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# Native Tongue (Native Tongue Trilogy)



## Synopsis

First published in 1984, *Native Tongue* earned wide critical praise, and cult status as well. Set in the twenty-second century after the repeal of the Nineteenth Amendment, the novel reveals a world where women are once again property, denied civil rights, and banned from public life. In this world, Earth's wealth relies on interplanetary commerce, for which the population depends on linguists, a small, clannish group of families whose women breed and become perfect translators of all the galaxies' languages. The linguists wield power, but live in isolated compounds, hated by the population, and in fear of class warfare. But a group of women is destined to challenge the power of men and linguists. Nazareth, the most talented linguist of her family, is exhausted by her constant work translating for the government, supervising the children's language education in the Alien-in-Residence interface chambers, running the compound, and caring for the elderly men. She longs to retire to the Barren House, where women past childbearing age knit, chat, and wait to die. What Nazareth does not yet know is that a clandestine revolution is going on in the Barren Houses: there, word by word, women are creating a language of their own to free them of men's domination. Their secret must, above all, be kept until the language is ready for use. The women's language, *Lafajadan*, is only one of the brilliant creations found in this stunningly original novel, which combines a page-turning plot with challenging meditations on the tensions between freedom and control, individuals and communities, thought and action. A complete work in itself, it is also the first volume in Elgin's acclaimed Native Tongue trilogy.

## Customer Reviews

"Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue trilogy, a classic text of angry feminism, is also an exemplary experiment in speculative fiction, deftly and implacably pursuing both a scientific hypothesis and an ideological hypothesis through all their social, moral, and emotional implications." —Ursula K. Le Guin, author of *The Left Hand of Darkness*"Less well known than *The Handmaid's Tale* but just as apocalyptic in [its] vision . . . Suzette Haden Elgin's Native Tongue. . . records female tribulation in a world where . . . women have no public rights at all. Elgin's heroines do, however, have one set of weapons—words of their own." —Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The New York Times Book Review*"Native Tongue brings to life not only the possibility of a women's language, but also the rationale for one. . . . [It is] a language that can bring to life concepts men have never needed, have never dreamed of—and thus change the world. Elgin never makes the mistake of easy utopianism or over-optimism. Her women revel in patience." —Voice Literary Supplement"As a nonreader of science fiction . . . I urge *Native Tongue* upon you. . . . Like

Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* but more drastically and distinctly, Elgin has carried current fundamentalist views on women to their 'logical' conclusion. . . . Above all she understands that until women find the words and syntax for what they need to say, they will never say it, nor will the world hear it. . . . There isn't a phony or romantic moment here, and the story is absolutely compelling." &#151;Women's Review of Books

Suzette Haden Elgin (born Patricia Anne Wilkins; 1936 &#150; 2015) is an American science fiction author. She founded the Science Fiction Poetry Association, and is considered an important figure in the field of science fiction constructed languages. Elgin was also a linguist; she published non-fiction, of which the best-known is the *Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense* series.

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