

game with a series of imaginative ideas of what he could be when he grows up.

This book might be meaningless for readers who are not initiates of baseball culture because it abounds in technical terms. The prose relies heavily on adult interpretation, not only for the baseball words but for those such as *kleptomaniac*, *ornithologist* and *paleontologist*. The puns cannot be explained until the words have been explained; this book could take an adult and child some time to work through. But those who do will certainly expand their vocabulary. However, some children may not feel it's worth the effort if all they want is an entertaining story.

Both books convey a sense of the fun and complexity of our language, and of the possibilities inherent in it. *Cold Night, Brittle Light* is sure to elicit chuckles. Because *Bats about Baseball* requires more sophistication, it may not work as well.

---

---

*Troon Harrison is completing a BEd at Queens. She writes picture books and poetry. Her most recent picture book is Lavender Moon (Annick, 1997).*

### Sometimes Pictures Are Better Than Words

*I Heard My Mother Call My Name.* Nancy Hundal. Illus. Laura Fernandez. HarperCollins, 1994, 1990. Unpag. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-647496-9. *November Boots.* Nancy Hundal. Illus. Marilyn Mets. HarperCollins, 1993. Unpag. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223893-4. *Moonsnail Song.* Sheryl McFarlane. Illus. Sheena Lott. Orca, 1994. Unpag. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-008-8.

Dreamy, poetic picture books are great bedtime reading for young children. They can work to stretch the youngsters' imaginations, yet soothe them to sleep by giving busy little minds something gentle to think about. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, *November Boots*, and *Moonsnail Song* all make good bedtime reading, but even better bedtime viewing.

The stories of all three books are very simple and direct. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* is about a child lingering on the front porch at twilight, watching his or her street turn from day to night while mother calls. *November Boots* is about a little boy's frustrated search for puddles in which to try his new boots. Both are told from the child's point of view, in the first person and in the present tense. *Moonsnail Song* is about a young girl who daydreams about the seashore, and what she could find there, as she goes through her day. It is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, again present tense. There is only a little dialogue in *November Boots*, none in the others, and all three focus on the thoughts of their protagonists.

The language used in all three books is lyrical and evocative of images rather than emotions or situations, and there is no superfluity of words in any of them; every word is precisely placed. In fact, they are so precisely placed that they constitute the major flaw of both Hundal books; adult words and turns of phrase are placed in a child's mouth, where they are unlikely to be. Sentences

like “The clouds are steel gates, clanged down tight to the earth, locking the sun away until spring” in *November Boots* are typical in both it and *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, and while superbly evocative, are discordant with the speaker. It is hard to imagine a little boy of about eight thinking in that way. *Moonsnail Song* uses equally adult language, but because it is written in the third person, there is no discordancy as the adult speaker is merely articulating a child’s thoughts. In *November Boots* and *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, an adult voice is given to a child speaker. Another flaw in the language of *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* is in the refrain; at the end of every single page the last sentence is “I heard my mother call my name and I know I should go in ...”. This gets monotonous, particularly since the refrain does not always tie in with what has just been said, and it seems to be stuck at the page end for the sake of a superficial continuity. If it had been occasionally altered, it could have contributed a sense of urgency perhaps, or of reluctance on the part of the speaker, and would have challenged the young reader to be alert to the changes. As it is, the refrain does not completely fulfil its function of providing coherence and furthering the story.

*Moonsnail Song* has a flaw in its story line’s sequence. There is some confusion about where the protagonist is supposed to be at one point. It seems obvious at the beginning that the little girl is imagining herself at the sea with the help of a seashell (no magic, just the sound one hears when one puts a shell to one’s ear), but in the middle, between wiping the supper table and hearing the phone ring, it seems she is really at the seashore finding the shell. There is no change in tense, wording, or voice to indicate that she is remembering or daydreaming. Even the accompanying pictures show her at the beach, although other illustrations in the book make it clear that she is thinking of one place while in another. So, what has been to that point a straightforward story becomes confusing.

The illustrations of all three books are literally frameable art, which is why although the books are good reads, they are even better to look at. The watercolour works of *November Boots* are in muted colours, depicting grey November throughout, and match the words, image for image. The watercolour illustrations of *Moonsnail Song* are in bright light colours evoking sunshine at the sea, or sparkling depths of ocean, and they surround the text or are inset, giving the same sense of the richness of life in the sea as the text does, with layers of pictures to go with layers of words. The illustrations in *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* are sharp, showing the protagonist’s heightened perceptions of a twilight neighbourhood, and they too match image to image. All of the illustrations in all three books are worth looking at. And despite some of the flaws in the texts, all three books are worth reading, too.

---

*Celeste van Vloten* is a freelance writer with a Masters degree in English literature. She and her family live in Fergus, Ontario.