

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

children in directions she never herself arrived at. She only/ navigated and travelled the seven windows of the house, and the two/ doorways.” Brand is wise enough not to explain the paradox: the question of being anchored and poor and a woman, versus being unmoored and incoherent with possibilities. Both options have their problems and their benefits.

*Fierce Departures* functions as a showcase for Dionne Brand’s considerable gifts, and provides a delightful introduction to her range, her pre-occupations and her unforgettable sound. Read this collection if you would like to understand why she has won so many awards, and how well she has earned her position as Poet Laureate for Toronto.

\*Galloway, Matt. Interview with Dionne Brand. *Here and Now*. CBC Radio One, Toronto, September 30, 2009.

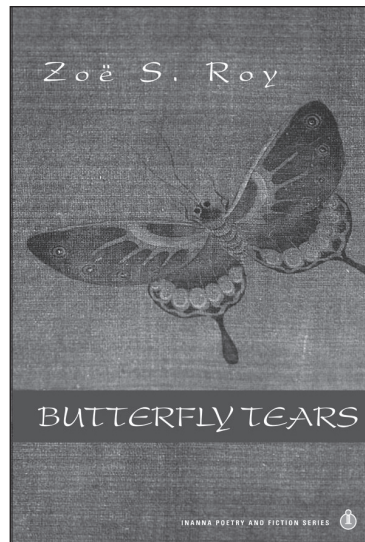
*Elaine Jackson is a writer, yoga teacher, and juggler of part-time occupational therapy contracts who dreams of someday being as poetically talented as Dionne Brand. She lives north of Mount Albert, Ontario—pretty much in the middle of a swamp.*

## BUTTERFLY TEARS

Zoë S. Roy  
Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, Inc., 2009

### REVIEWED BY MARLENE RITCHIE

The themes in Zoë S. Roy’s first collection of fifteen short stories, *Butterfly Tears*, are universal. They explore whether our lives are predestined and, if not, whether we are free and have the courage to better them. This exploration differs from the usual, because the life questions are explored through fictitious narratives depicting Chinese women



living in China, or as immigrants to the United States and Canada, and they relate to life between 1934 and 1996. All but one of Roy’s stories are told solely or in part by Chinese women with a particular focus on the status of these women as influenced by history, culture, and education. The plots are about relationships and are realistically set in the Chinese countryside and small apartments or in North American cities. Characters take on reality as they engage in daily life. The players could be Western women except for the fact that these women are bound by upbringing and memories to their homeland. We are persistently reminded of this tie in dreams and flashbacks. “Yearning,” “Twin Rivers,” “A Mandarin Duck,” “Gingko,” and “Life Insurance” explore the theme of women’s search and expectation that each woman will find the security of a “Mr. Right.” “A Woman in China,” and “Noodles” reflect on the teachings of Confucius prevalent in Chinese society, where the woman is to subjugate her wishes to those of her father and then to her husband. “Frog Fishing,” “Ten Yuan,” and “Balloons” are stories about patriotism and the lives of people during the Cultural Revolution, and about the realization by some people of their lack of freedom. Though uncovering family secrets often figures in the plots, this is the focus in “Fortune Telling” and

“Wild Onions.” In the latter story the woman comes to understand why her family members were labelled as “evil people.” In the tales “Herbs” and “Jing and the Caterpillar” women with unusual courage chart new paths. The first story, “Butterfly Tears,” sets the tender, reflective tone of the book. While the protagonist Sunni hears a familiar melody on the radio, “she sinks into the music’s sweetness as the memories it triggered played in her mind.” She sees herself as a child again, questioning her grandmother about love and life and pondering her present relationship with her husband. She is reminded of Grandmother’s story about Liang and Zhu: forbidden to be lovers, they soar together as butterflies in the afterlife. Nostalgia, tears, hope, and resolve come to the fore in Roy’s stories, and we are led to weigh the course of our own lives.

*Marlene Ritchie is a Toronto freelance writer. Her essays and stories are inspired by her family experiences, nurses’ training, years of teaching in Japan and China and being a partner in the auction business. She is on the Advisory Board for Child Research Net, a journal dealing with issues involving children.*

## MOTHERING IN THE THIRD WAVE

Amber E. Kinser, Ed.  
Toronto: Demeter Press, 2008

### REVIEWED BY KATELAN DUNN

Analyses of mothering tend to generate diverse reactions and elicit powerful responses. Despite the burgeoning literature that exists on motherhood and mothering, the same debates surrounding the value of motherhood, the nurturance of family, and the possibility of mothering as a form of activism which promotes, deliv-