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This special issue on translation is inspired by Eva Hoffman's memoir *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, which addresses translation on many levels: translation of languages and cultures, translating embodied experience into a textual self, psychotherapy as translation therapy and the ultimate level of 'self-translation'. It has inspired many publications and reviews as well as giving insights into the experience of language dislocation that were not generally considered in 1989 when the book was published.

Dr Eva Hoffman is an internationally renowned writer and academic. Born in Kraków, Poland she emigrated with her family to Canada in 1959. She studied at Rice University, Texas (English literature), the Yale School of Music and Harvard University, where she received a PhD in literature. She was awarded an honorary DLitt by the University of Warwick in 2008 and has been formerly a member of the CUNY Hunter College's Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing. Her publications include *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989), *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe* (1993), *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (1997), *The Secret* (2002), *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), *Illuminations* (published in the US as *Appassionata*) and *Time* (2009). She has taught creative writing at Kingston University and MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Eva Hoffman now lives in London, where the following conversation took place.

AP: Having written and published *Lost in Translation* 20 years ago, what would you say are the issues now for you, in terms of being a woman living in a multilingual country?

EH: If I look at it in retrospect, it seems to me that I came to America at a particular point. Of course, one always comes to a place at a particular point but two kinds of things affect-

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ed my experience of immigration and trans-acculturation. First, it was an immigration which took place in a Cold War world. So, the assumption was – and for my parents it turned out to be entirely true – that we could never go back. I was sort of prised out of my childhood and out of Poland. I was a very reluctant immigrant at that point. So the sense of rupture was quite extreme and stark. There was a sense of absolute division, between the past and the present, between my old self and the new self, etc. and synthesizing the two took a very long time. It was a kind of labour to try to put it all together. At the same time, in America of that time, the ideology was still that of a melting pot, and of course it was the immigrants who were supposed to do the melting. So one was supposed to become an American. Very quickly. And there was really no sense of, no acknowledgement even or understanding of, cultural difference. People did not think it mattered, they didn't really believe that culture can form you quite profoundly, and that cultural difference can be very central and deep. Immigrants took various attitudes towards this and various psychological paths, so to speak. In the 1960s some people just went along with it and did try to assimilate and to become American instantly, and, of course America did offer great opportunities to many people, including to me, and I was genuinely grateful for that and remain grateful for it.

I think that often there were costs of this kind of camouflage. Because, as you know, this kind of process of cultural transformation cannot happen over night or by sheer will. So I think that many people paid a kind of psychological price for it. This has changed enormously since then, with the emergence of the ideology of multiculturalism: i.e. recognizing cultural difference, recognizing the force of it. I think that today people don't struggle to be understood on this absolutely basic and fundamental level, that struggle has lessened. Of course, this doesn't mean that everybody understands other cultures, and what they mean, and how they form you, and how they construct you very deeply. But at least there is some acknowledgement of difference.

We have also been through a stage of perhaps romanticizing difference, of over-emphasizing it, and assuming that the Other is somehow wiser than we are, that there is a certain wisdom in otherness. And, I think that clearly has its perils. We're still not finished with thinking about how to handle multiculturalism and contemporary democratic societies. Thinking still has to be done. However, I do believe that the psychological trajectory of immigration is now very different.

AP: That's a nice phrase, psychological trajectory.

EH: Well, because there was a trajectory I think. There are stages. Several decades after my emigration, the world is completely intermingled. Cross-national movement is normative. It's almost being rooted in completely stable lives – lives lived in one place – that is the exception. So the world has become much more nomadic, much more intermingled.

KS: You are not in exile any more?

EH: No.

KS: In *Lost in Translation* after your protagonist has come to terms with the English language and with herself, she says that the condition of exile is the archetypal condition of contemporary lives. Do you think that the term 'exile' needs to be revised in this global world? Is nomadism now a more appropriate term?

EH: Yes, I think it is. There are different kinds of movement and exile is rare – perhaps exile in its strong sense still exists in some parts of the world, but I actually can't think of any.

KS: Some people see today's constant movement in negative terms – a kind of rootlessness or motion sickness. Others stress its positive nomadic openness. What about you? How do you see this process?

EH: Exile in its strong sense meant that you were expelled and that you couldn't come back. And, of course, this was the case for the many exiles from Eastern Europe. I can't think of

other parts of the world now where this obtains, so perhaps the age of exile of this kind is over. Of course it's the age of migration, and sometimes it's not entirely voluntarily migration. But, for example, for the Polish migrants in London now it's pretty voluntary, it's pretty chosen, it is an economic migration. And I sometimes actually don't quite understand why they choose it. Because, the conditions here are not easy for them, they're quite alienated from their surroundings. They don't mean to become acculturated, so it doesn't make complete sense to me but that's another story. So, no, I totally don't think of myself as an exile. I actually never did. I was an immigrant. I wrote a little essay called 'Out of exile' for a writers' symposium on exile, and I wrote the essay because it seemed to me false at some point to keep thinking of myself, of ourselves, as exiles.

AP: It's an interesting title because what you wrote in *Lost in Translation* seemed to suggest that you were in exile then. 'Out of exile' suggests that for you, the trajectory was a move from feeling yourself an exile to coming out of that feeling. Is that right?

EH: Well, that is right. I didn't think of myself as an exile because I wasn't, but I did feel exiled, in fact, as opposed to my parents. I felt exiled because I was prised out, it wasn't my choice really to leave at that point. If we'd have left a few years later I would have understood much better why we were doing it, and why I might have chosen it. So yes, that has been absolutely the route.

There is a kind of temptation to feel exiled, for a very long time or for ever. There is an essay by an Israeli writer AB Yehoshua, called 'Exile as a neurotic solution', where he speaks of the collective temptations for Jewish people all over the world to remain displaced, longing for the ideal home, but living for many centuries in Diaspora, not going to Jerusalem to try to find their ideal home. And that there was a kind of luxury in this sort of exilic position. The luxury of being outside, of not being fully implicated in the society that you're in. There is a temptation – being outside gives you a kind of vantage point from which to view the world, which is extremely valuable, especially for a writer. And I guess to some extent this will always inform my thinking and my perceptions. I will never be completely on the inside of anything. But I don't want to stress it and I don't want always to be writing only from that perspective, or only about those subjects; at some point one wants to write about subjects which are more fundamental.

KS: Going back to the exilic position you mentioned, do you think you have developed a kind of 'double vision', an acute sense of dealing with strangeness – not just imagining strangeness differently but imagining yourself as stranger – what Edward Said calls 'contrapuntal awareness', WEB DuBois 'double consciousness', or what Julia Kristeva describes as 'a subject in process'? Is self-estrangement a blessing or a curse?

EH: I think self-estrangement is better for writing than for living. In writing you do need a vantage point, you do need a certain degree of distance, detachment, which is close to estrangement. For living one wants to live from within oneself and to be immersed in one's experience. You know, insofar as possible, at least one wants it at times. But I also think that it's a very delicate and complicated issue, and very challenging. I believe that one also wants to write from within subjectivity to some extent.

AP: Can you say what you mean by that?

EH: What I mean is that one wants to write from that part of oneself which is receptive to experience, which has absorbed experience, and which has processed experience internally. As well as from distance; and I think that actually writing demands both – a vantage point, from which you see, and a certain kind of inwardness. I think the one consequence of this kind of 'double vision', which I acquired early, is that I will never not be aware of the context of certain experiences, lives, persons, myself. I'm always aware of the sort of context which shapes things. And I think that is valuable to have for writing, but I think one needs the other thing as well.

- AP: You talked about not thoroughly understanding new Polish migrants, and always being aware of context, subjectivity in the present and having moved out of exile. I wondered if you had any thoughts about living in more than one language, from the vantage point of living in a multilingual society, as a woman, now?
- EH: Well, yes, I think so, in that this whole condition becomes normalized. And it is a kind of a relief and a pleasure not to have it always be problematized in an acute way. So, that's . . . that's good. As for living in two languages, I think at some point, well it's strange because I notice that English is absolutely and completely my primary language . . . But also something happened at some point, whereby Polish started resurfacing again.
- KS: Is that because of revisiting Poland?
- EH: Well, there was revisiting, there was the political normalization which meant that I could go back and forth and that people came here, and you know, I started having Polish friends in New York at some point. So all of that, but I think also it was that . . . English became safe . . . I've written a little essay on this.
- AP: Can you tell us the title?
- EH: It's called 'PS'. As in Post Scriptum . . . I think what I actually did when I first went to Canada and then to the States, when I first started coming into English, is that I pushed Polish out of the way. I suppressed it, pushed it out of the way. Actually, I once talked to an Israeli poet who grew up in Russia for the first few years of his life and then was in a German refugee camp, and he said that he remembered German but he forgot Russian – that he murdered Russian. Because it was a danger to his new language. And I think I stifled Polish, I shoved it out of the way so it wouldn't interfere, while there was this new language that I had to internalize. And then English at some point started being safe. And it was really, it was a little bit, it was very surprising, because all of a sudden Polish started kind of geysering up and I could speak it more easily again.
- AP: But why did it start being safe?
- EH: Because it became internalized, because it became my language.
- AP: Is that simply because you're so secure in the language or is there something different about being an adult compared to being the teenage girl you were in *Lost in Translation*?
- EH: I think it was more linguistic security, I would say. . . . This is how it seems to me, how it feels to me.
- KS: So does it mean that you 'translate' yourself backward if we use this major trope from *Lost in Translation*? In the memoir you say: 'Like everybody I'm the sum of my language, there's the language of my family and childhood, of education and friendship, of love, and a largely changing world.' It seems that language is an overall metaphor about the first four decades of your life as a woman. And now you add yet another stage, where language has become a point of safety or like an anchor?
- EH: Reaching some sort of integration in which my subjectivity can express itself in both languages.
- KS: Or maybe, as you say in *Lost in Translation*, 'I've been written in a variety of languages. I know to what extent I'm a script'. We were wondering, perhaps you're more of a palimpsest figure with all these layers of your identity in different languages – Polish, Yiddish, English.
- EH: Yes, but by a script I mean being constructed. Not a narrative. But . . . I suppose it goes back to this business of writing from a unitary subjectivity. One does want to be at some point one person also, one person preceding all of this, and experiencing all of this, and allowing oneself to be influenced, and to have things added to oneself – but one wants to be this one person.

- KS:* In *Lost in Translation* you say, 'I had to translate myself but without becoming assimilated. A true translation proceeds by the motions of understanding and sympathy. It happens by slow increments, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase.' So do you think that living and writing in a second language implies greater empathy and understanding for the other, for the world as a whole? Which is the most productive form of 'translating oneself without assimilation'? Is it linguistic, is it cultural or gender marked somehow?
- EH:* Well, maybe I'll answer concretely because I've been recently working as an external consultant on a project for the British Council on rethinking cultural relations in our time. So I have organized these two conferences, called the Inner Lives of Cultures. The first one was completely globally international, because we had people from various regions and various countries all over the world: China, Indonesia, Egypt, Romania, Uzbekistan, etc., doing these kinds of informed reports on their cultures. And the second one, which I just came back from a week ago, took place in Delhi, and it was on larger stuff, sort of metacultural problems. The title, which was Globalisation and Diversity, sounds rather inflated, but within that there were various kinds of metacultural, cross-cultural issues, and participants from here and from India. So what can I tell you about it? It gives me great pleasure to do this, and it's very interesting to me to have some sort of understanding of otherness, of cultural difference. And also, in these particular conferences there's great pleasure in thinking across all of these national cultural lines, but thinking together – because there seems really to be a kind of global thinking going on.
- KS:* As you mentioned earlier – sometimes differences and otherness are romanticized too much and we tend to ignore the painful conflicts behind.
- EH:* Well, absolutely. At this conference we had a session on conflict and reconciliation, cultural relativism and human rights, all of these issues which have all of a sudden become absolutely global issues. We're all faced with them. We need to think them through. They are very vexed, they're difficult, even issues of human rights and how to apply them. But I suppose this has been a kind of transposition of that initial experience. I was very happy to be asked to do this and it's very interesting to me.
- AP:* That suggests a shift to the cultural role from the linguistic. And it's about reconciliation across difference?
- EH:* Yes, it's about seeing whether there are certain commonalities behind the differences. And what sort of commonalities are they and what do we want to make of them, in a sense. Are we willing to acknowledge them? Or to think about the possibility that there may be certain kinds of cultural or ethical universals.
- AP:* Do you think you're the same person as you were when you left Poland all those years ago? You've talked about this big international project you're doing now and also about your desire for a unitary subjectivity from which to speak, and yet you're also talking about multiplicity. So are you the same?
- EH:* I am probably, or absolutely not. But no one stays the same. I mean, in that sense, immigration and trans-acculturation is a kind of potent and a more extreme version of a process that we all undergo, which is that we change. We all have languages of education, and love, and adulthood, and childhood, etc. So no, I am not the same. There really has been a kind of accumulation and new layers . . . but it is much less of a split than it used to be. Much less of a split. Change can now become more additive.
- AP:* And is that through language again? Centring yourself in one?
- EH:* Well, I think that's a necessary prerequisite, or at least for me it was. Maybe it isn't for everybody. I mean, not everybody lives in language quite so much. But for me, it has been a necessary prerequisite in that language itself had to stop being quite so problematized and such a sharp issue. It had to become internalized. Eventually, that allows one to see through language, to see the world through language.

- KS:* Do you still discover different meanings attached to words? In *Lost in Translation* you mention how 'normal', 'self sufficiency', 'identity', reverberate differently in Polish and English. Do you still find such subtle differences?
- EH:* Well, they're there, they're definitely there. But now they don't trouble me . . . But also the world is becoming more globalized, the differences between East and West now are . . . so much less.
- KS:* In *Lost in Translation* you describe growing up as a girl in Krakow and in Vancouver as very different experiences; you say that in Polish 'femininity' implies some coquettishness and romantic flavour, whereas it's somewhat 'vulgar' in North America. Are these differences still so huge in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and North America?
- EH:* I think they're much lessened probably. They're still probably there. It has to be said that the one aspect of the political system in Eastern Europe, which I wouldn't have rejected was a kind of feminism, even though it was completely ambiguous, because of its communist associations. But it did exist, in that there was no question that women could go into professional lives and could exercise some kind of authority. And 90 percent of women worked and were educated. No, that is not to be wished away, but when I came to Vancouver, the young women there were more conservative. Much more conventional and much more conservative. But that of course has changed, over there. And certain stylings of self have changed very much in Poland.
- KS:* And now feminism reverberates in Eastern Europe somewhat differently again. What are your impressions?
- EH:* Yeah, it's a kind of western, imported feminism . . . As far as I can tell, no, feminism, in itself, as a kind of ideology, is not so popular. But I think there is a kind of intrinsic feminism. Which is what I was talking about. I came by it naturally to some extent.
- KS:* Your book *Exit into History* is a journey from the Baltic to the Black Sea, right after the fall of communism. You write with so much understanding and excitement about Eastern Europe, calling it 'my Eastern Europe' – unlike the common labels 'the other Europe' or 'the backyard of Europe'. What makes it your Europe? At the end of the book you say that the Iron Curtain has lifted, but imaginary curtains are still there and they take longer to remove. So how do you see this new Europe today?
- EH:* What I meant by 'my Eastern Europe' is that I grew up in a part of it after all, and I absolutely was never going to disallow that this was a formative influence. So when these transitions happened, I decided to do that book very impulsively and very quickly, I was going to do something else and . . . then I thought this was one historical event I want to see. Partly because I wanted to see Eastern Europe, which had been a kind of a country of my childhood through adult eyes, I wanted to understand it on a different level. But . . . there was so much that I loved about Eastern Europe actually. What did I love about it?

Talking in very large terms, I think the cultures there were less puritanical, I think they were more communitarian, there was a kind of real ethos of intimacy, or not even ethos but, you know an assumption, an experience of it. Experienced intimacy, which then in Poland turned into Solidarity. Solidarity could not have existed without these previous layers of connectedness, of connection. Eastern European countries were never powerful states. And I think that, but for certain things, they seemed very sympathetic to me particularly in this kind of booming, powerful 1960s, 1970s America. The sense of self-importance that people had living in a great power, being part of a great power – possibly there was more of it in Russia, or was there more of it in the Soviet Union? Which I have never been to still, but I want to go. But anyway, the sense that one wasn't a master of the universe and that one wasn't necessarily always in control of one's fate, that one had to have a certain receptivity to the unexpected, all of these things I found very sympathetic. That's why 'my Eastern Europe'.

- KS:* At the beginning of our conversation you spoke about the process of becoming American. Now you're becoming European?
- EH:* Well, the option of being a European is exciting. I'm very grateful for it, that one doesn't have to have a national identification, that one can think of oneself as European. This is excellent, I mean, this happens to fit my situation very well. But you know also several other things that could be said. My joke formulation is that London is my perfect mid-way point between Manhattan and Kraków.
- AP:* But not such a joke?
- EH:* It's not such a joke at all. It really is true of London. But, it seems to me that also we have different sort of layers of affinity, which can be to a city or a place, rather than a nation. I happen to like London a great deal. There are these affinities which are metropolitan rather than national: between here and Manhattan, between here and Kraków, etc., but anyway it's just kind of lucky to have the option of a European identity, and a cosmopolitan identity let's face it. Well, actually now that I think of it perhaps the term cosmopolitan is better than nomadic – or rather, nomadic which can at some point, change into something cosmopolitan – meaning that one is relatively stable in one place but can range out to many places and make connections with many places. A cosmopolitanism which no longer carries the suggestion of a few privileged centres of importance, which proceeds from everywhere.