



Girls, Goddesses and Giants: stories of heroines from around the world

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New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

This is the best collection of heroine folklore aimed at young readers that I have read. Scottish storyteller Lari Don here recreates 12 stories culled from the traditions of every continent. She has retained the savage elements of the originals, and, in the very helpful source notes at the back of the book, she admits to playing up the goriness of some of climaxes.

Only a small number of the stories are likely to be familiar. The Wolf in the Bed is a version of Red Riding Hood in which the human aspects of the wolf are chillingly emphasized. Vasillisa's visit to Baba Yaga highlights the solidarity between the young women and the oppressed animal servants. In the story of Durga and the Demon, the ten armed Goddess uses a panoply of weapons to maim, mutilate and finally slay her frantically shape-shifting opponent. Shape-shifting also occurs in the Scottish story of the Giant's Heart, in which the elusive organ is hidden inside an egg inside a salmon inside a duck inside a stag inside a tree stump. The heroine of this story winks the location out of the giant who has kidnapped her by pretending to fall in love with him. In all of the stories, courage mingled with ingenuity and bloody-minded determination win the day, though not all of the heroines survive their challenges. Kindness and good manners are also rewarded: in the Cameroonian tale of Mbango and the whirlpool, the heroine helps an old lady before politely accepting the offer of a plate of pig dung as a thank you meal. The pace and imagery of the stories are thrillingly intense, and the writer addresses the reader in a direct lively voice that mingles the brutality with wry humour in the manner of Angela Carter or Susan Price. They are excellent for reading aloud. This outstanding collection is embellished with Francesca Greenwood's spirited silhouettes of characters and motifs.

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