



Illustration by Paul Morin from *Animal Dreaming*

### A Return to "Whose Story Is It"?

*One Arabian Morning*. Pete Marlowe. Illus. Charles Bell. Annick, 2000. 32 pp. \$19.95, \$7.95 library bound, paper. ISBN 1-55037-659-4, 1-55037-658-6. *The Mole's Daughter*. Julia Gukova. Annick, 1998. 24 pp. \$15.95, \$6.95. ISBN 1-55037-525-3, 1-55037-524-5. *The Girl Who Lost Her Smile*. Karim Alrawi. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Tradewind, 2000. \$20.95 cloth. ISBN 1-896580-40-8. *Animal Dreaming: An Aboriginal Dreamtime Story*. Paul Morin. Stoddart, 1998. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-30621.

My title refers to Carole Carpenter's 1996 review entitled "Whose Story Is It?" (CCL 83 [1996]: 32-37) Among other useful comments, Carpenter reminds her reader that "folktales call for particular handling because while technically not the registered property of any individual, they are effectively not without ownership since they are, or once were, the communal property of particular peoples and reside within known and shared traditions. Folktales, then, raise specific concerns: matters of appropriation of voice, for instance, and cultural veracity, for another."

All of the books I am reviewing are retellings, modifications, or imaginative elaborations of stories not originally told in English. *One Arabian Morning* plays with Disney-like conceptions of Aladdin and the evil Arabian vizier, who is vanquished (nonviolently) by a contemporary North American child. There are some entertaining twists in the text, including a recursive climax in which the child tricks the adult and locks him up (sound familiar?) and a plot device which makes the child the genie in her own teapot. The self-reliance of the heroine is also admirable. Nonetheless, this text does bring up for me the troublesome issue of the North American (particularly US) demonizing of Arab peoples identified in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

The other tales are not original compositions. *The Mole's Daughter* is an adaptation of a Korean folktale. The illustrations, in a rather *Wind in the Willows* watercolour style, are attractive, though it did strike rather an odd note to see the Korean moles dressed in a sort of Edwardian waistcoat and shift-dress style. I

waffled between cheering on the daughter as she tricked her father into letting her marry as she chose and feeling very irritated with the daughter's weeping and wailing throughout the trajectory of the traditional marriage plot (compulsory heterosexuality definitely wins out in the end). Still, this *is* a folktale, and there's nothing stopping a parent from actually discussing its social conditions of production with a child (ditto for *One Arabian Morning*).

*The Girl Who Lost Her Smile* has engaging graphics and reasonably recognizable, though slightly caricatured, "Persian," "Turkish," "Chinese," and "Italian" characters (I particularly like the father in his "blue period"). The text has a lovely message: true happiness lies in engaging with your world and making it beautiful, rather than relying on others to do it for you. The storyline does need a bit of sophisticated interpretation, a difficulty one might expect of a children's story "inspired by a story in the collection of short stories and poetry called *Mathnawi* by Jallal al-Din Rumi," founder of the Whirling Dervishes. Still, as the press release explains, "this tale from the Middle East shows that beauty is in everything, but won't reveal itself without our help."

Finally, the most visually stunning and educational text of these four is also one that is truly problematic. *Animal Dreaming* has a frame story which foregrounds a child's learning experience, a central historical or ethnographic passage, and absolutely gorgeous, Koori-inspired illustrations. Unfortunately, neither the main story nor some of the graphics — those which "echo Aboriginal rock art" (press release) — "belong" to the text's "author," Paul Morin. A living Koori man, Bill Neidjie, a Gagadju elder, shared Dreamtime stories with Paul Morin and Morin researched Koori rock paintings (all noted in the author's note and the press releases), but these artefacts have a cultural specificity and contemporary function, an ownership, not maintained by folktales. While I respect the research done by Morin and acknowledge his educational intentions, I am saddened by the way the cultural productions of the highly oppressed and frequently impoverished Koori are circulating (and generating revenue) outside their control. I also wonder whether "secret" male initiation ceremonies are appropriate subjects for a children's story. There is, of course, the ironic consolation that, as one Australian website notes (citing a well-known statement) "it is absolutely certain that no secret stories have been recorded by white fellas."

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### Conflict Between Tradition and Personal Ambition

*White Lily*. Ting-Xing Ye. Illus. Bernadette Lau. Doubleday Canada, 2000. 41 pp. \$16.95 cloth+jacket. ISBN 0-385-25896-8.

In *White Lily*, Ting-Xing Ye constructs an empowering narrative around White Lily, who, with her brother's help, defies the foot-binding tradition that has been popu-