

# READING NOTES

CHRISTINE BALINT

# A SINGLE WITNESS



SPINIFEX

## BOOK DESCRIPTION

It is 1756. In the mountain village of Piovene, outside Venice, 13-year-old Anna Maria Bonon lives a spartan life with her grandmother and father. In the daytime, she cards wool at the local mill. At home, she raises silkworms. She is afraid of her violent father, Giacomo, who scrambles for work and drinks his sorrows away at the osteria. When Giacomo is arrested for a public brawl, Anna Maria and her grandmother walk miles to the court in Vicenza.

But instead of trying to free him, Anna Maria accuses her father of unspeakable crimes that he committed against her. The Council of Ten from Venice arrive to investigate. She is the single witness.

Challenged by her grandmother and the local priest to say she lied, Anna Maria is torn between loyalty to her elders and telling the truth.

Set against the evocative background of the fecund Veneto region, *A Single Witness* provides an insight into 18th century village life in Italy where being a young girl with an abusive father is a tough reality that would have crushed many others.

Drawing closely on original trial documents from Venetian archives, prize-winning novelist Christine Balint brings to light the true story of Anna Maria Bonon and her brave pursuit of justice at a time when a man's authority over his family was unquestioned.

## ABOUT CHRISTINE BALINT

Christine Balint is the author of four novels. In 2021, *Water Music* won the Viva la Novella Prize. Her first novel, *The Salt Letters*, was shortlisted for The Australian/Vogel Literary Award, and was followed by *Ophelia's Fan*. Her work has been published to critical acclaim in Australia, the United States, Germany and Italy, and she was named one of Barnes & Noble's Great New Writers in 2001. Christine holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English and Modern European Studies and has undertaken international archival research in French, Italian and Hungarian. She has a PhD in Creative Arts from the University of Melbourne and has taught at the University of Melbourne and RMIT, and currently at La Trobe University. She is the daughter of Hungarian/Transylvanian refugees and lives on Bunurong Land (the Mornington Peninsula) with her partner and two children.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the proverb, '[i]t takes seven women to make a single witness' tell us?
2. How do you think Anna Maria's story would have been different if Cattarina or Father Antonio had publicly supported her?
3. How did Cattarina feel about her place in the community? Why?
4. Are there points in the story where you think the action one of the characters could have changed the outcome?
5. What differences can you discern between the inquisitorial legal system as instituted by the Council of Ten and the adversarial legal system used in common law countries today?
6. In what ways was Anna Maria empowered or disempowered by the Venetian legal system to speak her truth?
7. How do you think Anna Maria found the courage to speak out against abuse in 1757?
8. Who were Anna Maria's biggest supporters in the story? Do you think they could have done anything more to help her?

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

For readers of Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*.

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