

No Bargain at a Dollar a Poem

Voices from the Wild: An Animal Sensagoria. David Bouchard. Illus. Ron Parker. Raincoast, 1997. 65 pp. \$23.95. ISBN 1-55192-040-9.

Flaunting a rusty cougar on its shiny cover, this visually impressive volume seems full of promise, but on the inside it is full of disappointment.

Each section of the book explores one of the five senses; sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste, and consists of five poems explaining how that sense is used by five different species. Each section concludes with a sixth poem in which the author wonders "what has happened" to that sense in humans (is there any evolutionary basis for this assumption?). Each species is described in further detail in a series of supplementary notes entitled "About the Animals."

I kept wanting to like this book a lot better than I did. The exploration of the senses is an appealing concept, and few would not share the author's concern for the preservation of wildlife. There's some fascinating information here, and Ron Parker's twenty-five paintings are undeniably gorgeous. So why isn't this a better book?

For one reason, the author has written for "young people" without deciding how young. Visually the book seems designed for school-aged children; how else to explain the excessively realistic illustrations (I believe that the very young might be served better by more imaginative art) and the encyclopaedia format of the notes? Within this context, the literary device of using the animals' voices to speak to the artist, is too fanciful: it might be delightful in a book for small children, but for an older readership, it sounds didactic and feels awkward.

The poetic structure is even more problematic. The poems are written mostly in a sing-song rhythm that recalls Longfellow's "Hiawatha." With almost no use of rhyme, this device works only if used continuously: when it is varied by lines that break the rhythm, or that maintain it only with laborious constraint, it's like an engine stalling, and the reader wonders if he is looking at an early draft. It doesn't take a particularly gifted editor to change "over down beyond the dark path" to "down beyond the darkened path." It is ironic that the author has written a book about the senses without awakening any of them. There is no magic in *Voices from the Wild*: these poems sound remarkably like prose — mundane prose at that.

Eleanor Swainson has reviewed books for Canadian Children's Literature, Books in Canada, and the Kingston Whig Standard, and is co-author of "The Buffalo Hunt."

All Work, No Play: The Realities of Child Labour around the World

Listen to Us: The World's Working Children. Jane Springer. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 96 pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-307-2, \$24.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-291-2.

This is not your typical adventure story written for the North American adolescent population ages 12-15. On one level it is tragic that a book like this