

Carver argues that definitions of the ethical human subject must take into account the recent challenges to traditional notions of sex, gender, and sexuality posed by transsexuality, gay marriage, and new reproductive technologies. Mitchell further troubles the analytical categories of 'sexual difference' and 'gender' by arguing that the shift to the conceptual category of gender reflects a move to the horizontal organization of society as a sisterhood or fraternity as opposed to a patriarchy. Tony Lawson advocates an ontological analysis of gender in which social positionality is conceived as ontologically separate from human agency. According to Lawson, this approach would enable feminist theorists to acknowledge the important differences among women's experiences, while simultaneously recognizing their shared social positions.

Catherine Hakim's essay may be the most controversial of the book. She challenges the commonly held feminist belief that it is gender inequality which accounts for the pay gap and gender segregation in employment in 'developed' countries. She argues instead that it is the lifestyle preference, to focus on family or career, that best predicts achievement in the public realm. Hakim argues that because of advances in gender equality feminist analyses are largely out of date and should be replaced by preference analysis. Rosemary Crompton's and Jude Browne's essays offer critiques of preference theory on the basis that it supports the status quo and disregards various social, institutional, and legislative constraints on choice. Crompton argues for state interventions that would support the dual-earner model of families and Jude Browne advocates equality in parental leave legislation.

This book is suited to a wide audience of specialists or non-specialists in any of the disciplines represented. While there is some interesting material on gender as a conceptual and subjective category, this book is most

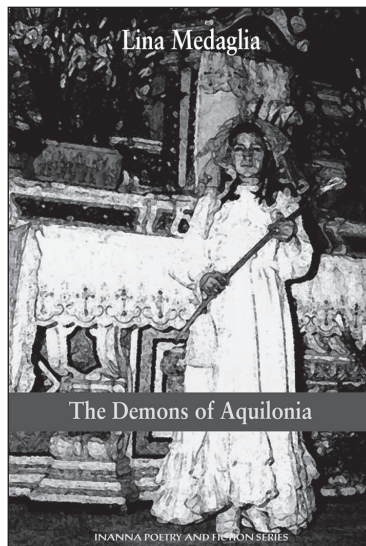
useful for those with an interest in feminist perspectives on public policy and work.

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THE DEMONS OF AQUILONIA

Lina Medaglia
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2009

REVIEWED BY DOUGLAS GOSSE



Lina Medaglia is a modern Italian-Canadian Scheherazade, telling yarns that magically intersect, to keep the reader wondering what happens next, and how her sometimes innocuous, sometimes alarming stories interconnect. The plot is narrated in a pleasing, journal-like fashion through the frank eyes of a young Italian peasant girl, Licia Giganteschi, in Southern Italy's picturesque, hilly farmland region of Calabria, located at the toe

of the Italian peninsula. Licia is raised by Grazia, her mother, whose sparse words carry hidden meanings. Her father, a Gastarbeiter, or guest worker in Germany, disappears for months at a time to toil and provide for his family in a foreign land; This leaves Licia at the whim of her extended relatives, who scrutinize her every move, as is the custom in many villages, adding to the sometimes warm and charming, sometimes oppressive atmosphere, for all is not pastoral, idyllic, and what it seems, in the village.

Licia, an anti-heroine, is an introvert with a whiplash intellect and intuition, who even as a child has an august penchant for language, reading, and learning. She observes everything, and knows full well the treachery that lies in the hearts and minds of the adults and children surrounding her. Licia's psychic-like intuition sets her apart from her family and community, and is also the catalyst for her obstinate yet compassionate inquiry into mysteries related to her family and community. Although charged with a variation of the old adage, "Children should be seen and not heard," Licia's burning desire for *knowing* pushes her to break silences and endlessly question, even as she journeys into adulthood.

Why does her recalcitrant grandfather guard a chest of valuable literature in the attic, and a stack of government bonds, when the family lives in relative poverty?

Was Licia's young kinswoman of 16 years, Natalia, a victim of a crime of passion just before her wedding, or is there something more sinister brewing in their family?

Who is Sister Assunta really—the village madwoman, a suffering Catholic saint, or a tragic, fallen woman? Inexplicably, why is she a confidante of her own mother, Grazia?

Another of her mother's acquaintances, the misshapen Carmela, a woman of medicinal herbs and midwifery, simultaneously inspires respect, and yet fear and dark suspicion... what happens to all the babies

who are deemed 'abnormal' or born out of wedlock?

Ultimately, *Demons of Aquilonia* is not just any mystery novel, but also a book of questioning one's place in society, one's social class, and the tensions inherent in racial, sexual, and gender norms. Just as the characters bend and manipulate truths to serve their own nefarious and altruistic purposes, so too must characters wear a variety of masks, much like the Greek masks of theatre—the innocent maiden, the mistress, the scholar, the wise fool, the slave, and the master. At times, Licia sports all of these masks, and her catharsis lies in navigating through the conflicting expectations inherent in all of these roles. En route to accepting her own true nature in a world that has little tolerance for keen-eyed sentinels, Licia challenges the status quo, for she is a natural fighter for knowledge, honesty, and righteousness.

When her family immigrates to Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Licia passionately pursues education, literacy, social mobility, and enlightenment but is hampered by the paradoxical memories of her troubled childhood in Italy. This necessitates a trip back home to Calabria, for to know oneself, and where one is going, one must first examine the past.

Licia juggles acceptance in her family, social circle, and relationships, whilst battling her pragmatic desire for knowledge and *truth*, for she knows that only *truth* may lead she and her loved ones to a difficult rebirth ... and rebirth for this eternally morphing anti-heroine might bring greater common understanding, bonding, and even the illusive mutual acceptance she spends her life striving towards. However, what price will Licia, her family members, and her childhood neighbours and friends be prepared to pay?

In addition to the stirring plot, the poignant description, and artful, straight-forward writing style of author Lina Medaglia are commendable. There is not a word *de trop* in

this novel. One has the impression of being seated in the cozy kitchen of Licia in downtown Toronto, and while sipping fragrant *caffè*, she starts spinning yarns of her hometerizing, enchanting, and disturbing...

Douglas Gosse is the editor of Breaking silences and exploring masculinities, a critical supplement to the novel Jackytar (2008), and author of Jackytar (2005), The Romeo & Juliet Murders (1997), and The Celtic Cross, A Vampire Journal (1995).

TELL ME A STORY, TELL ME THE TRUTH

Gina Roitman
Toronto: Second Story Press, 2009

REVIEWED BY APRIL SHARKEY

The title—*Tell me a Story, Tell me the Truth*—exudes mystery and entices readers. After all, who gets to define what truth is or whether or not it even exists for that matter? While truth is often linked to history, those traditionally in charge of writing it have mainly been men. Since the second wave of feminism, scholars and activists have compiled their own histories that focus on personal experiences and often deconstruct problematic concepts such as truth. Despite the void left in traditional historical texts, it is these narratives, handed down through generations of women, that construct and best represent some of their experiences and truths.

While the title seems a bit contrary and somewhat suspect, there is no confusion about the photos that adorn the front cover—photos that offer the only material evidence of one family's experience of the Holocaust. The cover represents the author's own personal history and lends itself to

the narrative. Through the photos, author Gina Roitman confounds the boundaries between truth and fiction even further with the inclusion of evidence of her history.

It is this glimpse of one family's history, a history that travels from the concentration camps and displaced persons camp, or *lager* of post WWII, to the tenements of Montréal, where Jewish immigrants negotiated the challenges of starting over in a new country after losing familial identities, home, and homeland that signifies the strength of a people's history. What captures the reader's eye is Roitman's seamless ability to move fluidly between first person experiences and third person narrative, exposing the presence of fiction in truth and truth in fiction, and a little bit of both revealed through myth. While writing in the first person, Roitman peppers readers with Yiddish terms and names, claiming and symbolizing her Jewish identity. The third person reveals the North American story of a young Jewish girl's "coming of age" in Canada following WWII.

Roitman begins by recounting her own relationship with her mother. In the introduction, she gives readers a common story—one of a mother and daughter struggling to co-exist—with one firmly entrenched in the past and the other heavily influenced by a very different present. As the book progresses, it becomes evident that it is about the mother's responsibility to make sure Leah Smilovitz (and Roitman) will always remember her words, despite the fact that she did not live them. It is through this storytelling (*narishkeit*) that Leah can feel some connection to her mother and history. It is this symbiotic relationship between story and truth that provides a foundation for the book.

Indeed, Roitman has presented a work that blurs the lines and is in constant tension. The most difficult task for the reader is keeping in mind that *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth* is a piece of fiction. Roitman qualifies the title by revealing the tensions