

## Storytelling: Interdisciplinary & Intercultural Perspectives

*Folklore Forum* 37.1 (2007).

[Elizabeth Burbach](#)  
Indiana University

*Storytelling: Interdisciplinary & Intercultural Perspectives* is a compilation of eleven pieces from the 1999 International Conference on Storytelling. Editors Irene Maria F. Blayer and Monica Sanchez assert that the aim of the volume is to address the divide that exists between academic disciplines in the study of storytelling and to underscore the importance of approaching storytelling from a multi-disciplinary perspective. Thus, ‘storytelling,’ in this volume, embraces both oral and written arts. The contributors include academics from the disciplines of linguistics, English, romance languages, literature, folklore, and library science. Additional contributors are oral storytellers themselves and those who pursue both fields.

Notable in this collection is Brian W. Sturm’s “Lost in a Story: Modeling Storytelling and Storylistening.” Sturm’s piece is an interesting examination of the entrancing power of storytelling—quite literally the mild trance state which Sturm posits may occur while listening to a story. Sturm’s theory grew out of his own observations as a storyteller. Sturm combines his personal experience with case study interviews and draws on reader response criticism, consciousness studies, and systems theory to posit a phenomenological approach to the study of subjective listening experience.

Elena De Costa’s “Voices of Conscience: The Power of Language in the Latin American *Testimonio*” is likewise compelling. De Costa discusses the testimonial narrative present in Latin American literature as a blend of sociopolitical consciousness and aesthetic practice, an arena utilized to give voice to the voiceless and to command intimate witness of experience otherwise overlooked or denied. For De Costa, *testimonios* are webs of memory, experience, and multiple narrative voices that both empowers and condemns the

recipient of the *testimonio* to carry the burden of experience along with the individual/community for whom that experience is a lived reality.

This collection does not serve as a “bridge between the academic and the non-academic world,” as claimed, merely because non-academic writing is included in the compilation. The book is not geared toward a lay reader; neither the writing nor the themes are accessible to a general audience, with the possible exceptions of Karen Seago’s “Constructing the Witch,” an historical analysis of the *Sleeping Beauty* tale focused on the change of the wise woman/fairy character into the evil witch, linking this change to larger social goals and the production of socially sanctioned gendered behavior, and Janet Maybin’s “Voices, Morals, and Identity in the Conversational Narratives of Ten-to-Twelve-Year-Olds,” an exploration of the role of personal narrative in children’s emotional and social development.

I venture that this collection was thrown together quickly: the back cover attests to sixteen pieces rather than the eleven that it contains. While many of the pieces have merit in and of themselves, the collection as a whole lacks a strong, sustainable through line. Hence, the collection is not cohesive enough to bridge the gap to which the editors profess. A reader versed in the art and scholarship of storytelling will find the book lacks meatiness and direction. A reader interested in learning about storytelling, its art, and its functions should look elsewhere.