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 hometown in Italy, that are at once mesmerizing, enchanting, and disturbing…

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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' 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

inherent in her own relationship with her mother, or *Mameh.* In many ways, the novel does capture an example of any mother/daughter dynamic. The words and memories that constitute a story from her mother, which permeates the pages of the book, offers readers part biography, part history, and part novel that transcend a conventional third person narrative. Viewed as one collection of stories, *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth*, takes readers on an emotional journey through history, and transforms into a collection of many stories. While growing up and "coming of age", Leah, while reluctant, absorbs her mother's stories. Long after her mother's death, she recounts the abundance of tales she has grown accustomed to as well as the words that influence her so much, and begins to understand the importance of them. Leah grows into adulthood bound by her mother's words, but clings to one of the only stories her father (*tetah*) shared with her. The topic of how he had escaped the Angel of Death (*mallaach homuvet*) five times, complete with climax and adversity, fascinates her. Despite Leah's need for this connection to her father, she knows better than to share it with her mother, who has carefully constructed the history, she wants Leah to know and remember.

To be sure, a good number of biographies, historical texts, and novels offer personal experiences of the Holocaust. *Tell Me a Story, Tell Me the Truth*, can be added to that collection. What Roitman has done with this book is relate the personal to the public by interspersing family stories into a work related closely to experience.

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FIERCE DEPARTURES: THE POETRY OF DIONNE BRAND

Leslie C. Sanders, Ed.
Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2009

REVIEWED BY ELAINE JACKSON

The publication of this collection of Dionne Brand's work could not have been timelier. In his Foreword Neil Besner remarks that the purpose of the Laurier Poetry Series is to promote "real engagement with our poets. There needs to be more access to their work in more venues…." Dionne Brand made a similar remark in a recent interview with CBC host, Matt Galloway, stating that her desire as the newly appointed Poet Laureate of Toronto was to bring people into contact with poetry in a "ubiquitous" way, including taking it to the sidewalks.* *Fierce Departures* represents a collection of thirty-five of Dionne Brand's poems, selected from four of her poetic works. Leslie Sanders provides an insightful and engaging introduction which delineates some of the central themes and dilemmas that course through Brand's work, and calls attention to some of her unique poetic gifts.

As a reader who was aware of Brand, but had never read or studied her work, I found this format very effective. The collection provides a broad sampling across Brand's writing career and makes it possible to trace the evolution of her thematic concerns and also the diminution of some themes and the growth of others, a perspective that could not be easily achieved by reading the individual works. This collection serves both as an overview and as an appetizer, a small feast that serves to awaken the desire to seek out the works in their original, organic forms.

The poems themselves are strong and beautiful. The speaker's voice is dynamic, full of intensity and energy regardless of the emotions at play. Brand is fluent in two languages: "Received Standard" (English) and Trinidadian, and she uses both with great facility. These poems throb, they embody and disembody; they long, they circumscribe a sense of lack, of uprootedness and exile. One does not get the sense of the speaker being an isolated, atomistic ego; but rather the sense of many souls in one, generations of women (and men) caught in currents beyond their control and often beyond their comprehension. One gets the feeling of wrestling with a reality that often seems dreamlike, of a struggle to pin things together and make sense of them, of following a map that keeps changing every time one looks away. Yet at the same time, there are tangible moments, people and objects to hang onto, however briefly. An early example is the poem that begins, "I walk Bathurst Street until it come like home/ Pearl was near Dupont," and what follows is a string of Pearls: Pearl as labourer, lover, mother, and friend; Pearl as fellow traveller, and co-conspirator, sharing a nostalgia that the speaker admits "was a lie." Brand's poems constitute an animated conversation between figure and ground, person and place. The borders are indistinct, clean separations are impossible, and every extraction leads to haemorrhaging. Although based on instances of forced migration and exile, the issues of identity are universal and expressed so well that any reader could relate to them.

Brand's poetic Afterword serves as a return to images of maps, exiles, and communal hauntings. The bulk of the Afterword is comprised of a "Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora" in which the speaker explains that "an oral ruttier is a long poem containing navigational instructions which sailors learned by heart and recited from memory." The final two verse paragraphs describe the speaker's grandmother, who was confined to her house, and yet "sent