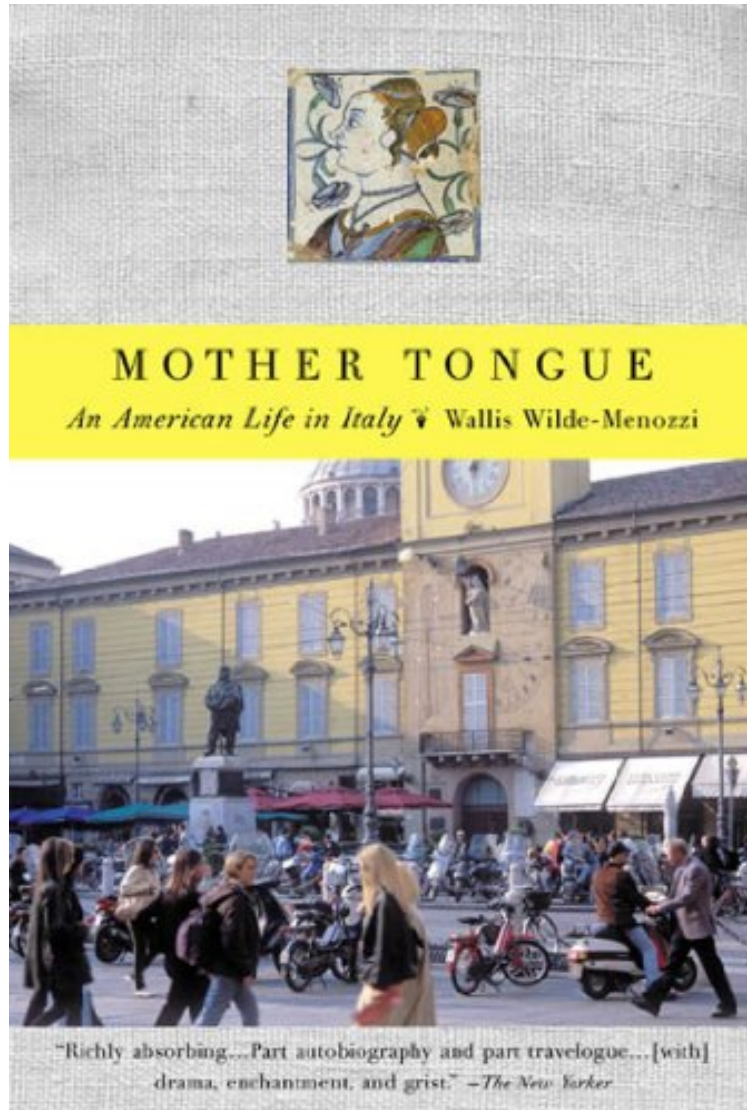


[FREE] Mother Tongue: An American Life in Italy

## Mother Tongue: An American Life in Italy

Von Wallis Wilde-Menozzi

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**Von Wallis Wilde-Menozzi : Mother Tongue: An American Life in Italy** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mother Tongue: An American Life in Italy:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. a spiritual journey filled with gems Von Ein Kunde Mother Tongue is a book to savor. Those who want a rapid read or a linear account will be frustrated. The book's strength is in its "free association" style and its poetic richness. When asked to say what the book is about, readers' answers vary. "It is a book about the strength of women." "...about being a foreigner." "...about Parma, Italy." "about Family." "...about the differences in two cultures." "...about the importance

of place."While this reader would agree with all of the above, it is more significantly a sharing of the spiritual journey that grows from enormous loss. In that sense it is the hero's journey. I am reminded of Dante's, "Midway along the journey of life I woke to find myself in some dark woods... How hard it is to tell what it was like, this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn... But if I would show the good that came of it/ I must talk about things other than the good."Wallis Wilde Menozzi's journey into a foreign land, with all of the "letting go" that is required by that literal leap, has at its heart the journey away from home that each of us makes in order to find the home within. Oneness and Separateness (the repeating of that first life journey where we must struggle with "Mine" and "Yours", "I" and "You") are achingly described, poetically expressed, and carefully crafted. Menozzi writes with a primal potent power. Menozzi draws upon rememberings, reflections, associations, images, dreams, architectural spaces, events, pets and neighbors, family life and historic figures who become mentors. Everything at hand becomes currency for the purchase of personhood. The stories of her historic mentors are particularly rich. For example she says to Ovid, "Admit it, Ovid, you were a complainer... To keep yourself alive you accepted the task of exploring myths, all you remembered about them... You captured the eternal inevitability of breakup and caprice and unstoppable tides... How Ovid, did you transmit so stunningly the unalterable power of a life's connection with events driven by the gods, if not because you entered an exploration of your own situation? You wrote, Ovid, starting from your feet's memory of ground... you took the paradox over and over and over: no one escapes change."It takes alot of courage to enter the dark woods and encounter monsters. This book is full of all the treasures that such a journey provides, ant the reader is the fortunate recipient of precious gems. Menozzi says it well when she says, "For me, the plummet into the unspoken had been something like prayer, private, internal, but infinite like sky. It was universal."It is that universality that resonates in the reader's soul, and issues in gratitude. This is a book to be turned to over and over. It's beauty lies in the fact that it can be opened anywhere and the eye will fall upon what Menozzi describes in a different context, as, "language that feeds and changes you, if you fall toward it."0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. A sensitive portrayal of Italian and American culture Von Ein Kunde Mother Tongue is an intimate and down-to-earth exploration of daily life as it emerges from Anglo-Saxon Protestant and Italian Catholic traditions. It is composed in twenty-nine brief sections. Readers will find little gems on almost every page which illuminate major questions of our time. I keep this book close at hand. It opens doors to cultural understanding. Wallis Wilde-Menozzi is an American writer who takes the reader into a culture in which the group and the community define daily life. American readers will find much here to yearn for, and much that they will not bear. So this book does not offer us any false and easy answers to our modern search from both community and individualism. Rather, we are engaged by one perceptive thought after another on the meaning of human relationships. "I didn't come in as an anthropologist, observing difference," she writes. "I came in as a human being looking for an open door." She has entered a small Catholic church in Parma, Italy, where she now lives with her Italian husband and her daughter. She wishes to be alone, to regain if only for a moment a sense of her own space in a society that gives her very little to herself. In Parma there is not much of a sense of the self, for the individual, at least not as Americans tend to understand individualism. It is a society that envelopes her. "Everyday as I write in my study at home, all that goes on crosses into my work. Space is not an idea. I have no maid. My child comes home and expects a hot lunch. My husband too, helpful and brilliant, still has no love of space; in fact, he wants to fill it in. The noise or upset about things not found or done--expectations seen from an oddly absolute perspective of what should happen in a home--are daily fireworks.'She is not always alone in the small church. "Last week an old white-haired man had his head on a pew and was down on his knees. It is moving to come upon someone in a cramped space, like going around a curve and meeting someone else's need head on. Community is a delicate definition that I can't articulate but feel."This is precisely what the author accomplishes. She feels daily life in Italy. She senses, smells, touches, hears, sees, and runs up against it. She is alive in it. Through her feelings she articulates community in Parma. Trying to locate herself, she searches for a way to express herself, always fearful that she is on the verge of being regarded as a GASATA, a windbag, a person who talks too much about herself, from herself. We learn how words and language are different in different places. We navigate between the public and the private. The author becomes particularly sensitive to the central place of women in the Italian past and present, and she wonders what American feminists would make of these women. From Parma, Wilde-Menozzi reflects on her life in America and on her youth in Wisconsin. America is the mental and physical place of open spaces. She has grown up in a big private home with three siblings and few friends. The pool filled with water is empty of kids. "In our rooms, behind closed doors, we talked to ourselves about contraventions and had lots of space to commit minor explorations. Above all, we began to read." "We were intense, frustrated innocents, formed in spaces unfilled by our parents--types that remain a mystery to Europeans, who think of America as avant-garde." Her husband's youth, on the other hand, was lived in a house that "boiled over with real life." "Parma runs rings around certain aspects of Midwestern sophistication."But this is not a simple book about an American who turns her back on her nation to become a convert to a new society. Far from it. Becoming more acutely aware what it is to be American, Wallis Wilde-Menozzi's admiration for her country's sense of public commitment, trust in others, of fairness, equality, and yes, of space, privacy, grows from abroad. And there is much about Parma that she simply cannot accept. "[W]hat most disgusts me is the [Italian]family's lack of trust in the larger world and the family's way of undermining conscience." Yet, at the

same time, we read her saying that "Italian education forces you to organize and approach reality and history as problems distinct from yourself. If you are serious, you learn to bear frustration and to chastise sloth. If you get through, you'll be as good as anyone in the world, and perhaps more generous." This beautiful book emerges from the mind and the experiences of an author living in two cultures. She is inside of Parma and outside, close and distant. She admires and she deplures. We are offered this nuanced picture because Wallis Wilde-Menozzi didn't come in as an anthropologist to observe difference, but as a human being looking for an open door. Readers will feel enriched by joining her. 0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. I touched part of my own life in *Mother Tongue*. Von Ein Kunde I am an Italian who has worked in Italy strengthening cultural links between my country and America. For many years, I have lived experiencing differences and similarities between the peoples of these two countries! Imagine my surprise and delight when I found *Mother Tongue, An American Life in Italy*, which translates for me more deeply than anything I have read the lyrical, historical, and cultures--especially these two cultures. Yes, I said, page after page. Yes, I said, recognizing the laughter and pain of personal and social change, the mystery of nationality, the depths of relationships and family ties. I touched part of my own life in *Mother Tongue*.

Kurzbeschreibung Fourteen years ago, the American writer Wallis Wilde-Menozzi moved with her husband and daughter to Parma, a prosperous city in northern Italy. Searching for a way to find a place within a city that has existed since Roman times, she conducted a highly personal investigation of the often baffling, closed way of life she encountered. *Mother Tongue* explores Parma, largely through the lives of its women, some historical figures Giuseppe Verdi, Correggio, the Renaissance badessa Giovanna Piacenza and other extraordinary individuals. It is also a remarkable, probing evocation of an American life that has been tried and tempered by two very different societies. No other book evokes so poignantly and profoundly the role of food, faith, and family attachment in Italian life and, by reflection, in our own. Pressestimmen "Richly absorbing . . . Part autobiography and part travelogue . . . [with] drama, enchantment, and grit." --The New Yorker "If I had to choose among [this book and Mary McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence* and Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's *Italian Days*], I'd take *Mother Tongue* . . . This woman can write; better yet, she can see, both inward and outward . . . *Mother Tongue* is a memoir . . . but is also a meditation on Parma, art, language, life and the role of women over the ages." --Lois Blinkhorn, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel