EYE ON FICTION

references

Gottlieb, R.M.

Braun, S.

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The book

Maurice Sendak's works have enormous social appeal and have been purchased and read by tens of millions of adults to their children over the years. Published in 1963, Where the Wild Things Are is the first and best-known part of what Sendak described as a trilogy. Although just 10 sentences long, it has become acknowledged as a masterpiece of children's literature, inspiring opera, ballets, songs and film adaptations (the most recent of which is released this month). Barack Obama recently told a White House crowd that Where the Wild Things Are is one of his favourite books. It inspired some to suggest that 'it is perhaps time to separate [Sendak] from the word 'children' and deal with his work as an exploitative art, purely and only seemingly simple' (Brun, 1970, p. 52).

As the lavishly illustrated book opens, we meet the main protagonist, Max, a young boy armed with a very large Hammer. He is wearing his wolf-suit and making mischief about the house. This includes chasing the dog about with a fork. His mother, never seen in the story, is unsympathetic and shouts at Max that he is a WILD THING! Max responds by shouting back, TLL EAT YOU UP! Because of this, he is sent to bed 'without eating anything'. In his bedroom, Max's rage continues, but soon trees begin to grow from the floor and the walls begin to disappear. His room becomes one he is surrounded by Max walks through the forest, coming soon upon a private boat that he takes across the ocean to 'where the wild things are'. Wild things appear from the jungle, bearing sharp pointed teeth and menacing claws. Max's Wild Things are threatening, too, but he confronts and dominates them and becomes their king, commanding them to commence a wild, gigantic

romp in which he joins them. He commands them to stop the wild rumput, sends them off to bed without their supper, and begins to feel lonely, wanting to be where someone loved him best of all. He smells 'good things to eat' from far away across the world, and journeys home, leaving the wild things, 'to the night of his very own room, where he found his supper waiting for him, and it was still hot'

Unspeasable concerns

Sendak's art addresses our deepest, frequently repressed, often unspeakable concerns about ourselves and our loved ones. Often it speaks to children and to the adults who read to them from a place of anguished inner struggle, struggle that had rarely been directly addressed in children's literature prior to Sendak. In straightforward, undogussed fashion, Sendak's work has addressed problems as monumental for children as being in a rage at a mother, relating to a depressed or emotionally unavailable mother, or coming to terms with a mother who cannot or will not recognise her children's concerns or state of being felled by both Max's rage and sets the narrative in motion. We also cannot fail to observe that Max is clothed as a predator, a wolf, a familiar cannibalistic image, and that he chases his dog about with a fork. The idea of eating anything'. In his bedroom, Max's rage continues, but soon trees begin to grow from the floor and the walls begin to disappear. His room becomes one he is surrounded by

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Psychoanalysis for a period during his early adulthood. He certainly had a good understanding of his family, among his closest friends. His partner of 50 years, who died in 2007, was a psychoanalyst. Rumour has it that the wolf that" (Sendak, 1970), Roald Dahl "High profile website with a practice profile Broadened public understanding of mental health counselling services. You, the practitioner: give us your email address: Provides private health solutions for Hope for the future: Register now:
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How do children survive? There is a remarkable thematic coherence to much of Sendak's work, and this coherence links creative efforts that are decades apart and, additionally, links to what is known about his early life and formative years. Sendak himself has commented, "I didn't feel isolated, as well, and his sexual orientation may have been problematic at the time. But one must remain uncertain about all these matters, as they never come up in published accounts of his life or in any of his myriad interviews. I also discern some suggestion that he was aware of an inhibition that at the time prevented him from producing a work entirely his own – both the words and pictures. Kenny's Window, entirely his own work, was produced after he had begun therapy and was partly dedicated to his analyst.

Sendak's interest in psychoanalytic techniques also allows us to add an additional insight into the mind that created Where the Wild Things Are. Beginning around 1932 he was suffering from oral dysfunctions, so for some time created what he called, "virtually, fantasy sketches", "stream-of-consciousness doodles`; and in 1970, while listening to classical music. His aim was not unlike that of Max wearing in Where the Wild Things Are, to roam carelessly through the unconscious" (Sendak, 1970, Introduction). Clearly he viewed these sketches as free associations, and they provide a kind of raw access to aspects of Sendak's fantasy life that is present but less readily apparent in his finished work. To the psychoanalyst, a patient's free associations are the silt from which we laboriously pan for our gold, that gold being knowledge of our subjects' unconscious imaginings and the configurations of their minds. Examining these sketches, as I did in Gottlieb (2009), we again find reflections of Bertram Lewin's ideas about oral psychology (Lewin, 1952, 1953, 1954) – the wishes to eat, to be eaten, and to sleep. Cannibalistic fantasies again feature prominently, with themes of devouring and regurgitation. We also find pleasurable and painful moods, the former expressed by ideas of floating and flight and an ocean tumbled by with a private boat for Max and he sailed off through day and day in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are.

And how do children survive? It is clear that positively toned relationships can continue. How wonderful it must feel to a child to return home to find that his dinner is waiting for him and in it still hot! So, 'How do children survive?' It would seem that Sendak's answer must come out of the mouth of Max, 'We meander through time, dream and daydream'. The child transforms otherwise crippling traumatic circumstances into meanings, survival, and positive maturations. These are the things they conquer them, and then they return.