

The book changes tempo in chapters that read as a travel journal. I was captivated by her life in such places as Cairo. Here Cooper documents David's relationships with cooks (Suleiman), writers and the congenial passer-by.

At times the web is tangled. Her return to post-war Britain, where frugal cooking was the order of the day, heralds a new course for the book. David's development as an academic cookery writer proves an interesting path to observe. Her recipes gave no place to quantity or measurement. Such precision had been unimportant in Italy, where the recipes were developed. However, with rationing still in force David's recipes were the antithesis of the British approach to cooking. Some criticism was inevitable.

Cooper unravels a scholarly woman – from the bookworm on board the *Evelyn Hope* who develops into the inspiring author who writes as she cooks with knowing confidence. In the chapter on baking bread, David emerges as an author who is keen to research her subject well.

In writing this book, Artemis Cooper laid herself open to opposition. In writing the life history of a *doyenne* who is survived by influential culinary friends, there is inevitable risk. The joy of this book is that, despite being written in partnership with such people, the observation is clear and not rose coloured.

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#### THE BLESSINGS AND PAINS OF LANGUAGE

*Lost in translation: a life in a new language.* Eva Hoffman 1998. London: Vintage. ISBN 0749390700, 288 pp., £7.99, paper.

*Lost in translation* is the story of Eva Hoffman's shift between worlds, from her birth in Cracow, Poland, to her family's emigration to Canada when she was 13. It evokes the struggles of them all, but Eva in particular, to integrate themselves into the ways of a new continent. A tale of linguistic dispossession, it is Eva's attempt to recapture her experience of losing personal voice and identity through emigration.

In writing this, Eva is both blessed and cursed by the strength of her talents – especially the quality of her mind and ability to remember or recreate in riveting terms the life she left behind. She has an almost Proustian motivation (with less volubility) to locate real meaning in a moment or tiny action. It suffuses the scope and detail of her imagination/memory to fix the reader in different episodes or moments – contentment experienced through sunshine, the impact and sufficiency of memories at 4 years old, the customs, rituals and traditions of agricultural and urban Poland.

Above all she is driven by a need to pin down the truth or reality of things, in relation to the limitations or blessings of language. She understands and reveals how 'moving languages' traumatizes our sense of self and our world, the impossibility of words from one language to fully replace similar words in another, the displacement and loss of reference points in emigration, and the most fundamental need for adequate language: 'I want my peace of mind back' (p. 128). Her truth-seeking determination permeates her questioning of time, reality and mortality, as she shifts gear linguistically through academic analysis, clear, unadorned prose, lyrical evocation and quasi-poetry. Her duty to the truth is paralleled by her sense of responsibility with the legacy of other people's remembered pain. She is also supremely aware of the ephemeral nature of being and fragility of human existence.

She takes her mission seriously. In doing it justice, she is both capable of producing stunning observations about the human condition while, on occasion, not being able to escape the Sisyphean nature of her search for truth – the harder you try to define something, the more elusive it becomes. Once in a while, these convolutions of thought are ones not easily followed. Ultimately, however, the satisfaction is Eva's; her recreation in new surroundings is deep enough for her to finally regain the self she had lost for many years.

Other citations for *Lost in translation* praise it as 'deep and lovely', 'tender and memorable', 'capturing the very essence of exile experience'. Indeed it is and does, and also has the power to humble. Even (especially?) readers who have lived abroad and speak more than one language will find her response to her challenges awe inspiring. More than any other book I have read, she made me understand the extent to which loss of language and transplantation from one culture to another control and shape the self that is constantly in formation.

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