



In Other Words

Author: Jhumpa Lahiri

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I decided to read Jhumpa Lahiri's book, "In

Other Words" because I loved her earlier book, *The Namesake* and also watched the movie directed by Mira Nair. I must admit that I was disappointed to read "In Other Words," where Lahiri characterizes herself as a linguistic nomad trekking across her mother tongue Bengali, day to day language English and her adopted language Italian. It's a memoir that examines her long sense of lexical displacement.

Learning to read and write in Italian has clearly been an invigorating experience for Ms. Lahiri. She compares this to an intense sexual affair. "When you're in love, you want to live forever," she writes. "You want the emotion, the excitement you feel to last. Reading in Italian arouses a similar longing in me," she writes.

She began to study Italian and, living in Brooklyn, hired a series of language tutors.

Eventually she moved with her husband and children to Rome for what she calls a "trial by fire." She stopped reading and speaking in English almost entirely; she also stopped writing in it. She achieved near-total immersion.

"In Other Words" is printed in both English and Italian side by side, Italian on even pages and English on odd pages. I didn't find this format appealing at all.

I loved Lahiri's juxta positioning of her statements such as. "There is pain in every joy. In every violent passion a dark side. That someone gets a lot out of writing something does not necessarily mean anyone else will get a similar amount from reading that thing. If only literature worked that way."

Lahiri has dealt with a unique topic related to language displacement but she has failed to do justice to the topic. She seems to lose her way at the T-junction of dealing with Bengali, English and Italian.