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The Birds of Opulence

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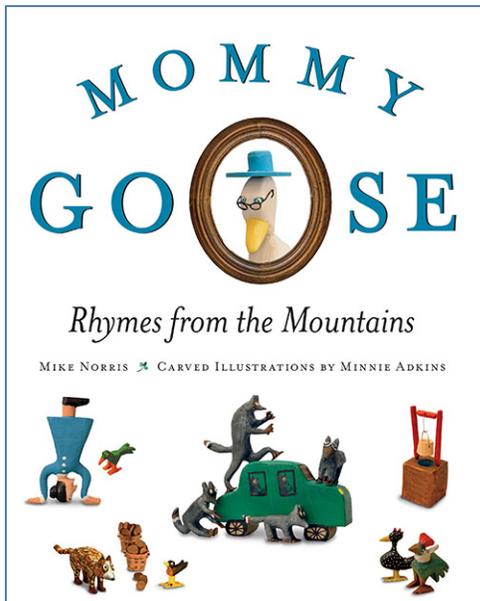
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Mommy Goose: Rhymes from the Mountains, Mike Norris. Carved illustrations by Minnie Adkins. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8131-6614-8. 48 p. \$19.95.



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.”

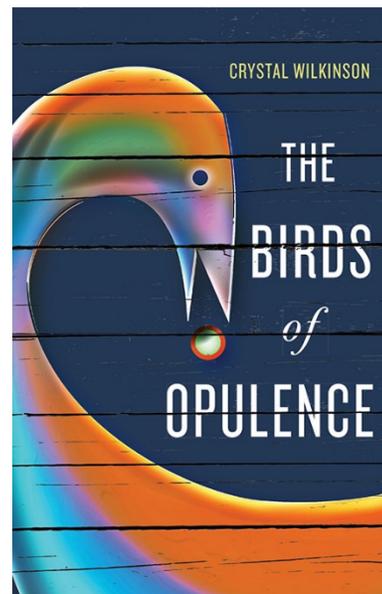
This colorful and engaging book features fifty original rhymes by Norris as well as photographs of more than one

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.

The author begins the first chapter with the thoughts of Yolanda, the narrator, telling the tale of her own birth in the first chapter to Lucy. Wilkinson is skillful at drawing the reader into the lives of the Goode-Brown women, Minnie Mae, Tookie, Lucy and Yolanda.

Minnie Mae is a leader in her community and in her own home. She usually surrounds herself with four generations of family with strong roots to the community.

Wilkinson's other work includes "Blackberries, Blackberries," winner of the Chaffin Award for Appalachian Literature. She also wrote "Water Street," a collection of short stories.

The novel's title doesn't seem metaphorical at all. "Opulence," a fictional town, was so-named after a freed slave from Virginia protested the racially charged name white people gave for that area. So Old Man Hezekiah dutifully named the town "Opulence." Parts of the book are set in Louisville and Lexington, as the book is the latest in the Kentucky Voices series published by the University Press of Kentucky. Wilkinson herself is a Kentucky resident.

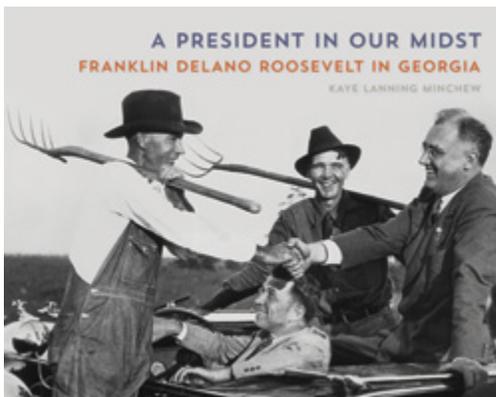
Part of what makes the novel so compelling is how characters like Joe Brown, Yolanda's husband, who is such a good mechanic he can fix almost anything, is helpless in trying to make sense of his wife's mental illness, having seen ghosts and endured depression while she was alive.

The struggle of the Brown family in coping with their families shortcomings, albeit no fault of their own, is one reason this book is such a good read.

This book is recommended for academic and public libraries.

Peter R. Dean
University of Southern Mississippi

A President in Our Midst: Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Georgia. Kaye Lanning Minchew. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2016. 270 p. ISBN-9780820349183. \$34.95, hardcover.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 45th president of the United States, visited Georgia 41 times in his lifetime, often claiming the state as his second home. In *President in our Midst: Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Georgia*, Kaye Minchew, former director of the Troup County Historical Society, has compiled a treasure trove of photographs of Roosevelt, primarily of his time spent in Georgia. The accompanying text, which includes anecdotes and eyewitness accounts, complements the visual images, providing an in-depth portrait of a politician and president's rise to power despite his disability. His battle to overcome and compensate for the ravages of polio and his connection to the farmers and ordinary folk of Georgia during tough economic times, helped propel him to power. This well-researched compendium of Roosevelt's connection to Georgia is a tribute to the man and his legacy.

Distilling Roosevelt's connection to Georgia into a chronological narrative, the author examines five periods of F.D.R.'s time in the state, providing the casual reader with a comprehensive overview and the more serious scholar with a timeline, footnotes and an extensive bibliography. Beginning in 1924 with Roosevelt's discovery and enhancement of Warm Springs as a treatment center while he recovered from polio to 1945 when he passed away at the little White House in Warm Springs, the author succeeds in showing how Roosevelt's relationship with his adopted state both succored and energized him.

It was at Warm Springs Georgia, a resort built around heated mineral springs, that Roosevelt recovered his strength after succumbing to polio in 1921. Through his efforts and generosity, a Foundation was established for a hospital specifically catering to polio patients. It was also at Warm Springs that the politician learned ways of managing and concealing his disability so as to convey strength and vigor. His fondness for the area was such that he had a house built in Warm Springs christened "The Little White House."

It was Roosevelt's connection to farmers and working people, however, that endeared him to Georgians. On his customary visits to the state, usually in the spring and around Thanksgiving, he enjoyed driving around the area, stopping to greet folks and chat. He enjoyed picnics and many of his favorite spots are commemorated with markers. Though steeped in privilege and the product of an elite upbringing, his connection and sympathy for working people provided him with insight and his New Deal policies reflect his understanding of their struggles.

Replete with photographs of his campaigns and presidential visits to Georgia, the book also includes a wealth of snapshots of more informal occasions with family and friends. Unfortunately, as demands on his time grew, especially with the onset of America's involvement in the war, he curtailed time spent in the state. Eleanor, his wife, never a frequent visitor to Georgia, continued to advocate for civil rights and desegregation. Comments by the First Lady suggest her discomfort with the subservient status of the black staff at the Warm Springs Foundation and