

stories through the eyes of a young character with whom young contemporary readers can identify. This approach is hardly new, since Euripides retold the myths in a “modern” way in fifth-century Athens. While, at best, this approach can give new perspectives on old tales, it always skirts the danger of turning stirring narratives into mediocre psychological dramas (something which not even Euripides always manages to avoid).

With such an archetypal action hero as Hercules, the thoughtful interpretation both raises interesting questions about heroism, and also seems to be genre-bending beyond the call of duty. I found my interest in the story flagging at times, and longed for a headlong narrative of derring-do in a world which was not “politically-correct” with sensitive men and empowered women. While we can use Hercules to point a moral, there is a lot to be said for a tale of sheer adventure. That, after all, is why these stories were told in the first place, and why they have lasted for three thousand years.

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Horse Books Good and Bad

Horses Forever. Lawrence Scanlan. Scholastic, Canada, 1998. 123 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12448-X. *Sienna's Rescue.* Nikki Tate. Sono Nis, 1998. 125 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-093-7. *Jessa Be Nimble, Rebel Be Quick.* Nikki Tate, Sono Nis, 1998. 138 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-088-0. *Glory Ride.* Tamara L. Williams. James, 1997. 103 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-602-1.

Horse books, both fiction and nonfiction, seem to be a perennial favourite with young girl readers. Each year a number of new titles appear.

Horses Forever, a nonfiction book by Lawrence Scanlan, provides the reader with a surprisingly interesting compendium of horse facts — from the gold-tipped oats that first-century Roman Emperor Caligula fed to his horse as proof of his affection, to the magic of twentieth-century horse whispering. It includes anecdotes about war horses, movie horses, sports horses, horses of myth and legend, a full colour section of photographs, and is prefaced with an excellent and moving introduction.

One can't help wishing that Scanlan had allowed the intimacy and warmth of this introduction to carry through into the rest of the book. Instead, for some reason, once the introduction is over, he suppresses emotion in favour of objectivity. One also can't help wishing he had provided more than just a far-too-brief mention of Canada's Big Ben. He undoubtedly has many fascinating anecdotes to tell, for he is the author of a complete book on the champion, and readers would have liked to share some of them. But the anecdotes that he does tell about other

horses are interesting and memorable.

Horses Forever is a valuable source of facts and information. It should find interested readers among both girls and boys from grade four through to high school, and should prove to be a useful research tool in school libraries.

Nikki Tate's two Stablemate titles, *Sienna's Rescue* and *Jessa Be Nimble, Rebel be Quick*, are aimed at a much more restricted audience — specifically girls between eight and eleven who love horses. *Sienna's Rescue*, book four in the series, is a good read. Its diversified plot should appeal even to readers who aren't horse crazy, for Tate draws a subtle parallel between the empathic relationship that exists between horse and owner, and the similar one that exists between dog and owner.

Particularly well done and sensitive is the section on horse whispering and horse training in the newly-developed round pen. This is a relatively new technique. Horsemen are just beginning to understand and sanction the use of round pens for training and gentling nervous or mistreated horses. Tate's sensitive and graphic description of the gentling and calming of a half-starved, terrified mare by an understanding elderly horseman using a round pen is enough in itself to make the book worth reading.

Jessa Be Nimble, Rebel be Quick, Tate's third Stablemates title, is not as successful. Its appeal will be limited for it is top-heavy with technical details. The plot centres almost exclusively on the preparation for and participation in an actual event competition. As a result, the story becomes plot-driven instead of character-driven, and the characters become one-dimensional.

Perhaps because Tate has written two previous books about Jessa and Rebel, she fails to re-establish for the reader the empathy existing between them. The only moment when the relationship between horse and rider comes to life is when Jessa insists that Rebel trot when a nervous non-rider is on his back. The book also suffers (as do all the books in the Stablemates series) from some careless editing regarding paragraphing and use of quotation marks.

Glory Ride, in the James Lorimer's sports series, is also aimed at this audience of eight-to-eleven-year old female horse lovers. Unquestionably, Williams is knowledgeable about show riding and jumping, but here, too, technical details threaten to overshadow the story line.

This book is intended to be a quick read. It is just over a hundred pages, with short chapters and plot-describing chapter titles. In the style of "quick reads" it relies heavily on dialogue. Unfortunately, this limits the use of viewpoint, and, as a result, neither the personality of the horse nor the dynamics existing between horse and rider are able to be explored. Instead, both the story line and the characters remain one-dimensional.

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