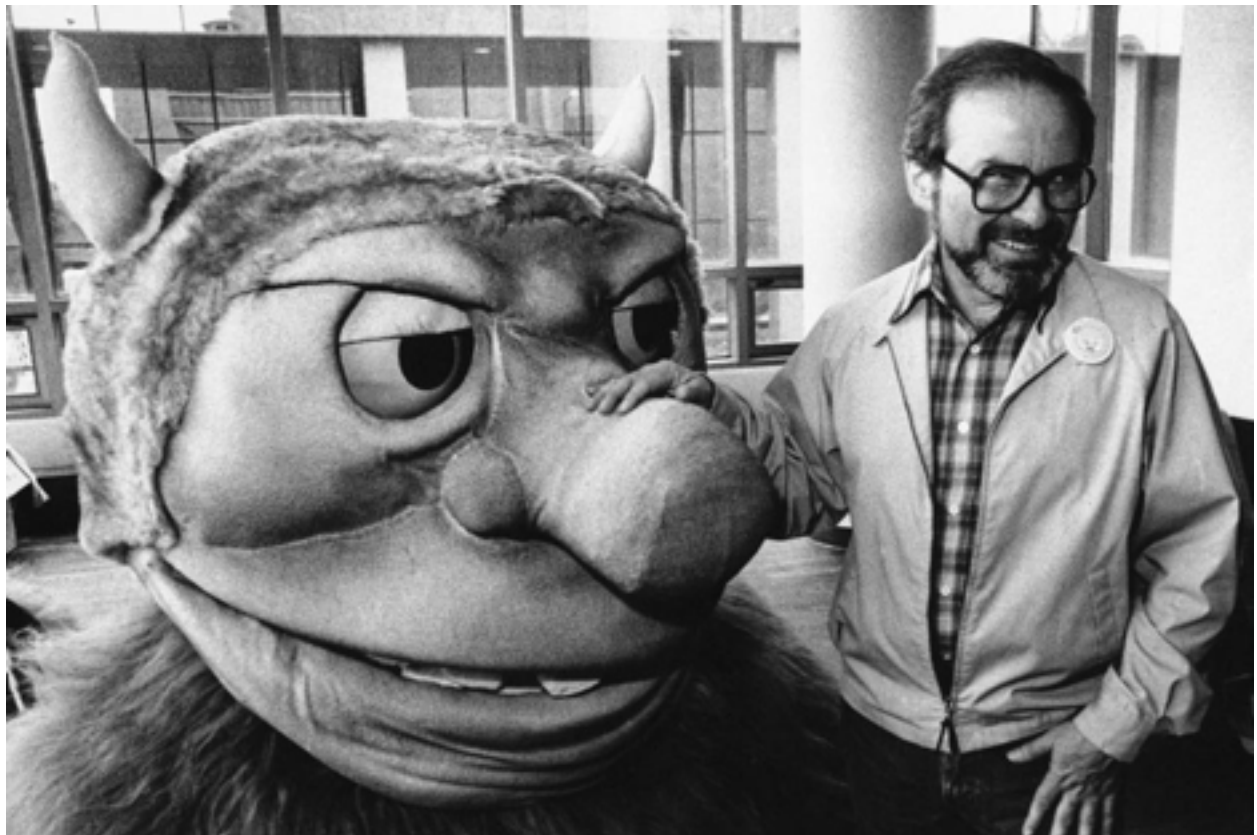


**Maurice Sendak: What Do Dreamscapes Allow? Constructing Jewish
Identity and Homosexuality after WWII
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Maurice Sendak, c. 1980s

Abstract

Through the lens of historical and cultural context, this paper will analyze the ways in which Maurice Sendak deals with the repression of his identity as a gay Jewish man through the children's literature he's published. These texts include *Where The Wild Things Are* (1963), *In the Night Kitchen* (1970), *We Are All In the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1993), *Bumble Ardy* (2000), and *Brundibar* (2003)—a Czech children's opera that was adapted into a children's book written by Tony Kushner and illustrated by Sendak. Using mainly a post-Holocaust lens, I focus on how his main characters create dreamscapes in order to deal with feelings of repression. These dreamscapes reflect Sendak's own views on the post- Holocaust world and the repression of his identity as a gay Jewish man. There are multiple sections in this paper consisting of an overview of his childhood during WWII, cultural factors that influenced his writing, and analyses of Sendak's texts which focus on why his use of dreamscapes are so effective. The final section addresses Sendak's engagement with other Jewish authors such as Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*) and Art Spiegelman (*Maus*), all who critically and effectively discuss themes of Jewish identity or homosexuality after the Holocaust. Throughout his work, Sendak constantly reiterates the trauma¹ of repression both Jews and the queer community faced as he discusses that repression in the context of his own life and work.

¹ A note on the word "trauma" as it's used in this paper. The word trauma is used frequently but not in terms of trauma literature or trauma narratives. While Sendak's main characters are often put in traumatic situations that force them to deal with intense emotional states in their dreamscapes, the character's lives are not narratives centered around trauma. Sendak's does not deal with trauma in a clinical sense, but means to give insight into human functioning (Dutro 197).

“Childhood Was a Terrible Situation”

Maurice Sendak was born in 1928 in Brooklyn (five years before the Nazi regime started in Germany) into a family of Jewish immigrants who fled from Poland before the onset of WWI (“Looking Back On 'Wild Things' With Maurice Sendak”). His father’s side of the family was destroyed by the Holocaust and was lost in the concentration camps, leaving the remainder of Sendak’s family permanently damaged (Conley 2012). He spent his childhood in the shadow of his father’s relatives who died in during the Holocaust. The presence of death and the Holocaust left Sendak with unresolved feelings about his Jewish identity and in turn his identity as a gay man. Already burdened with the unpopular label of being a Jew, he was now struggling with the label of homosexuality as well, something he was not open about until well into his middle aged life (Towle 2008). In 2008, Sendak stated, “All I wanted was to be straight so my parents could be happy. They never, never, never, knew” (Towle 2008). Sendak believed that it was “nobody’s business” whether he was gay or not (Towle 2008). Both identities come out in his writing through the conflicts his main characters face. Through his main characters’ struggles, Sendak aims to work out his own feelings of being repressed. In interviews later in his life, Sendak reflects on how extensively his parents and the war deeply impacted his perception of how he fit into the world.

Reflecting on his childhood with NPR in 2006, Sendak discusses impacts of the war and his parents, he states that “childhood was a terrible situation” (Inkskeep 2016) as recounted by the interviewer, Steve Inkskeep. Due to the losses his family experienced from WWII, his parents pushed on him extreme survivor’s guilt, and the constant presence of that guilt made Sendak aware of his own mortality at a very early age. Inkskeep states that “...[Sendak’s] own

unhappy childhood is the reason that danger lurks in his picture books. The Holocaust claimed the lives of many of his family members...He had an uneasy relationship with his father.

‘Childhood is a tricky business,’ Sendak says, ‘Usually, something goes wrong’” (Inskeep 2006), a view which is often reflected in his writing. The main characters of his tales are constantly put in positions of extreme danger and face terrible monsters and villains.

In addition to childhood being the terrible situation for Sendak that it was, and the damage his family had already faced from the losses of WWII, he was constantly reminded of his mortality and the overwhelming presence of death. In interviews closer to his death in 2012, he reflects on his preoccupation with death, his “survivor’s guilt” from the loss of his father’s family, his atheism, and his disbelief in an afterlife. Sendak’s relationship with death becomes more overt in the interviews closer to 2012 as he refers to death as “such a curious thing.” The preoccupation with death that exists in Sendak’s work pairs well his preoccupation with mortality, both of which are themes that appear frequently in his writing. In opposition to death and childhood trauma, Sendak also saw art as a solution to the evils in the world (PBS 2004), which is expressed through the main characters in his books as they return home safely. His stories put children in dangerous situations but there is always a solution, always a reminder that art can be part of the solution to combat the evils in the world.

Sendak was the youngest of three children, his older brother Jack, and his older sister Natalie. His early childhood sicknesses often left him narrowly escaping death. As part of an old Jewish tradition, his grandmother would dress him in all white and make him sit on the front steps of their home so that the angel of death would pass over him (PBS 2004). Sendak’s work is heavily pervaded by ideas of death and mortality, influenced by his early exposure to death as a

child. His parents constantly reminded him that he was lucky to be alive, and made him aware that they had not expected him to live very long, due to how often he was sick (qtd. in PBS 2004). Again, themes of mortality and real, constant danger often appeared in his own childhood. The characters in Sendak's books deal with similar situations based on his own experiences. Because of his weak immune system, he was often was kept inside, leaving him to develop an interest in writing and art from an early age (qtd. in PBS 2004). As Sendak continued to grow up, his preoccupations with death and mortality manifested in art which allowed him to express the things he was experiencing in his own life.

He was inspired by Walt Disney and Micky Mouse, one of his first jobs was drawing the lettering on a Mickey Mouse comic strip (Weiss 2012) and creating the window displays in FAO Schwarz in New York City. In his later life he was inspired by Melville, Mozart, and Emily Dickinson (Inkskeep 2006) and carried a pocket sized Dickinson around with him, mostly because he thought she was brave (PBS 2004). Bravery and courage are other defining attributes Sendak's characters seem to have. They are fearless in the pursuit of their journey to reconcile with their own identity. Sendak's influences range from children's art to profound musical arrangements and authors, interests that speak to his depth as a writer and as an artist. His depth as a writer manifests in his representations of themes such as the Holocaust, homosexuality, and childhood anger through his books, themes which his main characters confront repeatedly.

In dealing with these themes, the texts that are closely analyzed in the next few sections demonstrate most clearly Sendak's main characters using dreamscapes to cope with and counter feelings of repression, anger, and a struggle for an accepted identity. Sendak repeatedly manages to tackle the complex emotional states of his main characters and his stories usually end with a

peaceful resolution, paralleling resolutions he imagined or experienced in his own life. The dreamscapes Sendak creates allow for the cycle of stressor, profound insight by the main character, and an eventual resolution to play out. However, when the line between reality and the dream state become less clear, that's when themes of the Holocaust and themes of repressed homosexuality become more apparent and the books take on a much darker tone. The darker tone more directly address Sendak's post-Holocaust feelings and the attempts to reconcile with his own gay identity. A majority of his texts almost explicitly play off the idea of the main characters having to repress internal feelings which eventually find their way out into the larger universe.

The characters in Sendak's stories often deal with trauma and monsters that come out of their imagination. Although the trauma his characters face is not tangible, it's still real, and the monsters in his stories become a visible manifestation of that trauma. In *Where The Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen* the monsters exist in a tangible way, whereas Sendak's book *Bumble Ardy* falls on the other end of the spectrum. *Bumble*, the main character, does not create any monsters through a dreamscape—the monsters are already present when the dreamscape starts. The story is less of a dreamscape and borders on state of total nightmare. When the dreamscape is explicitly stated, like in *Where The Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen*, Sendak's characters are able to tame their monsters, unlike what happens in *Bumble Ardy*, *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy*, and *Brundibar*.

The traumas Sendak's characters face are directly related to post-Holocaust stress and the crisis that occurs during the repression of personal identity. That being said, the Holocaust and homosexuality both pervade Maurice Sendak's life and work extensively. Looking at his work in the context of the Holocaust and the repression of homosexuality in the 1960's, makes it apparent

that Sendak's children's books were talking about more complex issues that weren't previously addressed in children's literature. The post-Holocaust stress he deals with is the aftermath of WWII and the re-emergence of Jewish identity and culture, as well as his own needs while trying to cope with his identity as a gay man. Sendak makes constant references in his books to the Holocaust, homosexuality, frustration, anger, and loss, all seen and processed through the eyes and dreamscapes of children. Sendak believed that children have this profound insight, he stated that "you can't protect kids, they know everything" (qtd. in Weiss 2012), which is why communicating these themes through the perspective of a child is so important.

His work doesn't address the Holocaust or the history of homosexuality in its entirety, but both lenses offer a viable framework, through which to analyze Sendak's work and can be used to understand the complexity of the issues that he deals with in his books. In order to deal with such deeply rooted historical issues, such as the systemic repression of Jews and the gay community, Sendak uses dreamscapes to talk about and present these issues in a way that is accessible to a larger audience, especially adults (Jensen 2012). His work creates a real child's world that parents can learn from ("Maurice Sendak, Guardian of Children's World" 2012).

The worlds and dreamscapes Sendak creates allow his readers to understand how the post-Holocaust world is coping and recovering from such a tragedy and an unspeakable loss, including the lives of gay men and women that were lost during the Holocaust. Sendak aims for his characters as well as his readers to return to reality with a solution to help them cope with the losses life presents, the identities they feel they cannot express, and restore the hope that love conquers all. All these ideas that are made explicit when his characters return home safely from their dangerous dream worlds with a resolution.

The traumas Sendak explores in his work are directly related to his own identity as a gay Jewish man. Both identities are inseparable from each other when analyzing his work. Other research in the field suggests that Sendak's work deals with themes of Jewish identity and homosexual identity separately—but through a close analysis on the dreamscapes he creates it's clear that the two identities often coexist. These two identities work together in order to express the ways repression has functioned in Sendak's life and how that repression is processed through his main characters. Because Sendak deals with such intense and controversial topics in children's literature, like the Holocaust and homosexuality, he has created this unique medium within children's literature that uses dreamscapes to process trauma, therefore creating a new way to talk about repression, homosexuality, and Jewish identity. Sendak's best and most well known example of this identity crisis and battle with internal monsters comes from *Where The Wild Things Are*, and the main character, Max.

“Oh—Please Don’t Go! We’ll Eat You Up—We Love You So!” and Max Said, ‘No!’”

Where The Wild Things Are (1963) Sendak’s most well known children’s book, is the story of Max, who dreams himself away to the land of the wild things and becomes king. The children in Sendak’s stories are heroes who are saving themselves from monsters they created and can no longer control, a theme which is explicit in *Where The Wild Things Are*. The inspiration for the “wild things” came from Sendak’s Polish-American relatives with their sharp, crooked teeth (Moyers). James Adams, author of the article “Sendak Spoke for the Monsters Inside Us All,” describes Sendak’s Brooklyn childhood as one that “was filled with monsters” and relatives who chanted “‘You’re so cute I could eat you up!’ [and] As the youngest (and sickliest) of three children [Sendak] later recalled: ‘I knew that if my mother didn’t hurry up with the cooking, they probably would’” (Adams 2012). The famously inspired wild things from Sendak’s book scream at Max, “Oh please don’t go—we’ll eat you up— we love you so!” (Sendak [31]), a mirror image of his relatives, perfectly animated with their yellow teeth and sharp claws.

Other influences for *Where the Wild Thing Are* came from Sendak’s relationship with his mother. In a PBS interview with Bill Moyers, Sendak states “‘...in Yiddish she called me the equivalent of ‘wild thing’ and chased me all over the house,’” which mirrors the scene in *Where The Wild Things Are* when Max is being chased by his mother as he’s running around the house wreaking havoc. She shouts at him, “wild thing!” (Sendak [5]) and Max screams back “I’ll eat you up!” (Sendak [5]). Sendak’s mother suffered from emotional and mental health problems, much like Max’s mother does in the film adaptation of *Where The Wild Things Are*.

Sendak's parents had a crucial role in the danger that takes place in his own story telling. Talking about their influence on his stories, Sendak states, "...my parents were immigrants and they didn't know that they should clean the stories up for us. So we heard horrible, horrible stories, and we loved them, we absolutely loved them. But the three of us—my sister, my brother, and myself—grew up very depressed people" (Setoodah 2012). The stories his parents told had all the horrors, all the chaos, and tragedy of the real world, which seeped into Sendak's own writing in his books. In *Where The Wild Things Are*, Max tames scary monsters that threaten to eat him whole, but throughout the book he's portrayed as fairly immortal, a privileged feeling Sendak did not have as a child, and a feeling that Max embodies when he wears the white wolf suit.

Sendak was "not brave enough" (PBS 2004) to represent Max even though his world was drawn from Sendak's own. The all white wolf suit Max wears is similar to the white outfit Sendak's grandmother dressed him in when she put him on the doorstep, so the angel of death would pass over him and grant him a longer life. It's worth noting that Max parallels Sendak in terms of child/mother relationship and also being dressed in all white and being put on display for an audience. Sendak's audience was the angel of death and Max's audience was the wild things. Max embodies the braveness and wildness Sendak did not have access to during childhood, but nonetheless, Max is representative of Sendak's childhood experiences and the fight to form a meaningful identity and fight off monsters against dim odds.

Where The Wild Things Are, in addition to *Brundibar*, which doubles as a children's book and a play, is the only text of Sendak's that was made into a movie. The movie adaptation of *Where The Wild Things Are* (2009) was directed by Spike Jonze, with the screen play written by

Dave Eggers. The film heavily influenced my reading of Sendak's original story and the role the wild things play in Max's development, which is why it's valuable to analyze the movie and the book, seeing as they both center around Max using dreamscapes to deal with trauma in his everyday life.

The movie is a further representation of Sendak's book where Max is trying to cope with his own stress and create an identity that will allow him to be part of society. Since the movie differs from the book in several important ways, here's a short plot summary of the movie: The movie opens with Max being angry at his sister for not standing up for him when her friends wreck his snow fort. Max storms inside sopping wet and trashes her room. His mother is a distracted writer who, the night Max runs away, is spending time with her boyfriend, making Max feel like an outcast in his own home. He becomes enraged and screams at her, "Feed me, women!" and she responds by screaming at Max, "you're out of control!" after he bites her and runs off. Max sprints out the front door and down the sidewalk until he comes to an ocean with a boat at the end of his neighborhood, where he sails away to the where the wild things are. Once he arrives, he tames them with a magic trick to keep from being eaten and becomes king. The underlying messages of Sendak's story, as well as the movie adaptation, is that Max is an unruly child with anger issues who can't repress his wild side. He runs away to deal with his damaged mind in a dream land where he rules over monsters with yellow teeth and sharp claws; and Max is the most wild of them all.

Jonze picks up right where Sendak left off with Max. In a *Rolling Stone* interview in 2008, Jonze states that Max was about five in the book so he aged him to around nine in the movie to make up for the lost time in-between publication dates (Hill 2008). The wild things in

the movie look identical to Sendak's drawings, only now they have names— Carol, KW, Douglas, Judith, Ira, Alexander, and The Bull (who isn't in the book but just roams around in the background of the movie). Carol and KW never look quite as scary like the other wild things do in the book. They are the two most distinguished characters in the book, peering at Max from benevolent yellow eyes. Coincidentally, they are the two characters who have the most influence over Max in the movie.

The relationships between the wild things in the movie is extremely complicated, much more so than in the book. Their animated world parallels the adult world extremely well with the way the wild things express anger, fear, sadness, love and loss. When Max is elected king of the wild things, Carol gives him a golden crown, pulled from a pile of old, presumably human looking bones. The wild things are in a state of crisis. KW has run away, Carol is depressed because he misses her desperately but cannot communicate that other than through being angry and smashing things. KW has gone away to find peace, something the wild things do not have. They are constantly fighting and hurting each other emotionally, and they elect Max king in order to restore peace, bring KW back, and get rid of their sadness. Carol and the other things eventually realize that Max is not really a king, and Carol, who believed in Max the most, goes into an unparalleled state of rage. The wild things close in on Max, yelling at him for being a bad king, and for being the only king they did not eat, but that maybe they would decide to eat him after all. Max becomes terrified, and only finds comfort only in KW's sympathy, because she knew he was never really a king. Max tells her he misses home and sails away back to his mother.

Jonze's film captures the original intent of Sendak's work— to show the trauma, stress, anger and frustrations children deal with on a regular basis and how they work through that. In a *Newsweek* interview with Ramin Setoodeh (2009), Sendak, Jonze, and Eggers discuss where the film differs from the original book. On Jonze's movie production Sendak says, "The truth of the matter is, I saw immediately a combination of things that I wanted and I loved. The courage of the child, the danger of the situation—it could turn on a dime. They [the wild things] could have eaten him. All of that was apparent right from the start...I was happy right from the beginning..." (qtd. in Setoodeh 2012). The movie is equally as important to discuss because it captures the same dreamscape Max creates and complicates our understanding of the wild things world. They suffer much more emotional turmoil because the dreamscape exists outside of Max's room and is subject to real problems and interpersonal conflicts.

In the same interview, on the scene where Max dreams up the wild things world, Sendak states, "It was one of my favorite scenes in the book. It was so much about the ability of children to imagine themselves in another place. He was a prisoner, locked in his room by his mother. And by his imagination he was able to get through those few hours where he was isolated and trapped...But there was something so totally valid in what Spike was doing" (qtd. in Setoodeh 2012). In the movie, the dreamscape does not come out of Max's room and imagination alone. Max sprints out of his house and down the street until he's reached the end of the neighborhood — and that's where he sails away and dreams up the land of the wild things.

The difference in the way Max creates the wild things world is extremely important. In the book the forest and ocean grow out of Max's room, out of his own imagination and in a static environment where no one can alter his thoughts or the universe he's creating. In Sendak's book,

it's clear that Max enters into a dream state when he enters world of wild things, their jungle grows right out of Max's mind. In the movie, Max sprints out of his house, down the street, and then arrives at an ocean with a boat. The journey to the things' world could very well be real the way it's presented, complicating the idea of a dreamscape. The ocean and boat sit right at the edge of Max's neighborhood, suggesting that their world is just as real as his own, and it's right across the ocean.

Max's creation of their world in the movie takes away the possibility of a static environment that Max created alone from his room in the book. By static I mean untouched by anyone else, it's more or less stable when Max is the only creator. His perception of the wild things and their personalities are not at risk of being altered and impacted by the outside world, which is why the movie adaptation is much darker and more sinister than the book. In Jonze's version, the wild things are very real, and very terrifying. They frequently pose threats to Max's well being. Their world exists at the fringes of his community and the minute Max runs out his door the wild things world become subject to real problems. Max effortlessly tames the wild things in Sendak's book, but in the movie there are moments of tension when it seems as if the wild things will eat Max up and swallow him whole. That lingering feeling of danger is mirroring Sendak's initial inspiration to write the book which was to portray children dealing with anger and frustration.

The extension of Max's dream world out into his neighborhood in the movie suggests the issues he's trying to fix through his dream are much more complicated than just being angry at his mother and sister. Max is working out his problems on a much larger global scale that suggests everyone is dealing with rage and monsters. The most effective way to deal with anger

is to turn internally and try and work things out within your own head, which is why Max creates the world of the wild things.

The movie and the book also share the same exit out of the things' world, which signifies a clear transition back to the real world where parts of Max's identity are being repressed. In going along with the theme that Max is being cleansed or going through some type of rebirth, he returns back to reality on his boat free from his anger, frustration, and general rage towards his mother. Max sails away in the same boat he arrived in, waving goodbye to all the wild things as they shout "Oh please don't go— we'll eat you up—we love you so!" (Sendak [31]). And he sails away, back to his room, where dinner is waiting and is still hot. The goodbye in the movie is much harder to watch than Sendak leads on in the last few pages of his book (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2 to see the difference). In Figure 1, Max and the wild things look happy as Max sails away. In Figure 2, Max is looking back as KW pushes him out to sea, as if he's sad that he's returning home.

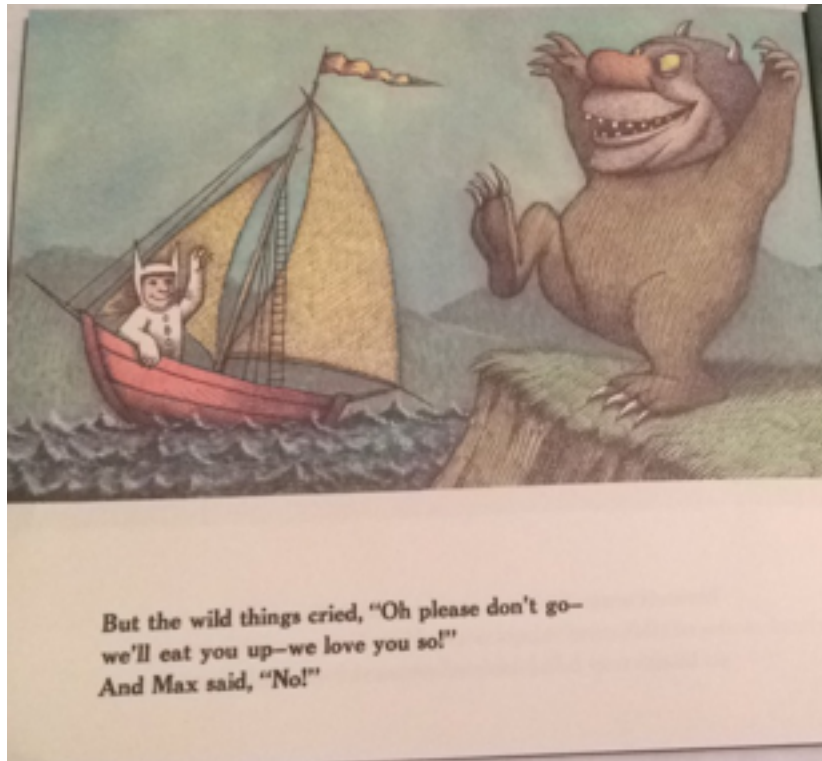


Fig. 1. Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. Print.



Fig. 2. *Where The Wild Things Are*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Screenplay by Dave Eggers. Warner Brothers, 2009. Film.

Another important distinction to make between the book and the movie is Max's lack of control when he's with the wild things. In the book, Max always seems to be confident and in control of his stages of anger until he works them out and leaves the island the wild things are on. In the movie this is far more complicated, there are times when Max slips out of control and Carol takes over, which are some of the most unsettling scenes in the movie. Carol screams and destroys the community Max has helped him create, he gnashes his sharp teeth at night during his own nightmares, and he speeds through the forest in a desperate range to find Max and eat him whole. Since Carol represents part of Max's personality, these scenes speak to Max not being in control of his anger and failing to successfully resolve his feelings at home.

In the movie, the departure from their world is heartbreaking. All the wild things gather at the shore to watch Max sails off, Carol barely makes it and is at a loss of words, all he can do howl until Max howls back and all the wild things join in. This ending scene and Max's departure is weighed on so heavily in the movie because this is Max parting with his anger, sadness, and rage at having to repress parts of himself. And since the wild things represent those emotional states, they are left permanently unhappy as Max sails away.

Max is cleansing himself of his human world and his mother as he sails away, in order to deal with this "wild side" that traditional society feels the needs to repress,² as seen when his mother is appalled by Max's out of control behavior in both the book and the movie. Max's

² In her piece, "Where the Wild Things Are: Sendak's Journey into the Heart of Darkness" (1997). Shaddock concludes that Max is ultimately no more civilized than the wild things, and that he is the most wild thing of them all. His behavior is a direct response to societies repression of wild and unruliness, although those wild identities are inseparable from the civilized parts of ourselves. We must embody both in order to exist fully. But, the unruly behaviors are the ones that must be repressed in order to contribute to everyday society, according to Shaddock.

struggle with his own anger and behavior is a direct representation of the frustration that comes along with trying to repress an identity that is innately part of human nature.

Max's struggle in *Where the Wild Things Are* can serve as a model for mindfulness (Stanton 2009) as the illustrations can serve as an "uncanny battlefield for combatting unhealthy urges" (Peele 2009) which connect back to Max's real life. Carol and KW can be read as Max's psyche being split between two dominant feelings, Carol as the impulsive part of himself and KW as the self critical conscience (Peele 2009). The wild things symbolize Max's various feelings as he is dealing with his anger (Davies 2011). They are permanently unhappy as they symbolize Max's unresolved states of anger and frustration, and in the end Max leaves the wild things worse than he found them. He is "acting out his anger as he fights to grow" (Handy 2009) and eventually has to leave them behind if he wants to return back to society. And in order to do so, he must continue to repress his wild side if he wishes to be accepted, which is a reference to the repression of Jewish identity and the repression of gay identity in order to fit in as a member of a post-Holocaust pre-gay rights era.

In the lesser known of Sendak's works, his main characters are also put in extreme danger and dreamlike situations that involve an identity crises due to repression. These situations are equally as threatening as the one Max finds himself in. The dreamscapes are always different but they reflect the same themes that the main characters are trying to work through, centering around some type of trauma related to post-Holocaust stress or the repression of gay identity.

“And That’s Why, Thanks to Mickey, We Have Cake Every Morning”

The dreamscape of *In The Night Kitchen* (1970) is more obvious than the dreamscape in *Where The Wild Things Are*. Mickey, the main character, is in his bed trying to sleep when he hears noises downstairs. He tumbles out of his bed, falls out of his pajamas, out of his room and into “the night kitchen” where there are three bakers in need of milk for the morning bread. In the search for the milk that the bakers need, Mickey falls into the dough batter, and almost gets baked into a cake and then thrown into the oven. Fortunately, he escapes and flies away on a doughy airplane out of the bakery and returns with the milk for the batter. Mickey is returned back to his bed and out of the night kitchen just in time for morning, re-clothed, and in time to catch a little bit of sleep, which is the end of the dreamscape. The book closes on the final note that Mickey is the reason the world has cake in morning with this seal of approval (refer to Figure 3). Mickey is the sole creator of his night time world, in which he successfully saves the baking industry and returns home safely with this new secret of what happens at night when children are supposed to be sleeping.



Fig. 3. Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.

In that single scene of Mickey, nude, being baked into a cake, there is overt Holocaust symbolism happening, accompanied by underlying themes of gay identity and shame around the naked body, specifically when Mickey is covered up by the bakers is a dough suit before he is baked. There are several layers of repression that are functioning in this text in terms of Jewish identity and gay identity. Other symbolism concerning the Holocaust takes place when Mickey gets put into the oven, and is almost baked into a cake. Not to mention the bakers resemble Hitler (refer to Figure 4 and Figure 5). Sendak's identities are directly in conversation with each other. There is Holocaust symbolism and overt homosexual symbolism existing in the same space. This causes the main character to confront both repressed identities and bring them to light in his dreamscape in order to reconcile with them.



Fig. 4. Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.



Fig. 5. Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.

Even though being baked into a cake is seemingly innocent, or being naked is seemingly innocent, those images still carry the weight of repression and annihilation of Jewish identity during WWII and the silencing of homosexual bodies during WWII and even after. Even though these undertones in Sendak's work are extremely dark, Mickey and Max are both able to cope with the threats in their dream worlds because they created the dream. There is always something evil or menacing present in his stories but there is never any God, the characters always seem to save themselves. Framing the main characters as heroes of their own stories is crucial to the acceptance of the parts of ourselves that we repress.

Historically and even now there is a tremendous amount of shame associated with being gay as well as the additional shame of one's own body. Especially bodies that are perceived as unnatural or abnormal (i.e queer bodies were deviating in some way from the norm because they did not fit into heteronormative society). Given that historical shame of the naked body, *In the Night Kitchen* was initially banned because of Mickey's nudity. The need to ban and ultimately silence homosexual bodies is clear through the act of banning the book, even though the only naked body was a child's. The banning of this book relates back to the repression of Sendak's gay identity and his unwillingness to come out until well into his middle age. The shame around the naked body and sexual undertones is something that shows up in Sendak's other works (Kushner 710) where he confronts and challenges adult prudery with sexual and homosexual undertones.

The same year *In The Night Kitchen* was published, the LGBTQ community marched through the streets of New York. "Thousands of members of the LGBT community march through New York into Central Park" ("Timeline: Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement") to commemorate the Stone Wall Riots which would eventually be "considered America's first gay pride parade" ("Timeline: Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement"). Sendak address the repression of homosexuality and queer bodies in his texts as the movement of gay pride parades started. As stated before, Mickey has absolutely no clothes on throughout the book, which Sendak attributes to childhood innocence, an image which upset the general public. Shame is often associated with nudity, and there was a great deal of shame associated with homosexuality, which is why the public was so off put by Mickey's nakedness.

Mickey is always in charge in the book, the same way Max is in charge of the wild things world in the story book version. While the characters are functioning primarily in their dreamscapes, the dreamscapes also seem to have an undeniable nightmarish quality. The peaceful dream is usually paired with the a series of scary events, which add to the weight of what the children in Sendak's stories are dealing with. Repression of the natural parts of oneself—the wild parts, and the shamelessly and natural naked parts—are meant to be heavy subjects. If the characters can't make peace with their own identity in the dreamscape, they cannot return the real world fully resolved. This is something Sendak demonstrates through his children's book, *Bumble Ardy*. *Bumble Ardy* focuses mainly on the repression of Jewish identity but also on the resistance to the accept ones own body and growing up.

“I Promise! I Swear! I Won’t Ever Turn Ten!”

Bumble Ardy (2000) most directly references the trauma of the Holocaust and while there is still a dreamscape present, the book ends up bordering on less of a dream and more on a state of total nightmare. Bumble has gotten himself into a terrible situation and the dreamscape is so blurred the monsters become all too real for the nine year old pig.

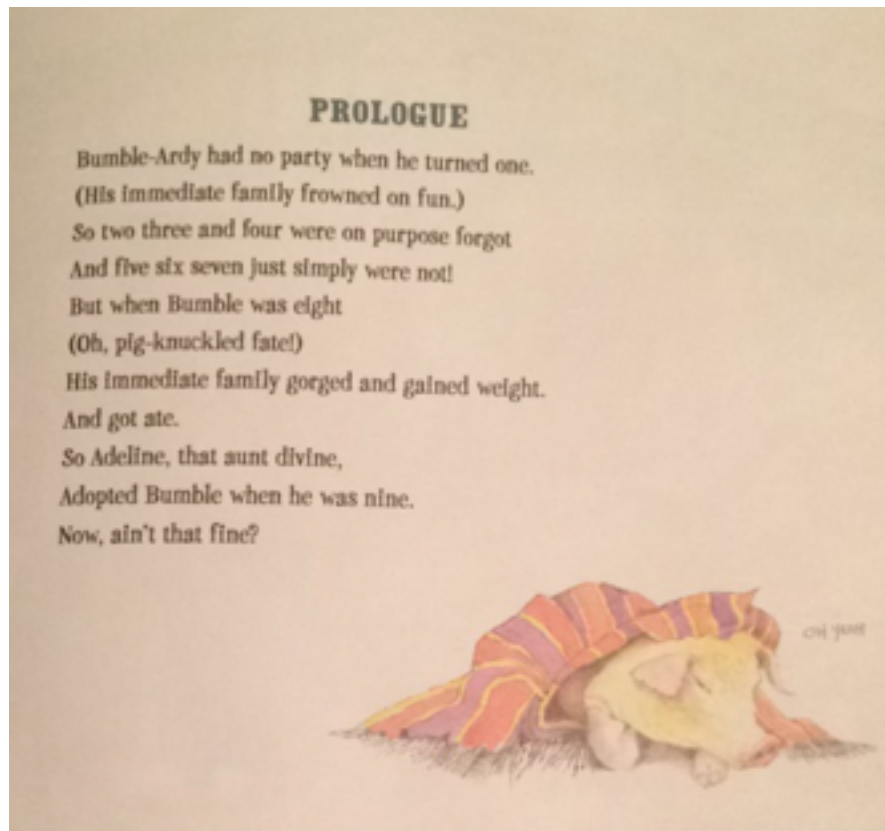


Fig. 6. Maurice Sendak, *Bumble Ardy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Print.

Bumble is eight, going on nine, and has been adopted by his aunt. The premise of *Bumble Ardy* is about a small pig whose parents have been brought to slaughter. He has never had a birthday party before, because his “immediate family frowned on fun” (Sendak [1]). The story starts out addressing Bumble’s dead parents (refer to Figure 6), then follows Bumble as he hands

out flyers inviting everyone to his ninth birthday party bash. Which, not surprisingly, does not go over well with his Aunt Adeline. She is furious he threw a party at her house while she was away and shoos everyone out. In the end, she still loves him, and the overall story is peacefully resolved.

While this story itself isn't actually scary, the references and background images are much darker than they appear at first glance. The dream Bumble has— or at least the event that I'm perceiving as a dream— is the party he throws. Bumble does not create his own monsters within the dreamscape, the monsters are already present when the dream starts. The dream is not so far removed from reality, leaving space for reality to seep in and interrupt Bumble's process of growing up. While the party itself may have been a dream Bumble had, the dreamscape is made so unclear that reality of Bumble's world—his dead parents, the repression of his newly forming identity as a young child—leak into his dreamscape leading to a muddy internal resolution.

This resolution is triggered when the party starts. All his neighbors and friends appear with gifts and food and drink. In the background there are banners in Hebrew, there are skeletons and monsters, and an overall look of total chaos (refer to Figure 7). The party is a direct expression of Jewish identity and the celebration of such identity, which is then shut down by Aunt Adeline. The Hebrew lettering in the picture spells out “no” is Yiddish, which translates to “nine” in Hebrew. She represents the desire of society to repress the horrors experienced during the Holocaust and the lasting trauma that followed, including the lingering anti-Semitism that makes embracing a Jewish identity extremely difficult. The line between Bumble's real world and his dream world are very blurred and he is unable to resolve internal conflicts. While

Bumble's aunt forgives him for throwing a party and their relationship is reconciled, the residue from his own identity trauma is not resolved.



Fig. 7. Maurice Sendak, *Bumble Ardy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Print.

Similar to the trauma that takes place in *In the Night Kitchen* centering around repression, there are several layers of repression happening in *Bumble Ardy*. The first layer is the overt repression of Jewish identity— the symbolism of the slaughter of his parents and using pigs to depict the repression of Jewish identity.

The slaughter of Bumble's parents represents the slaughter of the Jews during the Holocaust. Using pigs to represent Jews is problematic because pigs aren't kosher. Pigs are dirty because of the way they live, which is a social commentary on Sendak's part of an anti-Semitic view of Jews and how they were still seen as dirty or tainted in some way even after the Holocaust. The second layer of repression focuses on the repression of homosexuality. Bumble's refuses to grow older—a refusal to accept puberty and his body changing and having to experience unwanted emotions tied to sexual identity. The layers of repression function in order to illustrate the halting of Bumble's growth into a fully formed and accepted Jewish identity, and possibly a halting of growing into a homosexual identity as well.

Bumble's parents were prized pigs who were brought to the slaughter, representing more Holocaust symbolism. The parents are killed and the child is shipped away to be saved to another world where Jewish identity is more accepted but still ultimately repressed. Death is already present in the novel before the story begins. *Bumble Ardy* portrays a much darker side to Sendak's children's tales and the burden children bear when they enter the world. Bumble has a resolution but his resolution begs some open-ended and very scary questions, and while Bumble and Aunt Adeline's relationships is peacefully resolved, the trauma is not.

Through these symbols it's clear the Sendak is drawing from his own experiences with repression while existing in a time period where anti-Semitism and extreme silencing of homosexuality was running rampant. The layers of repression can be seen in the lines where Aunt Adeline shouts "Never again!" and Bumble replies, "I promise! I swear! I won't ever turn ten!" (refer to Figure 8 and Figure 9). The line "Never Again" is a phrase often used in response to the question: Can the Holocaust happen again? (Gross 2011). This quote is Aunt Adeline

shutting down the conversation of a discussion about the Holocaust, and Bumble's response is that he will resist growing older so he does not have to deal with the formation of his own identity centering around religion and sexuality.



Fig. 8. Maurice Sendak, *Bumble Ardy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Print.



Fig. 9. Maurice Sendak, *Bumble Ardy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000. Print.

These scenes suggest that without a clear dreamscape to process trauma in, reality sets in a little too hard and crushes the peaceful resolution for Bumble that Max and Mickey seem to experience. While Bumble gets an overall resolution with his aunt, the overarching theme of the repression of Jewish identity and homosexuality is not resolved in Bumble's world. Max is reconciled with his wild side; he realizes he must make peace with his own identity in some way if he wishes to return home, Mickey is reconciled by remaining nude despite popular opinion and embraces his identity, but Bumble is left with the phrase "never again," and the promise of never turning ten, giving him no actual closure on where Jewish identity or homosexuality can fit into his world. Bumble is accepting that he will always have to repress certain parts of himself, which is very heavy when thinking about Sendak's close relationship to the Holocaust and the lives lost there, and also the long term repression of his homosexuality. In dealing more directly with themes of his own his homosexuality, Sendak wrote *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, a book adapted from two children's nursery rhymes focusing on a wider range of issues.

With The Help of the Omniscient Moon

We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy (1993) a book adapted from two children's nursery rhymes by Mother Goose,³ focuses on themes of race, homosexuality, homelessness, and AIDS. There isn't much of a dreamscape in *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, but the book does take place at night which speaks to a dream like realm where triumphs over monsters are possible.

In addition to addressing homelessness and AIDS, among other things, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* is a tribute to Sendak's partner Eugene Glenn and his brother Jack (Popova). Glenn passed away before the acceptance of gay marriage, and Sendak right on the brink of acceptance in 2012.⁴ This text most directly addresses the intersection of Sendak's Jewish identity and his identity as a gay man. While this text is seemingly absent of a dreamscape, the story happens at night, and explicitly ties together themes of systemic repression on multiple levels. Tying it most closely to the larger conversation on the repression of Jewish and homosexual identities. The story follows two white males, who can be read as a gay couple, as they save and adopt a black child, who is taken away by evil rats. The couple, with the help of a giant omnipresent white moon, which actually turns out to be a giant white cat, save the boy from the rats and take him home and raise like "other folk do" (Sendak [49]) (refer to Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12).

³ This is referenced on the inside front panel of *We Are All in the Dumps With Jack and Guy*. It quotes the two nursery rhymes "We Are All in the Dumps" and "Jack and Guy", then states right below, "Two traditional rhymes from Mother Goose, ingeniously joined and interpreted by Maurice Sendak."

⁴ Obama announced his support for gay marriage in 2011, a year before Maurice Sendak passed away.

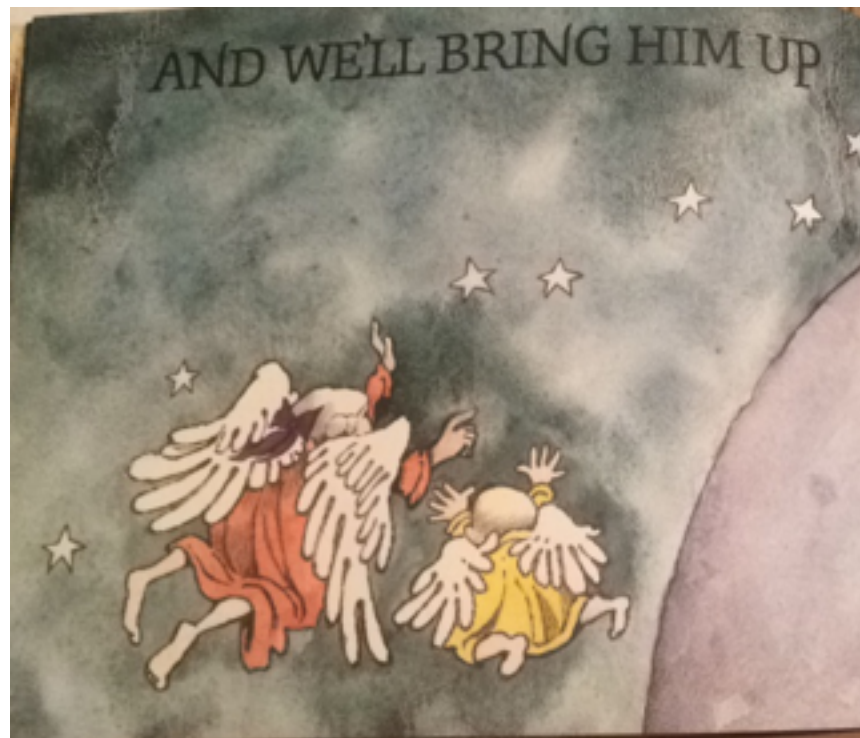


Fig. 10. Maurice Sendak, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*. HarperCollins Publishers.1993. Print



Fig. 11. Maurice Sendak, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*. HarperCollins Publishers.1993. Print.



Fig. 12. Maurice Sendak, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*. HarperCollins Publishers.1993. Print.

This text serves as a “monument of hope” (Popova 2014) and an integration of Sendak’s many identities; the son of a Holocaust survivor, a gay man living through the AIDS epidemic, and a “juggler of darkness and light” (Popova 2014). The orphanage is reminiscent of Auschwitz in the book, commenting on the fact that we are all equally responsible for the disasters in world, including homelessness. Even with these dark undertones Sendak still manages create an aura of salvation for his characters, reminding his readers that the world “is vastly imperfect but full of love” (Popova 2014).

The reading of Jack and Guy as a gay couple paired with Sendak’s decision to come out publicly speaks volumes about the power of his art and writing to express his internal struggles with his own identities. Art Spiegelman, the author of *Maus*, in an interview with *The New Yorker* states, “I knew that Maurice was about to have a book come out called ‘We Are All in the

Dumps with Jack and Guy,' that he felt had to do with AIDS. And he was wondering whether he was going to come out of the closet at that moment publicly''' (Spiegelman 2012). The further the Gay Rights Movement progressed, the more overtly themes of homosexuality became present in Sendak's work in addition to already coexisting themes of Jewish identity after the Holocaust. *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* serves as Sendak's tribute to the eventual acceptance of homosexuality he had come to see, which is why it's more or less absent of a dreamscape. The nighttime world and the chaos that happens there still exists, but there is no defined dreamscape to talk about these issues of repression. As the world shifted more towards the acceptance of gay identities, the more overtly they could be talked about in children's literature.

Sendak's children's literature and other collaborative work within the community of Jewish writers speaks to his profound ability to convey feelings of oppression through the eyes of children, whether that's dealing with Jewish identity, gay identity, or a combination of the two.

Can the Holocaust Happen Again?

In collaboration with Tony Kushner, Sendak illustrated a children's book adaptation of the 1942 play *Brundibar*. The play was originally preformed in concentration camps during WWII and all members of the original collaboration later died in Auschwitz. Completely absent of a dreamscape, the play address the constant evil that children must battle in order to survive, taking on an already dark subject. The play was originally performed in a Jewish boys orphanage and then later used as propaganda to sell "comfort" in the death camps.

The children's book adaptation, *Brundibar* (2003), follows the story of a brother and sister as they try and find milk for their sick mother. The children go into town and try to make money to buy milk, only to be stopped by Brundibar, an evil character who opposes the children's efforts to help their mother get well. With the help of the town, the children eventually fend off Brundibar and the story ends with a haunting monologue from the evil villain. On a postcard, Brundibar writes, "They believe they've won the fight, they believe I'm gone—not quite!" (Kushner [51]) (refer to Figure 13 to see the entire quote). The underlying message in Brundibar's note is that the children may have defeated him once, but the evil he represents will return in one form or another.

The evil that is being referred to is the Holocaust in its entirety which begs the same question that was asked in *Bumble Ardy*—Can the Holocaust happen again? *Bumble Ardy* and *Brundibar* respond directly to post-Holocaust trauma and the identity crisis Jews experienced during WWII and after, and in addition to that the general identity crisis Bumble experiences in dealing with Jewish identity and the refusal to grow old and have to face his identities in full.

In addition to Sendak, other authors have written about and continue to write about issues of identity and sexuality especially in relation to Judaism and the Holocaust.

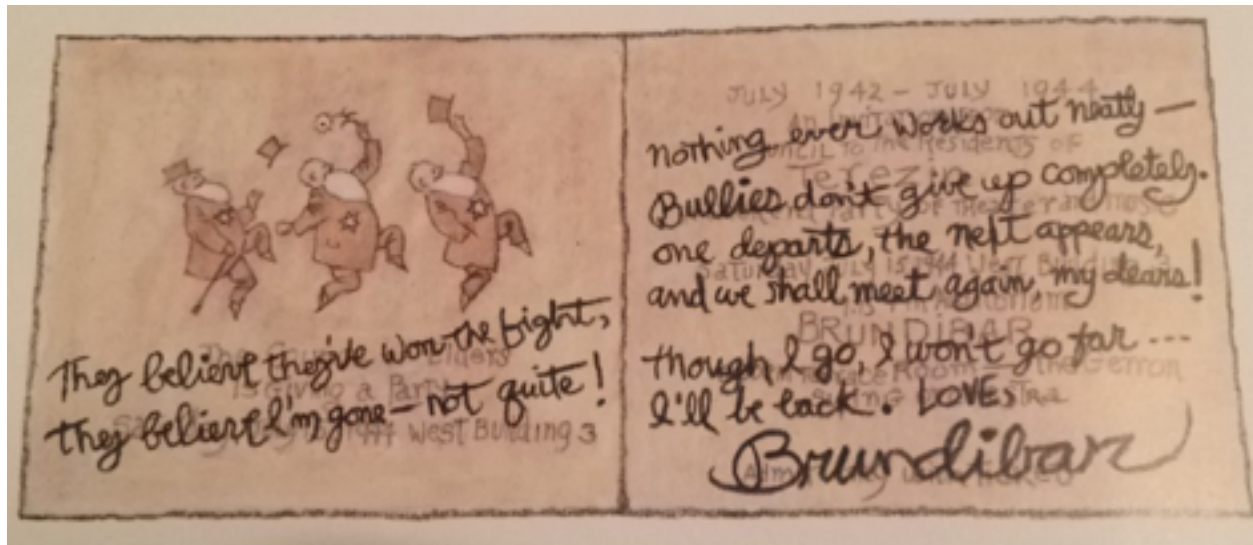


Fig. 13. Tony Kushner, *Brundibar*. Michael Di Capua Books/Hyperion Books For Children. 2003. Print.

Post-Holocaust Conversations with Tony Kushner and Art Spiegelman

In dealing with other issues of Jewish identity and homosexuality, Sendak has worked with both Tony Kushner and Art Spiegelman on joint work addressing the intermingling of Jewish identity, homosexuality, and children's literature.

In 1993, when Sendak was working on *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, he also collaborated on a comic strip on children's fear with Art Spiegelman called "In the Dumps" that appeared in *The New Yorker* in the September 27, 1993 issue. In an interview with Sasha Weiss, literary editor for *The New Yorker*, Spiegelman describes Sendak as a reclusive old man who rarely came up for air (Weiss 2012).

Spiegelman's most well known work, *Maus*, a semi autobiographical tale of his grandfather's experiences during the Holocaust, where the Jews are depicted by mice and the Nazis by cats. Spiegelman's work does something similar to Sendak's in the way that he uses art, geared towards a younger audience, to convey feelings about living in a post-Holocaust era and grappling with Jewish identity as well as other repressed identities. "[Sendak is] a basic building block of what one knows of cultural artifacts about the world, and the idea that the world can become a threatening place that one can survive, which is the theme of the two books that I spent the most intense time looking at, 'Where the Wild Things Are' and 'In Night Kitchen'" (qtd. in Weiss 2012). Surviving is something Sendak's characters do well, as they are a stand in for Sendak himself. Surviving through the trauma of childhood sickness, the Holocaust, and the ongoing of silencing of homosexuality is something that is directly illustrated in Sendak's work — his characters always survive despite the odds.



Fig. 14. Maurice Sendak and Art Spiegelman. "In the Dumps." *New Yorker* 27 Sept. 1993: n. pag. Print.

The same themes of survival appear in the collaborated work between Sendak and Kushner. Kushner's play, *Angels in America*, deals with the same themes of repression, homosexuality and the AIDS crisis (among countless other themes such as race, religion, death and salvation). While Kushner's play and its themes are meant for an adult audience, Sendak tackles the same issues in children's literature. Kushner's play was one of the first pieces of work that actually addressed the AIDS crisis and made a tribute to all the lives lost and the unjust treatment of the queer community. *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* speaks to the same unjust treatment of homosexuality and AIDS, and how no one was helping the queer community survive. Kushner and Sendak's texts are both a tribute to the AIDS epidemic as they

simultaneously confront issues of race, class, sexuality and religion.⁵ Similar to the dreamscapes Sendak's characters create, Kushner's characters in the play frequently slip into dreams or vivid hallucinations that lead them to insights about their own life and religious and sexual experiences. The dream states and hallucinations represent a way to make meaning of the real world and the trauma that happens there, which can often be unforgiving and harsh and needs to be worked out in an altered state of reality.

Sendak's engagement with authors who have influenced and revolutionized discussions about AIDS, gay identity, and the Holocaust have become so influential in the way that these identities can exist together in the same text. Sendak's ability to talk about repressed identities from the perspectives of children's dreamscapes gives a child's voice into atrocity and how we make sense of our identities since they are often multi faceted.

The authors that Sendak is in conversation with such as Kushner and Spiegelman are all addressing their own life experience in their texts, which is crucial to recognize if the reader is meant to understand the full weight of the issues these texts talk about, "...Sendak recognized that life is fraught, but that you're resilient and that you'll get through it somehow.... and told you so without becoming in any way moralistic. It was just really reporting on his own life experience" (qtd. in Weiss 2012). In the words of Spiegelman, Sendak is constantly dealing with his own life experience in terms of working through the learned repression of his various identities.

⁵ In the HBO adaptation of *Angels in America*, Sendak played the rabbi—a gay Jewish man, who wasn't out as gay for a majority of his life, playing a rabbi on a TV show about the AIDS crisis. The rabbi comes to one of the characters in the play as a religious hallucination in a swirling storm of emotions confronting unresolved feelings about religion and sexuality.

“Where He Found His Supper Waiting for Him—and it Was Still Hot”

Along with Tony Kushner and Art Spiegelman, Sendak’s work, which is dedicated as a memorial to those lost in the Holocaust and those lost during the AIDS epidemic, demands to be read as a key voice in narrating the traumas and repressions of life through dreamscapes.

Sendak’s work belongs in the realm of post-Holocaust literature in addition to his voice being recognized as a major influence in how children’s books deal with homosexuality. His work brings to light repressed identities that beg to be recognized and presents them in the only way that is accessible to a modern audience— through the highly effective dreamscape of his main characters—Max, Mickey, and Bumble Ardy.

Notes

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2. Jennifer Shaddock, "Where the Wild Things Are: Sendak's Journey into the Heart of Darkness," *Project Muse* (Children's Literature Association Quarterly, (1997) Web, 155-159, 25 Sept. 2016).
3. Maurice Sendak, *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) Print.
4. "Timeline: Milestones in the American Gay Rights Movement" (*PBS*, PBS, n.d., Web, 09 Oct. 2016).
5. Tony Kushner, "Millenium Approaches," *Angels in America* Dir. Mike Nichols (HBO 7 Dec. 2003) Television.

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Figure 1. Sendak, Maurice. *Where the Wild Things Are*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963. Print.

Figure 2. *Where The Wild Things Are*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Screenplay by Dave Eggers. Warner Brothers, 2009. Film.

Figure 3. Sendak, Maurice. *In the Night Kitchen*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Print.

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