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Mommy Goose: Rhymes from the Mountains

Kathelene McCarty Smith
University of North Carolina, Greensboro

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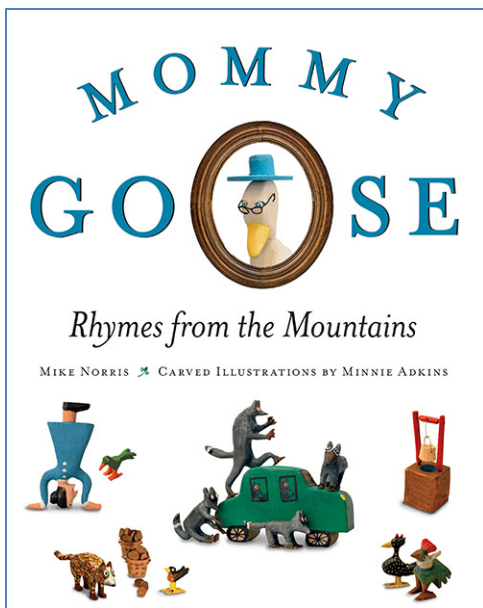
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Mommy Goose: Rhymes from the Mountains, Mike Norris. Carved illustrations by Minnie Adkins. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8131-6614-8. 48 p. \$19.95.



Mother Goose has long been a beloved character in children’s literature. With her origins steeped in European folklore, she is most commonly portrayed as an elderly woman with a tall hat who flies through the skies on a large gander. She is also depicted as an actual goose. In either case, her literary role has been to recount moralistic tales to generations of children. In *Mommy Goose: Rhymes from the Mountains*, author Mike Norris places the fabled character in the mountains of Appalachia, creating folk rhymes with a more regional flavor. Norris, an Eastern Kentucky native, has fashioned his “Mommy Goose” as a bespectacled Appalachian bird and “like cows like corn, she loves words.” She talks to her flock, choosing phrases that they will understand and enjoy. Playing the role of thoughtful observer, Mommy Goose makes appearances throughout the book, commenting on the power of words and the importance of using them wisely.

Norris crafts verses that reflect the unique traditions and language of the Appalachian South, and populates them with people and animals familiar to the mountain region. In the poem “Raccoons,” the mischievous creatures run amuck in the family car; eating corn, honking the horn, singing and dancing, and making themselves generally at home. Some rhymes are nonsensical or point out bad behavior, while others stand as cautionary tales. “Little Mary” illustrates what happens when an unrepentant, badly behaved child grows up to have children of her own. In a particularly interesting karmic twist, Mary has twin girls “with big blue eyes and yellow curls. They were sweet and cute at first, then acted just like her, but worse.”

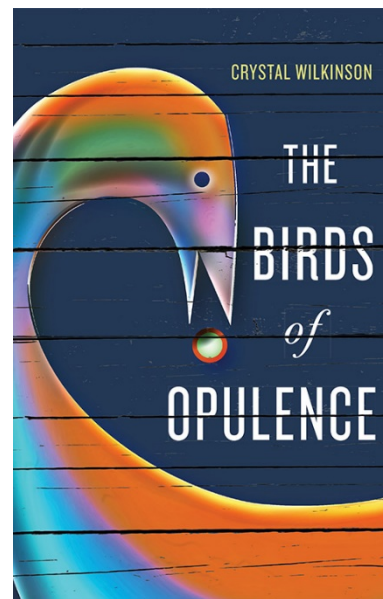
This colorful and engaging book features fifty original rhymes by Norris as well as photographs of more than one

hundred carved figures by renowned folk artist Minnie Adkins. Born and raised in the Kentucky Appalachian Mountain region, Adkins’ playful carvings prove an interesting twist on standard book illustrations. The hand-carved and painted regional folk art enhances the rhymes, creating a charming world of mountain characters ready for adventure.

Appropriately, the book ends with one of the author’s original songs, “Tell me, Mommy Goose.” As the former communications director at Kentucky’s Centre College and a folk musician, Norris has a true understanding of the deep-rooted link between words and music. Many early nursery rhymes had their origins in oral traditions, not written but spoken and sung. Norris’ song serves as a summation of all the rhymes included in the book, and as a reminder of what many of us already know - when you listen to *Mommy Goose*, “you may forget the words she said, but forty years later they’re still in your head.”

Kathelene McCarty Smith
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The Birds of Opulence. Crystal Wilkinson. The University Press of Kentucky, 2016. ISBN 9780813166919. 202 p. \$24.95



“The Birds of Opulence” is award-winning author Crystal Wilkinson’s first novel.

The book takes place over four decades, showing the life and struggles of the Goode-Brown women as they cope with both mentally ill relatives and their own very real memories of the past that haunt them. The book begins in 1962 and ends in 1995.