



La Bella Lingua: My Love Affair with Italian, the World's Most Enchanting Language

By Dianne Hales

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“Italians say that someone who acquires a new language ‘possesses’ it. In my case, Italian possesses me. With Italian racing like blood through my veins, I do indeed see with different eyes, hear with different ears, and drink in the world with all my senses...”

A celebration of the language and culture of Italy, *La Bella Lingua* is the story of how a language shaped a nation, told against the backdrop of one woman’s personal quest to speak fluent Italian.

For anyone who has been to Italy, the fantasy of living the Italian life is powerfully seductive. But to truly become Italian, one must learn the language. This is how Dianne Hales began her journey. In *La Bella Lingua*, she brings the story of her decades-long experience with the “the world’s most loved and lovable language” together with explorations of Italy’s history, literature, art, music, movies, lifestyle, and food in a true *opera amorosa*—a labor of her love of Italy.

Throughout her first excursion in Italy—with “*non parlo Italiano*” as her only Italian phrase—Dianne delighted in the beauty of what she saw but craved comprehension of what she heard. And so she chose to inhabit the language. Over more than twenty-five years she has studied Italian in every way possible: through Berlitz, books, CDs, podcasts, private tutorials and conversation groups, and, most importantly, large blocks of time in Italy. In the process she found that Italian became not just a passion and a pleasure, but a passport into Italy’s *storia* and its very soul. She offers charming insights into what makes Italian the most emotionally expressive of languages, from how the “*pronto*” (“Ready!”) Italians say when they answer the telephone conveys a sense of something coming alive, to how even ordinary things such as a towel (*asciugamano*) or handkerchief (*fazzoletto*) sound better in Italian.

She invites readers to join her as she traces the evolution of Italian in the zesty graffiti on the walls of Pompeii, in Dante’s incandescent cantos, and in Boccaccio’s bawdy *Decameron*. She portrays how social graces remain woven

into the fabric of Italian: even the chipper “ciao,” which does double duty as “hi” and “bye,” reflects centuries of *bella figura*. And she exalts the glories of Italy’s food and its rich and often uproarious gastronomic language: Italians deftly describe someone uptight as a *baccala* (dried cod), a busybody who noses into everything as a *prezzemolo* (parsley), a worthless or banal movie as a *polpettone* (large meatball).

Like Dianne, readers of *La Bella Lingua* will find themselves *innamorata*, enchanted, by Italian, fascinated by its saga, tantalized by its adventures, addicted to its sound, and ever eager to spend more time in its company.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Book Description

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Amazon Exclusive: A Q&A with Dianne Hales

Question: Why did you decide to write a book on Italian?



Dianne Hales: As a journalist, I know a great story when I see one—and the story of how Italian became the world’s most enchanting language has everything: adventure, drama, passion, beautiful women, gallant heroes, unscrupulous scoundrels—not to mention glorious music and fabulous food.

Question: Whom did you write this book for?

Dianne Hales: People who enjoy Italian food, music, art, film, travel and traditions. If you love Italy, you’ll love learning about its language. If you come from an Italian family, you’ll discover more about your heritage. If you’re studying Italian, you’ll find a new perspective that takes you beyond vocabulary and grammar. If you’re traveling to Italy, you’ll appreciate more about the people you meet and the places you visit. And if you’re an armchair adventurer—well, buckle your seat belt!

Question: Why and when did you start studying Italian?

Dianne Hales: I decided to study Italian more than twenty years ago so I could communicate with the friendly people we met on our travels in Italy. My goal was just to understand and be understood. However, the more Italian I learned, the more I wanted to know about Italian—where it came from, how it evolved, why it’s so musical and vibrant. I had so much fun in Italian classes and conversation groups that I didn’t want to stop my Italian education—and I never have.

Question: How did you do go about researching *La Bella Lingua*?

Dianne Hales: I used all the skills I honed in decades as a journalist and textbook author. I took classes in Italian language, history and culture both in the U.S. and in Italy. I worked very closely with a wonderful Italian tutor in San Francisco. In Italy I went to the great citadels of Italian, such as L’Accademia della Crusca and the Società Dante Alighieri, to interview leading linguists and scholars. But my greatest resources turned out to be the Italian people, who have deep pride in their mother tongue and infinite patience with those who try to master it.

(Photo © Robert Hales)

From Publishers Weekly

In this charming love letter to the language and culture of Italy, journalist Hales recounts her inebriation with Italian's sounds and her lovesickness over its phrases. Enamored of this lovely and lovable language, Hales immerses herself in Italian culture on numerous trips to Italy in her attempt to live Italian. She comes to think of Italian as a lovable rascal, a clever, twinkle-eyed scamp that you can't resist even when it plays you for a fool. Hales regales us with the mysteries of the language, such as when a color becomes more than hue. She tells us that yellow, for example, refers to a mystery because thrillers traditionally had yellow covers. In her

rapture over the language, she also swoons over Italian literature (from Dante to Manzoni), opera (Verdi and Puccini) and cinema (Marcello Mastroianni and Fellini) as she rehearses the many ways in which the language has seductively slipped into Western culture and consciousness. (*May*)
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Review

“A praiseworthy feature of *La Bella Lingua* is the way Hales peppers her narrative with hundreds of Italian words, idioms, and figures of speech—all chosen with gusto and brio and clearly translated into English—to introduce readers to the sonic and semantic seraglio that is the Italian language. A separate chapter on ‘Irreverent Italian’ highlights *la parolaccia*, the earthy lexicon of invective and jocular sensuality that contemporary Italians imbibe with their mother’s milk but foreign students of Italian rarely get to savor.”
—Peter D’Epiro and Mary Desmond Pinkowish, authors of *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World*

“Dianne Hales is just about pitch perfect as she weaves the engaging story of her *innamoramento* with Italian, hitting the high notes of Italian culture...

a lovely, touching tribute to the many fine civilizing gifts that Italy has shared with the world. Any smart traveler to Italy would want to read *La Bella Lingua*.

It’s not only readable and engaging but informative about things not easily found in guidebooks and common tourist materials.” —Julia Conaway Bondanella & Peter Bondanella, authors and editors of *The Italian Renaissance Reader*, *Italian Cinema*, and the *Cassell Dictionary of Italian Literature*

“An impassioned student, Dianne Hales takes us along on her delightful pilgrimage to the speaking heart of Italy. The rhythmic beat she comes to feel and love teaches her how to live, in beautiful and idiomatic Italian, ‘a language as rich in flavors and varieties as Italian cooking.’ The reading pilgrim’s reward is this delicious feast of a book, a strong mix of cultural and spoken treasure.” —Susan Cahill, author of *Desiring Italy* and *The Smiles of Rome*

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sam Grimes:

Do you have favorite book? Should you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each guide has different aim or maybe goal; it means that reserve has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They are reading whatever they acquire because their hobby is usually reading a book. What about the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, particular person feel need book once they found difficult problem or even exercise. Well, probably you will require this *La Bella Lingua: My Love Affair with Italian, the World's Most Enchanting Language*.

Mary Bingham:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important along? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what yours problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy person? If you don't

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James Ensor:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love La Bella Lingua: My Love Affair with Italian, the World's Most Enchanting Language, it is possible to enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its referred to as reading friends.

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