines, and grew up with different standards of femininity. Both women would write their memoirs at the end of the twentieth century (1989 and 1993), including a portion of information regarding their intimate experiences that might have shocked earlier generations. As Hoffman explains, “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. It could indeed be said that exile is the archetypal condition of contemporary lives” (197).

In this thesis, the focus on language in Hoffmans's and Kaplan's autobiographies, as enriched through intersecting discussions of cultural practices, is framed and informed by psychological and sociological studies, historical and political analysis, second language acquisition and psycholinguistic research, and reflections on autobiography, geography, and the politics of language. In using such a framework, I have kept in mind psychologist Oliva M. Espín's injunction that "thinking psychologically should incorporate the effects of the social world and historical dislocations on the intrapsychic life of individuals" (162). In including the work of such a wide variety of disciplines, I hope to have filled in the cultural background for each author's language learning experiences, thereby forging an enriched and deepened understanding of how Hoffman and Kaplan have chosen to write of their individual lives—an interpretation of the personal that is informed within the language of a time and place and by multiple subjectivities—without reducing either author to her subject position. In Hoffman's words, "How trite and tedious, in contrast [to the world of utterly individual sensibility], to see oneself as a creature formed by historic events and defined by sociological categories. I am a Jew, an immigrant, half-Pole, half-American" (197-98). This thesis has been guided by the principle that such categories are an aid in understanding the collective forces that shape each individual. In turn, research from social fields assists in achieving an understanding of each author's uniqueness outside of such categories because, in deciphering how each writer responds to and interprets such circumstances, her individuality is revealed. In addition to these methods of approaching Hoffman's and Kaplan's relationship to language, when discussing each author's self(ves) through time in the form of autobiography, I have used terms that highlight "the fictive aspect"

between the written self and the writer. These are adapted from Betty Bergland's discussion of Russian-Jewish immigrant women (Mary Antin, Anzia Yeziarska, and Emma Goldman) (137). The terms "autobiographical Hoffman," "autobiographical Kaplan," "young Alice," and "young Ewa," designate the written self, while "Hoffman" and "Kaplan" refer to the writer.

This thesis deals with how a concept of continuous selfhood is constructed within a specific time and place through the mediums of autobiography, language and culture. Each chapter division within the overall work can be understood, in part, by the two quotations at the beginning of each of the three chapters. The quotations of the first two chapters are taken from authors who have contemplated their own experience with language as multilingual persons, while the third is from a writer who ponders her relationship to spirituality and personal episodes. These quotations are augmented by excerpts from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*.

Poet and essayist Meena Alexander immigrated to America after growing up in India and the Sudan. In her short prose work, "Piecemeal Shelters," Alexander explores her relationship to the many languages that she knows and the inner space each occupies—English, the language of the newly vanquished colonial power; Hindi, the language of her birthplace; Malayalam, her parents' tongue; Tamil, used by her friends; and Marathi, spoken in Pune (3-4). In Chapter One, Alexander's inquiry provides a springboard from which to explore Hoffman's and Kaplan's relationship to their own first languages and the psychic spaces they occupy in each author's childhood. In addition, in his introduction to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, English professor and Victorian

scholar Richard Kelly explicates the other quotation that appears at the beginning of the first chapter. In his explanation of the garden that Alice sees through a small door at the beginning of her visit to Wonderland, Kelly offers a reading that he calls “basic:”

[Alice’s vision of the garden] becomes a dream vision within a dream. Too large to enter the passage to the garden, she can only imagine being among its delights.

In mythic terms, Alice’s dream garden corresponds to a longing for lost innocence, the Garden of Eden. Her desire invests the place with imagined significance. Later, of course, when she actually enters the garden it loses its romantic aspect. (18)

Like Alice’s dream of the garden, in both Hoffman’s and Kaplan’s writing, the mythic qualities of their first languages evoke the Edenic essence of childhood before they lost the Paradise of its innocence.

Poet, playwright, and novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi is a professor at the University of Rabat in Morocco and program director at the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. In Chapter Two, Khatibi’s free-flowing reflection on love and language in *Love in Two Languages*, provides a parallel from which to explore Hoffman’s and Kaplan’s experience of language as apart from their bodies at the same time that those bodies were maturing sexually. The quotation from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* corresponds to this connection between language and sexual maturation. As Richard Kelly explains, the scene with the Caterpillar “fuses the themes of sexuality, changing body forms, and the mystery of personal identity” (25). Moreover, the Caterpillar repeats the question, “Who are *You*?” “as if [he] had read [Alice’s] anxieties and set this question to torment her” (25). The discussion in the second chapter focuses on how both Hoffman and Kaplan

represent their experience of a second language through the process of sexually maturing bodies textually—through the medium of autobiography.

For the final chapter, I have included a poem by poet and assistant professor (at George Washington University) Judith Harris, a Jewish woman like Hoffman and Kaplan. In this piece, entitled “Narcissus,” Harris writes an achingly appropriate version of the experience of “Otherness,” which provides a vantage point from which to explore the meanings of “linguistic otherness” in Hoffman’s and Kaplan’s autobiographies. The corresponding quotation from *Through the Looking Glass* reflects and refracts many meanings. It is an allusion to Hoffman’s wish to live in the present, through whatever looking glass she can accomplish such an objective, a reference to state language policies that attempt to impose language on individuals, and an allusion to Gabriele Schwab’s interpretation of interpretation. In *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen: Otherness in Literary Language*, she argues: “Masters who control language in this way, or, for that matter, critics who play the role of Humpty Dumpty in theory, appropriate language according to their own desires” (8). On the other hand, critics who employ the openness of language into an infinite sea of relativistic meanings are “no less prone endlessly to reaffirm their own presuppositions” (Schwab 8). As in the medium of language, as well as autobiography, hearing or reading a new bit of information can spark off a web of interconnected meanings, but only through the development of a narrative can the nuances of those meanings be understood. In examining Kaplan’s and Hoffman’s autobiographies, this thesis is an effort to understand a life lived in translation.

II. The Poetry of the Self: Mapping The Spaces of Language

The act of writing, it seems to me, makes up a shelter, allows space to what would otherwise be hidden, crossed out, mutilated. Sometimes writing can work toward a reparation, making a sheltering space for the mind. Yet it feeds off ruptures, tears in what might otherwise seem a seamless, oppressive fabric.

—Meena Alexander (3)

Alice opened the door and found that it led into a small passage, not much larger than a rat-hole: she knelt down and looked along the passage into the loveliest garden you ever saw. How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains, but she could not even get her head through the doorway; “and even if my head *would* go through,” thought poor Alice, “it would be of very little use without my shoulders. Oh, how I wish I could shut up like a telescope! I think I could, if I only knew how to begin.” For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible.

—Lewis Carroll (*Alice* 55)

Both Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan write reverently and fondly of the space language occupied in their childhood experiences and the rhythms associated with their native languages. The magic quality of language and the cosmos constituting childhood merge intimately in the autobiographies of both authors, but especially in that of Hoffman. The intimate connection between the magic of language and the spaces of childhood is aided, no doubt, by a certain naïveté that speaking only one language supports. As many tests in psycholinguistics have shown, bilingual children tend to understand the arbitrariness of the sign more than monolingual children, who are more inclined to believe that a rose is a rose is a rose (Cook 292). In Kaplan’s *French Lessons*, “American” represents a time and space before Kaplan knew or needed to know French,

an innocent period in her family circle and in the broader context of American existence. But the knowledge of the novelty of this American language within her family tradition also permeates Kaplan's remembrances of her first language. For Hoffman, as well, Polish maps the psychic spaces of childhood, conjuring the world of her beginnings in Cracow and the familiar places that she lost when her family moved to Canada. In *Lost in Translation*, Hoffman recalls how she experimented with the rhythms of Polish, her first language, and how she loved the way that Polish words could clarify the world around her, adding a vividness to life. In both authors' writing, the mythic qualities of their first languages evoke the spaces of childhood before the troubling changes of youth, a time and space when language's rhythms were intimately associated with the flow of life, and speech had the power to evoke.

Both authors conjure the poetry of childhood by describing the spaces where the most meaningful and mundane events of their first languages unfolded. Through their writing, they recreate a space where the signifier is inextricably connected to the signified. In this way, Hoffman and Kaplan recapture the innocence of childhood, creating a psychic space and a language for the times and places of their first impressions. Both authors allude to psychoanalysis in their works, and, in a sense, autobiographical writing is its own therapy. Through their writing, Hoffman and Kaplan map their personal emotional shifts, translating a series of perspectives of the past into an understanding of their childhood selves as seen through the adult lens of experiences within the larger world of bilingualism. Using the framework of discourse analysis, Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński argue that language is key in mapping emotional identity:

The forging of “new languages” of identity whether as individual therapeutic practice or the collective struggles of identity politics can never be a simple matter of casting off one identity and taking on another through an uncomplicated re-description of oneself. Rather, writing self-narrative involves an *emotional shift*, a moving psychic identification which constitutes a transformation of one’s whole being. Personal change is thus much more complex and difficult than the notion of re-description or rewriting sometimes implies. At some level there has to be a displacement in feeling simultaneous with the taking on of new maps of the world. (37)

If we may speak of Kaplan and Hoffman as rewriting themselves, the form and content of their early lives provides an emotional “madeline” from which each author explores the impact of her second languages on her concepts of the rhythms and spaces of childhood. The self, as described by the autobiographer, appears as a map of written experiences, evoking notions of a certain occurrence according to what is included in addition to what is not recorded in the written text. As a map translates many landscapes that exist far beyond any human scale, so does writing, and autobiography in particular, map a translation of the self into an entity that is more comprehensible. In this chapter, we will explore the emotional spaces of childhood through the rhythmic experience of each author’s first language, using psycholinguistic research, the insights of humanistic geography, and cultural analysis. As adults rewriting their past, both Kaplan and Hoffman filter their experiences through a bilingual perspective of place and language and the knowledge that comes from leaving the paradise of childhood and one language. Though painful, in many respects, such an exile can prove useful for providing a broader

context for the self that eclipses the linguistic, cultural and environmental trappings of a particular time, space, or language.¹

For Kaplan, speaking the flat Midwestern speech characteristic of her childhood was intricately connected to the specific period of time in her childhood innocence, in which Americans were, in a sense, also innocent: “We were so American. It seems now that no one will ever again have that sense of being American that we had then, in the time between the Second World War and Vietnam” (7). After the Depression and the two World Wars, peace appeared to have finally come to stay, and with it a new wealth. In his article on Cold War culture, historian Alan Brinkley posits that with the effects of economic growth, many Americans saw no restrictive limits to the changes that capitalism could bring. Some academics even foresaw an end to social conflict because of the leveling effects of prosperity—the end of ideology (63-5). As Kaplan rewrites her impressions, the speech of her childhood is not appropriately termed English or American English—it was simply American—“more for what we talked about than how it sounded” (7). At the dinner table was where Kaplan remembers learning “language etiquette: what to say, what rhythm, when to step in, when to keep out” (8). In this world, where everyone in her family had a role, her father cut the meat at the table, her

¹ As Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński elucidate after reviewing the traditional Western concepts of the self,

Thus, historical and cross-cultural work suggests that the resources that form the material for personhood are the language and cultural practices of specific times and places. We are born into a world that preexists us and learn to use a language which was here long before we arrived. In short, we are formed as individuals in a social process using culturally shared materials. Without language, not only would we not be persons as we commonly understand that concept, but the very concept of personhood and identity would be unintelligible to us. (29)

brother learned facts of the world, and her sister waited impatiently for her chance to leave the table so that she could listen to an Elvis record (8-9). The lessons learned in early childhood of how language rises and falls, the correct pauses of etiquette in autobiographical Kaplan's "American," were refined and turned into a systematic system encompassing the appropriate roles and modes of behavior within the family circle and were to be used, eventually, in the world beyond it.

According to Alan Brinkley, during the fifties the middle class became more numerous and increasingly self-conscious. With the advent of television, which became "the most powerful force in American culture," the United States populace congealed even more powerfully around the middle-class experience, and television developed into the new purveyor of popular culture (67). But the commonality of that culture was bought at a price. In the post-World War II years, the American economy was booming: "It was, quite simply, the greatest and most dramatic capitalist expansion in American history, perhaps even in world history" (Brinkley 63). Kaplan's family took advantage of the new opportunities for wealth by moving into "an old Minneapolis neighborhood" that was peopled with "prosperous Republicans with names like 'Colby' and 'Dorsey' and 'White'" (6), in other words, with names that were decidedly not Jewish. Instead of relocating to the Jewish suburbs, her family decided to brave a neighborhood that was a stronghold of Anglo-American wealth: "The suburban population as a whole was highly diverse—economically, ethnically, even racially.... Yet few individual suburban communities were diverse; few were places where white Anglo Americans lived alongside African Americans or Hispanic Americans or other minorities" (Brinkley 69). It was amidst this composition of personal and cultural forces that Kaplan spoke and

learned the variety of English that she calls American, the language of the new middle class and of prosperity. As Kaplan recalls, “it is amazing to think that in one generation, a language could become so native, so comfortable, so normal, with no sense whatever of its relative newness: my parents were, after all, the first ones in their families to be born into English” (7). Yet the ease of this language is not historically entrenched; it is suspect and very new. Kaplan remembers an incident during her family’s move into their new house: the previous owners left a “detective’s report assuring the old owners that although we were Jews, our general comportment was in line with the gentility of the neighborhood” (6). The message was clear to the young Alice: “We were on trial, being upright for the neighborhood” (6). So, the innocence of her childhood, its prosperity, and sense of well-being was punctuated by the fact that her family did not belong by undisputed right in their neighborhood, linguistically, as well as spatially.

Deeply connected to the rhythmic qualities of young Alice’s language and the comfort it offered were the spaces of her childhood home. Kaplan remembers her house as a fantasyland of gadgets and special features:

Our house had been built in 1914 for people with servants. There were front stairs and back stairs, a bell button buried in the dining room floor, and on the wall of the dining room, an English hunting scene. There was an eight-burner restaurant stove with a griddle for pancakes, and a butler’s pantry with the cupboards painted cream outside and mandarin red inside. There were five bedrooms and a library for my father, and a clothes chute, and a separate garage with a big lilac tree, and a rock garden for my mother.... In the spring the lilac bloomed and the smell came into our house, the smell of our prosperity. (6)

In this house she hid behind the piano to inspect her sister and her dates, watch her parents' parties, and observe her father smoke in his corner of the living room (9). It was in this house, where Kaplan describes her family as speaking American, that autobiographical Alice feels that everything and everyone has a place. As philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes in his work, *The Poetics of Space*, "Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of the home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost" (6). In describing her mother's closet, Kaplan juxtaposes this sense of belonging and closeness of family and place with the disruption in that fabric of family. Before her father's death, it is filled with bright colors and deliciously swinging dresses of many fabrics, but three years later, the closet "is empty, except for a zipped plastic bag smelling of moth balls" (25-6). Everyone is displaced by her father's death; her mother moves out of the bedroom that she once shared with her husband, and young Alice's brother and sister also relocate to other rooms. The house, which once symbolized the protective comfort of family, has undergone an upheaval.

Like Kaplan's early experience around the rhythms of American, Hoffman also recalls her early encounters with Polish; she writes of practicing the cadences and rhythms of her native language for pleasure, "'*Bramaramaszerymery, rotumotu pulimuli,*' I say in a storytelling voice" (11). As psycholinguistic research has demonstrated, all babies "are sensitive to the prosodic structure of their language" (Altmann 48). In this fanciful childhood episode, young Ewa knows that she is forming nonsense syllables; it is the rhythm of language that entrances her. Such an exercise is an association with the

very earliest rhythms of sound that she has felt from the womb, a connection of the most deeply experienced rhythms of language. Indeed, as psycholinguist Gerry T. M. Altmann observes, “Studies have shown, in addition, that infants as young as just four and a half months are sensitive to the prosodic patterns that accompany some of the *boundaries* between the major constituents of a sentence” (48). Hoffman recalls her love affair with language, its ability to clarify and vivify the world around her: “I love words insofar as they correspond to the world, insofar as they give it to me in a heightened form. The more words I have, the more distinct, precise my perceptions become—and such lucidity is a form of joy. Sometimes, when I find a new expression, I roll it on the tongue, as if shaping it in my mouth gave birth to a new shape in the world” (29). For autobiographical Ewa, the rhythm of language is evocative, words are intimately connected to place and emotion, and the mere sound of a word or string of utterances in her mouth connects her with the cosmos that she knows as her childhood.

The power of myth, place, and language is evident in the creation narratives of many cultures. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, place is often connected with goodness and God. Places are created out of dark chaos by being spoken. As geographer David Jacobson indicates, “In Genesis, in other words, place is moral as much as it is physical; and humankind’s association with geographic place, and the forms that association takes, tell us much about the character and shape of different social identities” (1). For autobiographical Hoffman, place took shape through the tightly knit web of shared familial spaces in post World War II Poland. She was born into a Poland of changing boundaries and upheavals, but as she recalls, in 1949 at the age of four, “I don’t know that this happiness is taking place in a country recently destroyed by war, a place where

my father has to hustle to get us a bit more than our meager ration of meat and sugar” (Hoffman 5).² The modest apartment, which as Hoffman writes, was “considered respectable by postwar Polish standards” (11), puts her into close proximity with her family. In this “lumpen apartment in Cracow,” where young Eva was “squeezed into three rudimentary rooms with four other people,” Hoffman remembers the how intricately intertwined her physical presence was with others (5). According to social historian Peter N. Stearns, the rhythms of pre-modern America were compatible with close attention, like the close conditions in which young Ewa lived: “Adult activities in evenings” were “focused on family and on tasks like darning or knitting that could be accomplished near an infant”(Stearns “Consumerism” 403). This pattern of close-knit familial interaction was quite unlike Kaplan’s experience of wealth and the extra time that it afforded her parents, and her memories of watching their parties. As Stearns notes, by 1915, changes in parental habits included “more spousal socializing and a new desire to see the evenings devoted to adult entertainments” (“Consumerism” 403). Life in autobiographical Ewa’s Cracow is tightly knit and not much can escape from neighbors’ notice: “The three-story building is always full of talk, visits, and melodrama” (12). According to Hoffman, the closeness of humanity ensured the checks and balances of social approval/disapproval. But geographer and philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan also notes the constriction that such a “moral landscape” imposes:

² According to Krystyna Kersten in her book, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, during the autumn of 1946, the Polish economic situation improved:

Inflation was brought under control; however, the free-market rate of the dollar continued to rise significantly, from 800-850 złoty per dollar at the beginning of December 1946 to 1,020-1,050 złoty per dollar during the first few days of January 1947. One thousand złoty was the equivalent of each of the following items: about two kilos of butter, three kilos of lard, five kilos of beef, one and a half pairs of silk stockings, seventy-five school notebooks, or fifty glasses. (309)

Indeed, the physical proximity of dwellings in certain villages and urban neighborhoods suggests closeness and human warmth: people often stand or lean on one another as houses do. Nevertheless, behind the walls we should not be surprised to find tragicomedies of betrayal, or lives stunted or cut short in a world of febrile intimacy rarely relieved by the light of impersonal understanding. (148)

As Hoffman writes of her childhood, though, the web of human interconnection engaged her imagination. Its netting was not oppressive, but just safe and big enough to represent the whole cosmos of her understanding.

The mythic link between words and their power to conjure, which Hoffman associates with her childhood, is similar to the *dinnsheanchas* of the oral and written tradition of the Irish language according to poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. In this term, which is untranslatable, are the meanings of folklore, mountain, and notable place. *Dinnsheanchas* describes a particular worldview, based on metaphor and the intimate knowledge of shared myths. Like Hoffman, who writes of mapping a personal world that was Cracow into the rhythms of Polish, to those who knew of *dinnsheanchas*, places were intimately communalized and words conjured the very object/place to which they referred, along with all of the myths and lore associated with that place. As Charles Bowen states, “Seen from this point of view, a modern road-map transmits knowledge of a kind that primitive Celts would have found inconceivably abstract. Places would have been known to them as people were: by face, name and history” (Dhomhnaill 411).

Hoffman certainly recalls feeling at the center of the universe as a child, one with its rhythms in time and space and language. During a visit to the *Planty*, “the broad, tree-lined park-boulevards, which used to form the border of the old city” (40), where her

mother and father bring her sister and herself to spend Sundays at their leisure, gossiping with friends, dining, and luxuriating, young Ewa picks up chestnut, “and suddenly, through its warm skin, I feel the beat as if of a heart. But the beat is also in everything around me, and everything pulsates and shimmers as if it were coursing with the blood of life” (41-2). In this moment, Hoffman remembers feeling a unity with her surroundings, of knowing a sense of intimate connection with everything around her. As human geographer Robert David Sack observes in his monograph *Homo Geographicus*,

Indeed the features of the landscape often act as mnemonic devices that enter the language. Place or landscape becomes part of the repository of meaning, and an element of the narrative.... Everything is linked through a vital life force; all is animate, even the inanimate and the dead. This force is traced in the mythical story, and tapped by the power of words. (173)

Only in her native language, which young Ewa can speak and know effortlessly and which impressed her with its rhythms in her earliest experiences, can such a feeling of harmony transpire.

Kaplan, too, writes of her enchantment with the spaces of her childhood. Until she was eight years old, the rhythm of her summers was unbroken; her family spent every summer at their lake house “on Wildhurst Road, Lake Minnetonka” (Kaplan 15). She remembers the sights and sounds of the summer vividly in her writing. When her parents went trolling, the conditions of this ritual seem to embody the essence of the summer itself. She writes of an exchange in which her brother explains to her that trolling requires a quiet boat, time, a long line, and knowing where fish are likely to be: “Daddy knows the places on the lake where the fish like to go” (18). Kaplan recalls imagining

her parents waiting in a secret cove, where the enigmatic patterns of this special practice would come to fruition: "Fish would like a place with lots of seaweed, willow trees hanging over the water, frogs, flies on the surface" (8). The summers at Wildhurst Road created a space for young Alice to dream, using words to invoke the sorcery of summer, creating a scene of magic for herself. As Bachelard writes, "A new environment allows the word to enter not only into one's thoughts, but also into one's daydreams. Language dreams" (146). Kaplan remembers the first time that she was able to take part of the fishing ritual; she did not go trolling, but she did have a bamboo pole of her very own. Young Alice sat down with her father at the end of the dock; he showed her the right technique and demonstrated to her the persistence required to catch a fish: "We didn't talk much that evening, it was the perfect quiet time before the crickets get into full voice" (19). That very evening became the night of her father's death, and its perfect stillness was shattered by the disorder of this event.

Kaplan writes of the pain and discomfort she experienced when she had to celebrate her eighth birthday with strangers. Instead of a warm family gathering, young Alice has a beautiful cake, presents from the wife of her father's business partner, and fake smiles (22). Trying to recapture something of the presence of her father, the eight-year-old takes her birthday present of watercolors outside to the dock, but the paints inside the "neat white box with the Swiss mountain on the lid" do not conform to her purpose: "First I tried to paint the lake and the trees across the lake, but I couldn't get it to look right, so I changed the trees into mountains like on the watercolor box.... The green and the brown paint ran together until the whole thing was a mess" (22). As Kaplan writes of it, Lake Minnetonka represented the ritual of the seasons, the rhythm of

life when her family came together to rest and enjoy themselves. With the death of her father, that rhythm was broken and young Alice could never recapture it. She could not even paint the magic of her life there a few days after her father's death; her attempt became an ugly, soggy mess. Years later when Kaplan returned as an adult to the dock, this sequence of events remains poignant: "I see myself back there on the dock the day of my eighth birthday, the day of his funeral, trying to paint the trees across the water, and mad, because I couldn't get my trees to look like the real ones" (206).³

For autobiographical Alice, the events of the greater world seemed to converge with those of the personal a year a half later (1963) when President Kennedy was shot. Kaplan remembers watching his funeral unfold with her mother in front of the television, that part of the "communications revolution of the 1950s [that] endlessly portrayed and fictionalized contemporary culture" (Kuznick and Gilbert 6). After watching Jacqueline Kennedy receive the folded American flag from a soldier, just as her own mother had been given one at her father's funeral, Kaplan writes of noting the announcer's comment regarding "the special relationship of de Gaulle and Jacqueline Kennedy, who was able to speak to him in fluent French" (32). She also learned of the unique relationship between France and the United States—"Washington was designed on the model of Paris" (32). Just as the Champs Elysées ran between the Arc de Triomphe and the Place de la Concorde, so did Pennsylvania Avenue run between the White House and Capitol Hill, a parallel universe of sorts (32). As the newscaster told young Alice and the television

³ Indeed, as Kaplan recalls, her first experimentations with language were sanctioned by her father and no one else: "When I was in first grade, my sister's friends could hardly stand to ride to school with me in the car. I was loud and unrelenting. I liked to run my own bath water while I sang the song of the rest of my life, endless verses with my own lyrics: I would rule the world, I would sing on a stage, I would travel the seas. My father liked to listen to me sing" (5).

audience, de Gaulle had marched down the Champs Elysées after France was freed: “How familiar this procession must feel to the French leader; yet how different in mood” (33). As Kaplan remembers the event, the announcer’s reminder hinted at a French world that could be full of victory and joy, not defeat and death, and so, in preparation for her first stay abroad, young Alice wills the emotional spaces of Minnesota to recede from her field of vision: “It wasn’t my home anymore. It was a landscape” (41).

The Paris that young Alice visits during her first year abroad is indeed deeply connected psychically to her own idea of the best of culture; it is “organized for looking” (Kaplan 65), radiating out in concentric circles from the city’s center. As ethnographer Johnathan Boyarin describes the City of Lights, it “appears on a map as an imperfect circle, flattened somewhat horizontally. The Seine interrupts the perimeter of the circle at two points, flowing generally east-west and bending toward the north to encircle the Cathedral of Notre Dame” (1). From one person’s perspective, geometrically, Paris *is* organized for looking, as it radiates out from a central position. Indeed, de Gaulle, who Kaplan remembered so well from the televised broadcast of Kennedy’s funeral in 1963, ushered in a new era in the dissemination of French culture. In 1959, he appointed André Malraux as the first Minister of Cultural Affairs, who wanted to ensure that “the great works of art of humanity, and in particular of France, [would be] accessible to as many French people as possible” (qtd. in Collard 41). As French cultural analyst Susan Collard explains further: “The other main objective of the ministry was to contribute to the glory and grandeur of the French state—de Gaulle’s own overriding ambition” (42).

Kaplan writes of experiencing the “glory and grandeur” firsthand; after her first year abroad in Switzerland, young Alice visits Paris with her mother and some family friends. But before this engaging visit to the City of Lights, however, Kaplan writes of being totally surrounded for the first time by the rhythms of other languages. As Kaplan observes, in Switzerland, “I started thinking of my ear as something strong, and precious” (48). During this year, autobiographical Alice comes to understand that different languages distinguish between sounds in a variety of ways, but it will take more time for her to accept the limitations of her own rhythmic “accent.” As Gerry T. M. Altmann elucidates, “in French, the syllable is a rhythmic unit. The syllable is the smallest thing that is repeated regularly, rhythmically, with each beat. In English, the rhythmic unit is a sequence of syllables, with just one stressed syllable occurring in each such sequence” (57).⁴ Kaplan recalls that, years later, after her friend Micheline, a speech therapist, tells her that she will never rid herself of her “song,” she will finally begin to realize that she will never lose the prosodic influence of her first language, that she will retain the “American song” (100).

But, at the conclusion of her first year living immersed in the rhythms of French, autobiographical Alice feels that her vision, too, begins to sharpen because of Paris and its enchanting cultural landscapes. On one magical day, Mr. D, her surrogate father, shows her the city. Instead of the gooey mess of watercolors that her magical place on Lake Minnetonka had become, Paris provides a vibrant picture of life and beauty: “I had

⁴ In determining whether English and French speakers do, in fact, differ insofar as their perception of rhythmic units, Jacques Mehler and his colleagues have conducted studies that support the theory that French speakers organize their language by syllabic units, and according to Altmann: “When equivalent experiments are performed with English speakers the pattern is very different; the time it takes them to respond in the syllable-monitoring task is not dependent on the relationship between the target syllable and the syllable structure of the word they hear” (Altmann 57-8).

never been in a place where there was so much to observe: the benches, the wrought-iron balconies, the long cars that look like bugs, the policemen with their huge caps, the food sold outdoors, bookstalls outside along the river. Everywhere I went, there was a new tableau to take in” (65). At dinner that evening with Mr. D, his wife, and her mother, Kaplan writes of feeling that she understood the “truth and light of impressionism” in her soufflé (65). Mr. D is also impressed enough with young Alice’s abilities that he asks her to make a phone call for him in French (63). Kaplan remembers how much his confidence affected her, “I lived off that idea for a long time, the idea that my French was better than Mr. D’s” (63). Instead of the running, disordered watercolors of the painting that autobiographical Alice attempts to order during the trauma of her father’s death, young Alice feels that the world again makes sense—she perceives a new sharpness in her vision—all of the whites in her soufflé recall to her memory a Manet painting and the wondrous feeling of being shown Paris by Mr. D.

Human geographer Robert David Sack distinguishes places that carry a degree of emotional attachment, “thick places,” from places that are purely functional, with no emotional value for people who occupy and use them, “thin places” (9). As Hoffman writes of her childhood, Cracow is filled with meaning, or “thick places.” For young Ewa, the city is timeless: “Age is one of the things that encloses me with safety; Cracow has always existed, it’s a given, it doesn’t change much. It has layers and layers of reality” (39). Even the tram in Poland is suffused with meaning; it takes young Ewa to visit her friends, and she can hear it from her room: “Occasionally, a few blocks away, I hear the hum of the tramway, and I’m filled by a sense of utter contentment” (5). In her

essay, "The New Nomads," Hoffman explains what Poland meant in her inner landscape, and what its loss entailed:

So it was not the nation I felt exiled from, not Conrad's father's Poland; my homeland was made of something much earlier, more primary than ideology. Landscapes, certainly, and cityscapes, a sense of place. I was lucky enough to grow up in a city that really is quite enchanting and that escaped the ravages of the war. There was a webwork of friendships and other relationships, for example with my teachers. But there were also elements less palpable that nevertheless constituted my psychic home. (47)

As political scientist Jack Bielasiak explains, during the 125 years (1795-1918) that Poland no longer existed as a sovereign state, "its identity and historical continuity were assured by institutional modes vested in society, not the polity. Culture, language, family, Church, tradition were the guardians of Poland" (126). For much of its history, Poland was kept alive by its cultural institutions because it did not endure politically.⁵ With its rich tradition of literary dissemination, Polish stood as a romantic remainder of an independent state for much of the population. As Hoffman recalls, the character traits that she came to value may have been influenced to a large extent by her education in the Polish literary tradition, "perhaps I am picking up notions about flair, and panache, and sparks of inspiration—tonalities of character that are the true Polish values, and that are encouraged by my peers and my schoolteachers, not to speak of the Romantic poetry that we read" (71). Hoffman remembers Polish with perhaps even more fervor because such

⁵ Geographer Józef Babicz, however, emphasizes a somewhat different locus of cultural retention. According to his interpretation, when Poland was annexed by the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian empires in the late eighteenth century, "it was history and geography that the Poles referred to in their struggle for independence" (212).

respect was reinforced by the attitudes of her teachers towards the various political and cultural institutions around her.⁶ As Jerzy Durczak explicates, “Language, writing and literature become, for Ewa, synonyms of freedom” (157). On the other side of this world of meaningful culture and tightly knit family networks are Canada and the United States, which autobiographical Hoffman conflates into one idea—America (84). In her organization of political entities, autobiographical Ewa names Russia as the center, “a heavy and leaden center, a sort of black hole sucking bright energy into its sinister recesses” (60). Russia sucks people into its dark abyss with its poverty and fear, but America represents the fulfillment of want, “On the other side of the world, whirling in interplanetary space like an enormous flying saucer, is America—another ambiguous land of vague fears and desires” (60).

Later, in the United States, the places of her childhood and first language would symbolize both the ideals that shaped young Ewa in life, and how very different the new landscape was from what had molded her personality. Hoffman writes of standing on the deck of the *Batory* during her very last moments in Poland, listening to the last strains of the “jaunty mazurka rhythms of the Polish anthem” and longing for these rhythms to remain part of her landscape (4). For Hoffman, this feeling of yearning can only be evoked with a Polish word: “*ścisnota*—a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing. It is a feeling whose shades and degrees I’m destined to know intimately, but at this hovering moment, it comes upon me like a visitation from a whole new geography of emotions” (4). The word “*ścisnota*” symbolizes the rhythms of the

⁶ Hoffman comments on the radical fissure that her time in Vancouver introduced in her world view and how it altered her ambitions for herself: “Polish romanticism, in whatever naïve version it has infiltrated my imagination, doesn’t superprint easily on the commonsensical pragmatism required of me here” (159).

culture, language, and place that young Ewa lost when she left Poland. Indeed, according to linguist Mary Morzinski, despite Joseph Conrad's acquisition of his third language,⁷ certain elements of his native Polish remained to influence and nuance Conrad's writing in English.⁸ In her analysis of this impression, *Linguistic Influence of Polish on Joseph Conrad's Style*, Morzinski traces this prosodic influence while also explaining the factors that cause the rhythm that speakers detect in different languages:

Rhythm, in linguistic terms, is the result of suprasegmental features of sound in an utterance—the rise and fall of the voice tone, rate of speed, occurrence of pauses and patterns of stress. Each of these features may be responsible for changing the meaning of an utterance without any change in its words or word order; for instance, a question can become a command when a rising tone changes to a falling tone. However, every language has its own rhythm, that is, a natural configuration of suprasegmental features recognizable by non-native speakers. For example, it has been noted that the natural stress pattern of English is iambic.... Languages which are dominated by syllables composed of a single consonant and vowel are perceived as having a fast rhythm. Thus, although these features are not always easy to pinpoint, their overall effect does comprise what listeners and readers (mental listeners) hear as rhythm. Citing Norton Tempest's study of prose rhythm, [I. M.] Pulc concludes that Conrad uses a higher

⁷ Conrad's second language was French, which he had been reading, along with Polish, since he was five years old (Morzinski 28).

⁸ In her discussion of the colonial practice of remapping and renaming places, poet Meena Alexander observes, "In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow speaks of his childhood fascination with maps, with 'blank spaces' that beckoned him. Later in adulthood, these spaces, even as they fill with rivers and lakes, dwindle into areas of 'darkness'" (92).

proportion of the rhythmic feet and the rising and falling measures typical of Polish prose than those characterizing English prose.⁹ (9)

As Hoffman observes, “It will take years of practice before [English’s] nuances and patterns snap smartly into the synapses of my brain so they can generate verbal electricity” (119), but even after her second language becomes a habit, the rhythms of Polish will remain in Hoffman’s memory.¹⁰

She writes of hearing of Canada as a cultural desert (88), as opposed to her childhood home where she is encouraged as a pianist. Canada is empty with “vast spaces and little habitation” (4), in contrast to Cracow, young Ewa’s “city of shimmering light and shadow” (38). As Hoffman remembers the landmark decision, the determination to move to Canada was based on her parents’ memories of reading about “animals roaming without being pursued, of freedom” in a book called *Canada Fragrant with Resin* when they were hiding in a forest to escape being taken to concentration camps during the war (Hoffman 4). But in young Ewa’s imagination, Israel is more reachable: “In my internal geography, it’s closer than Canada, the journey to it less unthinkable” (86). Hoffman’s parents, though, inspired by the idea of westward expansion and the unbounded possibility of the New World, decide, not unlike Kaplan’s family, not to follow their Jewish friends to Israel, but instead to go to Vancouver.

⁹ The paper from which this reference comes is: “The Imprint of Polish on Conrad’s Prose.” *Joseph Conrad: Theory and World Fiction. Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium*. Eds. W. T. Żyła and W. M. Aycock. Lubbock: Texas Tech U, 1974. 117-39.

¹⁰ Joseph Conrad is often used as an illustrative example of how multilingualism enriches writing. As psycholinguist Vivian Cook argues, “Conrad is a fascinating example of someone, of native Polish, who spoke French with elegance, general ease, and no trace of an accent, and English like a foreigner, talking broken English, according to Virginia Woolf. Yet, he was one of the greatest writers of English prose of the twentieth century” (290).

As Hoffman writes their story, her parents certainly hoped to achieve an amount of material success in their new land, as well as freedom from the persecutions of the Old World of Eastern Europe. In the words of human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, many who came to the New World had high hopes for their destiny there: “The West itself—the New World—became the goal, a goal that signified the future rather than the past” (78).¹¹ In this new place, in a section that Hoffman dubs “Exile” after the “Paradise” of her childhood, Ewa/Eva learns of a different history and also that words are not inextricably intertwined with a complex web of myth and lore. According to human geographer David Jacobson, the forward march of “progressive ideals” on the American continent meant that “[m]ovement through space was movement forward in history” (134). In Vancouver, Hoffman writes of learning a different historical perspective; the pioneer stories do not follow the same pattern to which she is accustomed: “They summon images of tiny dots on an enormous landscape, huddles of humanity clotting and then making barely visible ink lines across the map, and I find it hard to conceptualize them as events, with a beginning, a middle, and an end” (156). In this novel culture, in which words no longer attach to meaning in Ewa’s/Eva’s brain, history moves horizontally through space, not vertically through time, and Poland is forever displaced in her mind as the center of the universe (132).

From the feeling of oneness with her own worldview and the place in which her body is rooted, Hoffman is thrown into a new language whose rhythms of life are

¹¹ Indeed, the theme of movement westward has a rich tradition, as Yi-Fu Tuan explains in his loose interpretation of history, “this imperial theme of power moving westward has its ancient root in Virgil, who celebrated the rise of Rome, displacing Troy, and its medieval-Renaissance root in Geoffrey of Monmouth, who pick up the Virgilian theme of the West, but transferred that West from Rome to England. In America, the religious and imperial themes conflated” (78).

unfamiliar. The suburbs appear to be so new and fresh to autobiographical Eva and her family that they seem to have no history at all. David Jacobson notes that the force of space in suburbs, at any moment in the second half of the twentieth century, is, comparatively, much different from an old, established city, such as Cracow:

Suburbs have privatized public spaces, most notably shopping and recreation mall, rather than public squares. Their civic life is of a different order, more privatized with a stress on private lots and backyards facing away from the street and even gated communities.... Suburbs are the physical mirror of the territorialites of the self, where civility is expressed in the ethics of maintaining a respectful distance and not being judgmental about neighbors beyond middle-class norms of respectability in dress, maintained yards, an egalitarian ethos, and general restraint. (164)

In addition, the mountains of Vancouver seem to dwarf human history, and more importantly, appear to have no place for young Ewa/Eva at all: "I want my landscapes human sized and penetrable; these mountains look like a picture postcard to me, something you look at rather than enter, and on the many cloudy days they enclose Vancouver like gloomy walls" (134). As Sack observes, "Place is a moral force at any scale," (203) and, as Hoffman writes of her impressions, the morality of Vancouver seems to be unreachable and beyond human comprehension. Her father, used to dodging the dangers that came with being a Jew during World War II, finds himself unable to acclimatize to the safety of Vancouver: "The structure of the space within which he moves has changed.... Everything seems to be open, but where is the point of entry?"

(128).¹² Like the notion of free enterprise, which seems to be an open road to prosperity, but is so incomprehensibly unreachable, the rhythm of this life is beyond Hoffman and her family. When asked to go for a walk, her father responds, ““For what is the purpose?”” (128). The capitalistic economy that Hoffman’s father encounters in Vancouver thrives on a different type of business dynamic than the kinds of relationships that he is accustomed to cultivating. As Ewa Hauser, Barbara Heyns, and Jane Mansbridge explain in their analysis of Communist-controlled Poland, the dance of exchange in Polish society involved an intricate web of relationships: “The logic of socialist societies also supported a way of life that placed a high premium on personal ties, social networks, caring relations, and the capacities to shop, trade, barter, and manage through informal means—the skills the Poles refer to as ‘załatwiać’ (arranging things)” (266).¹³

The very plenitude that surrounds young Eva and her family, the rows upon rows of consumer goods “threaten to crush me with their thinghood, with their inorganic proliferation, with their meaninglessness” (136). Hoffman writes that she has never been one to resist her desires, but with the abundance of things to look at, but not have, wanting them would be like a never-ending toothache that she cannot afford to have (136). Indeed, as Peter N. Stearns explains,

¹² In Yi-Fu Tuan’s analysis, the suburban style house seems to hide nothing, “a modern house with large picture windows, sliding glass doors, and patios that extend to unfenced lawns, almost constantly reminds it occupants of the existence of a larger world.... Culture’s ambivalence is that of walls and houses: walls that attempt to keep all dangers out lock people in, and houses that are effective shelters risk becoming prisons” (142).

¹³ Hoffman details her parents’ mode of bartering: “This highly formulaic dance accompanied all extraofficial purchases in Poland, and it entailed a number of dramatic and commonly understood gestures—pretending to take offense at the ridiculously high price being suggested, or, on the seller’s part, the absurdly low price being offered,” etc. (126).

To be sure, the direction of emotions toward material objects is not an invention of modern history. Men and women alike in preindustrial times could develop emotional attachment to cherished tools or weapons, and in more affluent classes emotions might connect to household items or fashions as well. But it is highly likely that the emotional importance of things has increased in modern times; more emotional energy is expended on wanting and at least initially enjoying things, and the process of acquisition is more likely to distract from emotional or other setbacks. Through these changes, in turn, envy of other people's material items—rather than their power—has become an increasing issue for social and emotional management. (“Consumerism” 396)

Hoffman writes of being dangerously close to an all-encompassing envy for the first time in her life, but in order to escape that emotional trap, she decides to remove herself to such an extent that she can look at her friends' possessions “as if they lived in a different world” (136). With all the new things that she can see, but not have, words seem to lose their essence. No longer does the Platonic essence of self seem viable;¹⁴ words no longer evoke. As Sack observes, “It is only since the development of modernity, with its economic transformations under capitalism, its increased literacy, its geographical mobility and interdependence, and its emphasis on reason and science, that the world of myth and magic or religion and ritual loses its grip as the commanding moral perspective” (174). The emptiness of consumerism in the vast spaces of Vancouver, coupled with the loss of the rhythms of her language is a sorrow that young Eva finds

¹⁴ Hoffman recalls that cannot even find the “right” toothpaste: “Just how am I to know which is the real thing, the Platonic toothpaste?” (135).

almost unbearable: “I know now that emptiness is not so easy to achieve, and that assuredly it exists most purely in the soul” (Hoffman 151).

Kaplan’s journey into French is much different from Hoffman’s immersion into English; she goes as a privileged visitor instead of a involuntary part of a family pressured by state policies to vacate their home. Her journey is from West to East, from the “rugged frontier” that the booming economy was transforming by the “movement of Americans out of older eastern and midwestern cities into the suburbs” (Kuznick and Gilbert 6) to the culture and many-layered chronicle of the French-speaking world. Kaplan writes of adhering to the French educational system, the “leçon de choses,” or lesson of things, reveling in its routines of rote memorization and orderliness after the disruptions to the order of her childhood home, “There was the world out there, the world of Switzerland and the French language, and I drew its contours and labeled it” (Kaplan 56). But despite her attempts to escape the Midwestern American of her childhood, Kaplan cannot rid herself so easily of the American “r”: “In September my “r” is clunky, the one I’ve brought with me from Minnesota” (Kaplan 54). But one day in class, after months of trying to transform her “r,” it happens: “I opened my mouth and I opened up; it slid out, smooth and plush, a French ‘r’” (55). Kaplan remembers very clearly the momentousness of this occasion; the French “r” is her passport away from America. With this sound in her repertoire, she can change the shapes coming out of her mouth, and therefore easily jump continents without attracting notice.

The culmination of her first year abroad comes when her English teacher, of whom autobiographical Alice is slightly suspicious for giving her class topics that are too personal, such as ““My family doesn’t understand me,”” assigns her class to read *The*

Great Gatsby (57). The narrator, Nick, like young Alice herself, comes from Minnesota, but he migrates East to the bright lights of New York. Notwithstanding the myth of culture, of a new language to wash away pain with its beauty, autobiographical Alice realizes her self-delusion after reading *The Great Gatsby*: “I identified with Gatsby because I had spent the whole year inventing a myth about my own rebirth and isolation.... I had learned a whole new language at boarding school but it was a language for covering pain, not expressing it” (58). Pinpointing autobiography’s contradictory paradigms of memory and progress, Gerri Reaves quotes from *The Great Gatsby* in her *Mapping the Private Geography: Autobiography, Identity, and America*: “Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us.... So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (1). Just as Kaplan sought an escape from her Midwestern American roots during her first year abroad in Switzerland, Gatsby sought to remake himself. But just as Gatsby is borne back by the current in his attempt to reach his goal of limitless wealth, the orgiastic green light, the currents of reflection hinder autobiographical Alice’s “progress.” As Reaves asserts, “Despite our intentions to adhere to the current of life, we find ourselves aswirl in that circularity of memory” (2).

The initial rhythmic experience of the music of their native languages and their attachment to childhood spaces continue to haunt both authors as adults. The prosody of Polish and “American” are unique and remain with Hoffman and Kaplan after they acquire their second languages, even after they have adjusted to the linguistic and cultural rhythms of their new and adopted lands. In their encounter with the spaces of French and

English, Kaplan and Hoffman have to literally map new ways of speaking and understanding into their perceptions. As Edward Sapir argued in 1929:

The fact of the matter is that 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. (qtd. in Steiner 91)

Despite her attempts to subsume the “high culture” and syllabic patterns of French into her very being, Kaplan writes of finding herself caught “aswirl in the circularity of memory,” confronted with the realization that the spaces of her childhood in Minnesota would never be erased; she would always carry its “song” in her speech. Hoffman’s certainty with language is lost with the places of Poland and her childhood paradise; she realizes that words do not always and only evoke a personal world. Thus young Ewa’s notions of the unity of word and object, rhythm and space, are abruptly interrupted. Reflecting back on this experience of linguistic change, Hoffman concludes: “I could not have found this true axis, could not have made my way through the maze, if I had not assimilated and mastered the voices of my time and place—the only language through which we can learn to think and speak” (Hoffman 276). Both authors revisit their childhood worlds through their writing, recapturing its innocence of perception even through the language of adulthood. In her short piece on autobiography, “Memory and Imagination,” Patricia Hampl observes, “Memoir seeks a permanent home for feeling and image, a habitation where they can live together in harmony” (Adams 171). In writing of

their childhood, both Kaplan and Hoffman map a space for its language, and in the process, fashion a poetry of the self.

In this chapter, we explored the inner psychic world of each author as each remembered the spaces and rhythms of her first languages—the language of childhood. The next chapter will deal with the intersection of bodily and linguistic changes and how Kaplan and Hoffman chose to write themselves as texts in their experiences of adolescent language learning. As both authors interpret their efforts to translate themselves into a new culture, the critical period hypothesis serves as a guide to understanding their experiences of second language acquisition. For both Kaplan and Hoffman, language plays a primary and sometimes problematic role in the experience of sexual maturation, a role in which speech and writing are no longer simply an extension of their embodied selves. The rhythms of childhood will never quite be totally subsumed by the prosody and culture of each author's new language—both will retain the poetry of their first experiences—but the difficulty of second language acquisition and the bodily discomfort of adolescence will transform childhood into a paradise that exists only in the spaces of Hoffman's and Kaplan's memories, and in their writing.

III. The Body of Language: Constructing Autobiographical Linguistic and Sexual Identity

This idea imposes itself as I write it: every language should be bilingual! The asymmetry of body and language, of speech and writing—at the threshold of the untranslatable.

—Abdelkebir Khatibi (5)

Alice thought she might as well wait, as she had nothing else to do, and perhaps after all [the Caterpillar] might tell her something worth hearing. For some minutes it puffed away without speaking; but at last it unfolded its arms, took the hookah out of its mouth again, and said “So you think you’re changed, do you?”

“I’m afraid I am. Sir,” said Alice. “I ca’n’t remember things as I used—and I don’t keep the same size for ten minutes together!”

“Ca’n’t remember *what* things?” said the Caterpillar.

“Well, I’ve tried to say ‘*How doth the little busy bee,*’ but it all came different!” Alice replied in a very melancholy voice.

—Lewis Carroll (*Alice* 85)

In their autobiographies *Lost in Translation* and *French Lessons*, both Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan discuss their adolescent years at length, which corresponds to the great impact of learning a new language during this formative period. Many researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have found evidence to support the theory of a critical period: an age after which complete mastery of a language is nearly impossible (Larsen-Freeman and Long 156). Both Alice Kaplan and Eva Hoffman fall at the very edge of this boundary. Although she studied French in a school setting, Kaplan’s first immersion into the language comes at the age of fifteen, while Hoffman remembers being cast away from Polish at thirteen years old. In their experience of sexual maturation, Kaplan and, especially, Hoffman, find themselves

thrown into a new unreality of self: a self experienced through a new language. For both authors writing of the struggle to reconcile their changing bodies and language, the (un)reality of differentiating themselves from the communities of their childhood was complicated and enriched through the lenses of a different culture and another language at a time when their identity formation was still very changeable—translatable.

In speaking of the field of translation, Octavio Paz suggests that our lived reality is also series of texts: “No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation—first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase” (Bassnett and Trivedi 3). If we can speak of the self as a text, this layering of meaning shows the depth of writing autobiography, meaning upon meaning, self upon self, especially in the context of bi- or polylinguals. In this form’s attention to an individual’s experience, the notion of boundaries becomes problematic, especially because both Hoffman and Kaplan, or “Ewa” and “Alice,” construct their childhood selves relationally, through the stories of others. Autobiography provides a stage for Kaplan and Hoffman to relate their own stories in their first and second languages, respectively. But even within this forum of one language, the boundaries of community, self, and reader are blurred. As Roberta Rubenstein concludes after her literary discussion of such writers as Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Silko, “one might construct a continuum of boundary themes, beginning with the representations of the body and extending into the more abstract expressions of being-in-the-world that emerge from both the correspondences and divergences between materiality and its representation in language” (231). Both Kaplan and Hoffman had to struggle with their own materiality

through an unfamiliar method of communication and the reality of their own changing bodies and sense of self. In this chapter, through the use of second language acquisition research, cultural analysis, and explorations in autobiography, we will negotiate understandings of Hoffman's and Kaplan's representation of the boundaries between body and language, self and community. In representing their experience of a second language through the process of sexually maturing bodies textually, Hoffman and Kaplan write of their transition from the nonverbal of bodily changes into some sort of livable reality of identity in translation.

As a developing young woman, Kaplan writes of feeling the uncomfortable changes and experiencing the startling revelations of adolescence before she arrived in Switzerland, which was the site of her initial immersion in French. Kaplan recalls that the American feminine "ideal" shaped within her the uneasy knowledge of being outside the bounds of normality. Pre-made clothes and books on the body place the twelve-year-old girl beyond the maturity level that her body should be expressing according to their prescribed standards. She cannot wear the dresses that the girls in her school wore to dancing school: "The dresses were tight in the rib cage and waist. They fanned out into flouncing skirts. I could not zip a Lanz dress around my rib cage, even if I took three sizes too big" (Kaplan 35). To uncover the processes that are driving the changes in her body, Kaplan writes of consulting a printed authority, *Youth: The Years from Ten to Sixteen*. From its sage advice, replete in the aura of scientific authority, autobiographical Kaplan infers that she was physically sixteen (although only twelve in years from her actual birth). The girl newly engaging in speculation about her sexual maturity was constantly looking at her self as a body and evaluating the consequences of physical

progress: "I kept seeing myself from outside myself, as though I were always looking at myself in a book. But I couldn't change the book" (36). Defined as developed beyond her years physically, Kaplan writes that she finds her adolescent self caught eerily in the space between what her body should be and what it, in fact, is. In reinterpreting Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267), Judith Butler observes that de Beauvoir

does not imply that this "becoming" traverses a path from disembodied freedom to cultural embodiment. Indeed, one is one's body from the start, and only thereafter becomes one's gender. The movement from sex to gender is internal to embodied life, a sculpting of the original body into a cultural form. (qtd. in Aalten 45)

Kaplan writes that she knows her body is changing, and she consciously seeks a societal niche into which this new body can fit. Instead, the "authorities," in form of the stores full of ready-made clothes and books full of scientific knowledge inform her that her body does not match the model of normal maturity. Consequently, Kaplan writes that, as her younger incarnation, she saw her early maturation as a physical test. Because her father had died when she was eight, "I thought that...I couldn't be a child even if I wanted to, that I had to toughen up" (37).¹⁵ France and a self lived through a different

¹⁵ Although ostensibly motivated by personal and psychological reasons, autobiographical Alice's proclamation of herself as an adult mirrors a broader cultural phenomenon. As Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert observe in their account of Cold War culture:

If all these changes [men's mounting resistance to marriage, as typified in the 1950s "Playboy" lifestyle, 1960s feminism and tolerance of homosexuality] conspired to raise the average age of marriage and lower the age of sexual initiation over the whole period [of the last half of the twentieth century], another result has been to lengthen greatly the stage of adolescence in America and to transform it from a period of social, economic, psychological, and cultural dependence upon the family into a period of dependent adulthood. (5-6)

language came to symbolize the “toughening up” that the young Alice at twelve saw as her lot in life. Unlike Hoffman, who is forced into her new language, Kaplan writes of actively seeking French. During the young American’s first excursion into the French language, she displays a strong integrative motivation for learning French, seeking, in second language acquisition John H. Schumann’s words, “maximum proximity in order to meet, talk with, and perhaps even become like the speakers of the target language” (266).

In the story of female sexual maturation, menstruation can be considered a potentially defining moment for the way a girl will respond to her body as a thing that will change outside of her own will or control. Different cultures sometimes display very different ways of encoding what is expected of a pre-adult woman. As psychologist Oliva M. Espín observes in her study of immigrant women and their sexual transformations,

In most cultures, messages about womanhood and sexuality are conveyed through half-muttered comments, behavior, example, and—powerfully—through silence. Women of older generations pass along values and beliefs about appropriate gender and sexual behavior by what they say about men and other women, and by teaching by example what is allowed or forbidden in the culture of origin. These include ideas about what “good” women should and should not do according to the norms of the particular culture. The messages frequently include other issues such as women’s reproductive health, pregnancy and menstruation, heterosexual intercourse and male-female relationships, and so forth. (146)

Kaplan describes how she, as a young girl of twelve, hid her blood-stained underwear in her closet, refusing to tell her mother that she has gotten her period (36). Kaplan does not

confide in her mother the news of her newly changing body, as she seems unapproachable in her afghan-wrapped cocoon, the characteristic pose her mother has taken after her husband's death (37). For Kaplan, the story of her menstruation is one mostly of silence, her own silence and that of her mother, who has retreated from life. This development seemingly originates from the same twisted story that places her body ahead of the age it "should" be expressing, which in Kaplan's rewriting of young Alice's mind, all stemmed from her father's death. Reflecting back on her behavior, Kaplan deduces that her foray into French was "a discipline to cover up the changes in my body I wanted to hide" (Kaplan 204), the uncontrollable, changing body that did not quite fit into the cultural mold that autobiographical Alice encountered in the United States.

Eva Hoffman, on the other hand, remembers learning about such mysterious biological processes when she hears offhand comments from her mother, such as her mother's disapproval of one of their servants, "'She's a bit primitive...So superstitious. She doesn't wash when she menstruates'" (22), and, later, from the advice of one of her friends not to think about sexual subjects when "'you have your period'" (77). The reason? "'Because you'll get sick'" (77). Although as Kaplan writes her adolescent self, she seems to have been affected greatly by the advent of her menstrual cycle, autobiographical Hoffman seems to take these conflicted messages as having the appropriately mysterious aura that surrounds such issues. Hoffman writes of her childhood in Poland as one long, almost uninterrupted paradise. The narration of menstruation fits into the gentle story of her childhood, and she relates only what she has been told by other women regarding this mysterious circumstance. As Leslie Marmon

Silko states regarding her own relationship to the narrative culture of the Laguna, “through the stories we hear who we are” (qtd. in Eakin 72).

Hoffman writes herself as a young girl who was a sponge for stories; she hears of how her mother was not allowed to talk to boys and learns of her mother’s marriage to her father, which “was an act of considerable rebellion” (Hoffman 9).¹⁶ When her parents’ treasured servant, Ciocia Bronia, finds a husband and gets married, young Ewa learns to interpret the event as an achievement; Ciocia Bronia has done well for herself, for now she can “be a mistress in her own house” (23). Hoffman also writes that Pani Ruta, the mother of her childhood love and playmate, Marek, “feels called upon to give me a talk on womanly restraint” when, as her young self, she spends “the summer of my most intense romance with Marek” (Hoffman 43). Although both Marek and Ewa “embrace and kiss and roll around on the floor” (43), autobiographical Ewa is the one onto whose body sexual morality must be inscribed: “Worldwide, women are enculturated and socialized to embody their sexual desire or lack thereof through their particular culture’s ideals of virtue. The social group’s expectations are inscribed in women’s individual desire and expressed through their sexuality” (Espín 124). Hoffman also writes that, as her young self, she could not reconcile the idea of Pani Orlovska’s husband keeping a mistress “who is practically his second wife” (47).¹⁷ Such a custom squares with the francophilic nature of certain Polish elite (of which Pani Orlovska was a member) in regard to sexual practices:

¹⁶ Her father, one of the roguish Wydra brothers, was “one of the town’s bad boys” (Hoffman 9).

¹⁷ Pani Orlovski, who “comes from an upper-class, almost aristocratic background,” is the mother of young Ewa’s friend, Krysia (43).

Women of the Polish intelligentsia have traditionally adopted some of the attitudes of the French intelligentsia toward sex, which include a nonpuritanical approach to the sexual activities of members of their class, so long as those implicitly accept the dominance of men (a weak version of the double standard, allowing men many partners but women only a few). (Hauser et al. 267-68)

Although this sort of practice is tolerated “and tacitly understood by all parties,” Hoffman writes that, in her understanding of the world as a twelve-year-old, “the situation doesn’t accord with [Pani Orlovska’s] dignity; it throws some odd light on her, on what she might be as a woman, rather than as an impressive personage” (47).

Alice Kaplan also writes of the stories she was told of sexuality and gender behavior. The very first pages of her book introduce her grandmother to the reader and how Kaplan remembers her reaction to her grandmother’s warnings to stay away from boys (11). Although Kaplan writes that she recalls herself thinking of her grandmother’s strict injunctions as jokes, on closer inspection, young Alice could see in her grandmother’s face that “[s]he was terrified” (11). Autobiographical Alice also learned of her mother’s strict upbringing; she dated only Jewish boys (7), and in their permanent home in town, her parents slept in twin beds (15). As Marilyn Yalom details in her monograph, *The History of the Wife*, such a description squares with generally accepted societal expectations of love and marriage in the forties and fifties in the United States:

It’s no secret that the American wife has been radically transformed during the past half century. Fifty years ago, a white middle-class woman was likely to enter marriage with a man from her own region, ethnicity, race and religion, hoping for three to four children, two cars, and wall-to-wall carpeting. Prior to marriage, she

had probably engaged in some pretty heavy petting, but for fear of “losing her reputation” or, worse yet, of becoming pregnant, she would not have “gone all the way,” at least not until an engagement ring was on her finger. (352)

As Kaplan writes regarding her mother’s interpretation of her own limited opportunities, “[t]he world had kept her at one table in the library. She wanted our world to be different” (7). Hoffman’s mother also wants to provide her with as many opportunities as possible; she refrains from teaching her daughter how to cook or sew, “lest such skills prevent me from turning to more interesting things” (9). Unlike Hoffman’s mother, who considers the prerogative to be lazy “the heart of feminine power” (15), Kaplan’s mother is revived from her sleepy cocoon of depression by going to work after her husband’s death (33).

As portrayed by Hoffman and Kaplan, their mothers responded to the greater opportunities and alternating cultural expectations for women by unyieldingly ignoring these expectations. In both Poland and the United States, World War II marked a change in policy toward the roles of women. The Polish woman, molded upon the predominant image of the Catholic Virgin Mary prior to the war, resulted in “[e]levated roles of young woman, lady and mother (e.g., *La belle Polonoise*, the Polish mother) as either romantic or respect-commanding figures” (Boski et al. 4), but governmental policy from 1947 to 1954 “was directed toward the extremely high professional involvement by women” (Grzymala-Moszczyńska 271). In a reversal of trends, the pressure of propaganda was on the “little woman” of America to join the ranks of the WACs (Women’s Army Corps) and the WAVESs (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service of the U.S. Navy), while after the war, Rosie the Riveter gave way to images of adorable wives in

families “of the *Father Knows Best*, *I Love Lucy*, and *Ozzie and Harriet* variety” (Yalom 359). In America, the patriotic woman would return to her former position as a wife and mother, leaving work for the men who had fought in the war, while in Poland, government propaganda directed women to help build the new communist nation through their work both inside and outside of the home. Kaplan’s mother, who Kaplan writes as telling deliciously shocked stories of her clients’ foul language at the county Department of Welfare (33), rejoins the work force after the war when women’s employment is not especially condoned, while Hoffman’s mother luxuriates in her idleness as much as possible at the same time that the government encouraged women “to enter all professions, even those that were traditionally considered to be male domains” (Grzymala-Moszczyńska 271).¹⁸

Although Hoffman and Kaplan portray their mothers as navigating different cultural expectations, indirectly teaching their daughters through their actions and attitudes both resistance and accommodation, these narratives are embedded within the unified logic of childhood, in which the world is an extension of the self. Both Kaplan and Hoffman, however, recall vaguely the unfamiliarity that French and English represented to them as children. For Kaplan, her French teacher, with her unshaven limbs, was associated “with the unknown excretions of womanhood that we were on the verge of experiencing in our own bodies” (126). Similarly, Hoffman recalls the images of American culture in her native Poland before her family was forced to emigrate,

¹⁸ Kaplan writes that her mother went “back to work for the Hennepin County Department of Welfare, where she had worked during the Depression before she got married” (33).

foreshadowing the unfamiliarity of what would become her “New World.”¹⁹ Her encounters with this strange culture came from snippets that somehow filtered through the Soviet authority’s restrictions: “Rock Around the Clock” on the radio, a film in which Kirk Douglas pursued a beautiful, and shockingly naked “Indian maiden,” and the “material proof of American wealth” that friends who had already left Poland would send, such as “a large box of cocoa with foreign words written all over it, a nylon slip for my mother, and then, best of all, two dresses, also made of nylon, with lace trimmings and beautifully gathered in the waist, for my sister and me” (60-1). In the comfort of her childhood home, an American magazine meant excitement. Hoffman remembers these rare sessions clearly, “We pore over the clothes shown in those magazines—we make no distinctions between advertisements and other pictures—with the closest attention, analyzing the minutiae of collars and pleats and waistlines, and we then show pictures of our chosen items to our dressmaker” (22).²⁰ Such strange encounters could be safely classified by autobiographical Ewa as “other,” and in this way, could be woven together into one tapestry of experience in the paradise of childhood and Hoffman’s undivided Polish self.

While ensconced in the familiarity of her first language and culture, young Ewa also engages in speculations about cultures that are foreign to her. In Poland,

¹⁹ The third section of her autobiography, in which Hoffman discusses how she negotiated a place for herself in “America,” is named “The New World.”

²⁰ In her study of immigrant women, Oliva M. Espín includes comments made by Barbara Schreier regarding the latter’s decision to focus on the connection between clothing and acculturation in a March 1994 exhibition at the Chicago Historical Society, entitled *Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience, 1880-1920*. As Schreier observes, even though men also discussed clothing in association with their immigrant experience, this connection did not carry with it the same “iconographic vocabulary.” “The decision to focus [the exhibition] on women was based on the long-standing relationship women have had with their appearance. Issues of dress unified women and framed their experience of life [as] separate from men” (126).

autobiographical Ewa reads about “wicked girls who skip school and sneak out at night to do God knows what,” but decides that it must be best to be “*bien pensant*” because it is these girls “who end up with a boyfriend” in the French boarding school novels (27). Such classics as *Quo Vadis?* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron* initiate the autobiographical Ewa into “a whole other knowledge—sex” (27-8), but she rejects her playmate’s confidence “that she wants to be a saint when she grows up” (30). Such fantasies hold no charm for the young Ewa, who does not like the idea of “lying down in a white dress, perhaps on a cross” because she wants to be free to “roam the world and have adventures” (30). As Danuta Zadworna Fjellestad so aptly writes in her article “‘The Insertion of the Self into the Space of the Borderless Possibility’: Eva Hoffman’s Exiled Body:” “While in Poland, she [young Ewa] never questions her own femininity, she merely tries to find ways of expressing it” (6). With such an adventurous spirit, Hoffman would seem to present the ideal candidate for the globe-trotting possibilities presented by the move to Canada, and Hoffman does remember exploring the ship that will cross the Atlantic, the *Batory*, in “a state of near-feverish excitement” (87). Like Kaplan, she seems to be in the thralls of the emotional roller-coaster of changing hormones, but her circumstance is compounded by the bare fact that she will not be able to return to Poland, at least for a very long time. Autobiographical Hoffman cannot stand to be near her parents; she behaves so erratically that her mother asks, “‘What’s come over you?’” (87). In contemplating the childhood that the writer felt she left behind in Poland, she asks how she could feel such “an upwelling of joy that seemed overwhelming, oceanic, absolute?” (74). The answer is: “Because they were the first things, the incomparable things, the only things” (74). For Hoffman, the end of the trip to Canada would represent the end of

her childhood (95), the Exile from Paradise.²¹ Hoffman can no longer write of her childhood, which for her, was unified in body, language, space and culture. She can no longer say to herself and her reader, “We are not yet divided” (74).

The split from childhood innocence and Polish is epitomized for autobiographical Ewa two days after her arrival in Vancouver when she and her sister are newly christened—Anglicized. After a quick deliberation with Mr. Rosenberg, the Hoffman family’s contact in Vancouver, the teacher “who has seen too many people come and go to get sentimental about a name” decides on Eva to replace the original Polish Ewa, and Alina becomes Elaine: “My sister and I hang our heads wordlessly under this careless baptism....nothing much has happened, except a small, seismic mental shift. 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” (105).²² In his analysis of this incident as Hoffman has rewritten it, Jerzy Durczak identifies this “moment of the ‘careless baptism’” as “the beginning of a painful split in Hoffman’s personality, the split which will mark a significant part of her adolescent and adult life” (159). In the same way that autobiography embodies a person and makes their version of life a thing in the form of the printed word, the names “Eva” and “Elaine” were, for autobiographical Ewa/Eva “disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself” (105). In textualizing the living body, the potential for a person to transform into thinghood

²¹ Hoffman closes the first section of *Lost in Translation*, which is entitled “Paradise,” with the end of the trip across the Atlantic from Poland to Canada, writing “The brief *Batory* interlude is over, and so is the narrative of my childhood” (95). The middle section of her autobiography, during which Hoffman writes of her adolescence in Vancouver, is entitled “Exile.”

²² This incident mirrors the second birth of Mary Antin, who, “as an adolescent schoolgirl, proclaims her transformation to American in a ‘second birth’” (Bergland 138). Magdalena Zaborowska has noted that Hoffman’s autobiography recognizes a continuation and rebuilding of her own experience upon what has been repeatedly dubbed Antin’s “classic immigrant story” (5).

persists, just as a new name stands for the body Ewa, now Eva: “the person, embodied in text, made thing, is accessible to harm. One can strike at a textualized body” (Eakin 172).

In recounting her initial experiences using a new language, Hoffman writes of being acutely aware of what second language acquisition researcher Merrill Swain terms the “hole” and the “gap” between her own developing language, or “interlanguage,” and the speech patterns of the people around her (66).²³ When first learning English, autobiographical Eva finds herself unable to translate adjectives used in English because they are so different from the Polish expressions, causing a “verbal blur” (Hoffman 108). Not only does she sometimes not know shades of meaning for English words, but she also struggles with placing words in their cultural context. When Eva’s friend, Penny, states that she feels envy, Hoffman does not understand exactly what sort of circumstances evoke envy in a North American context, or specifically what her friend is trying to communicate by using this particular word (107). Autobiographical Hoffman loses the thread of her friend’s conversation through her lack of comprehension during this immediately apparent “moment of strain” (107); she requires a cessation in her friend’s speech, not to organize grammar mentally, but to contemplate and translate her hierarchy of emotions into the new culture in which she is now immersed.

Alice Kaplan, on the other hand, writes pleasurably of hearing her name pronounced in the French manner with the stress on the second syllable—“ah-LEASE”—

²³ As Swain explains, “learners may notice not only the target language form itself but also that it is different from their own interlanguage” (66). (Interlanguage is the term that second language researchers use to describe a second language learner’s own unique form of the “target language,” which, in the case of Hoffman and Kaplan, is their second language.) Furthermore, Swain observes that learners may notice that they cannot express exactly what they wish to say in the “target language,” or “noticing a ‘hole’ in one’s interlanguage” (66).

during her first year abroad (52). For her at fifteen, French presented an orderly world quite unlike the “house where the patterns had broken down and the death that had broken them was not understood” (53). She would eventually sojourn into France at the height of the revolutionary activities of the 1960s, but her first trip into French is to Switzerland, to a school recommended for its “discipline and good French instruction: Le Collège du Léman” (Kaplan 39). Despite this seemingly conservative atmosphere, Kaplan is exposed to many more opinions and ways of thinking than she had known in the United States. Unlike Hoffman, who was forced into English and America at adolescence, Kaplan seized the opportunity to transform the turbulence of her English self into a tidy French persona, her American perception of the perfect francophone: “My privilege that I went away to Europe when I was fifteen and the shape of my mouth and the sounds going in and out of my ears weren’t frozen into place yet. An accident of class” (210).

Although Kaplan, unlike Hoffman, had the advantage of formal schooling in her new language before she arrived in France, she still does not communicate at length with her new roommate during their first meeting because “we didn’t have the words yet” (46). She notices that she cannot express herself fully in French (“the hole”), but chooses to attack her lessons almost religiously, “the way someone would run a marathon” (52), instead of withdrawing from her peers and grieving for her loss as autobiographical Eva did. Young Alice desperately wants to soak up language in any way that she can. She even makes out lists of words, then attempts to understand the nuances in their meanings by listening to other people’s conversations. Before the final step in this process of vocabulary retention, she checks her grasp of each word by listening for it again during

the course of another dialogue. Finally, she tries the word, gauging the correctness of her usage by her interlocutor's reaction (48). Kaplan's persistent methodology lends a new meaning to SLA researcher Swain's model of hypothesis formulation and testing (67).²⁴ She attacks her new language aggressively, inferring meaning through very consciously controlled experiments with unfamiliar vocabulary.

Whenever she is capable of speaking, Hoffman recalls that the disparity between her intended meaning and her actual utterance often results in a distortion of her message. In conversations, her "words often seem to baffle others" (147). The adolescent Eva knows that her language is different from that of native English speakers because her words sometimes arrest communication entirely; this lack of understanding makes her feel "impalpable, neutral, faceless" (147). Whereas SLA researchers Diane Larson-Freeman and Michael H. Long point out "that even free variation, which causes most problems for researchers and teachers alike, may play a constructive, perhaps crucial role in development" (88), Hoffman views her lack of proficiency as an inability to translate her unique personality into a language that other people will understand and an embarrassing, even frightening lack of control over her own body. For autobiographical Eva, as Hoffman rewrites herself, "the gap" between interlanguage and English is not a positive process of noticing which leads to a corrected articulation. She only feels a sense of pregnant loss, for her undivided childhood and the self that was left behind in Poland: "The largest presence within me is the welling up of absence, of what I have lost.

²⁴ As Swain elucidates, "A second way in which producing language may serve the language learning process is through hypothesis formulation and testing" (67). In this method, a learner uses her "output [or speech in the target language] as a way of trying out new language forms (hypotheses)" (67). Feedback from an external source, most likely an interlocutor who is a native speaker in the target language, provides the "test" for the new language forms that the learner is attempting to add to her repertoire, or her "interlanguage."

This pregnancy is also a phantom pain” (115). She is no longer able to express herself naturally and fully as she did in her native tongue, which distresses her greatly. As psychologist Oliva Espín observes: “[F]eelings of loss and the need to mourn those losses are at the crux of the process of successful adaptation. For healthy adaptation to occur these feelings of loss must become integrated into the individual psyche. But in so doing, identity is unavoidably transformed, and this transformation brings with it the additional need to mourn the old identity” (30). The transformation of linguistic and sexual identity comes at a high cost in an atmosphere so different from that of Eva’s native Poland. As Magdalena Zaborowska, herself an immigrant from Poland, shows in her analysis of Eva’s struggles, language and the body are inextricably connected:

She realizes that the price exacted by new language acquisition is a new “look,” as preconceived and rigid as the rules of grammar. Through connecting language and the body in the process of creating Eva’s bicultural identity, Hoffman points to the necessity, if not tyranny, of the right body image, which a nonnative speaker is expected to adopt in order to be accepted and understood. For Eva, learning English means acquiring a new “resident alien” body. (242)

In addition to the strain of acculturating herself to a foreign place, “Eva” also has to “pick and choose, from the Babel of American language, the style of wit that fits” (119), adjusting her body, her language—her self—to find the means by which she can express her own individualism in a way that will be acceptable to herself and the people who now surround her.

Unfortunately for the newly baptized Eva, this “resident alien” shape will involve a complicated ritual of twisting her form into an attractive Americanized girl, although

she is herself not entirely sure that the results of these manipulations are successful. Mrs. Lieberman, one of the Polish Jewish contingent that composes the community into which the Hoffman family has landed, along with some other ladies, decides that the newly arrived Eva needs some body work, and she assuredly sets about the “necessary” tasks of shaving the adolescent’s armpits (“that have never been objectionable to anyone before”), plucking her eyebrows, outfitting her with a crinoline, putting her hair into curlers, etc. (109). Through all of these ceremonial initiations into the American feminine, Hoffman writes of autobiographical Eva’s distinct knowledge that “after the passage across the Atlantic, I’ve emerged as less attractive, less graceful, less desirable” (109). For Hoffman, the constricting knowledge of her body as a limiting factor comes after her contact with American culture. Somehow, her previous self-image as “a pretty young girl” does not fit her new context (109). Her body must be shaped and molded into a different aesthetic. Like the angora sweaters that Mrs. Rosenberg and her daughter bestow upon the newly arrived autobiographical Ewa/Eva and her family (103), these gifts of beauty advice and makeovers are bitter pills. Ewa’s knowledge of intimate subjects is no longer adequate; even her personal hygiene must be adapted to fit the “resident alien body.” But as Hoffman writes her teenage self, “Inside its elaborate packaging, my body is stiff, sulky, wary” (110). Hoffman describes the newly arrived Eva as verging on the realization that something different is expected of her sexually. Her body must present a different shape and must react to different rhythms of speech than she has experienced and had foreseen continuing to experience her whole life. Oliva M. Espín and C. Goodenow note the psychological repercussions of the different cultural expectations for an immigrant caught between childhood and adulthood: “If sex roles are

problematic for adolescent females in general, this is doubly true for immigrant females, particularly those from more traditional cultures. The immigrant adolescent [girl] is faced with having to adjust to two sex cultures” (Espín 9).

Hoffman writes of her autobiographical adolescent self as turning inward, away from the sunny, white-toothed self she feels pressured to become in America: “*Tęsknota* [nostalgia] throws a film over everything around me, and directs my vision inward” (115).²⁵ When writing of her newly emerging English self, Hoffman reveals much about her first steps in her second language when she describes the frustrating disappearance of her pre-bedtime inner dialogue, her “way of informing the ego where the id had been” (107). The English words that she has learned in her daily interactions have not yet penetrated into a deeper level “from which a private conversation could proceed” (107). The Polish no longer applies, but Hoffman’s learning in English has not yet trickled down to a deeper level of consciousness to supply the evening thoughts that, in Polish, came effortlessly. In his article, “Toward a Sociocognitive Approach to Second Language Acquisition,” Dwight Atkinson defines the phenomenon that underlies Hoffman’s inability to digest her new language so that it flows into her mind before sleep. According to Atkinson, acquisition occurs through “neural networks that work together because of previous exposure to similar experience complexes.... From this viewpoint language...is...an integral element of a sociocognitive activity, the ultimate purpose of which is to perform holistic action-in-the-world” (14-15). As a young woman, new to Canada and its language, English is initially not connected to a real set of

²⁵ As Hoffman writes of her feelings as a new immigrant in Vancouver regarding her friend Penny’s aspirations: “Penny’s life, in her mind, opens out like a well-kept, sunny road” (150). Young Eva wonders, “Where are her moods, her intensities, the invisible, shadowy part of her personality?” (150).

meaningful events and emotions for Eva as Polish had been. Therefore, it cannot yet penetrate as Polish once did into Hoffman's unconscious, the relaxed mental state in which she rethinks the activities of her day before she drifts off to sleep. Because of her perceived lack of proficiency in English and disjointed inability to translate her Canadian experiences into Polish, Hoffman retreats into herself, distancing herself emotionally from English speakers in Vancouver.²⁶

When her friend Penny gives her a diary, autobiographical Eva does not know which language is the one that would be most appropriate to record her experiences. For her, time has stopped. The pleasant stream of Polish that used to inform her barely conscious self before she went to bed "has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness" (107), but English has not yet filled out her emotional world. Finally, Hoffman writes, autobiographical Eva chooses English because it is the language most connected to the present "even if it's not the language of the self" (121). Although Hoffman describes her younger self as taking "the first jump" into English, she finds that she cannot "use the word 'I.' I do not go as far as the schizophrenic 'she'—but I am driven, as by a compulsion, to the double, the Siamese-twin 'you'" (212). Before arriving in America, Hoffman writes of her integrated Polish self, "I hardly have an identity, except that most powerful one of first, private loves" (88). Not yet confronted with having to negotiate the world away from her family in order to survive, as a young adolescent Eva must try to establish her own psychic space in a different language and a new culture. Caught

²⁶ Hoffman's withdrawal was probably exacerbated by the fact that, for her, the target culture was dominant, creating social distance, which is not an ideal circumstance for language acquisition according to SLA researcher John H. Schumann (262). As Hoffman observes, and, as an adolescent in Vancouver, points out to her classmates and anyone who will listen, Polish and American culture are mutually unintelligible (132-33).

somewhere between the past and the future, she does not want fully to claim the “clumsy looking creature” into which she has been transformed (110). Alienated from the language and body that experienced her “first, private loves” (74), autobiographical Eva has not yet found the voice, the correct tenor, to overcome the condition of “resident alien.” Precariously too embodied and yet mentally outside of herself, in writing herself in English, autobiographical Eva discovers that “[t]his language is beginning to invent another me” (121).

But before this other “me” begins to venture out, diary writing for young Eva is in the second person, since she decides that her position “in life is to be an ‘observer’—making a poor virtue out of the reality that I feel so very out of it” (131). She has lost her ability to be quick and witty, a serious blow to her self-concept: “I’ve never been prim before, but that’s how I am seen by my new peers. I don’t try to tell jokes too often, I don’t know the slang, I have no cool repartee” (118). During the beginning of her English learning experience, autobiographical Eva no longer enjoys “the narcissistic gratification to which [she, as] the learner[,] is accustomed;” she experiences “language shock,” losing her linguistic confidence (Schumann 266). In his incorporation of psychologist John Shotter’s views into his own interpretation of autobiographical writing, (which likewise applies to the experience of second language acquisition), Paul John Eakin observes, “Identity formation, then, is socially and (more specifically) discursively transacted: thus ‘the capacity to be addressed as a ‘you’ by others is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say ‘I’ of oneself” (63).

Alice Kaplan, however, writes that her adolescent self welcomed the image of French, language and body. She rewrites an exchange between her mother and other

women who controlled her educational destiny as if their voices came from nowhere, or are the voices are of the Fates themselves:

“Europe is just what the doctor ordered.”

“Think how good it will be for your French.”

“You’re more mature than other girls your age.” (38)

Consequently, French in autobiographical Alice’s mind is nebulously equated with some form of physical and mental development, adulthood, and healing. In the beginning pages of her self-portrayal, Kaplan includes a scene in which her brother and sister are attempting to instill some tidbits of common cultural lore into their little sister, “Everything I like is illegal, immoral, and fattening” (3). As Kaplan writes her adolescent self, she is determined to overcome such “American” values. As the feminist critic Susan Bordo states, “Fat (that is to say, becoming *all* body) is associated with the taint of matter and flesh, ‘wantonness,’ mental stupor and mental decay” (148). In his *Fat History* of the United States and France, Peter N. Stearns points out the inherent contradiction of the French cultural notion regarding cuisine and body that combines “a traditional self-identity of superb taste with a new, and very proud, identity as the slimmest people in the Western World” (186). Such an emphasis on thinness as the correct body image is a fairly recent development, but one that has gained credence through popular magazines and the notions of the medical establishment.²⁷ As Kaplan acknowledges, autobiographical Alice’s “diary” was a catalogue of “food and conjugations. Wednesday. Breakfast: two crusts and coffee. And so on. I wrote ‘Force

²⁷ As Stearns observes, the French even had a common saying that linked fat and good nature: “Fat people, good people” (155).

de volonté' (force of will) across my notebook, the way other girls wrote 'Susie loves Ralph'" (52). For her, controlling language and body would propel her into adulthood and, thereby, some sense of a recuperated, contained self, "The school encouraged my belief that I had come through my childhood and that adolescence, too, was behind me" (50). Indubitably, the Alice that Kaplan describes was on the path to an eating disorder, if she would not already have been diagnosed with one. According to sociologist Debra Gimlin, eating disorders are apparently one indicator of a late twentieth-century preoccupation with a certain body image combined with psychological factors that constitute a predisposition to contract the disorder: "Psychoanalytic theories predict which individuals will contract eating disorders, but ignore the larger social issues essential to an understanding of these diseases... The cultural model, however, cannot explain why particular individuals become ill" (107). In a discussion with her mother regarding her father's alcoholism, Kaplan writes that, as an autobiographical adult, she attempts to dismiss her mother's explanation that "everyone in Washington drank," protesting, "People aren't alcoholics because of the times," to which her mother responds, "Yes they are, Alice, yes they are" (202).²⁸

In writing about her first experience in French, Kaplan reflects: "When I was an adolescent, French was my storehouse language. I collected secrets in French; I spoke to myself in French. I know now that my passion for French helped me to put off what I needed to say, in English, to the people around me" (214). Escaping into another language, autobiographical Alice seeks to control her emotions, control her

²⁸ In one of the early studies of eating disorders, in 1973, their incidence was considered "'very rare.' However, by 1984, it was estimated that 1 in every 200 to 250 women between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two suffered from the illness" (Gimlin 99-100).

circumstances, and control her self through her body. Indeed, sociologist Debra Gimlin asserts that unresolved crises in childhood or adolescence and a “discomfort with the developing female body” are both documented as causal factors for the anorectic’s attempt to gain control of her changing body by starving it (100-4). In young Alice’s case, this need for control is a provoking ingredient in a dangerous mixture that, ironically, will only malnourish and weaken her psyche. As Kaplan writes of her self during her first year abroad, “I grew thinner and thinner. I ate French” (53).

After “eating French” for a year, Kaplan remembers returning home and swapping eating stories in her newly-gained (or lost) French persona with her friend Louise, “I thought she would understand me. She, too, had a year behind her that no one at home could share.... We didn’t talk about loneliness. We complained about our bodies. She told me at her school the girls took Ex-Lax if they ate too much so they wouldn’t gain weight” (73). Such a ritualistic conversation has meanings underneath the supposed topic of conversation, weight. In their analysis of adolescent girls’ conversations, anthropologists Mimi Nichter and Nancy Vuckovic conclude: “In the United States, where food is abundant and diverse, weight is a reference point for conventionalized statements about the way people feel about themselves and events in their lives. Such statements may not reflect actual behavior, but rather index important personal and cultural concerns” (109). Corresponding to the psychosis of their times, autobiographical Alice and her friend dance around the topics would make them emotionally vulnerable by focusing on a shared topic that is superficial, although this topic is heavily coded with meaning. In using a subject that “seems,” such as weight, young Alice and her friend can speak of emotional concerns through the medial topic of

their bodies, but, in effect, they end up equating their bodies with their emotional state. If their bodies carry “extra” fat, the girls are not moral, fashionable, or intelligent—in a word unacceptable. After speaking French for so long, Kaplan writes that, in America, “When I spoke I felt like I was outside my own body, listening to someone else, and translating. I felt small and neat and the people around me looked messy” (70).

Suddenly, as in experiencing the initial changes of adolescence, autobiographical Alice finds that she is looking at herself from the outside (70). She must grasp tightly to her thin, thin body all of the neat “maturity” of control that she has gained through feeding herself on French. In returning home, she brings her French image with her in the form of her “size 38 white cotton shirt,” her “Swiss ‘Camel Filtres,’” along with her notebook of conjugations and food catalogue (71).

Subsequently, as Kaplan rewrites herself, autobiographical Alice has achieved the quintessence of cosmopolitanism and the correct body image in Switzerland. Except that her adolescent fantasy of again seeing her first boyfriend, Ted, with him succumbing to her worldly charms, falls very short of reality: “Instead, he looked embarrassed” (72). In her hypothesis regarding the causes of anorexia, Debra Gimlim asserts that the disorder is one in which an individual overconforms to ingrained cultural and personal messages: “The contradictory character of the role that the anorexic is trying to meet is reflected in the contradictory nature of her disease” (109). In tapping into these signals of body perfection so closely, autobiographical Alice both upholds and subverts the expectations of thinness, feminine passivity, and high achievement. She starves herself so slim that she simultaneously conforms to these standards of femininity while also displaying how unrealistic any idealized body aesthetic is. Kaplan writes of her first journey into French

in terms of the autobiographical Alice's picture of what constitutes maturity, the American "infatuation with (what we image to be) the civility, tradition, and savoir-faire of 'Europe' (seen as the stylish antithesis to our own American clumsiness, aggressiveness, crudeness)" (Bordo 99). Like "Americans" in general, autobiographical Alice's childhood and adolescent self were not thin enough; her mature "French self" is neat and small and tidy. Upon her arrival in the United States, she hears the sounds of American English as "loud and thudding—like an insult or a lapse of faith" (Kaplan 70). But after her fantasy of language and body is exploded by Ted's embarrassed stare, Kaplan rewrites her teenage self as suddenly being seized with an insatiable hunger. Analogous to Hoffman's pregnant feelings of loss for her childhood self that was left behind permanently in Poland, Kaplan writes that she sheds her French persona, small and neat, as she fills out over the summer, devouring "Wonder Bread with margarine and cinnamon sugar on top of it" (72).

The pattern of Hoffman's and Kaplan's adolescence is one of the changing rhythms of the body from the anthropomorphous, disembodied condition of childhood into the startling changes of a new language and unfamiliar cultural expectations. As newly emergent sexual selves, both women must contend with the reality of the importance of women's appearance, and how the expectations of beauty differ from culture to culture.²⁹ For Hoffman, coming from a francophilic culture,³⁰ the absurdity of

²⁹ Indeed, "[t]he contemporary belief that athleticism equals feminism and is 'based on sound medical knowledge' is as culture-bound as an Edwardian doctor's approval of 'healthy' fatness for both men and women...To minimize gender distinctions and to emphasize a mesomorphic body type is no more 'natural' than fashion's various exaggerations or stylizations of the sexual body" (Steele 244).

³⁰ In the article "Feminism in the Interstices of Politics and Culture: Poland in Transition," Hauser et al. concur in a discussion of current challenges for Poland that the "Polish intelligentsia, a distinct and self-

shaping the body through rigorous exertion is absurd. Nonetheless, Hoffman acclimatizes her adult self to this prescriptive embodiment by doing as the Romans, or, in this case, as the Americans, do, "Once in a while, I go to a health club, that place where people, with a look of high seriousness on their faces, attach themselves to various contraptions and put successive parts of their bodies into strenuous motion" (51). Despite the luxury of having a different cultural perspective from which to remove herself from the American obsession with self-improvement, Hoffman writes painfully of having her body worked over into an acceptable American version of what had been pleasing without any fuss in Poland. Kaplan, however, writes of embracing the chance to remake herself into a different form and hear the sounds of French come from the tidy person into which she has reformed her image. Her first immersion in French mirrors Susan Bordo's diagnosis of the problem with body work: "My focus, rather, is on a subjective stance, become increasingly prominent, which, although preoccupied with the body and deriving narcissistic enjoyment from its appearance, takes little pleasure in the *experience* of embodiment. Rather, the fundamental identification is with the mind (or will), ideals of spiritual perfection, fantasies of absolute control" (151). As Kaplan writes herself, she is enthralled with the rigors of French, with its possibilities of an orderly universe, while for adolescent Ewa/Eva, the world English represented confronts her with a disorderliness that threatens to subsume her with its unfamiliarity. As adolescents experiencing the reality of sexual differentiation, both women, on the edge of adulthood, must reorganize

conscious class whose members tend to see themselves as the conscious of the nation" have "a centuries-long intellectual fascination with French culture" (268).

their personalities into a new language and somehow reform the rhythms of their childhood narratives into an embodied language of a mature self.

In this chapter, we negotiated understandings of Hoffman's and Kaplan's representation of the boundaries between the body and self, language and community in their adolescent struggle to acquire their second languages and come to terms with their own changing bodies. In the next chapter, we will explore how Hoffman and Kaplan, having reformed the rhythms of their childhood narratives into an embodied language of a sexually mature self, write of how that self will be expressed in adulthood. Each author must find a way to balance her ancestral language and its heritage with the reality of her own life lived in the "imagined communities" of the present and fashion an idiolect that will remain faithful to her own story—past and present.³¹

³¹ Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community," both limited and sovereign (15).

IV. The Idiolect of Autobiography: Translating the Collective and Individual Self

As if I hadn't already dreamt it
a thousand times,
the moment your hand reaches out

to mine,
as a face grazing its own Otherness
in a mirror,
there is no real touch,
no feeling, but the icy numbness of snow
against window glass,

no awakening
but to the sudden tears of thaw.

—Judith Harris (56)

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

—Lewis Carroll (*Looking* 253)

Both Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan reflect on their struggles to reconcile the felt poetry of the psychic spaces and rhythmic language of childhood with the materiality of a sexually mature body speaking an unfamiliar second language during adolescence in their respective autobiographies, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* and *French Lessons*. For Hoffman and Kaplan, the process of adulthood occurred within a matrix of shifting allegiances and changes within the broader societal context from ethnic identification to nationalistic identification, as reflected in the languages that each speaks

as adults—Polish, American English, and French—as well as in the language that each did not learn—Yiddish. As bilingual adults, each must find a way to write herself as a coherent text; each must find her own individual voice within the community of language. In writing autobiography, both Hoffman and Kaplan translate into textual form an understanding of who they have become within the context of the time and place in which they live without losing their connection to a rich and deep cultural past. Having learned, in Hoffman’s words that “You can’t transport human meanings whole from one culture to another any more than you can transliterate a text” (175), each woman turns to autobiography to create a central text of linguistic existence—to understand and integrate their past and present selves into an idiolect of individual existence within the bounds of the communal medium of language itself.

In his study, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin examines both how the self is discursively constructed through language and how that self, in turn, is translated into a written text through autobiography. As Eakin notes, theories that account for the social formation of individual personality tend towards a highly deterministic viewpoint in which individual agency is all but lost in the overpowering social structures. In his view, the work of the Soviet linguists of the “‘cultural-historical school’—including L. S. Vygotsky and A. N. Leontyev—offers an attractively balanced answer” (65). Vygotsky and his colleagues couch the language of personality within the rhetoric of social structures without diminishing individual agency; according to them, “the self is a dialogue which reflects and refracts concrete social interactions in which it plays a part.... The personality is not a product of social

discourse, but is a self-create aspect of concrete social dialogue” (65). As adults, Hoffman and Kaplan write in order to reconcile the competing loyalties of ethnic/religious identification and family against their own personal life journey. Both writers use the stories of others in constituting their own life narratives, which serve as a guide and form of enrichment in understanding their connections to family and an ancestral past, much as the communal and religious stories of the Judaic tradition indoctrinated and informed their parents’ generation about appropriate actions and responses in the community in which they would become adults. However, these relational stories are filtered through the narrative of each woman’s autobiography and her own individual story, effectively balancing the first, emotional language of childhood with the second, learned language of adolescence. In this chapter, using research in cultural and political history, linguistics, and psychological insights, we will explore how both Hoffman and Kaplan fashion a text through the medium of autobiography that not only includes the stories of the lives that touched their own, but also shows how their individual selves were transformed—translated—through the medium of another language.

Both Kaplan and Hoffman connect their notions of timelessness to a grandmother figure, an ancestor in an endless tradition. For Kaplan, her grandmother, or Nanny, was also a storehouse of mysterious knowledge—she could speak four languages. Kaplan, who is fortunate enough to have access to a photo of her grandmother taken when she was thirty-eight (Kaplan’s age when she was writing *French Lessons*), observes, “I can see that she looked like me. The same lines from her nose to her lips. Low forehead. Full cheeks” (11). The lines of generations are inscribed on Alice Kaplan’s face and

body, but she holds only one language in common with her grandmother—American English. According to Kaplan, her grandmother faded away on thorazine in the Sholom Home, located “in a no-man’s-land between the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul,” where the sounds of Yiddish disturbed young Alice with their incomprehensible familiarity (12). The hodgepodge of Nanny’s languages eventually appear in her senility at the nursing home: “The languages from her past—Russian from the school she had attended in Lithuania, Yiddish from home, Hebrew from the synagogue—came up like bile” (12). As Kaplan explains, even when Nanny could live by herself, she would not fill out certain forms for the American government; she wanted to dissolve into the insignificance of the masses: “In her mind an evil force, bigger than the Red Owl, bigger than the Temple, lurking, perhaps, in the Social Security Administration or the Registrar of Voters, was waiting to send her back. Back to Trask, Lithuania, where her mother had hidden her in the closet so the Cossacks wouldn’t rape her” (11).

As linguist Solomon A. Birnbaum explains, with the beginning of the Russian pogroms in 1881, the tide of Yiddish speakers moved out from Eastern Europe, starting a new era in the geography of Yiddish. A big wave began to roll westward. It left groups of various sizes in the West European countries, but its main impact was on the United States...In 1880 East European Yiddish had hardly any outposts at all, whereas before World War II the outposts themselves comprised about a third to all those who spoke the language. (34)

Nanny’s languages are those of an ancestral and religious past, one to which young Alice has no direct connection, but for which she feels a mysterious and deep affinity: “I heard just enough Yiddish in childhood to imagine a world full of awkward, foolish people with

wild plans that turned to buffoonery. Yiddish sounds, in and of themselves, were tempting, full of vulgar but thrilling possibilities, like ‘oy’ with its diphthong you could stretch in your mouth for as long or short as you wanted” (5). Linguist and historian Benjamin Harshav notes that “the Yiddish language was very old and very young at the same time, rich in emotive expressions and poor in denotations of ‘realia,’ specific objects in everyday life and nature” (4). Kaplan recalls that Nanny, in her dementia, switched from language to language: “Hebrew sounded incantatory, ritualistic; Yiddish was conversational, emotional” (Kaplan 13). As an adult, Kaplan writes of finding herself almost schizophrenically switching between English and French in her thoughts, leading her to wonder “if I could end up like her?” (14).

Kaplan writes that her grandmother also had a deep identification with the Jewish people: “‘It’s a shame for the people’ was Nanny’s line about any Jewish person who committed a crime, lapsed in behavior, or called attention to themselves” (11). Kaplan’s grandmother displays a kinship with a Jewish community, with “her people” (12), which for Kaplan as an adult, is also an integral part of her identifications, but in a much subtler, remoter way. In the world from which Kaplan’s grandmother originated, however, Jewishness was an essential part of identity, permeating language, food, and rituals. Indeed, Lithuania and the rest of Europe was composed of a large Jewish community, the largest in the world at the end of the nineteenth century, when, according to Benjamin Harshav, “Ashkenazis constituted about ninety percent of world Jewry” (xiii). Before the “great Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania was dismembered by its neighbors” at the end of the eighteenth century, the Yiddish-speaking multitude lived in its territories (7). With the partition of these territories among the three states of Russia, Austria, and Prussia,

Jews formed one of the many minorities (Poles, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanian, Latvians, Germans, Czechs, Hungarians) that spoke a language other than that of the ruling state, conditions under which the Yiddish language thrived (8). Yiddish fulfilled the role of mediating language for the Ashkenazis extending back beyond the Jews of Nanny's generation for a millennium, a language which could be used in the home between the secular world of the surrounding language and the holy realm of Hebrew (Harshav xiii). This tradition ends with Kaplan's generation; as she writes, "My family had made the transition from diaspora Yiddish to American English in a quick generation. You couldn't hear the shadow of an accent, unless my grandmother was around" (9).

Hoffman also writes of a grandmother figure that looms in her mind, but for young Ewa, this figure is only a product of her mind; neither of her grandmothers survived the war. Unlike Kaplan, who can gaze on a younger version of her grandmother in photographic form, Hoffman has no photographs from which she can compare herself and her grandmothers: "the cut from the past is complete" (8). Despite this reality of discontinuity, young Ewa dreams of a grandmother figure, "a tiny old woman—a wizened Baba Yaga, half grandmother, half witch, wearing a black kerchief and sitting shriveled and hunched on a tiny bench at the bottom of our courtyard, way, way down" (6). In Hoffman's vision, the Baba Yaga does not speak; she only looks through her wizened, malicious eyes at young Ewa. Despite the potential hostility in this look, Hoffman writes of her speculation that perhaps, as a child, she knows everything that the Baba Yaga knows and that is why she understands the look in her eyes. Indeed, young Ewa is wizened beyond her years because of the circumstances of her birth. Born

approximately two months after the end of World War II (8), as an adult, Hoffman must reconcile the burden of her parents' sorrowful past to her own lived reality, since, for her, being Jewish does not carry the same weight of meaning that it did for her parents' generation. As she writes, "I try to slough off the excess darkness that is false to my condition" (253).

Like her fantasies of the Baba Yaga that replace the materiality of knowing her grandmothers, Yiddish was also inscribed in young Ewa's earliest memories. Just as she was named after both of her grandmothers—in a break with the tradition of naming the first daughter after the nearest dead relative in the matrilineal line—who she never came to know, Yiddish is the language that young Ewa heard but did not understand. It was "the language of money and secrets" (14). During the family's walks on the *Planty*, Hoffman remembers that sometimes her parents would stop to talk to friends, "their voices lowering if the exchange takes place in Yiddish" (40). As literary critic Jerzy Durczak explicates, "Ewa herself does not speak Yiddish; it is the language of adults and the problems discussed in this language are not the problems of a young, happy girl" (157). Although her parents do not inform young Ewa explicitly of her Jewishness until she is seven years old, Hoffman recalls always having a sense of being Jewish: "[It] permeates our apartment like the heavy, sweet odor of the dough that rises in our kitchen in preparation for making hallah. The Jewishness lives in that bread, which other people don't seem to make; it's one of the markers of our difference" (29). Like Jewishness, mystery shrouds Yiddish because young Ewa cannot fathom the literal meanings conveyed within its structures. Instead, these two aspects of her identity recall some sort

of secret ancestral past to young Ewa. As South Asian scholar and theorist Benedict Anderson observes:

First, one notes the primordialness of languages, even those known to be modern. No one can give the date for the birth of any language. Each looms up imperceptibly out of a horizonless past. (Insofar as *homo sapiens* is *homo dicens*, it can seem difficult to imagine an origin of language newer than the species itself.) Languages thus appear rooted beyond almost anything else in contemporary societies. At the same time, nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language. If English-speakers hear the words “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust”—created almost four and a half centuries ago—they get a ghostly imitation of simultaneity across homogenous, empty time. The weight of the words derives only in part from their solemn meaning; it comes also from an as-it-were ancestral “Englishness.” (132)

When her family goes to the synagogue for their annual visit, Hoffman writes of the long walk to the Jewish Quarter as “a small journey into a hermetic otherness” (36). On this day, her parents become removed; her father does not interrupt his chanting, the “irregular arrhythmic hum, so unlike the music of the Catholic church—this is more rapt and private”—to pay attention to young Ewa, and her mother only gives her a quick smile (37). For on this day, her family undergoes a transformation; Ewa and Alina cease to be the children of their parents “and become something both larger and smaller” (37). The chanting in the synagogue seems to be outside of time, as language itself sometimes appears to be.

Hoffman remembers listening to her mothers' stories as a child, storing them in her memory like "black beads" as a way to atone for the events of the Second World War and its suffering (24). Her family's servant, Ciocia Bronia had come through the ravages of the war with young Ewa's parents and they felt a great fondness for her, as the affectionate appellation *Ciocia*, or "Auntie" denotes (20). When Hoffman's parents found their final refuge in a Ukrainian peasant's home, where they hid in his attic for an entire year, "cold, lice covered, often hungry," his servant, Ciocia Bronia, revealed to them that she was passing for a Polish peasant, for she too was Jewish: "She had come from far enough so that nobody in this village knew it, and she looked enough like a Pole—large boned and broad faced—that she could easily pass" (21). Crucially, Ciocia Bronia also could speak Polish in such a manner that she could not be differentiated from "ethnic Poles." Passing undoubtedly saved Ciocia Bronia's life, but to survive, she had to deny her Jewishness (and Yiddish) for an extended period of time.

In describing Ciocia Bronia's revelation, Hoffman names Jewishness as "the tainted secret" (21). Speaking Polish and having the appearance of a "Pole" (meaning not a Jewish Pole, a Polish Jew, etc.) helped Ciocia Bronia cover "the tainted secret" by passing, but as literary critic Marion Rust notes, the term "passing" is a reminder of a past identity that cannot be expressed (23). Even in post-World War II Poland, Hoffman's parents were not able to speak Yiddish freely in public places. In this way, their public linguistic identity as Jews was curtailed, as in the experience of so many others. In her own autobiographical piece, Judaic Studies and English professor Anita Norich observes that, as a child, she knew never to speak Yiddish on Munich buses (149). Even when her family moved to America, her mother never wanted her to speak Yiddish: "My mother

worried that Yiddish would literally betray me in ways that my unremarkable name and American English accent never would” (148). As critic Samira Kawash points out, the definition of passing from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “accepted as equivalent to,” obscures its Latin root, *passus*, a “step,” which implies a crossing (64). This crossing, as such, also denotes a death, “the ultimate turning away” (Rust 23). For European Jews living during World War II, passing was sometimes the only way to survive, however, the Nazi’s imposed system of classification also stripped them of the ability to openly practice their faith in any normal fashion.

Hoffman also remembers one other instance of passing during her narrative: using “Aryan papers,” Pani Ruta’s family was able to pass during the war and live in the comfort of their Cracow apartment (36). Hoffman recalls how Pani Ruta, the mother of young Ewa’s childhood love, Marek, took her to a restaurant and ordered pork cutlets for herself and young Ewa during Yom Kippur. Despite her delight in her own refinement, Hoffman remembers feeling wary of this break with taboos; to young Ewa it seems “calculated to betray” (36). For Ciocia Bronia and Pani Ruta, passing in Polish served different functions. In recalling her meal with Pani Ruta, Hoffman uncomfortably notes that Pani Ruta’s actions seemed to connote a passing from Jewishness, a linguistic and group betrayal, while Ciocia Bronia’s “performance” did not. Subsequently, for Hoffman looking back on her life, Jewishness is “always there,” and to push too far beyond its borders or attempt to leave it entirely would be to dishonor the memory of the dead, but she also must come to terms with her own experience living as one of the generation born after World War II. In reflecting on this predicament, Hoffman writes, “I think, sometimes that we were children too overshadowed by our parents’ stories, and without

enough sympathy for ourselves, for the serious dilemmas of our own lives, and who thereby couldn't live up to our parents' desire—amazing in its strength—to create new life and to bestow on us a new world” (230).

Kaplan, too, recalls what “being Jewish” entailed for her. Her family, like Hoffman's, had a Jewish servant, Levine Blue, who lived on the north side of town, where Kaplan's father had grown up in a Jewish neighborhood that had become an African American community (8). This brief reference in Kaplan's writing retains within it a world of cultural history, and becomes of special interest considering Kaplan's fascination with French and her interview with the collaborator Maurice Bardèche, who, ironically, would later compare himself as the American “Negro” (whose sensibilities Americans ostensibly could not understand) to Kaplan herself, whom he termed an ““anthropologist of anti-Semitism”” (195). As historian Hasia R. Diner notes, after the lynching of Leo Frank (who was Jewish) near Atlanta in 1915 (15), Jews, who had always retained an interest in African Americans as an oppressed minority in America, found themselves even more inclined to take notice of African Americans “as the symbol of America's failure to live up to its rhetoric of equality and democracy” (20). Likewise, beginning that very year with the great migration North of African Americans, “a migration of an agrarian population to industry, and a migration of southern people to the North” (17), Jews found themselves in contact with this group en masse for the first time: “It [1915] was also significant in the relationship between the two groups because only after massive [B]lack migration to Northern cities did Jews and [B]lacks really come in contact with each other” (Diner 19). Kaplan notes that, as Jews, her family was “on trial,

being upright for [people of European descent in] the neighborhood” (6).³² Unlike European Jews, however, who were faced with memories of the Holocaust in the aftermath of World War II, American Jews were faced with discrimination. Although, anthropologist and professor of Africana Studies Katya Gibel Azoulay, who is herself Jewish and African American, is careful to note that “[d]iscrimination against Jews and against Blacks was not the same, chiefly because one group was always visible by skin color and the other could carefully conceal its background,” she also explains that there is an unavoidable parallel between Jews “and African Americans who were light enough to pass as white” (65).³³ Like Ciocia Bronia, who is able to pass as “Polish,” visually and linguistically, Kaplan’s family is able to live in places reserved for “Whites,” as they speak American English without a trace of an accent.

In her article “On the Yiddish Question,” Anita Norich ponders in an associative style her relationship to the Yiddish and English languages within the context of her Jewish heritage:

When my dead spoke to me, they always spoke Yiddish. They never spoke of how they had been murdered but always of Lodz and Zakopane and family and cooking and the fur trade and, sometimes, of the subversive power of books. And

³² But most African Americans had neither the means nor the right shade of skin tone even to attempt moving into such a neighborhood so early in twentieth century American history. Moreover, as sociologists Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott observe, “historically as well as in the contemporary era, the Jewish American experience stands in stark contrast to that of African Americans. Jews came to America as immigrants with commercial, craft, manufacturing, and intellectual skills shaped in the developing industrial and commercial context of Europe,” achieving a great measure of economic success (328).

³³ The relationship of color that was forced upon these two groups is highlighted in a Polish noble’s 1857 memoir upon his visit to the United States: “numbers of Jews have the greatest resemblance to the American mulattoes. Sallow carnation complexion, thick lips, crisped black hair.... On my arrival in this country I took every light-colored mulatto for a Jew” (qtd. in Gilman 7-8).

they never thought it odd to meet the child born after their deaths. Nor did they ever ask how a happy, well-adjusted American girl had come to speak such a wonderfully rich, unaccented Yiddish. I was passing, I could tell them, passing as an American, as a student, sometimes an American Jew. But I had not deserted them, leaving them to their fates. (148)

As a young girl who speaks “unaccented American,” young Alice, too, could pass as a member of the dominant group whose privileges were not obstructed. Subsequently, because she knows it has no Jewish members, Kaplan writes of feeling a thrill when she meets Ted, a bronzed, well-built young man, at the Woodhill Country Club: “The night I met Ted I felt like a spy, charming him undercover” (39). In effect, young Alice passes as an established Anglo American in order to gain access to this posh and “choice” country club, as this pattern of Jewish exclusion was firmly sewn into the American societal fabric. Indeed, according to political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg, after the Civil War a prominent and influential Jew, Joseph Seligman, was not admitted to a posh New York resort, the Grand Union Hotel, a symbolic gesture of rejection that would be repeated again and again in social circles and institutions throughout the country (84-85), while in the 1920s Jews began to find that they were limited in their access to top universities, major corporations, and law firms (96).³⁴

Young Alice finds a way, at least in her own beliefs, to subvert such prohibitive measures—language. Before leaving for her first year abroad, she remembers

³⁴ As sociologists Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott note, it was probably not coincidental that the year that marked the beginning of systematic anti-Semitism “was also the year of the Hayes-Tilden Compromise that signaled the defeat of Reconstruction in the South and the unleashing of almost one hundred years of unbridled White supremacy and social and political reaction” (330).

envisioning French as an escape from the exclusive “Anglo” world that Ted represents: “I’d be a new person. I wouldn’t even recognize Ted anymore. I wouldn’t even understand his language” (41). In addition, Kaplan writes that during her first visit abroad in Switzerland, she came to distinguish the sounds marking different German words in the whisperings of her roommate, Chris, so that she knew Chris was chattering about her to her other roommate, associating young Alice with the term “Jude” (47). Young Alice sharply interrupts Chris, saying, in French, “Don’t think you can talk about me behind my back right in front of me, Chris, just because you’re taking German—I understand, you know” (47). Because she could understand this appellation in German, Kaplan remembers feeling impenetrable: “I could understand languages. And because I could understand languages, she couldn’t get me” (47).

Despite Kaplan’s confidence in her impenetrability to discrimination, she remembers feeling not quite so invincible when contemplating death. Both Kaplan and Hoffman write of the fear they had as children of losing their loved ones. After her father’s death, Kaplan remembers that she would rehearse a certain morbid scene in which she would wake up and her mother would also be dead, leaving her an orphan (26). For Hoffman, the memory of death and destruction inevitably pervades the stories of the family circle. She writes of how, after the war, her mother ritualistically remembers the day of her younger sister’s death. Although the family has lost many of its members, Hoffman recalls that, for her mother, her sister’s death held the most pain: “She was so young, eighteen or nineteen—‘She hadn’t even lived yet,’ my mother says—and she died in such a horrible way” (6). Hoffman’s younger sister, Alina, is named after this aunt who met her end in the gas chambers of the Nazis and was forced to dig her own grave,

her hair turning gray from having to perform this ghastly task (6-7). Young Ewa herself is named after her father's mother in a break with tradition that demonstrates to her "the pain of loss he must have felt" (8). As historian Jaff Schatz states, to those Jews returning to Poland after the war, the magnitude of human loss was unfathomable, "The extent of the Holocaust was a shock. Poland was a gigantic Jewish cemetery" (203). Indeed, Anita Norich, herself the child of Holocaust survivors and born in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany (147), acknowledges, "I think of Poland as one vast cemetery, but there isn't even an actual cemetery where I can find the graves of my dead" (152). At a very early age, young Ewa understands intimately how precious and precarious life is, and as Hoffman writes of her perceptions as a child, "my mother too seems breakable to me, as if she had been snatched from death only provisionally, and might be claimed by it at any moment" (7). Subsequently, Hoffman remembers thinking as a child that to be an adult "is to be close to death" (7).

While stories of the Holocaust permeated young Ewa's family circle, with its missing relatives and the stories of their deaths, Kaplan recalls learning of this cataclysm through the pictures that she found in her father's desk drawers after his death.³⁵ Along with other American children of her generation who did not experience the horrors of the war firsthand, for young Alice, photographs provided a vivid picture of an unimaginable reality. Although, as an adult, Kaplan writes of how she suppressed these images from consciousness, as a child, these images of suffering were seared indelibly upon her upon her psyche: "I have a cold-war imagination. My image for forgetting and repressing is an

³⁵ Her father had served as a lawyer at the Nuremberg trials, and, according to Kaplan's second-hand account from her mother, the pictures were taken by a photographer for the Army named Newman (30).

iron curtain coming down in my face, a curtain like the curtain at a play, only hardened, rippled in place in such a way that it looks at a distance like regular cloth” (28).

According to historian William M. Tuttle, Jr., “It was *Life*’s photographs of the Holocaust that most deeply moved the homefront children” (18). Writer Susan Sontag saw photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau in a bookstore in 1945 and recalls: “Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me so deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after” (Tuttle 18). Kaplan writes of how, as a third grader, she wanted to shock her classmates out of their complacency: “I believed that my friends had no right to live without knowing about these pictures, how could they look so pleased when they were so ignorant. None of them knew what I knew, I thought. I hated them for it” (30-31). In reflecting upon this incident of showing these pictures to her peers, Kaplan wonders if her motives were so altruistic. As she writes, perhaps her desire to shock sprang from a more personal place, “I explained to them about the camps, Hitler, how many Jews had died. To shock them. They had to know! I had to tell them. Or was it just that I missed my father. I was trying to do what he would do, be like him” (31).

Hoffman, on the other side of the Cold War, experienced a very different reality, but the politics of language were inescapable in the twentieth century, both behind and outside of the “Iron Curtain.” Hoffman’s early life was touched by wave upon wave of language ideology as the changing political powers in Poland attempted to bring its population under their control. As Hoffman recalls, Russian was a requirement “from the fifth grade on. This should be no big burden, according to speeches by the principal and other personages, because learning the international language of Communism is

something we should naturally want to do” (61). Russian is the language that will unite the “Soviet nation.” According to linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, the homogeneity of a population under the aegis of the nation state means that “[i]n this linguistically, culturally, and socially homogenous community of an integrated population, national and linguistic identities are supposed to coincide” (44). Because there are many more languages than nation-states in the world, this logic of what constitutes a nation-state does not hold in reality; therefore, “this assimilatory ‘integration’ and homogenization has to be achieved through social engineering and state-initiated reforms. Formal education has always played a decisive part in trying to achieve it” (Skutnabb-Kangas 44). As young Ewa learns, the political language propaganda coming from the top down stops with the teachers who would actually be the purveyors of “the international language of Communism.” Discipline is lax in the Russian class and in this class only; after half-heartedly going through some exercises, the teacher chats with the students about other topics—in Polish (62). As Hoffman reflects, just as World War II and the “lye of extreme suffering” stripped away her parents’ “obedient preconceptions and beliefs” (16), the nature of the authoritarian regime in Poland shaped the people of that “Soviet nation” into enduring cynics regarding the government. They neither had the desire nor felt the need to become faithful Russian-speaking citizens of a Soviet nation: “The System—compounded by the Poles’ perennial skepticism about all systems—produces a nation of ironists and gamblers” (15).

Later in her life, Hoffman recalls how she distanced herself from her parents’ stories and the troubles of being Jewish during World War II for a period during her adulthood, convincing herself that these memories only made her “a knee-jerk pessimist”

(25). On the other hand, in her unique way, Kaplan demonstrates in her autobiography how she sought her Jewish identity through her academic studies—through the medium of French. As a young adult, Kaplan is obsessed with the French language, so much so that during her junior year in college she has an affair with a Frenchman named André, who her friends frankly dub a “creep” (88). She sacrifices her health in order to breathe in French, become French: “I wanted to crawl into his skin, live in his body, be him. The words he used to talk to me, I wanted to use back. I wanted them to be my words” (88).³⁶ That very year, her enchantment with the French language also leads her to Céline, who compels her with his style and repulses her with his politics. As Kaplan notes, “When he was most reviled in France, at the end of the German occupation, Céline’s hate language was linked in the public mind to everything that had happened since France fell to the Nazis in 1940” (106). Historians Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton explain further:

France had been the first European nation to extend full civil rights to Jews, in the 1790s; Frenchmen were, however also among the most influential pioneers of secular antisemitism in the later part of the nineteenth century. Both traditions exist in twentieth-century French society. During the Third Republic, [which ended with the French surrender to the Nazis in 1940] the tolerant tradition prevailed, almost to the end, against the xenophobic one. (xiii-xiv)

When writing her dissertation on (anti-Semitic) fascist writers in France, Kaplan writes that she had finally found her voice: “I was writing about fascism and desire. Crowds, wanting to be part of the Motherland, following the voice of a leader” (161). The Vichy regime of the early forties, like the policies of Hitler’s dictatorship, parasitically

³⁶ Kaplan contracted herpes simplex through contact with André (93).

nourished its authority by distinguishing “the Jews” from “the French.” As cultural historian Pierre Birnbaum observes, “The [Vichy] idea of separating Jews from the national community and regrouping them into a specific organization, charged with representing them before the authorities as a particular group, abolished in an instant the entire long process of emancipation, which had led to their integration into the public space, as citizens equal to everyone else” (50). Similar to the infamous German Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935, which began a whole gamut of subsequent statutes stripping Jews first of any self-defined identity, then of their right to exist (the “Final Solution”), the Vichy Jewish Statute “declared the Jews to be different from other French citizens” (Poznanski 68), beginning a reign of discrimination that culminated in the deportation of “[s]eventy-six thousand Jews” (Kaplan 106).

Kaplan writes of the climax of her own foray into this dark history, which came during the summer of 1982 on her first professional research trip (185-86). Her fascination with Céline, with his theories regarding literature and language, such as “that to make writing sound like the spoken voice, you have to distort language” (Kaplan 111), extended to the fascists intellectuals when she wrote her dissertation. This long journey started with her junior year in college in Bordeaux (1973-74) and continued beyond her years at Yale. As Kaplan writes, she wanted to talk to one of these fascist intellectuals in person, but the only one left living was Maurice Bardèche: “Bardèche was the keeper of the archives of the executed writer Robert Brasillach; he had been Brasillach’s best friend at the Ecole Normale and had married Brasillach’s sister, Suzanne. At the end of the war Bardèche was arrested and imprisoned. He had been a tenured professor at the University of Lille; he was stripped of his title” (186). As David Carroll shows in his

French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture,

Bardèche's apologist statements and venomous attacks speak for themselves. Maurice Bardèche stated that Brasillach was not political, "'but rather a carefree young man who took great pleasure in throwing snowballs'" (273). His explanation for Brasillach's execution was that "'the director of General de Gaulle's cabinet was Georges Boris, a Freemason and Jew'" (Carroll 273). According to Kaplan, the Fascists connected "racial purity" with language; as she states, Céline claimed that his "pure French blood" was apparent in the rhythms of his writing, which was unavailable to "Others:" its "music was in his genes, he said; no foreigners were capable of genius. Fellow writers were nothing but Jews and robots, standardizing the language, destroying French literature" (106).³⁷

Despite her obviously Jewish name, Kaplan recalls that she is well received by Bardèche and his family; she even falls into a daughterly role with him (195).³⁸ However, this mood changes after the publication of her article on him (with his permission). Kaplan writes of the scathing written attack that Bardèche unleashed in a letter to her in which he equates himself with "Negroes," writing of the Holocaust: "'The Jews just died like flies'" (196). Bardèche not only puts himself into the role of the misunderstood victim, he also equates Jews with a common stereotype, as having poor health, a disease "related to the special nature of the Jews and their corrupt discourse" (Gilman 102). As Ethan Goffman observes, stereotypes of Jews that originated in Europe were carried to America and conflated with those of African Americans and "mixed as needed: laziness, confused thought, shrewdness, amorality. Besides the obvious

³⁷ As E. J. Hobsbawm elucidates in his article, "Are All Tongues Equal?": "At the time of the French Revolution only half the inhabitants of France could speak French and only 12-13 per cent spoke it 'correctly'" (88).

³⁸ As Kaplan notes, she and the head rabbi of France at the time shared the same last name (188).

economic advantage of such stereotypes in justifying colonialism, they also serve a psychological need, an image against which the European—and American—self is defined” (5).

Bardèche’s display of anti-Semitism is similar to the roots of the German view of Yiddish and Hebrew, along with traditional Jewish dress, as markers of Jews’ essential difference.³⁹ According to cultural historian Sander Gilman,

The German associated the image of the Eastern Jews and the *Jargon* spoken by them with the image of the Eastern (now Communist) barbarian and treated the Eastern Jew as subhuman. This was quite the reverse of the glorification, albeit temporary, of Yiddish as the original German which followed on German incursions into Russian territory during the period following 1914. (315)

Ruthlessly, Bardèche punctuates his attack with a phrase reserved for intimate acquaintances, “chère Alice Kaplan,” before launching yet again into his tirade (196). As Kaplan writes, it was “as though repeating my name over and over made his sentences carry further, because they were addressed to a Jew” (196). But Bardèche’s cruelty goes even further, to a personal level. He knows how to wound Kaplan in her most vulnerable

³⁹ In most cases, the politics of language is a long and tangled story. Yiddish is no exception. As Solomon A. Birnbaum notes, during the European Enlightenment, in the absence of religious markers of difference, Yiddish came to be seen by some Jews as a nettlesome display of their own otherness. Confronted with the rhetoric of the nation, “the one-people nation, the one-nation state,” conceptually, Jews were to be accepted not as a people, but as individuals, so “Yiddish became an unpleasant fact and a stumbling block” (35). Viewing Yiddish as “bad German,” many Jews adhering to the views of the Enlightenment sought to rid themselves of it (Birnbaum 35). As in the history of many languages, many observers degraded Yiddish, as did the German professor, Johannes Wagenseil in 1699, “[The Jews] have mutilated, minced, distorted, the good German words” (Harshav 38). Yiddish hit another wave of language controversy in the 1880s when its speakers encountered American English: “This third fusion was relatively short-lived and was violently opposed by the immigrant intellectuals and the purists in Europe” (Harshav 30). Ironically, as Benjamin Harshav notes, the nature of Yiddish is similar to English in that it acquires vocabulary from other languages and subverts the new vocabulary to its own established syntactical rules (27), giving “the feeling that there is a basic core of Yiddish, a domesticated, unified, intimate language of fusion,” as well as guaranteeing, “on the other hand, the *openness* of Yiddish toward its component languages” (49).

spot—her need to pass in French. As Kaplan writes, “In the ending flourish to his letter, he let me know that he understood a thing or two about me, about my desire to be accepted in France and my need for camouflage: ‘If once again, you get the chance to be French for a little while, come see us’” (196-97).

While Kaplan sought the “otherness” of French, through lovers and her pursuit of French fascist intellectuals, as an adult Hoffman found that she became the “eroticized other.” On the campus of Rice in Houston after deciding to extricate herself “from the mesh of family need and love, to believe in the merits of a separate life” (161), Hoffman writes of finding that her accented speech arouses interest in others. As Hoffman recalls, she is pleased when the “bare fact” that she is from Poland seems to lend her “special stature” (172). But as she soon discovers, as a young college student in America, she cannot find her male corollary; she does not know how to transpose herself “into a new erotic valence” (189). As literary critic (and European immigrant) Gabriele Schwab writes, “The gaze of the Other—even if it is a mirror of self-reflection—may enforce or question the marks of gender passed on from generation to generation” (x). In a different cultural context, a romantic lover, or “Other,” may not only question “marks of gender,” but confuse those signals altogether. As Hoffman writes of her first romance, “How do you talk to an alien? Very carefully” (186). In her early affairs, Hoffman writes of missing the spark of recognition, “the intuitive click which comes from knowing the play and surfaces of each other’s personalities” (190). As psychologist Oliva M. Espín observes, for immigrant women “the use of English rather than the mother tongue may act as a barrier or resistance in dealing with certain components of the psyche” (138).

Even the diminutives exchanged between people who know each other intimately are different in each language, as linguist Edward Stankiewicz explains:

The rich diversity of emotive forms can best be studied on the most productive diminutive or affectionate terms. It is also in this area that the languages of the world exhibit their true affective potentials and the greatest typological diversity. Thus some languages employ one or two diminutive suffixes (e.g. the English *-i* and the German *-chen / -lein*), whereas other languages employ large inventories of suffixes which they distribute differently according to the part of speech or lexical domain. The number of suffixes used for emotive gradation is usually limited to two or three, but occasionally the sequence acquires considerable length. Copious examples are provided by the Slavic, Baltic and Romance languages (especially Italian); e.g. Polish: *mały* “small” → *maleńki*, *maluchny*, *maluśki*, *maciupki*, *maciupieńki*, *maciuciuciupieńki*. (80)

Hoffman’s need to fill in all of her inner spaces with English leads her to her first husband, whom she admits that she marries in part for his language, “light, erudite conversation at which he’s so good, and at which I’ve acquired some skill as well” (227). Of her husband, whom she eventually divorces, Hoffman notes that she is struck by his pleasantness, but she cannot understand the semiotics of his emotions: “I’m touched by his niceness...but I know that though I’m captivated by his eloquence, I still can’t read the language of his feelings” (227).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Indeed, as Peter Stearns elaborates, Americans have a reputation for niceness that is perceived by others as insincere: “At the same time, though, they noted that American did seems ‘nice,’ an attribute that includes unusual discomfort with emotional outbursts on the part of those raised in different cultures where displays of temper might be more readily accepted” (Kövecses 180).

In spite of all her attempts to reject her new culture and language, then adopt an insider position through a romantic “other,” Hoffman finally decides to try to live in her new land, in the present: “I no longer want to tell people quaint stories from the Old Country, I don’t want to be told that ‘exotic is erotic,’ or that I have Eastern European intensity or brooding Galician eyes.... I want to reenter, through whatever Looking Glass will take me there, a state of ordinary reality” (202). On the other hand, Kaplan confesses, “I’ve been willing to overlook in French culture what I wouldn’t accept in my own, for the privilege of living in translation” (140). She writes of her student, Edna, who uses a common French joke regarding Belgian weather, a slur that makes Kaplan wince (182). In viewing Edna through the eyes of the adult that she has become, Kaplan notes that she sees her own mistakes in Edna’s assumption of an imagined French persona: “Edna, discarding, borrowing, and passing in French, reminds me of the time I said ‘Que je suis bête!’ [How stupid of me] to a French novelist and feminist philosopher, Monique Wittig” (182). Like Edna, as a young French student, and even later, in the beginning of her professional career, Kaplan wanted to slip into a French persona—to be French—ignoring the need to find her own idiolect within her new language. As an adult, Kaplan knows that she has a tendency to want to hide in her French persona (216), but also realizes that French helped her grow up: “French got me away from my family and taught me how to talk. Made me an adult” (141).

As women living in secular societies organized through the “imagined communities” of nationality,⁴¹ both Hoffman and Kaplan explore what their religious

⁴¹ Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined political community,” both limited and sovereign (15).

heritage of Judaism means as the first generation to be born after World War II. In this way, they strike a balance between an ancestral past in which “the Jews,” as a group, were persecuted and, in their parents’ lifetime, executed, and their own present, which is relatively free from such extremities of group-identified suffering. Both authors find themselves washed by the waves of history, exposed to the language of a religious and ancestral past, but not learning it. But, as linguist and historian Benjamin Harshav notes, the Yiddish culture was not an unchanging, linguistic monolith of Judaic knowledge. It itself represented change, namely, the most radical transition in Jewish history in the past two thousand years:

In retrospect, modern Yiddish culture can be seen as a product of this period of transformation [from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century] and, as such, it seems that it was destined to decline with its completion, when Jews had integrated into the languages and cultures of their new homelands, including the revived Hebrew in the state of Israel. In fact, however, history dealt it a deadly blow when the Nazis annihilated the centers of European Jewry and the Soviets stifled the last breath of Yiddish culture in Russia. (xiv)

As descendents of Jewish parents, both authors find themselves overwhelmed at times by conflicting loyalties, to a past filled with the emotions of Yiddish and the rituals of Hebrew, but confronted in the present with the languages of the nations—Polish, American English, and French. For Kaplan, the legacy of her father, the famous trial lawyer at Nuremberg, spurred her on in her own search for justice. Hoffman reflects that, for her, perhaps the meaning of Jewishness is a rift, a gap between herself and people that

are her friends: “That I’m Jewish; what does it, after all, mean, at this moment, here? Perhaps only this silence between Danuta and me, this awkward space that inserts itself between us” (Hoffman 239). For both Hoffman and Kaplan as women living in a secular society, the religious parts of their upbringings are vestiges of the past, but a past that is not forgotten.

In translating their lived selves into textual form, both Hoffman and Kaplan must faithfully represent all of the elements that have shaped them into the adults that they have become. For both authors, learning a second language highlighted how much cultural trappings seeped into their very existence, a knowledge that implanted within them a linguistic internal other. In coming to terms with her new language and culture, Hoffman indicates the difficulty of forming an idiolect within a new language and the delicacy involved in the process of translating her self:

I have to translate myself. But if I’m to achieve this without becoming assimilated—that is, absorbed—by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced. To mouth foreign terms without incorporating their meanings is to risk becoming bowdlerized. A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy; it happens by slow increments, sentence by sense, phrase by phrase. (211)

Her words echo A. K. Ramanujan’s theories of translation. According to Vinay Dharwadker’s interpretation of these theories, translation is a delicate process in which the translator, the writer and the reader must all be considered. Faithfulness to the original lies in being able to translate it literally as well as ideologically:

The translator is expected to render textual meanings and qualities “literally,” to successfully transpose the syntax, design, structure, or form of the original from one language to another, and to achieve a communicative intersection between the two sets of languages and discourses. At the same time, the translation has to attempt to strike a balance between the interests of the original author and those of the translator (or between faithful representation and faithless appropriation), to fulfil the multiple expectations of its imagined readers, and to construct parallels between the two cultures and two histories or traditions that it brings together.

(115)

In writing their autobiographies, both Hoffman and Kaplan integrate their life stories into a central text, bringing together their past and present selves, and balancing their competing cultural and linguistic heritages. In doing so, they also come to understand the linguistic internal other that will remain a part of their existence, just as in a translation, there is a gap between the original and its adaptation. As Paul John Eakin sums up this process: “If language promotes the idea of the extension of self across time, it also points to its undoing” (104). In this way, writing autobiography serves as “translation therapy” (Hoffman 271). Like the “poetic language in psychoanalytic aesthetics,” which “assumes the function of creating a space of resonance that stimulates the transference of internal others” (Schwab 10), autobiography is a unified text that, through the stories of others and the slipperiness of language, displays the closures, as well as the gaps, within an individual’s life story.

V. Conclusion

Through their memoirs, both Alice Kaplan and Eva Hoffman give their readership an intimate portrait of their own struggles in a culture and language that was, and in many ways, still is, unfamiliar to them. As George Steiner observes in *After Babel*, “Language is in part physical, in part mental. Its grammar is temporal and also seems to create and inform our experience of time. A third polarity is that of private and public” (169). In writing their life stories in textual form, both authors not only fulfil a personal need to retell the stories of their own exile in a way that will forge a more coherent self, they invite whomever can read English and is able to access their books into the textual world which they have created. As James N. Stull explains in the introduction to his study, *Literary Selves: Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*, “Autobiographical writing dramatizes the complex relation—and tension—between individuals and their society” (7). Language, as a means of communication, and as inner dialogue, connects individuals with the societies in which they live and also helps them to reflect on their own unique role within that community. As Hoffman notes, “I’ve been caught between two stories, between the kinds of story we tell ourselves about ourselves. In one story, circumstance plays the part of fate, in the other, character” (268). Both Kaplan and Hoffman were able to become fluent in their second languages, but the language learning process itself revealed the trappings of culture to both writers and their own needs and limitations—a wealth of insight that neither would have gained had she not struggled to express herself in a very unfamiliar medium. As Michael Gorra writes in his discussion of Kaplan’s work, “younger autobiographers have to claim our attention, not with an earlier record of achievement but through the fact of the book itself” (143).

Hoffman and Kaplan claim our attention not only as accomplished women, but foremost as individuals who have struggled with an unfamiliar language and culture, and through this process, have come to a richer understanding of their selves in relation to body, language, culture, and community. As Kaplan writes of her friend from Bordeaux, Micheline Veaux, a speech pathologist, “‘Speech,’ Micheline told me, ‘is the highest and lowest human function, the *endroit charnière* [the hitch] between the mechanical grunt of the vocal chords and the poetry of cognition’” (100).

In writing their autobiographies, both Hoffman and Kaplan refashion their second and first languages, respectively, as to remake their selves into an integral, written text—a text which satisfies many of the gaps that were created when their lives were split (forcibly and voluntarily) between two languages. But the remaining gaps (textual, and perhaps, in their lived realities as well) demonstrate how contingent on circumstance many seemingly unchanging truths, in fact, can be. Like the figure of Alice, who searches in vain for a series of logical explanations by which to understand the strange chain of events she encounters in Wonderland, each author’s foray into a new culture reveals how different the language(s) and customs of other societies can be. As Hoffman rewrites her encounter with her second culture and language in *Lost in Translation*, the morality of American spaces and rhythms of English were distressingly different from those she experienced during her upbringing in Poland, while, in Kaplan’s version of her life, *French Lessons*, the “high culture” of France and the French-speaking world were, to her, enchantingly distinct from the United States of her childhood. Unlike Wonderland, however, these new places, while never home in the deepest sense of the inner psychic spaces of first experience, grant each author novel associations to the meanings contained

within the word “home.” During her junior year abroad in Bordeaux (96), Kaplan writes that French became “regular, boring, real. *Quotidien*” (103), while, at the end of her textual journey, Hoffman is finally able to write of America: “I am here now” (280). Both France and America become a “home” in which each woman can negotiate the subtle signals and signs of each language, both “homes” become places where each woman re-experiences the emotional pull of language and culture.

As James Robert Payne observes in his introduction to *Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives*, there is “a recurring tendency to find basic patterns of American literature, including and perhaps especially autobiography, to be more or less traceable to (British) colonial Puritan antecedents” (xiv). While there may be a certain strain of the American autobiographical tradition that can be traced and classified in such a manner, many autobiographies simply will not fall into such a mold. Eva Hoffman’s *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* and Alice Kaplan’s *French Lessons: A Memoir* are two such works. As Payne goes on to explain (in a reinterpretation of Robert F. Sayre’s reflections), perhaps finding such patterns, though understandable, is premature and built upon “too narrow a definition of ‘America’ and ‘American’” (xii-xv). Both Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan reside in America, and because of these circumstances, could be called, among other designations, “American,” but in using this term for these authors, their multi-dimensional identities should be emphasized, not erased. Just as autobiography creates a central text for a life story at the same time it reveals the slips and gaps within that narrative and interprets the stories of others through the lens of one life, the national appellation “American” is not and should not be

envisioned as synonymous with one set of origins or one language. As E. J. Hobsbawm explains,

The concept of a *single*, exclusive and unchanging ethnic, cultural or other identity is a dangerous piece of brainwashing. Human mental identities are not like shoes, of which we can only wear one pair at a time. We are all multi-dimensional beings. Whether a Mr. Patel in London will think of himself primarily as an Indian, a British citizen, a Hindu, a Gujarati-speaker, an ex-colonist from Kenya, a member of a specific caste or kin-group, or in some other capacity, depends on whether he faces an immigration officer, a Pakistani, a Sikh or Moslem, a Bengali-speaker and so on. There is no single platonic essence of Patel. He is all these and more at the same time. (87)

Just as there is no single, exclusive and unchanging ethnic or cultural identity, there is no single, immutable variety of language. Every language grows and changes with each new community of speakers and as each community of speakers changes. Even within one community, language is altered as each individual reforms its idiom in myriad, slight ways. As long as one other person can understand such a modification within the language system, it is useful for communication. As Kaplan writes, she is wary of the idea that French students should learn to speak “‘perfect French,’ whatever that is” (177).

Eva Hoffman and Alice Kaplan demonstrate in their autobiographies that, like language and translation, identity is a negotiated process. According to Vinay Dharwadker’s interpretation of A. K. Ramanujan’s theories, “the translations that succeed best are those capable of making the most imaginative connections between widely separated people, places and times” (123). Hoffman and Kaplan are able to translate

themselves into a new culture through improvisation and creativity—they find and create their own niche within their new “homes.” As their autobiographies show, direct exposure to other languages and cultures remakes the speaker. Using the metaphor of *Alice in Wonderland*, literary critic Gabriele Schwab, herself an immigrant to the United States, explains how fiction transforms the reader, a process which can also be extended to Hoffman’s and Kaplan’s remaking of their selves through autobiography:

The figure of this little girl reminds one that the looking glass of literature was never meant merely to replicate the world, but to bring us in contact with those other worlds—be they those of the dream or schizophrenia, utterly alien cultures or uncannily familiar ones. By keeping us in touch with other worlds, literature brings us back to ourselves, albeit changed and different. This is why, in the encounter with literature, seeing ourselves in the other may not be reduced to a mere appropriation of the other’s image nor to a narcissistic self-reflection. Instead, this encounter constitutes an experience that transforms the very boundaries between self and other. (xvii)

In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, along with the necessary measures for tightening security, many Americans appear to have tightened their views of what constitutes an “American,” and in turn, what elements compose “good English.” In their autobiographies, Kaplan and Hoffman show how a linguistic internal other can be cause for struggle and a discontinuous sense of self, but, in revealing how they are the sum of their languages to themselves and their readers, both authors expose the complexity of language and identity—forging works that show how mistaken it would be to name a person by any single outside identity.

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