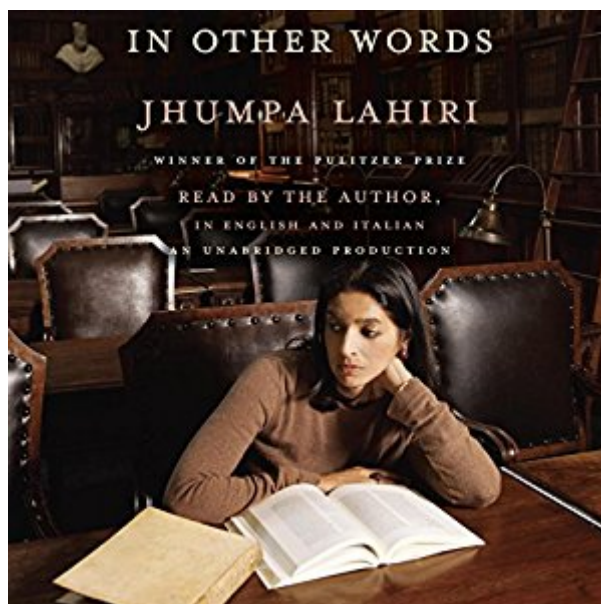


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In Other Words



Synopsis

From the best-selling author and Pulitzer Prize winner, a powerful nonfiction debut - an "honest, engaging, and very moving account of a writer searching for herself in words" (Kirkus Reviews). In *Other Words* is a revelation. It is at heart a love story - of a long and sometimes difficult courtship and a passion that verges on obsession: that of a writer for another language. For Jhumpa Lahiri, that love was for Italian, which first captivated and capsized her during a trip to Florence after college. Although Lahiri studied Italian for many years afterward, true mastery always eluded her. Seeking full immersion, she decides to move to Rome with her family for "a trial by fire, a sort of baptism" into a new language and world. There, she begins to read and to write - initially in her journal - solely in Italian. In *Other Words*, an autobiographical work written in Italian, investigates the process of learning to express oneself in another language and describes the journey of a writer seeking a new voice. Presented in a dual-language format, this is a wholly original book about exile, linguistic and otherwise, written with an intensity and clarity not seen since Vladimir Nabokov: a startling act of self-reflection and a provocative exploration of belonging and reinvention. Read by the author in both English and the original Italian.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hours and 53 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: February 9, 2016

Language: English

ASIN: B01A7QR4XW

Best Sellers Rank: #26 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Language Instruction > Other

Languages #172 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Travel #349 in Books > Travel > Europe > Italy > General

Customer Reviews

For a 65 year old English speaking child of Italian immigrant parents who learned to speak (a combination of dialect and official language) as an infant, and later took high school Italian, this book is a revelation. I read a sentence in Italian, then look to the right to see how much of the translation, that comes into my brain, is correct. I've only read the first chapter, but I've learned so

many new words that I can easily pronounce, but don't really understand; that I am for this reason alone in love with the book. So few of us Italian Americans can speak the language. I was blessed with a wonderful Italian mother who spoke broken English and a father who spoke perfect English and Italian. Additionally he insisted that his children learn the Italian language. Most other Italian Americans thought this a hinderance to total assimilation. This fact tells me my dad who was born in 1909 was years ahead of his immigrant peers. Over the years perhaps only one in 1000 Italian Americans, from my generation, that I have met can carry on a reasonable conversation with me in Italian. This book makes it easier (and more interesting) to perfect your Italian because of the wonderful translation pages. In the first few graphs the author describes her fear of swimming across a lake and how she for much of the time just swam along the edge close to the shore for fear of the deep water. She wanted to get to the other side and then some friends arrive who swim alongside her but in a way not together. Swimmers are mostly on their own, no? Si or no?"Per vent'anni ho studiato la lingua italiana come se nuotassi lungo i bordi di quel lago"Per conoscere una nuova lingua per immergersi, si deve lasciare la sponda. Senza salvagente.

I was eager to listen to Lahiri's book. I found the premise of a memoir in the context of learning a new language to be incredibly interesting, and indeed this book shines in those sections where Lahiri talks directly about her need to find her place in the world through language. I found the concept of choosing Italian as her home language even though she was raised with Bengali and was proficient (to say the least!) in English, intriguing. The parts of the book where Lahiri talks about her youth and time in Italy with specificity were the most interesting for me. Unfortunately there was very little of this in the book. The first hour of the book is consumed with her love for Italian which is deep and abiding, but for me, who does not share her love for this foreign language, it was boring. It's like listening to your best friend wax on about her imaginary boyfriend - I don't know him, I'm never going to know him, and without any connection to the object of her affections I am never going to understand this love. If I was learning Italian or was struggling to learn any language I may have enjoyed this portion of the book more, but I was impatient to get through it. It was tedious to me. And because there are only so many ways that one can say "I love Italian. This is the language for me," Lahiri resorts to metaphors to express this. They are good, long, involved metaphors, but belabored and ultimately repetitive. I usually prefer to listen to the author reading their own work, but in this case it left me a little flat. Lahiri has a soft, quiet voice. It is very even, but that meant that it was hard to maintain my interest. It was easy to tune out or let my thoughts drift.

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