

The Italian American Book - Where My Body Ends and the World Begins

Fred Gardaphe (April 26, 2019)



Tony Romano's second novel, one that is part family-secret saga, part detective story, and all psychological thriller.

Anthony Lazzeri, is not a mamma's boy, but only because he's become a grandma's boy. Since he lost his sister in the infamous Our Lady of Angel's school fire of 1958, from which he barely escaped himself, he's depended on Nonna to feed his stomach, head, and heart. Or so he thinks. Nonna is a source of strength for Anthony because she avoids the past. "So, this was why we heard to few stories of the old country. Not because of shame or regret...but because to look over one's shoulder at what came before would spell disaster," he thinks. But Anthony is not like his grandmother.

Antney, as he's called, lives with Nonna in the family two-flat his parents abandoned after Ellie's death. Ma, a working nurse, comes back now and then to care for him, but only when she thinks he needs her. Dad, a washed-up baseball pro, is pretty much absent, that is until Anthony gets stalked by Mr. Lipshultz, a retired cop who has never given up his search for the culprit of the fire that forever changed the Chicago neighborhood where they all live.

With the help of his girlfriend, and fellow fire survivor, Maryann, Anthony tries to piece together his life after that historical trauma as well as the car accident (or suicide attempt?) that breaks his leg.



As Anthony is trying to reconcile his injury with his losses, his next-door neighbor Lipshultz thinks he's got the goods on Anthony as the source of that fire; the ex-cop is doing his best to prove it when he is found dead in his home. What follows is a strange family reunion.

Where My Body Ends and The World Begins is Tony Romano's second novel, one that is part family-secret saga, part detective story, and all psychological thriller. What goes on in Anthony's mind rarely gets into the minds of others, save Maryann, Nonna, and Ellie. Think Hitchcock's Psycho. Think Endless Love. Then think beyond both of them as Romano concocts a rich tale worthy of a second read, for even if you read closely, you've got to go back to see just how he did it.

From its thick grey winters to its dripping humid summers, from the bustle of city streets to the hustle of its folk, Chicago is more than backdrop in the capable hands of Romano's prose. With a cast of characters who could all vie for best supporting actor in a novel, and a plot that keeps you on your toes, this novel takes off like the old Riverview rollercoaster and doesn't let up until you been through some very interesting turns, twists, and stomach dropping dips.

There's danger in taking on real-life events in a work of fiction, especially one as far-reaching and emotionally laden as the school fire that killed ninety-two children and three nuns, but Romano uses his research well. He never lets the tale get bogged down by the mundane necessities of reporting or trying to reconstruct history. It's story that Romano's after, and he captures it well as he shows us all how childhood trauma can haunt a family for generations. What we get is a number of versions of key events, even after Anthony tracks-down a key suspect years later. Periodically Maryann takes over the narrative to add her take on what's happened, but since she too has had a "breakdown" of sorts, we are left wondering who's got it right.

Tony Romano is the author of the story collection, *If You Eat, You Never Die*, and the novel, *When The World Was Young*.

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