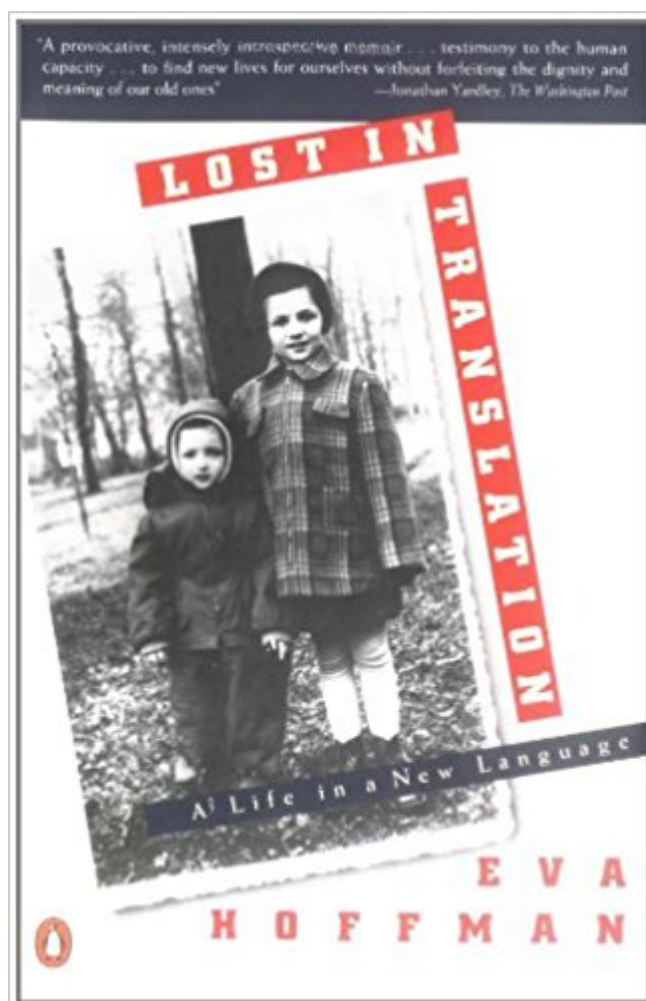


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Lost In Translation: A Life In A New Language



Synopsis

“A marvelously thoughtful book . . . It is not just about emigrants and refugees. It is about us all.” —*The New York Times*

When her parents brought her from the war-ravaged, faded elegance of her native Cracow in 1959 to settle in well-manicured, suburban Vancouver, Eva Hoffman was thirteen years old. Entering into adolescence, she endured the painful pull of nostalgia and struggled to express herself in a strange unyielding new language. Her spiritual and intellectual odyssey continued in college and led her ultimately to New York’s literary world yet still she felt caught between two languages, two cultures. But her perspective also made her a keen observer of an America in the flux of change. A classically American chronicle of upward mobility and assimilation. *Lost in Translation* is also an incisive meditation on coming to terms with one’s own uniqueness, on learning how deeply culture affects the mind and body, and finally, on what it means to accomplish a translation of one’s self. “Hoffman raises one provocative question after another about the relationship between language and culture . . . and about the emotional cost of re-creating oneself.” —*Newsday*

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The condition of exile is an exaggeration of the process of change and loss that many people experience as they grow and mature, leaving behind the innocence of childhood. Eva Hoffman spent her early years in Cracow, among family friends who, like her parents, had escaped the Holocaust and were skeptical of the newly imposed Communist state. Hoffman’s parents managed to immigrate to Canada in the 1950s, where Eva was old enough to feel like a stranger--bland food,

a quieter life, and schoolmates who hardly knew where Poland was. Still, there were neighbors who knew something of Old World ways, and a piano teacher who was classically Middle European in his neurotic enthusiasm for music. Her true exile came in college in Texas, where she found herself among people who were frightened by and hostile to her foreignness. Later, at Harvard, Hoffman found herself initially alienated by her burgeoning intellectualism; her parents found it difficult to comprehend. Her sense of perpetual otherness was extended by encounters with childhood friends who had escaped Cracow to grow up in Israel, rather than Canada or the United States, and were preoccupied with soldiers, not scholars. *Lost in Translation* is a moving memoir that takes the specific experience of the exile and humanizes it to such a degree that it becomes relevant to the lives of a wider group of readers.

Daughter of Holocaust survivors, the author, a *New York Times* Book Review editor, lost her sense of place and belonging when she emigrated with her family from Poland to Vancouver in 1959 at the age of 13. Although she works within a familiar genre here, Hoffman's is a penetrating, lyrical memoir that casts a wide net as it joins vivid anecdotes and vigorous philosophical insights on Old World Cracow and Ivy League America; Polish anti-Semitism; the degradations suffered by immigrants; Hoffman's cultural nostalgia, self-analysis and intellectual passion; and the atrophy of her Polish from disuse and her own disabling inarticulateness in English as a newcomer. Linguistic dispossession, she explains, "is close to the dispossession of one's self." As Hoffman savors the cadences and nuances of her adopted language, she remains ever conscious of assimilation's perils: "But how does one bend toward another culture without falling over, how does one strike an elastic balance between rigidity and self-effacement?" Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This was quite the enjoyable read. My professor for my senior seminar on translingual literature assigned the book, and I was pleasantly surprised at the quality of it. You'll definitely laugh, and probably cry at a few of the more depressing moments of the book. I'll be honest that I'm reading well out of my normal comfort zone here. I normally only read science fiction, fantasy, young adult literature, or crime novels (though I am making attempts to branch out). I've only read a few other autobiographies before this one, and was caught off guard by how brutally honest the author was (or at least attempted to be) as she mapped out her transition from Poland to America. From frank talks on her thoughts towards sex as a kid to her admitted drug use during the hippie era, the book is rife with the experiences and explorations of her generation as seen through the mind of an

immigrant attempting (or sometimes not) to assimilate into a foreign culture. The book, in my opinion, only suffers in one crucial area, while the prose is eloquent, and as stated in the title, quite often poignant, the book suffers from an excess of that prose. Perhaps it is just par for the course when it comes to autobiographies, but parts of the book become a chore to read. Thankfully, when the prose does become a chore, it was broken up by intense or intriguing debates between figures in her life, it was given analysis by the personification of her internal struggle between her English voice and her Polish voice, or it was taken to new heights by her occasionally profound insights on life. Though the author currently lives in London, she has a solid grasp on the American way of life. The book was an enjoyable and quick read that I managed to finish in two days in brief moments while at work and home.

"Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language" by Eva Hoffman is a non-fiction piece detailing the author's life from her youth through her thirties. Part I, *Paradise*, is centered on the author's early years in Poland. Even though, life is rather difficult it is all the Polish people know and overall it is a good life. Also found in this section are the socio-economic conditions and how their society had been affected by the war, which ended about two months before Eva was born. Part II, *Exile*, demonstrates the Wydra family leaving Poland to immigrate to Canada. This section does a great job at capturing the confusion and disorientation of a young girl in a foreign country and how the family must learn to adapt to a new environment, especially its customs and language. Part III, *The New World*, kicks off when Eva receives a scholarship to Rice University in Houston, Texas. In Texas, Hoffman actually receives her first taste of "Americanization" and also meets her future husband. Part III depicts Eva's evolution as she goes through college and eventually moves east to go to Harvard. While the author is highly accomplished and successful, the struggle to define her identity is never quite done. One of the more thoughtful books I have read, this book is a highly reflective memoir that deals with numerous topics, such as immigration and anti-Semitism. Hoffman moves from Poland to Canada at a young age and her insights on what she is going through parallels with many of the lives of her readers and what they have gone or will go through. A must read indeed.

Eva Hoffman, born in Cracow, Poland in 1945, emigrated to Vancouver, B.C. with her family in 1959 when life in post-war Poland became increasingly difficult for the relatively few remaining Jews. This is a story about learning about life by struggling with a new language. The prose is dense and

difficult, but for linguists and other scholarly folk, it is a joy. The author traces her teen-age years in Vancouver, describing through adolescent trauma through the eyes of an "other", her college years in Houston, and subsequent years at Harvard and beyond. Family relationships, love life, and friendships are explored through the medium of one who thinks in two languages for years and inherent difficulties as a result; ultimately she triumphs when she begins to think almost exclusively in English after many years. The reader is advised to have a dictionary handy when perusing this book. Though interesting, it is not a good "read" for the casual reader.

It was delightful to read about Cracow in the 50's and your immigration to America. I was born in Nowa Huta in 1969 and never met a Jew. Now I live in the United States, and I can totally relate to your experiences with foreign language and culture. This was a fascinating read, especially part 1 and 2. Part 3, although full of wonderful insights, suffers a bit from too much dry, academic writing style, but overall, I loved the book.

Like Eva, my father came to America from Poland via Canada to become an academic. Like Eva's, my father's family is from Krakow area. My family is not Jewish but was "different" enough not to fit in in Poland, socialist before WWII, anti-communist after the war. My maternal grandmother survived a Nazi concentration camp. I came to join my father years later. I can relate to Eva's story of a person starting anew in an entirely different environment. Here is my own immigrant's tale available on , not as well written (I am an engineer and I am dyslexic), but I hope interesting-How to Improve America: Education, Immigration, Health Care, and more: Immigrant's Perspective:<http://www..com/How-Improve-America-Immigration-Perspective/dp/1495269884>

This is a beautifully written memoir. I had to read this for a linguistics class and, while it was great for that class, I would recommend this read for pleasure as well. I gobbled it up in an afternoon with a cup of tea - really great!

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