# More Splendid Folktales

*MARY H. PRITCHARD*

*A Dream of Promise*, as told by Meguido Zola. Illus. by Ruben Zellermayer. Kids Can Press, 1980. 29 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-31-1.

*Gonbei's Magic Kettle*, as told by Michiko Nakamura. Illus. by San Murata. Kids Can Press, 1980. 25 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-919664-30-3.

Kids Can Press has done it again with two additions to its multicultural folktale series: this time, an unlikely pair in Japanese and Hebrew. Like the rest of the series, the stories are told in parallel translation with the familiar English forming a sharp contrast to the mysteriously unfamiliar scripts. And, like most of the other tales, these are illustrated in black and white. Here, however, the similarity ends, as perhaps it should.

The Hebrew tale, *A Dream of Promise*, is, from the very beginning, self-conscious about its implications. It begins by evoking its Old-Testament background: "Time was, our people, the people of the Book, the Hebrew people, were close to God and had faith to dream." This is the story of a dreamer, Joseph, whose self-discovery becomes the core of his later rabbinical teaching:

> "Search for your dream, take it to your heart, make it your own by faith. This dream is your priceless treasure.
>
> "The treasure must be found, but no one can find it for you, you must find it for yourself.
>
> "Your treasure is to be found neither in books nor from hearsay, nor even by travel to the very ends of the earth; for it is in no other person, place, or thing: your treasure is in yourself."

The story thus encompasses both loss and self-discovery as if it were a miniature cultural history, tracing the growth and transformation of a people and their vision of themselves, their faith, and the meaning of their dreams. Indeed, it is a curiously modern folktale, quite unlike anything else so far in the series.

Even the styles of both text and illustration embody the weight of theme and its combination of light and shadow. In the story itself,

details abound, yet they are, in the end, overshadowed by the thematic importance of the action, and that weighty importance is captured in the sonorous style of story-teller Meguido Zola.

Similarly, Ruben Zellermayer's pencil drawings manage to capture at once dream and reality, simplicity and detail, as they set Joseph's dream against the hard reality of the world outside the House of Studies. At the same time, Joseph himself is transformed as he moves from the hard outlines of active boy confronted with the transparent angel of his dreams into the light-infused figure of the holy man, poised, as it were, for levitation, in the midst of a scene that includes several solidly earth-bound figures.

The rich, but rather heavy, beauty of the Hebrew tale is in sharp contrast to the delightful simplicity of *Gonbei's Magic Kettle*, and oddly, this Japanese story seems closer to the European tradition. Here, the poor but kind-hearted hero rescues a raccoon from some thoughtless children who are tormenting it; as a reward for his kindness, Gonbei is rescued from poverty and, of course, lives happily ever after.

Although its outline is common enough in folktale tradition, this story has a couple of rather clever twists. The raccoon attempts to reward Gonbei by turning into a tea-kettle that can be sold. After having been sold, however, the raccoon-kettle gets severely singed and returns to Gonbei, and together they create a circus that features "the amazing raccoon-kettle." Finally, having earned enough to keep them, Gonbei and his raccoon-kettle retire and live happily ever after. Nonsense, yes, but within it the standard reward-kindness motif is expanded into a simple and gentle comment on materialism and friendship.

San Murata's illustrations are equally simple, gentle, and nonsensical. Here we find no shadows. Rather, the simple line drawings and light wash belie the significance of the story, concentrating instead on ease and humour right to the final illustration in which Gonbei, in his striped jacket that matches the raccoon's tail, goes off hand in hand with his friend. There is a cartoonish quality about these illustrations that sometimes approaches the absurdity of an Edward Lear drawing in which characters defy gravity, and inanimate objects, animals, and man share equally in the joy and pain of life.

Although, unlike some of their predecessors, neither of these books goes to any great lengths to make linguistic connections, there are connections to be made. In the Hebrew text, the parallel layout reveals

verbal equivalents – for 'boy,' 'Joseph,' and the verb 'to be.' The curious reader is likely to look for more.

Japanese is, of course, a different cup of tea, and the parallel presentation is dropped in favour of a large, open, Japanese version, with the English functioning almost as subtitle. The Japanese characters thus represent both a pleasing design and a tempting puzzle for the budding linguist, while their function as sign is underlined by their appearance in the illustrations on the label on a jar and on banners advertising the circus.

This series continues to explore sensitively the complex relationships among language, image, and story. We can only hope that it continues and that Kids Can Press is committed to retaining its superior quality.

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# Moving On: Changing Patterns in Inuit Life

*PATRICIA MORLEY*

*Shadow of the Hunter, Stories of Eskimo Life*, Richard K. Nelson. Illustrated by Simon Koonook, University of Toronto Press, 1980. 282 pp. $15.00 cloth. ISBN 0-8020-2388-6.

*An Annotated Bibliography of Canadian Inuit Literature*, compiled by Robin Gedalof. Indian and Northern Affairs, 1979. 108 pp.

*Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing*, ed. Robin Gedalof. Drawings by Alootook Ipellie. Hurtig Publishers, 1980. 172 pp. $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88830-181-2.

Inuit life has altered with frightening speed in the last few decades. Some find these inescapable changes beneficial; some do not. Elderly