

They Know Everything

Children and Suffering

Maurice Sendak

Herbert Schreier

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We have learned a lot in the thirty years since we began seriously studying the long-term effects of trauma. Without going into too much detail, there are many kinds of trauma. There are traumas that occur at the hands of human beings, and traumas caused by natural disasters. There are kids traumatized individually, in groups, and there are whole populations traumatized. There are also kids who are traumatized repeatedly in family situations. People can be traumatized by situations. Witnesses to trauma, for example, can be traumatized. We also know that kids have an extraordinary memory for trauma and that memory can precede language.

There are two really painful cases in the literature of children who were known to have experienced trauma prior to the development of language. One was an eight-month-old baby who was in a pornography ring. When she was being observed in play therapy, she kept stabbing a baby doll with a pencil in the belly button. Eight months into therapy it just happened that they discovered the cache of photographs, and there was this child with an erect penis in her belly button. If you don't do trauma work, these stories may upset you, but just telling them can give you a sense of what it is to be traumatized. There's a case of a child who watched her mother being blown up by a letter bomb when she was one year old, again preverbal. At age four, she was not getting on well with her adoptive family. Nobody had talked to her about the event, but she played out in exact detail to her psychiatrist what had happened to her mother on that day. Memory, even eidetic memory, is quite good. Despite the current attacks on repression, dissociation as a defense against facing trauma has been well documented.

What I wanted to present today very, very briefly are the results of the study that we did of the Oakland Hills fire, a fire which in one day destroyed 3300 homes, and

400 apartments, injured 125 people, and killed 25. A frightening thing for the kids was watching the blaze while the television kept reporting that the fire was “out of control.” I don’t think there are many things more frightening to children than adults being out of control.

After the fire, we did several studies, one of them involving an art class. In the school that we consulted there was a wonderful art teacher who had them do drawings of the fire. (Actually, the assignment before the event of the fire was to imagine that they were Maurice Sendak!) You all know what can happen when you let your imagination wander. We showed these pictures, with drawings from a control group, to art therapists and asked them to use an adjectival checklist. The overwhelming analysis of the emotions in the pictures done by kids who were actually involved in the fire were anger and anxiety. Drawings eight months later showed loneliness. I think this change from anger and anxiety to loneliness reflects our limited attention span for other people’s trauma. We expect them to get better right away. The work of Mardi Horowitz is very clear on this matter. It takes a year to two years to get over a trauma and reorganize your sense of who you are in the world, based on having been through that trauma. The non-traumatized, who perhaps could just as easily have been hurt, do not want to think about it.

Another study that we did concerning the fire was to look at kids and their parents. In this case, unlike Anna Freud studying children in the London Blitz, we actually asked the kids how they felt. We found a lot of families in which the kids told us that they were more troubled by the fire than their parents, who were questioned separately, were able to perceive. This is interesting because it raises many possibilities about how we understand other people’s suffering. These kids did better at the one-year anniversary when we went back to look at them. But at two years, the anniversary week of the fire, there was a huge fire in Los Angeles, and these kids saw it on television. In the middle of the week on Wednesday, the kids went out for a fire drill at eight o’clock in the morning, and at ten o’clock in the morning they were called out for another fire drill, which is very unusual for any school. When they looked up in the hills, there was a house on fire. The kids went wild. When we looked at scores for anxiety and PTSD at that time, the results indicated that when such a discrepancy exists, there is an increased susceptibility to the effects of a reminder of the trauma.

I want to close with a couple of points about trauma, and what happens if you don't treat it. Kids will reenact trauma. They will create games, which often involve the trauma symbolically, and engage other kids in sometimes dangerous and anxiety-provoking play that they don't associate with trauma. (One girl played bus on a very dangerous ledge, and got other kids to play with her. The kids didn't make the connection.) Art can be very useful for working out trauma, but if the trauma is not worked through, it becomes post-traumatic play. It just goes nowhere.

An example of our understanding the degree to which kids can be traumatized and the long-lasting effects of post-traumatic stress disorder in kids can be found in juvenile detention homes. Thirty percent of kids in juvenile detention are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. That study was just done by a researcher at Stanford. If you look at children who murder, 100 percent of them have been traumatized. Despite the finding that 100 percent of them suffered from some sort of psychiatric syndrome besides PTSD, only 15 percent of them had received any form of treatment!

The final point I want to make is also taken from studies by Lenore Terr published in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*. Those who know the paintings of Magritte know that they're weird in a way. There are a lot of faces without features; they are blank. There are pictures where body parts are in the wrong place. Water scenes are very common. The case is interesting because when he was 14, Magritte awoke one night and found his mother missing. She was later found drowned in the Sambre River, her nightgown around her face. Magritte refused to talk of the past and loved Edgar Allan Poe, who was with his mother when she died of consumption for four days before it was discovered. We know Magritte also hated psychiatrists and would not talk to them. He has a famous sculpture of a psychiatrist; it has a birdcage for a chest and no head.

The question of whether the artist was involved in very creative post-traumatic "play" or whether he worked through his trauma is one we might ask of our guest artist, Maurice Sendak.

Maurice Sendak

Well, I feel a little bit betwixt and between. I read the article about Magritte that you gave me, and it was fascinating. I have no doubt, as you have no doubt. Sometimes I'm skeptical that something so abrupt and simple that happens in childhood could have such a long-lasting effect, but I know it's true. A number of things like that have happened to me, and only one of which I'll tell you about because it actually has a lot to do with this issue. I'm one of those people who did not hate psychiatrists. I couldn't afford to. I spent most of my twenties in the psychiatrist's office working out part of this problem. It's something that took me roughly between the ages of three and fifty to solve, and it was solved not through psychiatry so much as through the creative process and working it out through endless books, and then finally clinching it in one book.

I was a very sickly child, which was very typical back in the early '30s, when there weren't drugs or vaccines. You got dyptheria and you got pneumonia, and scarlet fever. My parents were immigrants. They were poor. They were tactless. The fact of my mortality was loudly proclaimed all over the house. . . in my hearing. My grandmother dressed me in white clothes so that God passing over would assume I was already dead and angelic and go get some other kid. There was no question I could croak at a very early age. At the time I was three, and I was getting over a very bad bout of scarlet fever, which left me impaired in many ways, the Lindbergh case happened.

Some people are nodding, those old enough to remember that case. I will review it briefly for the younger people here who might not know about it. Charles A. Lindbergh was a great national hero, the first man ever to fly non-stop from New York to Paris. He married the daughter of a Mexican ambassador, who was beautiful

and poetic and wonderful. She learned how to fly with him, and she flew when she was pregnant upside down doing Morse Code. Everyone followed them like you follow now Charles and Di, but they were a lot more interesting than Charles and Di. Well, who isn't? But they were of that princely, royal nature. I knew about them. We all knew about them. But what I knew most about them was that they had a child. That child's face was in the paper, it seemed, almost every day. And that child, of course, was the most beautiful child in the world. He had to be because he belonged to them. He was blond, he was blue-eyed, he was Charlie, Jr., and we heard about him all the time. And then he was kidnapped.

You must remember, this was a time of no television. I was three years old. There wasn't much conversation between me and my parents. Lots between me and my siblings, but I got all my information from the radio and from glimpsing pictures in the newspapers. I remember vividly Mrs. Lindbergh talking over the radio in a very broken voice about the baby having a cold and will the person who took the baby rub camphor in his chest and warm his milk for him.

Years later I went to a party in New York and met a news reporter, Gabriel Heater, the only celebrity I ever wanted to meet in my whole life. I rushed over to him. He must have thought I was totally out of my mind. I said, "You're the guy who introduced Mrs. Lindbergh on the radio." He said, "Yeah." He obviously introduced millions of people, so he couldn't fathom why I was so excited.

We followed the news, of course. Lindbergh flew over the Andes because somebody had seen a blond baby. He flew over the Yangtze because somebody had seen the blond baby, or the Alps or wherever. He was flying and flying and flying looking for a glint of gold somewhere that was his baby's head. Now, I only know this from having understood it later, but you have to accept that this is true—that I equated my mortality, my survival, with Charlie's. You had to see. . . I knew I was a poor baby who came from an immigrant Jewish family. He came from a Gentile family, and he had a nurse and a policeman and lived in a house with German shepherds guarding it. How did he get out of that house at seven o'clock in the evening? If that could happen to him, what chance did I stand? So my fate hung on Charlie's coming home alive. And, of course, he didn't. He was found dead about three or four miles away, in the woods outside of Hopewell, New Jersey. And that

created in me a sense that I died. There was no question I could not live if he could not live. That occurred within me without anyone observing. Obviously, I went on eating and drinking and being a pest, but some very fundamental, crucial part of me I declared dead, and it remained so.

Something else happened at that point, too, because when the body was found, I saw a picture, a photograph of the body. I proclaimed this loudly to everybody. My parents were furious at my morbidity, that I went on and on and on about this thing. I did not see the body; I couldn't have seen the body. And they tried in every way to eradicate this bad thing in my head in rather rough ways. So I learned to shut up; I learned to not talk about it. This went on for most of my life. And I never bring it up. At the psychiatrist's office we used it as a symptom, you know, as a fantasy symptom of what had occurred to me. He didn't for a minute accept it as factual.

About fifteen years ago in my little community in Connecticut, and I thought I was hallucinating, it was announced that a man who had just written a book absolving Bruno Hauptman, who was electrocuted for kidnapping the baby, was going to talk about his book at Ridgefield, Connecticut at the library. Well, he had a bad agent. Ridgefield, Connecticut. . . the Lindbergh kidnapping—nobody's going to be there, except me. And nobody was there, except me. And there's the author up on the stage, looking very distraught because nobody's there except one sort of hysterical looking middle-aged man in the audience. He started to talk about his book, and I was raising my hand. Finally he just quit, and I said, "Let's go out and have a bite," and went out. He said he would autograph a copy of his book for me, and he was amazed at the details I knew about the kidnapping.

I'd been to Hopewell, New Jersey. I had gone close to the house with a friend who was quite alarmed when we parked the car and I said, "I'll walk to the house." He said, "No, no, no. They won't let you." It was by then a school for bad boys. I wanted to feel what had happened. I didn't time this consciously, but it was seven o'clock in the evening. We parked, and then I walked towards the house. I could hear people talking in the house. I could hear dogs barking. I thought this is how it must have been. It was still light. People are talking in the house, like the Colonel and his wife on the first floor. The dog was barking. I went around the corner of the house. I looked up at the nursery window. I had all the time in the world to put a ladder against that window. I went through the whole madness.

Anyway, I told Tony over dinner and a lot of wine—I was quite loosened up—about this perverse image I’ve had in my head, and I said, “I always felt since a child I’d seen a photograph of the dead baby.” He shoved a napkin over and said, “Draw it.” Easy. I drew it. Gave it to him back, and he said, “You saw it. You saw it.” It was a morning edition of the *Daily News* and it said, “Kidnapped Baby Found Dead, ” with a hideous photograph of the remains of the child amid a tangle of woods and leaves. You could just see the head and part of the body. It had decayed over two or three months. The newspaper printed a big arrow pointing to the skull, so you could begin to see what it looked like. The colonel threatened to sue the paper if it appeared in the second edition.

This happened to John Lennon, by the way, who was photographed lying on a slab, naked, and Yoko Ono said she’d sue if that appeared in the afternoon edition. Same thing. I’d had the bad luck of seeing it, and children have Polaroid vision memory. I saw it, I took it, and it stayed there forever. And Tony saved me because he said, “You’ve seen it. It was there.” He told me he had seen it, and then, on another occasion, he gave me a souvenir photograph of that edition, and I could see what I’d seen. It was just what I had drawn.

I can’t tell you the relief I felt to know that it was just a simple thing that happened, that I’d just passed a news stand, probably holding my mother or my father’s hand, and I’d turned and looked as I was taken home. That was the beginning of an endless nightmare for me.

The nightmare ended for me, more or less, with *Outside Over There*. Every book of mine, every major book of mine has hidden somewhere in it a child being taken away—a dog kidnapping a baby in *Higgledy, Piggledy, Pop*. Over and over again children are being taken away. Or they think they’re lost, like Max, who was separated from his mother. Now, I’d always known I would do a trio of books. There would be the little boy, Max, the preschooler. There would be a tiny bit older Mickey, who’s now smart enough to investigate a mystery that is erotic and disturbing to him. And then there would be the oldest child, Ida, in *Outside Over There*, who had a whole different problem.

The point of my books always has been to ask how children cope with a monumental problem that happened instantly and changed their lives forever, but

they have to go on living. And they cannot discuss this with anyone. No one will take the time. Parents are embarrassed so they'll shush them up. Of course, this was me that I was talking about, all the time, but I had to get older and stronger to do the Lindbergh book, to really get to the matter. And that's what *Outside Over There* is all about.

The heroine is Ida, who is nine or ten years old. That was my sister, who was just ten years older than me when I was born. I gave her the name Ida because we had a neighbor who I preferred to my mother, which hurt my mother a good deal. I would run across the hall to Ida and sit on her lap and babble and tell her things. She'd be amused, and she would listen, which my mother couldn't do. So I named my heroine Ida. She has a baby sister. I changed the sex of the baby to a sister, thinking, "God, I don't want anybody to track me on this thing." So it's a baby sister. And Ida hates her baby sister and wishes her gone, wishes her dead.

Through art and a magic horn the goblins come, take the real baby away, and leave an ice baby in its stead. Of course, the ice baby was me, a dead baby, and they take the live baby away. Now, I have Ida come to her senses because she's not a psychopathic child—every child will hate her parents or hate her siblings for a moment—and she becomes frightened of what she's done. She isn't yet ready to accept the fact that she has to live with this child. She goes out into the world backwards, and her adventures lead her to an understanding of the situation. She goes into the goblins' den, and finds, to her horror, that goblins are babies. They all look alike. How is she going to tell the difference between goblin babies and her sister baby?

Throughout the journey, the baby always looks like the baby. I'm good at making the likenesses clear. No one ever, in looking at this book, has detected that there's one picture, a center spread of Ida floating through the air, determined that she's going to find her sister, and below, in a small cave, is the baby hidden away from her. It is an exact portrait of Charlie Lindbergh, Jr.

I can't tell you how difficult it was to just do it. It was like some kind of obscenity, some kind of strange perversion, but I could not resist copying his features, which I've memorized. It's very easy to do his face.

Before I tell you the dénouement of the story, there was another social thing that occurred, which is very important in the '30s. The Dionne Quintuplets were born, I think, in 1936 or '37, which was the year after the Bruno Hauptman trial and his execution. By then, of course, I was talking and completely demented. Those five babies obsessed the world, as did the Lindbergh case. Yvonne, Marie, Cecille, Emily, Annette. I don't know my birthday, but I cannot forget the names of those girls. That was magic. If anything happened to one, well, the magic was over. If Annette caught a cold, we all held our breath. Of course, this also got us through the Depression. This got us through a lot of rotten stuff that was going on in the world. You could focus on Lindbergh and Dionne. The babies were extraordinarily beautiful. And, of course, historically the first ever recorded from one egg.

They were personally important to me because there were five. There were five Sendaks in my family, so five, as it is with a lot of children, is a very magic number. So nothing could happen to Annette or Emily, or I was a nervous wreck. Every time one had a cold or diarrhea, I was [laughter] in a scary depression.

Now, I use five goblin babies, all identical, in the book, homage to the Dionne quintuplets. I dress Ida in a blue dress, homage to Judy Garland in *The Wizard of Oz*, who broke my heart. It was the first movie I'd seen—I was about ten—where I wept and wept not about Oz, but about Judy Garland, because I knew she and I had gone through some kind of serious hell, and that she was using her enormous talent to tell us about that. The blue dress was for her. There's Mozart in the book. I was just designing *The Magic Flute* and so the two works overlapped, and the solution to the book, of course, was that the only way to find her baby sister was to play a magic tune. And goblins have to dance. Grimm Brothers tell us that if you're a mother, and you turn your back for a moment, the goblins will come and take your baby. And they'll put a changeling in its place. And if you turn around and look, it looks very much like your baby, slightly cross-eyed and drooling. How do you know your baby from a changeling? You can take a flute and start to play. Changelings have to dance. If it dances, it ain't your kid. Then you pound three times on the table, and the goblins, very grumpy, have to come up and give your kid back and take that thing away. So Ida plays her magic horn, and they all dance themselves into foam; they just disappear into the ether. They just become water, and the only one left is her sister, who welcomes her with open arms. Ida takes her home, and Mozart points the way,

because she's now in total harmony with her situation.

She comes home to a depressed mother, who has just gotten a letter from her seafaring father. The first line of the book is "When Papa was away at sea," like a lot of papas, in one form or another, including mine. The letter says Papa's coming home, and he knows his lovely, wonderful, little Ida will take care of the baby. This macho letter drove all of my friends mad, but it's what fathers do. They dump on their elder daughters, and, of course, she adores her father, so she will, indeed, resign herself to her fate and take care of the baby, which is what my poor sister did. With a lot of pinching and poking and black-eyeing she got me through childhood. Telling this story was so hard to do that I experienced my first and only, thank goodness, serious depression and mental collapse during the making of this book.

Somebody asked me last night, when you take a dive, do you come up all the time? And I said sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you come back a little bit less than when you went in, and it's risky. It's very risky. This was the riskiest book I ever did because I couldn't get out of it. And I couldn't finish the book without the help of friends, psychiatrists, pills. I took six months or eight months off from the book. Then I went back and I did the deed. And, in fact, I finished it. I mean I can talk about it now as if it were a very severe fever that I had for most of my life.

I met the daughter of Lindbergh, Reeve Lindbergh, a marvelous young woman who happens to be a children's book writer. I was shaking because I was sitting next to a Lindbergh, and I leaned over to her and I said, "I did a book," and before I could finish it, she looked back and she said, "And it's called *Outside Over There*, and it's about my brother, isn't it?" [laughter] And she quite frightened me. She quite frightened me. I also frightened her because it was a Lindbergh thing. He was a very, very dictatorial man and, as we learned later, not a very good man in my terms. Nothing was to be said about this child, ever. Mrs. Lindbergh was pregnant when it all began and he was afraid she'd miscarry. She had her second son some months after the trial. And then five other children, Reeve being the last. Reeve said, "I know nothing, nothing about the case. My parents didn't want us to know anything about it, and so I have been loyal to my parents, and I've never read anything about it. I've never looked at pictures. I've never . . ." And I said to her, "Do you want to? Or do you not want to?" And she said, "I want to." She was forty at this point. So I told

her about her little brother, and you can only imagine what this did to me, to be talking to this person, who looked so much like her father. But then it was over.

So I am the case Herb's talking about, and I am the book you're talking about, and how it is, indeed, worked out, or least attempted. And it isn't because you pedantically think you must. You have no control. It's a repetition business. You've got to tell the story, like the Ancient Mariner. You've got to tell the story until the story's finished.

It's hard for me to even tell you now. I didn't think it would be this difficult, and I thought I was quite clear of it, but it's still there. I saved all my Lindbergh souvenirs that Tony gave me, that I collected over the years. The mother, Mrs. Lindbergh, lives two towns away from me, and I've had many fantasies of going to her house, thinking "What would I say to her?" And then the absurd thought came into my mind: I'd rush over and say, "I'm Charlie! I've come back!" *That* would kill her. [laughter]

Open Discussion

Question #1 You mentioned that the Lindberghs had German shepherds. Did you get German shepherds first and then later realize that there was that connection? Or can you talk about your affection for German shepherds?

SENDAK: I didn't make the connection to the German shepherds as Lindbergh's. I just. . .I've always loved the breed, but I have no doubt it probably came from that time because the first dog I ever heard of in my life was a German shepherd because the Colonel had trained one to kill, had trained one useless, goofing-off watchdog. Now, in *Outside Over There*, the mother's sitting in her grove, with a German shepherd. The goblins right in front of the German shepherd are carrying a ladder to the house to take the baby away from Ida, and the German shepherd is looking benignly into the landscape. So I was saying, "What a goof-off German shepherd, of no value whatsoever." But that reminds me of something else that you'll find interesting. When my sister came to look at the pictures for *Outside Over There*—she knew what the whole thing was about, that she was Ida and all the rest—she was puzzled by the first line, the mother sitting in an arbor. And she said, "Why did you pick an arbor?" And there are so many arbors in the book. I said, "I don't know." I said, "I've always loved the word." And I did. I loved the word and everything associated with it: the smell of the leaves and the feel of the shade. "You couldn't have known this." She said, "When you were an infant, I got stuck with you all the time, because Mama was working, " and she would wheel me in a carriage to her best friend's house. This was Brooklyn back in the early '30s, where immigrant Italian families had their own gardens and vineyards. Her best friend's father had a vineyard, and she'd park me in the arbor because I would coo and smile, and the shade, she knew, was good. So she'd leave me happily gurgling away while she went off and did her business. So the arbor clearly was something from my earliest memories, because

the word just stuck in my head. I don't know. I still love German shepherds.

Question #2 You said that at ten years old you recognized in Judy Garland a kindred spirit. Was that because you knew something, or because you actually recognized it in her performance?

SENDAK: I hadn't read anything about her. I knew she was Judy Garland, and I was so moved by her. I loved the movie, but it's mostly because of her. The movie's blurred. It was her voice, it was her face, her motions. What she suggested through her body, her face, and her eyes had moved me terribly. Still do actually.

Question #3 You seem to indicate that the traumas of your childhood inspired the creative impulse in your books. Could it be that you were an extremely creative child, that you would have simply produced different books if these traumas had not affected you the way they did?

SENDAK: I think that was innate probably and was there previous to the trauma. But I have to say something else because it's an act of incredible vanity to work on your own problems in a work of art, and you can't do that unless you're sure it can transcend your particular obsessions. Well, that's any artist's job. You can't just talk about yourself and expect anybody to care because everybody has suffered in one way or another. Your suffering is just a mere *other* suffering. But if you can take that particular suffering and move somebody, like Judy Garland did to me or Shakespeare does to all of us, then it isn't so egotistical to talk about your dilemma. You've got to figure out how to do that. You're never sure it's going to work. You're never sure you've done that. One good friend, when he saw *Outside Over There*, said, "It's too personal. You shouldn't publish it." And that really worried me. Had I covered it enough? Was it sufficiently a work of art that was worth publishing, or was it me just acting out my Lindbergh shtick? I didn't know, but I think I did it.

Question #4 I'm wondering if trauma isn't a necessary element of children's literature. One early Victorian child's book begins with the father asking the children if they want to see a dead man. They go upstairs and the first thing they register is the odor of decomposition. That early as well as later literature seems to deal with death quite frequently.

SENDAK: Well, there was a time when there were no children's books—not until there was medicine enough to keep children alive. It was quite late, actually, and prior to that kids read what everybody else read, and they were mostly tracts like you're describing: Come see your little dead brother in his coffin in the living room, and say your prayers. Come see your dead mother and get used to corpses. When there was more of a guarantee that kids would reach a certain age, you could provide them with fantastical children's books without ever talking about the question of death.

Question #5 Many children's books start with an abused child and the story goes on from there. Water Babies for instance, starts with a boy who is abused by a chimney sweep. Many others are like that, too.

SENDAK: George MacDonald has a picture of a boy who is making friends with North Wind, who is Death, and who carries him away. I think this is part of the transition from the earlier "Come see your dead brother," to the mystical, magical, wonderful George MacDonald, who turned the subject of death into art for children.

Question #6 I wonder if any of you could comment on kids who draw the same thing over and over in a way that shows they might be seeing something in a way that we don't. We know that houses don't look like the things some kids draw, or that trees aren't purple. When we tell them they're wrong, we damage their ability to see and to draw.

SCHREIER: Well, I mean there are a couple of things. We don't know a lot about what constitutes trauma, and we have a loose definition which is very vague, and it's very clear that trauma has as much to do with who's perceiving the trauma as to whether it's traumatic or not. There are certain traumas where you actually see a change in brain chemistry, and behavior like numbing or an increased sensitivity to sensory stimulation is the result. Children will play out trauma—and art is a form of play—and may be unconscious to even very obvious connections between their work and the trauma. For those who would help them, we must look carefully at their play. If it is repetitive and boring, it may do little of what we call working through the trauma. Play, therapy, and play-therapy can be very helpful in giving children a real sense of the meaning of what has happened to them so that they can re-integrate it into their schemes of themselves. There is no right or wrong play.

Question #7 Could Mr. Sendak comment on the advice he gave at last night's lecture to a woman who was planning to write a children's book? You told her to go home and start, that if she could do it, she would.

SENDAK: Well, what led me to that statement is that she was totally ignorant of the process of what should she do. She wanted to write and illustrate books for children. The usual route is to take a course in children's book writing, as I know them in New York City, and to look at everybody else's book. That was wrong because what is being produced is, for the most part, so vulgar and commercial. There's nothing, nothing, nothing to do with children or anybody. The purpose is to sell books really. Young people like this young woman are misled. They don't know what to do. If she's really gifted, it's all there. It's in the body, it's in the nervous system. If she has the patience and if her ambition is genuine, she'll find it within herself to do it. People who wrote children's books before children's books were invented, like George MacDonald or Lewis Carroll, didn't know what to look at. They just had to do what they were doing. And the great writers of children's books are people like that, like Beatrix Potter. She hated being called a children's book writer because she was a grown-up woman, and she was writing about animals whom she knew and she loved. She was appalled that people put her in that category, and she was right. So I was trying to say that to this young woman: Don't go some silly route of learning how to do it. You know how to do it. . . if you really want to do it.

Question #8 We've talked a lot about how you translated your childhood traumas into books. How do you think this helps children work through their own traumas. Secondly, do you do the same with your adult traumas?

SENDAK: My adult traumas don't hold a candle to my childhood traumas. None of my adult traumas have ever interested me as subject matter. To your first question, not all of my books are traumatic. Some were done out of a deep sense of play and pleasure. Very few of them have this pointedness, only the ones that had to have it, when I knew I was going to do it. But a lot of the books are funny, I hope, and a lot of the books are available emotionally.

A lot of children had troubles with *Outside Over There*. I got very angry letters. "Well, what are you trying to do?" "Why are you trying to scare me?" Or "What does

it mean?” And I got one wonderful letter from a young girl in Canada. It’s about eight pages long. I promise I won’t tell you all eight pages, but the first part of it was very brief and furious. “I hate you. I hate you. And I’ll never read your books again. Yours truly.” [laughter] It really said, “Yours truly.” And then at the end, she said, “I showed this to my mother, and she said, ‘You like his books. Why be so mean to him? Write something nice.’” Well, she fortunately left the rough letter, and then she wrote a second one. “My mother said I was not very nice to you. And it is true, I do like”—we’re paraphrasing here—“I do like your books, but this one I dislike so much, I think I can’t like your books anymore.” And then she rethought that. “I think I’m still very mad.” And it was so wonderful! She worked herself out of it until finally she came to the heart of it. She said, “The goblins. . . why don’t they have faces? Why did you scare me? Why don’t they have faces?” It’s like she trusted me, and I had betrayed her trust. Then she went on for all these pages until finally she came to the end and she worked it through. She said, “Now I know why. I know why. Because they’re babies, and babies are very small, so they don’t fit into their clothes. So we can’t see their heads. Their heads are down below somewhere. So you shouldn’t be afraid. You should feel sorry for them that their clothes don’t fit.” So she had gotten through being angry. Then the mother wrote a little postscript, saying, “I think you will enjoy all of the above, and I have to tell you that Loretta has only recently become accustomed, or tried to be accustomed, to a baby sister living in the house.” [laughter] So I knew, I knew, I knew where the anger had come from.

Question #9 I’m a child survivor of the holocaust. As they say, nothing happened. I’m alive and I’m here and I wasn’t in a camp. Many of us who are child survivors are told, “You weren’t in a camp. You don’t have a story.” But we have a group that meets once a month, and ever since our first meeting we’ve told the stories that nobody wants to hear. There’s a lot we knew and understood even though there are some who say that we couldn’t have known about those things. I’m amazed that even very young children could figure out what was going on even before anybody told them.

SENDAK: I would like to read your story.

Question #10 [From Herbert Schreier] One point that came up in our study of the Oakland Hills fire was that some of the children were more traumatized than their

parents could recognize. It appears that there are two things happening here. One is that parents often cannot bear their children's suffering. Another is that the children know that their parents can't handle the pain, so they tell us, the therapists, what they can't tell their parents.

SENDAK: That's true. I have mail coming like the little girl's letter, but I also have letters, nearly a dozen letters, from young women who have read *Outside Over There*. They all came from different parts of the country and had to do with the same issue: that all these women were pregnant. The pregnancy was going well, and they were married, the husbands were content, and the parents were painting bedrooms, and everything seemed all right except the women were in total distress. Now, why do they pick *me* to tell the story to? They worried that there was something wrong with them because they hated the condition they were in. Two of them said, "I have a Rosemary's Baby in my belly." They all indicated that it was a vicious thing that they would hate. They knew they would hate it. Were they abnormal? What should they do? Well, I had no answer except to say the now platitudinous things like "I suspect it's a condition which is much more generalized than is accepted and lots of women must feel this way and that. Hopefully, when the baby arrives, you'll smell it, you'll lick it, you'll hug it, you'll love it." I wondered what it was in the book that had provoked it, and one woman told me. The letter was so wrathful about her condition, and she said, "I know what you're doing because when Ida goes into the cave and washes out that cave, that cave is a mother's womb, and all the water rushing out from the baby's dissolve is an abortion. She's getting rid of the babies. She's never going to let her mother ever have another baby again. She's going to scour out that room. That's what Ida's doing." I thought, "*Gott in Himmel!* That's not what *my* Ida is doing!" But it was astonishing how it dropped like an anchor.

Question #11 I am a friend of Utte Lohne, who writes children's books in Norway. She also gets mail. One series that she writes has a female hero with a panther. Once, a reader wrote to tell her that the panther had given her the courage to make her father stop molesting her. I wonder if there is any literature on the effects of literature on children's ability to work out trauma.

SENDAK: That I don't know. I don't know if there is such thing, but I have had letters as strange as that, where readers solve their problems in ways that were not in my

book at all, but they chose to see it that way and use it that way. Kids are very resourceful.

Question #12 There is a tendency to bring trauma to completion, to end the story by bringing the child home again. I'm wondering if you could comment on that.

SENDAK: Well, it's not always complete completion because in a book like *Outside Over There*, what she comes back to is the problem. At that moment she's more resigned to the problem—the burden of being with completely indifferent parents. They may love her, but they're indifferent anyway. And being stuck with the dilemma of being the mother to this baby when she's only nine years old. What she's done is ferociously tried to bring herself some commitment to deal with him, but that fantasy or that rage will pour out of her the next week. It's going to take her a long time to come to grips with it. It's not really a solution. One of the reasons some of the critics were angry with the book was that it *wasn't* a completion, that it didn't have a happy ending. I never intended it to have a happy ending. Last question.

Question #13 Do you notice any change in the structure or content of our books since you dealt with the Lindbergh trauma in Outside Over There?

SENDAK: I was going to ask Herbert a similar question. I'll bring it up because you just asked this. I think there are all sizes of traumas, right? Like huge ones that scare you death, like the one that scared me; and then much smaller, very delicate ones that aren't at all bad, but that change your personality in a very, very subtle way. I found that once the big giant H-bomb trauma of the Lindbergh kidnapping was sort of resolved, a bevy of smaller, more charming ones rose to the surface that I can't tell you about because they're entirely too private, but they still frighten me. I wonder if you've had any such evidence of this. The big ones squash the little ones, and when the big one has dissipated, the little ones rise to the surface. I realize that other simple, ordinary things that happened to me had done this or that to me forever. Forever, forever, forever. But I didn't mind these, even if some were a little handicapping, or quite spoiled my life in very cunning ways. Is that called a trauma?

SCHREIER: Well, it's interesting. There are two studies on this issue, one done here at Berkeley, and another in Britain. They both suggest that kids who have multiple, manageable traumas are more resilient and perhaps even more creative and resource-

ful. I think that what may have happened in your case was an early trauma or susceptibility precluded your going through those little traumas as easily as some other kid might have. Girls who begin puberty early and are preyed upon very early in adolescence don't do as well as young adults as do their age mates who develop late. But when they face crises later on in life, they do much better psychologically, having learned to deal with trauma through those early, perhaps more manageable crises. They tend to do better than the kids that breeze through adolescence having learned how to deal with adversity in a way that was much less useful. But the simple notion that early trauma is for life is just simplistic, just as simplistic as assuming that a trauma-free existence insulates you totally for life.

SENDAK: In answer to the young man's question, I think I can honestly say that since then, I have been much happier. *Jack and Guy* on the surface is a sad book, but I was very happy doing it. I think I have become a much happier person. There's no question that my sixties have been a release of a whole lot of junk in my system. The junk that remains I'm resigned to and I don't mind anymore. On that note, thank you.

**Mozart, Shakespeare
and the Art of
Maurice Sendak**

Maurice Sendak

Wye Allanbrook

Stephen Greenblatt

Stephen Greenblatt

It is an enormous privilege and somewhat of a provoker of anxiety to be sitting next to Maurice Sendak. Sendak's works raise, at the most serious and profound level, the nature of visionary influence and creative adaptation, which is to say, artistically licensed theft. Of course, he's chosen his rabbis, as he called them the other night, well, not only because they retain their extraordinary vitality across centuries, but also—and here I should limit myself to the figure about whom I profess to know something and not say anything about Mozart—because Shakespeare was certainly a master thief. The first notice of Shakespeare as a dramatist is as a thief: Robert Green sourly remarked that “there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his ‘Tiger’s heart wrapped in a player’s hide’ supposes he’s as well able to bombast out of blank verse as the best of you, and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the country.” “Beautified with our feathers”—the odd thing about the passage is that it begins by complaining that Shakespeare has robbed others to make himself beautiful, but then it ends by complaining that he thinks he’s absolute, a nonpareil, the only “Shake-scene” in the country. Evidently, when Shakespeare borrowed from you, he not only wound up looking gorgeous himself, but you, the one he borrowed from, the one he left behind, also somehow wound up looking a little ugly and diminished.

This is, or so I’ll claim for the purpose of today’s conversation, the logic of the changeling. And it will lead us immediately to what I want to propose as two great Sendak moments in Shakespeare. The first is the very strange argument about the “changeling boy” in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. You’ll remember that Puck informs us, in a conversation with a fairy in Act II, that Oberon and Titania, the fairy king and queen, are engaged in a terrible custody battle.

The king doth keep his revels here tonight.
Take heed the queen come not within his sight,
For Oberon is passing fell and wroth
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king.
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.
But she perforce withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.

When Oberon and Titania do shortly thereafter meet, they immediately begin to quarrel. The quarrel first seems to be not about the changeling boy at all, but about their mutual sexual infidelities, which they rehearse for each other. And the consequences of their quarreling have been horrible.

The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat and the green corn
Hath rotted 'ere his youth attained a beard.

I'll stop for half a second to say that this kind of metaphoric game in Shakespeare, the green corn which "hath rotted 'ere his youth attained a beard," that way of seeing the hairs on *kern* or grain as the hairs of a beard is a game that Maurice Sendak plays again and again in half-seen human forms in the shapes of the earth.

The fold stands empty in the drownèd field
And crows have fattèd with the murrain flock.
The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For want of tread are undistinguishable.

There follows a very long speech about the disasters, the absolutely miserable weather, rain and hail and so forth, caused by the struggle between Titania and Oberon. All of these things, Titania says, stem from their debate. She says rather

oddly, “We are their parents and original.” “Do you amend it, then,” Oberon replies. “It lies in you. . . I do but beg a little changeling boy/To be my henchman.” And in response Titania flatly refuses to turn over the boy—“The fairyland buys not the child of me”—and explains why she’s adamant.

His mother was a votress of my order,
And in the spiced Indian air by night,
Full often hath she gossiped by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune’s yellow sands,
Marking the embarkèd traders in the flood,
When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind,
Which she with pretty and with swimming gait
Following, her womb then rich with my young squire,
Would imitate, and sail upon the land
To fetch me trifles and return again
As from a voyage rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake I will not part with him.

I want to say several very quick things about this speech and the whole issue of the changeling boy. First, the unnamed changeling, “lovely,” “sweet,” “loved,” “little,” and “young,” has no lines in the play and is called for by none of the stage directions. The recent Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play, directed by Adrian Noble, was typical in not bringing the boy on stage at all. In consequence, the audience has no idea how old he is: he could be anything from a child to a young man. Second, there are two quite different accounts of the boy, neither of which, by the way, is an account that would give you fully the idea of the changeling, that is to say, another child left in its place. In the first account, Puck’s, the boy has been stolen from an Indian king. In the second, Titania’s, he has not been stolen at all. Perhaps—we cannot tell—it is the boy’s pregnant mother who has not been stolen, but has run off with Titania to share the intimacy conveyed in those remarkable lines. We might note, incidentally, that some details in the lines have caused commentators

through the centuries difficulty, and there have been many attempts to amend them. The emendations of are of a kind that occur when commentators are nervous about something other than the textual materials. There's nothing particularly incomprehensible about the text, but many suggestions have been made. For example, the meaning of the word "following" has been questioned. The lines are: "she grew big bellied with the wanton wind"—we last see the sails conceive and "grow big bellied with the wanton wind," which she "with pretty and with swimming gait following her womb, then rich with my young squire, would imitate and sail upon the land." Already in the 18th century, people are nervous about "following." They couldn't figure it out. In the 18th century William Warburton proposed that it should read "follying," that is, wantoning in sport and gaiety, and William Kendrick, another 18th-century editor, suggested that a comma should come not after "following," but after "womb," so that she would be following her womb. For H.H. Furness, the Victorian editor of the *Variorum*, this was a repellent suggestion for it "coarsened Titania's sweet picture and degraded her words to the slang level of 'following one's nose,'" though the nose is displaced upwards, far from the womb that Kendrick in the 18th century saw her following.

The intensity of Furness's response seems to have something to do with the sexual suggestion that he can't quite articulate in the lines, but that makes him anxious. The anxiety can easily be extended to the changeling boy. What is it that Oberon and Titania want from that boy? Why are they fighting over him? The answer's actually not easy to come by, though we have a sense—as a small child may have when parents are fighting—that the stakes of the altogether obscure quarrel are very high indeed. Shakespeare seems to have altered or suppressed quite deliberately the folklore of changelings, a folklore with which Maurice Sendak's own work is very much in touch. The term "changeling" in English fairy tales usually refers not to a beautiful child stolen by the fairies, but to the withered, tetchy, idiotic or otherwise defective child left in its place. In some accounts, fairies had to sacrifice the stolen children to the Devil; the unfortunate parents were not only deprived of their offspring but forced to raise the miserable substitutes, unless, that is, they could contrive to recover those who had been kidnapped. All through the 18th and, in fact, into the 19th century, when the folklore of stealing handsome and lovely children was still very much alive, it was partly a way of explaining why you have such a

wretched, squinty little kid, whom you could, in fact, abandon if need be. Then there are stories of fairy breath. If the fairies couldn't actually get the child from you, just the breath of a fairy would wither your child—like the blight of the ear of corn—except for the face, which would still be beautiful. There was various folk magic to try to get the child back, and there are other stories in which they actually get the child. I'll read you one. It's not in Shakespeare and it is somewhat perverse, but variations of it are in folklore, and also in work like Maurice Sendak's.

In *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song: With historical and traditional notices relative to the manners and customs of the peasantry*, by R. H. Cromek, F. A. S. E. D., Cromek reports that

A beautiful child of Caerlaveroe in Nithsdale, on the second day of his birth and before its baptism, was changed, none knew how, for an antiquated elf of hideous aspect. It kept the family away with its nightly yells, biting the mother's breasts, and would neither be cradled or nursed. The mother, obliged to be from home, left it in the charge of the servant-girl. The poor lass was sitting, bemoaning herself,—“We't nae for thy girning face I would knock the big, winnow the corn, and grun the meal. “Lowse the cradle band,” quoth the Elf, “and tent the neighbors, and I'll work yere wark.” Up started the elf, the wind arose, the corn was chaffed, the outliers were foddered, the hand mill moved around, as by instinct and the *knocking mell* did its work with amazing rapidity. The lass, and her elfin servant, rested and diverted themselves, till, on the mistress's approach, it was restored to the cradle, and began to yell anew. The girl took the first opportunity of slyly telling her mistress the adventure. “What'll we do, wi' the wee diel?” said she. “I'll wirk it a prin,” replied the lass. At the middle hour of the night the chimney top was covered up, and every inlet barred and closed. The embers were blown up until glowing hot, and the maid, undressing the elf, tossed it on the fire. It uttered the wildest and most piercing yells, and, in a moment, the Fairies were heard moaning at every wonted avenue, and rattling at the window boards, at the chimney head, and at the door. “In the name of God, bring back the bairn,” cried the lass. The window flew up; the earthly child was laid unharmed on the mother's lap, while its grisly substitute flew up the chimney with a loud laugh.

It's precisely that, as it were, Maurice Sendak plot that Shakespeare does not give you in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His fairies have something wild and alien about them, but they are not demonic.

That Shakespeare was self-consciously reworking and softening tradition is made quite clear in an exchange between Oberon and Puck. Oberon declares that he will go to Titania and beg her Indian boy. Puck warns him that he must act quickly:

My fairy lord, this must be done with haste,
For the night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger,
At whose approach ghosts, wand'ring here and there,
Troop home to church yards; damnèd spirits all
That in cross-ways and floods have burial
Already to their wormy beds are gone,
For fear lest day should look their shames upon.
They willfully themselves exiled from light,
And must ride, consort with black-browed night.”

The evocation of a world of ghosts, damned spirits, wormy beds, and shame returns us for just a moment to the frightening fantasy world of the Nithsdale peasantry, but Oberon quickly corrects the impression:

But we are spirits of another sort.
I with the morning's love have oft made sport
And like a forester the groves may tread
Even till the Eastern gate, all fiery red,
Opening on Neptune with fair blessèd beams
Turns into yellow gold his salt green streams.

All the same, as if Puck were not completely mistaken, the fairy king urges expedition:

But notwithstanding, haste, make no delay;
We may effect this business yet ere day.

The reassurance then vanishes as soon as it is given. And we still do not know what Oberon and Titania want with the changeling boy. There are two alternatives:

(a) They don't want anything. The boy is just a cipher. Parents argue bitterly about nothing, as many of us may know from either personal experience or observation. We mortals have our whole world disrupted, but we can't really understand what all the screaming is about. The sign is empty. (b) The boy is actually incredibly important, but the interest of the adults in that boy can't be fully expressed or articulated or acknowledged. The sign is full, but its meaning is hidden.

If the latter is true, if Oberon and Titania want the boy for a purpose that is hidden from us, is there any clue as to what it is they want? There happens to be a clue in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We might find that clue in one of the few details that were given about Titania's treatment of him:

She perforce withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.

That "crowns him with flowers" looks very innocent, but it's odd. Why is it a clue? Because the detail happens to figure again in the off-stage scene that Oberon describes when Titania releases the boy into his custody. Oberon, you remember, has anointed the fairy queen's eyes with what is wonderfully called "love juice," and she is madly doting on Bottom when Oberon approaches her:

For she his hairy temples then had rounded
With a coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers.
And that same dew which sometime on the buds
Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls
Stood now within the pretty flow'rets' eyes,
Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.
When I had at my pleasure taunted her,
And she in mild terms begged my patience,
I then did ask of her her changeling child,
Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent
To bear him to my bower in fairyland.
And now I have the boy, I will undo
This hateful imperfection of her eyes.

I propose to you it's not an accident, but a clue—that we've got the same primal scene, as it were, between the account of the changeling boy and the account of Bottom. We sometimes read that Titania releases the boy as a consequence of her humiliation at Oberon's hands. What we find is something different. She hasn't been released and humiliated. She's humiliated after she gets the antidote to the love juice. She's besotted. She's obsessed. She's dotting. She's weaving chaplets around the head of Bottom. She's in the kind of passionate, erotic dotting on her love object who turns out to be a still more perverse, perverted and bestial desire even than the changeling boy. In the Royal Shakespeare production, that desire is made altogether explicit: as they rise to the skies on an enormous, inverted umbrella, hairy, ass-eared Bottom humps away at the ecstatic Fairy Queen.

I won't try to tease out the relationship between this whole extraordinary episode of secret desire and the imaginative world of *Outside Over There*, which is tattered and torn because it was read so often to my kids, which is Maurice Sendak's most astonishing changeling story, though I think it's worth noting that in Sendak the goblins are said to have taken the child for a "kidnap honeymoon" and Ida discovers the baby and finds herself "smack in the middle of a wedding." I want instead very briefly to invoke what I call my other Sendak moment, because I know Maurice cares about it a lot, and I do too. There turns out to be another changeling child in Shakespeare, a child that in this instance we actually get to see. I refer to the baby in *The Winter's Tale* discovered in the wild shore of Bohemia by the old shepherd. At first, the shepherd had surmised that he had found an abandoned bastard:

Mercy on's, a bairn! A very pretty bairn! A boy or a child, I wonder?
A pretty one, a very pretty one. Sure some scape. Though I am not bookish, yet I can read "waiting-gentlewomen" in the scape. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door-work. They were warmer that got this than the poor thing is here. I'll pick it up. He says, I'll take it up for pity.

When the shepherd's son arrives, horrified by what he has seen—a bear eating a man—the father comes up with a completely different explanation.

Now bless thyself. Thou meetest with things dying, I with things new-born. Here's a sight for thee. Look thee, a bearing-cloth for

a squire's child. Look thee here. Take up, take up, boy. Open 't. So let's see. It was told me I should be rich by the fairies. This is some changeling. Open't. What's within, boy?

Clown: You're a made old man. If the sins of your youth are forgiven you, you're well to live. Gold, all gold

Shepherd: This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so. Up with it. Keep it close. Home, home, the next way. We are lucky, boy, and to be so still requires nothing but secrecy.

We could say that this magical account, the talk of fairies and changelings and fairy gold, is a kind of joke standing in for the cynical assessment of motives that the old shepherd, when he first sees the baby, articulates. "This is stair-work, trunk-work," and so forth. Perhaps, indeed, the father is trying to keep his son from knowledge of the actual causes of abandoned babies, that it's not fairies, it's trunk-work—trunk work, I take it, being the object against which the people in the back stairs were going about it. But the cynical and the magical, the two poles between which much of the action of *The Winter's Tale* takes place, are not so easily ordered. In fact, everything in Shakespeare's romance works to demonstrate that this baby is *not* the result of some stair-work or trunk-work or behind-door-work. That is, in fact, the horrible, paranoid suspicion of the mad Leontes. So the whole play is about getting yourself to the point where you don't think that when you see the baby. Years later, when Perdita, now a grown woman, runs off with Florizel, and the shepherd and his son are consequently in horrible trouble, the son returns to the alternative theory:

There's no other way but to tell the king she's a changeling, and none of your flesh and blood.

We are not asked to believe that she's a changeling, but only because we're asked by the play to believe something else, a ghost story, a fairy tale, an illustrated fantasy by Maurice Sendak.

Wye Allanbrook

Well, Shakespeare and Greenblatt are a hard act to follow.

It has been a privilege to spend time in the presence of Maurice Sendak and, in particular, to catch a glimpse of the role imposing cultural figures of the past have played in informing his extraordinary books. Mozart, for example, Shakespeare, the painter Mantegna, King Kong. One gets the sense of a man who cannot help but turn everything experienced, whether grimly painful or comic, into some purpose. Consider the fate of his dreadful relatives whose childhood visits involved repulsive kisses. These relatives got their just rewards, becoming in intimate details, he tells us, the models for the monsters in *Where the Wild Things Are*.

But I've had the happy experience this week of discovering that, like all powerful books, Mr. Sendak's bear reciprocal relation to their sources—that I, in fact, have learned something about those sources by reading backwards from the books they touched so deeply. I would like to make an essay into that kind of reading—an exploration via Sendak of one of his deepest attachments, Mozart. I do have some trepidation, aware as I am now how meticulously he has constructed—that is, Sendak, not Mozart in this case—his own territory and hence how misguided my discoveries may seem to him. But I also sense that he's a generous man who would not grudge another the pleasure of playing briefly under his arbor. The net result may be less an exegesis of Mozart than an appreciation of Sendak. But no one who has been present at the events of the last week could possibly fault that.

Legions of mothers must feel that they've had a special, secret relation with Mr. Sendak, and I'm no exception. Too old to know his books as a child, I discovered them with the coming of *my* child. I love the sweet, reflective adventures of Little Bear and the savage socks of Mad Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*. I even

succumbed to the seductions of commerce and bought one of those stuffed wild things with its black polyester fringe, which unaccountably never moved either myself or my son very much, and sits even to this day inert and baffled in a small rocker in my son's old room. Were you fond of them? Which relative, I wondered, did I buy?

But *my* book—the book I lived with for easily several hundred readings through the Late Ones, the Terrible Twos, and even the supposedly Tranquil Threes was Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*. The adventures of Mickey, a child who's stirred from sleep to some version of consciousness by the suggestive thumps and bumps of parental bedtime noises, who “fell through the dark, out of his clothes, past the moon and his mama and papa sleeping tight, into the light of the night kitchen.” In what has always seemed to me to be an out-of-bed dream, Mickey floats through the star-lit sky into a cityscape constituted of objects off the kitchen shelf: cereal-carton skyscrapers with illuminated windows, whisks and egg beaters as building finials, a little elevated train chugging across the artificial landscape. This world is scarily free, yet just as scarily contained—the outside is the inside is the outside. Essentially, No Exit.

The dream is one whose scariness gets reversed into triumph. Straightaway Mickey is accosted by a trio of bakers, who, with their neat brush moustaches and sublimely impassive grins, seem to be symbols of oppression. If you look closely, all three are likenesses of Oliver Hardy, an observation corroborated by Sendak. The bakers see Mickey as mere material, Aristotelian *hule*, and mix him in cake batter, chanting, “Milk in the batter! Milk in the batter! Stir it! Scrape it! Make it! Bake it!” This is a fine example, by the way, of the way the text lends itself to musical reading—doggerel broken by edgy, jazzy rhythms, by over-long lines and bits of chant, the climax a triumphant rooster crow that I once made my specialty. I won't do it though. I think I've lost my touch.

In a riff on the Hansel and Gretel *topos*, the bakers bear the giant pan to an old-fashioned oven that could have graced Mr. Sendak's Brooklyn kitchen. But at this critical moment, Mickey recognizes who he is, and that simple knowledge gets him out of the batter. He remarks his critical otherness from mere stuff. “I'm not the milk and the milk's not me,” he cries. In the canonical rendering of the text that my son and I worked out over time, it seemed natural to us to render that crucial moment of self-discovery with a triumphant little fanfare motive.

Mickey's life has changed in an instant, and without protest, he rises to the occasion. Forgive the baking pun, but I suspect its Freudian slipperiness is not alien to Mr. Sendak's sense of play. He separates himself from chaos, flux, mere batter, and becomes a *mensch*. And the reversal is complete: the once threatening bakers turn out to need Mickey! Milky, yeasty Mickey, his pudgy little-boy body barely distinguishable from the oozy batter from which he has just extricated himself, climbs into a bread-dough airplane, that he has kneaded into shape in order to escape, and is nearly aloft when the bakers run up with the measuring cup, howling, "Milk! Milk! Milk for the morning cake!" Now the milk-baby becomes the milkman, the milk-*mensch*. In his bread-dough airplane he flies to the top of a giant glass milk bottle to get milk for the bakers' cake. In the City of the Night Kitchen, Sendak has told us, the milk bottle is the Empire State Building, so our airborne hero is doing the equivalent of saving Fay Wray. His quest successful, he pauses briefly on the top of the milk bottle, buck naked and sublimely jaunty, to loose a hero's piercing cock crow before he "slides down the side, straight into bed, cake free and dried." The waking dream dissolves into sleep again.

So what does this have to do with Mozart? Well, see what you think. Reconsidering this book this month has led me to an insight about a work that clearly means a great deal to Mr. Sendak as well as to me, Mozart's *Magic Flute*. You may be aware of the controversies that surround this opera, which began practically from its first performance. Is the work shallow or deep? And if deep (usually the prevailing opinion) how do you explain what seem like the marks of mere shallowness? The libretto is an amalgam of popular fairy tales and an 18th century French novel *Sethos*, ostensibly about the Egyptian mysteries, but generally understood as an allegory of Masonic ritual. The Prince Tamino enters pursued by a serpent, and meets his salvation in the person of the Three Ladies, henchpeople of the notorious Queen of the Night. Sententiously moral, they hand out proper punishment to the flighty Papageno; ditsy and predatory, they quarrel over the gorgeous body of the recumbent Prince. Who *are* these ladies?

The queen appears to tell the dolorous tale of the kidnapping of her daughter, first in pathetic accents, and then in corruscating *coloratura*; it captures us all. "Save Pamina, my daughter, O Prince, from the forces of evil that hold her fast in their

grip.” But by the end of the opera’s first act and a puzzling reversal, the forces of evil turn out to be the force for all good. The punitive oppressor becomes, without further comment, benign. Sarastro, the tyrant so detested by the Queen, turns out to be the high priest of the temple of wisdom. Soprano yields to *basso profondo*, *coloratura* to sonorous hymn. As in a dream, we don’t look back. Granted, Tamino accepts the new situation with a little less equanimity than did Mickey; he grows veritably cranky with the high priest and the temple of wisdom, his first contact with the brotherhood, raves wildly about hypocrisy and threatens to leave. But on the slightest assurance that Pamina is unharmed, she transfers his allegiance to the Holy Temple and, like us, never looks back. In fact, he disappears inside, to emerge later hot on the trail of Enlightenment.

I have to admit—and I know for sure that Mr. Sendak will not approve, for he has already said so—that at times I have placed myself in the Philistine camp: “Beautiful music, crazy story.” Or, to lift a phrase frequently quoted pejoratively from Jacques Chailly, the most passionate proponent of the libretto’s unity, “a fable cut from a Harlequin’s cloak.” The conventional *reductio ad absurdum* on the Philistine side is that the librettist Emmanuel Schickaneder—and perhaps Mozart, his chum and collaborator—changed their mind about the forces of evil halfway through composing the libretto, and themselves never looked back. Well, I can live with that, one mutters, because the unacceptable alternative, unacceptable to me at least, is Jacques Chailly with his extraordinary wishful reading of the work that translates every moment into a Masonic symbol and converts every surface puzzle into an esoteric meaning. To bring philosophical rigor to the work, Chailly invents for it a “cosmogony,” as he calls it, in which Pamina’s father represents primeval, undivided matter which splits into the male and female principles: Sarastro and the Queen, Light and Dark (but not necessarily, mind you, Good and Evil—just different, for this is the crux of the problem).

This necessary conflict between the sexes comes to a harmonious resolution in the Perfect Couple, Pamina and Tamino. To bring the female acceptably into the opera, Chailly finds her in the overture, the female, that is, in the famous opening knocking chords; there are five in the beginning Adagio, he reminds us. Instead of the more usual three times three, that occur in the body of the piece. Five, it turns

out, is the Masonic female number. Hence, male and female principles are brought together in the introductory music; the female in the dark *Adagio tutti*, the male in the more ordered and logical fugal section—and he also gets nicer orchestration. To be honest, I find all this a bit pat.

So let us try reading *The Magic Flute* as a waking dream like Mickey's. It makes sense that quests begin like dreams, in which the quester knows neither his goal nor himself. Self-knowledge is the goal, not the starting point. In the middle of his nightmare, Tamino bursts onto the stage, soon to be lit by those same stars as Mickey's night sky was; they call the Queen of the Night the "star-flaming Queen," and her throne is backed with stars. He immediately falls into a swoon and persists in that stage in a figurative way throughout the act as he struggles to make out the dim figures around him. Like the bakers, the identities in his dream world mutate effortlessly. The hag-like, predatory Aunt Sadies yield to innocent young boys, helpful and pure of heart—heavenly Boy Scouts. And the tyrannical *Unmensch*, Sarastro, becomes the compassionate priest and mentor. Tamino's final conversion happens off stage. He disappears into the Temple of Wisdom, still uncertain. When we next hear of him, it is in Sarastro's ringing words to the other priests: *Er ist ein mensch*. Like Mickey, he must go through trials involving Earth's elements—fire and water for Tamino; for Mickey the mother element, milk. Both youths then become crucial to the designs of the elders who first seem to oppress them; though not said, it is implied that Tamino will be Sarastro's successor and W.H. Auden read Sarastro as Prospero, renouncing his magic books.

Both boys are the objects of high moralizing at the end. Tamino is crowned with his mate in the name of Isis and Osiris, and shines—O brave new world!—in beauty and wisdom. Wickedly, for mothers everywhere, Mr. Sendak penned an impossible moral to *In the Night Kitchen*: "And that's why, thanks to Mickey, we have cake every morning." (Anxious to be truthful, I would have to admit I would occasionally substitute the word "bread.") This moral is proclaimed in a formal medallion at the end of the book in which Mickey and his milk bottle stand silhouetted against a golden circle shooting out orange and gold colored rays. It looks strikingly like the emblem of the seven-fold Circle of the Sun, the all-consuming circle of the sun that the Queen says Sarastro wears on his breast and for which she wants Pamina to murder. Surely, with this bit of arcanum, Mr. Sendak was calling attention to the

connection between the two works. But I've clearly been reading too much Chailly. It was enough to be reminded in this retrospective reading of Mickey's adventures, of the ambiguities inherent in the process of coming-to-know—a motion from credulity to clarity—and to see how they might also inform our greatest musical fairy tale, Mozart's *Magic Flute*.

Maurice Sendak

Well, that's the best review I've had.

I have no notes, so I'm going to just hinge off these people in a kind of wayward way, which I hope makes some kind of sense.

If I understood that Scottish version of the changeling baby, I would illustrate it. I'm new to Shakespeare. I read him in school, of course, like we all did, but now, in my sixties, it's become imperative that I read him, and I'm petrified that I'm not going to understand him. It was wonderful to hear about the changeling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because when I read that, I was really dumbfounded by what was going on here. Why was there no explanation? Now that I've read a lot more Shakespeare, I know that in many cases he just doesn't explain. And the fact I have those eerie feelings about that baby—Who wanted it? Titania or Oberon? Why

didn't she object when he took him away? And then why did he want them in the first place? Is partly because those questions are never answered, right?

GREENBLATT: Never answered.

SEDAK: Never answered. It was such a relief because I thought I read it wrong.

When I heard that Cadman Records was putting out the Shakespeare plays—Cadman belongs to Harper's, my publisher,—I called them up and asked, “Could I do the CD jackets?” in the hopes that, like a Regents exam, I would have to read each play, because I would owe a picture for each play. They were thrilled to pieces. That was until they began to see the pictures that I was doing.

In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there was a two-week meeting over whether they dared publish this offensive, sex-crazed picture I had drawn for them. I just wonder if they hadn't read the play in a long time. When they told me why they were objecting to it, they said, “Maurice, you must understand, we are trying to attract high school audiences,” I said, “You sure the hell will!” It just seemed to me, as a Shakespeare novice, that Shakespeare is intensely erotic. It may be me, of course—I'm perfectly willing to accept that—but I don't think it is. I've now done nine other plays, and all nine have produced meetings up on the ninth floor of Cadman Records.

They were doing the so-called commercial Shakespeare first—the comedies and *Julius Caesar* and so-forth. But I was reading faster than they were telling me what to do, and I began reading essays, desperate for homework, desperate for information, all of it almost incomprehensible to me. I noticed that scholars would get interested in what seemed to be the least little things, things that almost weren't worth reading about. And what criticisms I did read were very odd, as though they were a little bit embarrassed by Shakespeare, a little bit like he'd lost it—you know. . .

dottering, finished, *kaput*—just as some people thought that Mozart had lost it when he did *The Magic Flute*. Those criticisms included The Four Romances, and that they were called romances was puzzling to me. The only one I knew, of course, was *The Tempest*. I love *The Tempest*. I didn't know, honestly, that *The Tempest* was attached like a choo-choo train to *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*. And then everything I read, of course, excited me because they all seemed to be embarrassed by them.

The first romance I read was *Cymbeline*, and then I went on to *The Winter's Tale*. And there I've been stuck ever since. I just keep rereading it and rereading it and rereading it, and it has totally unnerved me, which I don't quite understand. One of the reasons I came to Berkeley was to find out what *The Winter's Tale* was all about. *The Magic Flute* and *The Winter's Tale* both have an annoying and incredibly dopey fairy tale, really an absurd fairy tale. And you *know* Shakespeare knew—he was not losing it. He's a devilish man, and he took this dopey fairy tale, impregnated it and filled it with an intense, spiritual subtext so that you go quite crazy reading it. You have to just take your jump, like I said in the lecture. You have to take your dive. I'm happy that I'm old enough so that I can take that jump. Every time at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, when Paulina reveals Hermione, I just lose it. I just lose it. Even though there are hints all through the play that she has been alive all this time, waiting for her daughter to be found—Paulina, I guess, is supplying her with chicken dishes or something for sixteen years—I do and don't want to believe both stories. Shakespeare is very careful to show that the statue does have wrinkles, that it is in fact Hermione, but, in fact, I believe absolutely that the statue is a statue and that the statue moves, or I have a need to believe that the statue moves. So, when the statue descends and embraces her lost daughter. . . I'm gone.

Of course, Stephen's too smart to say there is any one explanation for *The Winter's Tale*, but it brings us a little bit to Mozart and the sense of what Wendy is talking about. *The Magic Flute* is just such a silly fairy tale. It is a Shakespeare fairy tale. So many have condemned the opera for being foolish. It's mostly done as a children's opera because, if it's foolish, let's give it to the kids. It's what we've always done. The Mother Goose rhymes—when they made no political sense anymore, we gave them to the kids. Anything that makes no sense we give to the kids, because they

always make sense of it.

I was so annoyed with Ingmar Bergman, whom I love most of the time, when he did a film of *The Magic Flute*. He obviously could not stand the fact that the Queen of the Night is one kind of person in Act I and another kind of person in Act II, so he solved it by having her marry Sarastro. If you've seen his movie *Scenes from a Marriage*, you know he's used to people hating each other, especially when they're married. So then *The Magic Flute* makes sense. These are two demented people who got married, a typical Bergman solution. I wish he hadn't done that, because you do have to accept, or I do, that the Queen of the Night, who seems so remarkably sensuous and beautiful and mournful and suffering in Act I, is as crazy as Leontes at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale*, and that she is capable of becoming demented on the spot and singing that terrific knife-like aria in Act II. She is crazy enough that when her daughter begs her not to make her kill Sarastro, she threatens her daughter's life. She's off her rocker.

Now, you just *buy* that. You do. You buy it in the same way that you buy Mozart bringing this poor, young girl, Pamina, to the brink of suicide. It is all incomprehensible. Is her mother crazy? Yes. Is Sarastro crazy? Possibly. Is Tamino crazy? It seems so. He loves her one minute, and then doesn't talk for the rest of the opera. Nobody can tell her anything, and so she's the typical teenager, wandering around in a fog, where all the grownups are keeping mum. They ain't gonna help her. . .no way.

Well, what's logical? What's logical is you kill yourself. And there she sings one of the greatest arias Mozart ever wrote, ever, ever, ever. Then there's nobody to believe in but three little boys who come down in a balloon, in a basket. What do they know? What do they know? They see her with the dagger about to kill herself. They rush out of the basket and say, "Stop. Listen to us. He loves you. We will take you to him. Everything will be good. You'll see." It's not a good translation of what they actually say, but the point is that she believes them. A big smile covers her face, and then she puts her arms around them—or at least she did in our production—and they sing this quartet of complete joy and happiness. She doesn't want to kill herself anymore. She believes the kids because why in hell would a kid lie? I mean grownups will lie, of course, but children have no reason to lie. So she climbs in the basket, and she goes where Tamino is, and she becomes a Mason just like him—the first lady

Mason that we know of, certainly the first one in any opera.

Mozart and Shakespeare—and the word you used so well, these two *mensch* people—are the only artists I know who treat women with that kind of seriousness. In all the operas of Mozart, it's the women that break your heart. When I read Shakespeare, it's the young girls that break your heart. This understanding of young women is so amazing, coming from male artists, so that I have fallen under the spell of all the heroines in Shakespeare.

GREENBLATT: One thing that would be interesting, for me at least, would be to hear you say a bit more about why you think a very sophisticated artist, to put it mildly, like Shakespeare would turn to such puerile, nonsensical stories. What do you think is going on? Why choose such materials?

SENDAK: I can only guess. It seems to me he's really hiding something extraordinarily important, perhaps something that he could not talk about any other way than by telling it in an incomprehensible story.

GREENBLATT: Things that are too dangerous to talk about.

SENDAK: They're too dangerous to talk about in a serious way, and so, paradoxically, you turn it on its head. Like some of the operas of Rossini or some of the operas of Mozart—comic operas that break your heart. He's telling you something very serene and severe, and it's kind of hidden in the fabric of this dopiness. I have no other answer. And I don't know if that is a good answer, but my purpose of getting all involved in this and reading him and getting so excited over *The Winter's Tale* is concocting such a thing for myself: to make up a story that is so silly that it is a fairy tale, like some of the George MacDonald's fairy tales, that are kind of mindless, but that everyone can follow if they want to. Understanding such a story is like finding the thread in the *Princess and the Goblin*, the invisible thread that Irene follows back to her great, great, great, great, great, great grandmother—it's the thread you follow all through the story, this implacable idea which runs through this fairy tale. The combination, the paradoxical combination, is just so beautiful. The end of *Cymbeline*, is like, as we said, a Rossini finale—"Hi. Oh, yes, I saw you. Oh,

I yeah, oh ah oh ah!” Everybody comes out of the woodwork. Everybody’s alive. Everybody forgives. And it goes on forever. It’s like. . .

ALLANBROOK: Sounds like *The Marriage of Figaro*.

SENDAK: It is like *Figaro*. It’s *exactly* like *Figaro*.

ALLANBROOK: The Count pulls them all out of the bushes.

SENDAK: It’s exactly like *Figaro*. And you know it’s a silly scene, and it breaks your heart. And when the countess finally comes and she forgives, well, you *plotz*. It is total *plotz* time. But you’ve just been laughing your head off. Isn’t that what Shakespeare does too? He just catches you up short that way.

GREENBLATT: He seems to go out of his way, at least in the case of *The Winter’s Tale*, to call attention to the fact that he’s picking your pocket, that it’s a trick. Or he wants you to know that he’s aware of that as a child would be, in contrast to the Autolycus figure who will steal the sheets off the clothesline if you don’t keep your eye on them or if you haven’t put locks on them. He wants you to know that he knows that, precisely as an anticipation of asking you to believe everything, to believe the most implausible thing, to believe what you can’t possibly, as an adult, believe.

SENDAK: Well, it takes enormous *chutzpah*, what he’s doing. When I first heard the play, I had the Cadman cassette of the Old Vic performance. I was lying on my couch in the studio. My hair stood on end. I did not know the play before I listened to it. I was scared through the whole first scene. I was really frightened of what was happening with the king going crazy like that. “Too hot, too hot.” Within minutes he’s deranged. Well, *I* was like that, but I didn’t know anybody *else* was like that. And then, when it came to the end, and the recovery of Perdita and the whole sheep shearing scene with the flowers, which was so extraordinarily beautiful, I sort of sensed what was coming. I remember lying on the couch, and as Paulina leads them to her house where the statue is, I almost heard myself say, “No, no. No! You’re not going to do this. You are *not going to do this*. You *can’t* do this.” Because I didn’t believe a word about Hermione being alive. Maybe she didn’t die in the courtroom scene; maybe she just keeled over and had been hiding for sixteen years. I mean, forget it, Charlie! She was dead as a door nail, and we know that because Antigonus

has that dream on board the ship where she appears to him as a ghost. She's dead. . . . Well, if she's dead, "Cut it out, Willie!" I mean he's coming at you with this horrific, wonderful thing. The statue moves, and it's an impossible thing. It's almost as though my life as an artist stops at that point and will begin again if I can go beyond that point. It's like I stopped on track. I don't know where to go. It doesn't frighten me, I just don't know what to do with it.

I just thought of another little thing. When I designed *The Magic Flute*, what always struck me as so beautiful is that Tamino appears in the first scene and falls down the steps. He's being chased by the dragon. "Hilfa!" Then Papageno comes in on the scene. The three ladies and the Queen appear, and they send him on this mission to save Pamina. But I always have the feeling that Pamina is two minutes away from where *they* are. When I designed the set, it was just another part of the cave.

ALLANBROOK: Oh, really? On the same set?

SENDAK: There's one opening to the cave, where he falls down. Then I had a real balloon bring down the children. They climb into the balloon, and *aufweidersehn*, they go off on the balloon, and the stage darkens. The cave opening gets a little smaller, and a few little Egyptian type things are hanging out there, and there's a bed for her to swoon on. The balloon comes into that place. It took a minute and a half to get there. So, of course, it's a dream world. By the time they get to Sarastro's room at the end of the opera, it is in the center of the cave, like a glowing jewel. It's painted, and it's gorgeous, and it has pillars and windows, but it's in the same cave. So you'll be going zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. . . like that. Now, what I love about *The Winter's Tale* is that I always have a feeling that here is Sicilia with her king, Leontes, and Hermione, and when Camillo runs away, he goes to Bohemia, which is just over here. Like you get on a boat. . . boom, boom, you're in Bohemia. How could Sicilia be so close to Bohemia, and how come it has a harbor or anything like that? Shakespeare doesn't care that Bohemia has no coast line. It's like my favorite moment in *Babar*, on the first page. He's riding on his mother's back. Bam! Dead mother! He falls off, and he runs in fear. . . eight steps to Paris, which is just behind the palm trees. They all have this dream-scape in common.

ALLANBROOK: On the other hand, the trip to Paulina's house seems like the longest . . .

SENDAK: That is the *longest* walk.

ALLANBROOK: And he doesn't often go to places like that.

SENDAK: No, he's killing you. He's killing you, like he was killing me. And I'm saying, "No, no, no. No. No, no, no. Don't go." It is like a walk down a long, dark, narrow street, you're right.

GREENBLATT: It is interesting as you read the play that you want very much, and I understand why—you want to dismiss those hints that Shakespeare, as you said, threw in to suggest that maybe she was alive and living in the garden house all the time anyway. It seems to me that you want to dismiss them because you actually want—you, Maurice Sendak—want Hermione to die as well as to live. That's to say, it's not just that you want the statue to move, but you need the mother to die in order to get the mother back.

SENDAK: Yes.

GREENBLATT: You can't have it that she's alive continuously. . . .

SENDAK: That's wimpy.

ALLANBROOK: That's true.

SENDAK: Don't you think he would have thought that was wimpy?

GREENBLATT: I must say, too, that I think it's unconvincing, considering the few gestures that are in there, that she might have been alive all along. There's a kind of panicky atmosphere at the end of the play. When Paulina says, "If this be magic, let it be an art as lawful as eating," it is a very disturbing form of magic. Getting statues to move or the dead to come back to life are the two forms of magic most frightening in the early 17th century, the first because it smacks of Catholicism, and the second because it smacks of necromancy. I think there's an attempt to push those off . .

SENDAK: It's like saying. This is not black magic. If this unnerves you, go.

GREENBLATT: It's a somewhat more intense version of Oberon saying, "We're fairies of a different sort," even though he's also raised all of these anxieties about what is going on. Why is the woman a votress of the Indian woman, and why is the baby being kept, and so forth? It's all there, and yet it's not being completely copped to. It's being hidden or talked about, in your terms, without being fully acknowledged.

SEDAK: What's also marvelous in *The Winter's Tale* is that everybody comes back to life except the little boy.

GREENBLATT: Yes.

SEDAK: His son dies. The king suspects the son of being a bastard. He frightens his son literally to death, doesn't he? He looks at the boy. Is the nose the same? Is the chin mine? And then the boy knows that his father hates his mother, who is in prison. We hear that the boy dies, and there's no attempt to recover him.

GREENBLATT: Yes.

SEDAK: That's so awful! And that's what makes Leontes unforgivable forever. Even in that happy ending there's a big, jagged, painful hole that a little boy died for no reason whatsoever. There isn't even a painted statue of a little boy. He doesn't come back to life. He's ignored completely. He's deader than dead. So that's another mystery.

Open Discussion

Question # 1 *I think that the idea of the absurd stories breaking your heart is very interesting. It's almost as if we not only want to believe but do believe on some level, even as adults, that we always have cake for breakfast or that statues can turn into long-lost mothers.*

GREENBLATT: It's interesting in that regard that *The Winter's Tale* doesn't give you the satisfying scene of the recovered heterosexual marriage at the end. Hermione moves but says not a word to Leontes at the end. The only person she wants to speak to is her daughter. What's recovered at the end of the play is the dyad. It's not the

son either, as if, perhaps for the male artist, that kind of Oedipal reunion was not permissible, was, in fact, too much to imagine. But for Shakespeare and for his audience, the reunion of daughter and the mother is both possible and ecstatic.

Question # 2 In both The Winter's Tale and Don Giovanni you have images of statues coming to life at a precise moment when truth or justice is about to be doled out. In both Higgledey, Piggley, Pop and We're All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy, you seem to have the moon come to life at important moments. Is that something you consciously thought about?

SENDAK: Well, an artist almost never consciously thinks, I think, or maybe I should just speak for myself. I mean the moon is an obsession of mine. You'll find the moon in every book I've done practically. It just automatically becomes part of a composition. And then, of course, the scene has to occur at night. In *Higgledey, Piggley, Pop*, the moon is the guiding spirit. You remind me of this, frankly, because I hadn't thought of the two books together since they are so far apart in time—the moon is Mother Goose. The moon is the benign mother who watches over the situation and helps Jenny become the great star she wishes she were and is going to be. I got a letter from a child about *Jack and Guy*, because there is no female figure in *Jack and Guy*. It's all these little boys who are actively performing. And the moon is watching anxiously. There's one scene where the moon appears three times in one composition. Puzzled a number of people. To me, it was my mother—I described her during the lecture—who watched me out the window to see if I'd get killed if I crossed the street. If I turned the corner, she'd run to the window on the other side of the building. Her head darted out of three windows, like a cartoon. I remember wherever I looked, her head *was*. I mean she must have had migraines at the end of every day. But the book was read to a class in Chicago where the teacher was disturbed by *We're All in the Dumps*, and she wondered about the reaction of the children. So she read a number of my books and then she ended with *We Are All in the Dumps* to see how they could put it all together. The responses were wonderful. There are only two that really interested me. One was from a little boy who said, well, what he likes is that we should all eat, because Max gets a hot supper and Mickey gets cake, and Jenny eats all the time. And he went on and on to the bread that the boys

give the baby in *We're All in the Dumps*. So I was just like a grocery store. I calmed him down because I fed him in each book. The other letter came from a little girl who hardly ever spoke up, according to the teacher. She said the book means that the moon is everybody's mother. That is the best review I ever had. It's like she dropped her plumb line right into the book, and it was wonderful. That's how children get what they're reading. That's sort of what we get from listening to Mozart too. But I haven't answered your question because none of this is consciously wrought. It isn't.

ALLANBROOK: Was that news to you when she wrote you that letter?

SEDAK: Totally.

ALLANBROOK: Totally? That the moon is everybody's mother?

SEDAK: Totally. I mean I knew it was a worried, Jewish moon.

ALLANBROOK: It's a terrifying moon, too.

SEDAK: But it's a . . . it's a *nudgy* moon.

ALLANBROOK: A *nudgy* moon.

SEDAK: I mean, it watches and watches. It knows it shouldn't come to earth and knows it's a moon and can't do anything, but the kids are so dumb in not solving the problem that it comes down and grabs them and says, "You *shmegegies*, come with me." [laughter] So it does break the cosmic law. But then mothers—my mother anyway—always broke the law.

Question # 3 *Did you design the sets for The Nutcracker ballet in Seattle? And why did the company do The Nutcracker?*

SEDAK: Yes, I did. It was a new ballet company in Seattle back then, and a ballet company that is trying to establish itself does *The Nutcracker*, which is your bread and butter ballet. Then if it's successful, you do all the ballets you really want to do. But no ballet company wants to do *The Nutcracker*. I mean it's just so tedious, and there's not enough dancing in it, and the story is a yawn. What is forgivable is Tchaikovsky, because the music is divine. It's just. . . it's a great ballet score. So when

I was approached to do it, it seemed paradoxical that I would be engaged—it's a very long piece and a lot of work. So in order for me to do it, I would have to revise the whole thing. The choreographer was also very eager that it be changed, but how? That was really easy because it is based on a fairy tale by a great writer named E. T. A. Hoffman called "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." It's one of the bloodiest, most horrendous German fairy tales there is. So, of course, I loved it.

Now, the question was how much of it could you get up on the stage and not sabotage Tchaikovsky. A lot of the fairy tale had to be left out. What was crucial to the fairy tale, as is crucial to *The Magic Flute*, in my opinion, is that the story is about a young girl. *The Magic Flute* is about Pamina. It's about the girl and her growing up. Everybody else is sorta hanging out, either helping her or hindering her. It's basically about a little girl, and so is *The Nutcracker*. It's about how Clara goes through a hormonal burst. There's a scene in the fairy tale where she takes the Nutcracker doll out of her cabinet. She's wearing her night dress, and she cradles the nutcracker in her arms, and it makes a weird shiver. It moves in such a way that her spine is like ice, and she's frightened, so she puts it back on the shelf. When she looks down, the front of her night dress is covered with blood. That's what the fairy tale is about.

ALLANBROOK: Was that in the ballet?

SENDAK: It was—as best I could, without chasing the audience out, yes.

ALLANBROOK: Did you ever hear of Spike Jones' *Nutcracker*? It's a gas.

SENDAK: Not Spike. . . Spike Jones does that?

ALLANBROOK: Yes, I have it at home.

SENDAK: Yes, I would like to hear it, actually. But it was really about her coming of age and having a dream about this young prince whom she's going to fall in love with. In most versions of the ballet, the children do all the work throughout the ballet, then there is a party at the end. The Sugarplum Fairy comes, and it's like inviting Nancy Reagan to your party. [laughter] And nobody wants to do that, in their sane mind. The kids just sit on their duffs while the grownups dance. I mean it's so bad to treat her that way when she's worked so hard.

So we dumped the Sugarplum Fairy. And we knew we'd get in trouble with Anna Kisselgoff, the writer for the *New York Times*, or all the ballet writers. . . you cannot do this kind of thing. My idea was that we'd put in the program that the Sugarplum Fairy was killed in a street accident [laughter], and so we had to get rid of her. We didn't do that either. Instead, at the end of the ballet, Clara, the little girl, as a reward for her bravery and courage, and since she's dreaming the whole thing anyway, is allowed to become a grownup and dance her own *pas de deux* with her own boyfriend. It was fun, and the kids loved it because they can follow the course, and they knew she was the important person. Some grownups didn't like it, but *c'est la vie*.

Question # 4 Could you comment more generally about the role of trauma in your books?

SENDAK: Oh, trauma I did on Tuesday, I think. Trauma. I think it would be hard to talk about, so many of these people have heard about it already. You know, I feel like somebody in Alcoholics Anonymous, saying, "My name is Maurice," [laughter] but to answer your question in a general way, yes. Yes, the work is filled with stuff of mine that I'm trying to solve. The puzzle and problem of an artist is how to do that, since everybody has problems they're trying to solve, and turn it into a work of art, so it isn't just a boring case history. That's the dilemma.

Question # 5 Do people share your Lindbergh trauma?

SENDAK: Oh, yes. I think there's a big club of us in America who shared the Lindbergh trauma. When I first announced the Lindbergh trauma at that session, there were some people in the audience my age, and there was a little, audible groan that they were going to have to hear this and feel it again. I spoke to a young woman yesterday about it. She's much younger than me and she, too, is fascinated with it. I suggested that she write a book about, or have somebody write a book about America in the '30s and why we were so obsessed with children. We had the Lindbergh baby who was kidnapped. We had Gloria Vanderbilt, who was the million dollar baby, who was threatened with kidnapping all the time, who wrote me a letter, in fact, after *Outside Over There* came out to tell me how much it upset her and made her relive times of her own childhood. We had the Dionne quintuplets, magic babies,

from 1938. We had Fannie Brice dressed up like a baby all the time. And we had Eddie Cantor dressed up like a baby all the time. So what was going on with babies? Why were they especially vulnerable in the '30s? Was it the Big Depression? Was it the seeds of World War II just beginning? But why were kids in such a perilous condition? It's fascinating. I don't have a clue. It went through a whole decade, and I was part of that decade. The Lindbergh case was in March, 1932. I was three. And that was the beginning and the end of my life, so to speak. Well, it's certainly the beginning of a life-long obsession with children being unsafe and children being vulnerable. Then that translated into books. I'm concerned about children in this country and so on., but the root of it is me and how concerned I was for me.

Question # 6 How does the sudden appearance of Mozart in a very ordered, rectilinear building in Outside Over There fit into this question of children being unsafe and kidnapped?

SENDAK: Well, this is the end of my book, where she comes back to a peaceful condition of harmony. And the end of *The Magic Flute* is that too. This young woman is saved. She is allowed to join this order. She marries the man she loves. So both endings are not chaotic anymore. She's gone through the chaos. She has survived the chaos like Ida has survived the chaos. And Mozart is sitting there composing *The Magic Flute*, and that is literally copied from a photograph of the house they'd built for him because he used to sneak away and not finish operas. They built that house just outside the theater where they could make sure he finished the music. He slid pieces of paper under the door, and they put sandwiches there until he wrote the next few pages. So it just shows Ida in a moment that is quiet. She has accomplished what she set out to do. There are notes all over that picture that tell you there's danger ahead. She'll be calm for only a very short time.

ALLANBROOK: Really?

SENDAK: Yes. The tree is about to clutch her. The goblins are there as five butterflies are fluttering about. It's just for a moment. It's just for a moment. Kids can only be peaceful for just a moment.

ALLANBROOK: Am I right in thinking that he's incommensurable with the rest of the landscape, I mean that little house doesn't belong here. It's as though it were out

of proportion.

SENDAK: Well, it's like an opera set. And also it's badly drawn. [laughter]

Question # 7 What can you say about the lyrics of Chicken Noodle Soup?

SENDAK: What can I say about lyrics to *Chicken Soup with Rice*, you mean? That has nothing to do with Mozart or Shakespeare. It was a joke for my mother, who thought it was a cure-all for everything—having scraped your knee, pneumonia, attempts at suicide, anything—you would eat chicken soup with rice, which I hated and still do. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but those huge, round globules of fat floating on the top just did not make it for me.

Question # 8 (From Wye Allanbrook): I wanted to change operas. I wanted to beg a favor of Maurice and find out why Idomeneo was perhaps Mozart's favorite opera.

SENDAK: Well, it's a hard question. It's a hard question because I don't know that I can understand. I know what you're saying. It's very. . . well, it's *opera seria*. It's very stately.

ALLANBROOK: It's no fairy tale.

SENDAK: It's no fairy tale. It's very stiff. And yet it has the sea serpent. It has Neptune. It also has a father and a son who are hating each other. Has a father who condemns his son to death. It has a son like Pamina, the daughter, who is completely confused by why his father hates him and treats him in this way. So it's a little bit of a fairy tale.

ALLANBROOK: Has a mad woman.

SENDAK: It has a mad woman who sings the most demented aria there is in all of Mozart, and then she drops dead on the spot. So what are you saying, it's not a fairy tale? [laughter]

ALLANBROOK: So, you see, it all figures out!

SENDAK: But I think what you're talking about is the very stateliness of *opera seria*. . .

ALLANBROOK: . . .and the lack of comedy.

SEDAK: Total lack of comedy. I have a feeling that Mozart was, and just to push my point as hard as I can, doing something a little bit like Shakespeare did in *The Winter's Tale*. He was very young when he wrote *Idomeneo*. About 22 years old. He is saying, I'm going to take a form which is antiquated, which nobody performs anymore, which everybody thinks is creaky and unfashionable, and I will show them—because this was a very important commission.

ALLANBROOK: Definitely.

SEDAK: It was a major, major opera.

ALLANBROOK: He went to Munich to do it.

SEDAK: Yes, to Munich. So why would he risk everything on taking an unfashionable form? He knew how great he was.

ALLANBROOK: It wasn't that unfashionable. There was a lot of *opera seria* still around.

SEDAK: But even his own father wrote to him, saying he was unnerved by his choice of *Idomeneo*. He said, OK, you have to do it, you have to do it, but how would you do it? What can you do with this? It's as stiff as a board. I think really it was his own self-knowledge that he would enliven it and warm it and fill it with human beings, which he did. Ilia and Idamante are early versions of Tamino and Pamina. And she's as lovely as any of the girls in any of his operas, I find. Her first music in the very beginning of Act I is so gorgeous and sensuous. So then you have this stiff-assed opera and this warm, sensuous music. It's that contradiction again. It's like *La clemenza di Tito*, which is even stiffer. It's harder to understand why he would choose that, except that people say he had no choice. He was out of fashion, and so he had to compose for what they wanted. He never would do that. That's like saying Shakespeare was losing it, or Shakespeare wasn't smart enough. That's such dumb nonsense. I mean these people were in such control of their material, I think. I have to think that.

GREENBLATT: Maybe I should just quickly show a couple of things, just to bounce off of your work. I wanted to show you here what the demonic version of following your womb looks like. This is a Hans Baldung Grien painting of witches. There are some corpses, little babies perhaps waiting to become corpses or to be eaten, and

then this splendid, very old witch with the flowing hair flying in with the pregnant woman. This is what you might see if you were not hiding or suppressing the story that is floating somewhere behind talk of the pregnancy and the baby and the changeling, the story that is associated with the nightmarish, flowing, demonic, hideously misogynist imagination of Hans Baldung Grien and with what Europeans believed about witchcraft in the Renaissance.

Then I'll just show you two other pictures quickly. This is *Santca Maria del Soccorso*, of the Rescue, a painting that is precisely about what someone just called Mozart's incommensurability. The panel is by an unknown Italian Renaissance artist, who introduces into his elegant Renaissance setting, in something of a failed experiment, a slightly miniaturized version of the worst-case fear of the Middle Ages. This hideous, fanged monster, such as you might see frescoed on the walls of a church, is brought into a fancy, elegant Italian Renaissance setting. The Virgin is about to squash him like a bug. He's only fit to terrify the two little children, the little one's bare bottom showing that he is not even in training pants yet. They're terrified by this figure; you can see how scary he still is in some way, with the various phallic attributes. But he's also been introduced into both a rational setting and into a children's tale, where the mother has all the power. I brought it in because I was thinking about some odd effects in Maurice Sendak's work: the appearance of terrible things in the safe space of children's books or the introduction, in slightly miniaturized form, figures that in fact have their old terrors still associated with them. I think they're similar to those magical moments like the Mozart we just discussed, where terror has been introduced into a world in which it's about to be, at least for the moment, contained.

I have one other image that the first lecture made me think of. This is a panel also from the same period, of Christ saving the souls in Limbo. This fascinated me, again, for two reasons. You can see the same image of the bug-like demon. Christ has evidently battered the door down to get in, and left this poor thing that was waiting behind it, trying to hold him off, squashed underneath. The artist had the clever idea of letting you see into the cave through a huge hole in the side. There's clearly a door and it's been locked. But he had the further idea, that he must have thought was clever, of rustivating the edges of a hole in the side of the cave to make

them look more cave-like. Of course, the effect is totally irrational. Why didn't they just walk out of the place? But Jesus had to knock the door down. So it's that game, which I also see as a very characteristic, deep game of children's fiction, of George MacDonald, of Maurice Sendak, of the great children's fiction, of letting you look into the hidden place. MacDonald lets you get into the earth. He lets you actually go underneath and see the hideous things that are in the mountain, as Sendak does. And at the same time the artist here has carved this very strange opening, trying to make it seem plausible that you should get the implausible vision. I suppose that this a little bit like the daily visits—was it to deliver the chicken soup?—that Paulina is said to be making to Hermione. It's actually a detail that makes the story in some ways more insane, not less insane, even though it's a gesture toward rationalizing it.

SENDAK: It's like a pretty little frame.

GREENBLATT: Exactly.

Question # 9 Do you see the hero of the Janacek opera, Cunning Little Vixen, as similar to the girls in The Nutcracker or The Magic Flute?

SENDAK: Yes. Yes, actually I do, but it's not me who sees her that way. It's Janacek who sees her that way. I mean he fully sees her that way. But he does a terrible thing. We see her as a little vixen grow up and mature and suffer, and then come to total happiness with her boyfriend and with her babies. In her happiness, she becomes careless like a fox shouldn't. And the man who's trying to shoot her, she doesn't take him seriously enough. So, the message seems to be don't get happy. You know? She's cocky at that point, and she turns her back as she never would, and he shoots her dead. It's a curious, unhappy ending.

ALLANBROOK: Should we play Pamina's aria?

SENDAK: That'll cheer everybody up. Before we play Pamina's aria, should we give some background?

ALLANBROOK: Well, Pamina has already had the dreadful scene with the Queen, when the Queen asks her to murder Sarastro, and then she finds Tamino in the temple—they find each other, and then they're separated again, and Tamino says, "I," and is told he's going on the trials. Pamina is in terrible grief because she can't

be with him, and this is an aria that expresses her pain and his—because of his failure to look at her. Of course, at the end, as Maurice said, there's a wonderful reunion. But this aria is the kind of grief that you know Sarastro would never allow. Perseverance is probably a Masonic virtue, right? And this is not perseverance. This is complete, utter pain.

SENDAK: Pamina also runs into the room where Tamino and Papageno are. Papageno is eating, as usual, and Tamino cannot speak to her. He must have the strength to not speak to the girl he loves. And she comes rushing in, all excited, because she's heard him practicing his magic flute. She says, "Tamino, Tamino," and he turns away from her. She actually says something like, "Will you not speak to me? Why have you stopped loving me?" And he cannot answer a single question. So she gets darker and darker and more depressed and grief-stricken, and she assumes that it must mean he doesn't love her. It isn't worth living, and she's telling him she's going to kill herself, but he cannot stop her. She turns to Papageno, who's under no vow. He could, indeed, help her. But he's such a pig, and his mouth is all full of food, and she turns to him and says, "Papageno, you tell me." He makes noises with his stuffed mouth but says nothing. So she assumes both men are against her, like everybody else in the opera, and she walks to Mozart's music slowly off stage. She could have been stopped by either of them. Nobody stops this girl going off to her death. It's like she's waiting for them to stop her. In every production she slowly walks off stage, and then she sings this aria.

ALLANBROOK: Andrew Porter points out that Tamino has already told the Three Ladies that he can't speak. It's just a detail, but it suggests that his not speaking to her is not necessary. Not being able to explain the problem eventuates the greatest, the saddest aria . . .

ALLANBROOK: [plays music]

ALLANBROOK: You notice the kind of family resemblance. She has the vocal ornament that her mother has, but it's so plangent and poignant instead of violent and cutting.

SENDAK: Is it just after that that the balloon comes?

ALLANBROOK: Yes, they come right then.

SEDAK: This is where the three children come and say, “Don’t do it, honey. Come with us.” And they sing the quartet.

Question # 10 *Perhaps I’m being Philistine, but this music did not sound particularly plaintive, but more like she was dispelling fear and nausea rather than contemplating suicide.*

SEDAK: I’ve never heard *this* performance before, but this is the quickest I’ve ever heard it taken. . . far too quick for my taste. I will recommend the performance directed by Willem Furtfengele back in the ’30s. I don’t understand why this performance is done at such a speed.

ALLANBROOK: Because it’s Roger Norrington, who always takes things fast.

SEDAK: OK. There’s your answer.

ALLANBROOK: And notice also that he gives her *rubato* as a substitute for the slower tempo.

SEDAK: It doesn’t work. I absolutely agree with you. This is not the way it should be done.

ALLANBROOK: Right. There is the moment of the Neapolitan chord, which is the lowest, lowest degree you can get toward home base without being at home, which on the word “tod” is to me the most depressive, amazing moment in the aria. It is followed by that wonderful summary coda of the instruments.

Question # 11 *Did you know anything about The Winter’s Tale before you heard it?*

SEDAK: No, I’m afraid I didn’t. I mean I’ve come to Shakespeare very uneducated, just with the handful of plays I read in school and then the other handful of plays I read on my own growing up. I probably read maybe seventeen or eighteen. There are 37. I carefully avoided all the ones that I knew were hard, and the ones that were obscure. I’ve been telling these people *ad nauseam* how poorly educated I am, partly because I was petrified of school. I hated school. I hated my teachers. Even those who

cared for me, or tried to, I would reject because I was sure they were really rejecting me. Getting out of high school was my entire goal in life. And the only way I got out of high school, because I was failing everything, was by illustrating the first book on the atomic bomb called *Atomics for the Millions*. The bomb had just been dropped—I graduated in 1946—and my physics teacher, Dr. Heimen Ruckless, wrote the first book explaining it to the layman, chose me as his illustrator—the dumbest kid he ever had in his class. I could draw, but he had to explain each picture. The deal was a hundred dollars and a passing grade so I could graduate.

GREENBLATT: And the rest is history.

SENDAK: The irony of the situation—that’s the only review I have ever been interested in because it was my first, and it was in the *New York Times*. And it said, “An otherwise sober book enlivened by brilliant cartoons.” Little did they know that every cartoon was Dr. Ruckless’s cartoon and my hand. But getting out of school was everything. Not going to college and having to fight my father down on that was everything because I was the only kid he could send. My sister had longed to go, and he couldn’t afford to send her. Escape was everything. Working was everything. Getting out of my house was everything. Education was anathema to me. It was torture. And now, I want to be educated. I’m now reading things that I’ve always been afraid to read because I thought I was simply not clever enough to catch it, that Shakespeare was for those elitist type people, like some people think opera is. I torture my way through. Part of it was illustrating *Pierre* by Herman Melville, and knowing that Melville spent years reading Shakespeare—bitter years for him. I love everything Herman Melville does, so I would now read Shakespeare. Ahab sounded like Shakespeare. *Pierre* sounded like Shakespeare. What the hell? What was there to lose?

THOMAS LAQUEUR: Maurice, if you decide to come back to a university, I hope you come back to this one.

