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Author(s): Thomas Leddy

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Aesthetics and Children's Picture-Books

THOMAS LEDDY

Imagine that aesthetics had been designed with children's picture books as paradigmatic. The idea is not inconceivable. Plato deals with children's literature in Book III of the *Republic*, long before his somewhat better-known Book X. Imagine that Aristotle had responded, in his *Poetics*, not to Book X, but to Book III, and that his central concern was not tragedy, which is designed for adults, but children's picture-books. Although such books did not exist in his time, there were books, like Aesop's fables, which were at least partially intended for children, as well as many easy-to-understand pictures available on vases and walls. As it turned out, tragedy *was* the paradigm art form in Western aesthetics. Aristotle believed that he needed to defend it against Plato, and he did not bother defending imaginative stories told to children, or narrative pictures that might accompany such stories.

However, Aristotle defends tragedy in somewhat Platonic terms, as capable of giving us knowledge of universals and as helping the rational side of the self dominate the passionate side (in other words, through catharsis of pity and fear). Just as Plato places imagery at the bottom of his metaphysics, Aristotle considers spectacle, the very process of performing the piece, the least important element of tragedy. Pictures in picture-books would count as mere spectacle. Nonetheless, his conception of tragedy can be applied, with some modification, to children's picture-books. Some of these, perhaps the best (for example Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen*¹) involve a purging of pity and fear. Some writers on children's picture-books seem to believe that comfort and reassurance are their most important goals. Yet these books may also provide a context for imaginative adventure, and even for a journey into the dark night of the soul. As Nietzsche would put it, there is a Dionysian as well as an Apollonian element in children's picture-books.

Someone might argue that basing aesthetics almost exclusively on adult perception is ageist. If sexism is wrong because it valorizes an exclusively

Thomas Leddy is Professor and Acting Chair of the Department of Philosophy at San Jose State University. He has recently published articles in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, and *Architecture and Civilization*.

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male perspective, then adultism is wrong because it valorizes the adult perspective. Are we guilty of adultism in aesthetics? Well, aestheticians generally give more credit to adult aesthetic perceptions than to those of children. But, perhaps there is nothing wrong with privileging the adult perspective. After all, adults have a natural authority over children. They are expected to take care of and educate them. Although we do not consider adults to be superior to children in all matters (for example in intelligence, morality, or creativity) we do think of them as holding a *position* of superiority. The critic of adultism might reply that this position is no more warranted than the superiority once given to slave-owners over slaves, or to men over women. Yet, part of what is meant by the equality of slaves to owners and of women to men is that they should not be treated as children. No one has argued convincingly that children, especially small children, should *not* be treated as children. It would seem crazy, for example, to accuse adults of adultism when they teach their own moral views to their children. Yet, it may be replied, this is just one of those places where aesthetics and ethics are not analogous: even if children should be treated as inferiors with respect to moral perception, this is no reason to treat them as inferiors with respect to aesthetic perception. Although their aesthetic perceptions are different, and are certainly less sophisticated, they are perhaps equally valuable, at least to the “experiencers.”

Why should we simply focus, as aestheticians do, on the tastes of adults? Why do we assume adult taste to always be superior to that of children? The concept of maturity enters in here. We know that small children will choose Barney over Hamlet, yet we hope that someday they will be mature enough to enjoy Hamlet, and consider Barney mere childish entertainment. Yet maturity does not fully authorize adult taste as superior. Adults and children simply prefer things closer to their respective interests. And this is some warrant for relativism. Xenophon once said that Thracians, who are red-headed, portray their Gods as red-headed. Since all (all that I know of) aestheticians are adults, and all past ones did their aesthetic work as adults, it is no surprise that children’s interests and perspectives are not met by their theories. We adults assume that adult perceptions are more important, more serious, and more valuable than those of children, especially small children.

Consider an adult’s reaction to a small child at Stonehenge who attends only to the pebbles on the ground.² Few adults would spend any time with these same pebbles at the expense of the ancient arrangement of large rocks. Yet, we do not blame the child for failing to look with awe at the megaliths. After all, the child is “just a child.” Kant says that we demand of others that they experience as beautiful what *we* experience as beautiful. This is not always true, however, in our relationships with small children, even though it becomes increasingly so as children get older. We may not demand of a

three-year old that she find Stonehenge beautiful, although, she may demand of us that we find her small stones beautiful. (I wonder, though, whether "Daddy, daddy, look at the beautiful rocks!" is really a "demand" in Kant's sense. Is the child in a position to make a demand?)

Kant speaks of the experience of beauty in terms of the free play of the imagination and the understanding. Assuming that a three-year-old girl has imagination and understanding, then she can be said to be capable of experiencing these in free play. But would not that mean (if Kant is right) that she could reasonably demand that we aesthetically experience her pebbles, and further, that we could demand of her that she aesthetically experience Stonehenge? Perhaps she cannot appreciate Stonehenge because such appreciation is a matter of the sublime, which, Kant says, requires the free play of the understanding and reason. He would have assumed that the small child did not yet have reason. Arguably, however, there is something proto-sublime in the child's fascination with things that are big (an elephant) or scary (daddy as monster).

Of course, we could appreciate the stones to some extent as the child does. We can put ourselves somewhat into the child's frame of mind. The child's fascination with pebbles may be a primordial example in aesthetics, a kind of ground upon which later, more sophisticated experiences, are built. Our aesthetic fascination, say with a painting by Anselm Kiefer, may be importantly similar to the *child's* fascination with her stones. This is the kind of thinking that comes from imagining that aesthetics had focussed more on early aesthetic experience.

I do not advocate replacing our adult-centered aesthetics with a child-centered aesthetics. But it does seem reasonable to replace it with one that is not completely focused on one age group. It is arguable that, since all adult humans were once children, the aesthetic tendencies, assumptions, and theories they have *now* are based, at least in part, on the ones they had as children, although perhaps not consciously so. At the very least, we cannot exclude childhood experience from our overall account of aesthetics.

Moreover, childhood aesthetic experience is indirectly a part of adult aesthetic experience. We may experience a child's fascination in a book *vicariously* as we read to her. Consider a similar sort of case: the college professor's relationship to his or her post-adolescent college students. As a middle-aged college professor I cannot appreciate the paintings of Dali *now* in the way I could when I first discovered him as a college freshman. It takes much more work to get that aesthetic fascination I once had. But I can experience pleasure in his paintings vicariously through the pleasure of my students, as when a student enthusiastically writes about Dali's paintings. This is not mere simulation of real experience, but experience by way of mediation of our sympathetic imagination. Applying this point to children's picture-books, we re-experience the aesthetic satisfactions of picture-books

through the eyes of the children with whom we read. This is one of the reasons for the rereading of books that were once read to us when we were children.

Hume deals with a related issue in his essay on taste. Although he does not talk about children's taste, he does recognize valid differences between the taste of adolescents and that of adults. He writes, "A young man, whose passions are warm, will be more sensibly touched with amorous and tender images, than a man more advanced in years, who takes pleasure in wise, philosophical reflections concerning the conduct of life and moderation of the passions."³ Between adolescents and adults, Hume holds, there is no disputing about taste. Similarly, if Ovid is legitimately preferred by a man of nineteen, one might argue that Sendak is legitimately preferred by a five-year-old. It would follow that nothing proves Shakespeare superior to Sendak. This conclusion may make us uncomfortable. For Shakespeare provides us with a wider range of aesthetic satisfactions over a longer time than Sendak. But it is arguable that the two are in different classes with respect to aesthetic valuation: one should not compare apples and oranges.

Can a five-year-old meet Hume's criteria of a good critic: "strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice"? It seems unlikely, unless one recognizes that "practice" might simply be "having had many picture-books read to one," and that "delicate sentiment" with respect to the virtues and vices of such works might arise simply from this practice. Some children might become good critics of such books. A Humean could then say that the joint verdict of such children, and those elders who enjoy these books both directly and vicariously, is the true standard of taste in these matters.

This may be disturbing to those teachers of aesthetics who believe they have a duty to undercut the naïve relativism of their students. One of the best lines against the young relativist is to ask: "Don't you appreciate work now that you did not appreciate when younger, and don't you despise at least some of your youthful enthusiasms as lacking in taste?" Such an argument cannot work if there is no way to say that a more mature taste is better overall.

A mature critic could continue to appreciate her childhood books, although on another level. We might try to write this off as mere nostalgia. But perhaps nostalgia plays a more positive role in aesthetic experience than we are willing to admit. Marcel Proust bases an entire aesthetic on nostalgia. An adult reader could conceivably have aesthetic experiences as powerful as those of the child to whom she is reading, although from a different perspective. She might sympathetically identify with the child based on her early experiences of being read to.

If children's picture-books were central and paradigmatic to our aesthetic tradition we might have a different attitude toward imagination and

make-believe. Kendall Walton's theory of make-believe might come under criticism. Although Walton often refers to children's games, he seems strangely unaware of important differences between adults and children in their reactions to fictional monsters.⁴ Whereas an adult may be able clearly to distinguish between real fear and make-believe fear, a child may not. As Ellen Handler Spitz says, "The child who was frightened by images of a menacing dinosaur...or a wicked witch still needs to be calmed down" (*IPB*, 208). Spitz argues that, "the emotions with which we respond to art are as real and powerful as those with which we respond to life" (*IPB*, 208). This may not always be true for adults, but it is especially true in early childhood.

A classic issue in aesthetics is the nature of aesthetic qualities. Here is another area in which a focus on the aesthetic experiences of children can influence overall aesthetic theory. Lists of aesthetic qualities usually include "beautiful," "sublime," "elegant," "harmonious," "balanced," and "unified." More recently they have been expanded to include such everyday qualities as "pretty," "dainty," and "dumpy." Elsewhere, I have argued for the importance of everyday aesthetic terms such as "clean," "messy," "sparkles," and "shines." I claimed that the study of childhood aesthetic experience might assist us in understanding everyday aesthetics and enrich aesthetics in general.⁵ Following Spitz, we may add "coziness" and "warmth" to this list. Spitz speaks of these qualities experienced by a child on having a picture-book read to her by her mother. These qualities, and the appropriate qualities of the art object that causes them, have been neglected in the history of aesthetics.

"Coziness" and "warmth" do not appear in our canonical lists of aesthetic qualities. These values are frowned upon, or downplayed, in the adult world. Although we adults still like to be cozy and warm, and to have products that give us these feelings, we worry that such things are not serious, or that our enjoyment of them will seem child-like. We art cognoscenti look down on people who seek coziness and warmth in art. We say that this is "mere sentimentality." The art that some people find cozy and warm we find disgusting. But if we found it *actually* cozy and warm, perhaps we would like it too — for most of us on occasion still like a cozy room, blanket, or conversation. Still, as we shall see, there are dangers in overemphasizing the cozy and the warm as evaluative qualities in the aesthetics of children's picture-books.

We come now to the issue of art and morality. Many writers on children's picture-books evaluate them almost exclusively along ethical lines. Ellen Spitz and Herbert Kohl are examples. Although Spitz often mentions aesthetic issues, she generally makes a moral critique of the books she reads. This is somewhat hidden by the fact that she calls such critiques "psychological interpretations." Like Plato, she prefers books to teach

children *the right lesson*. For example, she praises *Horton Hatches the Egg* for teaching the lesson that men can take female gender forms, but criticizes its ending for failing to integrate parental roles (*IPB*, 181).

This raises the problem of censorship of children's literature. Almost everyone agrees that some forms of literature are not appropriate for children. The important questions come in when we ask whether certain books designed for children and appreciated by many should be changed or even removed from the children's library. Spitz would probably not insist that the next edition of *Horton* be changed. But she may insist that with some books. *Little Black Sambo* is an especially controversial case. A newer version, *Sam and the Tigers*, attempts to eliminate the racism found in the work. Spitz notes, however, that this version "lacks the elegant simplicity and mythic power of the original" (*IPB*, 215). She prefers another new version of the story, *The Story of Little Babaji*. This version only changes the offensive names of the lead characters, and replaces the offensive pictures. One is left with the impression that she would support replacing *Little Black Sambo* with *The Story of Little Babaji* on the shelves, and of course this would be censorship. (The question is not one simply of choosing to read some books to children and not others, but of preferring, using, and making available a version which is really a censored form of the original.)

Herbert Kohl addresses the issue in his *Should We Burn Babar?* He seriously considers whether we should burn *Babar the Elephant* since it is sexist, racist, colonialist, and capitalist.⁶ His conclusion is that although he probably would not burn the book he would also not buy it. He would only read it to his grandchildren as an example of the kinds of books he read as a child, and would accompany this with a discussion of its political and social implications. Kohl admits that he and his wife were not damaged for life by reading and liking the Babar books. But he insists that reading these books contributed to his not asking questions about patriarchy earlier in life. (He notes also that his daughters insist that they were not unduly harmed by these books, and that they understood, even when young, that the books were fiction.) In the end, he would rather that the Babar books exist only in research libraries, unavailable to children.

Spitz puts the debate in terms of safety vs. developmental danger. She writes: "Some believe that the purpose of art is to stimulate the imagination and allow children to go over to the other side, as it were, without leaving home — that is, they believe that art is safe" (*IPB*, 207). On this view, children's art should be given wide latitude in content. Others, she argues, "see images as causative with respect to behavior and formative with respect to attitudes." These people believe that the imagery shown to young children must be carefully monitored. Spitz wishes to negotiate between these two positions, saying that the first "has merit and is extremely important to claim and to maintain" but that the second is *true*, since you cannot simply

ignore a child's fears. She concludes that, "art is both safe and unsafe, like life itself" (IPB, 208, 215).

Of course she cannot logically hold this position unless she makes clear in what respects such art is safe and in what respects it is unsafe. What freedom of content is she willing to sacrifice for the sake of the child's comfort and right education? In the end, Spitz's sympathies are more with the view that "art is unsafe." To this end, she stresses the crucial role adults have to play as "mediators between our children and the images they encounter" (IPB, 215). She, like Kohl, portrays the ideal reading situation as one in which the adult reader guides the child in understanding the book.

Yet, sometimes ethical imperfection contributes to a higher aesthetic perfection, so that, contra Spitz (and Plato, for that matter), you cannot always have ethics and aesthetics harmoniously intertwined. Even though it might be better in real life to have an integration of parental roles, this need not be accomplished in fiction too. Fiction is a world of make-believe in which we should be allowed to have feelings that might not be acceptable in real life. It should be acceptable, for example, to see Mayzie, the lazy bird in *Horton*, as a neglectful mother. Children should have a chance to try on different attitudes toward life and learn how to think and feel for themselves.

There is nothing wrong with parental guidance and discussion accompanying the reading of children's picture books. The problem is with the kinds of literature that would be encouraged by an aesthetics of comfort and coziness. Alison Lurie in *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature* contrasts two kinds of children's literature.⁷ The first consists of "improving books" loved by adults in which protagonists always learn to depend on adult authority for help and advice. The second includes books like *Tom Sawyer* and *Peter Pan*, that "recommend, even celebrate, daydreaming, disobedience, answering back, running away from home."⁸ The latter are famous for having made fun of adult institutions. Such books, as Lurie argues, "appeal to the imaginative, questioning, rebellious child within all of us, renew our instinctive energy, and act as a force for change."⁹ They are subversive. And yet their very subversiveness of some values may foster other values such as self-reliance, iconoclasm, and courage. Although Spitz does not argue for the superiority of what Lurie calls the "improving books adults love" she does insist on having children depend on adult help and advice in the interpretation of the books they read. It should be noted that Kohl joins Lurie in favoring subversive children's literature, as can be seen in his discussion of *Pinocchio*.¹⁰ However, he seems not to favor children's literature that might be subversive of his own leftist values, thus perhaps limiting the development of an independent capacity for judgment.

It is instructive to contrast Lurie's analysis of *Peter Rabbit* with Spitz's. Spitz sees Peter's naughtiness as based on rashness and impulsivity: his act is motivated by a need to master the anxiety that his mother's story about

his father has produced in him. So his act is one of reenacting his father's behavior to bring it off *right* this time (*IPB*, 146). On Spitz's account, the book teaches that anxiety-induced naughtiness results in frightening moments, sickness, and punishment. Lurie, by contrast, finds the concealed moral of the story to be that disobedience and exploration are more fun than good behavior: "and not really all that dangerous, whatever Mother may say." She stresses that the book is not a mere screen for conventional morality.¹¹

Aesthetics and ethics are often at loggerheads. An all-pervasive ethical attitude can be too constraining, and can inhibit the rich style of life we moderns value. If picture-books are training children for adulthood, they should encourage them to seek aesthetic experience even when it is not quite in accord with ethics. I am not saying it is wrong to evaluate picture-books in terms of their overall ethical effect. Spitz is correct, for instance, to praise *Wee Gillis* for helping children to have faith in their ability to bring harmony to their family lives (*IPB*, 184). But, as *Wee Gillis* also teaches, the resolution of social conflict often takes something more than moral rectitude — something imaginative, something like art. The moral of the story, as of many stories, may be that morality alone is not enough.

Spitz is no mere moralist. She is deeply ambiguous on the issue of aesthetics vs. ethics (as was Plato!). This ambiguity can be seen in her analysis of *Madeline*.¹² She believes that *Madeline* has been popular for so long largely because of its "uncanny grasp of the inner life of children" (*IPB*, 185). Yet she goes on to assert that "It parlays subliminal messages that both reflect and perpetuate longstanding cultural myths about the feminine gender" (*IPB*, 185). The book is praised for its longevity and wisdom, and then immediately condemned for the myths it perpetuates.

Spitz notes that in this book, the girls are expected to affirm the negatively gendered values of submission, passivity, cleanliness, order, and nurturing. *Madeline* herself seems to reject these values, but is symbolically punished by becoming sick with appendicitis. She then becomes limp and passive like Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind*. She is "fully feminized," says Spitz, when she is surrounded by flowers, a lacy curtain, and toys from her father.

This reading is undercut, however, when *Madeline* stands up in her bed and raises her pajama top to reveal her scar to her classmates. This gesture shows that she (and hence the author?) never succumbed to sexist stereotyping — that she is still a bold and outrageous girl. The sexist stereotyping is present as an element, but not clearly as the author's intended thesis. Spitz, by contrast, reads *Madeline*'s gesture as indicating the confusion of little girls about the placement of their genitals. I find this interpretation implausible. Is *Madeline* showing her scar because she thinks it may be her vagina? This strange interpretation distracts from the way in which *Madeline*'s values are reaffirmed in the face of traumatic experience.

Assume that Spitz is right that *Madeline* is a deeply sexist. What then? Her response, again, is ambiguous. She says that, "no reading should be taken as a warrant for abandoning others" (IPB, 189). She even encourages us to "continue to read and cherish *Madeline*" which, she says, remains "charming, wise, and brilliant" (IPB, 189). *Madeline*, she insists, deserves to be adored as well as questioned. Yet if *Madeline* represents the enduring rigidity of our gender ideals then shouldn't we just cast it to the flames? And if it truly is charming, wise and brilliant, shouldn't we question the idea that it mainly expresses repressive gender concepts? The truth is that great literature, including great children's literature, questions traditional ideals and encourages us to think in new ways.

A similar problem arises in Spitz's analysis of *Willy the Wimp*, although this book is clearly more morally objectionable than *Madeline* is.¹³ She writes, "By caricaturing Willy's apologetic stance and making fun of his tendency to say 'I'm sorry,' the text here works against the tide of early moral development. In the interest of humor, it burlesques and covertly undermines the agendas of other children's books that elicit empathy" (IPB, 191). Here, it is humor that loses out in the battle against ethics. Spitz's solution is that the parent should be prepared to bring out the proper moral conclusions in conversational dialogue with the child, perhaps talking about the dual nature of Clark Kent and Superman (alluded to in the story). Fine. But there should also be some spaces in life in which moral issues are not predominant. As Lewis Hyde has argued in *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, artists often take the role of the trickster, inhabiting and creating an amoral world in which conventional boundaries, including moral boundaries, are broken.¹⁴ Human history has proved the need for this, and the trickster appears again and again in children's picture books.

It is useful in this context to contrast John Cech's account of *In the Night Kitchen* with Spitz's.¹⁵ Spitz analyzes *In the Night Kitchen* in terms of references to Jewish culture, concentration camps, and Hitler. This is not entirely inappropriate since Sendak was Jewish and was a child during the Holocaust. Yet, such references, if present, are very indirect. Spitz's argument relies partly on a similarity she sees between the mustaches of the cooks and that of Hitler. Yet there are restaurants in Paris in which advertisements for soup feature a cook with the same overall look and the same mustache. Sendak himself said that the figures were based on Oliver Hardy of the Laurel and Hardy comedy team.¹⁶ Of course, it is always possible that Sendak unconsciously portrayed Hitler and the ovens of death. But why then would Mickey, the boy-hero of the story, help the cooks in the end? Sendak does not portray the cooks as vicious or mean, but only as incapable of distinguishing a little boy from milk.

As Cech argues, the value of this work is largely a function of its mythic reverberations. I would add that this includes an affirmation of masculine identity. One thing the book says is "I am a boy, and it is great." Mickey

affirms his masculinity in a positive way through various characteristics that have been traditionally associated with the male gender. (This is not to say that these characteristics *should* be associated with male gender.) He is adventuresome, innovative, courageous, and indomitable. When he jumps into the giant milk jar he sings "I'm in the milk, and the milk is in me" and then "God bless milk and God bless me!" This is almost a mystic incantation of faith in the nourishing stuff of life. After he has emerged from the bottle and given the milk to the cooks, Mickey stands on the side of the bottle and cries "Cock-a-doodle doo!" — a cry of victory and cocky self-satisfaction.

When Mickey emerges from the bottle he reveals his full nakedness. The revelation of the penis was objected to when the book first came out. This might have been due to prudishness. Cech thinks that the 1960s were much more conservative than we remember. Spitz suggests that the reaction was due to an "implicit juxtaposition of sexuality, aggression, and self-centeredness" in the boy (*IPB*, 60). This criticism (whether Spitz's own is not clear) is inappropriate. Mickey is neither particularly aggressive nor particularly self-centered, nor even particularly sexual. His adventuresomeness is life-affirming and giving. He gives even to his apparent enemies. Even though the three cooks try to bake him in an oven he uses his ingenuity to get milk for them, milk for the morning cake. The concluding words of the book are "And that's why, thanks to Mickey, we have cake every morning." Mickey is portrayed as one of those figures of ancient myth whose adventures explain natural phenomena, for example, "and that is why we have the rainbow." An exclusive concern for the aesthetics of comfort and coziness leaves no room for appropriate aggression and adventuresome heroic self-development.

Spitz's sexual reading is based on her interpretations of two images in the book. She reads Mickey as responding in the first frames of the book to the thumping and bumping of his parents having sex. When he shouts, "Quiet Down There" she believes he is shouting at his parents. But on the very next page we hear that his mama and papa are "sleeping tight." The racket is coming from the night kitchen where the cooks are baking, not the bedroom. The boy is not mad at his parents: he calls out their names when he floats into the world of the night kitchen. Sendak himself said in an interview that he was disturbed as a child by strange thumps that occurred in the night. Cech associates this with a child's fear of dying in his sleep. Again, we cannot rule out the possibility that Sendak himself consciously or unconsciously had the thought of parental sex in mind. Freud, after all, was in the air when his book was written. Still, the interpretation is a bit stretched.

The second sexual element Spitz finds is when Mickey is making his airplane out of dough. She interprets the last frame in which he is molding the propeller as a masturbatory gesture. I cannot see this. Cech has his own

doubts about the masturbation analysis, which was not original with Spitz. He argues that to leave the image at this point is "to flatten the metaphoric suggestiveness of Sendak's premise in the book" and that Sendak is describing a process of creation "using the archetypal child once again as his literal embodiment of this human capacity."¹⁷

This brings us back to the "Cock-a-doodle doo" scene. There is no mistaking the juxtaposition of the presence of the penis and the term "Cock." What is being said here, however, is not sexual in the sense of sexual desire but only in the sense of referring to gender identity. Mickey is saying "here I am, all of me, a boy, and I am proud to be a boy." Still, there is no denying that sexuality is present in the book: and this is perhaps why moralists object to it. Cech observes that the trip into the night kitchen is "a plunge into everything that is usually repressed in children's books: death, the body, sexuality, the dynamics of the unconscious, and the work of the soul."¹⁸ This is a great work of children's literature precisely because it goes beyond the aesthetics of coziness and warmth stressed by Spitz. As I have suggested, it contains both the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

As aesthetics turns to children's picture-books, new avenues of exploration arise. We adults all begin our aesthetic careers as children. But we often forget the unique aspects of that experience. We fail to give credit to a certain relativism in which children themselves can act as good judges in their own domain. Giving attention to this domain allows us to notice certain aesthetic properties perhaps for the first time. Among these are the properties of "comfort" and "coziness." The dynamic of the child's experience is influenced by the mutuality of the relation between child and parent, in the purchase of the book, in its reading, and in its interpretation, although we should not ignore the important moments when children peruse books alone, engaging in their own story-telling and imaginative games. Although censorship in the sense of parental selection is appropriate in the context of children's picture-books, there needs to be limits to moralism. One can advocate feminist values, for example, without insisting on readings that devalue all gender traits associated with the masculine. In the past, children's literature has often been transformed in new editions for the good of the children. For example, the stories of the Brothers Grimm were almost totally transformed. Yet children need a space for aesthetic development that is somewhat autonomous from strictly moral issues. Interestingly, many children's picture books bear this point out. Though strict parents might prefer books that always promote virtue, many children's stories valorize the experiences of naughty children, for example, not only *Madeline*, but *Peter Rabbit* and *Where the Wild Things Are*, often challenging a strictly ethical approach to the world. Art can be dangerous, but that is part of its attraction and value.

NOTES

1. Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (New York: Harper Collins Children's Books, 1984) and Maurice Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen* (New York: Harper Collins Children's Books, 1995).
2. This example appears in Ellen Handler Spitz, *Inside Picture Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). This book will be cited as *IPB* in the text for all subsequent references.
3. Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Aesthetics in Perspective* (Fort Worth: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1996), 49.
4. Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
5. Thomas Leddy, "Sparkle and Shine," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 37, no. 3 (1997): 259-73 and Thomas Leddy, "Everyday Surface Aesthetic Qualities: 'Neat,' 'Messy,' 'Clean,' 'Dirty,'" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (1995): 259-68.
6. Herbert Kohl, *Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories* (New York: The New Press, 1995).
7. Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: Subversive Children's Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990).
8. *Ibid.*, x.
9. *Ibid.*, xi.
10. Herbert Kohl, "Wicked Boys and Good Schools: Three Takes on Pinocchio," in Kohl, *Should We Burn Babar?*
11. Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-ups*, 95. Much in this disagreement may be a function of the age of children the two authors have in mind. Spitz mentions three- and four-year olds as the audience. Lurie does not give an age, however most of her discussions of children's literature focus on older children. Kohl is also working with five- and six-year olds.
12. Ludwig Bemelmans, *Madeline* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1976).
13. Anthony Browne, *Willy the Wimp* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).
14. Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York: North Point Press, 1998).
15. John Cech, *Angels and Wild Things: The Archetypal Poetics of Maurice Sendak* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).
16. *Ibid.*, 199.
17. *Ibid.*, 204.
18. *Ibid.*, 211.