

Henry who returns from war to find that his younger brother has taken over his castle and his lands, and sold his beautiful horse, Lily. The story goes on to tell of Henry's experiences as a weaver, and how he weaves horse tapestries to reflect his longing for Lily.

It is at this point that the plot becomes confusing. There is no explanation of why Lily is so important to Henry; his ties to her are never explored. As well, she enters and exits the story so many times that her return to Henry at the end of the book is anti-climactic. Even though she is the subject of the book's title, she is actually a minor character.

Other characters, such as Agnes the healing woman and the nobleman, also come into and leave the story abruptly. This makes the plot seem sketchy and difficult to follow, and complex ideas such as Henry's nightmares about dragons also impede its progress. At times the plot advances so quickly the reader is left behind, unsure about what has just happened.

In addition, the story carries a contradictory message, however sublime. On the one hand, Henry symbolizes virtue by walking away from a conflict with his brother, and integrity by channelling his frustrations into constructive creativity (his tapestries). On the other hand, his brother and the self-indulgent nobleman take what they want, and are never made to pay the consequences. This inconsistency in moral tone is sure to be recognized and questioned by children over age eight, and they may find the book unsatisfying on that count. Younger children, however, who will respond largely to the illustrations, may enjoy having parents read *The weaver's horse* to them.

The author has chosen to write a fairy tale without the over-used "Once upon a time...", which is refreshing. However, the instability of the story takes away from its potential appeal, and one is left with little more than a very fancy picture book.

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GIANT PROBLEMS

Ryan's giant. Allen Morgan. Illus. Marian Buchanan. Oasis Press, 1992. 31 pp. ISBN 1-895092-02-7.

These three loosely-connected stories for young children are beset with problems of structure, characterization, sloppy writing and timid illustrations.

First, the structure undermines the title: the relationship between boy and giant is never developed to the point of possession. Instead, we have three separate episodes of a friendship spanning more than a year. With a tighter time frame, Morgan could have explored more deeply this relationship.

Characterization is problematic too. The giant regresses from guardian of

children's nightmares to a befuddled creature who cannot find food for his dinosaur to a simpleton who is petulant about a forgotten birthday and loses his pet during a child's game. This transformation from adult to child is as incongruous as Ryan's development from distraught boy (annoyed rather than frightened of his nightmares) to the dominating partner of the friendship. One wonders if Morgan had a clear vision of his characters.

This lack of clarity extends to the writing which is devoid of memorable imagery and seldom shows affinity for the natural rhythm of language that so delights young children. The reader/listener is often lost amid half-hearted rhyme schemes and convoluted sentences, such as:

Ryan and the Giant searched all around. But the Dinosaur stayed in his hole in the ground, he didn't move or make a sound and there wasn't a clue where he might be.

In addition to misplaced punctuation, the internal rhyme scheme of those two sentences (around...ground...sound) is weak because it is not concluded in the final clause.

The illustrations add interest to the text. Painted often in moody colours, they are comforting but lack excitement. Not all are successful: the giant is no bigger than a tall man; the dinosaur, a large cuddly toy. A pity. The intended audience knows its dinosaurs well.

In addition, a few inconsistencies can be found. There is no bed for the giant in his cave and a dinosaur that feeds on organic garbage could not eat a tire. More troublesome is a scene in a movie theatre with patrons who are annoyed but not surprised to find a giant in their midst. Since adults play no part in the resolution of these tales, Morgan might have done better to have kept them out.

The stories are meant to be read aloud and come with three songs with scores for thumping out on an old classroom piano. They will certainly engage a child's attention, but a lack of crisp writing and solid character development make them a questionable choice for introducing children to the wonder of books.

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THE LOUD MAGIC OF MUNSCH AND MARTCHENKO

Show and tell. Robert Munsch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-195-9, 1-55037-197-5.

Children and adults have come to expect chaos from this well-known author, but his latest piece of work takes absurdity to new heights. Young Benjamin decides his new baby sister will make a really neat idea for show-and-tell. She's asleep