REVIEW ROUNDUP 2003

GAIL DE VOS
MERLE HARRIS

This collective descriptive review essay encapsulates all of the remaining titles that I received for reviewing in this journal in 2003. As you will see, two major publishers of storytelling and folklore material have been strong submitters to your review columnist. Storyteller Merle Harris and myself divided up the titles for review and I have arranged them, for the most part, by publisher and series.

World Folklore Series published by Libraries Unlimited.

The World Folklore Series is aimed at school librarians and teachers, but much of the text is accessible to older students. The series not only contain folktales, but also brief histories as well as information on the role of folklore and storytelling in the various regions and is a wonderful introduction to new stories and a better understanding of distant countries and their peoples. The series could be made more inviting for children by improving the book cover design. With the exception of the cover of *When Night Falls!* the series look more like textbooks than the storybooks they truly are. All volumes contain line drawings and colour photographs. Thematic indices in all the books would also be appreciated.

The following volumes are only a few of the titles from this ongoing series which both of us were quite impressed with the presentation, background information and rhythm of the tales.

Folktales from Greece: A Treasury of Delights. Mitakidou, Soula, Anthony L. Manna, and Melpomeni Kanatsouli. Illustrated by Anastasia Valavanidou and Photography by Georgios Katsagelos, 2002. 1 56308 908 4

From the Mango Tree and Other Folktales from Nepal. Shrestha, Kavita Ram and Sarah Lamstein, 1997. 1 56308 378 7

Gadi Mirrabooka: Australian Aboriginal Tales from the Dreaming. Retold by Pauline E. McLeod, Francis Firebrace Jones and June E. Barker. Edited by Helen F. McKay, 2001. 1 56308 923 8.

Jasmine and Coconuts: South Indian Tales. Spagnoli, Cathy and Paramasivam Samanna. Illustrated by Paramasivam Samanna. 1999. 1 56308 576 3.

Tales from the Heart of the Balkans. Marshall, Bonnie C. Edited by Vasa D. Mihailovich, 2001. 1 56308 870 3.

The Celtic Breeze: Stories of the Otherworld from Scotland, Ireland and Wales. McNeil, Heather. Illustrated by Nancy Chien-Eriksen. 2001. 1 56308 778 2.

When Night Falls, Kric! Krac! Haitian Folktales. Louis, Liliane Nerette, edited by Fred Hay, 1999. 1 563089 579 8.

Folktales from Greece: A Treasury of Delights was the result of meeting with Manna, visiting from America, and Mitakidou when they were both doing research in the same Greek pre-school where the oral tradition was alive and well. The introduction offers a brief historical background of the area, and explanation of the function and classification of Greek tales, information on the art of Greek storytelling and the selection criteria for the tales in the book. The twenty tales are divided into five sections: supernatural beings, tales of transformation, clever folk, stories with strong morals, and humorous stories. Each section begins with an introduction about these tales and comprehensive notes follow each story. This is a strong collection, beautifully translated and containing stories that are suitable for all ages. There are good references and a useful index but pronunciation guides for some of the names would have been helpful.

As with the other volumes in this series, *From the Mango Tree and Other Folktales from Nepal* starts with a brief introduction to Nepal—its history, religion, people and daily life. Lamstein points out that it is the first collection of Nepalese folktales published in North America. The fifteen folktales, collected and translated by Kavita Ram Shrestha, are stories of royalty, the common people and pour quoi tales of the origins of lakes and caves in Nepal. There is a combination of gentleness, humility and humour in these stories which should appeal to adults and children alike. The final story in the collection has been written out in the Nepalese script. The end matter includes a glossary of terms and a bibliography.

The introduction to *Gadi Mirrabooka* states that this is the first collection of stories from the Dreamtime of the Australian Aboriginals told by Aboriginal storyteller custodians. The informative introduction explains the importance of these stories to the culture and belief system of the traditional audience as well as the concept of the Dreamtime. Material in the first sections of the books looks at the physical landscape, the flora, the fauna and the aboriginal people of the land and includes historical and contemporary background information. The thirty-three short tales, the majority of which are pour quoi tales, are told in various localities within the Australian continent. Back matter includes a glossary, a bibliography and information about the three storytellers and editor of this volume. This volume puts these tales in their proper content and allows the non-aboriginal storyteller/reader a strong glimpse into this ancient culture.

In *Jasmine and Coconuts: South Indian Tales,* Spagnoli and *Samanna* write of a region and people they know well. Their exploration of this area includes a brief history of the four southern states, as well as an overview of religions, arts, crafts and daily life. The authors also explain the differences in telling styles in South India covering the many facets of storytelling: language, gesture, pronunciation, music and much more. The forty-two tales are divided into seven themes consistent with South Indian values, such as "Value of Simplicity, Problem of Greed" and "Respect for Family and Elders," and, where necessary, explanatory notes precede the story. The stories are wide ranging from ancient to modern, from folklore to true stories, and all of them have a strong oral rhythm to them. The appendix covers festivals, resources, pen pals and websites, and a glossary. As well there are sources for the stories, bibliographies for both adults and children, an index and thematic index. This book is a real treasure trove - a delight for the ears and the eyes.

Tales from the Heart of the Balkans is the most diverse of all the collections reviewed. The book covers five independent countries: Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Yugoslavia and Macedonia. The introduction includes a concise but good history of the region, with an overview of oral literature and its importance, as well as some of the problems associated with translating stories from three official languages and their many dialects. The thirty-three tales are divided into myths and legends, animal tales, fairy tales and tales of everyday life. All the regions are represented in all the stories and the retellings should work well whether they are read aloud or told to the students, or used for independent reading. A glossary and pronunciation guide and a good index round off a book that is a great introduction to a diverse region and its stories.

In her search for her Celtic roots, author Heather McNeil travels to the country of her ancestors. *The Celtic Breeze* briefly introduces this region and its people, tales and songs before retelling fifteen traditional tales, many accompanied by related ballads and their musical notation. Faery folk of the earth, of the water, and their interaction with ghosts and music are the focus of this collection. Each tale is put in context by the author. The back matter includes a brief inventory of items offering protection from the faery folk, a glossary, bibliography and a recommended reading list as well as an index.

In Liliane Louis's introduction to *When Night Falls, Kric! Krac! Haitian Folktales* she uses stories to give what she calls "an overview of the beautiful and mysterious land." Together with Hay's introduction, readers learn about Haiti's geography and history as well as the importance of voodoo and magic to the Haitian people. The twenty eight stories are divided into six sections: That Stupid Bouki, Stepmother Can Never be Real Mother, Animal Stories, Kings and Princes,

Unpleasant Encounters and Stories of Love and Courtship. There is a gentle reminder before the stories begin about the importance of pre-reading because several stories in this book reflect the harsh realities of life in a culture different from that of our readers. There are, however, stories for everyone from young children to adults in these tales which Louis has both heard and told over the years. She also includes some of her favourite recipes. A much needed glossary, good index and coloured photographs round out this collection which will have many calling out "Kric" and waiting for the "Krac" to get story time going.

Titles from August House

A prolific producer of books of storytelling material and folktales for adults and children, August House offers various series and collections for use in schools, libraries and by storytellers of all ages. The titles that reached your book reviewer's desk revealed a great diversity in the types of materials that they publish.

The Books of Nine Lives series by Pleasant DeSpain

All nine volumes of this series, written by Pleasant DeSpain and illustrated by Don Bell, are aimed at young tellers. These tales were originally published in "Pleasant Journeys," a weekly newspaper column in *The Seattle Times* between 1977 and 1978 and were reprinted several times in book form before they appeared in this most recent transformation. I have only two volumes in hand (Volume 2: *Tales of Nonsense* & *Tomfoolery* (2001) and Volume 3: *Tales of Wisdom and Justice* (2001)) but they all have the same format. Each slim volume begins with an introduction of the theme, nine or ten tales from diverse cultures, simply written and accompanied with a full-page line drawing, and adequate source notes with a brief commentary for each of the tales. I have used these books very successfully with elementary school students coming to the art of storytelling for the fust time. Not only are these tales writing succinctly, the students are not intimidated by the size of the books themselves

The other titles in the series are:

Volume 1: *Tales of* Tricksters
Volume 4: *Tales of Heroes*
Volume 5: *Tales of Holidays*
Volume 6: *Tales of Insects*
Volume 7: *Tales of Enchantment*
Volume 8: *Tales to Frighten and Delight*
Volume 9: *Tales of Cats*

World Tales Series by Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss

How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell. Hamilton, Martha and Mitch Weiss. 1999.0 87483 561 5.
Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell. Hamilton, Martha and Mitch Weiss, 2000. 0 87483 585 2.
Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell. Hamilton, Martha and Mitch Weiss, 2001. 0 87483 624 7

Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss, also known as Beauty and the Beast, have been telling stories and teaching storytelling to children and adults for over twenty years. Their first book *Children Tell Stories: A Teaching Guide* (Richard C. Owen, 1990) is a classic. Their first collection of stories for children to tell is *Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Read and Tell* (Fulcrum, 1996) was a huge hit with students and teachers alike. We have used and recommended these books in workshops for both children and adults. These three collections are aimed at children, full of wonderful suggestions on how they can become storytellers in their own unique way, but they are equally as useful to all beginning storytellers

Each collection has an introduction to the type of stories in the compilation and a world map showing where the stories come from. The stories are one to two pages, retold simply but effectively with a black and white illustration for each story followed by brief "About the Story" which discuss the origin of each story and "Tips for Telling" which cover gestures, body language and use of voice. Following the stories there is a chapter "General Tips for Telling Stories" which covers choosing, learning and telling stories and throughout the authors emphasise that the tips are suggestions only and should be used to help tellers find their voices when telling the stories. Back matter includes an Activities chapter for children who want to make up their own stories and an appendix of sources where children can find other versions of these stories.

There are twenty-five stories in *How and Why Stories* which answer many questions such as "Why the Sun Comes Up When Rooster Crows," "Where All Stories Come from" and "How Owl Got His Feathers." In the "Activities" section the authors make suggestions for original pourquoi stories, using the library to see if there are. stories unique to regions and also provide a bibliography of scientific explanations for some of the stories. Children love stories where they can laugh out loud and *Noodlehead Stories* delivers twenty-three hilarious stories. The authors warn against using derogatory terms and point out that the joy in these stories is "laughing at the noodlehead in all of us. A bibliography of literary noodlehead stories is included. *Through the Grape-*

vine includes thirty-one tales that have been passed down through the years (or grapevine), from mouth to ear to electronic transmission.

Other August House offerings

Czanota. Lorna MacDonald.*Medieval Tales That Kids Can Read & Tell*. 2000. 0 87483 589 5.

DeSpain, Pleasant.*Sweet Land of Story: Thirty-Six American Tales to Tell*, 2000. 0 87483 600 X.

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Parent's Guide to Storytelling: How to Make Up New Stories and Retell Old Favorites.* 2nd Edition, 2001. 0 87483 618 2.

MacDonald, Margaret Read *Shake-It-Up Tales! Stories to Sing, Dance, Drum and Act Out.*. 2000, 0 87483 570 4.

McBride-Smith, Barbara. *Tell It Together: Foolproof Scripts for Story Theatre.* 2001. 0 87483 650 6.

Each of the fifteen classic legends in *Medieval Tales* is simply and briefly told to be accessible for young tellers. The tales are placed in context with a very concise history of the story and precise tips for the telling of the tale. The legendary characters in these tales include William Tell, Robert Bruce, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc, the Knights of the Roundtable, Duke Lech of Poland, Beowulf, Roland, Saladin, Alexander the Great, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Boudicca. Back matter includes information on the role of the medieval storyteller, additional pointers for telling the tales, and a bibliography instead of source notes. The stories themselves are extremely short and are attractive to children beginning their storytelling endeavours.

DeSpain's collection of American tales is a treat for those who wish to get a sense of the United States through its regional tales. While some of the tales are folktales, many of them are tales of the folk, gathered by the author from tellers living in the various regions. The collection, divided up by regions, includes ghost tales, hero tales, tall tales, and a few tales from the Native people. Entertaining and informative source notes conclude the collection.

Both of Margaret Read MacDonald's volumes follow her well-established formula for presenting stories for retelling. The stories are printed in sound bites for ease of reading and learning and include notes on telling the tales and relevant background notes on when to tell and why to tell stories. *Shake-It-Up Tales!* offers information on playing with stories, using chants, songs, motions and sound effects, as well as stories which encompass a more dramatic flair using multiple tellers and audience participation, Besides the twenty tales in this collection, MacDonald includes an extensive list of resources and guides for each

of the elements of story she discusses. An added benefit of this collection is the introduction of little known folktales from around the world.

Story theatre is the focus of *Tell It Together.* After a brief discussion about story theatre, McBride-Smith provides tested scripts for seven classic myths, nine folktales and seven literary offerings adapted with permission from the various publishers. The scripts call for five to fifteen cast members and are designed for middle school students although many are appropriate for use with older teens. One of the strengths of this compilation is that the story scripts can be told by one voice, making it a valuable addition to any variety of collected works.

Folktale Collections from Other Publishers

Congdon, Kristin G. *Uncle Monday and Other Florida Tales.* Illustrated by Kitty Kitson Petterson. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001, 1 57806 385 X.

Dorson, Mercedes, and Jeanne Wilmot. *Tales from the Rain Forest.* Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1997,0 88001567 5.

Hazell, Rebecca. *The Barefoot Book of Heroic Children.* Illustrated by Helen Cann. New York, NY: Barefoot Books, 2000, I 9 0228 323 6.

Ryan, Patrick. *Shakespeare's Storybook: Folktales that Inspired the Bard.* Illustrated by James Mayhew. New York, NY: Barefoot Books, 2001. 1 84148 307 9

Spagnoli, Cathy. *Terrific Trickster Tales from Asia.* Fort Atkinson, WI: Alleyside Press, 2001, 1 57950 045 5.

Spencer, Ann. *Song of the Sea: Myths, Tales and Folklore.* Illustrated by Mark Lang. Toronto: Tundra Books, 2001, 0 88776 487 8.

A collection of the diverse cultures that comprise the state of Florida, *Uncle Monday* presents tales of magic, humor, adventure and creation. The introduction discusses the origin of the stories of and the tradition of storytelling within the state. Each story is accompanied by a reflection to that guides the reader to a deeper understanding of the issues, historical context and contemporary relevance of the tale. The fifty tales are arranged according to their overall focus: pour quoi tales; people with special powers; food, friends and family; unusual places, spaces and events; and ghosts and the supernatural. The back matter includes endnotes for the descriptive material, source notes, a glossary and bibliography. An accessible and enjoyable collection.

Tales from the Rain Forest begins with a brief introduction to the Amazon basin, the Amerindian culture, and the flora and fauna of the area. The importance of the oral tradition among the various tribes is also discussed. Paintings and etchings from early explorations to the Amazon accompany each tale. Dorson (who grew up in Brazil) and

Wilmot acknowledge that the material available to them was so abundant that they chose to concentrate on myths of origins as being most engaging for young listeners. The book ends with a glossary of Amerindian and Portuguese words as well as bibliographies. The ten myths and legends explain the origin of humans, rain and thunder, birds, water lilies, fire and other wonders. Each story is followed by brief cultural comments. The stories (translated from Portuguese) allow the reader a glimpse of a mysterious and rich relationship between humans and their environment, and leave her or him with a desire for more of these stories.

Rebecca Hazell has chosen to write biographies for twelve young people from around the world who exemplify bravery and determination. Some of the names and their stories are well known, while others are not so well known. In the introduction, Hazell explains what makes a person heroic and how she is presenting their stories in the first person. Each biography is written in three parts - beginning with a 'you are here" setting in which the place and time and a brief history is given, followed by the child telling the story in the first person, and then a summary of his/her accomplishments. I wanted to like the book but found the format frustrating and false. The "first person" voice did not ring true for me and travelling back and forward in time did not work. The book would have far more impact if the children's stories were in more traditional biography format.

In his introduction to *Shakespeare's Storybook*, Patrick Ryan points out that in all probability Shakespeare had listened to stories all his life and "read everything he could lay his hands on" and so knew which stories his audiences would enjoy and wrote to please them. Ryan presents the seven stories he feels inspired Shakespeare to *write The Taming of the Shrew, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Hamlet, King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale.* An essay in which Ryan talks about the themes, characters and sources Shakespeare might have used for the play precedes each folktale. He also brings in snippets relating to Shakespeare and his family. Each essay is accompanied by small illustrations of the characters and a border introducing elements and words from the play. Mayhew's full-page watercolour illustrations accompanying each story are dreamy and theatrical. This book is a great introduction to children who have never seen a Shakespeare play, and at the same time offers much to those who have already been introduced

Divided into three major sections, the collection, *Terrific Trickster Tales from Asia,* acquaints the North American reader with Asian tricksters. Spagnoli first introduces trickster tales and how to get ready to tell them, pointing out that "Everyone loves a trickster, except the one being tricked!" Her instructions are excellent and should encourage would-be storytellers to relax and enjoy themselves. Twenty-five dis-

tinctive trickster tales comprise the second section of the book. They have universal appeal and there is a brief explanation of the origin of each tale, telling tips, resources and follow-up activities for each story. Part Three "More Ideas and Resources" encourages the reader to explore the world of storytelling beyond the trickster tales. Highly recommended.

Poetry, historical accounts, superstitions, folktales and ballads from around the world and featuring the folk that live beneath or sail upon the waters, *Song of the Sea* evokes the watery spirits and adventures of a distant time. The collection seems aimed at a young audience and while it includes a bibliography, it does not include any source notes for the wealth of information contained within its covers.

Picture book titles:

Hallworth, Grace. *Sing Me a Story: Song-and-Dance Tales from the Caribbean.* Illustrated by John Clementson. [Little folk] Little Rock: August House, 2002. 0 87483 672 7.

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *Fat Cat: A Danish Folktale Retold.* Illustrated by Julie Paschkis. [Little folk] Little Rock: August House, 2001. 0 87483 616 6.

Mora, Pat. *The Race of Toad and Deer.* Illustrated by Domi. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2001, 0 88899 434 6.

Five traditional stories from Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago are playfully retold in *Sing Me a Story.* Musical notation and dancing instructions, where applicable, accompany each tale which jumps right out of the brilliant pages. Folk art illustrations create a frame around each tale to produce this small collection of delightful tales.

Fat Cat is a combined retelling of the traditional Norwegian tale of the Fat Cat and a Czechoslovakian tale, "Kuratko the Terrible," that was a long established element in storyteller Margaret Read MacDonald's repertoire. Cat and Mouse are friends and when the greedy cat not only gulps everyone in sight including his friend and roommate, mouse, something has to be done. Mouse to the rescue and Cat no longer is a fat hungry cat but a fancy one as well. Folk art illustrations dance across the pages of this colourful and rollicking version. Great source notes!

Pat Mora has provided an adaptation of the Mayan variant of the fable of the "Hedgehog and the Hare" in which cooperation in the race aids victory in *The Race of Toad and Deer.* The story was told to the author by a mason and scholar in Guatemala. The text is reminiscent of the chatter of the jungle and is highly complemented with the rich col-

ours and shapes of the illustrations by artist Domi of Oaxaca, Mexico. A treat to the ears and eyes.