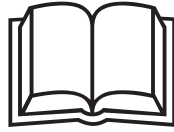


From the Winds of Manguito
Cuban Folktales in English and Spanish
a review by Jill Johnson



Well, MRM has done it again. She's edited another book of folktales from a fascinating part of the world rarely heard from: Cuba. First we had Carmen Deedy and her sister, Tersi Bendiburg; now we have a book of really unique tales retold by Elvira Perez, translated by Paula Martin (an Argentine teller who has performed several times here in the PNW), and edited by MRM.



The tales were collected by Ms. Perez and several other prominent Cuban folklorists and storytellers: Martha Esquenazi Perez, Lydia Cabrera, and Samuel Feijoo. A number of the stories are memories of the storyteller from growing up in the small village of Manguito and listening to the tales her grandmother and other older relatives told her. There is a touching tribute to those early roots in her Introduction

As in other books by this publisher (Libraries Unlimited, Westport, CT), there is first a section describing Cuban history, geography, and folklore traditions. Then, the tales themselves are divided into sections: Campesino stories, Afro-Cuban or "Pataki" tales, Animal stories, and Fantastic tales. Intriguing line drawings illustrate the tales with a small section of color plates in the middle of the book.

For someone who has little knowledge of most Hispanic cultures, reading this book was a real eye-opener – to the rich cultural diversity that is Cuba. It was fun to discover those tales that seemed utterly unique, as well as stories I recognized – but they were dressed differently.

Two of my favorites were "The Story of the Invincible Women", a Pataki tale and "The Headless Dance", an animal story. The first is the story of two sisters, Azul, a warrior woman, and Ambar, a quiet but tenacious worker. When their parents die, they separate and Azul finds herself – unwillingly - in the middle of a war. She defeats both sides and consolidates the two kingdoms. Ambar finds a deserted island and, through hard work, turns it into a paradise. But jealous neighbors soon threaten, and it is only through her search for help that she – inadvertently – finds her sister – and protection for her land.

"The Headless Dance" is a delightful story of an attempt to foil the Devil, his wife, and their son, El Diablito, by the animals. There is dancing, trickery, and they - almost -succeed. The English translations are very skillfully done; as you read, you get a real sense of how these stories are performed and presented in Spanish.

"From the Winds of Manguito", retold by Elvia Perez, translated by Paula Martin, and edited by Margaret Read MacDonald. Libraries Unlimited, Westport, Connecticut, 2004. ISBN 1-59158-091-9

