

Book Review: *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories*

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Book Under Review

Kruk, Laurie. 2012. *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories*. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2012.

With her collection of personal poems *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories*, Laurie Kruk (2012), Associate Professor of English at Nipissing University in North Bay, offers an honest portrayal of women living in between boundaries and bonds – both emotional and sociocultural. Their stories are presented in three parts, which shed light on different aspects of motherhood and womanhood, such as constant change, resilience, and awareness as well as melancholy and nostalgia for the past.

“Part I: My Mother Did Not Tell Stories” voices the evolution of women’s mothering experience, from the delicate tenderness of its beginning in “First Birds,” through the familial rituals in “Reliquary,” to “the dark pages / of adult discouragement” and reiteration of gender stereotypes in “my mother did not tell stories” (30).

The second section, “River Valley Poems,” paints the misadventures Kruk’s family had to face when unwittingly moving to a French-speaking flood zone in Ontario, thus learning painful lessons “not just [because of] nature,” but also because of the cultural differences separating them from the locals (“After-Earth: second spring” 43). In this way, the author imbues the collection with an intersectional approach, as she stresses not only gender differences, but also linguistic and ethno-specific ones.

“Drawing Circles,” the collection’s final section, closes the loop of the narrative, as, in “mak[ing] a long, slow arc / turning back” to the family’s past, it conveys a sense of continuity of a shared memory (“Boat Trip to James Bay,” 71). Kruk’s mother’s once untold stories can finally be passed on now that they have been verbalized, thus enabling the author as well as the reader to “mak[e] use of these windfalls, neglected / lessons, unharvested plenty” (“Translating the Bush,” 76). By so doing, Kruk skillfully connects a past reflected in “stretch-marks, scars, sags /lines, wrinkles, valleys and flesh-dimples” to the territory of present life (“How to Look Good Naked,” 97).

Overall, *My Mother Did Not Tell Stories* is characterized by a stunningly elegant phrasing as well as strong closing verses. Yet, the delightful grace of Kruk's poetry is in some places encumbered with too much information and an overly polished and technical lexicon. This can be seen in "Catching the Rabbit," where she uses the appellative "formerly sun-drowsy lagomorph" to refer to the animal of the title (88). Moreover, her explanatory notes may be somewhat distracting to readers interested primarily in her poetry and may prevent them from fully engaging with her artistic vision. For example, the long footnote for "T & N. O. Rail" in "Widowmaker" will be appreciated by readers curious about local history but not necessarily by those interested in poetic verse (58). Nevertheless, Kruk's poetic strategy of telling stories in an authentic and simple way truly has the power to enchant the interlocutor with its pure and effective lines.