

# Takinga the Wise Man

by Various Authors

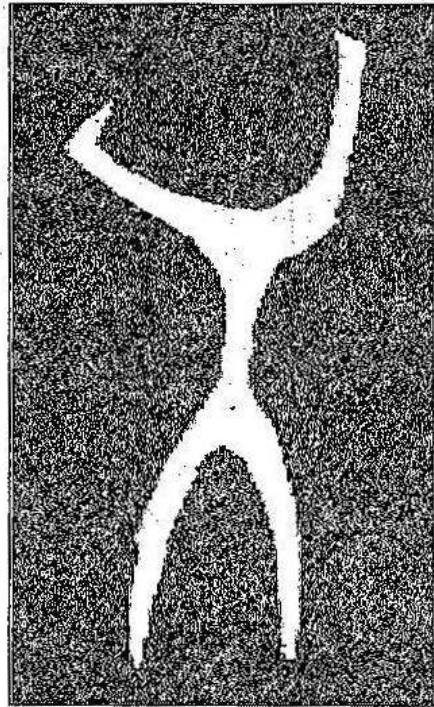
(Spirasi)

*Takinga the Wise Man* is, to the best of my knowledge, a unique publication in Ireland. A collection of 19 mini-stories from around the globe, it is a colourful book in which artwork and storytelling mingle to full effect.

Published under the auspices of Spirasi, a faith-based NGO, *Takinga* is a sort of modernised, exotic version of the Brothers Grimm fairytale collection, but with more happy endings. But for all that the uncomplicated style of writing and bright illustrations make this book suitable for young readers, it also has its interests for adults in its portrayal of other folkloric traditions, predominately those of west Africa.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these stories, which range from the didactic to the humorous, is the degree of basic similarity between them and their European counterparts, with cruel step-parents, princes enamoured of virtuous beggar girls and the ultimate triumph of humble poverty over arrogant affluence all making regular appearances.

The Liberian 'Cinderella' is almost identical to the European version



but for a lack of pumpkin; in another tale the neck of a lying giraffe is made to grow in an echo of Pinocchio; and *The King with Five Wives* bears some similarity to the Biblical stories of Moses and Solomon the Wise wrapped into one.

The book also includes many fables with the tortoise cast in the role of trickster and general mischief-maker, running the gamut from the sombre *How There Came to be Death* to the pointed *Why the Chicken is Used in Sacrifice* and the witty *The Tortoise's Cracked Back*.

No less interesting than the stories are the authors themselves, many of whom left their homes and families in difficult circumstances to begin a new life in Ireland. As such, *Takinga* represents a product of Spirasi's work in helping to integrate new immigrants, particularly asylum seekers and those who have suffered torture, into Irish society through the written word.

Communication can be difficult for those who have had traumatic experiences, torture or otherwise, and writing has long been acknowledged as a positive tool in re-learning self-expression. In this case, it acquires the double function of encouraging proficiency in the English language, one of Spirasi's main goals. Integration – as opposed to assimilation – is, however, not a one way-street, and *Takinga* goes a long way to further enriching Irish culture and the experiences of young readers, by delivering the stories and images of similar yet exotic, and in some respects different, cultures.

All in all, *Takinga* is definitely an asset in introducing children to what could be termed morals (for example, by emphasising the perils of greed and excessive pride) and awareness of other cultures in a fun and interesting way. With its colour-intensive, imaginative layout and modern language, it's bound to be a hit with children both Irish and non-Irish alike.

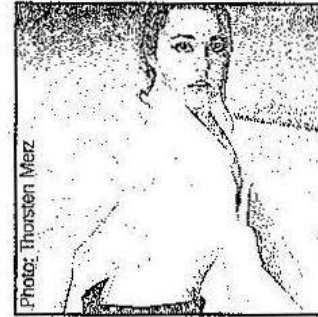


Photo: Thorsten Merz

Roslyn Fuller is the author of political thriller *ISAK*. More information about the Canadian author, her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at [www.Irishwriters-exchange.com](http://www.Irishwriters-exchange.com)

Review by Roslyn Fuller