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RE-CONSTRUCTING THE SELF IN LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE IN EVA HOFFMAN'S *LOST IN TRANSLATION: A LIFE IN A NEW LANGUAGE* AND ANAÏS NIN'S *EARLY DIARIES*

ANITA JARCZOK

University of Bielsko-Biała

ABSTRACT

This essay analyses the life narratives of two European women – Anaïs Nin's *Diary* and Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* – in order to investigate how their transition to North America affected their sense of self. It emphasises the key role that language and narrative play in the formation of identity, and argues that both writers reinvented themselves both in their adopted language and in writing.

Keywords: Exile, identity, self, language, narrative, Anaïs Nin, Eva Hoffman.

Emigration can be a traumatic experience, especially when it is involuntary. An exile loses home, friends, home culture and frequently an opportunity to express oneself in the mother tongue. When one loses a language, one, in a way, loses the self. Alfred Kazin remarks that "to speak a foreign language is to depart from yourself" (1951: 127). Language is central to the formation of our identity as it is the means through which we create narratives about ourselves and our lives. The way we talk about ourselves determines to a great extent who we are and various languages, together with cultures in which they are embedded, allow us to construct our identity in different ways. The relationship between the self, language and narrative is investigated here in the life accounts of two European women, Anaïs Nin and Eva Hoffman, who emigrated to North America in the twentieth century. The analysis of Nin's early *Diaries* and Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989) seeks to comprehend whether the estrangement

from their homeland and their mother tongue entailed the departure from themselves, how their sense of self was affected by their existence in a new language, and what was the role of narrative in shaping their identity.

Anaïs Nin was born in France in 1903; Hoffman was born in Poland in 1945. Nin is best known for her erotic stories and a multivolume diary whose various instalments (sixteen to date) have been gradually published since the 1960s. Eva Hoffman is the author of several novels and a number of autobiographical/historical writings out of which *Lost in Translation* is the most popular. Both writers share some commonalities of experience. They both emigrated to North America from Europe when they were teenagers. Nin was eleven years old when her mother took her and her two younger brothers to the United States in 1914, a year after Nin's father abandoned the family; Hoffman was thirteen when she emigrated with her parents and her younger sister to Canada in 1959. Neither Nin nor Hoffman knew English before they arrived in their respective host countries, but both of them eventually adopted English as the language of their literary composition. Another thing they have in common is their interest in psychoanalysis. Both writers were psychoanalysed, and both consider the talking cure as a great way of getting to know oneself.

Most of Hoffman's and Nin's writings are of an autobiographical nature. Both *Lost in Translation* and the first volume of Nin's early *Diary* begin with a story of a sea voyage which constitutes a powerful image of a transition from one continent, country, and culture to another. The journey symbolizes in-betweenness, the state of belonging neither here nor there which both writers knew well. Although the similarities between these two women writers and their narratives end here, it is the differences between them that can yield stimulating insights into the subject of identity and its links to language, narrative, culture and exile as we deal here with two diverse genres – the diary and autobiography, and two authors who approached their existence in a foreign language differently.

Most contemporary theories regard identity as a construct that bridges the personal, the social and the historical. Identity is not something we possess; it is not a state of being but a dynamic process of becoming. It is not fixed and unified but rather fragmentary and fluid. Despite the fact that our identities are fragmented, we like to think of ourselves as being a coherent self. The urge to present our life as a consistent narrative is thus explained by the cultural studies critic Stuart Hall: "Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continually being shifted around. If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves" (1992: 227).[1] Life narratives –

[1] For a different perspective on narrative see Galen Strawson who, in his controversial article

memoirs, autobiographies, biographies – in particular impose such coherence. Our experiences, which are inevitably chaotic, are put together into a meaningful story. In fact, similar findings are reported in research on the neurobiology of storytelling. Our brains seem to have a natural propensity to put random pieces of information into a logical whole.[2]

Language and narrative play a vital role in the formation of our identity. Nancy Budwig (1995) points out that language in relation to self can be understood in two ways: language as grammar and language as a discursive action. Researchers who have focused on language as grammar pay attention to certain grammatical features of language such as pronouns, voice or the choice of specific words. They argue, for instance, that the use of passive voice de-emphasises the subject, and as a result we can speculate about the attitude and the involvement of the speaker. The discursive approach concentrates on how discursive practices constitute the subject and what can be said in a given language. As Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasiński explain, "Living persons are required to 'take up' subject positions in discourse in order to make sense of the world and appear coherent to others" (2001: 13). The second approach strongly connects language with culture and history. These two views of language are merged in narrative – the practice of telling stories and in individual narratives (like autobiography, diary etc.), which are told/written in a specific grammatical and lexical system and unavoidably make use of available subject positions and cultural scripts.

Many poststructuralist critics, with Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault in the lead, point to the fact that language pre-exists us and therefore shapes our awareness and determines how we perceive, interpret, and represent ourselves and our worlds. "How much of what autobiographers say they experience is equivalent to what they really experience, and how much of it is merely what they know how to say?" is a thought-provoking question posed by the life-writing scholar Paul John Eakin in his book *How Our Lives Become Stories* (1999: 4). Contemplating this issue, Eakin suggests that the way we talk about our experiences is culturally and historically specific. Language defines what is thinkable and sayable at a given historical moment. Barker and Galasiński maintain that "The limits of lan-

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"Against Narrativity," argues against the view, he deems fashionable, that our lives are structured as narratives. He claims that not everyone conceive their lives as narrative, and he puts forward a very provoking thesis, namely "that the Narrative tendency to look for story or narrative coherence in one's life is, in general, a gross hindrance to self-understanding: to a just, general, practically real sense, implicit or explicit, of one's nature" (2004: 447). He incorporates the findings from neuropsychology to suggest "the more you recall, retell, narrate yourself, the further you risk moving away from accurate self-understanding, from the truth of your being" (2004: 447).

2 See for example Plaford 2009; or Zak 2014.

guage mark the edge of our cognitive understanding of the world, for our acculturalization in and through language is indicative of our values, meanings and knowledge" (2001: 29). Language is embedded in culture; in fact, the two are inseparable. "To say that people belong to the same culture," Stuart Hall explains, "is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways" (1997: 2). And we interpret the world, ourselves and other people through language and in language we communicate ourselves to others. Any attempt to comprehend reality is in fact an act of interpretation. Being an immigrant means that the language and cultural repertoires we bring to the interpretation of our new reality become inadequate.

In *Tongue Ties*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, who analyzes writings of bilingual Spanish-English authors, provides a very simple illustration of the way in which different languages shape what can or cannot be expressed. He gives an example of kinship terms in Spanish such as "compadre" or "comadre" that do not have equivalents in English, and he comments that these differences between two languages "may well reflect differences in how each culture defines the family unit" (2003: 11). Although Firmat's assumption may seem like a continuation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, it is not, as Firmat himself asserts. Firmat insists on a personal perception of language. He says that a given language might be perceived as possessing certain characteristics – for instance, Spanish as being more passionate than English, and argues that although this notion would not survive any rigorous testing, what counts is an individual's apprehension of a language which may lead to such usage of the language that confirms the person's perception. He concludes that comments about languages "generally reveal more about the writer than about the language" (2003: 13). Observations made by bilinguals[3] definitely help understand the way people exist in their respective languages and how their sense of self is affected with a shift to another language.

Bilinguals frequently report feeling like a different person when they switch to a different language. In the web-based questionnaire Dewaele and Pavlenko (2001-2003) asked their 1039 informants whether they "feel like a different person sometimes when (. . .) [they] use (. . .) [their] different languages" to which 65% answered in the affirmative (Pavlenko, 2014: 198). Wierzbicka, a professor of linguistics and a Polish-English bilingual, claims that she does not "only project a different persona" but is "in fact a different person in (. . .) [her] Anglophone and Polonophone relationships" (2004: 99). She knows that this can be difficult to prove but asks rhetorically whether "only knowledge that can be obtained by methods acceptable in a lab is valid or worth having" (2004: 99). Wierzbicka

[3] Throughout this paper I will be talking about bilinguals but most of what I say refers also to multilinguals.

strongly encourages taking the testimonies of bilingual people into consideration, not as the ultimate source of knowledge but as a supplement to other methods of examining the phenomenon of bilingualism.

Recent studies have revealed that people do behave and react differently depending on whether they use their mother tongue or a foreign language. The use of a foreign language is supposed to increase psychological distance, mostly because of a reduction of emotionality and decreased cognitive fluency. For example, in experiments involving a footbridge dilemma Costa and his associates (2014) found that people make more utilitarian moral choices if they speak in a foreign language.[4] Similar findings were reported by Keysar and his colleagues (2012) who noticed that if the dilemmas regarding risk-taking were presented in a foreign language, participants reacted in a cooler and more detached manner. Also the observation of dual-language psychotherapy revealed that bilinguals tend to switch to their second language in order to achieve emotional distance which, in turn, allows them to talk more freely about taboo subjects or traumatic experiences (Pavlenko 2014: 284).

Language allows us to make stories about ourselves and the way we talk about ourselves forms the basis of our identity. Narrating, as Bamberg rightly notes, "in recent decades has established itself as a privileged site for identity analysis – a new territory for inquiry" (2009: 133). Language, narrative and identity are therefore closely interconnected. Paul John Eakin employs the concept of narrative identity in order to emphasise the fact that when we talk about ourselves "we perform a work of self-construction"(2008: 2). According to him, "there is a mutually enhancing interplay between what we are and what we say we are" (Eakin 2008: 2). Eakin further suggests that autobiographies are representative of self-narration that each of us practices daily. This claim is in line with Bamberg's model of "narratives-in-interaction" – "the way stories surface in everyday conversation (small stories), as the locus of where identities are continuously practiced out and tested out" (2009: 139). Bamberg suggests that when certain stories are repeated over and over again they give us a sense of constancy and sameness which is then reflected in big stories, like an autobiography (2009: 139-140).

We usually do not think much about our identity until that identity is somehow threatened or vulnerable. According to Eakin, we also do not normally give much thought to the process of self-narration, but when the identity story is disrupted, Eakin explains, "we can be jolted into awareness of the central role it plays in

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[4] The footbridge dilemma required people to imagine and assess a situation in which they had to decide whether to push a man off the bridge in order to save five other people. When considering this situation in their native tongues, only 12 to 20 percent of respondents found pushing someone to a certain death permissible if it were to save more lives. When evaluating the same situation in a foreign language, the number of respondents who would push the man increased to 33 percent.

organizing our social world" (2008: 4). A transition to another country can lead to an identity crisis and to the disruption in the identity story. Discussing the experiences of foreign intellectuals in Paris in the nineteenth century, Lloyd S. Kramer observes, "The experience of living among alien people, languages, and institutions, can alter the individual's self about as significantly as any of the traumas known to psychologists" (1988: 9-10).

While exile can be traumatic, writing about it can prove to have a healing potential. Suzette Henke sees life narratives as a form of scriptotherapy, or, in other words, a form of textual self-psychoanalysis. Life narratives offer the possibility to reinvent ourselves. She explains: "Because the author [of a life-narrative] can instantiate the alienated or marginal self into a pliable body of a protean text, the newly revised subject, emerging as the semi-fictive protagonist of an enabling counternarrative, is free to rebel against the values and practices of a dominant culture and to assume an empowered position of political agency in the world" (2000: xv-xvi). The existence in a foreign land and language itself, as opposed to writing about it, can also prove positive as it can heighten one's consciousness. Lloyd S. Kramer suggests that "extended contact with a foreign *mentalité* helps [exiles] to recognize the unconscious social or ideological hierarchies that create order and meaning in their native culture but pass unnoticed by people who never leave home. The 'normal' (or normative) values of the home country become more relative: simply one way of explaining reality or social experience rather than *the* way" (1988: 10; original italics). This heightened awareness is easily discernible in both Hoffman's and Nin's narratives. Confronted with new values and perspectives and existing outside of them, both writers are able to articulate them effectively. Hoffman thus describes her privileged position of an outsider: "Being deframed, so to speak, from everything familiar, makes for a certain fertile detachment and gives one new ways of observing and seeing (. . .). This perhaps is the great advantage, for a writer, of exile, the compensation for the loss and the formal bonus – that it gives you a perspective, a vantage point" (1999: 50).

Eva Hoffman's autobiography entitled *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* was published in 1989, thirty years after Hoffman first set foot in Canada. It is a chronological narrative divided into three parts: Hoffman's childhood in Cracow, her adolescence in Canada and her adulthood in the United States. These three parts are entitled respectively: Paradise, Exile and The New World. Hoffman's self-narration is shaped into a coherent story of a gradual immersion in a new culture and a painstaking translation of the self into a foreign language. Language, as the title of her autobiography suggests, is the axis around which her story revolves. Hoffman's autobiography can be considered from two perspectives – as a testimony from which one can learn about experiences of a bilingual and as an intentional piece of writing meant for publication, which was to confirm

Hoffman's status of a New York intellectual. These two perspectives will interweave in this analysis.

After her arrival in Canada Hoffman discovers quickly that Polish becomes an inadequate means of expression. It does not effectively capture her experiences in the new world so when she decides to keep a diary, she, unlike Nin, decides to write it in English even though, as she admits, "it's not the language of the self" (1989: 121). Using Polish, however, seems to her like resorting to Latin. "Polish," she says, "is becoming a dead language, the language of the untranslatable past" (1989: 120). The decision to keep her diary in English is a vital one. A diary is a very intimate space where an ongoing formation of identity takes place. In deciding to keep her diary in English Hoffman seems to drastically cut off her Polish self and to deprive herself of a confidante and ultimately of a space where she can maintain the continuity of her self. Hoffman admits that her diary-keeping becomes "a school exercise," "one of the more impersonal exercises of that sort produced by an adolescent girl" (1989: 121). Her diary is not an act of spontaneous confession but a controlled and deliberate exercise in language composition, although this is not to say that diaries written in a mother tongue are devoid of deliberation or are repositories of genuine emotions. As Margo Culley reminds us "all diarists are involved in a process, even if largely unconscious, of selecting details to create a persona" (1998: 218-19). Hoffman notes something similar when she comments on the benefits of keeping a diary in English. She remarks, "I learn English through writing, and, in turn, writing gives me a written self" (1989: 121).

The second part of her remark – "writing gives me a written self" – points to the close interrelation between the self and the written narrative. Writing in English, as Hoffman admits, "is beginning to invent another me" (1989: 121). Her diary serves as a space for self-invention. The English/writing self is presented as more serious, mature and intellectual than her Polish self. Her diary written in English does not record "sentimental effusions of rejected love, eruptions of familial anger, or consoling broodings about death" (1989: 121). Instead, it consists of "reflections on the ugliness of wrestling; on the elegance of Mozart, and on how Dostoyevsky puts me in mind of El Greco" (1989: 121). Writing a diary and later an official autobiography gives Hoffman the chance to establish herself as an observer and a cultural anthropologist but also a powerful agent who can make a meaningful story out of the disorienting circumstances in which she was plunged. Hoffman admits that her English self, which is "refracted through the double distance of English and writing" is "oddly objective; more than anything, it perceives" (1989: 121). It seems that writing her diary in English gives her a necessary detachment from her distressing experiences.

Mastering the language of the host country is important for Hoffman. It is a prerequisite for successful assimilation in a new environment. Xuemei Li argues that "to have more access to the resources in society, people have to gain more

power in controlling the linguistic resources and be able to use the language as a tool in achieving their goals" (2007: 261). Hoffman is deeply aware of the relationship between language, power and social status. She mentions the fact that it is crucial for her to speak and pronounce English properly as "hearing English distorted grates on (. . .) [her] like chalk screeching on a blackboard" (1989: 122). She brings her knowledge of sociolinguistics to interpret her attitude. She discusses speech as a class signifier and claims that proper English might help her to overcome her marginality (1989: 123).

A successful existence in a foreign country requires not only mastering a language but also a correct understanding of cultural codes. In order to feel at home in a given place, one has to agree with other community members on the interpretation of social reality. Reaching such an agreement is termed by Pavlenko as intersubjectivity. Hoffman discovers that culture influences not only what can or cannot be said but also how one should behave towards others. She records: "I learn my new reserve from people who take a step back when we talk, because I'm standing too close, crowding them. (. . .) I learn restraint from Penny, who looks offended when I shake her by the arm in excitement, as if my gesture had been one of aggression instead of friendliness" (1989: 146). Behaviours acceptable in Poland are no longer appropriate in the new environment. Hoffman is determined to learn how to fit into her new community, and her autobiography records the process of the attempted assimilation

Hoffman's bilingual and bicultural perspective makes some otherwise transparent linguistic, social and cultural conventions visible. Being sensitive to language differences, she is aware of the fact that words do not easily translate and they have diverse connotations. She mentions, for instance, the fact that English "friend" and Polish "przyjaciel" are hardly equivalent. Lexical differences are often commented on by bilinguals. Wierzbicka, for instance, who is particularly interested in the ways language affects our emotions, thus relates her experiences of describing her baby granddaughter:

> In Polish, the language used for talking about babies relies on a wide range of emotionally coloured diminutives, and to talk about a baby in a purely descriptive language would seem strangely cold and loveless. For example, in Polish I could say that now she has a lot of *loczki* (dear-little-curls), or that she has six *ząbki* (dear-little-teeth), or that for her age she is *malutka* (dear-little-small). Since English doesn't have such diminutives, I would have to use descriptive "loveless" words like "curls," "teeth," or "small." (2007: 99)

But this is not a purely linguistic issue. Words and their meanings enable different ways of being in the world. Commenting on the connection between language, subjectivity, emotions and culture Besemeres notes, "If Polish has the words like *ptaszku* [little bird] and *córuchna* [sweet-daughter-of-mine] whereas English

does not, this is not an arbitrary idiosyncratic fact about the language, unrelated to other aspects of Polish culture. For a Polish-English bilingual, the emotional style made possible by such words is part of the two emotional worlds that she lives in, which engage different parts of her self" (2004: 156). For Hoffman English is not initially the language of her emotions and as a result the Cracow Ewa is regarded as the real one. But, as Firmat remarks, "Tongue ties are dynamic; they tighten or slacken over time" (2003: 9). And such a loosening of the bond between Hoffman and Polish in favour of a gradual strengthening of the bond between her and English is narrated in Hoffman's autobiography.

As Hoffman's command of English and familiarity with the host culture gradually improves, she is pulled between two selves – the Polish and the American one. The most compelling, and at the same time the most advertised,[5] remove fragments of Hoffman's autobiography are the dialogues between her Polish and American self. The conversations in which she engages during the most momentous times of her life such as deciding whether to get married and later divorced or whether to pursue her musical career reveal subject positions one can take up in a given culture. In the second exchange the Polish and English self discuss a musical career:

> Should you become a pianist? the question comes in English.
> No, you mustn't. You can't.
> Should you become a pianist? the question echoes in Polish.
> Yes, you must. At all costs. (1989: 199)

Pavlenko demonstrates that with the shift to another language people can change their points of view because they rely on various discourses and interpretative frames – "assemblages of lexical items, metaphors, rhetorical practices, and scripts that structure speakers' expectations, assign interpretations to social events, and serve as a kind of memory structure facilitating understanding, encoding, recognition, and recall" (2014: 225). A musical career definitely has a different status in Poland than in the United States. In an interview, Hoffman explains how emigration influenced her decision to give up a career in music:

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[5] The following fragment:
"Should you marry him? the question comes in English.
Yes.
Should you marry him? the question echoes in Polish.
No." (1989: 199)

is quoted in a range of academic and non-academic sources. Just to give a few examples. It is a fragment that features on the back cover of the American hardcover edition of the book. It is quoted in Pavlenko's study *The Bilingual Mind* as well as a number of other publications (Oster 2003; Creet and Kitzman 2011; and Auer and Wei 2008).

“the Vancouver to which I came did not have a very rich musical life. I did have a wonderful music teacher (. . .) but there wasn't a fertile soil for that. It seemed from our immigrant point of view that going to Juilliard might have been nearly impossible. That possibly becoming a pianist would have been very impractical” (Kreisler, 2000). As a result Hoffman eventually decides to study literature.

Divorce, the topic of the third and final conversation, is also treated differently in both cultures. A few decades ago divorces in Poland were rare and Hoffman knows that if she had lived and got married in Poland, she probably would not consider a divorce. In 1970s America, the second wave of feminism introduced significant changes in the divorce law, and these were accompanied with the discourse of individual happiness and individual responsibility for that happiness. Divorce is therefore thinkable. In Poland Hoffman might have felt exactly the same in the confinement of an unhappy marriage, but she knows that in Poland divorce would not be something she would consider because she “would exist within the claustrophobia of no choice, rather than the agoraphobia of open options” (1989: 230-231).

This battle of the selves always leads to an attempt to establish which self is the real one. In the last of the three conversations, the American self concludes almost triumphantly, “I don’t have to listen to you any longer. I am as real as you now. I’m the real one” (1989: 231). Hoffman’s dialogues are a site of struggle, a place where her identity is negotiated. They are in a way a literary illustration of this conflict between different selves which Stuart Hall describes so aptly. It seems that for a bilingual this sense of having various selves is very prominent and every person deals with it in a different way. Quoting various studies Pavlenko says that

> some bi- and multilinguals perceive multiple linguistic selves as a threat to the perception of self-coherence (. . .) . Attempts to manage the discontinuity and to impose coherence on self-perception range from acknowledgements of fragmentation and multiplicity to creation of a hybrid identity in a third liminal space, to the imposition of a single ‘true’ self that is either linked to a single language or is alinguistic and unthreatened by different linguistic persona. (2014: 200)

Hoffman, just like Nin, offers a contradictory view of identity. On the one hand, she strives for unity and coherence, a hybrid identity. On the other, she embraces the variety and instability of her self. I agree here with Bartoszynska, who claims that “Hoffman re-enacts the process of exile, the fragmentation and eventual rebuilding of the self that is, however, still somewhat split – aware of itself as constructed, but comfortable in its ability to navigate between cultures and narratives”(2005: 4). Narrative is at the heart of making sense of her different selves.

Hoffman’s Polish self hovers over her life. It is a version of herself that was not lived out. While we all make daily choices that determine the course and

shape of our lives, they are often so subtle that most of us rarely consider how our lives would have looked like if we had led them elsewhere. For an immigrant, this moment at the crossroads when their life took a dramatic turn is often felt very acutely. Because the separation from the previous life is often so definite, it is easy to think back to that moment and try to envision how that other life and self might have developed if allowed its natural course. And in Hoffman's case the awareness that she would be a completely different person if she had lived in Poland is very sharp, and sometimes even painful. In her autobiography, she reimagines her potential Polish self and by doing so, she revives it, reclaims it and incorporates it into her identity.

Hoffman eventually finds immense pleasure in using English. She recounts the moment when the barrier between herself and English is cracked. She teaches literature and while analysing T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" she suddenly feels that "words become, as they were in childhood, beautiful things – except this is better, because they're now crosshatched with a complexity of meaning, with the sonorities of felt, sensuous thought" (1989: 186). This is the turning point of her autobiography, which finds resolution in her two selves beginning to co-exist peacefully. Towards the end of the book, she concludes that she starts to "trust English to speak my childhood self as well" (1989: 274). Writing down the story of her Polish self in English serves a similar purpose to that of psychoanalysis. In fact, Hoffman admits it herself, explaining that her two voices merge during therapy. They coalesce further in her autobiography.[6]

Analysing Hoffman's autobiography, one cannot ignore the fact that it is a space where she builds her identity by reclaiming her Polish self but also by self-fashioning herself according to fashionable discourses of the host country. As a result in the pages of her narrative she establishes more firmly her American identity. When Hoffman was writing her autobiography the linguistic turn in humanities reached its peak. The focus on language was accompanied by the memoir boom and the interest in the issues of migration, identity, and power. Her narrative therefore fits into the conventions of American storytelling. Her autobiography strikes a chord with the issues that were crucial to American society in the 1980s. Hoffman frequently uses scholarly discourses to understand her experiences and emotions. In the following passage she writes compellingly but also very knowledgeably about learning English:

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[6] Such a view is also offered by Philips Casteel who writes: "Rewriting the past will help her to understand that past, for it is in the act of writing that she can both construct a meaningful narrative about her life and also construct a more unified self" (2001: 294). Zaborowska offers a contrary view. She sees Hoffman's narrative as failing to reach any resolution. She claims that the autobiography "defies traditional immigrant narrative structure (…). It does not end with any kind of arrival that suggests permanence (…)" (in Philips Casteel 2001: 299).

> (…) the problem is that the signifier has become severed from the signified. The words I learn now don't stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. "River" in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the essence of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. "River" in English is cold - a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke. (1989: 106)

And she adds further: "I am becoming a living avatar of structuralist wisdom; I cannot help knowing that words are just themselves" (1989: 107). She employs the discourse of structuralism that for readers unfamiliar with Ferdinand de Saussure or Roland Barthes might be incomprehensible. Although she tries to grasp the experiences of her teenage self, the way she talks about them is characteristic of her adult self. It is hard to imagine an adolescent immigrant being able to articulate her experiences using such a complex discourse. Hoffman reimagines her Polish self but this envisioning is prone to distortion not only because memories are constantly reconstructed but also because they are tinted by her use of highly literary, reflexive and intellectual language. While many critics suggest taking testimonies of bilinguals into account in order to comprehend better the phenomenon of bilingualism, we cannot ignore the reverse. Bilingual writers can tell us about their experiences of using various languages but their understanding is influenced by the culture, or cultures, they inhabit. Hoffman uses discourses popular among American intellectuals and academics in the 1980s – structuralism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis – to capture the changes her identity has undergone in relation to the switch of a language.

Hoffman reconstructs her Polish self, perhaps inarticulate for many decades of her life in the United States, while simultaneously establishing more firmly her identity in English–an identity of an American intellectual. Her very poetic and reflexive autobiography, in which every word seems to be carefully chosen, gives evidence to her success of gaining mastery over English. Hoffman became what she had set out to be, namely a New York intellectual, a writer and a fully-fledged participant in American culture conversant with contemporary discourses.

Anaïs Nin kept her diary for most of her life. The emergence of this lifelong habit coincided with her voyage to the United States in 1914. Initially intended as a letter to her absent father, her diary grew over the years to overwhelming 35,000 pages. Unlike Hoffman, who wrote down her story a few decades later, Nin recorded her migrant experiences as she lived through them and her diary witnessed how her self was affected by the host culture day by day. In contrast to Eva Hoffman's autobiography, we do not find in her diary many conscious reflections on language and identity, but it is a diary written by an adolescent who has not acquired yet a full understanding of her condition and is therefore unable to deconstruct it the way Hoffman did.

Nin's first language was French and as a child she also acquired some Spanish while living with her grandparents in Barcelona. English was therefore her third language. She wrote the first volumes of her journal in French, and she switched to English in 1920, announcing her decision in, and to, her diary, which she addressed in a similar manner on many different occasions:

> There is a volume I often turn to at night after my daily tasks are accomplished, for sweet, mute sympathy. I call it my Diary (. . .) . You are today made one of them, and perhaps the only distinction I make in my treatment of you is the use of the English language in place of the French. It makes little difference, after all, what language the tongue employs if it speaks from the heart, does it not?. (1982: 5)

As evident from the above quote, at that point Nin does not mind which language she uses, giving the impression of being equally attached to both. She switches to English because her cousin Eduardo, who does not speak French, also keeps a diary, and she wants them to share their journals. Nonetheless, for the first six years of her life in a new country Nin uses French for a daily inscription despite the fact that she often admits to having difficulties with the language.

The early use of French must have helped Nin maintain the continuity of the self and facilitate her recovery from the trauma of displacement. When Nin arrives in the United States, she experiences alienation and gives vent to strong feelings of dislike to her new country. Nin hates everything American – the landscape, the way of life, her school, her classmates, and her teacher. On numerous occasions she mentions feeling different from everyone else, and she also frequently positions herself as an outsider, as in the passage in which she describes the first day of a new school year. Nin says: "Three American flags look down on their children, except for Thorvald [Nin's brother] and me. We were born of another mother who has the same heart and the same name of Mother Country" (1978: 83). This aversion to America goes hand in hand with the idealisation of and patriotic identification with France. Nin fears for her mother country, which is then entangled in World War I, and dreams of being another Joan of Arc, who will save France.

In the article on nostalgia in Nin's *Diary*, I observed that nostalgia is largely absent from Nin's journal and I suggested that it might be due to the fact that Nin refuses to see her past as the past and instead she incorporates the people and places she left behind into her daily recording (Jarczok, forthcoming).[7] Her absent father is for instance a very powerful presence in her diary. She mentions him

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[7] The article "Creative (anti)nostalgia and nostalgic reminiscing as strategies employed by Anaïs Nin to cope with the hardships of migration" will be published in the post-conference monograph *Dwelling in Foregone Days: Nostalgia in North-American Literature and Culture* with Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2016.

constantly, copies letters she sends him and his infrequent replies, yearns for his return and imagines her parents' reunion. Her father is the one who encourages her to work on her French as it is the only language in which they can communicate. Using French therefore brings her closer to her father and alleviates the pain of their separation. Her diary provides a space where she can express herself in her 'father' tongue and where she can validate her feelings and emotions. Misunderstood by others, Nin turns to her diary. In one entry, she records: "When I write, I say everything; if I talk, I say nothing. Writing is my language and my diary knows more about the depths of my soul than any of my confidants, as if I had any, because that's just what I never want to have" (1978: 115). In this passage Nin brings attention to the healing potential of writing.[8] It is neither English nor French but writing itself that becomes an adequate means of expression.

Writing is Nin's new language and it plays a vital role in rebuilding her identity. Commenting on Nin's diaries Elizabeth Podnieks rightly notes, "The writer of any life text necessarily creates herself in the process of self-documentation" (2000: 285). Nin's newly emerged self and the one that cannot be lived out in a new country are fused together in the process of daily recording. This gradual immersion in the new language and letting go of the old one might have had therapeutic effects. Nin, unlike Hoffman, does not seem to be torn between her French and English selves in her adult life, although that is not to say that she does not experience or problematize the split of the self. But even when the adult Nin confesses, "I have always been tormented by the image of multiplicity of selves. Some days I call it richness, and other days I see it as a disease, a proliferation as dangerous as cancer" (1973: 54), she does not apprehend this multiplicity in terms of her multilingualism. Perhaps because Nin, unlike Hoffman, who was haunted by her Polish self, does not seem to be disturbed by her ability to speak various languages. When asked whether she finds it easier to express herself in either Spanish or French rather than English, Nin replies that she does not and explains:

> I really had a love affair with the English language from the first time I began to study it. I loved the language and I found that it was sufficient, in fact, very rich and just right for what I wanted to do. So I never did go back [to Spanish or French]. In fact, I can't write any longer in French or in Spanish. So there was really an adoption of English as a permanent language. (1975: 224)

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8 Richard-Allerdyce also sees Nin's writing as a means of recovery from trauma but we differ in what we think was traumatic for Nin. While I claim it was the separation from her father, arrival in a new country and isolation she experienced in the United States, Richard-Allerdyce maintains that Nin's diary allowed her "to express the sense of fragmentation and shock that resulted from her father's emotional and physical abuse" (1998: 7). Since the alleged abuse is the subject of much speculation, I do not support this view.

But although her relationship with her multilingual self was not problematic, her relationship with her writing was. Nin admitted on numerous occasions that she became addicted to her diary. When her psychoanalyst Dr Otto Rank, whom she was seeing in the early 1930s, told her to stop writing compulsively in her diary, Nin noted "The period without my diary remains an ordeal. Every evening I wanted my diary as one wants opium" (1973: 317). Similar comments abound in Nin's journal. Her diary was so precious to her that later on in life she stored it in a bank vault and spoke of it as a repository of her genuine self. Helen Tookey notes that "[Nin's] sense of life and writing as inextricably woven together is apparent in her earliest diaries, in which she envisages herself and her life as 'a book without an Epilogue, an unfinished book' (13 June 1919 [*Early Diary*, I 215]), and the future 'as the unwritten text which will come to fill the blank pages of her diary' (1 February 1920 [*Early Diary*, I, 427])" (2003: 15). For Nin her diary – a written narrative – became a locus of her being.

To summarise, bringing these two authors together proved fruitful as their narrative give us a deeper picture of the experiences of exile and acquisition of a new language. Nin's diary highlights the highly self-fashioned nature of Hoffman's autobiography while Hoffman's narrative can help explicate some feelings and frustrations of the young Nin who was unable to articulate her experiences the way the adult Hoffman could. Although we deal with two different types of narratives – autobiography versus diary – and two different types of narration – Hoffman's observations are shrewd to the point of being deconstructive while Nin's are more intuitive – in both cases we can notice the importance of language and narrative in the process of identity formation. Although both writers lost the opportunity to exist in their native language, they reinvented themselves, and not so much in the adopted language as in writing. Both narratives became sites where identity was constructed as the old selves were simultaneously recycled.

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