



Dictionary Days

Ilan Stavans

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The whole of *The Catcher in the Rye* is in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, waiting to be unscrambled, and so are all the novels of our past, present, and immediate future

en·thu·si·ast

Function: noun

: a person filled with enthusiasm : as a: one who is ardently attached to a cause, object, or pursuit b: one who tends to become ardently absorbed in an interest

A dictionary, despite its heroic effort to pin down language, is destined for failure the moment a single word is printed; language, with its eternal mutations, is forever uncontainable. In *Dictionary Days*, award-winning essayist Ilan Stavans explores our very human need to "seize upon the meaning of a word." Owner of hundreds of dictionaries, he follows a fascinating, zigzagging history of lexicography across many languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic. Throughout his journey, Stavans spots strange meaning inconsistencies, uncovers unusual origins, and shares extraordinary and often hilarious anecdotes.

With a dazzling knowledge of dictionaries through the ages, matched by a lively wit, Stavans reaches far beyond the margin of the page and pays a worthy tribute to a discipline that is at once inspiring and maddening. "For dictionaries are oracles: nothing is outside them?except the impossible."

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