



# Angels and Wild Things: The Archetypal Poetics of Maurice Sendak

*By John Cech*

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**Angels and Wild Things: The Archetypal Poetics of Maurice Sendak** By John Cech

Over the course of more than eighty books that he has written and illustrated in a career that has spanned four decades, Maurice Sendak has become the most influential and, at times, the most controversial creator of works for children. Each of the books in his trilogy--Where the Wild Things Are, In the Night Kitchen, and Outside Over There--has been precedent-setting, dramatically expanding the boundaries of subject matter and images that have been conventionally accepted in books for younger children. In this first comprehensive reading of Sendak's key works, John Cech considers the symbolic child who has appeared and developed in Sendak's books and remains at the center of his vision. By fusing biographical, historical, cultural, and literary materials with the insights of depth psychology and archetypal theory, this study traces the evolution of Sendak's work--from its first, bold steps in the 1950s, to its liberating breakthroughs of the 1960s and early 1970s, to the rich complexity of his most recent books. Though touching on many of the works that Sendak has been involved with, Cech concentrates on those books that Sendak has both written and illustrated. It is in these books that we can see most clearly the poesis of Sendak's art, the alchemy of his creative process that has woven together the remembrances of his own things past, the spirit of his times, the history of children's literature, and Sendak's animating concern with the archetypal figure of the child--a symbol of creative potential, emotional vitality, and spiritual renewal.

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### Editorial Review

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Although Sendak is one of the few children's illustrators whose work reaps wide coverage in national newspapers and magazines, his illustrations have not undergone such an intensive exploration since Selma Lane's *Art of Maurice Sendak* (1980). Cech delivers a sophisticated analysis that delves into Sendak's writing and pictures and the rich symbolism of his work, all for the purpose of capturing the "unique Sendakian child." Focusing on the eight books that Sendak has both written and illustrated, Cech begins with the early robust characters from the Nutshell Library; leads readers through a thought-provoking examination of Max, Mickey, and Ida in *Where the Wild Things Are*, *The Night Kitchen*, and *Outside over There*, respectively; and concludes by discussing the somewhat baffling images in *Down in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*. Sendak, Cech claims, "takes adults back to their [childhoods] and allows children to fully claim their own." This fascinating study, which includes a generous supply of black-and-white illustrations, a 12-page inset of full-color reproductions, and a complement of notes, will give students of children's literature and devotees of Sendak the chance to follow the trail. *Barbara Elleman*

### Review

John Cech has written an extremely valuable and critically important book which is both thoughtful and timely. Given the place of Sendak in children's literature, Cech's book will become a standard work of criticism in the field. --Jan Susina, Illinois State University

### About the Author

John Cech is Associate Professor of English at the University of Florida, editor of *American Writers for Children, 1900-1960*, volume 22 in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* series, and a past president of the Children's Literature Association. His two most recent children's books are *Django* (with Sharon McGinley-Nally) and *Jacque-Henri Lartigue: Boy with a Camera* (Four Winds Press, 1994).

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