The Poet’s Voice in the Making of Mind
Russell Meares

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
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.

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

The Playdate: Parents, Children, and the New Expectations of Play
Tamara R. Mose

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