

Sardine eater's casual command of contemporary conveniences, refer to time present. While the illustrations and prose move in opposite directions, they combine to contribute to the movable time/place aspect of the story, and the story is not without anchors.

Brenda Shelley Clark's illustrations pin the setting to Italy. The red and green two-colour illustrations use the white of the page to produce the colours of the Italian flag. Dry red islands rise out of the flat sea reminiscent of the Mediterranean seascape. Clark also generously and cleverly employs sea shells, sea urchins, snails, and fish to give a visual link with the sea from which the Sardine eater has come. Most convincingly, the illustrations refer to past grandeur in Italian art. When the Sardine eater installs himself on a chaise longue, Pietro stands in the right middle ground. The scene whimsically parodies Titian's *Venus of Urbino* which Manet parodied with his *Olympia*. Adults will see the reference immediately and children will appreciate the sentiment: the Sardine eater stares at the reader with as much challenge to life's restrictions as Manet's *Olympia* expressed contempt. There is also a charming *Madonna and Child* cum *Mona Lisa* scene.

In another aspect the text and illustrations move in opposite directions: the text implies Pietro is more dynamic than the illustrations portray. Visually, Pietro is depicted as hesitant and reticent which enhances the struggle between him and the Sardine eater because the effort of engaging in conflict seems a challenge for Pietro.

The book will function best as a read-aloud for the five- to eight-year-old age group because some of the sentences are long and extend over two pages, but I also recommend it as a primary reader.

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MAGNIFICENT BUT MUDDLED: *THE WEAVER'S HORSE*

The weaver's horse. Jill Creighton. Illus. Robert Creighton. Annick Press, 1991. Unpag., \$15.95, no price, cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-181-9, 1-55037-178-9.

At first glance, one is drawn to *The weaver's horse* because of its magnificent cover featuring a delicately-framed drawing of the weaver leading his splendid, black horse. And this drawing is just a hint of all of the other glorious, coloured illustrations found within which, in their charm and detail, reflect the events of the story perfectly.

Unfortunately, Jill Creighton's story is not as fascinating as Robert Creighton's illustrations. Written in the fairy tale genre, the story follows a rich man named

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