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Conquering shame? Trauma, Family, and Identity in Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*

Abstract: The article examines the impact of trauma on identity as exemplified by Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*. The book focuses on the arduous process of adapting to a new culture; however, it also sheds light on historical and structural traumas (LaCapra), which ultimately shape her path. Drawing on dialogic philosophy (Buber) and the notion of posttraumatic identity (Szczepan), the text argues that conquering shame is crucial for the development of a subjectivity and reclaiming agency. However, avoiding shame at any cost may hinder relationships, leading to isolation of the "I."

Keywords: Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, trauma, the Holocaust, family

Eva Hoffman is an American writer of Polish-Jewish descent. Born shortly after the war in Poland, she was forced to leave her beloved Kraków as a teenager to live in Canada and later the United States. To survive, Polish Ewa had to transform herself into American Eva. Hoffman gives voice to those unsettling experiences in her first book,[1] *Lost in Translation: A Life in*

[1] The author also published *Exit into History*, where she focuses on Poland's emergence from Communism and *Shtetl*, in which she attempts to reconstruct the lost world of East European Jewry. See Eva Hoffman, *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993); Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1997).

a New Language (1989), which consists of three chapters: "Paradise", "Exile", and "The New World", marking her trajectory from a joyful Polish girl forcibly displaced to an alienated stranger in Canada, and ultimately to the American Eva, who is the master of her destiny. Interestingly, while navigating the depths of the new culture, the author largely ignores that her identity has been multifaceted from the beginning. Eva Hoffman is not only an immigrant but also a daughter of survivors. Although Hoffman's first book centres around her lived experiences as an immigrant, rather than the burden of the Holocaust legacy, the latter guides her through the intricacies of the new culture, for better or for worse.

The second generation is a term used to refer to children of Holocaust survivors who have no memories of the Second World War but simultaneously claim to be heavily influenced by the aftermath.[2] Members of this generational formation are still associated with a painful stigma, probably best expressed by the term "memorial candle," which is used to describe children designated to commemorate "all of the relatives who perished in the Holocaust, and [who are] given the burden of participating in [their] parents' emotional world."[3] On the one hand, the second generation was undeniably immersed in the aftermath of the Holocaust. However, on the other hand, children of the survivors were accused either of exaggerating or appropriating their parents' suffering.[4] As a result, they were suspicious of their own motives, ashamed of admitting that events from their parents' biographies had profoundly impacted their lives.[5]

This shame spiral was only exacerbated when the second-generation authors entered the publishing market – the first book in which the second generation could speak of their struggles was *Children of the Holocaust* (1979), which features conversations with daughters and sons of survivors, some of them anonymous.[6] Although Epstein's book was groundbreaking, the author struggled to find a publisher,[7] and her experience is by no means

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2 Helen Epstein, "The Heirs of the Holocaust," in New York Times, June 19, 1977: 175, accessed February 14, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/1977/06/19/archives/the-heirs-of-the-holocaust-holocaust.html.

3 Dina Wardi, *Memorial Candles: Children of the Holocaust*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

4 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 15.

5 Epstein, "The Heirs of the Holocaust."

6 Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (New York: Penguin Books, 2019), 6–23.

7 Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 17.

unique[8]. However, this breakthrough heightened public interest in the second-generation perspective and even led to its legitimisation – *Maus. My Father Bleeds History* (1986) received the Pulitzer Prize in 1992.[9] From that moment onward, we can notice an outpouring of second-generation works[10] that serve as a testament to the aftermath of the Holocaust.[11]

As Ewa Domańska points out, memory studies were dominated by trauma associated with silence, victimhood, or suffering.[12] Trauma is commonly associated with an immediate injury, such as a wound[13] or a burn mark,[14] which the survivors bear. Second-generation metaphors also convey the painful effects of trauma, but at the same time convey chronological distance – the daughters of war victims write about their damaged DNA[15] or suffocating air that still reminds them of the great fire that swept through Europe during the war.[16] These metaphors tend to reduce the person experiencing trauma to an object towards which the action is directed, further stigmatising them.

Since the late 1990s, there have been attempts to shift the focus of memory studies. Trauma was no longer seen as a mere symptom; instead, a wound is viewed as an attempt to articulate the past.[17] The most recent developments in memory studies involve a shift toward different aspects of traumatic experiences, such as Ewa Domańska's concept of a "rescue story," which counters the negative aspects of one's experiences by seeking more positive alternatives. The goal is not to erase difficult circumstances, but to empower the subject living in a world where oppressive governments, natu-

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8 Sonia Pilcer, another second-generation author, admits that her book, *The Holocaust Kid*, was rejected countless times. See Sonia Pilcer, "Writer Sonia Pilcer Interview, interview by H. Candee," *The Artful Mind*, no. 1 (2015): 15.

9 C.f. *The 1992 Pulitzer Prize Winner in Special Citations and Awards,* accessed October 3, 2025, https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/art-spiegelman. See also Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale. My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

10 *The War After* (1996) by Anne Karpf, *Elijah Visible* (1996) by Thane Rosenbaum, *Losing the Dead* (1999) by Lisa Appignanesi, *After Long Silence* (1999) by Helen Fremont, *The Holocaust Kid* (2001) by Sonia Pilcer, *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) by Jonathan Safran Foer, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2006) by Bernice Eisenstein are just a few examples second-generation of works.

11 Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust*, 1.

12 Ewa Domańska, „Historia ratownicza," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5 (2015): 22.

13 Zygmunt Freud, *Poza zasadą przyjemności*, trans. Jerzy Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1976), 34.

14 Irit Amiel, *Osmaleni* (Warszawa: Czuły Barbarzyńca, 2010), 91.

15 Anna Janko, *Mała Zagłada* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2015).

16 Magdalena Tulli, *Włoskie szpilki* (Kraków: Znak Litera Nova, 2017), 37.

17 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3–5.

ral disasters, military conflicts, and inequality are not remnants of the past but a disturbing reality.[18]

In this context, the goal of the following article is to reexamine the relationship between the Holocaust trauma and identity, which, in turn, allows us to underscore the other side of the second-generation narratives. Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989) was written at a time when Hoffman was not yet consciously aware of the inner workings of intergenerational trauma transmission.[19] Therefore, her narrative sheds some light on the extent to which the Holocaust determines the identity of the second generation in the ever-changing postwar reality, as it is also "the first 'postmodern' autobiography written in English by an emigre from a European Communist country".[20]

Hoffman's narrative offers alternatives to the notion of posttraumatic identity, which dominates in Poland. This identity type is stimulated by both traumatising family stories from the past and unfavourable sociopolitical circumstances at present, and ultimately freezes identity at the point of trauma.[21] The image of a mute subject, humiliated and passively experiencing trauma, may be at least partially countered by Hoffman's narrative, from which a strikingly different picture of the second generation emerges. Analysing moments in which alternative feelings replace fear and shame may help expand these frames to include instances where the second generation reclaims agency, understood as the capacity to act and change reality.[22]

Navigating the fear of trauma

To understand how posttraumatic identity impacts the self, it is essential to employ two sets of terms introduced by Martin Buber: I-It and I-Thou.

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[18] Domańska, „Historia ratownicza," 22.

[19] Hoffman extensively refers to what she calls "the Holocaust strand of [her] history" only in *After Such Knowledge*, which stands in stark contrast to her previous publications, as it is a series of essays entirely devoted to the aftermath of the Holocaust, however, the book stems from extensive research on the collective "we" of the second generation rather than individual identity. See. Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), x.

[20] Danuta Zadworna-Fjellestad, "The Insertion of the Self into the Space of Borderless Possibility: Eva Hoffman's Exiled Body," *Varieties of Ethnic Criticism*, no. 2 (1995): 136.

[21] Aleksandra Szczepan, *Polski dyskurs posttraumatyczny. Literatura polska ostatnich lat wobec Holokaustu i tożsamości żydowskiej*, in *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy – konteksty i perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 251–253.

[22] Ewa Domańska, „„Zwrot performatywny" we współczesnej humanistyce," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5 (2007): 52–53.

While both describe the attitude toward human and non-human beings, the former is expressed through an objectifying gaze, which moves Thou, or the Other, into the realm of things; the latter establishes the realm of relationships, allowing for the subjectification of the Other.[23] The I-It pair was subject to criticism, as objectification prevents the "I" from fostering meaningful relationships. However, at the same time, it is important to remember that the urge to expand is vital, not only for the development of "I" but also for its mere survival.[24]

Posttraumatic identity is detrimental to the self as it tends to magnify the danger because environmental influences act as triggers that elicit a reaction caused by the deeper "wound," leading to shame, understood as the negative evaluation from the Other.[25] Moreover, shame may be accompanied by fear when external punishment is involved.[26] Therefore, shame is linked with the threat of destruction – one regards oneself as vulnerable and powerless in the face of possible or imaginary danger.[27] Experiencing shame, whether internalised or imposed externally as a means of control, weakens the "I" – its objectifying gaze is averted, which means it can easily fall victim to the claims of others. Additionally, it simultaneously hinders the ability of "I" to foster a relationship with the Other, leading to its isolation.[28]

The fear of weakening the self finds its way into the second-generation literature by images of disintegration and death that are symptomatic of members of the second generation, as they "live with the six million in [their] head."[29] It is also evident in the case of Hoffman, who, according to Marianne Hirsch, is consumed by an "obsession with the canyon, with a disjunction that defines her life and her book."[30] The central metaphor in *Lost in Translation* is also a wound, which takes the form of a rupture:

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[23] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edingburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 8–9.

[24] Eberhard Grisebach, *Doświadczenie spotkania*, trans. Marek Jakubów, in *Filozofia dialogu,* ed. Bogdan Baran, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1991), 111–114.

[25] Helen Block-Lewis, "Introduction: Shame—the "sleeper" in psychopathology," in *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation*, ed. Helen Block Lewis (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1987), 17.

[26] Eugeniusz Jaworski, *Wstyd jako kategoria typologiczna*, in *Wstyd w kulturze. Zarys problematyki*, ed. Ewa Kosowska (Katowice: Śląsk, 1998), 44–45.

[27] Stephanie Arel, *Affect Theory, Shame, and Christian Formation* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 50.

[28] Buber, *I and Thou*, 6.

[29] Mikołaj Grynberg, *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2014), 143.

[30] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 223.

> How can this be, that this fullness, this me on the street, this moment which is perfectly abundant, will be gone? It's like that time I broke a large porcelain doll and no matter how much I wished it back to wholeness, it lay there on the floor in pieces. […] How many moments do I have in life? I hear my own breathing: with every breath, I am closer to death.[31]

While reviewers locate Hoffman's trauma of immigration in "the loss of Polish as her language of the self," and therefore classify *The Lost in Translation* as a "book about the quest for language as a tool for survival,"[32] they usually refer to English. However, what is overlooked is the fact that the author's preoccupation with language starts already in Poland:

> [W]hen 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. Nothing fully exists until it is articulated. "She grimaced ironically," someone says, and an ironic grimace is now delineated in my mind with a sharpness it never had before. I've now grasped a new piece of experience; it is mine[33]

Hoffman's attitude toward language is unusual, considering that Polish is her native language – building one's linguistic self[34] in such a conscious manner can be seen at least partially as a reaction against the Holocaust trauma. In this sense, it is historical trauma, which LaCapra links with the actual losses[35] the survivors suffered during the war. Although these are not Hoffman's experiences, she witnesses the haunting aftermath: the author's mother resorts to "tears and whispers in a half-understood tongue,"[36] and her father is convinced that "dignity […] is silence,"[37] which leads Hoffman to associate trauma with unspeakability. Little Eva understands that ordinary words do not suffice to verbalise traumatic experiences; therefore, she attempts to reverse her parents' logic by inventing nonsensical phrases such as "*[b]ramaramaszerymery, rotumotu pulimuli.*"[38] What may seem like an innocent game is empowering, as Hoffmann explains, the goal is to "make

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31 Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (London: Vintage Books, 1998), 16–17.

32 Angela Neustatter, "Sad, Articulate Pole," accessed February 25, 2025, https://literaryreview.co.uk/sad-articulate-pole.

33 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 29.

34 Madeline Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," in *Living in Translation: Polish Writers in America,* ed. Halina Stephan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 220.

35 Dominick LaCapra, *Historia w okresie przejściowym. Doświadczenie, tożsamość, teoria krytyczna*, trans. Katarzyna Bojarska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 154–155.

36 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 32.

37 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 23.

38 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 11.

a Möbius strip language,"[39] allowing her to verbalise every single event even before she faces any trauma.

Hoffman is adamant about strengthening her identity and does not take her survival for granted. The act of transforming the outer experiences into the inner ones strengthens the "I", and according to Buber, it stems from the desire to overcome the mysterious power of death.[40] Although such a desire is characteristic of humans in general, Hoffman, as a second-generation member, is acutely aware of its closeness. Fearing destruction, Hoffman braces herself, explaining: "I know that I can do anything I have to do. I could jump out of that second-story window the way my father did […]. The sense of necessity […] relieves me from small trepidations, the Big Fear supplants small ones."[41] Her parents' miraculous survival prompts the author to expand the sense of self; fear is her most significant driving force, and language becomes Hoffman's tool for assimilating the external world, ultimately allowing her to "make it [her] own."[42]

Writing against shame

Compared with the memoirs of other second-generation writers born in Poland, Hoffman's is strikingly different as it is characterised by an almost complete lack of shame regarding her roots. This is unusual as the dominant mode of self-identification for the majority of Polish second-generation writers[43] remains posttraumatic identity. Their roots are a source of shame due to the humiliating experiences of their ancestors during the war and the in-

[39] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*.

[40] Buber, *I and Thou*, 5–6.

[41] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 157.

[42] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 108.

[43] In *Family History of Fear*, Agata Tuszyńska claims that the moment of learning about her roots was so traumatising that she represses this information. Ewa Kuryluk, another second-generation author, signals her Jewish identity by giving readers the first letters followed by suspension points („Mom, are you…?") – only later does she explain that her brother was still alive at the time of publication, and she wanted to protect him. Magdalena Tulli only indirectly refers to the Jewish identity of her unnamed narrator, acknowledging that she does not consider herself part of the second generation. See Agata Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear: A Memoir*, trans. Charles Ruas (New York: Random House, 2016), 27. See also Ewa Kuryluk, *Goldi. Apoteoza zwierzaczkowatości*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Książkowe Twój Styl, 2004), 10; Magdalena Tulli, „Ludzik mi padł, więc gram następnym" [Interview], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 30, 2011, accessed February 22, 2025, https://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,10548289,magdalena-tulli-ludzik-mi-padl-wiec-gram-nastepnym.html.

tense fear of recurring persecution. As a result, the Jewish component is silenced[44], at least initially. Even when children of survivors plan to break the silence, the decision is difficult to make – Aleksandra Szczepan even compares the moment of self-disclosure to "coming out"[45] due to the unpleasant feelings it causes.

In contrast to other second-generation authors from Poland, the information about Jewish roots is not disruptive for Hoffman. The author calmly states that she has known they are Jewish "as long as [she] can remember".[46] It may be because her associations go beyond the Holocaust, which is rarely discussed at her family home[47]. Still, another plausible explanation that is not mutually exclusive with the previous one is that her Jewish identity, together with its Polish counterpart, strengthens the subject by adding additional layers of experience to the "I". In this context, it is worth mentioning that Hoffman observes the Passover but simultaneously celebrates Easter and Christmas, her family speaks both Polish and Yiddish, "the language of money and secrets",[48] and she has Polish and Jewish friends. Using the Polish language and holding Polish celebrations allows Ewa's family to feel included and, quite literally, find a common language with their neighbours. While the author lives in Cracow, her identity is shaped by Jewish and Polish influences, which do not exclude each other but rather intersect, allowing dialogue.

Hoffman's sense of self receives a major blow precisely when the author leaves Poland – the moment of departure is compared by the author to the feeling of being "pushed out of the happy, safe enclosures of Eden."[49] This statement was met with much criticism – in the context of disclosing Jewish roots, in Hoffman's case, one should write about Polish "coming-out", at least in the eyes of Hoffman's critics. The author is almost shamed for not wanting to reject her ties with the Polish culture. Trying to understand the reasons behind Hoffman's reaction, Marianne Hirsch wonders: "What does it take for Hoffman to consider Poland paradise?" Why would she want to recapture a childhood that rests on such a legacy? What I can only see as Hoffman's

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[44] Aleksandra Szczepan, „Polski dyskurs posttraumatyczny. Literatura polska ostatnich lat wobec Holokaustu i tożsamości żydowskiej," in *Kultura po przejściach, osoby z przeszłością. Polski dyskurs postzależnościowy – konteksty i perspektywy badawcze*, ed. Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 251–253.

[45] Szczepan, „Polski dyskurs posttraumatyczny. Literatura polska ostatnich lat wobec Holokaustu i tożsamości żydowskiej," 240.

[46] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 29.

[47] Anna Mach, „„Na początku była wojna": Postpamięć w utworach Evy Hoffman, Bożeny Keff, Ewy Kuryluk i Agaty Tuszyńskiej," *Literaturoznawstwo*, no. 8–9 (2014–2015): 172.

[48] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 14.

[49] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 5.

denial is painful to read."[50] Similar views are expressed by Madeline Levine, who points out that Hoffman creates "a lovely paean to childhood, seen with all the clarity that the haze of nostalgia lends to remembered moments,"[51] because of her ignorance about the past and tangled Polish-Jewish relations. According to both, Hoffman dismisses parts of her biography. In this case, shame, traditionally associated with concealing,[52] would manifest itself by excluding fragments that do not align with Poland's idealised representation. What makes Hoffman's narrative extraordinary is that her strategy is much more complex than a nostalgia-fuelled denial she has been accused of. It ultimately allows her to survive in Poland, which is "home, in a way, but […] also a hostile territory."[53]

Paradise (re)created

From the book's first chapter, "Paradise," one may expect an idyllic representation of Poland; however, mythical wholeness, if it ever existed, was experienced by Hoffman only in early childhood. Despite the afore-mentioned criticism, Hoffman does not idealise Poland and examines complex Polish-Jewish relations. According to the author, restoring the possibility of manifesting religion after the death of Joseph Stalin[54] contributes to the rise of antisemitic incidents. After the initial confusion caused by this unexpected shift, Hoffman is surprisingly adamant about protecting her identity. Although the author initially feels neither pride nor shame regarding her roots, the resurgence of antisemitism encourages her to manifest her Jewishness; it also inspires her survivor-mother to speak of Jewishness as "something to stand up for with all one's strength."[55] When one of the author's school friends sends her a note asking whether she is of the "Hebraic faith,"[56] she responds affirmatively – her answer may be understood symbolically as the first act of offering resistance. The author's pride protects the wholeness of her identity from external forces that may lead to its disintegration.

Hoffman is not only proud of her Jewish identity, but her family proves capable of redirecting shame. For them, antisemitism is an example of "bar-

50 Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, 224.

51 Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," 224–225.

52 Jaworski, *Wstyd jako kategoria typologiczna*, 46.

53 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 84.

54 Michał Wenklar, "The Polish Church and the "Thaw" of 1956," *The Person and the Challenge*, no. 2 (2011): 83–85, DOI: https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.3451.

55 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 32.

56 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 33.

barian stupidity" to which the author feels "immediately superior".[57] When Pani Orlovska, one of the author's neighbours and a member of the upper class and a well-educated musician, wonders whether Jews use blood to make matzahs, the family acknowledges the rupture in their relationship. However, they are not embarrassed by her question – instead, the author's mother mocks Pani Orłovska's lack of knowledge despite her extensive education and wonder whether this really is "an intelligent person"[58]. After anger wears off, Hoffman chooses to forgive her neighbour, as "[t]here are other parts to Pani Orlovska, after all, as there are to all the people who have drunk anti-Semitism with their mother's milk, but among whom we live in friendship and even intimacy."[59] Although Hoffman may seem sentimental about her neighbour, her decision is very rational – Hoffman does not conflate antisemitism with Polishness, as maintaining wholeness of the self also means protecting the Polish counterpart of her identity. This step, in turn, allows her to see Poland not as a mythical and dangerous part of "the Other Europe,"[60] but as an actual place which "has fed [her] language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind."[61]

Hoffman prevents the disintegration of her identity while still in Poland, but cannot do so once she is forced to leave Europe. The author's journey to the New World is a traumatic experience in itself. The chapter in which Hoffman arrives in Canada is titled "Exile", not only because of physical dislocation, but also psychological displacement. The meticulously built linguistic self[62] is useless – Canadians are a "different species," from which "Polish words slip off without sticking."[63] The new reality cannot be claimed, and the author is forced to float in an "incomprehensible space".[64] Comparing Hoffman's behaviour in Poland and abroad, one can see that her sense of self becomes very limited, leaving the author extremely vulnerable. Shame is inscribed on Hoffman's body, and she falls victim to the claims of those around her, despite the lack of imminent danger. While in Cracow, Ewa organises meetings with her friends to plan how to act in case of pogroms. In Vancouver, however, Hoffman does not want to occupy too much space; therefore, she walks cautiously, her shoulders bent and her chest receding inward. The author symbolically loses a sense of agency when her and her sister's names

[57] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 32.
[58] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 33.
[59] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 32.
[60] Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, 137.
[61] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 32.
[62] Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," 220.
[63] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 108.
[64] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 104.

are changed – their only response is to "hang [their] heads wordlessly under this careless baptism."[65]

If Paradise ever existed, it could never be fully regained, but Hoffman manages to recreate it, employing previously used strategies. As the author immerses herself in American culture, she learns English, and words once again become her tool for assimilating the external world. However, American Eva never replaces the previous identity – just as with Hoffman's Jewish identity and Polish counterpart, the author supplements existing identity layers with a new facet. They all coexist and modify one another – while American Eva enables Hoffman to navigate the new culture effectively, Polish Ewa allows the author to resist complete assimilation,[66] which is essential due to another shift in the sociopolitical landscape. As the importance of the Solidarity movement grows, the state of affairs in Poland becomes a topic of current interest in America[67]. Under such circumstances, Hoffman can capitalise on her European heritage; the signs of otherness, such as a foreign accent, are no longer a cause for shame. Instead, they become an essential asset, making the author "excited by [her] own otherness, which surrounds [her] like a bright, somewhat inflated bubble."[68]

Performing difference

If the act of translation is essential for survival, *Lost in Translation* shows that Hoffman is not merely surviving in the New World but thriving. Hoffman's otherness makes her "one of the most respected and recognised Polish voices in America,"[69] but achieving that would be impossible without creating American Eva. Language is a matter of life and death for Hoffman – every word she claims allows her to assimilate reality, a strategy that enables her to survive even in the exilic conditions she faces, both in Poland and Canada. Observing the author, one can notice that she leans toward the realm of It. Considering that she presents her identity struggles through the lens of language, it may be surprising to discover that she has little desire for dialogue.

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65 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 105.

66 Elizabeth Kella, "Affect and Nostalgia in Eva Hoffman's Lost in Translation," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, no. 2–3 (2015): 16–18.

67 Halina Stephan, "Introduction: The Last Exiles," in *Living in Translation: Polish Writers in America*, ed. Halina Stephan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 8.

68 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 179.

69 Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," 216–217.

Hoffman constructs herself through difference, which is understandable, given her experiences in Poland and immigrant status.[70] When the author visits Montreal, Polish Ewa experiences cultural shock as she observes the striking differences between Poles and Canadians. Once again, Hoffman redirects shame – when she sees a young girl wearing high heels and lipstick, she complains about her vulgarity and wonders whether "this is some sort of costume".[71] She even resorts to shaming Canadians on local radio, informing them that they are "an unadventurous lot who never dare to sidestep bourgeois conventions."[72] One may be under the impression that this is a self-defence mechanism, the interpretation Hoffman suggests, explaining that while as an immigrant, she is relegated to the margins and therefore becomes "an anthropologist of the highly detached nonparticipant variety."[73] However, this time Hoffman seems to be the one alienating the local community, and the language barrier, along with a lack of knowledge about their culture, are plausible excuses.

As Bożena Karwowska noted, Hoffman portrays Canada as an utterly homogeneous country, overlooking that by the 1960s, it had already become home to a diverse mix of immigrants[74]. Even before American Eva is fully developed, Polish Eve does not want to associate herself with other immigrants – she seems almost embarrassed by their attempts at assimilation, which are only a mere imitation of the Canadian lifestyle, such as distorted English, which "grates on [Hoffman] like chalk screeching on a blackboard, like all things botched and badly done."[75] Even later, when the author becomes American Ewa, a self-assured woman in the US, seeing others who struggle does not spark any recognition. When she participates in a carefree conversation between fashionable personas about vacationing in Cuba and extravagant parties organised by the Russians, Jiri, a Hungarian on a temporary visa, halts the conversation by alluding to the Russian construction of missile sites on the island. When he expresses his concerns, he is only further alienated by the natives. Hoffman sees his blunder as a source of shame and also withdraws, not offering Jiri any support.

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[70] Anna Jamrozek-Sowa, „Młoda Polka patrzy na młodą Amerykę (na podstawie Zagubionego w przekładzie Evy Hoffman," in *Literatura polska obu Ameryk. Studia i szkice*, eds. Beata Nowacka and Bożena Szałasta-Rogowska, (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), 45.

[71] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 99.

[72] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 133.

[73] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 131.

[74] Bożena Karwowska, „Ślady Innego (swojego i obcego) w literackiej opowieści powojennych emigrantek," in *Narracje migracyjne w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Hanna Gosk (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 318.

[75] Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 122.

The dialogic relationship is a condition that allows the "I" to become fully itself[76]. Although Hoffman claims she is aware of belonging to a "splintered society," whose members share an "acute sense of dislocation,"[77] she is surprisingly keen on emphasising differences. While still in Poland, Hoffman proves that she is capable of strengthening connections – she does not lose this ability, but Pani Orlovska belongs to the upper class, and a relationship with her can be a source of pride. In Canada, being in the company of struggling immigrants, including her own parents, can be shameful; therefore, Hoffman prefers to associate with Mrs. Steiner, a fabulously wealthy ex-pianist. As the author admits, while being near her, she feels that "satisfaction and contentment are surely possible—more, that they are everyone's inalienable right—possibly even [hers]."[78]

If the Holocaust is "elemental evil," the subject can achieve the human condition not in isolation but through the vulnerability of the Other, which needs to be protected at any cost[79]. The Other that Hoffman faces is not radically different from the self; in this sense, it is not threatening;[80] instead, it allows for starting a dialogic relationship based on shared experiences – in the author's case, experiences allowing identification are struggles stemming from her own displacement. However, for Hoffman, the vulnerability of the Other is shameful and may weaken her sense of the self. By trying to obscure the connection between her and the groups she considers undesirable, the author effectively erases any possibility of dialogue.

Life in post-tragic condition

Hoffman's identity is shaped by two historical traumas: her own trauma of exile and the trauma of the Holocaust that her parents suffered. While the former prevails in *Lost in Translation*, the latter seems to modify its expression – Hoffman sees her survival in the postwar reality as a continuation of her parents' efforts. The author undoubtedly recognises historical trauma, both in her and her parents' biographies, but she is also aware of something else entirely:

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76 Buber, *I and Thou*, 11.

77 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 197.

78 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 111.

79 Emmanuel Levinas, *Kilka myśli o filozofii hitleryzmu*, trans. Jacek Migasiński, *Literatura na świecie*, no. 1-2 (2004): 5–14.

80 Emmanuel Levinas, *Ślad innego*, trans. Bodgan Baran, in *Filozofia dialogu*, ed. Bogdan Baran (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak), 216–219.

> On about the third at the Rosenbergs' house, I have a nightmare in which I'm drowning in the ocean while my mother and father swim farther and farther away from me. […] The black, bituminous terror of the dream solders itself to the chemical base of my being—and from then on, fragments of the fear lodge themselves in my consciousness, thorns and pinpricks of anxiety, loose electricity floating in a psyche that has been forcibly pried from its structures[81]

Hoffman's journey to the New World is a traumatic experience in itself. Still, it seems that it reveals the subject suffering from what LaCapra refers to as 'structural trauma' – a condition more associated with the transhistorical absence rather than the actual loss[82]. In Hoffman's work, it is foreshadowed by the author's preoccupation with everything that is "distinct, complete, and intelligible"[83] and her constant fear of the disintegration of the self, which appears long before sociopolitical shifts in Poland endanger the self, and her 'exile' to Canada that ultimately shatters it.

Speaking of historical trauma, Hoffmann takes proper action. She understands shame is detrimental to the self; therefore, shame is replaced by pride, which, contrary to posttraumatic identity, allows the "I" to expand. On the textual level, a narrative deprived of ruptures signals that the author recovered from trauma[84]. In this case, *Lost in Translation* would be an example of a perfect working-through. Hoffman takes pride in closing all the ruptures – her eloquence and lyricism were widely praised; some viewed her style as a performance demonstrating her mastery of English.[85] Hoffman finishes her book with the image that may be interpreted as rebuilding one's linguistic self[86] – the effortlessly enumerates various flower species in a Cambridge garden, which leads her to conclude that "[t]he language of this is sufficient. I am here now"[87].

Hoffman believes that she lives in a "post-tragic condition" in which there are no such things as "fatal mistakes"[88]. In some respects, it is true – Hoffman's historical losses may be alleviated to some extent, proving that the author is capable of reclaiming her place in the world. However, the author's compulsive flaunting of her working-through is suspicious – by incessantly

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81 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 104.

82 LaCapra, *Historia w okresie przejściowym. Doświadczenie, tożsamość, teoria krytyczna*, 154–155.

83 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 28.

84 Birgit Neumann, „Literatura, pamięć, tożsamość," trans. A. Pełka, in *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 273–274.

85 Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," 208, 223.

86 Levine, "Eva Hoffman: Forging a Postmodern Identity," 220.

87 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 280

88 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 248.

demonstrating the closed ruptures, she is constantly reminded about the wound in the first place. Moreover, the consequences of structural trauma cannot be eradicated[89]. In this sense, the Paradise is forever lost, and the mythical wholeness of the self is only an illusion – one has no choice but to regard oneself as vulnerable. Hoffman's posttraumatic condition resulting from witnessing the aftermath of the Holocaust makes this task impossible – by replacing shame with pride, Hoffman continuously expands her sense of self; however, the author seems unable to face the fact that her actions still leave her powerless against the looming absence[90] that she was vehemently defending herself from the very beginning. One can say that Hoffman is ashamed of feeling vulnerable – in this sense, she is ashamed of shame[91]. No matter how much the self expands, the vulnerability essential to the human condition cannot be changed. By rejecting this fact, Hoffman perpetuates the vicious circle – by expanding the self, the author further isolates herself, ultimately weakening the self, as the "I" can never become fully itself as it lacks the Other.

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[89] LaCapra, *Historia w okresie przejściowym. Doświadczenie, tożsamość, teoria krytyczna*, 154–155.

[90] LaCapra, *Historia w okresie przejściowym. Doświadczenie, tożsamość, teoria krytyczna*, 154–155.

[91] Arel, *Affect Theory, Shame, and Christian Formation*, 50.

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Przezwyciężyć wstyd? Trauma, rodzina i tożsamość w *Lost in Translation* Evy Hoffman

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest zbadanie wpływu traumy na tożsamość na przykładzie *Zagubione w przekładzie* Evy Hoffman. Utwór ten stawia w centrum adaptację tożsamości do realiów nowej kultury, jednak rzuca także światło na sposób, w jaki trauma historyczna i strukturalna (LaCapra) kształtują ten proces. Korzystając z założeń filozofii dialogu (Buber) oraz pojęcia tożsamości posttraumatycznej (Szczepan), autorka artykułu udowadnia, że chociaż pokonanie wstydu jest kluczowe dla właściwego rozwoju podmiotowości i odzyskania sprawczości, unikanie tego uczucia utrudnia budowanie relacji i może prowadzić do izolacji „ja".
Słowa kluczowe: Eva Hoffman, *Zagubione w przekładzie*, trauma, Zagłada, rodzina

Die Scham überwinden? Trauma, Familie und Identität in *Lost in Translation* von Eva Hoffman

Abstract: Das Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, den Einfluss von Traumata auf die Identität am Beispiel von Eva Hoffmans *Lost in Translation* zu untersuchen. Dieses Werk stellt die Anpassung der Identität an die Realitäten einer neuen Kultur in den Mittelpunkt, beleuchtet jedoch auch die Art und Weise, wie historische und strukturelle Traumata (LaCapra) diesen Prozess prägen. Unter Verwendung der Annahmen der Dialogphilosophie (Buber) und des Begriffs der posttraumatischen Identität (Szczepan) belegt die Autorin, dass die Überwindung von Scham zwar für die richtige Entwicklung der Subjektivität und die Wiedererlangung der Handlungsfähigkeit entscheidend ist, die Vermeidung dieses Gefühls jedoch den Aufbau von Beziehungen erschwert und zur Isolation des „Ichs" führen kann.
Schlüsselwörter: Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, Trauma, Holocaust, Familie