



Sweet Pea and the Bumblebee

Jason Akley

Bobbi Switzer, Illustrator

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Sweet Pea emerges from garden dirt in a state of confused disorientation. “And who was she really? What was the deal?” A friendly bee stops to assure Sweet Pea that her purpose in life need not remain a mystery. Unfortunately the bee speaks more like Friedrich Nietzsche than like Mister Rogers: “Out of order and chaos our world is derived. Its continuity is dynamic. Its alteration is contrived.”

The artist’s performance here is commendable varying the composition of elements in each image as much as possible a challenge because the subject a pea plant leads a stationary life. Bobbi Switzer keeps busy. In addition to wearing her illustrator’s hat she is also a photographer a woodcarver and a muralist.

Jason Akley has written three other books including the novel *Salted With Salt*. He is a new father and a poet. The rhymes in this book retain an elegant subtlety easy on the adult ear. Concepts borrowed from classical sources mesh decently and maintain consistency. The way to discuss existence with a small child is by using words they already understand in a strategic arrangement. The artwork is perfectly age-appropriate but the text would fit an undergrad study session for a Philosophy 101 class. “Beauty is symmetry. Nothing is to an extreme. It’s a balance of opposites. What some call the golden mean. But what else can we say about them? Are these opposites at war? Or does a synthesis take place?”

Heady stuff for youngsters who are learning to count by fives. They’re probably not ready for Sartre yet. In the best-case scenario an adult could read *Sweet Pea and the Bumblebee* to a child a bit at a time and then take the trouble to construct carefully simplified explanations of the explanations. The effort to provide substance for caregivers tired of fluff stories shows thoughtful intent but the result is an intellectual overshoot. Despite the presence of positive qualities this book does not meet the requirements of its most basic mission.

TODD MERCER (April 17, 2007)

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