

Bringing the Dreamwork to the Picturebook

Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*¹

KENNETH B. KIDD

Combining cultural history with the insights of psychoanalytic theory, this article examines Maurice Sendak's Caldecott-winning and controversial *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), arguing that Sendak's book represents picturebook psychology as it stood in the early 1960s but also radically recasts it, paving the way for a groundswell in applied picturebook psychology. The book can be understood as rewriting classical Freudian analysis, retaining some of its rigor and edge while making it more palatably American. *Where the Wild Things Are* has been embraced as a psychological primer, a story about anger and its management through fantasy; it is also a text in which echoes of Freud remain audible. It is read here as a bedtime-story version of Freud's Wolf Man case history of 1918, an updated and upbeat dream of the wolf boy. It is to Sendak what the Wolf Man case was to Freud, a career-making feral tale. Standing at the crossroads of Freudian tradition, child analysis, humanistic psychology, and bibliotherapy, the article reveals how the book both clarified and expanded the uses of picturebook enchantment.

In 1963, humorist Louise Armstrong and illustrator Whitney Darrow Jr. published a picturebook entitled *A Child's Guide to Freud*. Dedicated to »Sigmund F., A Really Mature Person,« *A Child's Guide to Freud* is a send-up of Freudian ideas, pitched to adults and specifically to upper-middle-class New Yorkers. Armstrong was a confirmed Manhattanite and Darrow a longtime *New Yorker* cartoonist and children's book illustrator. »This is Mommy,« the book begins, showing a woman chasing a naughty little boy.

When she won't let you play doctor with Susie, call her OVERPROTECTIVE. This is Daddy. He sleeps in the same room as Mommy. Call this a MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP. The feelings you have about Mommy and Daddy closing their door are called OEDIPAL. This means that you want to have a Meaningful Relationship with Mommy. If you think a lot about this, it is called a WISH. If you think about it in your sleep, it is called a DREAM. If you suck your thumb instead of thinking about it, it is called COMPENSATION. (Armstrong / Darrow 1963, n. p.)

While Freud had a lot to say about children, he did not usually talk to them, and so a picturebook about Freud seems laughable, even absurd.

That year, 1963, saw the publication of another American picturebook inspired by Freud and likewise staged around a naughty if more imaginative boy, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. In short order it was hailed as a psychological masterpiece, exploring as it does young Max's anger and adventurous imagination within the safe space of home. While the scenario of teaching Freud to children, especially in the form of a picturebook, remains comic, the idea that the picturebook has something to offer by

¹ This article is excerpted from Chapter 4 in Kenneth B. Kidd: *Freud in Oz. At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature*.

Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press (2011), and is reproduced with kind permission from the publisher.

way of psychological value for children – and psychological insight into childhood for adults – was firmly in place by 1963. With *Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak affirmed the picturebook genre as deeply concerned with the emotional and imaginative lives of children. Even Bruno Bettelheim, who in 1969 criticized it in his *Ladies' Home Journal* column, changed his mind about Sendak's book; indeed, it may have helped galvanize Bettelheim's exploration of fairy tale enchantments. *Where the Wild Things Are* has never been out of print, and as of February 2008 it had sold over nineteen million copies (Thornton 2008). Winner of the 1964 Caldecott Medal, it is one of the most successful picturebooks of all time.

Where the Wild Things Are emerged in part out of Sendak's ongoing fascination with psychoanalysis. Sendak has often talked about its place in his life and work. Sendak's longtime partner, Dr. Eugene Glynn, was a psychoanalyst specializing in adolescence.² Sendak underwent analysis in the 1950s during a period of depression. The first picturebook he both wrote and illustrated, *Kenny's Window* (1956), was given shape by a case history that he read on the advice of his analyst. What he calls the »trilogy« of *Where the Wild Things Are*, *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), and *Outside Over There* (1981) is concerned with things that go bump in the night, with, in his words, »how children master various feelings – anger, boredom, fear, frustration, jealousy – and manage to come to grips with the realities of their lives« (quoted in Lanes 1980, p. 227). Sendak's love affair with psychoanalysis cannot be disputed, and there is no shortage of psychoanalytic commentary on his picturebook work.

But Sendak's encounter with discourses of the mind was indirect as well as direct, coming through his apprenticeship with pioneers in the picturebook genre as well as through more personal experiences. This article approaches Sendak as a cultural switch point as well as a figurehead for what I am calling *picturebook psychology*, a broader discourse about the psychological value and texture of picturebooks that takes a cue from Freud but has other aspects and influences. Sendak can be linked not only to Freud and to American humanistic psychology but also to fairy-tale discourse (see Kidd 2011, pp. 1–33) and to child study and analysis (see Kidd 2011, pp. 35–63). In Sendak's picturebook work we see the alignment of fairy tales, the »classical« genre for children, with a creative version of child analysis, one that includes both treatments of the inner child and observations of actual children. Sendak has reworked or illustrated quite a number of fairy tales; those of the Brothers Grimm stand out, but there are also tales by Hans Christian Andersen, Clemens Brentano, Wilhelm Hauff, and E.T.A. Hoffmann (Bodmer 2003, p. 129). Psychologist Robert Kloss (1989), among others, likens Sendak's picturebooks to fairy tales, which are linked to the dreamwork as theorized by Freud. Sendak's picturebooks work like and resemble fairy tales and the dreamwork. His books also resemble the child–adult playwork practiced by child analysts, which is hardly surprising since Sendak imitates some of their techniques. Sendak, in short, is the consummate picturebook psychologist, bringing together in the picturebook key psychological themes, forms, and practices. It is no coincidence that he is »one of the principal mythologists of childhood,« who »has created a kind of map of the emotional and visionary

² Dr. Glynn died in 2007. A year later, Sendak acknowledged the relationship and his sexuality in *The New York Times*. Noting that he has given hundreds of interviews over the years, Patricia Cohen asks Sendak if there is any question that was never asked

in all that time. »He paused for a few moments and answered, »Well, that I'm gay All I wanted was to be straight so my parents could be happy. They never, never, never knew« (Cohen 2008, n. p.).

terrain of childhood« (Cech 1995, p. 7), or that friend and collaborator Tony Kushner can liken his child characters to »the kids described in the best, richest developmental literature, the kids in Piaget and Winnicott, doing the tough work of holding themselves and their world together« (2003, p. 10).

There was picturebook psychology before Sendak, and there certainly has been picturebook psychology in his wake. Taking a page from Bettelheim, Ellen Handler Spitz proposes that the »popularity of classic picturebooks derives from their remarkable capacity to tap ongoing issues of deep emotional significance for children« (1999, p. 8). Spitz acknowledges Sendak's importance, devoting some twelve pages to a reading of *Where the Wild Things Are*. But what Spitz does not provide is a history of the genre, and specifically its pre-Sendakian period. John Cech, Barbara Bader, and Leonard Marcus all suggest that Sendak is both legatee and torchbearer of creatively applied child psychology. Bader especially makes a number of connections between child psychology and picturebooks. While acknowledging that *Where the Wild Things Are* was a watershed, she dates the psychologization of the picturebook to the 1930s. Sendak's own practices reach back to this period as much as they reach forward to our current moment of picturebook psychology.³

Sendak's book represents picturebook psychology as it stood in the early 1960s but also radically recasts it, paving the way for a groundswell in applied picturebook psychology. The book can be understood as rewriting classical Freudian analysis, retaining some of its rigor and edge while making it more palatably American. *Where the Wild Things Are* has been embraced as a psychological primer, a story about anger and its management through fantasy; it is also a text in which echoes of Freud remain audible. I read it as a bedtime-story version of Freud's Wolf Man case history of 1918, an updated and upbeat dream of the wolf boy. It is to Sendak what the Wolf Man case was to Freud, a career-making feral tale. Standing at the crossroads of Freudian tradition, child analysis, humanistic psychology, and bibliotherapy, the book both clarified and expanded the uses of picturebook enchantment.

From *Kenny's Window* to *Where the Wild Things Are*

Sendak styled his first picturebook, *Kenny's Window* (1956), after a best-selling psychological casebook by Dorothy Baruch about a young boy named Kenneth. Sendak's text is fascinating but clunky; it features a dream, but dream logic does not govern it or give it shape. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak more successfully brings the dreamwork to the picturebook. The Wolf Man's dream helped make Freud famous and came to signify his expertise, and so too with Sendak's dream of the wolf boy. In the transition from *Kenny's Window* to *Where the Wild Things Are* we can see Sendak refining his own brand of expertise; the book is a self-conscious, highly successful experiment in picturebook psychology.

I am not the first to hear echoes of the Wolf Man in Sendak. In his chapter on psychoanalytic criticism in *The Nimble Reader*, Roderick McGillis remarks insightfully on the similarities as well as the differences between these two narratives. McGillis even observes that several illustrations in *Where the Wild Things Are* are reminiscent of dream scenes from the Wolf Man case, implying that Freud might be a source or inspiration

³ See Kidd 2011, pp. 106–115 on how child analysis and progressive educational theory helped psychologize the picturebook.

for Sendak (1996, p. 82). McGillis, however, focuses on the use-value of psychoanalytic interpretation, concluding, »Freud, then, can provide a model for our understanding of *Where the Wild Things Are*« (ibid.). McGillis is right to imply that Sendak takes his cue from Freud, my line of emphasis here.

Although Freud was highly interested in questions of visual-verbal relation, he was writing before the heyday of picturebooks and thought of such books only as delivery systems for images and scenes formative to individual experience. Freud noticed that in picturebooks we encounter powerful scenes that stay with us into adulthood. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900, he describes a dream as »a substitute for an infantile scene modified by being transferred on to a recent experience« (1965, p. 585) – including experiences with picturebooks. In the case of Little Hans, a picturebook illustration helps Freud make sense of a horse phobia. In the Wolf Man's case, the patient's dream of the wolves derives in part from a childhood encounter with »the picture of a wolf in a book of fairy tales,« in which, as Freud reports, »the wolf was standing upright, striding out with one foot, with its claws stretched out and its ears pricked« (1963, p. 187). Freud theorizes that the Wolf Man's recollection of this image gets entangled with his (screen) memory of the fairy tales *The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. Freud does not muse explicitly on the picturebook as an imagetext form or genre, despite his sense, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, of the dreamwork as a »pictographic script,« a »picture puzzle« (1965, p. 312). Others, of course, have pushed this line of inquiry.

Ronald R. Thomas reminds us that Freud's theory of the dreamwork is indebted to scenes of dreaming in Victorian literature as well as to Freud's own dreams. *The Interpretation of Dreams* »may even justifiably be read as Freud's own autobiographical novel,« he suggests, »in which he recovers the unconscious material of his own childhood, refashions it into an account of the operations of the mind, and establishes his authority as a scientist of the psyche« (1990, p. 3). Moreover, the »paradigmatic plot« of both literature and psychoanalysis »as mediated by the dream, revolves around questions of authority. Nineteenth-century literary dreams are *always* dreams of authority« (ibid., p. 2; emphasis in the original). While Sendak does not position himself as an authority on the dream, he does self-identify as an authoritative dreamer of childhood and its discontents, drawing from a store of dreamtexts and translating them into picturebooks.

Even as he drew from real life, Sendak styled his work after that of Winsor McCay, creator of the comic strip *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. In a 1973 tribute to McCay, republished in *Caldecott and Co.*, Sendak remarks, »McCay and I serve the same master, our child selves ... and neither of us forget our childhood dreams« (1988 c, p. 78). »McCay re-created dreams that we all had as children,« he continues, »but few of us remember – or care to remember. ... In Slumberland, as in Wonderland, irrational taboos, forbidden places, and terrifying creatures confront our hero at every turn« (ibid., p. 81). In every strip, Little Nemo sleeps, dreams, and awakes – often screaming or falling out of bed, as his dreams are usually nightmares. Once Sendak imagined himself in place of the creative child: he drew kids dreaming as well as drawing. But unlike Little Nemo and the Wolf Man, Sendak's child dreamers do not typically suffer nightmares. In both *Kenny's Window* and *Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak transforms dreams of Wild Things into fortifying experiences for the child.

The Wolf Man case is the best-known or most canonical of all Freud's case histories. In February 1910, a young, wealthy Russian aristocrat named Sergey Pankejeff came to Freud for help with some serious psychological symptoms. The analysis lasted until

1914 and focused on a neurosis that had occurred between the ages of four and ten, as suggested by the official case title, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*. The case revolves around a »specimen dream« occurring just before the Wolf Man's fourth birthday but recollected during the analysis. Here is the Wolf Man's account of the dream, as reproduced by Freud:

I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheepdogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they are attending to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. (Freud 1963, p. 186; italics in the original)

To accompany this report the Wolf Man gave Freud a drawing of the dream, the first of many such renderings. In the drawing, against a blank background, five white wolves perch ominously on the craggy branches of a tree. There are five wolves instead of the six or seven in the narrated account. Freud used the dream and the case history to argue for the staying power of infantile experience and to theorize about the origins of obsessional neurosis. While both Freud and the Wolf Man were satisfied with the course of treatment, the Wolf Man's symptoms later returned, and he spent the rest of his life in and out of therapy. And here is the beginning of *Kenny's Window*:

In the middle of a dream, Kenny woke up. And he remembered a garden.
»I saw a garden in my dream,« thought Kenny, »and a tree.« There was a tree covered white with blossoms. And above the tree shone the sun and the moon side by side. Half the garden was filled with yellow morning and the other with dark green night.
»There was something else in my dream,« thought Kenny, and he tried to remember.
»A train,« he cried, »and a rooster with four feet and he gave me something.«
There was a train puffing its way through the garden and in the caboose sat a rooster with four feet and he gave Kenny a piece of paper.
»Here,« said the rooster, »are seven questions and you must find all the answers.«
»If I do,« asked Kenny, »may I come and live in the garden?«
But before the rooster could answer, the dream ended.

Kenny then sets about answering the seven questions, which are:

1. Can you draw a picture on the blackboard when somebody doesn't want you to?
2. What is an only goat?
3. Can you see a horse on the roof?
4. Can you fix a broken promise?
5. What is a Very Narrow Escape?
6. What looks inside and what looks outside?
7. Do you always want what you think you want? (Sendak 1956, n. p.)

Instead of six or seven white wolves, we get seven seemingly absurd questions and a tree covered in white blossoms; in place of the eerie moonlight scene depicted by Freud's patient, we have a split scene of day and night. While more philosophical than sexual, at least on the surface, Kenny's questions echo the questions of the Wolf Man and indeed the »researches« of small children. Beginning his quest, Kenny tries to draw a picture on the blackboard, remarking,

»I'll call it A Dream« (capital letters).

»NO!« cried an angry voice. »You cannot draw on the blackboard today!«

»Why not?« asked Kenny.

»Because!« said the voice.

The voice belongs to Bucky, Kenny's stuffed animal, who refuses the role of collaborator or transitional object. Bucky is upset because Kenny has neglected him, and after writing a poem for Bucky, Kenny can draw his dream picture on the blackboard, a picture featuring Bucky astride the dream rooster, a distorted image of the dream we have been told about. As he pursues the other questions, Kenny has close encounters with a white goat, lead soldiers, his dog Baby, and his friend David. At the book's end, on another dreamy, moonlit night, the rooster returns to hear Kenny's answers. The hardest of all is the seventh, »Do you always want what you think you want?« »I thought I wanted to live in the garden with the moon on one side and the sun on the other, but I really don't,« concludes Kenny. That we don't always want what we think we want is one of Freud's central lessons.

Sendak has never mentioned any direct influence of the Wolf Man case on *Kenny's Window* or *Where the Wild Things Are*, although he has repeatedly acknowledged the general impact of Freudian analysis on his life and work. Sendak was inspired to write *Kenny's Window* after reading, in a period of depression and on the advice of his analyst, Dorothy W. Baruch's 1952 case history *One Little Boy*. Baruch was a psychoanalytically trained therapist who wrote a number of popular texts on child-rearing as well as books for children. *One Little Boy* is an account of a seven-year-old boy named Kenneth brought into treatment because of his failure in school, which turns out to be a symptom for family dysfunction and emotional distress. Baruch administers play therapy in the tradition of Klein, working closely with Kenny and even explaining to him the principles of treatment. The book is sometimes described as an account of autism; in fact, Kenny's problems are more generic, the result of family dynamics and childhood anxiety generalizable to all children. Eschewing Freudian terminology, Baruch nonetheless takes us through the usual Freudian story of psychosexual development, explaining how she gave Kenny permission to be bad, so that »he would now be a fraction less afraid of two things: of his own inner feelings running wildly out of hand, and of retribution from me« (1964, p. 39). With her help, Kenny learns to express anger – and his parents learn to put aside their own fears. His imaginative world is »as illogical and full of fantasy as are all children's,« writes Baruch. »From the vantage point of adult logic, they looked as strangely distorted as images seen in the mirrors of funhouses« (ibid., p. 103).

As Bader notes, while *Kenny's Window* is not a direct translation of *One Little Boy* into picturebook form, »the seven episodes that answer the questions for Kenny deal figuratively with yearnings or fears that Kenneth confronts and comes to terms with in the course of his therapy« (1976, pp. 504–5). By the end of his adventures, Kenny no longer wants to live in isolation in the magic garden, is no longer fearful of himself or others.

Sendak aligns himself with Freud and Baruch alike, while taking a cue from an earlier generation of picturebook psychologists. Sendak develops his picturebook as a therapeutic exercise, a working-through of desire, prohibition, and anger undertaken on behalf of the child subject. It is a fascinating picturebook, but not a very successful one. Many readers find it enigmatic or too existential. Bader remarks that the book's shape is »unintelligible because Kenny is indistinct« (ibid., p. 505); we do not know enough about his situation to understand his experiences. Another, more significant problem is a hovering adult presence in the text, not the presence of parent figures but rather that of the author, who presides over Kenny's recovery. *Kenny's Window* fails in part because its psychological program is too obvious.

»The picture books that become classics do so,« writes Ellen Spitz, »because they dare to tackle important and abiding psychological themes, and because they convey these themes with craftsmanship and subtlety« (1999, p. 8). By this standard, the »classic« status of *Where the Wild Things Are* should come as no surprise; indeed, the book functions for Spitz (among many others) as the exemplary picturebook. In fact, it helped set the stage for what makes a picturebook a classic; classicism or canonicity is not a naturally occurring phenomenon but rather the result of particular values and practices. Psychological depth alongside »craftsmanship« and »subtlety« are certainly to be found in the book. Unlike *Kenny's Window*, *Where the Wild Things Are* gets the dream work just right. Moreover, there is little sense of authorial presence; the story seems to tell itself.

Sendak made the first dummy for *Where the Wild Things Are* in 1956, calling it »Where the Wild Horses Are.« Displeased with it, he put the dummy aside until 1963, after he had written several other books of his own and illustrated many others. At that point, he still struggled with the concept, at first writing several horse-themed versions (including one about »nightmares«) before finally deciding he could not draw horses and revising to the generic and far less threatening »things« (see Cech 1995, pp. 126–36). On May 25, 1963, he composed a new dummy featuring eighteen illustrations and only 380 words, far fewer than in the first version. Given the level of revision that went into this book, we might even call it overdetermined, like the dreamwork itself. In one of the best analyses of Sendak's book, Perry Nodelman calls attention to the complexities of its spatial and temporal design, including its alter nation of »action« shots with scenes of Max suspended »in a dreamlike stasis« (1988, p. 162).

Where the Wild Things Are is more clearly about the possibility of self-fulfillment, in keeping with broader cultural trends. Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg note that while American child-rearing literature had previously been dominated by just a handful of manuals – the foremost being Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* (1946) – the field »rapidly grew more crowded and confused during the 1960s,« and by 1981 more than six hundred books on the subject were in print (Mintz/Kellogg 1988, p. 220). The new manuals shifted emphasis away from children's thinking and toward their feeling. By the mid-1960s, notes Eugene Schwartz, books on child-care suddenly had »many discussions on ›feelings‹ (virtually absent from earlier volumes)« (1999, p. 46). The literature remained focused on the mother–child relationship, and there were strong traces of Freudian thought inherited from the so-called Freudian forties, especially in the extent that »feelings« were thought to be able to signify the unconscious. By the 1960s, the so-called humanistic or third-force psychology of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Erich Fromm had come to dominate the popular scene, placing great premium on individual happiness and self-realization. Child-rearing discourse since Spock had already imagined a kinder, gentler parenting, setting the stage for further modification.

Accounts of this trend vary; its advocates welcomed it as an alternative to the pessimism of psychoanalysis and behaviorism, whereas skeptics saw it as vacuous and anti-intellectual.

In *Where the Wild Things Are*, published amid this overhaul of child-rearing literature, we see the importance of feelings, both in a residually Freudian sense and in the context of humanistic psychology. Sendak is perfectly attuned to the complexities of his time and represents them as we might well expect: through a dream, one that echoes but tames the Wolf Man's dream and other variants of wolf-boy narrative. Running amok in a wolf suit and making mischief »of one kind / and another,« young Max is sent off to bed supperless. His room dreamily becomes a forest – bedposts turning into trees and carpet into grass; the moon escaping the window frame. An ocean tumbles by and Max sails »off through night and day / and in and out of weeks / and almost over a year / to where the wild things are.« Five Wild Things welcome Max as their king. The wild rumpus, which runs several pages and constitutes a centerfold of sorts, is wordless, not unlike the Wolf Man's dream of the wolves. Both »dreams« are moonlit, essentially nonverbal episodes. Postrumpus, Max grows bored and homesick and sails back »into the night of his very own room,« where he finds his supper waiting for him – »and it was still hot«.

There are of course key differences between the Wolf Man's dream of the wolves and Max's dream of the Wild Things. The situation of the protagonist is particularly crucial. The Wolf Man reports in distress: »It seemed as though [the wolves] had riveted their whole attention upon me« (Freud 1963, p. 186). Max, too, is the center of attention, but he is firmly and happily in charge, staring into the Wild Things' yellow eyes until they look away and sending them to bed without supper. Max, notes McGillis, is aggressive and destructive and »the book is replete with images of phallic aggressiveness: the strong vertical lines of erect trees, bedposts, Max's scepter, his ship's mast, and the horns of some of the Wild Things« (1996, p. 80). Because Max's anger is directed partly toward his mother, explains McGillis, the Wild Things are »parodic of adults« rather than scary (ibid., p. 81). Even at their most menacing, the Wild Things have a friendly countenance, their arms extended in welcome and their forms suggestively human.⁴ »Whereas Freud's patient feared animals,« McGillis points out, »Max is one« (ibid., p.82). McGillis notes that in an early version of the story, Max does not wear a wolf suit; rather, he meets a character claiming to be his mother who then turns into a rapacious wolf.⁵ This aborted plot resonates with the Wolf Man's dream and with wolf-themed fairy tales, whereas in Sendak's version, the mother is firmly linked with care and feeding (rather than with child-devouring). Whereas the Wolf Man spends the rest of his life in analysis, never successfully overcoming his phobias, Max works through his anger and returns to a hot supper. Max needs no dramatic intervention, only an understanding mother and some time and space of his own.

Initially meeting with some disapproval, *Where the Wild Things Are* quickly found status as a psychological as well as aesthetic masterpiece. Psychologist Michael Thompson, for instance, proclaims it »the best book on boy anger« (2000, p. 165). Whatever its com-

4 The Wild Things were in fact modeled on Sendak's uncles and aunts.

5 By having Max replace his mother as the wolf, suggests McGillis, Sendak acknowledges the boy's overriding narcissism as well as the dynamics of ag-

gression and sublimation (1996, p. 82). And by making this particular change, he revises the fairy-tale formula behind the Wolf Man's dream, emphasizing the adaptive power as well as the psychic wildness of the child.

plexities, it has nonetheless been received as a psychological primer. Sendak himself authorized that view in his 1964 Caldecott acceptance speech: »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« (1988 a, p. 151). In that speech, Sendak remarked, »I feel like I am at the end of a long apprenticeship,« anticipating work even more attuned to »the child's endless battle with disturbing emotions« (ibid., p. 154). *Where the Wild Things Are* has a place in our culture because it made classic the idea of the picturebook as hard psychological work.

The Triumph of the Therapeutic

Now in his eighties,⁶ Sendak has written or illustrated nearly seventy children's books; he has also illustrated adult classics and designed opera and ballet sets for stage and television. He has been awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Award, a National Medal of the Arts, and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for Literature. Sendak's oeuvre is rich and complex and should not be eclipsed by *Where the Wild Things Are* or by its popularity. Sendak himself has expressed some ambivalence about the book's great esteem. When asked in 2003, »How does it feel to realize that your work – *Wild Things* in particular – is so much a part of public culture?« Sendak responded, »I'm not very impressed with being a catchword every time someone needs something to be ›wild,« while acknowledging that *Where the Wild Things Are* has enabled him to »do all kinds of books that I probably never would have done« (quoted in R. Sutton 2003, p. 687). Some of Sendak's picturebook work in fact moves deliberately against the happy message of *Where the Wild Things Are* or against the assumption of that there is such a message, vis-à-vis humanistic psychology.

Even so, *Where the Wild Things Are* marked an important turning point for picturebook psychology, reworking in a contemporary idiom the themes and forms of progressive pedagogy and child analysis as well as those of Freud himself. The book is so much a part of public culture because it captured and expressed the psychological zeitgeist of 1960s America. We are still living with that zeitgeist, more or less. Even more postmodern or more metafictional picturebooks partake in what I have been calling picturebook psychology, inviting the playful engagement of the child and foregrounding the playful inventiveness of their creators. Picturebook psychology still emphasizes the psychosocial utility of the form for both children and their caretakers. In fact, there is a strong trend toward the explicitly bibliotherapeutic from the 1960s forward. Tomie DePaola's 1973 *Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs* and John Burningham's 1984 *Granpa*, for instance, were written to help young children cope with death. Often the titles of picturebooks make obvious their applied focus, as with Aliko's 1986 *Feelings*, Mercer Mayer's 1968 *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* and 1988 *There's Something in My Attic*, and of course Stan and Jan Berenstain's popular Berenstain Bears books of the 1980s, such as *The Berenstain Bears in the Dark*, *The Berenstain Bears Visit the Dentist*, *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food*, and so forth.

If parents are unsure which picturebooks to use with their children, they can turn to resources such as child psychologist Jacqueline Golding's *Healing Stories: Picture Books for the Big and Small Changes in a Child's Life* (2006), an annotated guide to some five

⁶ Editor's note: Maurice Sendak died in 2012 at the age of 83. The chapter from which this article is taken was published in 2011 (see Note 1).

hundred picture books addressing such problems as sibling rivalry, moving, bullying, death, and war and violence. Dozens of articles in professional psychology and psychiatry journals now deal with the therapeutic value of children's books; Golding merges this professional literature with the literature of annotation provided by librarians. With or without the likes of Golding and such explicit thematizations within the texts, parents routinely turn to picturebooks for help with their children, tacitly acknowledging the author-illustrator as a partner in child-rearing. Some of this, at least, is the legacy of Sendak and of *Where the Wild Things Are*. Sendak has always taken picturebook work very seriously as hard, psychological work. When asked by Walter Lorraine, »Can you define what a picture book is for you?« Sendak replied thus:

It's my battleground. It's where I express myself. It's where I consolidate my powers and put them together in what I hope is a legitimate, viable form that is meaningful to somebody else and not just to me. It's where I work. It's where I put down those fantasies that have been with me all my life, and where I give them a form that means something. I live inside the picture book; that's where I fight all my battles, and where I hope to win my wars. (Sendak 1988 b, p. 93)

Primary Literature

- Armstrong, Louise / Darrow Jr, Whitney (Ill.) (1963): *A Child's Guide to Freud*. New York: Simon & Schuster
- Sendak, Maurice (1956): *Kenny's Window*. New York: Harper & Row
- Sendak, Maurice (1963): *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper & Row
- Sendak, Maurice (1970): *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row
- Sendak, Maurice (1981): *Outside Over There*. New York: Harper & Row

Secondary Literature

- Bader, Barbara (1976): *American Picture Books from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*. New York
- Baruch, Dorothy W. (1964): *One Little Boy*. New York. [First published in 1952]
- Bodmer, George R. (1986–87): Ruth Krauss and Maurice Sendak's Early Illustration. In: *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter), pp. 180–183
- Bodmer, George R. (2003): Arthur Hughes, Walter Crane, and Maurice Sendak. The Picture as Literary Fairy Tale. In: *Marvels and Tales* Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 120–37
- Bettelheim, Bruno (1969): The Care and Feeding of Monsters. In: *Ladies' Home Journal*, March, p. 48
- Cech, John (1995): *Angels and Wild Things. The Archetypal Poetics of Maurice Sendak*. Pennsylvania State University Press
- Cohen, Patricia (2008): Concerns beyond Just Where the Wild Things Are. *New York Times*, 11.09.2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/10/arts/design/10sendak.html> [19.06.2020]
- Freud, Sigmund (1963): Three Case Histories. The ›Wolf Man,‹ the ›Rat Man,‹ and the Psychotic Doctor Schreber. Edited and introduced by Philip Rieff. New York
- Freud, Sigmund (1965): *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. New York. First published in 1900
- Golding, Jacqueline (2006): *Healing Stories. Picture Books for the Big and Small Changes in a Child's Life*. New York

- Kidd, Kenneth B. (2011): *Freud in Oz. At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature*. Minneapolis MN
- Klein, Melanie (1998): *Narrative of Child Analysis*. London. [First published in 1961]
- Kloss, Robert J. (1989): *Fantasy and Fear in the Work of Maurice Sendak*. In: *Psychoanalytic Review*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Winter), pp. 567–579
- Kushner, Tony (2003): *The Art of Maurice Sendak. 1980 to the Present*. New York
- Lanes, Selma G. (1980): *The Art of Maurice Sendak*. New York. [First published in 1971]
- Marcus, Leonard S. (2002) *Ways of Telling. Conversations on the Art of the Picture Book*. New York
- McGillis, Roderick (1996) *The Nimble Reader. Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. New York
- Mintz, Steven / Kellogg, Susan (1988): *Domestic Revolutions. A Social History of American Family Life*. New York
- Nodelman, Perry (1988): *Words about Pictures. The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*. Athens, Ga.
- Piaget, Jean (1962): *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*. Translated by G. Gattegno and F. M. Hodgson. New York
- Schwartz, Eugene (1999): *Millennial Child. Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century*. Hudson, N.Y.
- Sendak, Maurice (1988a): »Caldecott Medal Acceptance.« Speech given in 1964. In: *Caldecott and Co. Notes on Books and Pictures*. New York, pp. 145–156
- Sendak, Maurice (1988b): »A Conversation with Walter Lorraine.« In: *Caldecott and Co. Notes on Books and Pictures*. New York, pp. 185–193
- Sendak, Maurice (1988c): »Winsor McCay.« In: *Caldecott and Co. Notes on Books and Pictures*. New York, pp. 77–86. [First published in 1973]
- Spitz, Ellen Handler (1999): *Inside Picture Books*. New Haven
- Sutton, Roger (2003): *An Interview with Maurice Sendak*. In: *Horn Book*, November–December, pp. 687–699
- Thomas, Ronald R. (1990): *Dreams of Authority. Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious*. Ithaca, N.Y.
- Thompson, Michael (2000): *Speaking of Boys. Answers to the Most Often Asked Questions about Raising Sons*. New York
- Thornton, Matthew (2008): *Wild Things All Over*. *Publisher's Weekly*, 04.02.2008. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/12192-wild-things-all-over-.html> [19.06.2020]
- Winnicott, D. W. (1989): *Playing and Reality*. New York. [First published in 1971]

Biographical Note

Kenneth B. Kidd, PhD, Professor of English at the University of Florida. Areas of research: the intersection of children's literature with other cultural projects, such as philosophy, psychology, and critical theory; gender and sexuality in and around children's literature. He is coeditor of the *Children's Literature and Culture Series* (Routledge).