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Dogbrain

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Weller, Michael. *Dogbrain*. 1996. 62 pp.

A- K-2

Nick is a six-year-old with an active imagination who refuses to take responsibility for his own misdeeds. When Nick blames an imaginary character named "Dogbrain" for a hitting incident at school, Dogbrain materializes and begins creating mischief. At first Nick enjoys the pranks of his new companion but becomes more and more frightened as he discovers that he cannot control the creature.

This play is likely to be controversial and will evoke strong positive and negative response from academicians, public educators, parents, and children. One of the assets of the play, as well as one of its liabilities, is the painful accuracy of the boys' spiteful and "potty-mouthed" dialogue. From one perspective, the play embodies a story and a language which are readily identifiable to the children in the audience. From another perspective, it presents behaviors and actions which no parent or teacher would want their impressionable young children imitating.

The subject matter and characters tailor this play to a K-2 audience, but the treatment of the subject will likely alienate a large sector of its potential audience. At best, the play is reminiscent of the harshly realistic child dialogue in Maurice Sendak's controversial children's musical *Really Rosie*. At worst, the antics of the imaginary creature go unnecessarily far, as Dogbrain rubs Nick's mother's bottom, drives Nick's confused father into a mental hospital, and eats cat "poop" and live rats.

Perhaps the greatest virtue of the story is that Dogbrain is eventually suppressed but not permanently defeated. "Goodybags," Dogbrain's alterego, stuffs Dogbrain back inside of Nick, but Nick discovers that Dogbrain can still reappear if he doesn't control his own impulses. The story's psychological realism provides children with hope without the false expectation that self-control is ever easy.

This play is found in:

Jennings, Coleman A. *Eight Plays for Children: The New Generation Play Project*. University of Texas Press, 1999. ISBN 0-292-74056-5 cloth, 0-292-74057-3 paperback. \$44.95 cloth, \$19.95 paperback. 479 pp.

A Reviewed by John D. Newman