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response to a study of Maurice Sendak

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***THE FEARS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD:  
WRITING IN RESPONSE TO A STUDY OF  
MAURICE SENDAK***

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at a series of stories written for children by Maurice Sendak. They are: *Where The Wild Things Are* (Chapter 3), *In the Night Kitchen* (Chapter 4), *Outside Over There* (Chapter 5) and *Dear Mili* (Chapter 6). Through analysis of these works I hoped to find a way of helping young children recognise and work through their fears. As the study progressed, it became apparent that the stories were written less and less to deal with the concerns of young children and more and more to deal with Maurice Sendak's own concerns.

As I still felt that it was possible through literature to recognise and deal with children's fears, I wrote a series of seven children's stories. They are based on concerns which, as a preschool teacher and parent, young children have expressed to me. They appear in Chapter 7. I have tried to resolve the situations in realistic and easily understood ways.

In Chapter 8, I have related my stories to the Sendak stories I have analysed, as well as relating my personal experiences to those of Sendak. The result is this thesis: **THE FEARS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD - Writing in Response to a Study of Maurice Sendak.**

## THANK YOU

To Ron Pretty and Jillian Trezise, for your help, support and encouragement. Thank you Jillian for getting me to interpret and create. And thank you Ron for opening a door that would have remained closed to me.

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To Irene Fock, for sorting out on all the technicalities which I find so overwhelming.

To Gertie and Shelley for being there, even from so far away.

To Ben, just for being Ben.

And to Max, King of all the Wild Things, and his creator.

*"Thus does my heart go out to you, and though  
my eyes have not seen you yet, it loves you and  
thinks it is sitting beside you. And you say:  
'Tell me a story.' And it replies: 'Yes, dear  
Mili, just listen.'"*

*(from *Dear Mili*, by Maurice Sendak.)*

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WRITING IN RESPONSE TO A STUDY OF MAURICE SENDAK

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE FEARS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD- WRITING IN RESPONSE TO A STUDY OF MAURICE SENDAK

On first reading Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are," I was impressed with the sensitivity with which Sendak dealt with critical childhood issues and the sense of empowerment I felt any child could receive through indulging in Sendakian fantasy. Further reading, both of his stories and reviews of his stories made me reconsider. Was it possible that the child's hero was really an adult still himself unresolved in his own childhood fears and fantasies? Who, if anyone, was being empowered by these fantasies?

In interviews about communicating with the child in himself, Sendak advocates: "I communicate with him-or try to- all the time...at least once a day I feel I have to make contact." (Cott, 1983, p.66.)

He tells Selma Lanes: "I have an endless fascination and absorption with childhood, an obsession with my own childhood." (Lanes, 1981, p. 27).

His less than perfect childhood led him, as an adult to seek Freudian therapy for several years. "I was miserable as a kid. I couldn't make friends, I couldn't play stoopball terrific, I



couldn't skate great. I stayed home and drew pictures. You know what they all thought of me: sissy Maurice Sendak." (Cott, 1983, p.45) Sendak describes his childhood as filled with poor health and memories of years spent observing the world from the windows of his family's apartment in New York.

Perhaps these experiences are catalysts for the four stories, "Where the Wild Things Are," "In the Night Kitchen," "Outside Over There" and "Dear Mili," which make up the series that grows and evolves from simply stating and resolving childhood fears to "the quest for truth through endless definition (which Deluca finds) somewhat oppressive." (Deluca, 1986, p.147) Deluca goes on to condone Sendak's movement into set design for opera and ballet as the next step for Sendak's creativity; in other words, she suggests he should leave children's literature alone.

"Where the Wild Things Are", the first in this series, was written in 1963. By then I was too old to appreciate children's picture books, so it was only as a preschool and kindergarten teacher that I came to be familiar with this book. I was immediately taken with precocious little Max, who seemed to be modelled after some of my own preschoolers.

Max, along with Mickey in "In the Night Kitchen," Martin in "Very Far Away" and other Sendak characters whose names often began with the letter "M", were inspired by Sendak's first love: Mickey Mouse. "Childhood for me was shtetl life in Brooklyn, full of old

world reverberations - and Walt Disney, and the occasional trip to the incredibly windowed "uptown" that was New York-America!" (Lanes, 1981, p.26).

Of Mickey Mouse Sendak states, "Best of all was seeing him on the movie screen. In the darkened theater, the sudden flash of his brilliant, wild, joyful face-radiating great golden beams-filled me with an intoxicating unalloyed pleasure." (Lanes, p.9)

Sendak's characters display Mickey Mouse's charisma and charm, and a free spirit coupled with a sense of mischief. Young children, even the most idyllic, can easily identify with them. This identification helps to empower the young child; as the character triumphs so does the child.

Not so with Ida in "Outside Over There", and Mili, the Good Girl in "Dear Mili." Young Ida, who wishes only to express her creativity through the music she plays with her wonder horn, is burdened with the responsibility of minding her baby sister while father is away at sea and mama is daydreaming in the arbor. She pays dearly for a moment of inattention when, while deep into a tune, goblins kidnap her sister and leave an ice baby goblin in her place. Deluca argues that Ida's horror and punishment for such a small crime (inattention, jealousy, loneliness) is not resolved enough for children by the fact that she endures and everyone survives. (Deluca, 1986, p.146).

It is easy for us as adults, as well as Sendak as an adult trying to get in touch with the child in himself, to be mesmerised by the quality of the images, each and every one a work of art unto itself, and by doing so to ignore the book's impact on young children.

Where *Ida* and *"Outside Over There"* leave off, *"Dear Mili"* follows. *Mili, the Good Child*, receives a letter at the beginning of the book. The letter contains a moral lesson which is elaborated throughout the pages of the book.

In all fairness, the original words are by Wilhelm Grimm, and this edition was translated from German into English by Ralph Manheim. I imagine that Sendak as writer/illustrator would have selected the text. He says in one interview that it takes him two years to feel satisfied with the words of one of his books, and only after that does he begin his illustrations.

The letter is an allegory. *Mili* must have been an adolescent at the very least, and one who had been attending catechism classes for years, to have understood its content. Biblical images and moral connotations abound throughout. The message would be lost on a young child.

The story again contains remarkable visual images. As an adult I can admire them; children have either been unaffected by them or seen them as scary. A young girl wandering alone in the woods, followed by sinister-looking birds and dwarf-like figures is

"rescued" by a suspicious-looking old man with a long white beard living alone in a hut and offering her his bed. And she accepts! With all the warnings we give children about strangers, this seems odd. Later we see the young girl in a flower garden with the old man hidden in a crevice, watching her. Is he friend or foe? The words try to convince us that he is Saint Joseph, and is protecting her, but is he? Why are her three days in the woods actually thirty years?

Her return home is explained to the reader as her mother's dying wish. Yet the final illustration, her reunion with her mother, fails to bring the relief and satisfaction which should be felt at such a time. The mother, thirty years on, has aged about sixty years and is now a toothless old hag who resembles the witch in "Hansel and Gretel." She sits on her porch with outstretched arms; the young girl looks at her questioningly. Were it not that she is portrayed as the "Good Child", it looks as though she would scream and run back into the woods.

By her reunion with her dying mother she brings upon herself her own death, and the two of them are found dead the next day by neighbours. No illustration, only words, shows this.

Initially I looked to Sendak to find the key to empowerment; the spokesperson for the fears and concerns of young children. In "Dear Mili" I found a young girl dying beside the old hag that

her mother had become. As an adult I was afraid. I needed to examine this and the preceding stories more carefully to decide whether or not Sendak's stories could be used to express the fears of early childhood and to deal with them. And if they didn't meet this need, could I write stories that would?

I began to take a closer look at the preschoolers I taught, and at my own son, then three years old and having just begun preschool. I noted carefully the concerns they shared with me, and felt limited in offering them reassurance only. I asked them to elaborate on their concerns, to draw or paint their nightmares, to act out their fears. But with limited literacy and drawing not yet at a representational stage, my use of art therapy with these young children was relatively unsuccessful.

Yet when I read them books, the stories became catalysts for conversation, drawing, painting and drama. Through this expression children seemed able to come to terms with their fears. Certain books, including "Where the Wild Things Are," were especially good catalysts. I challenged myself to write a series of stories about the fears and concerns which I had observed in young children and so doing to try to help them to come to terms with them.

The areas of concern I identified were: monsters, being separated from primary caregivers, being an only child, coming from a sole parent family, a lost pet and not understanding basic scientific

concepts. While monsters and separation can be a source of fear, children are also concerned with how and why things happen the way they do.

After several trials and revisions, I include my seven stories as part of this thesis. I believe they work to help children identify and empower themselves against the fears and concerns of early childhood.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Finding Maurice Sendak, and writing my own children's stories in response to Sendak, was a natural evolution from a curiosity about the use of art therapy in early childhood. I had often heard of the great success therapists were having with their clients by using the creative arts as a mode of expression. People drew, painted, danced and sang their way through their problems, coming out happier and more resolved. Often the art produced was quite remarkable. I wanted to understand this process and find out how it could be used with preschool-aged children. Thus I began my search.

This review reflects the path I took in getting to Sendak and learning from him. It covers the following areas:

1. Child Art Therapy
2. Understanding Children's Art Work
3. Maurice Sendak's four stories: Where the Wild Things Are, In the Night Kitchen, Outside Over There, and Dear Mili and critiques of these works.
4. A Psychoanalytic/Symbolic perspective.

### 1. CHILD ART THERAPY

Art therapy is a technique of using art both for expression and for analysis in a clinical setting. It is a relatively new form of therapy, and especially new as a way of working with children.

While many books have been written on the subject of art therapy, few successfully deal with its application to the young. Judith Rubin, however, came from a teaching background and later qualified as a psychotherapist. She is also a painter and a parent. Her book *Child Art Therapy- Understanding and Helping Children Grow Through Art*, (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., Inc., Melbourne, 1984), targets an audience of parents and teachers as well as therapists.

Rubin suggests that totally unstructured activities are best suited to art therapy. She argues a strong case for art as therapy, in all aspects of childhood: "If art can be helpful to troubled and to handicapped children, it can also be helpful to "normal" children in school and at home, as a way of expressing and clarifying and perhaps coping with some of the complicated feelings like jealousy, anger and fear that every child has when growing up." (Rubin, p.234)

As well she states, "Perhaps as important as expressing feelings is the fact that a child can feel very good about himself as a competent person, through mastering the skills involved in using art materials...he has also learned that he himself can do something and can do it well." (Rubin, 1984, p.235) The fears, concerns, emotions of early childhood need an outlet and some way of being worked through at least partly non-verbally and largely in a creative/expressive fashion.



Rubin offers ways of looking at and assessing art work. She advises looking at: the child's approach to the material, the degree of absorption in the activity, the energy expended, the manipulative action, the child's attitude towards the material, the tempo of the work, body movements, any verbalisation and any development or change apparent over time. While these are most certainly the jobs of a therapist, many of these areas are also observed by the early childhood teacher to profile the development of the preschool child.

Rubin goes on to identify areas within a child's overall behaviour, interaction with adults, use of materials, attitude to their work and creativity of their thinking which can be rated through a child's art. She describes how special needs children should be assessed in a different way. For example an intellectually disabled child should be assessed on what (descriptively) they can do and a blind child on how (qualitatively) the child reacted to the materials and the invitation to create. She stresses flexibility; adapting the method and the assessment to the child's needs. Along with this, she points out that art alone should not be assessed, but used as a tool for assessment along with the child's observations, discussion and the therapist's input.

Greg Furth, in The Secret World of Drawings- Healing Through Art, (Sigo Press, Boston, 1988,) uses an open-ended drawing technique with his clients, and when the drawing is complete he

engages in a discussion with the artist about it. Through his discovery of common symbols, he is able to share with the reader interpretations which could prove helpful in understanding a person's drawing. He mentions psychoanalysis, fairy tales, myths and legends as sources of understanding symbols in art. (Furth, 1988)

In Artful Scribbles- the Significance of Children's Drawings, (Jill Norman Ltd., London, 1980), Howard Gardner combines his own experiences with his children's art with ideas from psychoanalysts and art educators. Gardner takes the reader through the developmental stages of children's drawings which, surprisingly are consistent from child to child, no matter what area of the world they are from. With this consistency,

"deviant depictions are often symptomatic, sometimes of an emotional disorder, at other times of general retardation. Such "diagnoses" must of course be made cautiously: "odd" schemas can derive from a number of causes and are by no means necessarily pathognomic. Yet because the development of drawing at this age occurs so similarly throughout the world, significant discrepancies are readily noted and compel some explanation." (Gardner, 1980, p.73)

## **2. UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S ART WORK**

While Gardner mentions children's drawings as having a commonality, he credits his information to Rhoda Kellogg, an

American woman who had undertaken the enormous task of analysing 100 000 children's drawings from all over the world. Her results are produced in Analysing Children's Art, (Avon Publishers, New York, 1970) and Children's Drawings, Children's Minds, (Avon Publishers, New York, 1969.)

"Psychologists and psychiatrists who use drawings as mental tests should be very familiar with the whole scope of early childhood art and realise that it is universally so similar that it is not very reliable for interpreting personality traits." (Kellogg, 1969, p.4-5)

She develops her case by stating that every child draws proportions, shapes and sizes to achieve an aesthetically pleasing and visually balanced end product, and that this skill leads to learning to read by recognising the overall form of the words.

So a young child who draws legs coming out of a head is not denying the sexuality and physicality of the body, but rather going through the tadpole stage which every other child goes through. Another who draws a small head, long body and one arm is not denying the intellectual/emotional side of her personality but rather filling up the rectangle in a visually pleasing way. The fundamentals of design and pre-reading, according to Kellogg, supercede the issues of drawing as therapy in the pre-literate child.

Kellogg demonstrates that once children begins to read, the body form is complete and detailed and it is at this point that they can express their thoughts, concerns and feelings in words and images in a way conducive to art therapy.

### 3. MAURICE SENDAK'S FOUR STORIES: WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE, IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN, OUTSIDE OVER THERE AND DEAR MILI AND CRITIQUES OF THESE WORKS

The information above, especially from the work of Kellogg, made a redirection of my study necessary. If visual art was a means by which children explored the rectangle in which they were working, and if all children progress alike in figure drawing, then I had to find another method of dealing with the fears and concerns of early childhood. I looked to children's literature, in particular the stories of Maurice Sendak, for that method. Where the Wild Things Are has entertained young children for years. Since its publication, in 1963, Sendak has produced three other children's books, In the Night Kitchen, Outside Over There, and Dear Mili. Their various successes have a great deal to do with the credibility of the main character to a younger audience.

With this credibility can come the opportunity to simulate, and thus to express, through drama, art, music and movement concerns of the child which are similar to those of the storybook character. "Children can relate to Max's (Max is the main

character in Where the Wild Things Are) experience and use it to stimulate their own wild experiences through creative drama." (Norton, 1987, p.10) In this way the developmental stage of the child's drawing will not matter; it is the expression itself and the child's interpretation of the expression which will ultimately be the therapy.

Stronach-Buschel confirms a connection between art therapy and Maurice Sendak. In her article about Where the Wild Things Are called "Where the Wild Things Are: A Psychoanalytic Art Therapy Perspective," (The Arts in Psychotherapy Journal, Volume 18, pp.65-68, 1991, Pergamon Press, U.S.A.) she attributes the success of the book as an art therapy tool to the fact that it encourages children to express their anger and empower themselves within the secure environment of a loving mother and comfortable bedroom. Indeed, Max becomes a role model as he encourages imaginative play of we readers can become a part.

Despite the monsters, children rarely, if ever react with fear to Where the Wild Things Are. The reading I looked to for an explanation was that of Bettina Stronach-Buschel, "Where the Wild Things Are: A Psychoanalytical Art Therapy Perspective", (from "The Arts in Psychotherapy Journal, Volume 18, Pergamon Press, USA, 1991.) Stronach-Buschel uses Freudian theory to explain why children do not react with fear. She introduces the concepts, seen again and again in Sendak's stories, of devouring or being devoured, the Oedipal complex and the child's growing sexuality,

anger, aggression and fantasy. Max triumphs, and this triumph speaks for all children in that it encourages them to become empowered, to gain mastery over the monsters in their lives.

In her book, The Art of Maurice Sendak, (The Bodley Head, London, 1981), Selma Lanes describes Sendak's background and the composing of his books up to the date of writing, 1980. She talks about his Brooklyn background, and his obsessions with Mickey Mouse, New York, Freud and Jewish tradition. While Lanes can see no wrong in Sendak's work, she is still able to give enough background information to strengthen arguments against his omniscience.

Literary criticism deals largely with Sendak in terms of psychoanalysis, his Jewish and New York background, and the influence various authors, artists and schools of thinking had upon his work. From these I chose to concentrate my study on psychoanalysis and his Jewish background.

Jonathan Cott, in "Maurice Sendak: King of all the Wild Things" from Pipers at the Gates of Dawn- The Wisdom of Children's Literature, (Random House, New York, 1983), combines biographical information with interviews in a style similar to new journalism, where the writer becomes an obvious participant in the scenario. We are shown an eccentric, introspective and somewhat defensive Sendak: "People who objected to Mickey bathing in milk and floating naked-every part of his body having a sensuous

experience...as if that's naughty. Why? Why are we all so screwed up, including me? But at least creatively I try to convey the memory of a time in life when it was a pleasure."  
(Cott, 1983, p.52)

Sendak discusses his writing and illustration with Cott, and his thoughts about such others as Mozart: "Very conceivably one might think that Mozart was an anal retentive, that he never got past the toilet-training stage..." (Cott,1983, p.61). Beethoven, Wilhelm Busch, George MacDonald and Henry James are names which occur frequently in critiques of Sendak because of the various influences they have had upon his work.

But it is the sensitive perceptions, both by Cott and Sendak, of Sendak's own work that give credibility to this article.

"The 'wild things' are, of course, the feelings within us, and if we lose contact with them and with our childhood being we become defenders of the Social Lie and the forces of death, as we mouth platitudes about 'reverence for life.' But life demands us to defend not denatured human beings but rather transformed and transforming boys and girls, men and women." (Cott, 1983, p.66)

In other words, as adults we must never lose touch with our childhood; our emotional selves lest we become pawns in the unfeeling social sphere of sameness and drudgery.

While Cott was able to provide an introspective look into Sendak's motivation and the process of his work, Sendak's Caldecott and

Co.: Notes on Books and Pictures, (Viking Press, London, 1988), which is based on his speeches and lectures, provides a look at Sendak's reality, which is the basis of his stories.

"I have watched children play many variations of this game. They are the necessary games children must conjure up to combat an awful fact of childhood: the fact of their vulnerability to fear, anger, hate, frustration-all the emotions that are an ordinary part of their lives and that they can perceive only as ungovernable and dangerous forces. To master these forces, children turn to fantasy: that imagined world where disturbing emotional situations are solved to their satisfaction. Through fantasy, Max, the hero of my book, discharges his anger against his mother, and returns to the real world sleepy, hungry and at peace with himself." (Sendak, Caldecott and Co., 1988, p.151)

His defence of Outside Over There, "Maurice Sendak's Narrative Images" in The Voice of the Narrator in Children's Literature (Otten and Schmidt, Greenwood Press, USA, 1989) shows Sendak at his social best, excusing the lax mother and condemning the absentee father, while totally ignoring (or possibly actually blocking) the Freudian interpretations so apparent in this story. Of the mother Sendak says: "It's taking those normal moments when a mother eases back, or more vulgarly said, 'poohs out,' isn't as attentive as the child wished twenty-four hours at a time for his or her needs- at that moment the child is unforgiving. And that's also when the child notices the lapse and



will interpret it in ways based entirely on what has happened previous to this moment. And so one doesn't know how the child will respond. In point of fact, normal; the mother has a right to avert her gaze once in a while." (Otten and Schmidt, 1989, p.23)

Of the father he says:

`When Papa was away at sea' is saying it all because most papas are away at sea- or they're at sea. In terms of making a living, dealing with children, dealing with wives- `Papa ain't there.'...That Papa-letter is meant to be ironical. Here's this great pompous ass, the father, sending his love from across the sea and dumping huge burden on this little girl and claiming that his love for her is sufficient reason." (Otten and Schmidt, pp 23-24)

Deluca notes the success of his defence of the child's freedom of expression through the Freudian images in Sendak's work.

"In depicting the Oedipal dramas, the sibling rivalry, the drive toward control and creativity, Sendak is a humanist, understanding and celebrating the place of anger, rebelliousness, hunger, and recognising the need to shape those drives to create the order, the decorum, the harmony that his own work at its best demonstrates." (Deluca, 1986, p.142)

But ultimately, she argues, he loses his child audience as he becomes more and more self-indulgent. She sees Outside Over

There as intentionally written to be so obscure as to not be understood by anyone other than Sendak himself. So much for defending the spirit of childhood. I begin to wonder whether Sendak is using his books as an exhibitionist way of dealing with his own childhood sexual identity problems. Backed up by fact, Sendak has never had an adult heterosexual relationship, has never married or had children, and writes eulogies to his dog, the one great love of his life. Is this a case for psychoanalysis or children's literature? And is it possible that these books are art therapy in action; Sendak resolving his dilemmas through creative expression?

In "Maurice Sendak's Ritual Cooking of the Child in Three Tableaux: The Moon, Mother and Music" (from Children's Literature: An International Journal, Inc., Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature, Volume 18, USA, 1990), Jean Perrot relates Sendak's work to Postmodernism, Judaism and Freudian psychology. He compares In The Night Kitchen's issues to ideas written by French Jewish anthropologist Levi-Strauss around the same time of writing. The attempted cooking of the child, which he sees as ritualistic, he suggests comes from Jewish mythology and means among other things the creation of the next generation. If so, I wonder, then why are three fat men creating the next generation? The moon and the mother image, as well as other images in the story have, according to Perrot, similar origins. Does that mean that the Max's punishing but loving mother, Mickey's absentee mother,

Ida's negligent mother and Mili's concerned mother-turned hag symbolise the Jewish mother in Jewish mythology? I would have thought her to be all-loving and all-giving. Music is "the magical substitute for yeast, (and) acts on the higher level of social (not merely bodily) regeneration." (Perrot,1990, p.84)

In "Deconstructing Maurice Sendak's Postmodern Palimpsest" (from "Children's Literature Association Quarterly, Volume 16(4), Winter, 1991-1992, USA) Perrot dissects Outside Over There and Dear Mili in a similar fashion to the previous article. He concludes,"Dear Mili shows the same allegiance as Outside Over There ...to the principle of writing based on the hermeticism of quotations and personal humour." (Perrot, 1991-1992, p.262)

Steig, in "Coming to Terms with Outside Over There," (from "Children's Literature: An International Journal, Inc.," Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature, Volume 13, 1985, USA,) discusses the story from many aspects, including other critics' work, Freudian psychology and Judaism. He concludes: "My suspicion about Outside Over There is that Sendak is essentially correct about child-readers: most of them will take from the book whatever is meaningful to them, without conceptualising it, though this does not mean that they will be motivated to understand every detail." (Steig, p.216)

I suspect that this is probably true to a great extent, but as a teacher, parent and adult, I still battle with how much should be left to the child's interpretation and how much should be

censored.

Finally, in discussion of an adult's interpretation of Sendak's work Steig says: "I have tried to demonstrate how it is possible to discuss a difficult text by treating the individual reading experience as a palimpsest of the reader's own responses and associations, extrinsic evidence (sources and biography), and direct interpretation based on conventions of literary criticism--all three interacting in the reader's thoughts and feelings to produce, not `truth,' but a way of coming to grips with the text." (Steig. p.217)

#### 4. A PSYCHOANALYTIC/SYMBOLIC PERSPECTIVE

The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets (Harper and Rowe, USA, 1983) by Barbara Walker, proved to be an excellent source of symbolic meaning. Listed alphabetically, each entry is given full explanation, not just the patriarchal one which most resource books would provide. This book goes further to show the original connotation of each symbol and how it has changed through time and with the advent of patriarchy. I found this book particularly useful while studying Dear Mili which is so strongly based on the symbolism of the New Testament.

A Dictionary of Symbols by J.E. Cirlot, (Routledge, Great Britain, 1990,) also provided useful information pertaining to many things in Sendak's stories, but here the perspective is patriarchal. For example, in reference to the flower, lily, a dominant image

in an illustration in Dear Mili, Walker says: "The flower of Lilith, Sumero-Babylonian goddess of creation; the lili or 'lotus' of her genital magic. The lily often represented the virgin aspect of the Triple Goddess, while the rose represented her maternal aspect. The lily was sacred to Astarte, who was also Lilith; northern Europeans called her Ostara or Eostre, the Goddess of 'Easter' lilies. Because of its pagan associations with virgin motherhood, the lily was used to symbolise impregnation of the virgin Mary. Some authorities claimed the lily in Gabriel's hand filtered God's semen which entered Mary's body through her ear. Mary's cult also inherited the lily of the Blessed Virgin Juno, who conceived her saviour-son Mars with her own magic lily, without any male aid. This myth reflected an early belief in the self-fertilising power of the yoni (vulva), which the lily symbolised and Juno personified. Her name descended from the pre-Roman Uni, a Triple Goddess represented by the three-lobed lily or fleur-de-lis, her name stemming from the Sanskrit 'yoni', source of the Uni-verse." (Walker, 1983, pp.542-543)

About "lily" Cirlot states: "An emblem of purity, used in Christian- and particularly medieval- iconography as a symbol and attribute of the Virgin Mary. It is often depicted standing in a vase or jar, which is, in turn, a symbol of the female principle." (Cirlot, 1990, pp.188-189)

The different perspectives in these two books are obvious.

Charles Rycroft's Dictionary of Psychoanalysis (Penguin books, London, 1972,) lists in alphabetical order, terms which are common to psychoanalysis and cross references associated terms. For anyone conducting a study of this nature without a professional background in psychoanalysis, this book is an excellent guide.

Mallet's Fairy Tales and Children, (Schocken Books, USA, 1984) and Bettelheim's The Uses of Enchantment, (Random HOuse, Toronto, 1977) are both brave interpretations of fairy tales, using psychoanalysis, sociology and personal symbolism as a basis for their theories. Both authors provided insights into fairy tales which dealt with similar issues to those of Sendak's (Little Red Riding Hood and Hansel and Gretel in particular). But it was the ability of these authors to free their imaginations to interpret what most of us would hardly allow ourselves to recognise which gave me the courage to really listen to and interpret Sendak.

While many other books provided help with this thesis, the above books were the major literary works which helped to form the ideas presented here.

## WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Where The Wild Things Are is seen by Sendak as the culmination of his long apprenticeship "an immense step forward, a critical stage in my work" towards which "all my previous work now seems to have been an elaborate preparation." (Caldecott, p.154.)

The purpose of this thesis is to show why this is so, why Where the Wild Things Are works so successfully as a story for young children, a pivotal point in the career of Maurice Sendak after which Sendak's work took a turn away from this finely-tuned understanding of universal childhood concerns to, as Deluca puts it, an "oppressive..quest for truth through endless definition." (Deluca, p.147) In rehashing his own childhood, and perfecting his illustrative style, Sendak progressively seems to lose his child audience.

His name is Max, but it could just as easily have been Mickey (from In the Night Kitchen), Martin (from Very Far Away), Disney's Mickey Mouse, or Maurice himself. All are portrayed as mischievous children and, as Sendak says, he is "playing a Kafka game of shared first initials with most of the heroes in my own picture books." (Caldecott, p.100)

What these characters have in common goes beyond a shared first

initial in some cases, to "a need to master the uncontrollable and frightening aspects of their lives, and they all turn to fantasy to accomplish this." (Caldecott, p. 152) They all possess the courage of their convictions and the bravery (or childish naivety) to proceed with their mission, often against all odds.

First published in 1963, Where the Wild Things Are received a lot of criticism from adults who thought it created unnecessary fear in young children. In an article for Ladies Home Journal, Bruno Bettelheim wrote: "The basic anxiety of the child is desertion. To be sent to bed alone is one desertion, and without food is the second desertion. The combination is the worst desertion that can threaten a child." (Lanes, p.104)

Yet from its time of publication, Sendak has been a self-appointed emissary of children's rights to live in a real world with real fears and real concerns, in the best way they know how: through play.

It is 1963, and Max looks about seven or eight years old in the story. He is growing up at a time when "children should be seen and not heard." (I remember this from my own childhood.) Not only that, but talking back to a parent warranted some form of grandiose punishment, in this case being sent to his room and being deprived of food. Today if my son talked back to me I would probably consider his opinion, and if he was rude, I would



try to ignore the rudeness so it wouldn't be a source of negative attention and would hopefully go out of his vocabulary.

"In the olden days children were spanked plenty, and nobody thought much about it. Then a reaction set in, and many parents decided that it was shameful. But that didn't settle everything. If an angry parent keeps himself from spanking, he may show his irritation in other ways: for instance, by nagging the child for half the day, or trying to make him feel deeply guilty. I'm not particularly advocating spanking, but I think it is less poisonous than lengthy disapproval, because it clears the air, for parent and child. You sometimes hear it recommended that you never spank a child in anger but wait until you have cooled off. That seems unnatural. It takes a pretty grim parent to whip a child when the anger is gone.

Some parents find that putting a child in his room works well. One theoretical disadvantage is that it may make his room seem like a prison." (Spock, p.338)

In Where the Wild Things Are food is used as a reward and its deprivation a punishment. When Max made mischief his mother punished him not only by sending him to his room, but also by denying him his dinner. Upon conquering the wild things, which can be interpreted as reaching manhood, Max returns to his room where his supper, still hot, is waiting for him. He has achieved so he has been rewarded.

The theme of orality is alluded to in Where the Wild Things Are by means of using food as such an obvious determinant of behaviour. Of the five stages which Freud uses to define the transitions between birth and adulthood, the first stage is called the "Oral Stage". Max in some ways is fixated at this stage, as is shown by his reward for achieving manhood being a nice hot dinner. During the oral stage "the mouth is the main source of pleasure and hence the centre of experience...The stage begins at birth, though it is not clear whether it ends with weaning or at whatever age it would be natural for the infant to wish to be weaned. Persons who are fixated at the oral level not only tend to retain the mouth as their primary (usually unconscious) erotogenic zone and to be mother-fixated (breast-fixated) but also to be prone to manic and depressive mood swings and to identify with others rather than to relate to them as others." (Rycroft, p.108)

Sendak denies the Freudian influence in his portrayal of childhood, saying that "Childhood is a difficult time...it is a marvellous time as well-perhaps even the best time of all...all children's games are not therapeutic attempts to exorcise fear: often they are just for fun. Max, too, is having fun, and not by playing hide-and-seek with Sigmund Freud. He is delighted at having conjured up his horrific beasts, and their willingness to be ordered about by an aggressive miniature king is, for Max, his wildest dream come true...my hero is having the time of his life and ..he controls the situation with breezy

aplomb. Children do watch Max. They pick up his confidence and sail through the adventure, deriving...as much fun as he does." (Caldecott pp.152-153)

Perhaps Max is not playing hide and seek with Sigmund Freud, but Maurice seems to be doing so. Whether he admits it or not, Freudian images are strong in Where the Wild Things Are.

Beginning with the title page, we the readers are immediately introduced to some important issues. A good description comes from Hunt: "The front cover features the title of the book like a headline across the top; reading down the page into the picture our eyes fall on a seated animal-like creature who is dozing off in the foreground at one corner of the page...the "Wild Things" in the headline is generic, almost too abstract. What is a wild thing? In no bestiary will we encounter quite the specimen of "wildness" shown here, bull's head and human feet, sporting a one-piece blue fur suit, sitting like a Manet gentleman...We turn to the title-spread...now, in addition to two others of the original furry breed, pictured on the left, comes a new figure dancing onto the page from the right. Is this too a wild thing? It looks like a boy in some sort of wolf suit...between these images (cover and title page) lies a buffer zone, an undefined "wilderness".Only later may we discover that Max has earned the appellation "wild thing" from his mother, thanks to his "mischief of one kind/ or another"; the benign creature with the horns is "wild" only in appearance, and is easily tamed by Max, "the wildest thing of all." (Hunt, pp.135-136)

In my copy of Where the Wild Things Are, that "buffer zone" of which Hunt speaks is used to further quell any fears a young child might have about this place where the wild things are. A revised version, it reads: "Max's wonderful adventure began the night he put on his wolf suit. He stepped into his private boat and sailed off through night and day, and in and out of weeks, and almost over a year to the place where the wild things are."

Here the child is first of all reassured that the adventure was indeed "wonderful", so the outcome must be good. We are introduced to the luxury in which this adventure takes place- Max has his own private boat. This sounds more like a relaxing summer vacation than a scary adventure. So here the buffer zone really does buff any fears, imagined or real, that a child may have upon entering the land where the wild things are. We are also assured, right from the start, that any pictures of a little boy who looks like a wolf are due to his donning his costume, not to his being part wolf. It is a temporary situation.

Monsters, such as the ones in Where the Wild Things Are, are a common appearance in the nightmares of young children, along with giants, spiders, space ships, weird people and scary animals, among other things. In dealing with these nightmares, therapists try to explain to the child that the fear can be a "good guide.

Fear lets us know we need to protect or strengthen ourself." (Sayre-Wiseman, p.5.) Often it is suggested to a child that he/she draw the dream on paper, and draw possible positive solutions to it.

Ann Sayre-Wiseman believes that we should respect fear and teach children it is okay to be afraid. She believes that the cause of fear is often not enough understanding of the situation. Consequently, more information can reduce or conquer fear.

"Very young children have absolutely all the equipment for feeling that grownups have, including very sophisticated dream imagery. All they lack is the verbal language to describe it, and the freedom and practice to express and defend themselves." (Sayre-Wiseman, p.5.)

In Where the Wild Things Are, Sendak seems to be describing the fear for the child and working out positive solutions so that the fear is either reduced or resolved and thus the child is empowered.

"`Children are not always escaping from the mundane,' he (Sendak) said on one occasion, `But from the horrific- from all kinds of strong, frightening feelings they have; they don't really mind a little anxiety and heart failure, so long as they know it will end all right.'" (Lanes, p.106.)

Max wears his wolf suit. One of the wild things is wearing a

striped jumper which looks homemade. "The wolf symbolises the threat of devouring and being devoured. His is a dangerous and destructive animal." (Bettelheim, p.42) Who then is more fearful to a young child? A little boy in a costume, or a monster in a hand-knit jumper?

While the striped jumper and goofy look on the monster's face seem to make him less than threatening to anyone, the little boy in the wolf suit, even with his cute little face, is a source of psychoanalytic interpretation which needs to be looked at.

"The wolf is also seen as an oedipal figure, a seducer. The wolf could raise sexual issues in the child's mind by the equation of sex with death and violence. Sex and orality are combined by the child's fantasy that impregnation occurs when the mother originally swallows the foetus." (Stronach-Buschel, p.66)

It is interesting how in Sendak's work there are so many sketches of mothers consuming their children, children consuming their mothers, animals consuming children, and children consuming animals. Is Sendak playing with this Freudian concept or are these allusions what is commonly called a "Freudian slip?" Consuming, or as the wild things say, "eating someone up because you love them so" is a way for Max to express his anger.

The wolf as a symbol has been used in a variety of ways, the most famous being the literature written about Sigmund Freud's most

popular patient, the Wolf Man; so named because of a dream he had in childhood where seven wolves appeared outside his bedroom window.

Wolves have been named the "id, the unconscious, desire. They are also reason, and they triumph over time...The wolf uses time, he moves within it. It does not control him...The wolf is the image both of purity of desire and of the Nazi death-squads. Its suppression produces neuroses, its expression produces terror."  
(McLaren, Pp.39-40)

Where the Wild Things Are was first written as Where the Wild Horses Are. The story then was about a young boy travelling to find wild horses. Along the way he face many obstacles. "A character appeared, claiming to be his mother. With a growl the make-believe mother turned into a terrible wolf and chased the boy out of the magic garden, through the forest...

In a moment the boy grew to an old man and frightened the wolf away. I am now an old man, said the boy, and I have still not come to where the wild horses are. And besides, I am tired." (Lanes, p.92.)

The idea of a mother turning into a wolf would indeed be frightening to a child. It is far easier to deal with the final version, a little boy in a wolf costume than the original idea of a mother-figure changing into a wolf.

By any definition, the wolf is the aggressor; an easy winner in the showdown to become "King of the Wild Things". And all it takes is the "magic trick of staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking once" to tame these creatures.

This is 1963. Perhaps Max was just being a stereotypical "boy" in his wolf suit, and engaging in "boys'" play- fantasies of adventure, monsters, building a tent with hammer and nails, and chasing the dog. Had that book been written today, or by a female author, Max (or Maxine, as the main character could be a girl) might be wearing a spacesuit or bird costume, and might be making mischief by overfilling the bath or typing four letter words on mum's computer. The image of Max, his wolf suit, and his play must be seen in the time context in which it was written.

Children's books age with time, and in that aging become "classics". Often in that aging they lose meaning and appeal to young children. An example of this is Beatrix Potter, who Sendak venerates, but whom the children of today find boring, hard to understand, and illustratively dull. Compared to the brightly coloured illustrations and simple, clear words of modern children's books, Potter is far down the list of choices.

Where the Wild Things Are has not suffered the aging process very much at all. Although from a feminist perspective it is outdated,



with mother being represented only through the discipline she exerts and the hot meal she prepares, it still holds children's interest and helps to empower them over their fears. The simple language, the clear images, and the underlying theme of being allowed to express and deal with anger appeals to children (and adult children) universally. Dressing up in an animal costume is still popular today, along with a variety of other dress up materials, and imaginative play still surpasses expensive, elaborate toys to the creative child. Lanes seems to agree: "The artist's fantasy is not spun of gossamer; rather it seems built of bricks, made not for the moment but for all ages." (Lanes, p.104.)

Before I move on to discuss the consequences of Max's mischief, I must note that in the scene where Max is terrorising the dog, there is a drawing pinned to the wall by Max the artist. It is a drawing of a monster's face, and bears a striking resemblance to the wild things we meet later in the book. This seems to be a subtle way of introducing the wild things as creations of Max's imagination.

The two illustrations of Max's mischief-making seem relatively innocent. In the original sketch of the scene where Max is nailing a tent support made of handkerchiefs tied together to the wall, the mischief-making is considerably more complex. Max is swinging from the tent support, made of rope, the tent (a bed sheet) is decorated with his drawing of a wild thing, and hanging

from the tent support are a banana, a bucket with one of his mother's boots, and a coat hanger with an adult-looking hat tied to it. Inside the tent is what looks like a lounge room lamp, propped up on a cardboard box, and plugged into a power point just outside the tent. There are paw prints, seemingly from Max's wolf suit feet, all over the walls. Max is shouting. (These illustrations appear in Lanes, p.89)

In a desire to simplify the illustrations, Sendak shows a frowning Max nailing the tent support into the wall, supporting himself on two large books. There is a small stool inside the tent, and the only thing hanging from the tent support is a coat hanger from which dangles a toy dog. As well as simplifying the illustration, Sendak has removed the more aggressive, mischievous elements of the original drawing.

The result of Max's mischief: his mother gets angry and calls him a 'wild thing.' He responds, also in anger, saying 'I'll eat you up!' But the parent has the last word so Max is sent to bed without supper. The illustration here is a frustrated Max, hands on his hips frowning at the closed door. (If looks could kill...)

Stronach-Buschel believes that Max uses imaginative play as an outlet for his anxiety. Citing Freud's definition, she says: "Anxiety is the ego's response to helplessness in the face of internal needs and demands. Freud saw anxiety as threatening in for basic ways: (a) the loss of the love object, (b) castration

fear, (c) superego anxiety, and (d) the loss of the love of an object." (Stronach-Buschel, p.66)

The loss of the love object would be his mother's love, which has turned to anger due to his mischief-making. Max has done what was in his time was frowned upon for a child to do. He has expressed his anger. For that he was punished. He now must suffer the anxiety of having lost not only his dinner but also his mother's love. His aggression may be the result of his powerlessness in this situation.

"Max's mother puts limits on him, frustrates him, and Max responds by wishing to devour and destroy her. Then the threat of losing mother, of being sent away, is present.

Klein's theory (1935/1975) of the depressive position concerns precisely that injury to or loss of the love object. The core of the infantile depressive position is the child's fear of losing the loved object as a consequence of his own hatred and aggression...Because his mother is frustrating him (she sends him to bed with no supper), Max becomes angry at her. He then feels she is the "bad mother" and projects his own anger. He also wishes to devour mother but fears destroying her in the process of incorporating her. He becomes affected by anxiety, which is derived from the aggressiveness." (Stronach-Buschel, p.66)

We are first introduced to the expression "I'll eat you up!" on

this page of the book, and later, when Max is ready to return home from the land of the wild things, they say to him "Oh please don't go-we'll eat you up-we love you so!" Max responds with a firm "No!"

The theme of orality, as discussed previously, clearly runs through this story, in both these examples and other references to food and eating. But there is more. I can remember as a child having my cheeks tweaked ceaselessly by doting relatives who would say something like "You're so cute, I could eat you up." Somehow being eaten up was the greatest complement they could pay. It was supposed to be an honour to be thought of as someone's lunch.

Eating and being eaten are themes which run through much of Sendak's work, from his early cartoon sketches to his latest books. In an early sketch, he shows a child eating its mother. This, he explains, is a natural process: "On the face of it, what could be more destructive? But, in fact, the child may not view it in that light. It's the most natural thing. There's that great, luminous breast hanging over your head; if you have that much of the mother, why not more? Obviously she's there for you. There's something both monstrous and poignant about it." (Lanes, p. 239.)

To deal with his anger and frustration, Max turns to fantasy. His room grows slowly, over the course of three pages, into a

forest. In the first picture the bed posts and the door frame have turned into leafy trees. The second picture shows more vegetation, but the outline of the bed, carpet, door, and window are still clearly visible. By the third picture we have been gradually and safely brought into the forest, with trees recognisable from the two previous drawings, the same moon and the same little boy in a wolf suit. The difference now is that the walls of Max's bedroom have changed. The text reads: " The walls became the world all around." Anything to do with the actual bedroom is no longer in the picture.

The scene changes rapidly to the ocean, but again it is non-threatening because we are told that it is Max's private boat and indeed his name is inscribed on the helm of the boat. Anger is no longer visible on Max's face. He smiles happily, but a hand placed firmly on his hip seems to indicate that he is very much in control of the situation.

Time is dealt with in this story in a very childlike fashion. Max sails off "through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year" which indicates a child's limited understanding of time and distance. When he returns home he repeats this process in reverse: "over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day." The time involved could be anywhere from one second to a lifetime, and the distance could be the distance from where Max was originally standing in his room to his bed, or it could be a million miles away. Whatever, he

reaches his destination: the place where the wild things are.

The drawings of the wild things were inspired by Sendak's Brooklyn relatives. As he tells Selma Lanes: "I remembered how I detested my Brooklyn relatives as a small child. They came almost every Sunday, and there was my week-long anxiety about their coming the next Sunday. My mother always cooked for them, and, as I saw it, they were eating up all our food. We had to wear good clothes for these aunts, uncles, and assorted cousins, and ugly plastic covers were put over the furniture. About the relatives themselves, I remember how inept they were at making small talk with children. There you'd be, sitting on a kitchen chair, totally helpless, while they cooed over you and pinched your cheeks. Or they'd lean way over with their bad teeth and hairy noses, and say something threatening like 'You're so cute I could eat you up.' And I knew if my mother didn't hurry up with the cooking, they probably would." (Lanes, p.88)

Upon arriving there, Max looks angry and defiant. The wild things look goofy, and a bit aggressive. One wild thing, resembling a lion/rhinoceros with a goat-like creature on his back, reaches out angrily towards Max's boat. The goat, and the two other wild things, look pleased to see Max.

"They roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth and rolled their terrible eyes and showed their terrible claws" says the text, but the illustrations seem to contradict this. They don't look so terrible at all. Children seem quite

amused by them.

A fantasy comes true for Max when he tames the wild things by staring into their eyes without blinking once. This was enough to give him power over these so-called "terrible" beasts. Their response was to crown him and make him king of all the wild things. He is given a royal tent, not unlike the one he himself constructed at the beginning of the book. Max orders the 'wild rumpus' to begin.

The illustrations at the beginning of the book are relatively small, and there has been text throughout. Over the pages the illustrations increase gradually in size. When the wild rumpus begins, the illustrations take over the entire double page, and no text is needed.

Max and the wild things dance beneath a full moon, shouting and jumping and generally having a good time. By morning they are happily swinging from tree branches. Some time later they are dancing in a forest, with Max their king riding on the back of the fiercest-looking wild thing. What a party!

The next illustration is getting smaller again, and the text indicates that the wild rumpus is over, with Max punishing the wild things the way he was punished, by sending them to bed without their supper. The picture is of three very weary wild

things, dozing on the grass, and Max sitting on a stool in his kingly tent, looking glum and pensive. He misses the security of being somewhere where he is loved best of all.

Max's mother never appears in this story, but as Sendak says, her `tokens' show that while she is firm, she is loving and caring. Max's home environment is a stable one. "What interests me is what children do at a particular moment in their lives when there are no rules, no laws, when emotionally they don't know what is expected of them." (Caldecott, p. 207) Max gets angry and lashes out at his mother. Later, he resolves his anger and probably regrets his actions. "But," says Sendak, "the problem for children, with their primitive logic and lack of experience is passing from one critical moment to the next." (Caldecott p.208.)

From the great distance of "far away cross the world" the smell of good things to eat turns Max homeward. When he does get home his supper is waiting for him, still warm. His anger is spent, his forgiveness is complete.

But when Max leaves the wild things, they become upset at losing their love object, just as Max had become upset at losing his mother's love for being mischievous. Just as Max had threatened to eat his mother, the wild things threaten to eat him- out of love, of course.

The wild things go into their wild frenzy, but this time instead



of having to overcome his fear of them by taming them, Max just gets back into his boat and calmly waves good-bye. He is no longer angry or frustrated.

The illustrations continue to diminish in size as Max backtracks over the route he took to the wild things, implying that he is heading back in the direction from which he came. In the last picture he is back in his bedroom, and the only "forest" in it is the pot plant by the window. The wolf suit is still on, but the hood has come off to reveal his hair, and one hand is on his head in a "Thinker" position.

Max looks weary, but satisfied. On the table with the pot plant is a bowl of something hot (the last page of the book has no illustrations, but the words "and it was still hot), a glass of milk, and a piece of cake. This must have been the food he had smelled from across the world. The tangible; his supper and ultimately his mother's love, have won out over the intangible; power, fantasy, anger.

According to Hunt, this story demonstrates Piaget's cognitive development theory, "the passage from pre-operational and concrete operational thought to formal operations, from the various 'realisms' to the recognition of symbol." (Hunt, p.137.) He also sees the symbols of doorways, windows, natural and unnatural lighting as indications of the degree of understanding of the character. In this story Max has crossed a threshold and

progressed to a deeper understanding of his situation. He has gone from child to young man. He stands pensively, and his wolf suit is coming off.

"The 'wild things' are, of course, the feelings within us, and if we lose contact with them and with our childhood being we become defenders of the Social Lie and the forces of death, as we mouth platitudes about 'reverence for life.' But life demands us to defend not denatured human beings but rather transformed and transforming boys and girls, men and women." (Cott, p.67.)

It is interesting to note that Where the Wild Things Are has been used successfully with autistic children. "One child, who had never exhibited any sign of connection to reality, clutched the book and spoke. Others smiled and looked interestedly at the pictures." (Lanes, p.107)

Children have responded honestly to all of Sendak's books, either loving them and wanting to marry him, or hating him and wishing him an early death. He mentions in several interviews a letter from a little boy who wanted to know how much it would cost to get to the place where the wild things are because, if he could afford it, he and his sister wanted to spend their summer vacation there.

In his acceptance speech for the 1964 Caldecott Medal for Where the Wild Things Are being the most successful picture book of

1963, Sendak spoke about the element of fantasy: "Max, the hero of my book, discharges his anger against his mother, and returns to the real world sleepy, hungry, and at peace with himself. Certainly we want to protect our children from new and painful experiences that are beyond their emotional comprehension and that intensify anxiety: and to a point we can prevent premature exposure to such experiences. That is obvious. But what is just as obvious-and what is too often overlooked-is the fact that from their earliest years children live on familiar terms with disrupting emotions, that fear and anxiety are an intrinsic part of their everyday lives, that they continually cope with frustration as best they can. And it is through fantasy that children achieve catharsis. It is the best means they have for taming Wild Things.

It is my involvement with this inescapable fact of childhood-the awful vulnerability of children and their struggle to make themselves King of all Wild Things-that gives my work whatever truth and passion it may have." (Lanes,p.107.)

## IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN

In The Night Kitchen is seen by Sendak as homage to growing up in New York during the first half of the twentieth century. The child in him remembers chants, rhymes, colours, characters, posters and advertisements that bombarded his childhood. Here he puts them together in mythical form, bestowing the greatest honour of all on the hero - to be named after Sendak's greatest hero, Mickey Mouse.

"I'm not the milk and the milk's not me! I'm Mickey...

I'm in the milk and the milk's in me.

God bless milk and God bless me." (from the text)

An abandoned Mother Goose project provided Sendak with the inspiration for this rhyme:

"I see the moon,

And the moon sees me;

God bless the moon

And God bless me." (Lanes, p.173.)

The story begins in a cramped New York tenement, depicted here by two pictures drawn on the same page, of a small bed which reaches from one wall to the opposite wall in a room which appears the size of a broom closet. This is Mickey's bedroom. Noise from a floor below stops Mickey from getting to sleep. To shout for quiet, Mickey has only to stand on his bed and yell through the

wall "Quiet down there!" to whomever is making the noise.

From here Mickey tumbles down through the floors of the building "Past the moon and his Mama and Papa sleeping tight into the light of the night kitchen." Falling down past the moon and into the night kitchen, which looks situated on the roof of another building, implies that where Mickey lives is even higher. On the way down he helplessly calls for his mama and papa, but keeps falling before they can be woken to stop him.

Oedipal conflicts can be seen in this scene. As Mickey falls he cries out for first mama and then papa, but we are told that "His mama and papa (are) sleeping tight." His father has won the affection of his mother, as they are together in bed and do not hear Mickey's cries of help.

By this point in the story, Mickey has fallen out of his clothes. Having fallen unnoticed past his parents' bedroom, he lands in the night kitchen, where he falls prey to three foreboding-looking men, whose sinister smiles and gigantic implements and ingredients seem quite threatening.

"When I was a child," Sendak explains, "there was an advertisement which I remember very clearly. It was for the Sunshine Bakers, and the advertisement read 'We Bake While You Sleep!' This seemed to me the most sadistic thing in the world, because all I wanted to do was stay up and watch...it was so arbitrary and cruel of them to do it while I slept...I used to save the coupons showing the three fat

little Sunshine bakers going off to this magic place, wherever it was, at night to have their fun, while I had to go to bed. This book was a sort of vendetta book...to get back at them and to let them know that I was now old enough to stay up at night and know what was happening in the Night Kitchen." (Lanes, p.174.)

The night kitchen is a strange, dreamlike combination of household products and New York buildings. A container of cream towers over buildings ten or more storeys high. A bottle of Kneitel's Fandango is crammed in between tenement buildings, as is a salt shaker and two large jars of jam. Mixer beaters, a cork screw, a bottle opener, and an egg beater tower over the buildings, shining in the midnight sky along with the full moon and several stars.

Explaining the illustrative style of the book as a tribute to Sendak's 1930's childhood in New York, Selma Lanes discusses the symbolism of some of the details. According to Lanes, a large bottle labelled "Kneitel's Fandango" is in reference to Kenny Kneitel, a collector and dealer in Mickey Mouse and other nostalgia items, who has sold Sendak some of his memorabilia. A container labelled "Woody's Salt" refers to Woody Gelman, who was the editor of "Nostalgia Press" and a friend of Sendak's. A flour sack is labelled with a tribute to Sendak's dog, Jennie, whom he describes her on several occasions as 'the greatest love of my life,' and who was born in 1953 and died in 1967. A giant

cream container lists two addresses from the Sendak's childhood: 1717 West 6th St. and 1756 58th St. References to friends and family appear on other containers, as does Sendak's date of birth. (from Lanes, pp.182-183)

Perrot adds to this: "Sendak makes no secret of his intentions: the kosher boy Mickey, who undergoes so clever a culinary elaboration with the box of 'Mama's baking powder,' is patented June 10th, 1928'- the author's birthday. The word 'pure' repeated on the cream box hints at another obsession Sendak finds pleasure in exorcising: that of the purity prescribed by ancestral rules that would now seem useless were they not granted new meaning by the Jewish sense of solidarity." (Perrot, 1990, p.74)

Finally, the dedication of the book is to Sendak's parents, who at the time of writing were both in failing health.

Mickey lands in a large mixing bowl in which a dough-like substance has already been placed. While falling, Mickey had fallen out of his clothes, and here he lands in all his vulnerability with a soft bed of bread dough cushioning his fall. He should feel safe.

But lurking on the adjoining page, with a wicked-looking wooden spoon protruding the page's border, are three smiling old men, all of whom are modelled after Oliver Hardy of Laurel and Hardy. Laurel would have seemed much less threatening. "Sendak at one

point considered picturing the bakers as three animals. It proved to be an old Laurel and Hardy rerun on TV-"Nothing but Trouble- that gave him the inspiration to cast a trio of Hardy look-alikes as bakers in his book." (Lanes, p.179)

These seemingly jolly old men somehow denote danger to a vulnerable child. Besides the wooden spoon, they are carrying giant containers of flour, baking soda and salt. Something awful lurks on the pages beyond. It reminds me of Sendak's Brooklyn relatives, who thought he was so cute they could eat him up. They were always hungry , and he was always worried that they would really eat him up.

In the fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel, the orality of both the children and the witch are explored. "The witch, who is a personification of the destructive aspects of orality, is bent on eating up the children as they are on demolishing her gingerbread house. When the children give in to untamed id impulses, as symbolised by their uncontrolled voraciousness, they risk being destroyed. The children eat only the symbolic representation of the mother, the gingerbread house; the witch wants to eat the children themselves." (Bettelheim, p.162.)

And the three bakers really do act out this fantasy. Believing Mickey to be the milk, the missing ingredient, they mix him into the batter, chanting something that sounds like a skipping song: "Milk in the batter! Milk in the batter! Stir it! Scrape it!



Make it! Bake it!" and all we see of Mickey by this time is one very small hand reaching out of the cake in desperation. The Mickey cake is proudly led to the Mickey Oven. Here Mickey Mouse probably takes over, as Sendak says that once Mickey Mouse became popular, everything from Mickey toothbrushes to toys, lights etc., sported the name of Disney's popular mouse.

Is Mickey really being acculturised by being cooked; initiated into the strange society of the Night Kitchen? Perrot notes the work of French anthropologist Levi Strauss who said "The individuals who are 'cooked' are those deeply involved in a physiological process...the conjunction of a member of a social group with nature must be mediated through the intervention of cooking fire whose operation thus ensures that a natural creature is at one and the same time cooked and socialised." (Perrot, 1991, p.71)

Fortunately for Mickey, before the cake is finished baking, he pokes his head through the smoke to try to explain that he is not the milk, he is Mickey. The first baker with the wooden spoon walks away from the smoke, disappointed. The second puts finger to lips in an attempt to quiet Mickey. The third baker lurks over the top of the oven, eyes narrowed and frowning.

But Mickey is confident- this is his fantasy. Wrapped safely in dough which resembles a one-piece sleeper, warm and snugly on cold winter nights, Mickey rises from the oven into some bread

dough. Using baking techniques he kneads, punches, pounds and pulls the dough into the shape of an aeroplane which he uses to escape the bakers and the oven. On take off, the bakers are still chasing after Mickey with measuring cup and spoons, believing that he is the milk for the morning cake.

Mickey is fearless as he soars above them, grabbing the measuring cup on the way, and travels over giant versions of Baby syrup, "Absolutely Pure" condensed food, infant food, and rolled white oats and over the Milky Way to the top of a giant milk bottle. The bakers look up at him, in various stages of intrigue and amusement.

The Milky Way is an interesting analogy at this point in time, considering that Mickey has just been mistaken for milk and that he lands up in a giant bottle of milk. Has Mickey actually returned to his mother, whose milk was his original life source? In The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets Barbara Walker explains the concept of the Milky Way as follows:

"The Milky Way is our galaxy, from the Greek gala, "Mother's milk." the ancients believed this heavenly star-stream issued from the breasts of the Queen of Heaven. Worshippers of Argive Hera said the stars were made of milk from Hera's Moon-Cow incarnation. Ionians said the stars came from the udder of their own Moon-Cow, Io, "the Moon." Others said the Moon-Cow was Europa, consort of Zeus as a totemic white bull. All White Moon-cows were the same Goddess, known from

India to Scandinavia as the nourisher of the world and the mother of the star-spirits....

Names differed, but everywhere the Milky Way was regarded as the Goddess' star-milk, which formed curds to create worlds and creatures." (Walker, pp. 657-658)

The Milky Way, along with the moon, become important symbols in Sendak's work. "The moon is of primary importance in the folklore of peoples ruled by the traditional lunar calendar (Gaignebet 33): the nightly celestial body is the "gate" of the sky and when full and `open' allows free circulation of dead men's souls between heaven and earth through the Milky Way." (Perrot, 1990, p.77)

From the role of pilot, Mickey becomes "the milkman" and dives into the bottle, using the measuring cup to pour milk all over himself. His dough sleeper falls away from him and he becomes one with the milk. "I'm in the milk and the milk's in me" he chants. "He reaches the night kitchen at the exact moment when his plane crosses the moon; then the moon stands in the centre of the page as though presiding over his ritual immersion in the bottle, which brings him back to the maternal element and qualifies him as a truly magical agent or donor." (Perrot, 1990, p.72)

Maternal influences, symbolised by the moon, form a polarity with male cooking, and it seems that maternal influences are superior.

"This male-female polarity shifts into a mixed system of `high' and `low' categories; whereas the bakers are in the lower part of the town, the moon plays the symmetrically dominant role of the absent but virtual mother by watching through the window as the child in his dream falls from his bed and calls to his parents for help. The mother, implicitly located in a room at the top, gives us an inkling of the true divinity enthroned on the heights of the modern matrilineal firmament." (Perrot, 1990, p.73)

Mickey swims to the top of the milk bottle with a full jug of milk, and pours the milk into the mixing bowl which two of the bakers hold below. This appeases the bakers, who continue making their cake, strumming a wooden spoon guitar and using a funnel megaphone to sing and dance together, forgetting Mickey.

Mickey becomes the rooster, crowing at the break of dawn. In his naked glory, his arms forming wings, and his measuring cup his comb, Mickey perches near the top of the milk bottle and lets out a big "Cock a Doodle Doo!" which rivals his "Quiet down there !" cry at the beginning of the book, and which marks a point of exit from the fantasy which began with the former cry. Sliding down the side of the bottle, measuring cup falling away, a sleepy Mickey falls again, this time straight into his bed and pyjamas, "cake free and dried."

"Oh," "Ho," "Hum" and "Yum" are Mickey's only sounds upon re-

entry into his real world, sounds one might hear from a sleeping child.

The final page looks like an advertisement for milk. Here we see Mickey in his dough sleeper, gripping a largish bottle of milk proudly, and backed with a sun graphic. Mickey is important, he is in the centre of attention. We are told that thanks to Mickey we have cake every morning. Thanks to Mickey, and thanks to milk.

Milk represents a mother's nourishment. A mother is the source of food, of loving, of nurturing. What can we make of it in In the Night Kitchen? The three bakers keep thinking that Mickey is the milk (nourishment) they need for the cake they are baking. Would this be a way of emasculating Mickey, making him into a woman?

"The theme of In the Night Kitchen is a dream, in this instance a happy one that poses few problems for its hero, and asks nothing of its audience beyond the willingness to surrender to its own irrepressible dream logic," says Lanes (Lanes, p.175)

Yet Sendak's own comments suggest otherwise: "It's mad...It comes from the direct middle of me, and it hurt like hell extracting it...It's about as regressed as I imagine I can go." (Lanes, p.174)

"Adult readers are disturbed by In the Night Kitchen's candid acceptance of a young child's sexuality and the fact that its hero, Mickey, is unclothed for a good part of the story. As one new York critic saw it, "The naked hero wallows in dough, swims in milk, and otherwise disports himself in a manner that some might interpret as a masturbatory fantasy...Sendak is dealing with a child's sexual feelings and he will doubtless offend those who are unprepared to acknowledge such feelings." (Lanes, p.185)

Sendak states over and over again that In the Night Kitchen is a tribute to his childhood and to New York. Its strength is in its hero who, like Max in Where the Wild Things Are finds a creative solution to his problems. It is a bridging story, between the straight-forward heroics of Max in Where the Wild Things Are to the unresolved 'anti-hero' Ida in Outside Over There.

"The plots slowly move from the representation of a young hero (Max) involved in adventures due to the implicitly comforting influence of a virtual mother, to a boy (Mickey) meeting successive parental substitutes that qualify him as a true heir to the family magic, down to a couple of heroes (Ida and Baby) facing the absence of a father whose 'power,' expressed through his faraway song, can survive only through the elder daughter's active support. (Perrot, 1990, p.82)

## OUTSIDE OVER THERE

When I first saw *Ida*, beautifully illustrated on the front cover of Outside Over There, I was relieved to finally see a female in an heroic role in a Sendak story. There had been Rosie many years before this, but Rosie was an anti-hero; hers was the role of born loser, ever hopeful of success and a following. *Ida* seemed different. She stoops beneath the title rectangle, one hand reaching out to hold the baby sister who is about to pull mercilessly at the flowers in the garden. The other hand steadies her balance and comfortably holds a horn which we learn later is *Ida's* "Wonder Horn." *Ida* is balanced and in control. But her eyes are focused out at something we cannot see. Could it be that she is looking out to sea where, as we later learn, her papa is away?

The title page shows *Ida*, a smaller figure with the illustration only in the bottom right quarter of the page, still guiding her sister, but this time a faceless, robed figure, presumably some sort of ghost or goblin, sits crouched just beyond the small gate, only footsteps from where the baby is attempting her own first steps. Both little girls seem unaware of the figure lurking closeby.

By the time we reach the double-page title, which includes the author's name, *Ida* is holding her sister, the goblin is facing frontwards and seems to be reaching out to them, and three other

faceless goblins are approaching, one carrying a horn which is identical to Ida's Wonder Horn in the story, and another carries a ladder, presumably the one used to enter the house and steal Ida's sister.

Both the horn and the ladder are sexual symbols in psychoanalysis. "Horns were connected with the oldest Tantric belief concerning male vitality: that by suppression of ejaculation, mystic energy mounts up the spine to the head and flows forth in wisdom and magic power, made visible by horns." (Walker, p.409.)

Further to this Cirlot adds: "Jung offers the explanation that the horn is a dual symbol: from one point of view it is penetrating in shape, and therefore active and masculine in significance; and from the other, it is shaped like a receptacle, which is feminine in meaning." (Cirlot, p.151.)

Ladders symbolise the joining of man and woman in a climax of sexual bliss, achieved through the heavenly union of two souls. (Walker, p.525.) No wonder Ida looks worried. The reader is forewarned.

The dedication page shows Ida carrying her crying baby sister away (Ida's back is to us) and a goblin following close behind. This time we see a goblin foot, and lo and behold!- It is just like a human foot. The dedication is to Barbara Brooks, a



publisher, but the book seems to be about Sendak's older sister, Natalie, who was just Ida's age when she looked after Maurice, who was then a baby, not unlike Ida's sister.

The opening lines, "When Papa was away at sea, and Mama in the arbor, Ida played her wonder horn to rock the baby still- but never watched" seem to come straight from a Victorian folktale. I would have expected something similar to Shalom Aleichem or Isaac Bashevis Singer from Sendak. After all, he'd already explored his New York Jewish heritage and his passion with Mickey Mouse. "When I conceived this book, I set it in Mozart's time, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, the decade he died. So I was thinking of 'The Magic Flute,' thinking of a little girl in a raincoat and boots, thinking of the end of the eighteenth century" notes Sendak. (Caldecott, p.208)

It seems to me that this story is more influenced by northern European tradition, both in the folklore and in the visual arts, and the time frame is much earlier, possibly in Renaissance times. I hear traditional English, Scottish and Irish ballads, early nursery rhymes and fairy tales in those lines. I see images of northern European Renaissance paintings in the images.

But from the British Isles, Austria or Poland (Sendak's parents' country of origin,) the message is the same: Papa is away and Mama isn't around. As Sendak says, "When papa was away at sea' is saying it all because most papas are away at sea- or

they're at sea. In terms of making a living, dealing with children, dealing with wives- "Papa ain't there." (Otten and Schmidt, p.23).

In furthering his case, Sendak refers to the letter from Papa to the family in the last scene, where he tells Ida to take care of things at home until he returns, "That Papa-letter is meant to be ironical. Here's this great pompous ass, the father, sending his love from across the sea and dumping this huge burden on this little girl and claiming that his love for her is sufficient reason. And that has to suffice; she has to take care of the baby, she has to take care of herself, and she has to be content with that. And she is. She truly loves her Mama and her Papa." (Otten and Schmidt, p.23-24)

While Sendak claims to be portraying the father as a pompous ass, his treatment of the mother, by his explanation, is much more gentle. She is not the bimbo I would have guessed her to be, who sits daydreaming in the garden while one of her children is being kidnapped. From psychoanalysis we learn that the mother is the most important person in the child's life throughout what Freud termed the "pre-oedipal phases of development." Her job is to satisfy the child's needs at whatever cost to herself. (from Rycroft, p. 92) According to Sendak, she is just a woman who has taken a minute off from full-time motherhood and in this minute disaster strikes:

"Ida's mother is not a monster. She is not indifferent to

her children. She happens to miss her husband, and for one brief moment she leaves the baby. Even loving mamas turn away sometimes. You have to vacuum the floor, answer the telephone, go to your job, and just then kids are caught in a crisis-a very quiet crisis. You don't hear a scream, you don't hear a fall, but something occurs." (Caldecott, p.210)

Deluca argues that for a child, this is not enough. "Is this the perception the child is likely to have in reading this book- that Mama was maybe just a moment before actively involved with Ida and the baby? Ida is a child in trouble. Her young spirit is burdened with jealousy and loneliness; she is charged with caring for the baby when she'd rather play her horn." (Deluca, pp.145-146)

Ida's mother seems to possess the fallibility of Hansel and Gretel's stepmother, Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother, and other women in traditional fairy tales who were called aunts, step mothers, step sisters, grandmothers- anything but "mother" when human frailty and desire were given priority over the so called "sainthood" of devoted, gull-time mothering. These women were labelled as evil, possessed and often "witches." Ida's mother is redeemed by the passage of time to 1979, when the book was written, so she only appears to be a daydreaming and slightly irresponsible woman, still labelled "mother." Seated in the mystical "arbor," she appears to be "off with the fairies."

After two pages of text, the situation so far shows us two absentee parents with flimsy excuses for their inattention to their two young children. Page three, enter Ida.

"Sendak agonised a good deal, however, over his heroine's name. Was it the right one? It contained ID- all to the good because Ida was a primal child. The name was also auspicious in that it belonged to Mrs. Ida Perles, the Sendak children's second mother as they were growing up in Brooklyn...Sendak realise(d) that the letters of Ida also appear, backwards, in his mother's name-Sadie. The artist was delighted. Moreover, he is certain that he had already subconsciously known this fact when he wrote the lines:

If Ida backwards in the rain

Would only turn around again." (Lanes, pp.233-234)

Ida is a little girl created from subconscious memories into which Sendak seems to dip freely. Outside Over There is based on his childhood fears, including a story about a young girl caught in a rainstorm.

"When I conceived this book...I was...thinking of a little girl in a raincoat and boots. And I was thinking of my sister, Natalie, who is nine years older than I am and who had to care for me...I remember her demonic rages. I remember her losing me at the New York World's Fair of 1939. I also remember that she loved me very much. But my parents were both working hard and

didn't have time, and so I was dumped on her. And that is the situation in Outside Over There: a baby is taken care of by an older child named Ida, who both loves and hates the newcomer." (Caldecott, pp.208-209)

While describing Ida as "pluckier" than his other heroes, and boasting of the all-female cast of characters in the story, Sendak gives Ida a rough deal. For all her trouble she is given very little consolation. "The experience of the kidnapping-the ultimate horror and punishment for a moment's inattention-evokes momentary and not terribly convincing anger and ultimately a kind of bewilderment. That she endures and everyone survives is about as much triumph as we get in the book...(Deluca, p. 146)

While blowing her horn, expressing her creativity, Ida is ignoring her responsibility to her sister. Her horn is a wonder horn, both in sexual and musical terms. While suppressing her father's desire, Ida gains the power to create. But by so doing, she faces tragedy brought on by her own neglect and self-indulgence. While Ida is playing her horn, the illustration shows two faceless goblins near the top rung of a ladder, entering the room where she and the baby are.

The next illustration further demonstrates Ida's neglect. She plays her tune, eyes focused out the window (at the sea beyond, or deep in creative thought?) The baby's panic and screams at her abduction, and the replacement of the baby by an ice figure, go unnoticed by Ida.

With shades of evil and seemingly the devil being alluded to, Sendak still states, " I don't have, being Jewish, a sense of the devil. That was not a part of my mythology at all. The devil was a kind of literary idea which was imposed upon me, and I think my reaction to him is based on that literary idea or, better yet, musical idea." (Otten, p.18) The process of creating this book is repeatedly described by Sendak as a birthing process.

When Ida finally puts down her horn to give the baby a hug, it melts. It is a changeling and Ida realises angrily that goblins had been there. The scene outside shows a raging storm on the previously calm sea. The image likens itself to a northern Renaissance painting; the harsh seas foreshadows the sailor's death. And is not "death" the ultimate climax? How often are people quoted as shouting "I'm Dead!" in any number of languages, at orgasm? But what has happened to her father, as well as her sister? Ida's adrenalin starts to flow, as she hurries into action.

This is where the famous yellow raincoat comes into the action. Based on the picture from Sendak's childhood, Ida dons her mother's rain cloak, thereupon taking on more fully her mother's role than before. She tucks her wonder horn phallus safely in the pocket, thereby replacing her mother as the object of her father's desire. But, says Sendak, it is here that she makes a

serious mistake.

Besides alleviating the boredom of your typical rescue scene, this section of the book helps to justify why this book has won acclaim both as a children's and as an adult story. Sendak's cryptic puzzles are at their best here, or so he says:

"I may be pushing it too far, but in a way the book is like a mirror reflection; It's called Outside Over There, but if you hold the title up to the mirror, so to speak, it says `Inside in Here.'...And the whole construction of the writing, which is what I'm so proud of, gives the sense of being written backwards. Some people will be disturbed by the construction of the sentences- they may be anxious to put commas in places like `Ida mad' but the words are going their own strange route, and it's critical to the book. I don't want to give away what I know it's all about (because in a sense I do know what it's all about,) but one of the clues is to reverse everything that happens. I mean, Ida has to reverse things: Only when her father tells her what to do in his song (`If Ida backwards in the rain/would only turn around again/ and catch those goblins with a tune/ she'd spoil their kidnap honeymoon!') does she turn right side round and begin to solve the dilemma. Until then she's done everything wrong side round." (Cott, p.75)

Furtherto this Steig states: "Outside Over There really is

...anywhere primal dangers might lurk, outside one's own comfortable bedroom, home, and family. Yet 'outside over there' is also 'inside in here,' both the unconscious mind and the domestic world where all the child's guilty feelings of Oedipal desire, aggression, and jealousy (sibling and other) originate; and Sendak's tale could almost be taken as a paradigm of how what is 'heimlich' (domestic, private, secret, forbidden) becomes 'unheimlich' (alien, threatening, strange, but also eerily familiar.) (Steig, pp.208-209.)

Does this reversal expand to include Idas's fears? Is Ida indeed "projecting her fears upon her baby sister, who in Ida's phantasy becomes the victim in place of the nearly adolescent Ida; Ida can then save her sister?" (Steig, p.209)

Ida's mistake is that in her haste she goes backwards out the window and heads in the opposite direction to where the goblins are hiding her sister. Only with her father's help, which comes to her in song through words of advice instead of in person by a responsible parent, does she reverse her actions and proceed towards a happy ending.

"Backwards may have various implications, including regression, but in the context of the previously turned backs of Ida and her mother it suggests to me a continuation of the unconscious neglect of her sister, whom she is now



trying to save from the goblins but cannot see. It is the voice of the father (psychologically perhaps the introjected father or the superego, but also Ida's actual phantasy of the presence of the father who she feels has abandoned her) that provides Ida with the right kind of magic: His command, in effect, means "Turn around and look!" (Steig, p.214)

It is a riddle which Sendak refuses to explain, but which he beckons us in post-story interviews to solve. "You've got to puzzle that one out. Nothing is as easy as it looks. Backwards has its price, even though that seems to be the right direction." (Cott, p.76)

Perhaps Ida should have recognised and lived through her Freudian "Electra" conflict. Similar to the "Oedipal" conflict in young boys, it is a time when the young girl would like to get rid of the mother to sleep with the father. Part of what is called the "Phallic Stage," it is a stage which Freud, and followers of his Psychodynamic theories, believe that all children must pass through. It is resolved when the young girl accepts the fact that she cannot have her father. She then begins to identify with the same-sex parent. (from Harris, and Lievert, 1987, p. 87) While this stage is usually complete by age seven, at nine years of age Ida is slower than average to pass through this Phallic stage.

Is Sendak saying that Ida's mistake is that she hasn't yet learned to identify with her mother, and is still uselessly trying to seduce her father? Ida, says Sendak, is foolish. She is whirling by the robber's caves instead of in the direction of the goblins.

With Papa's song of advice, Ida not only reverses direction away from the robbers and towards the goblins (out of the frying pan and into the fire?) but is also told to "catch those goblins with a tune." If she is able to catch the goblins, says Papa, she will "spoil their kidnap honeymoon;" she will spoil the consummation of their stolen pleasures. Thus she will prevent her sister from becoming the 'real bride' of a goblin.

The obsession with a baby, and the abduction of a baby, stems from the news of the kidnapped Lindbergh baby of 1930s. Charles Lindbergh was a famous aviator. "That is a memory all middle-aged Americans share, one of the most traumatic experiences of our lives. I remember it. I remember the headlines in the newspaper. I remember the anxiety. Lindbergh was the Prince Charles of his day, and his wife the Princess Di, and their baby a royal prince, a beautiful, blond, charming baby. At that time I was a very sickly child and very worried about it, mainly because my parents were indiscreet enough to bewail my sickliness and carry on about how long I'd be around.

I learned early on that it was a very chancy business, being

alive. Then this disaster occurred; an immaculate, rich baby, living on an estate, surrounded by warriors, you would think- German shepherds, guards, all the rest-on an ordinary evening, on an ordinary March day, this precious baby is taken away. I lived in terror and dread of what might happen to him...Outside Over There became my exorcism of the Lindbergh case. In it, I am the Lindbergh baby and my sister saves me. It's Charlie Lindbergh brought back to life."(Caldecott, pp209-210)

While Ida's sister is modelled after the kidnapped and murdered Lindbergh baby, the five goblins have a somewhat more pleasant origin, that of the Dionne quintuplets whose early years were well-documented in fairy-tale fashion in the newspapers of the 1930's. "The goblins in Outside Over There number five, and it has occurred to the artist that this undoubtedly had something to do with the Dionne quintuplets. No one who was a child in the thirties could fail to think in terms of those five babies. We saw pictures of them every time they smiled, cut a tooth, or got a new toy." (Lanes, p.235)

Unlike the large, scary-looking goblins of childhood fears, these goblins are babies, just like Ida's sister. Seen without their hooded cloaks, they are difficult to fear. While agreeing that the goblins are funny, Sendak ponders the way many of his readers are taken aback by them but adds: "They are threatening, too, or course; they're meant to be threatening. I was just remembering a

little girl's letter about how she wished their clothes fit them better. That's why their heads didn't show, because their clothes didn't fit them better- so she thought." (Otten, p.17)

Comparing the goblins to those he illustrated for a Grimm fairy tale, Sendak says: "The Outside goblins are a younger bunch. They come at Ida's call. They are her henchmen. They are her dark insides acting out for her. They also have the impish, uncontrollable movements of infants. I tried hard to get that sense of broken movement that babies have- collapsing and colliding into everything." (Otten, p.18)

If the goblins are indeed Ida's "dark insides acting out for her" then, like Max taming the Wild Things, she must defeat them with a trick. Max used the trick of staring into the wind things' eyes without blinking. Ida, whom Sendak describes as sly, uses her wit and her magic horn to entice them into dancing until they drowned. The feminine aspect of Jung's "horn" comes into play as Ida seduces the goblins and ultimately destroys them. She is like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, and her music has a power which has evolved from her own power to create and which gains control over the goblins.

The goblins can't stop dancing when they hear the sound. They dance until they can't breathe; they plead that they are sick and must go to bed, and then with frenzied music which Ida continues to play "a hornpipe that makes sailors wild beneath the ocean

moon...they quick churned into a dancing stream."

"There is a reference to the hornpipe making `sailors wild,' which recalls Ida's father the sailor and makes me think of a girl's ambivalence about her father's sexuality, for both `hornpipe' and `wild' may be sexually loaded words."  
(Steig, p.215)

Ida has conquered the goblins, just as Max conquered the Wild Things. With the Phallic Stage over, Ida emerges with clear, adult-like vision; with sexuality giving her a patriarchal type of power. It is then that she discovers her sister and is able to take on a more responsible role, without the internal conflicts of the Electra complex; it is then that she passes by Mozart in his cottage in the woods, " to show how close she is - though she doesn't know it consciously- to that music and its power. Ida may not be ready to understand the joy and sorrow of the human spirit embodied in the figure of Mozart at the keyboard, but it is one thing an adult can offer to a child whose problems cannot be acted out and conquered in a single dream."  
(Deluca, p.146) Ida has somehow gained a rite of passage.

When she returns home with her sister, her mother is still sitting in the arbor, and now we are shown a letter from Papa, the ever-absent power figure in the story. He states: "I'll be home one day, and my brave, bright little Ida must watch the baby and her Mama for her Papa, who loves her always." In other

words, be a good kid and keep the home fires burning. I'll be home from work soon. How much is Ida supposed to be able to bear? Even after her ordeal her mother is still "off with the fairies," and this time Papa reinforces her mother's behaviour by officially dumping the responsibility on Ida. Moreover, the last page informs us that is "just what Ida did." Has Ida passed through the Phallic stage, or has she, in her fantasy, actually killed the mother and won over the father?

And will the father ever come home? The views of the sea in the early pages of the book show a calm sea which becomes stormy. This is often symbolic of disaster or death at sea. While the letter states that he will be home one day, it is written like a last will. Father is leaving Ida with the responsibility of the family. It does not seem that he is ever coming home.

This book is, as Sendak suggests, a statement about the absentee father. But it seems less credible in its handling of what Sendak sees as a moment's lapse in the life of the mother. Even after the ordeal she appears unaware of what has happened, and certainly has not resumed her motherly role. If this book is to provide the security a child needs to feel comfortable in fantasy, there should be a secure, loving parent, such as Max's mother in Where the Wild Things Are. There is no such parent here, unless Sendak is trying to put Ida into the role of parent to her sister. Where is the joy and excitement of childhood that are celebrated in Where the Wild Things Are and In the Night

## Kitchen?

Ida is not a stereotypical child to which young children can easily relate. She is more like the child "inside" whom adults discover after much introspection. Young children have difficulty relating to her.

The illustrations, for all their artistic merit, lack the simplicity and brightness that draws children into the story. The words are stilted. They are like "Spoonerisms"- nice cryptic puzzles for curious adults, but probably not clear enough for young children.

Questioning the definition of children's literature, in reference to Outside Over There Deluca states: "The genre bridges the gap between children's and adult literature and is filled with the primitive impulses and the deepest conflicts in all of us...This is the fertile soil of our imagination, these are the patterns of our lives, though bizarre enough so that we may not own them. There again is Sendak's fascination with brash truths the bare bones of things, and there again the challenge to the conventional notions of what children's literature is supposed to be, of what Sendak the artist is supposed to be." (Deluca, pp.146-147)

In Outside Over There, written in 1979, Sendak seems to be moving on. By this point in his career he had begun to design opera sets for Mozart's "The Magic Flute." He was fifty-one years old.

His nieces and nephews, who appear to be his only contacts with children, would have been well-past their early and even middle childhood stages. The only child left to him would have been the child within himself, and that child would have been weary from constant use. The character, Ida, deals with some of the issues of Sendak's childhood, and childhood in general, but in a somewhat repetitive, unenthusiastic way. Perhaps the introduction of a female protagonist is an attempt to explore his sister Natalie's childhood in an effort to come up with fresh material for this new story. I think it would have been to keep himself from getting bored with the story that Sendak invented the words puzzles and backward messages.



## DEAR MILI

Dear Mili is the fourth and last book in this series, and while it relates in many ways to the previous three, it is also vastly different. Unlike the other books, which originated from his own experiences Dear Mili is Sendak's only through its illustrations and possible editing of the text. In 1983 a discovery was made of an 1816 letter written by Wilhelm Grimm to comfort a little girl he had never met. The story in the letter was subsequently translated from the German into English by Ralph Mannheim and illustrated by Maurice Sendak. Sendak, as a child of immigrant parents, would have grown up speaking a fluent Yiddish, a language comprised of 80% German, 10% English and 10% Hebrew. Yiddish words abound in his remarks. Possessiveness of his texts is always mentioned as well as the length of time it takes him to plan the text. I would imagine that Sendak must have had some input into the story as well as the illustrations.

While in previous works Sendak has rejected Christian mythology, he embraces it in this story. After losing members of his family to the Nazi Holocaust, embracing a Christian work by a German author seems unusual. Certainly Sendak uses his powers of illustration to work through the horrors of the Holocaust even though this story takes place in the nineteenth century. That may have been a reason for taking on so foreign a piece to begin with. The illustrations certainly enhance Sendak's art career while relaying his impressions of the terrors of the Holocaust.

As a piece for children, its appropriateness is in question. It seems to no longer hide behind the intention of reaching the child, and aims for the child within each adult; especially the faithful who have bravely given up hiding within the pages of the novel to emerge as grown-up picture book readers. Besides, Wilhelm Grimm wrote for an adult audience as well as a child audience. Adults can appreciate works that give them the space and freedom to create, imagine, interpret. As a parent and preschool teacher, I keep this book in my personal collection and while I would not prevent a young child reading it, I would also not encourage him/her to do so.

In classic Sendak style, the title page draws the reader to the book. The soft pastels and ornate decorations, including cherubs, flowers and leaves, feature a central oval, looking very much like a mirror or photo frame, in which a young woman holding a rose embraces a little girl. They look away from the reader, towards a waterfall at a distance in the oval. Beside them is a rose bush, full of lovely pink blooms. Below this scene are two names, firstly Wilhelm Grimm and beneath it Maurice Sendak, and the title in large bold letters. Until we reach the explanation on an inner title page, it appears that Grimm and Sendak actually did collaborate on this book; author and illustrator are not differentiated. One hundred and seventy years have been bridged and the two legends have come together to formulate this story.

The inner title page clears this up. We are told that the story

is an old tale, newly translated and illustrated, and the credit is given to the three people involved accordingly. The publisher is also noted. Before the story begins, there is a dedication:

"For my sister, Natalie

M.S."

Natalie once again emerges, as she did in Outside Over There, as the protagonist. In Outside Over There she was Ida to Sendak's representation of himself as the baby. Here she is Mili, the "good child," the survivor.

The story begins with the letter. Too many words on one page, especially with no illustrations, to keep a child's attention, but enough to keep an adult reading and re-reading. It is an analogy of a flower drifting away in a stream. After three days it stops for a rest, and is joined by another flower and they travel together until they sink. The same happened with two birds. The moral is that while animals and flowers and brooks can come together, distance prohibits people from doing the same thing. So the letter, and the story that follow must relay the emotion that the writer feels for the little girl.

I have gone back to this page time and time again. In it is the metaphor of the story. In it is the lesson, which all good children must comprehend as a sort of passage out of childhood. While Christian in its origin, it resounds in Jewish folklore; tales which entertain while subtly or not so subtly teaching.

In Grandpa's House, a book written through his son's persuasion, by Philip Sendak, Maurice's father, is an example of Jewish folklore. Maurice has illustrated this story in a style not dissimilar to Dear Mili, and it is perhaps with this story that one should read Dear Mili. It was written in Yiddish, some time in the years before his 1970 death, and was published in 1985. The text and translation are the copyright of Natalie Lesselbaum, Sendak's sister and the same person to whom Dear Mili is dedicated, and the illustrations are the copyright of Maurice. It was translated by a Seymour Barofsky, again not by Sendak himself. Interestingly, In Grandpa's House was published during the formative period of Dear Mili.

"In Grandpa's House is a story about Philip Sendak's life as an American immigrant as well as a fable within which he attempts to pass on his values and beliefs to future generations. The story teaches lessons similar to those taught in Dear Mili, that is, to be kind, fair and generous, even in the face of disaster, and to be brave.

"His desire to instruct came naturally-from the Jew's imbibing of Midrash and holy tale and from the immigrant's extreme social-mindedness and practicality, even in art. And aren't wisdom and honour a grandfather's natural state, too, despite any actual disappointments of old age and grandfatherhood that occasionally break through? Philip Sendak wanted to teach that a child should eat properly,

study, have courage, be fair and just, and leave something for the next generation. (Seymour Barofsky, from Sendak, Philip, In Grandpa's House, The Bodley Head, 1985, pp 41-42)

Both the introductions to Dear Mili and to In Grandpa's House foreshadow the lessons, the morals of the stories to follow. Both seem to need an adult's reading and re-reading to fully understand. In Grandpa's House introduces the story with the real story of Philip Sendak's life, on which many of the situations in the story are based. The introduction to Dear Mili speaks in metaphors of the story itself, in terms which seem to try to clarify for the young child the complex nature of the images to follow. While Dear Mili is dedicated to Maurice Sendak's sister, Natalie, In Grandpa's House is dedicated to Sarah Sendak, Philip's wife and Maurice's mother. Maurice has stated that his mother's name was Sadie. I can only imagine that "Sahrah" was his mother's Yiddish name, and that while her husband continued to use this name throughout her life, living in America demanded an Anglicised name, thus "Sadie."

Maurice was named "Moishe" and Maurice would have been a popular Anglicised version at the time. Other possibilities may have been: Moses, Morris, Michael and Malcolm. "Maurice, the translation of Moishe which Jews were forced (by North American society) to use at this time. This forename is a constant reminder of the cultural duality inscribed in the symbolic representation of his person. This name may also contain an image of death (either "Mort"= death; "hisse"= to drag or lift;

and by a deconstruction, the spirit of the word does not reject in its relationship with the subconscious, "Mor-hisse," i.e., one who 'drags and raises death.'" (Perrot, 1991, p.259)

The message from Philip Sendak is to eat well, be brave and be kind. The message which Maurice conveys in Dear Mili is to be generous with your food, brave, kind and trusting.

"Is not the story of the little girl who escapes from the horrors of the war (the nightmare), thanks to Saint Joseph, with whom she shares her 'Sunday cake,' an artistic transposition of the adventure of Max who, in his frightening and delectable dream, manages to get his dinner by dominating the monsters? To eat, be eaten or give food for eating, to die or not die in the forest, these are the aesthetic questions raised in the universe of 'archaic' childhood impulses, in the wonderland of an illustrator who multiplies the equivalences inspired by the logic of the thought of the modern primitive." (Perrot, 1991, p.259)

With the lessons foreshadowed, the story begins. The text speaks immediately to a reader of middle childhood age or above; there are too many words to keep the attention of a young child. Six sentences, many of which are compound and complex, describe the setting; that of a little cottage at the end of a village, in which lives a widow and her one surviving child, who seems to be blessed.

The illustration portrays the scene with the magnificence of landscape paintings from Renaissance times to the nineteenth century. A gentle-looking woman sits on a seat, holding a basket of flowers on her lap and reaching one hand out to stroke the hair of a little girl seated by her side. Two dogs, a German shepherd and a golden retriever sit peacefully nearby. Maurice Sendak has three dogs of his own, two German shepherds and a golden retriever. The detail in the drawings of the dogs far surpasses that in the drawings of both of the human characters. A small childlike figure, presumably the guardian angel referred to in the text, sits peacefully in a bush beside the cottage.

By the second page of the story, trouble is brewing. The clouds appear dark and fiery. While a table is neatly set outside the cottage, with a tablecloth, pitcher, glass, a plate of food, and a vase with flowers, the mother's arms are outstretched in fear, the little girl clings to her mother's dress, and the German shepherd is hiding under the table, looking out beyond a fallen book. The retriever looks out at the storm. The guardian angel covers his or her face with an arm, while using the other to cling to the tree.

Unlike the devil, which would have been a war symbol in a Grimm story, here we are told that war results because "It was not God's will that the happy life they led together should continue."

"`Great God!' cried the mother, `what a fearful storm is coming!"

Is it coming of its own accord or was it imposed by them? But it is to the little girl that she looks for solutions: "Dear child, how shall I save you from the wicked men!" This is not a question but an exclamation. In other words: I will save you from the wicked men! And interestingly enough, war in the mother's mind is personified as "the wicked men."

While this story certainly speaks of the Holocaust, and pre-1816 wars, there seems to be another, less obvious war going on. It is a war against wicked men. In previous books, men have been either entirely absent, asleep, or absent but controlling. Here they are the enemies. As in previous stories, the attempt to conquer or escape evil often leads the hero into greater danger. Max came face to face with his hungry monster-relatives; Mickey was nearly eaten by a bunch of hungry old men, Ida faced robbers instead of finding her sister, and here the Good Child is sent into the forest with a left over piece of cake which she shares with an old man who ultimately determines her death. Somehow, these heroes seem invincible.

The widow sends her daughter into the forest with a leftover piece of cake as her solution to saving the child from the wicked men. Again, she puts fate in God's hands. "God in His mercy will show you the way," she instructs the little girl. With a few other words of advice she kisses the child goodbye at the forest's edge and lets her go.



As in much western literature, the mother is abandoning the young girl to patriarchy; her fate is to be determined by a male society. The illustration shows a tender scene at the edge of the forest and, hidden amongst the bushes the guardian angel who now has wings.

With the little girl now alone in the forest, the words echo her fear. The wind blows wildly, she thinks that wild beasts will tear her to pieces. Woodpeckers, crows and hawks scream furiously and the stones cut her feet. The illustration shows us the wind, the birds, and also the guardian angel sheltered in a tree trunk close to the child. The fear becomes too much for the little girl, so she stops and for the first time appeals to God for help to carry on.

A double paged illustration follows. The little girl is seated on a low branch in a pensive pose with the guardian angel asleep beside her. While she looks puzzled about what to do next, the angel sleeps peacefully. We see a bridge with people crossing, and buildings in the background, one resembling a tower. A Sendak follower has seen these figures before. They are dark, despairing, victim-like. Resembling characters in his illustrations for the Grimms' "The Goblins," these people look like concentration camp victims on their way to their death. Their skeletal bodies are covered in babushkas and drab-coloured simple clothing. Their posture and facial expressions foreshadow doom. They seem to exist in contrast to the little girl whose

fate must be brighter or else her guardian angel would be awake and worried as before.

The illustration on the next page overpowers the text. A tree has burst forth in magnificent pink bloom, one of which rests in the girl's arms. The guardian angel, whose sex was questionable at first, now appears to be male, although genitals are still hidden by the tree which he clutches with one hand while reaching out to the girl with the other. His size has changed from frame to frame, but now he is about two thirds the size of the girl.

Although she still refers to God in her justification of her situation ("God and my heart are weeping together" and "God is feeding His sheep with roses, why would He forget me?") the author interjects: "I believe it was her guardian angel who, unseen, guided her over cliffs and past deep chasms, for how otherwise could she have come through safely? Most likely the angel had instructed a white dove to fly ahead of the child and show her the way." God or the angel, portrayed as male, are the ones to whom this little girl's survival has thus far been attributed. Her bravery and endurance seem to have had little to do with it. The "wicked men" who created this situation are all but forgotten by the author.

The little girl continues walking and as night falls she looks up at the stars and calls them bright nails on the great door of heaven. She anticipates the joy of God opening the door to

heaven for her. Just then a star falls to earth and by its light she reaches the door of a house and is beckoned to come in.

An old man, whom is later identified as Saint Joseph who guided Jesus, is sitting in the house, waiting for her. There is another German shepherd dog crouched in the corner, possibly modelled after Sendak's third dog. Saint Joseph shelters the Good Child for three days, which in fact is thirty years, and then sends her back to her mother with a rose which, upon blooming will return her to him. On the last page, with no illustration, it is stated that she and her mother are found by neighbours lying dead with the rose in full bloom between them.

There is something disturbing about both the old man's speech and his visual image. "Good evening, dear child, is it you? I've been expecting you a long time," says he. Why does he sound like the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood who, as the little girl enters, is lying in bed waiting for her. Although St. Joseph is infinitely more welcoming, he offers her only water to drink and a few wild roots which the little girl herself must cook and share with the old man. Somehow, the little girl feels satisfied.

Assuming a root to be a phallic symbol, this scene is quite disturbing. An old man whom at this point has yet to be identified to the reader appears out of nowhere, beckons the child in saying he was expecting her. Then he offers her his roots, which she mixes with part of her sweetcake (feminine

sexuality), and demands to partake of the mixture. Though he eats much more than she does, she eats what is left and feels full.

This seems to be a seduction by an overpowering old man on an obedient, obliging and vulnerable little girl. The result seems to be mutual satisfaction; innocence lost. The little girl has entered the phallic/patriarchal order of the world. She can now return to her mother.

Despite her resistance, St. Joseph picks up the little girl and places her in his bed. The next morning when she awakens she finds him sitting beside the bed. The German shepherd's head is resting on the bed, and the sun is shining through the window. The sun is rare in Sendak's illustrations, which are largely moon-dominated. St. Joseph instructs her to go out and gather roots for their supper. "The forest with its skeleton-like roots thus describes in Dear Mili the path of murderous history expressed by images which are understood by people of Western culture." (Perrot, 1991, p.261)

It is these roots which provide their sustenance and help the three days pass for the little girl.

The little girl obliges, and twice more (making three times- a trinity reference?) mixes the roots with the last two portions of her Sunday cake, achieving satisfaction for both herself and the old man. While outside looking for roots, we the readers are finally given an explanation about who the old man is in the

text; St. Joseph who protected the Christ Child. Is he a protector or a paedophile/voyeur? The illustration shows the old man hiding amongst the foliage, watching the little girl. We are told that he is protecting her, but she looks vulnerable to his stare. Is his protection one of sexual ownership; women can't be trusted, so he is guarding her himself?

Suddenly another little girl appears, almost identical to the good child, but blond and with larger eyes. She is said to be the guardian angel, who in the forest was given the features of a young boy, and now we are to believe appears in the form of a little girl who can be seen by the good child. Is she the guardian angel, or the child of a seduced little girl? (The three days, as it turns out, are actually thirty years, so time-wise a pregnancy, delivery and growth of the baby are possible.)

Is this the story of Little Red Riding Hood one step further, after she gets into bed with the wolf? "The wolf gained entrance at the grandmother's home by pretending to be Little Red Riding Hood, and immediately swallowed up the old woman. In Perrault's story the wolf does not dress up as Grandmother, but simply lies down in her bed. When Little Red Riding Hood arrived, the wolf asked her to join him in bed. Little Red Riding Hood undressed and got into bed, at which moment, astonished at how Grandmother looked naked, she exclaimed, 'Grandmother, what big arms you have!' to which the wolf answered: 'To better embrace you!' Then Little Red Riding Hood

said: 'Grandmother, what big legs you have!' and received the reply: 'To be better able to run.' (Bettelheim, p.167)

The other little girl, guardian angel or love child, helps the good child gather roots, which again she prepares and shares with St. Joseph.

A double paged illustration shows the girls embracing in an old Jewish cemetery while St. Joseph is lurking in a rose garden nearby, about to pick a rose yet to bloom. Between them are old stone Renaissance buildings, seemingly from central Europe, and the eternal child prodigy Mozart lying on the ground conducting a choir of people who resemble concentration camp survivors. In the centre stands a large tiger lily plant in full bloom. Is this the story of the conception of Jesus, retold with Grimm and Sendakian twists?

"Because of its pagan associations with virgin motherhood, the lily was used to symbolise impregnation of the virgin Mary. Some authorities claimed the lily in Gabriel's had filtered God's semen which entered Mary's body through her ear...Christian artist showed the angel Gabriel holding out to Mary a sceptre surmounted by a fleur-de-lis on a lily stalk. A scroll usually issued from Gabriel's mouth, with the words 'Ave Maria gratia plena,' the seminal 'Word,' which made Mary 'full.'...The lily was also called Pash-flower, Paschal flower, Pasque flower, or Passion flower.

Pagans understood that it represented the spring passion of the god, like Heracles, for union in love-death with the Virgin Queen of Heaven, Hera-Hebe, or Juno, or Venus, all of whom claimed the lily. When Hera's milk spurted from her breasts to form the Milky Way, the drops that fell to the ground became lilies." (Walker, pp.542-543)

The last piece of her cake eaten, (her sexuality devoured?) Saint Joseph sends the little girl back to her mother. When she indicates her interest in returning to him, he hands her the red rose we saw him pick in the double-paged illustration on the previous pages saying, "When this rose blooms, you will be with me again."

While the lily symbolised the Virgin goddess, "the red rose represented full-blown maternal sexuality." (Walker, p.866) Is the old man saying to come back when you are sexually mature. If so, do we equate the death of the little girl and her mother mentioned on the last page with having achieved that sexual maturity? St. Joseph's rose is found lying between them, in full bloom, indicating that they are now worthy of returning to him.

Is it possible that St. Joseph is really the little girl's anima or male side which has been influenced by her father? We are never told anything about her father. Is this anima, perhaps, a demon of death? "The father endows his daughter's animus with the special colouring of unarguable, incontestably 'true'

convictions that never include the personal reality of the woman herself as she actually is. That is why the animus is sometimes...a demon of death. (Jung, p.199)

Upon leaving St. Joseph, the good child makes her way home to her mother, with the guardian angel helping her along the way. We are able to tell the difference between the two little girls because the good child is holding the red rose given to her by St. Joseph.

The next two pages are entirely text. The war is over and there are changes in the village and changes in her mother, who is now an old woman. It is here that we are told that the three days was actually thirty years. Her reappearance coincides with her mother's dying wish, to see the child once more.

Following the two pages of text is another double-pages illustration, the third in this book. The little girl approaches the old woman carrying her rose. The old woman sits on the seat, arms outstretched to her daughter. Between them is an autumn tree, in its last stages of life before winter. The sun is setting and a crescent moon appears in the cloudy sky. Buildings with arches, towers and thatched rooves, which previously have appeared in fragments and shadows, now frame the scene with distinct features. There is a sense of impending death.

The story ends with three sentences and no illustrations: "All evening they sat happily together. Then they went to bed



calmly and cheerfully, and next morning the neighbours found them dead. They had fallen happily asleep, and between them lay Saint Joseph's rose, in full bloom."

## MY STORIES

The Sendak stories left gaps. What was originally supposed to be my answer to preschool art therapy became therapy for Sendak alone. There were still the early childhood issues to deal with, issues like monsters, being separated from the primary caregiver, finding answers to the hundreds of questions that pop into a preschooler's mind. As I still felt strongly that the way into the young child's emotions was through literature, I decided to create stories to generate discussion, art, drama and music about early childhood concerns. There are seven stories in this series, and I see them as ways of articulating the concerns of three, four and five year old children.

The first story I wrote was The Monster Under the Covers. It was both a reaction to Where the Wild Things Are and an attempt to deal with my son's fears. He was three years old then, and his father had been lived away for a while. At night there was just Ben and me in the house. Ben woke a lot at night (so did I) and started telling me about monsters in his room. I'm not certain what exactly was the source of his ideas.

Mercer Mayer wrote books called There's an Alligator Under My Bed and There's Something Spooky in my Attic. They deal with children's imaginary monsters, but in a much gentler way than Sendak. I must have been thinking about these books when I wrote The Monster Under the Covers.

The alligator under the little boy's bed in Mayer's book is elusive to all eyes, but the boy still knows it is there. He also know that he is the only one who can deal with it (no one else can see it) so he bribes it with food, leading it out of the house and into the garage. Foods that alligators like to eat are very much like foods that little kids like to eat, including a peanut butter sandwich and the last piece of apple pie. As the alligator follows the trail of food from beside the boy's bed to the garage, the boy follows. When the alligator goes into the garage, the boy slams the door, thereby removing the alligator (and the mess) from the house. Before he falls off to sleep he leaves a note on the garage door to warn his dad that there is an alligator in the garage.

In There's Something Spooky in my Attic the little girl decides to lasso a spooky something she sees in the attic. When she finally does lasso the monster, who had just stolen her teddy bear, she brings it down to show her parents. When they go to look, it has slipped away from the lasso. In the last picture it is sitting in the attic, clutching the teddy bear, and the words suggest that the little girl will try again tomorrow to get her teddy bear back.

In both these stories the monsters are cute and relatively non-threatening. Both children show no real fear of the monsters, and an overwhelming desire to capture them. In both books the child

has two parents present, even if they are sleepy and non-supportive. Max's mother is the only parent mentioned. Ben appears to be living with just one parent in most of my stories.

I wrote the children's stories to help young children in general, and to help me to recognise and to deal with my own son's concerns. But am I also dealing with my own? For instance, my concern about being a good parent. I think in many ways I was afraid of the monster under my covers; the person still wanting to remain a child and now having to act the role of parent.

Whomever's monster it is, I found it hiding under the covers in my son's bed. Did he tell me about it or did I tell him? I wonder if my reactions encouraged his fabrication. In stories I have read there have been nightmares in the closets, alligators under the bed, monsters in the attic and wild things just beyond the bedroom. So now there was a monster under the covers.

Ben used to wake me several times in the night with such reports. I bought him a night light, but he still preferred to sleep with the main light on. Ideally, I should have treated his comments with the good humour of the mother in the story. But I am not very good at humour when woken up in the middle of the night. Probably all he wanted was a little affection but I felt that if I allowed that, it would result in a nightly bed companion with the habit of weeing on the sheets.

In this story I try to become the ideal mother who deals with the child's fear in a humorous, gentle way and encourages him to scare away his own monster. In some ways the mother in my story seems to be the type who gets up in the middle of the night with a smile on her face and not one hair out of place. I hope I have portrayed her in a less perfect way than that. I expect nothing short of perfection from myself; gentle humour coupled with a rational and practical way of dealing with a child's fear.

As a child I had so many fears: the dark, insects (what am I doing in Australia?), the outside world. Do we ever really overcome our fears, or do we just create a world for ourselves which allows us to deal with and/or avoid our fears? Why was I left alone to deal with my fears when I grew up with two parents and two grandparents always in close proximity? Did someone at some time scare away my monsters or are they still hiding; behind the doorway, in the closet, under the covers?

This mother uses food as a ploy, in a similar way to which it is used in There's an Alligator Under My Bed. But here it is more tongue in cheek; not a real possibility for dealing with a monster. When Ben worries about being eaten by the monster, his mother advises him to tell the monster that there are snacks in the fridge. I see the illustration for this scene as being a cross-section of a refrigerator with shelves laden with margarine, yogurt, chocolate cake, monster, and peanut butter

sandwiches.

The mother is finicky like me. It's okay to have a monster in the top drawer, just as long as it doesn't mess the neatly folded socks.

It's only when the bed gets too crowded for Ben because of the monster's presence that mother gets up and takes notice. This is too much! Everyone deserves to be able to stretch out and get comfortable while they sleep. So mother uses some practical dramatization to evict the cover-stealing monster. With the help of a couple of pairs of socks and one green blanket, the monster meets its match. Upon switching on the lights, Ben and his mum discover that the monster is no longer in Ben's bed. Between the two of them they have created a bigger and scarier monster and ultimately conquered Ben's fear/monster. The monster under the covers is gone, and the mother/son bond remains intact; just what I'd hoped.

The Monster Under the Covers has undergone some changes since first writing. For one thing, the monster was originally referred to as "him" and is now referred to as "it." I wanted a non-sexist approach to my stories, both for my own sense of responsibility and to discourage stereotyping which is so prevalent in children's literature. Why are monsters usually seen as male?

The next thing I did was to change the North Americanisms to Australianisms, which was done through more than one draft. I have yet to become totally acculturised. The closet became a wardrobe; the mother doesn't fancy folding socks instead of hating the idea of folding socks; instead of opening the lights they switch them on. It was suggested to me that the covers be changed to the doona, but The Monster Under the Doona didn't seem to work.

In the original version, the monster is quite visible in the illustration as it is being scared away. In this toned-down version, it is only suggested that there actually was a monster in the room. Fantasy is almost erased in an attempt to quell rather than create fear in a young child.

The language in this story, as in the rest of my stories, was originally written to echo the language of a three-year-old. I found this sounded stilted and unnatural. So I have changed to plain English and in so doing feel I can still communicate with the young child without trying to be a young child myself.

The plot of the story has remained the same through all of the drafts. I have struggled with the ending, in that I wanted it to be original and calming. So I have ended the story with the triumph of having scared away the monster and the affirmation of this triumph by the mother.

Following The Monster Under the Covers came I Won't and The Little Orange Canary. They were written during the same period of time. Ben had started preschool, and it seemed to be a big concern for him. At the time, I was listening for issues that concerned him or caused him fear. Preschool was one. For what seemed liked forever but was probably only a couple of months it was awful taking him to preschool. He cried and carried on and seemed so upset. I felt terrible leaving him. All those years as a preschool teacher didn't help me as a parent.

I wrote I Won't as an attempt to rectify the situation. I had to stand back from the situation and become teacher/therapist to get through this situation. How could I stay with him and still get to work and uni? Had I failed as a mother? Mothering does not come naturally to me. I am too self-involved. I actually did give Ben a couple of photographs in an envelope, which he carted to preschool in his backpack for months, until there wasn't much left of them. But by then he had settled in and didn't miss the fragments I finally removed. I remember a mother of one of the older kids telling me that her daughter had carried on like that for a whole year when she first started preschool. I hoped I didn't have that to look forward to.

I remembered the statistics from my Status of Women days about quality not quantity time as being more effective and thus supporting the concept of the working mother. I had always agreed with that, only now I can't work out what is actually



quality time. I am always tired, or planning lessons or writing stories, and I really hate Lego. Where is the quality there? I love my child, but does he know it or will he grow up feeling neglected?

In the story, Ben anticipates his first day in preschool with excitement until he gets there. Even his pre-preschool visit was a huge success. The first real day of preschool, Ben is fine until his mum leaves to go to work.

In the original draft, I deal with only the real, practical aspects of the situation. In the final version I have introduced fantasy; a little boy imagining dream-like images which escalate his fear. Buildings get bigger and bigger. In reality, buildings are huge when you're only three feet tall, but in this fantasy they grow and grow and Ben gets lost. Being lost is a fear I borrow directly from my childhood. I was the kind of child a mother would never lose in a shopping centre because I was too scared to let my mother out of my sight. My younger sister would wander off at any opportunity, but not me. Old faithful, or is that fearful?

In the story the mother says, "I'll see you later." This is a common expression among adults, but what does it mean to a child? Young children do not have a clear concept of time. Is later five seconds from now, tomorrow, or next year, and for that matter is there a difference in time between tomorrow and next

year? Everything in the past is "yesterday" and everything in the future is "tomorrow" and that's about as complicated as it gets for a young child.

From this statement Ben goes into a fantasy about time. He is old enough to know that time has to do with clocks and that clocks have numbers on them. Here he sees himself in a room with several (or as he thinks, a hundred) clocks with hands pointing to all different numbers but he doesn't know which number means later. As he stares, the clocks start to take on features of the kids in preschool, whose round faces surround him in this new environment. Ben becomes more and more afraid.

A puzzle, often used by a desperate parent to distract a child, is Ben's mum's next attempt at a getaway. She thinks that if she can get him involved in an activity, leaving will be easier. I never found this to work during those first months. In Ben's imagination the puzzle becomes the family photo that he sees daily on his fireplace, but it is missing the "piece" that is him. He is a missing person in the family picture. He is lost. This is all too much.

This leaves mother to solve the situation once and for all. She has to be creative and sensitive, and most of all consistent. She has to be there for Ben.

The way she solves this dilemma is to put a photo of herself and

Ben into an envelope on which she writes a reassurance that she loves him and is coming back for him. To me, as to Ben in the story, this is a reasonable compromise and shows that she is there for him, even if she does leave him for a while. It is a well-handled separation. Ben can deal with the photograph and message as a guarantee that mum is coming back. With this security he is able to say goodbye and enjoy his time in preschool.

This is similar to Max in Where the Wild Things Are. Max is able to vent his rage, explore his fears, take on the wild things, and return home safely because his mother is there, is consistent and is loving. It is this steady base that allows for "taking-off." In my story, it is not anger that the little boy needs to express; it is independence, the process of separating from the primary caregiver and becoming an individual that is the issue for Ben.

Often preschool is the first experience a young child has away from the home. In Ben's case, he had been going to a babysitter from the time he was three months old, so I didn't expect the drama I got at preschool. The babysitter must have been like another mother to him. He was in her home, and was either alone with her or with one or two other children at most. When he started preschool, he was one of forty children; there were seven caregivers and two support staff. That might seem overwhelming, even after a babysitter.

I wrote this story because I think it is often difficult for a child to begin preschool. I do not think Ben's experience is unique. The only books I've seen that actually deal with starting school seem to be written to comfort parents and teachers as much as anyone. The language is often inappropriate to young children.

I have tried to express things in simple language to which a young child can relate. I think that years of talking to young children has refined my use of language. I've always hated teachers who "talked down" to kids, or talked baby talk to them. I tried to express my ideas in plain, clear English. I used a lot of humour. It seemed to work, and I think it works in my stories.

In the story as in reality, Ben has adjusted well to preschool. Mum is off to work, where she can have a better time knowing that Ben is okay.

The Little Orange Canary is based on a true experience. One morning when we were leaving for preschool and work respectively Ben spotted a bird in the garden. I was really surprised. Our friend had recently found a budgie with a broken wing in his yard, so I didn't think the same thing was likely to happen to us. I could hardly believe it. I really wanted to catch that

bird. It would mean that Ben would finally have a pet, other than the two goldfish who didn't do much. His dad disliked caged birds, so there was no possibility of buying him a bird. But finding one was different.

It really was an orange canary. At the time I hadn't seen one before, but since then I've noticed them in pet stores. I thought it was an exotic budgie. There it was, hiding in the garden behind the gardenia. It took a little boy to notice the tiny creature.

In the story the mother is too busy gathering the bags and the child and attempting to pile the lot into the car to take much notice of the bird. She is a busy working mother. While she displays similiar humour to the mother in The Monster Under the Covers she is late and nothing is going to get in the way of getting the kid to school and her to work. Nothing, that is, except the "chirp,chirp" she hears from behind the bushes.

This mother has all the answers. She tells Ben that the bird is not a wild bird, but a pet that has gotten away. Ben wants a pet bird. He is told that there are enough animals in the house without a bird, but Ben persists and mum isn't as tough as she talks.

The next obstacle to overcome is actually catching the bird. In reality I had no success. I lunged at the poor thing and it flew

away. I had no idea how to catch a bird. I just knew I had to catch it right away or I'd be late for work.

After I failed to catch the bird, everyone had their theories about how I should have gone about catching it. Where were they when I needed them? I remember as a child spending hours chasing wild birds around the back yard trying to sprinkle salt on their tails. My mother and grandmother used to tell me that you could catch a bird by sprinkling salt on its tail. I became obsessed with the notion.

The people who offered me expertise after my failing to catch the bird seemed to think that a lure of food and something thrown over the bird would have worked. In the story, this is what the mother does. It makes sense- the poor thing probably wouldn't have had anything to eat for a long time. Being a birdless family, chances of having birdseed in the house were improbable. In the story the mother improvises with cracker crumbs. Instead of the recommended tea towel, she uses an old wool cardigan.

As the family also would not have been in possession of a proper cage, an old shoe box that had been used as a train is recruited as a temporary shelter for the bird. So as not to be totally heartless, water and crackers are placed at the bottom and holes are poked in the top.

Left to my own devices I would have ended the story here: Boy

finds bird, mother catches bird, boy has pet. But my critics suggested that my ending didn't deal sufficiently with the issue of acting honestly and responsibly. A responsible person would try to find the bird's owner. So mum looks through the lost column of the newspaper and rings the radio station to find out if anyone has reported a missing bird. Fortunately, no one has. A cage and birdseed are purchased and Ben gets to keep the bird.

Just Ben and Me started as an experiment in word pictures, alliteration, and concept exploration. I felt there was a need to explore these areas in a picture book. But it turned into much more than that. It became a story about the friendship between a parent and child.

There is still some alliteration: high hill, purple paddock, slippery slide, night is near, bath and bed, baking brown bread. There are still word pictures: walking along a leafy path, up a high hill, across a purple paddock and down beside the lake to pick flowers go the two friends. The concepts are still there: along, up, across, down, through, inside, outside, etc.

Just Ben and Me has become a kind of ideal relationship with my son which I wish I had. The practicalities of everyday living, being a working mother, and my university studies prevent the relationship from being quite this way. Much of my so-called "free" time is spent planning lessons, doing uni work, writing, or sleeping. In the story the parent has infinite time for

adventure and enjoyment with the child. There are long walks, games in the playground, bread baking and picnics; an ideal parent/child relationship.

This story is written with minimal text; the intention is for illustration to do most of the description. I have considered photographing this story, although I have reservations about photographs as illustrations for children's books. The words in the story are intentionally short and hopefully crisp.

Just Ben and Me and When You're A One are the two stories I wrote which I feel rely heavily upon illustration. When You're A One is a story about being an only child. I wonder if Ben is disadvantaged by not having siblings? Is he lucky? Or am I just selfish? Growing up with a younger sister, I always wished I'd been an only child. As an adult I feel lucky to have a sister.

When You're A One deals with the pros and cons of being an only child. I keep seeing cartoons of large families with two, three or eleven children illustrating the pages. Yes it's good to be first in the shower- there's always enough hot water; but having to do two chores instead of one isn't great. Blue smarties are all the rage and if you're an only child, you don't have to share them. But at the same time there's no one around to have a good old wrestle with. What could be more fun than choosing the bedtime story every night? But "Hide and Seek" is awkward with one person playing.



I conclude that no matter how many children there are in the family, there are always people who love and care for each and every one, and give each child the necessary personal space. What counts is to love and to be loved.

Alone, like I Won't deals with a young child's fear of being left with other adults when the parents go out. In this case, Ben is being left with his grandparents in Sydney.

I have tried to see things from the perspective of a three-foot high person. To him, the wrought iron gate is huge; what he sees are circles and swirls. An adult would look down on the latch. A tree fern is quite small, but to Ben it is big. Sydney is overwhelming to me; to a small child it must be even more so. The narrow hall seem must seem endless to him. He must feel like he is being transported into another world.

In this new world, a chair being fixed becomes a dungeon to the fertile imagination of young Ben. The family pets become guard dogs, keeping him locked away. When Ben sees his reflection in the oven door he thinks he is being baked in the cake.

Worst of all, Ben realises that things are not in order; Mummy and Daddy are missing. He imagines that they are going away in the plane he hears flying overhead. Not only that, but they must be looking for another little boy. Ben believes he is destined to live forever in a park; his bed will be a park bench.

Ben feels sad and scared at the thought of being left alone. This is frightening enough to an adult; to a child it is very hard to deal with indeed. Security, stability, love- the things we as adults often take for granted- are so important to a child.

Here Grandma and Grandpa intervene. They seem to realise what the problem is so they explain to Ben exactly where his parents are and why. They reassure him that Mummy and Daddy are coming back and will take him to the zoo tomorrow. In the meantime, they give Ben the love and support which help him to relax and to anticipate, in a more realistic fashion, the trip to the zoo.

Who Makes the Rain is the last story in the series. It is about curiosity, and the never- ending desire young children seem to have to get things explained. The question "why" is a favourite with preschoolers. It can make the most clever adult feel like an uneducated primary school dropout.

In this story Mother, the Preschool teacher, another preschooler and daddy are lost when it comes to answers to Ben's many questions. The neighbour, a retired scientist, steps in and is able not only to answer Ben's questions in easily comprehensible language.

This story is an attempt to explain scientific concepts at a Preschool level through a story. It was a challenge to try to

explain things in words that kids could understand. I ended this story humourously. Dad is finally in his element with a question about music. Off he goes into this great explanation, and, without even trying, he puts Ben to sleep with his words.

I need to let the child out, but not as part of this series. This series is practical, rational, humorous, limited in fantasy, and really quite tame. It reads like stories written by a preschool teacher. Words and structure are carefully chosen to lead but not frighten, to guide but not to take off too deeply into fantasy.

## THE MONSTER UNDER THE COVERS

In the middle of the night, when Ben couldn't sleep, he went into his mummy's room. "Mummy," he said, "There's a monster in my wardrobe. It's going to eat me up."

"Tell it there are plenty of snacks in the fridge," said his mum, and went back to sleep.

A little while later, Ben returned. "Mummy," he said again, "There's a monster in my top drawer."

"Make sure it doesn't mess up your socks," said his mum. "I don't want to fold them all again."

Later still, Ben returned again. This time he looked very worried. "Mummy," whispered Ben, "There's a monster under my covers. I can't sleep! There's no room left in bed for me!"

"Have you asked it to roll over?" asked his mum.

"Yes," said Ben. "But it won't budge."

His mother sat up. "This sounds serious," she said.

Ben and his mummy thought and thought. How they could make the monster go away? Ben was really tired by now, so something had to be done right away.

"I know what would make a monster go away!" said Ben. "Another bigger, fiercer monster. But where would we find a bigger, fiercer monster?"

"What does your monster look like?" asked his mum.

"It's green and furry," answered Ben.

"Like this blanket?" (Mother points to blanket on her bed)

"Yes, like this blanket," said Ben. (Mother puts blanket over her and Ben's shoulders)

"And it has long black arms," said Ben. (Mother takes out two pairs of black socks and places them on Ben's and her arms)

"Just like this mummy."

"The monster has huge feet with twenty toes," said Ben.

"Look," said his mum. (They look down at their bare feet and Ben counts one to twenty)

(Ben and Mummy look in the mirror) "We look just like my monster," said Ben. "Only bigger."

"And fiercer," said his mum. (making a face) "Now let's see if we can scare your monster away."

Very slowly and oh so quietly, Ben and his mummy crept down the hall and into Ben's room. They tiptoed to the edge of Ben's bed, pulled back the covers, and shouted "BOO!" as loud as they could

for a very long time.

(Picture of monster being frightened, hair standing on end, and jumping from bed, but the picture is so dark that we're not sure if it is a monster or just reflections of things in the room.)

"Do you think the monster's gone now, Mummy?" asked Ben.

"Let's switch on the light and check," said his mum.

They switched on the light and looked at the bed. There was nothing under the covers, and the big green blanket that had covered them lay in a pile on the floor. "We sure scared that monster away," said Ben.

"We sure did," said Mummy and gave Ben a big hug.

## I WON'T!

Last week, Ben started preschool. He thought he would like it. All summer long he had talked about going.

When Ben and his mum visited the preschool, Ben painted a picture, played on the swings and built a train. Ben liked preschool.

But last week, when Ben started preschool, he wasn't so sure.

His mum took a photo of Ben at the gate of the preschool.

They went into the room to meet Ben's teacher. They found Ben's locker. It had a picture of a butterfly on it.

Ben and his mum made a playdough snail. Ben met Sophie and Joshua.

Then his mum had to go to work. "Goodbye Ben," she said, kissing his cheek. "Have a happy day at Preschool."

Mummy was leaving. How would Ben get home? Ben imagined that he was walking down the streets trying to find his house. The buildings seemed to get bigger and bigger and he couldn't find

his street.

"No!" wailed Ben. "Don't leave me mummy."

"But I have to go to work," said his mum. "I'll see you later."

What is later? thought Ben. He had seen people look at clocks and say "later." Ben imagined he was in a room with a hundred clocks. The hands of all the clocks pointed to different numbers. What number was later?

"Mummy, don't go to work. You will leave me and you will lose me," sobbed Ben. "Don't leave me mummy!"

"Come, Ben," said the teacher. "Here's a puzzle I know you'll like. Can you help me put it together?"

Ben imagined that the puzzle looked like the picture of his family on the fireplace at home. But there was no little boy in the picture. That piece was missing.

"Mummy!" cried Ben. "Don't leave me! MUMMY!"

Ben's mum stood at the door and thought and thought. Then she opened her bag and reached deep inside.

She took out some things and began writing.



When she finished, she put something into a small white envelope and placed it in Ben's hand.

"What's this mummy?" asked Ben.

"Open it," answered his mum.

Ben opened the envelope and pulled out a photo of himself and his mum at the beach last summer. They were smiling and playing in the water. Above the photo were some words.

It says: "I will always come to get you when my work is finished and preschool is over. See you soon Ben. Love from Mummy."

Ben thought back to summer. He loved playing in the water and making silly faces for the camera.

Ben's mum took him to the beach, to the playground, and to visit Grandma. She always brought him home again. He knew Mummy would come for him when preschool was over.

"You can go to work now Mummy," he said. "I have you here with me all day, in my envelope."

"And I can read you Mummy's letter any time you want," said the teacher.

Ben and his teacher waved goodbye to his mum through the window as she got into her car. Ben waves to his mum like that every

day now.

Ben likes preschool, especially the playground, the puppets, the nice teacher, and Sophie and Joshua.

#### THE LITTLE ORANGE CANARY

One morning, as they were leaving for preschool, Ben said, "Mummy, there's a birdie in the flower bed."

"Come on Ben," said his mum. "We'll be late." (Mum is inside the doorway, getting ready.)

Ben wouldn't budge. "Mummy," he said again. "There's a birdie in the flower bed. A little orange birdie."

(Mum comes out the door, laden with briefcase, raincoat, Ben's bag, etc.) "Don't be silly Ben. Birds don't live in flower beds. Roses and petunias live in flower beds. Get in the car."

Suddenly there was a noise from behind the bushes. "Chirp, chirp," it said.

Ben turned to look. His mum turned to look. "What was that?" asked his mum.

"The birdie," answered Ben.

The little bird looked up at Ben and his mum.

"That's a little canary, Ben," said his mum. "It must be somebody's pet. It must have flown away from its cage."

"Can I keep it?" asked Ben.

"We don't need any more animals," replied his mum. "We have two goldfish and you and your dad."

"Please mummy!" wailed Ben. "I want that birdie. I'll take good care of it." So Ben and his mum thought about how to catch the little canary.

Would a net work? Well maybe for butterflies.

Grandma always said that you could catch a bird by sprinkling salt on its tail. But how could you get it to stand still for long enough?

Ben thought that if he dressed in a bird costume he could chirp to the little orange canary. But Ben was so much bigger. He would probably frighten the bird away.

Ben watched the canary while his mum went inside. She returned with a handful of cracker crumbs and dad's old wool cardigan.

Ben and his mum dropped cracker crumbs in front of the bush that

hid the little bird. They watched and waited.

Soon the little orange canary came out into the sunshine and began nibbling the crumbs. It ate and ate. Ben dropped more crumbs for the canary, this time a little closer to the edge of the garden.

As it ate the crumbs, Ben's mum gently put the cardigan over the little bird. Then she picked it up and carried it into the house.

Inside, she placed the canary in the shoe box that Ben had been using as a train. She put the lid on the box, and poked tiny holes in the top so the bird could breathe and get some light.

Ben's mum put water into a medicine cup and placed it on the bottom of the box. Ben crumbled more crackers and dropped them into the box for the little bird to eat.

Mummy looked in the newspaper. Nobody had lost an orange canary. Then she rang the radio station. No canaries had been reported missing.

Ben didn't get to preschool that day. His mum didn't get to work. They went to a shop and bought a cage and some bird seed. The little orange canary had found a new home.

JUST BEN AND ME

We walked along a leafy path  
Just Ben and me.

Up a high hill we climbed  
Just Ben and me.

Across a purple paddock,

And down beside the lake  
We stopped to pick some flowers  
Just Ben and me.

A special day, Saturday  
Ben and I go to the playground.

Round and round the slippery slide  
Through the tunnel, who is waiting?

Inside he hides, I am looking.  
It is hard to see him from outside.

On the way home Ben grows sleepy  
Night is near, the water still.

He thinks only of bath and bed.

I look for his pyjamas.

I tuck him in, with teddy and lamb,  
And read him a story as he drifts away  
To sleep, till morning. Just Ben and me.

Today we are baking bread.

We pull and twist and knead the dough  
and fold it neatly into the pans.

We butter the top, then into the oven  
We place it on a rack.

When it is done we have a picnic  
With cheese and pears and apples and grapes  
And the bread we've baked.

Ben throws and catches a ball

I take photos.

We run up the hill and roll down the grass  
Just Ben and me.

Another day passes, another is waiting.  
For Ben and me.

## WHEN YOU'RE A ONE

When you're a one

And everyone else

Is a two

Or a three

Or even more

You are always first in the shower

But you have to make you're bed and do the washing up!

You get all the blue smarties

But there's no one to fight with (child shadow boxing)

You get to choose the story- every night!

But when you play hide and seek,  
You always know where you are hiding.

When daddy bakes a cake  
You get to lick the spoon every time.

But there's no one to blame (child breaks vase)

There's room for just one more (child under covers in parents' bed)

But it gets pretty crowded. (stuffed animals crowd bed)

When you're a one

Or a two

Or even more

There are always people who love you

And will be your friend.

When you don't want to be alone, that is.



## ALONE

A long time ago last week, Ben arrived at the door of his grandparent's house, somewhere in Sydney.

There was a white gate with circles and swirls, and beyond that a big tree fern. Grandpa and the two dogs were waiting at the door.

"Hello Ben," said Grandpa, giving him a big hug. The dogs barked and jumped all over Ben.

They walked down a long hall, and into the kitchen. Nanna was fixing a chair. "Want to help me Ben?" asked Nanna.

Ben climbed into the middle of the chair to help hold it together, but the legs and cross bars trapped him. He felt like he was in a dungeon, locked up with two fierce dogs guarding him.

"Stuck, are you?" asked Nanna and gently lifted Ben out.

When the chair was fixed, Nanna took a book from the shelf and began reading. Grandpa was baking a cake. Ben helped stir the batter and got to lick the spoon.

Ben looked into the oven. He thought he could see a cake baking.

In the cake was a boy who looked just like him. He felt hot and scared.

Grandpa opened the oven door.

"Did you see your reflection in the glass?" asked Grandpa as he pulled Ben aside and put the cake in the oven.

While the cake was baking, Grandpa painted a model train. Grandma was turning the pages of her book. The dogs were asleep in their baskets. The goldfish were swimming around in their pool.

Mummy and Daddy were...Ben looked around. Mummy and Daddy weren't in the kitchen.

They weren't in the hall. They weren't by the front door. "Mummy! Daddy!" called Ben.

"Where are you Mummy and Daddy?" cried Ben. Ben thought they must have been on the aeroplane that he heard fly over the house. They were flying away to find a new little boy. He was being left- ALONE.

He imagined that he would live forever in a park with lions, tigers, kookaburras and maybe even an owl at night.

There would be no one to tell him stories. There would be no one

to cook him dinner. And he would never find his way to preschool on his own.

Ben felt sad. He felt scared. And most of all, he felt lonely. "Where are you mummy and daddy?" he called.

"Your mummy and daddy have gone out for a little while," said Grandpa.

"But they will lose me!" wailed Ben. "They won't have a little boy!" Ben felt very sad.

Nanna put down her book. Grandpa put down his paint brush. They sat on the sofa, on either side of Ben.

"Your Mummy and Daddy won't lose you, Ben," said Nanna. "They have gone out to see a movie. They left you here with us so that we could look after you until the movie is finished. Sometimes mummies and daddies like to go out on their own."

"And your daddy said to tell you that in the morning, when you wake up, he is going to take you to the zoo to see all the animals," said Grandpa.

The lions, tigers, kookaburras, and owls would be in cages. Ben would be watching them from outside the cage. Ben felt much better. Mummy and Daddy were coming back. He was not alone.

Nanna showed Ben pictures from the book she was reading. It was about Australian birds.

At bedtime, Grandpa tucked Ben in. He read Ben a story, and they talked about the zoo. Ben fell asleep just when Grandpa was talking about the giraffes.

#### WHO MAKES THE RAIN?

Last night, Ben's mum tucked him in, read him a story about steam engines, and was just about to kiss him goodnight when...

"Mummy," asked Ben, "Who makes trains?"

"Go to sleep, Ben," said his mum, and turned off the light.

The next day at Preschool all the children were playing outside. It was spring and the flowers were growing.

"Who makes flowers, Glen?" Ben asked his teacher.

"Aren't they lovely, Ben?" answered Glen. "Can you name the colours? Red...Pink...Purple..."

At nap time, Ben's bed was next to Carly's. Carly was cuddling her teddy bear.

"Carly," asked Ben. "Who makes teddy bears?"

Carly looked puzzled. "Maybe the people at the shop," she said. "Mummy bought my bear at the shop."

Ben had lots of questions. He asked lots of people. No one seemed to know the answers.

Even daddy. When daddy picked him up from preschool, he helped Ben into his poncho and boots and they walked home in the rain.

"Daddy," said Ben. "Who makes the rain?"

"I don't know exactly," said his dad. "It comes from clouds. I'm a musician, not a scientist. I know that when it rains, I have to cancel my outdoor concerts."

Ben and his dad turned the corner into their street. Ben had an idea. "Let's ask Ms Edwards," he said to his dad.

Ms Edwards lived next door to Ben. She was retired now, but she used to work as a scientist. Ms Edwards knew everything.

Ben saw Ms Edwards sitting on her porch, watching the rain. She was happy to see Ben, and liked to answer his questions.

She told Ben that rain is made when water from lakes and oceans rises up into the air. The water is held in clouds, but when the clouds get too full of water, they make rain to send some of the

water back down to the ground.

"Clouds make the rain," said Ben, stepping in and out of a puddle by the stair.

Ms Edwards told Ben that trains are made by people who work in big factories. They are made from metal and wheels and windows.

Ben, his dad and Ms Edwards drank some cocoa. Then Ms Edwards explained to Ben that flowers grew from seeds that were planted in the earth. Rain and sunshine helped them grow.

Ms Edwards even knew about teddy bears. She said that teddy bears were first made by a man who owned a toy shop. He sewed the bears together from fuzzy material, and gave them buttons for eyes. Now lots of people make teddy bears, just like the one Carly cuddles at nap time.

Ben felt happy. He now knew how rain is made, who makes trains, how flowers grow, and who makes teddy bears.

When Ben went to bed that night, he said to his dad: "Tomorrow I'm going to ask Ms Edwards who makes music."

"That's a question I can answer, Ben," said his dad. He leaned back in the chair and began to tell Ben about musicians and composers and orchestras. Ben didn't hear the end. He was sound asleep.

## ANALYSIS OF MY WORK AND HOW IT RELATES TO SENDAK

While Maurice Sendak and I have many differences- we are from different generations, occupations and lifestyles- there are common threads that appear in both our work. We share similar beginnings. We both grew up in families where Yiddish was the first language and Eastern European Jewish tradition mixed with the new world ways of North America in the early to mid 20th century. As part of our Jewish upbringing we both had strong mother/child relationships and were taught many of life's lessons through folklore steeped in tradition. Food played an important part in that tradition, along with study, morality and religious protocol. Finally, we both write about monsters; the monsters that bring fears and concerns into the otherwise innocent lives of young children. Likewise we both attempt to conquer the monsters by offering empowerment, that is awareness of and ways of dealing with these fiends. We do this both for the children of the world and for the child within. Sendak does so through fantasy; I have chosen reality.

### 1. PERSONAL DIFFERENCES

As we are made aware of on a packet of cocoanut in "In the Night Kitchen," Maurice Sendak was born on June 10, 1928, the year Mickey Mouse was created and the same decade my mother was born. His parents, Sarah and Philip Sendak, were Polish Jews who

immigrated to the United States before World War I. Maurice was the youngest of three children; his sister Natalie is nine years older and his brother Jack is five years older than him. As a child of the Depression and in poor health, "the fall in the Sendaks' fortunes after Maurice's birth possibly served to increase parental anxiety over the frailty of their youngest offspring." (Lanes, p.18)

Education was not a happy memory in Sendak's childhood. "The only part of my childhood that was truly punishing and suffering was school." (Lanes, 1981, p.22.) This experience never improved for Sendak, and, as soon as he could, he left school. In Sendak's writing, his heroes always have a home base from which they begin their adventures, but no academic venue is ever mentioned.

As a first generation North American, Sendak grew up in a ghetto-like existence. "American childhood composed of disparate elements strangely concocted, a childhood coloured with the memories-never lived by me-of shtetl life in Europe, vividly conveyed to me by my immigrant parents-a conglomerate fantasy life typical perhaps of many first-generation children in America." (Lanes, pp 25-26).

This lifestyle became the source of the characters that colour Sendak's writing with a European style which is usually only seen in the folklore of Europe.



By the time I, a second generation North American was born, on July 3, 1952, my family had long since left the immigrant centre of New York to settle in a much colder and less inviting place to the north west; Manitoba, the central province of the relatively new country, Canada. Mickey Mouse was old hat; Disney's "Lady and the Tramp" was the first movie I ever saw.

Although we lived with my Russian immigrant grandparents, both my parents had been born and educated in Canada. While Yiddish was spoken at home, my parents spoke fluent English and my grandparents a broken English. Eastern European shtetl life, while alluded to, was not the main source of my history. Details of the early days in Manitoba accounted for most of the family stories I was told about as a child. Europe was referred to as the place they had left behind and would prefer to not discuss. I was the elder of two children; my sister Shelley is four years younger than me. Other than a couple of bouts of pneumonia and tonsillitis, which were not so serious by the time I had them, I was a healthy, robust child.

As a Baby Boomer, born a few years after World War II, my childhood, while not affluent, was one of great opportunity and I was encouraged to pursue an education and an academic career. Where Sendak looks at formal education as "the sworn enemy of the imagination and its free, creative play," (Lanes, p.22) I see formal education as a great source of knowledge and pleasure. The

heroes in my children's stories, while strongly tied to the mother, locate themselves in a variety of settings- at school, at the grandparents home in Sydney, in paddocks and also at home.

Sendak began his career, and primarily works today, as an illustrator. This stemmed from extended periods of ill health as a child. "I was a miserable kid," Sendak confides. "I couldn't make friends. I couldn't skate great, I couldn't play stoopball terrific. I stayed home and drew pictures. You know what they all thought of me: sissy Maurice Sendak. Whenever I wanted to go out and do something, my father would say, 'You'll catch a cold.' And I did. I did whatever he told me." (Lanes, p.16)

While I was dubbed the class artist in primary school, I don't feel at all good about drawing. It is through words, and sometimes through photographs that I feel best able to communicate my ideas to others. Sendak has been able to refine his drawing to such an extent that it gives him a great deal of power to communicate. His illustrative work is so refined that each page is a masterpiece unto itself.

Because of Sendak's skill as an illustrator, he has a luxury I do not; that of being able to team words with images to convey a message. I must convey my message through words alone before I have any chance of being matched with an illustrator for possible publication.

Sendak's lifestyle differs greatly from mine. A confirmed bachelor, his success has afforded him a reclusive lifestyle in rural New England, where he shares a house with his three dogs. His contact with children is almost non-existent. The child he seems to write for is the child within himself whom, he believes, is infinitely recyclable. "You can use the material of your life over and over, and always make of it something new," he says. (Lanes, p.17)

Sendak's child, the child within himself, is now in the body of a 65 year old man. Recollections wear thin and become overworked, with little fresh input. He has no children or grandchildren himself, his nieces and nephews would be adults, and the children who read his books contact him only by letter. The freshness of childhood emotion is limited to what a child can express on paper, and often this is quite limited compared with what a child can express in other ways. So while Max seemed to reach out to all children, Mickey reached most, Ida reached some and Mili probably reached very few.

As a parent and teacher, my life revolves around going to work, paying bills, buying groceries, planning lessons, and carting my son to classes and after-school activities as well as to various friends' houses.

I have been working with young children for twenty years now. It is about these children, and my own son that I write. The child

in me is usually buried deep beneath the roles of educator and nurturer. My stories speak in simple language, the language I hear from the children, the thoughts and concerns which they express to me frequently over the long periods of time I spend with them. They were written to get right to the point; to work through the concerns in as simple and non-frightening a manner as possible. My son asks me to read him the stories over and over again, even without illustrations.

While Sendak and I are from different generations, occupations and lifestyles, we share common concerns. As he says, "Too many parents and too many writers of children's books don't respect the fact that kids know and suffer a great deal. My children show a lot of pleasure, but often they look defenceless, too. Being defenceless is a primary element of childhood. And often, I am trying to draw the way children feel-or, rather, the way I imagine they feel. It's the way I know I felt as a child. And all I have to go on is what I know-not only about my childhood then, but about the child I was as he exists now." (Lanes, 1981, p.27)

## **2. JEWISH BACKGROUND**

### **Yiddishkeit**

Maurice Sendak and I are both from a similar religious and ethnic background. Although Yiddish was essentially my first language, it was quickly replaced by English and now remains mostly in understanding and not in conversation. Sendak is conversant in

Yiddish as is evidenced in the many Yiddish references in interviews. The only "Yiddishkeit" in the stories is a star of David adorning a salt box in In the Night Kitchen. Other than that, references are generally to Christianity. My stories show no reference to "Yiddishkeit," unless the mother trying to bribe the monster with food in The Monster Under the Covers were to count as Jewish mothering.

### Lessons

The teaching of right from wrong made up the substance of lessons taught through Jewish folklore. Of his father's folklore Sendak states: "During my childhood...he (Sendak's father) invented beautiful imaginative tales to tell to me and my brother and sister. He was a marvellous improviser and would often extend a story for several nights." (Lanes, p.12)

I remember the stories my mother would create for my sister and me as we endured the hour-long bus ride home from my grandparents' house on a Friday evening. We sat, spellbound, waiting for the conclusion which, as I recall always reinforced the message of good triumphing over evil.

In my stories, the hero triumphs over not so much evil as obstacles which, although we as adults might trivialise them, are real concerns to young children. Courage, while important, is superseded by understanding on both an academic and emotional level. Ben's fears disappear as he grows to understand the

stability of the mother/child relationship and the love which is felt for him.

"Philip Sendak wanted to teach that a child should eat properly, study, have courage, be fair and just, and leave something for the next generation." (Sendak, P., 1985, p.42)

Maurice Sendak's stories do much the same. Max, Mickey, Ida and Mili all have to be courageous to achieve their goals. While food is used as punishment and reward for Max, when he returns home successfully it is to a good, home-cooked meal. While taming the wild things, Max is never cruel. He treats them fairly. Mickey helps the bakers who had intended to eat him. Mili is kind and generous in the face of all adversity. Ida, however, is not as altruistic- her goblins are danced to death.

### Good and Evil

"Angels were active participants in most of Philip's stories, and Sendak attributes his fondness for them to his father. Indeed, he remembers his father's telling him once when he was sick that if he stared hard enough out the window he might see an angel flying by. If he did, it was a sign of good luck and he would get better quickly." (Lanes, p.12)

In Jewish tradition- as Sendak says- there was no concept of the devil. Yet the forces of evil manifest themselves in Sendak's books as monsters, greedy bakers, goblins, robbers and wicked

men. The "forces of evil" in my stories are limited to one imagined monster. Other than that it is separation from the primary caregiver that is to be feared, rather than any "forces of evil."

### **Food**

In Jewish tradition, food is used as a reward, punishment and focal point of family gatherings. If you ate all your dinner you were a good child and would never get sick. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the year for all Jews, we must deprive ourselves of food while begging forgiveness for our sins of the previous year. Every Jewish celebration, from Chanukah to Passover to New Year and Sukkoth, involves the sharing of ritual foods and a good home-cooked meal with family and extended family.

In Sendak's stories food is used in traditional, as well as non-traditional ways. Food deprivation is Max's punishment and a nice hot meal his reward. Being cooked almost becomes Mickey's fate and getting the bread out on time becomes his reward. Mili cooks roots and Sunday cake for St. Joseph and is rewarded by being returned to her mother. It could be said that Ida's food substitute is her wonder horn.

The heroes are all portrayed as triumphant. Max's coming to terms with his anger, Mickey's being "cooked," Ida overpowering the goblins and Mili being taken in by St. Joseph, or more generally

losing the innocence of childhood and becoming an adult, is what empowers them. In my stories, the child is made aware of the situation, but at no time has to sacrifice the innocence of childhood to triumph over the obstacles. Rather, an understanding in the child's own terms provides the gateway through which the child is able to deal with adversity and become empowered.

### **Religion**

Religion played a lesser role in Maurice Sendak's life, as in mine, than tradition. "Though both parents and children went to synagogue on the High Holy Days, the family was certainly not particularly religious." (Lanes, p.25) But Judaism permeates all aspects of our lives.

"Though he (Sendak) has long since left the insularity of his early life behind, he retains an outsider's apartness from the world at large. There remains the sense of separateness that coloured his feelings as a small boy from a sheltered Jewish community in Brooklyn." (Lanes, p.26)

### **Mother/Child Relationship**

The mother/child relationship is an important one in Judaism. While religion put women in the back benches, unable to form part of a minyan (a group of ten men necessary before prayers can begin) the Jewish mother is steeped in tradition. "How many



Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb? Never mind, don't worry about me, I'll just sit here in the dark." Guilt, obligation, remorse are all words that come to mind in association with the concept of a Jewish mother. I might add here that I, too, am a Jewish mother. But don't worry about that, just keep reading.

"Sendak has characterised his mother, always called Sadie, as a `withdrawn, scrimping woman. She was never stingy toward her own family or relations...but she was always worried. She also had a gruff, abrupt manner, because I think that any display of feeling embarrassed her.' Apparently her way of showing affection was to rush into her children's bedroom and shout `Whoooot!' thereby scaring her youngest child out of his wits." (Lanes, p.18)

Max's mother never appears in person in Where the Wild Things Are, yet she certainly makes her presence felt. She calls him "Wild Thing" and when he talks back, saying "I'll eat you up!" she lays down the law - no time out, no more chances- she sends Max to his room without supper. It is made very clear to Max what her expectations and his limitations are. But it is this same mother who has thoughtfully left a hot supper for Max to enjoy when he returns from his adventures. While a firm disciplinarian, she is not without love and compassion.

Mickey's mother sleeps through his whole ordeal and plays no real

role in providing a stable home environment from which Mickey can bravely take on the world. Yet he does so, and seemingly very much on his own.

Ida's mother seems to be clinically depressed, and thus unable and/or unwilling to provide the mothering which Ida and her baby sister so desperately need. It is not just a passing moment, as Sendak would like us to believe. This mother is not there for her children at any point in the story. It is her psychological absence that puts Ida into the stressful situation of mothering her sister and instigates the conflict which Ida must resolve.

An absentee mother, as well as an absentee father who shouts messages from afar is a scary situation for a young child to be in. The lack of stability and love within the family makes Ida's predicament all the more difficult, so mistakes are bound to happen. While they are overcome on paper, I would suggest that young children reading Outside Over There do not easily accept or enjoy it. The home base, the reality of the mother/child bond is missing.

Mili's mother is a loving mother, but her fear and desperation cause her to make a bad choice; to give up her child to what she hopes are more powerful sources. Still, she is stable- she is waiting there in the same place, thirty years later, for her child to return. She has never lost faith or stopped loving. It is the strength of that love which guides Mili through the

forest, and the knowledge that her mother is waiting that motivates Mili to return home.

In my stories, Ben's mother, while consistent in her love for the little boy, is tied up in the concerns of everyday living. Like most of us, she is less than perfect. She doesn't like the idea of getting out of bed in the middle of the night to chase away some sort of monster, so she tries humour and bribery to get the kid back into bed.

When that doesn't work, up she pops, bright-eyed and smiling, and becomes supermum. She doesn't impose a solution, but encourages the child to think it through for himself. Together, mother and son don a monster costume and go about scaring the monster away. All this and it's 3 a.m.! I wonder what she would have been like at work the next day.

But her love and support has ultimately led the way for Ben to scare away his monster. The peaceful family environment is back to normal; Ben is back in his bed.

The mother in my stories is a working mum, often a single parent. She is not Max's mum of the sixties whose day probably revolved around cooking the hot meal for the family dinner and disciplining a somewhat unruly child. I am writing thirty years later. Mum doesn't have the same luxury of time. She has to be consistent in her love, reliable, and still hold down a job, run

a house, and help solve the problems her child brings to her. She has probably done a night class in Effective Parenting, or at the very least read what the current experts have to say about child rearing.

How does she cope? Humour helps. She suggests that Ben offer his monster snacks from the fridge. She notes that the family doesn't need another pet, they already have two fish, a dad and a little boy. She makes monster faces in the mirror.

But she also shows her love, in overt easily understood ways. She writes a clear, loving message on a picture of her and her son which she gives to the little boy to help him feel secure in preschool. She spends quality time with him on weekends, walking through fields, baking bread, visiting the playground. She misses a day's work to catch a stray bird and outfit it with a cage and birdseed.

Mother never leaves for long; she always comes back from work and from the movies. She is no longer a stay at home mum, but she is steady, loving, and provides a secure environment from which the little boy can deal with his fears. In many ways, she is closer to Ben than Max's mother was to him. She is Ben's mother and his friend.

### 3. MONSTERS

Monsters are the adversaries of the hero. "The fight against a monster signifies the struggle to free consciousness from the grip of the unconscious. The hero's deliverance corresponds to the sunrise, the triumph of light over darkness, of consciousness or the spirit over the affective strata of the unconscious. In a less negative sense, the monster may be equated with the libido." (Cirlot, p.213)

Monsters of one sort or another appear in both Sendak's and my stories, and attempts to empower the child by changing the world to one in which a child can succeed, are weapons we use to triumph over the monsters.

The most literal use of monsters is in Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are and my Monster Under the Covers. While Sendak's monsters are uglified versions of his pushy Jewish relatives, my monster remains not quite visible except in the imagination of a fearful child. When personified, a green blanket, two pairs of socks and four bare feet make up the substance of the creature. In both cases the monster is conquered. Max stares into the monsters' yellow eyes without blinking once; Ben and his mother dress up and frighten the monster. The processes are different; Sendak creates a fantasy situation to tame his monsters while I deal with the child's cognitive processes to create an understanding that leads to frightening the monster away.

In the Night Kitchen presents a rather unusual world, the world

of the night. But in this world, the scariest things are three fat bakers who want to cook a little boy. While I find this frightening, I still prefer this to what really goes on in the streets of New York at night (or during the day for that matter.) At least in this reality Mickey is triumphant; he is able to fight back and he wins. Not only does he win but he becomes the hero of the morning. In actual fact, a little boy alone at night in New York wouldn't survive. Mickey's reality is altered to give him the power and success he needs to grow up in confidence.

When I compare Where the Wild Things Are and In the Night Kitchen to my stories, The Monster Under the Covers, I Won't and Alone, I see quite a different reality. Alterations to this reality are much simpler and closer to home.

Written almost thirty years after Sendak wrote Where the Wild Things Are, my child begins from a more powerful position as the rights of children are more recognised now than they were in the sixties. Ben sees a monster in his room, both out of a very real fear and as a means of getting his mother's attention. Rather than confronting Ben with disciplinary measures or an adult's perception of reality, the mother uses fantasy and creative drama at the child's level of reality to deal with the monster. Ben becomes empowered, both by devising the plan and acting upon it. Not only has the monster been scared away, but Ben has attained the confidence necessary to deal with any monsters which may appear in the future.

Monsters appear in less obvious forms in my other stories. In I Won't! Ben is afraid to be left at preschool as he fears his mother isn't coming back for him. This fear exists in Alone as well, when Ben is left with his grandparents while his parents go to a movie.

To a still lesser extent, the concerns of being an only child, needing to understand basic science concepts, catching a stray canary, and having fun with mum are what needs to be overcome in When You're A One, Who Makes the Rain?, The Little Orange Canary and Just Ben and Me. The solutions are less extreme, but practical.

In I Won't the mother's presence is substituted by a photograph with a loving message. Alone offers kind grandparents whose simple explanations reassure the worried little boy. When You're A One suggests the pros and cons of being an only child, but concludes that the important thing is that you people love you, not how many siblings you have. In Who Makes the Rain a friendly neighbour provides simple explanations which a young child is able to understand as he explores his world.

The little orange canary is caught by a bureaucratic mother who takes time out from her busy working schedule to indulge her child's whims. And Just Ben and Me offers an idyllic weekend when mummy has undivided time for her little boy. In all cases reality

has been restructured so that the obstacles no longer need concern child. Hopefully, this will provide a model on which children can pattern their reactions.

Reality in my stories is fixed by a practical action that a child could possibly experience. While the magic of the wild things has its place in that it encourages imagination, humour and fun, perhaps the clear resolutions in my stories provide situations with which a child can identify. Both styles seem to have their value in helping children to come to terms with their world.



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