

unsentimental view of mother-daughter relationships that lays bare the many ways that the narrowly confined and prescribed lives of women can come to poison, stunt, and undermine the very relationship that might be a source of power, strength, and resistance. Limned here is the complex interplay between individual aspirations and patriarchally defined possibilities for women. But there is also the strength and love of women, “the love that binds all these pages together.”

*Mothers, Daughters and Untamed Dragons* is both provoking and riveting. I empathized with Anna as she negotiated a tradition bound childhood in Turkey, a loveless marriage, a new life Canada, and the 1970s feminist revolution with a tertiary education that promised liberation and the despair of losing the connection with her own daughter, Negrise. Negrise represents the liberated life that finally eludes her mother. Is the novel suggesting that liberation for daughters is only attainable by severing ties with their mothers?

Anna’s story encourages readers to ponder their own complex histories, to consider the interaction between history, culture, and family. Sev’er also reminds readers that the constraints of patriarchal motherhood can threaten women in small but catastrophic ways. Nonetheless, her story of four generations of women is powerfully and lovingly rendered as “a beautiful, challenging and sometimes foreboding tapestry.”

## My Mother Did Not Tell Stories

Laurie Kruk.

Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2012.

REVIEWED BY DORSÍA SMITH SILVA

Laurie Kruk’s volume of poems, *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories*, explores the realities of mothering. In the intimate opening poem, “First Birds,” Kruk recalls her daughter’s sounds when she is eight months old. Like the sound of a baby bird, the child’s guttural noise transforms from a bird in flight to a “nest” between mother and daughter. Kruk also explores the connections between mother, child, and nature in “Scratching Tree.” At the start of this poem, the expectant mother is the “Mama Bear” who fiercely protects her unborn child. Following birth, however, the daughter matures quickly and becomes a “she-bear” with own “den.” Here, Kruk skillfully balances the mother’s longing for the return of her child with hope for the birth of grandchildren. She reminds readers that a part of mothering is the independence of children and connection to extended family.

The title poem, “my mother did not tell stories,” concludes the volume’s first section and offers a fresh perspective on gender roles. The mother gives “advice” to her children, such as “don’t ask your brother to dry the dishes.” While the implied meaning is that this household chore should be delegated to a female, the speaker challenges this assumption. The speaker also sympathetically reveals her mother’s struggle with the daily demands of motherhood and marriage, as seen when her mother keeps “running away.”

The second section, “River Valley Poems,” broadens the focus on motherhood to include nature and community. In “After-Earth: second spring,” for example, the speaker recalls losing property to the rising river and ponders the different seasons: “winter” was a “friend” and “spring” was “a dangerous time.” Yet, by the end of May, the speaker’s cabin is rebuilt by the river and the earth is fecund like a pregnant body: “the returned earth is placental.”

The last section, “Drawing Circles,” returns to the themes of motherhood, marriage, nature, and family. In “Translating the Bush,” the speaker’s dream of pregnancy evokes her grandmother’s life in a “cabin-cocoon on the riverbank.” She marvels at her grandmother’s ability to balance her numerous daily chores with helping women with “swollen white bellies.” The speaker also reflects upon her daughter’s activities, such as “chasing toads and butterflies,” as the women in the poem merge into the different elements of earth.

By the concluding poem, “How to Look Good Naked,” Kruk adopts a lighter, more humorous approach. As she laments the numerous ways she has tried to lose weight through various workout and diet methods, the speaker notes that her scars and stretch marks from pregnancy should be celebrated not hidden. The speaker states that women’s post-pregnancy bodies are strong “mappings” of where “babies were made” and “fathers were born.” She calls for women to rise “like a birch,” so they may stand in awe of their bodies’ strength. This last poem is a powerful ending that honours the maternal body.

## Noble Orphan: Poems

Andrea Nicki.

Bradford, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2012.

REVIEWED BY ANNE BURKE

A self-professed “orphan” and traitor who abandons her “unlivable” family is transformed as the family hero in the title poem of *Noble Orphan*, the