



# Polish Literature

(GAINED, NOT LOST) IN TRANSLATION

By  
Ewa Bronowicz



**EVA HOFFMAN**  
**Lost in Translation**  
Penguin Books, 280pp. \$11.95

## The Canadian / American Dream

To write about Eva Hoffman's "Lost in Translation", despite the fact that it was originally written in English, not Polish, was for several reasons a temptation I could not resist. Not only does the title of her book correspond to the title of this column, and not only is her first name Eva, like mine; but also, most importantly, this memoir mirrors the emigrant experience, and in particular the Polish emigrant experience of life in Canada and North America. I am confident that many of us emigrants will find similarities between Hoffman's account of moving to this continent and our own, as I did. As for natural born citizens, it will be fascinating, if not at times disturbing, to see one's homeland through the eyes of an emigrant.

And Hoffman's eyes are very detail-oriented. "I decide that my role in life is to be an observer," she writes shortly after emigrating to Canada at age 13, with her parents and family, in the late fifties. Nothing escapes her attention, everything is a new discovery, even if not a happy one. It is this commitment to being an observer that both gives the teenage Hoffman strength to adjust to the new land and at the same time distances her from her own narrative. While the author acknowledges her nostalgia for Poland and her childhood in it, she is equally aware of the walls that have to separate her from blending in with her Canadian peers, whom she perceives as immature and unsophisticated. "Can I jump continents as if skipping rope?" she asks, and by that she means everything: physically, culturally, mentally, linguistically. In fact, some of the best descriptions in the book have to do with language: the vast differences between Polish and English, and how a language is an integral part of oneself. Without language, "I don't really exist anymore," she tells us, and shows us as well.

Interestingly enough, it is leaving Poland that puts a halt to Hoffman's family being discriminated against because of their Jewish roots. As a young girl in Krakow, Hoffman was quick to realize that Poles were superstitious of Jews, and that there was no room for Judaism within the Catholic realm. In fact, when the Soviet Union-controlled Polish government lifted the ban on emigrating in 1957, it did so only for Jews. Nonetheless, Hoffman's nostalgia for her childhood is bigger than her memories of humiliation.

If Krakow is Hoffman's utopia, then Canada and America are dystopias, at least in the beginning. The author sees her move from Krakow's "winding paths" to Vancouver's "sprawling parking lots" as a step down. While a lower to middle class Polish family could go to the theater, opera and cinema (and often did so), the same family in the West could not afford such cultural luxuries, and didn't want to, either. On the new continent, the young Hoffman found "abundance that doesn't fill" instead of fulfillment in any form. And yet, perhaps despite herself, she dived into the American Dream and now incarnates it—first as a graduate student at Harvard University, then a journalist for the New York Times, and finally as a New York intellectual and published writer.

"Like everybody, I am the sum of my languages," Hoffman writes on one of the last pages of the book, and this is what we ultimately take away with us—that even if we do get lost in translation, literally or not, we then find ourselves again. And it is this process of constant discovery and rediscovery that makes us stronger.

Any questions or comments for Ewa....

You can contact her by visiting her website: [www.literatka-nyc.com](http://www.literatka-nyc.com)

# Enrollment Surge at New Jersey Community Colleges Hits Record 12 Percent;

*Bergen Community College Maintains Position as Largest Community College in State*

In a year in which enrollment is up an all-time high of 12 percent at New Jersey's 19 community colleges, Bergen Community College has maintained its position as the largest community college in the state, according to figures released today by the New Jersey Council of County Colleges.

Nearly 16,500 students are now enrolled in more than 90 academic degree programs at Bergen Community College. This is a 10 percent increase in enrollment from fall 2008.

"This is a historic time for community colleges - and certainly Bergen Community College," Bergen President Dr. G. Jeremiah Ryan said. "Our nation and region are depending on community colleges to provide a quality, afford-

able education that is a stepping stone to viable career opportunities and four-year degrees. Even President Obama has asked Americans to commit to at least one year of higher education or career training."

New Jersey's community colleges have experienced the largest credit enrollment ever this fall with 176,514 students taking college-credit courses.

In addition, total full-time credit enrollment at New Jersey's community colleges grew from 86,186 in fall 2008 to 96,878 this year. Part-time credit enrollment increased 2 percent from fall 2008 to fall 2009, with 78,050 students enrolled part-time last year and 79,636 students enrolled this year.

"Students are turning to community colleges to provide them with a high-quality education at an affordable price during this tough economic climate," said Dr. Lawrence A. Nespoli, President of the New Jersey Council of County

Colleges. "These are preliminary numbers. We're sure our fall enrollments will be even greater, since many community colleges offer five and seven-week late start sessions that students can register for until late October."

In addition to increased student enrollments, the number of credit hours college students take has increased 10 percent, from 1,645,347 in fall 2008 to 1,814,094 in fall 2009. A typical college class is three credit hours.

Along with credit enrollments, New Jersey's community colleges enroll over 125,000 students in noncredit courses in professional and personal skills development each year. Community colleges also work with over 500 businesses each year to provide customized training programs to nearly 50,000 members of New Jersey's workforce.

Bergen Community College has nearly 17,000 students enrolled in

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