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## Book Reviews

### **The Poet's Voice in the Making of Mind**

*Russell Meares*

New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

Acknowledgments, introduction, references, and author index. 222 pp.

\$33.56 paper. ISBN: 9780415572347

*The Poet's Voice in the Making of Mind* tackles one of the most fascinating mysteries of all: how the human mind comes into being and what distinguishes it from our nearest simian relatives. The book sweeps across evolution and development at a dizzying pace, touching upon biology, philosophy, linguistics, psychotherapy, literature, human development, and neuroscience. Meares's through line is how the germ of mind gets planted in each child initially through play. The process begins with the earliest conversations between mother and child, when instinctively the mother sets up a kind of pretend game that is half real, half imaginary. Mother speaks to baby "as if" the infant understands; and through her words and coos, she pours hopes, dreams, intentions, and perceptions into the space between herself and the baby. Amazingly, from the start,

baby does understand mother's love, her underlying intentions, and the nuances of her tone. Through this dialogue, a child slowly internalizes a mother's pictures of inner and outer worlds, eventually understanding even the content of her words.

Meares's primary thesis is that these early, playful exchanges between mother and child constitute the origins not only of a baby's mind, but also of what is uniquely human about our capacity to symbolize, including the full range of cultures across place and time. Within the alchemy of love and care for children, Meares asserts that the instinct to play brings the highest expressions of self—creativity and culture.

When we read a book, we not only read what the book has to say about the topic at hand, but we also read the personhood of the author. As if by osmosis, readers implicitly understand writers in much the same way that babies internalize the perspectives of their mothers. Such underground communication becomes especially pronounced in books with a well-developed perspective. *The Poet's Voice in the Making of Mind* is just this sort of book. Within a couple of paragraphs of the introduction, I began marveling at the

mind of the man behind the words. Meares brings the passion, curiosity, creativity, and compassion of a psychiatrist who has scaled the pinnacles of the healthy, creative mind, yet who has also spent decades working with the broken minds of some of the most troubled, character-disordered patients of all.

This book embodies the spirit of its own argument in multiple ways. It seems also as if the reader enters into conversation with Meares by becoming privy to a succession of his intellectual and cultural mentors and heroes. These include William James, Robert Hobson, Ferdinand de Saussure, Hughlings Jackson, William Shakespeare, Lev Vygotsky, and Wolf Singer. Meares designs each page to evoke a feeling and picture rather than to analyze a topic or defend an idea. Each chapter represents the “doubleness” of real-imaginary by demonstrating how uniquely human aspects of symbol, metaphor, and creativity emerge within the fertile, ambiguous spaces existing between this word and that one, self and other, inner and outer, private and public.

The book is written in nontechnical language. Every chapter is unique and serves as its own stand-alone verse circling a central image. A story about a waving game with Meares’s infant granddaughter becomes a teaching tale about perspective taking. Two ambiguous lines from a Shakespeare play launch the holistic potential of the human imagination. The book radiates out from the making of the individual’s mind to ever wider spheres of culture.

In multiple ways, the arc from early to later conversations between mother and child resembles the arc created here

between author and reader. The author writes as if the reader understands, by offering lovely metaphors and evocative images packed with meaning and associations. The writing is clear and minimalist; the imagery is compelling. Meanwhile, this stripped-down-to-its-barest-essence, minimalist quality is both the book’s strength as well as its weakness. During my first reading, the sparsely fleshed out allusions left my head spinning. I confess, this is exactly the feeling I get the first time I read a poem. The book, intended for a generalist audience, begs for a second reading, and even a third. Just as with poetry, there is more to appreciate with every pass. For, no matter what the occupation or background of the reader, with enough patience, eventually the reader does understand. Meares’s brilliance is well worth fleshing out every word and connecting every dot. Through the poet’s voice, the universe opens to its fullest capacity.

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—Terry Marks-Tarlow, *Insight Center, Los Angeles, CA*

**The Playdate: Parents, Children, and the New Expectations of Play**

*Tamara R. Mose*

New York, NY: New York University Press, 2016. Preface, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, and index. 192 pp. \$26.00 paper. ISBN: 9780479866298

“We should schedule a playdate!” In the world of modern parenting, these words have become more and more common.