

CREATIVE DIFFERENCES: SENDAK'S AND KNUSSEN'S INTENDED AUDIENCES OF *WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE* AND *HIGGLETY PIGGLETY POP!*

by

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Abstract

Author and illustrator Maurice Sendak and composer Oliver Knussen collaborated on two one-act operas based on Sendak's picture books *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life*. Though they are often programmed as children's operas, Sendak and Knussen labeled the works fantasy operas, but have provided little commentary on any distinction between these labels. Through examination of their notes and commentary on the operas, published reviews and analysis of the operas, e-mail interviews conducted with operatic administrators and composers of children's operas, and my analysis of the two works I intend to show that Sendak and Knussen had different target audiences in mind as they created these works.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Leah Giselle Field, with the guidance of professors Dr. Alexander J. Fisher and Nancy Hermiston. The e-mail interviews discussed in Chapter II were covered by UBC Behavioral Research Board of Ethics Certificate number H12-03199 under the supervision of Principal Investigator Dr. Alexander J. Fisher.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family, friends, and the many, many teachers responsible for my musical and academic education who have guided and inspired me through the years.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In 1979 children's author Maurice Sendak and composer Oliver Knussen were commissioned by the Brussels Opéra National to adapt Sendak's picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* into a one-act opera to celebrate UNESCO's International Year of the Child. An early version of *Where the Wild Things Are* was performed in November 1980 in Brussels at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, and the final version was premiered in January 1984 at The National Theatre in London. A second picture book opera, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* was commissioned for the BBC and performed in an incomplete version by Glyndebourne Touring Opera in August 1985. A completed version was premiered at the Barbican Centre in February 1991, with the final edited version completed in 1999. Though Sendak and Knussen intended to present this opera first, *Wild Things* was deemed more appropriate for the UNESCO celebrations. As indicated in the score, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* "is designed to form the first part of a double bill, with *Where the Wild Things Are*, Op. 20 as the second part. When the two operas are performed together, this ordering should always be observed."¹

Though the operas were conceived of collaboratively, with both author and composer involved in the adaptation of the stories, Sendak's contributions of concept, libretto, and design appear to have been intended to engage an audience of children, while the intricate sophistication of Knussen's music suggests an intended audience of mature listeners. Based on

¹ Oliver Knussen and Maurice Sendak, Notes to the published score of *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life*, by Oliver Knussen (London: Faber Music Ltd., 1991 and 1999 revised supplement), ii. Sendak's original picture books *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must be More to Life* were published in 1963 and 1967 respectively by Harper & Row under the mentorship of Sendak's long-term editor Ursula Nordstrom.

their documented design processes, resulting content, and commentary on these operas, I will show that Maurice Sendak and Oliver Knussen had a fundamental difference in vision of the intended audience for both *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* and *Where the Wild Things Are*.

The history of their collaboration and differences of opinion was recounted by Knussen in an interview with *Los Angeles Times* music critic, Mark Swed, published on 7 October 2012.² In 1975, while a student at Tanglewood Music Center studying with Olivier Messiaen, the 23-year-old Knussen was approached by Mike Miller, an acquaintance of Sendak's, and asked if he were interested in writing an opera. When Miller and Knussen met to discuss the potential project, Miller presented Sendak's collected works and explained that the author wanted to write an opera. Swed notes that this was a surprising partnership, given that Knussen was a "budding young modernist" and Sendak's musical tastes were notably conservative. According to Knussen, "One of the New York FM stations at the time went over to playing only contemporary music. But they had to stop it because various people protested. And Maurice was one of them."³ Their two resulting operas— *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*— are based on picture books of the same titles with story and pictures by Maurice Sendak. Both were published by Harper & Row under the mentorship of Sendak's long-term editor Ursula Nordstrom.

² Mark Swed, "Oliver Knussen knows the monsters well," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/07/entertainment/la-et-cm-oliver-knussen-maurice-sendak-20121007>.

³ *ibid.*

1.2. Maurice Sendak

Author and illustrator Maurice Bernard Sendak was born in Brooklyn to Polish-Jewish immigrant parents on 10 June 1928.⁴ The youngest of three children, he was often ill as a child and was regularly confined to his bed. This ill health resulted in an affinity for quiet, sedentary activities including reading, drawing, listening to “beautiful, imaginative tales”⁵ told by his father, and, when well enough to leave the house, going to movies with his older siblings. As children, Sendak and his elder brother Jack carried on their father’s tradition of storytelling by writing, illustrating, and binding their own storybooks.⁶ Ultimately, Jack was to author half a dozen children’s books between 1956 and 1971, two of which were illustrated by Maurice. Jack’s last book, *The Magic Tears*, illustrated by Mitchell Miller, won the Children’s Book Showcase Award.

Speaking of his childhood in his 1970 acceptance speech for the Hans Christian Andersen Medal, Sendak said,

Two emblems represent that era for me: a photograph of my severe, bearded grandfather (I never actually saw him), which haunts me to this day and which, as a child, I believed to be the exact image of God; and Mickey Mouse. These two lived side by side in a bizarre togetherness that I accepted as natural.⁷

Images of and allusions to both permeate his body of work, the former depicting authority and wisdom, the latter often used to represent the artist himself. Sendak and Mickey Mouse were

⁴ The following biographical material is taken from Maurice Sendak, *Caldecott & Co.: Notes on Books and Pictures* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux: 1988), Selma G. Lanes, *The Art of Maurice Sendak* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), and Tony Kushner, *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003).

⁵ Lanes (1999), 12.

⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁷ Maurice Sendak, “Hans Christian Andersen Medal Acceptance,” in *Caldecott & Co.*, 170.

both “born” in 1928, and Sendak has called Mickey “an early best friend.”⁸ Describing his practice of “Playing a Kafka game of shared first initial with most of the heroes in my own picture books,”⁹ Sendak imbues his protagonists with autobiographical traits, and when greater distance is required, he shares “private, favorite childhood fantasy¹⁰” with Mickey Mouse, as exemplified in his naming Mickey the hero of *In the Night Kitchen*.¹¹

Books and stories played a significant role in Sendak’s childhood; indeed he identifies receiving his first “real” book as a pivotal moment in his artistic development. His sister gave him a copy of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper* for his ninth birthday, inspiring in him a love of books not only as stories but also *objets d’art*:

My sister bought me my first real book, *The Prince and the Pauper*. A ritual began with that book. The first thing was to set it up on the table and stare at it for a long time. Not because I was impressed with Mark Twain; it was just a beautiful object. Then came the smelling of it. I think the smelling of books began with *The Prince and the Pauper*, because it was printed on particularly fine paper, unlike my Disney books from the five-and-ten, which were printed on very poor paper and smelled bad. *The Prince and the Paper- Pauper*- smelled good and it also had a shiny cover, a laminated cover. I flipped over that. And it was very solid. I remember trying to bite into it, which I don’t imagine was what my sister intended when she bought the book for me. But the last thing I did was to read it. It was all right. But I think it started then, a love for books and bookmaking.¹²

This appreciation of the book as a complete art work fueled Sendak’s desire to be involved in the creation of books, as he noted that “There’s so much more to a book than just the reading. I’ve seen children play with books, fondle books, smell books, and that’s every reason why books should be lovingly produced.”¹³

⁸ Lanes (1999), 10.

⁹ Maurice Sendak, “Walt Disney: 1,” in *Caldecott & Co.*, 109.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Maurice Sendak, “A conversation with Virginia Haviland,” in *Caldecott & Co.*, 173.

¹³ Ibid, 174.

Representing a greater degree of sensory stimulation than printed material alone, Sendak's experiences of movies in the 1930s— the event of going to the theatre, hearing, seeing, and responding to stories unfolding on the screen— shaped his artistic trajectory. Busby Berkeley's *Gold Digger* series, *King Kong*, the Laurel and Hardy movies, and Disney's animated features and cartoons stimulated many of the characters, settings, and events of his books to come.¹⁴ Sendak was particularly enthralled by animated features and describes seeing Disney's *Fantasia* at the age of twelve as the experience that solidified his desire to become an illustrator.¹⁵ The importance of music in this film is significant to any consideration of Sendak's output. The careful selection of music to illustrate by was a necessity throughout his career and he used recordings of classical music to stimulate his drawing (as with his *Fantasy Sketches* from 1952–1957, published in 1970).¹⁶

During his time at Lafayette High School in Brooklyn, New York, Sendak was encouraged as “one of the three most talented artists in the school.”¹⁷ He was involved with the school's yearbook, literary magazine, and had a regular comic strip, “Pinky Carrd,” in the student newspaper. Over the 1943 summer holiday Sendak wrote and illustrated a book version of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, a piece of music particularly dear to him at the time. The next summer he illustrated Oscar Wilde's *The Happy Prince*, the following year Bret Harte's *The Luck*

¹⁴ Lanes (1999), 20.

¹⁵ Rick Schindler, “Where the Wild Things Are author Maurice Sendak dead at age 83,” *Today.com*, May 8, 2012, http://www.today.com/id/47335950/ns/today-today_books/t/where-wild-things-are-author-maurice-sendak-dead-age/#.VA3fGvldWSo.

¹⁶ Maurice Sendak, “The shape of music,” in *Caldecott & Co.*, 4.

¹⁷ Lanes (1999), 23.

of *Roaring Camp*, and designed and created a complete, bound set of illustrations to Gustave Charpentier's libretto for his opera *Louise*.¹⁸

As a developing artist during the last years of World War II, Sendak was able to find an afterschool job with All-American Comics. Jobs which would have been otherwise unavailable to such an inexperienced artist had been vacated by draftees, enabling Sendak to gain illustration experience adding background detail to *Mutt and Jeff* comic strips.¹⁹ He received his first commission as book illustrator from a Lafayette High School physics teacher, Hyman Ruchlis, for *Atomics for the Millions*, the 1947 physics textbook Ruchlis published with Dr. Maxwell Leigh Eidenoff.²⁰

Upon graduation from Lafayette High School in 1946, Sendak began working for Timely Service, a Manhattan window-display company, constructing models for store windows. It was a job and environment he loved, where he happily worked until a promotion to a different department in 1948 left him dissatisfied. He quit, and, unemployed, was forced to move back to his parents' home in Brooklyn.²¹ He passed time by sketching the characters and scenes he saw through the apartment windows. The product, a homemade sketchbook titled "Brooklyn Kids, Aug. 1948," contains Sendak's earliest sketches of Rosie, who would develop into one of the artist's seminal characters.²² Another occupation that summer was constructing intricately designed mechanical wooden toys with his brother Jack, recently discharged from the army. Modeled after eighteenth-century German lever-operated toys, their figurines enacted

¹⁸ Ibid, 24.

¹⁹ Ibid, 25.

²⁰ Peter D. Sieruta, "Maurice Sendak: how it all began," *Collecting Children's Books*, May 8, 2012, <http://collectingchildrensbooks.blogspot.ca/2012/05/maurice-sendak-1928-2012.html>.

²¹ Lanes (1999), 33.

²² Ibid.

dramatic moments from “Little Miss Muffet,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” including a blanket provided by Natalie Sendak, “Hansel and Gretel,” “Aladdin’s Lamp,” “Old Mother Hubbard,” and “Pinocchio.” The brothers brought their prototypes to F.A.O. Schwarz and were disappointed by the assessment that their toys would be too costly to manufacture. Richard Nell, the store’s window-display director, impressed with the design and execution of the toys, hired Sendak as a construction assistant for the store’s window-displays. It was a position Sendak held through 1952, working at the store during the day and taking evening classes at the Art Students League in oil painting, life drawing, and composition.²³ Through the toy store’s extensive children’s book section and his education from illustrator John Groth at the Art Students League Sendak was introduced to the world of formal children’s book illustration. He studied the nineteenth-century works of George Cruikshank, Walter Crane, and Randolph Caldecott, through the postwar European works of Hans Fischer, Felix Hoffmann, and Alois Carigiet.²⁴

Sendak made known his interest in children’s book illustration to F.A.O. Schwarz’s book buyer, Frances Chrystie, who introduced him to Ursula Nordstrom, children’s book editor at Harper and Brothers. The day after assessing a sample of Sendak’s work Nordstrom offered him the chance to illustrate Marcel Aymé’s *The Wonderful Farm*. Sendak immediately accepted the offer to become “an official person in children’s books,”²⁵ and embarked upon the professional

²³ Ibid, 34.

²⁴ Ibid, 35.

²⁵ Ibid.

and personal relationship with Nordstrom which was to fundamentally shape his career in children's books.²⁶

Nordstrom carefully selected works for Sendak to highlight his styles and talents best. After looking through his 1948–49 sketch books she assigned to Sendak Ruth Krauss' *A Hole is to Dig*, the 1952 work that was to establish him as a major illustrator in the world of children's books. A series of word definitions the author compiled through careful discussion with children, the text was particularly appealing to Sendak who has said that "it was like being part of a revolution. This was the first time in modern children's-book history that a work had come more or less directly from kids."²⁷ With the critical and commercial success of *A Hole is to Dig*, Sendak felt confident in his establishment as a free-lance illustrator and gave up both his position at F.A.O. Schwarz and living in his parents' home. In this period Sendak began illustrating works by children's author Meindert DeJong, a collaboration that would span six books and nine years. Early in his career Sendak took any work to come his way, from children's stories published by the United Synagogue Commission and the Anti-Defamation League to book jackets for works by Ogden Nash and George Eliot, to advertisements and commercial story boards for Jell-O Instant Puddings. Sendak illustrated more than fifty books between 1951 and 1962, and has said of the early years of his career that he developed artistically by "borrowing styles and techniques shamelessly, trying to forge them into a personal language. I was an arranger more than an innovator."²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 42.

²⁸ Ibid, 51.

Sendak didn't set out to write a story of his own until 1955.²⁹ He began work on *Kenny's Window* at Yelpling Hill, a West Cornwall, Connecticut writers' colony hosted by editor Henry Seidel Canby and his wife. In addition to marking his debut as an author, *Kenny's Window* was Sendak's introduction of his beloved Sealyham Terrier Jennie as an illustrated element of his work. Jennie would go on to appear in almost every book Sendak illustrated from that point until her death in 1967, and was memorialized in many of his books afterwards. An important theme introduced with this book is Sendak's ability to move his narrative seamlessly between states of fantasy and reality. An ambitious story for the scope of a traditional picture book, *Kenny's Window* uses the protagonist's experiences in waking and dreaming to integrate elements of his imagination with real life experiences as a coping mechanism. Critical of this early work, Sendak has remarked, "The pictures are ghastly— I really wasn't up to illustrating my own texts then. And the story itself, to be honest, is nice but long-winded."³⁰

Sendak's second book, *Very Far Away* (1957), tells the story of Martin who, frustrated by his mother's divided attentions, chooses to run "very far away where somebody will answer my questions." A story smaller in scope than *Kenny's Window*, *Very Far Away* brings Martin "many times around the block and two cellar windows from the corner" for a span of an hour and a half, during which he and a bird, a horse, and a cat, "live together very happily."³¹ Growing weary of his companions' social dynamic Martin returns home, frustrations dissipated, and the story ends with superficial resolution of the protagonist's conflict with his mother. Sendak's evolution as an author is evident in his tailoring of this story to a more picture book-appropriate

²⁹ Ibid, 64.

³⁰ Ibid, 66.

³¹ Ibid.

scale than his first effort, and his development as an illustrator is displayed through his more “direct and lighthearted, more relaxed”³² two-colour illustrations. He is able to harness the humour and whimsy of his illustrations for other authors’ works in this personal effort much more so than in *Kenny’s Window*. It was also during this period that Sendak began one of the most significant collaborative relationships of his career. Sendak began illustrating Else Holmelund Minarik’s work with her first *Little Bear* book in 1957, and went on to illustrate the rest of the six-book series between 1959 and 2010.³³ He also illustrated her 1958 book *No Fighting! No Biting!* where he began developing the forms of his characteristic alligators which were to appear in illustrations throughout his career.³⁴

The Sign on Rosie’s Door (1960) has its roots in an undeveloped manuscript from 1949.³⁵ Based on sketches and jotted-down dialogue from the “real” Rosie outside his parents’ Brooklyn apartment window, the story details Rosie’s ability to daydream herself and an apartment block’s worth of colleagues into an all-engaging full-day’s fantasy. This book marks the establishment of Sendak’s trademark children’s syntax in dialogue and his first mature illustrations of autobiographical Sendakian children. (He has said of his signature child figures, “They were just Brooklyn kids ... Yes, they’re all a kind of caricature of me. They look as if they’ve been hit on the head and hit so hard they weren’t ever going to grow any more.”³⁶)

³² Ibid, 68.

³³ “Maurice Sendak Biography and Timeline,” The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia, <http://rosenbach.org/maurice-sendak-biography-and-timeline>.

³⁴ Margalit Fox, “Else Holmelund Minarik, Author of Little Bear Books, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, July 13, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/books/else-holmelund-minarik-childrens-writer-dies-at-91.html?_r=0.

³⁵ Lanes (1999), 33.

³⁶ Lanes (1999), 26.

Sendak's next solo effort was the 1962 four-volume collection *The Nutshell Library*. *Alligators All Around*, an introduction to the alphabet; *Chicken Soup with Rice*, a book of seasons; *One Was Johnny*, a counting primer; and *Pierre: a cautionary tale in five chapters and a prologue*, are miniature books, two-and-a-half by four inches in size, a tribute to Sendak's conviction that books have intrinsic value as physical entities, in addition to their verbal and visual content. The books are presented in a box painted to resemble a wooden crate with faux curtains drawn at the sides and back to reveal miniature stages hosting the characters from the four stories. The narrative and pictorial evolution of this collection is indicative of the exceptional detail with which Sendak's mature stories are crafted. Small-scale sketched mock-ups, "dummies," were made for each of the books, and everything from layout to text to style of illustration developed over the course of multiple drafts: Sendak's *Alligators* were originally apes, each illustration was rough-sketched with penciled-in text in various configurations, and options for graphic transitions from event to event were painstakingly explored before final decisions were made. The publication of *The Nutshell Library* marked the close of the artist's exploratory early period and allowed for his unfettered mature style to be expressed in his most famous book, *Where the Wild Things Are*. Upon accepting the Caldecott Medal for *Wild Things* Sendak remarked, "I feel that I am at the end of a long apprenticeship. By that I mean all my previous work now seems to have been an elaborate preparation for it [*Wild Things*]. I believe it is an immense step forward for me, a critical stage in my work."³⁷

³⁷ Maurice Sendak, "Caldecott Medal Acceptance," in *Caldecott & Co.*, 154.

1.2.1. *Where the Wild Things Are*

Sendak's 1963 *Where the Wild Things Are* tells the story of Max, a rambunctious little boy who dresses up in his wolf suit one evening and "makes mischief of one kind and another." He chases the dog with a fork, performs the ritual sacrifice of a stuffed animal, vandalizes the house, and torments his mother, threatening "I'LL EAT YOU UP!" Eventually reaching her breaking point, Max's mother calls him "Wild thing!" and sends him to bed without dinner. Max imagines himself out of this unpleasant situation by allowing the confines of his bedroom to transform into a dense forest, leading him to a private boat which carries him "off through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are."

Upon encountering the Wild Things he commands them to "Be still!" and tames them with an intense stare. He is crowned their king and leads them in a Wild Rumpus. When he tires of the riotous festivities he sends the Wild Things to bed without their supper and longs to be back where someone loves him "best of all." The Wild Things entreat him, "Oh please don't go. We'll eat you up, we love you so!" Max escapes in his private boat, bringing his adventure to a close as he "travels back over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day and into the night of his very own room where he found his supper waiting for him and it was still hot."³⁸

Sendak considers his first seven solo works illustrated books, not picture books. He finds distinction between the forms in the length of story and the role of text versus the pictures in the communication of the narrative. In his seven early works the majority of story is told with text, and illustrations serve to enhance the text's progression. For a work to be a picture book,

³⁸ Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are, twenty-fifth anniversary edition* (New York: HarperCollins Children's Books, 1988).

Sendak requires pictures and text to be equal partners in the communication of the narrative.

The narrative of neither element represents a complete story: “pictures are vitally needed to fill in what the words leave unsaid: the words, in turn, are indispensable to moving the narrative forward during whatever time— or space— gaps exist between illustrations.”³⁹

The formal development of *Where the Wild Things Are* spans nearly a decade of Sendak’s life as a professional illustrator, though early development of the book’s themes began with his 1952 fantasy/musical sketches.⁴⁰ From a small boy’s sea voyage, his victory over Wild Thing- like creatures and his transport home through a dream, several important elements of the final version of *Wild Things* have their roots in these sketches. The first mock up in the body of work that would eventually become *Wild Things* was completed in November 1955 and titled “Where the Wild Horses Are.”⁴¹ The long, thin, seven-page dummy uses linear progression of pictures across each page to narrate the action, with text appearing only on occasional sign posts. The protagonist is a small boy who follows a sign post arrow “To Where the Wild Horses Are.” He follows the path, encountering three further signs: “Go Slow,” “Don’t Let Them See You,” and “Hide Your Eyes.” He arrives at his destination and pulls the tail of one of the wild grey horses, which then kicks the boy out of his clothes. Otherwise unharmed, passing a last sign post stating “BEWARE,” the boy walks along, naked, and is chased in turn by a monster, a bird, and a wolf. He jumps into nearby water to evade his pursuers and finds a small boat and captain’s uniform. Later developments of this concept have the small boy sailing

³⁹ Lanes (1999), 85.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 87.

⁴¹ Ibid.

off to Happy Island, where he meets a small bride waiting for him in the island's small house.⁴²

The plots of early versions of the story are far denser and more complex than the eventual *Wild Things*, which highlights plot points of misbehaviour, punishment, escape, triumph, and return.

The first draft of text for the story is dated 24 April 1963, still titled "Where the Wild Horses Are":

Once a boy asked where the wild horses are.
Nobody could tell him.
So he asked himself where the wild horses are.
And he answered, they must be this way.
Luckily the way led through his own room.
He found signs pointing in the right direction."⁴³

Continuing on 28 April, Sendak added:

Soon his room was the beginning of a forest. The rug on his floor was the grassy path into the forest. The boy followed the path into the very middle of the forest and then lost his way.

He entered a magic garden though the sign said do not enter, and looked round the tree though the sign said do not look. He thought this might be the place where the wild horses are.

Someone appeared and said stay with me, I am your mother. That cannot be, said the boy, you do not look like my mother, and besides my mother is home waiting for me.

With a growl the make-believe mother turned into a terrible wolf and chased the boy out of the magic garden, through the forest....

In a moment the boy grew to an old man and frightened the wolf away. I am now an old man, said the boy, and I have still not come to where the wild horses are. And besides, I am tired."⁴⁴

In addition to evolving past the early story's melancholia, removing the menacing elements from the mother's authority, giving the wild creatures more anthropomorphic characters, and escalating the adventure of Max's journey, the notable change from these earlier drafts to the

⁴² Ibid, 81.

⁴³ Ibid, 88.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 92.

published story is the evolution of wild horses to wild things. As to how this transpired, Sendak has said:

I couldn't really draw horses. And I didn't, for the longest time, know what to use as a substitute. I tried lots of different animals in the title, but they just didn't sound right. Finally I lit on things. But what would "things" look like? I wanted my wild things to be frightening. But why? It was probably at this point that I remembered how I detested my Brooklyn relatives as a small child. They came almost every Sunday. My mother always cooked for them, and, as I saw it, they were eating up all our food. We had to wear good clothes for these aunts, uncles, and assorted cousins, and ugly plastic covers were put over furniture. About the relatives themselves, I remember how inept they were at making small talk with children. There you'd be, sitting on a kitchen chair, totally helpless, while they cooed over you and pinched your cheeks. Or they'd lean way over with their bad teeth and hairy noses, and say something threatening like "You're so cute I could eat you up." And I knew if my mother didn't hurry up with the cooking, they probably would.⁴⁵

Sendak was working with a completed typescript of *Wild Things* roughly as it appears in publication by 16 May 1963. The text Sendak submitted to Harper and Row included three stanzas after Max decides to return home from the Land of the Wild Things which were edited out of the final story:

But Max didn't care because the Wild Things
never loved him best of all— or let him
eat from grown-up plates

or showed him how to call long distance.
So Max gave up being King of Where the Wild Things Are.

Wild Things are child things,
said Max as he steered his boat
back over the year and in and
out of weeks and through the day.⁴⁶

The final version of the text retains just one of these thoughts, with the three stanzas replaced by, "And Max the king of all wild things was lonely and wanted to be where someone loved him

⁴⁵ Ibid, 88.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 96.

best of all.” The only other textual change from this prepublication submission is the removal of the word “quick” from the line “tamed them [quick] with a magic trick” in the description of Max’s calming of the Wild Things.⁴⁷

Where the Wild Things Are was published in the autumn of 1963. Though much controversy was to arise regarding the child-appropriateness of the story in the years following its publication, it was only when he received the first adverse reviews that Sendak realized his work to be at all controversial.⁴⁸ Despite criticism of its dark themes and “frightening” illustrations from sources as varied as children’s library associations and child psychologist and writer Bruno Bettelheim, the book won the 1964 Randolph Caldecott Medal for the most distinguished American picture book for children.⁴⁹ Sendak had previously illustrated five Caldecott-awarded books by other authors, but this was his first of three Caldecott honours for a story of his own creation. The book was awarded other important honours in the field of children’s literature, receiving distinction as a Reading Rainbow Book, a Library of Congress Children’s Book, and an American Library Association Notable Children’s Book. It was named one of New York Public Library’s “One Hundred Titles for Reading and Sharing,” and received a Lewis Carroll Shelf Award. Since its initial publication, *Wild Things* has been translated into thirteen languages and reprinted multiple times with special editions released following the Caldecott honour, and for the tenth, twenty-fifth, and fiftieth anniversaries of its publication.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid, 104.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 106.

⁵⁰ “Caldecott Medal and Honor Books, 1938 to Present,” *Association for Library Service to Children*, <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecotthonors/1964medalwherewildthingsare>.

1.2.2. *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life*

An appreciation of the narrative significance of landscape in Sendak's illustrations developed in the collaborations the artist undertook following *Wild Things*. His first foray into illustrating nonsense nursery rhymes with *Hector Protector and As I Went over the Water* (1965) served as preparation for the whimsical weight with which he was to treat Samuel Goodrich's poem *Higglety, Pigglety, Pop*, as well as emphasizing the perennially important Sendak elements of Jennie the Terrier, an oversized lion as a means of transportation, and food as a main theme.⁵¹ The visual depth of his landscapes and depictions of animals in his most personal work are foreshadowed by the cross-hatching and formal realism of his illustrations for Randall Jarrell's *The Bat-Poet* (1963)⁵² and Jan Wahl's *Pleasant Fieldmouse* (1964).⁵³ The style of photorealism that Sendak embraced for elements of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* has roots in his illustrations for *Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories* (1966), a collection of folktales by Isaac Bashevis Singer.⁵⁴ Elements including his soon-to-be-signature choleric baby based on images of the artist as an infant found inspiration in old family photographs. Sendak continued this style of hyperrealism in his illustrations for George MacDonald's *The Golden Key* (1967), though these images were not based on actual photographs.⁵⁵

Apart from his stylistic maturation, Sendak underwent multiple personal traumas in 1967 that informed the composition of *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life*.⁵⁶ Sendak's mother had been diagnosed with cancer, and both parents, as well as his fourteen-

⁵¹ Lanes (1999), 127-140.

⁵² Ibid, 128.

⁵³ Ibid, 149.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 239.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 149.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 151.

year-old dog Jennie, were aging noticeably. The book is as much a meditation on death and loss as it is an ode to his beloved dog.⁵⁷ Sendak completed the manuscript for *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* in Spring 1967, just before leaving for Europe for several months. In England Sendak was to be interviewed by BBC-TV, facilitated by his British editor Judy Taylor. Sendak fell ill mid-interview and was unable to speak. Taylor, unconvinced by a preliminary diagnosis of severe indigestion, insisted on calling an ambulance. Sendak was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead-upon-Tyne and treated for a coronary thrombosis. Following five weeks of cardiac care, Sendak was transferred to a nursing home in London, to be released on 28 June 1967.⁵⁸ “My best friend, my dog Jennie,”⁵⁹ died in August of that year. *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* was published a month later in September 1967. This story provided a framework within which separation from loved ones was more a means of moving onto a new form of satisfaction, rather than a concrete ending, in this case, death. The locale for this new satisfaction is the Castle Yonder, “some kind of artist’s heaven where you can continue to work.”⁶⁰

Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life is the story of Jennie, a Sealyham terrier with an insatiable appetite in the midst of an existential crisis. She is loved, well-cared for, comfortable, and, by her calculations, has “everything”:

She slept on a round pillow upstairs and a square pillow downstairs. She had her own comb and brush, two different bottles of pills, eyedrops, eardrops, a thermometer, and for cold weather a red wool sweater. There were two windows for her to look out of and two bowls to eat from.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid, 154.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 152.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 153.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 171.

⁶¹ Maurice Sendak, *Higglety Pigglety Pop! or There Must Be More to Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1967), 3.

In spite of this, she still longs to experience everything the outside world has to offer. After first debating with and then eating the potted plant by the window she packs all of her belongings, save for the “two windows” she leaves at home, in her little black bag with golden buckles and goes off in search of more, stating, “I am discontented. I want something I do not have. There must be more to life than having everything.”⁶²

Jennie, hungry for adventure and anything she can eat, encounters a pig wearing sandwich boards advertising for applicants for the position of Leading Lady with the World Mother Goose Theatre. His offer of free sandwiches piques Jennie’s interest, and after devouring his supply Jennie contacts the number listed and is told that if she can acquire the necessary experience by the first night of the full moon she’ll be considered for the position.⁶³

While lamenting that experience isn’t edible, Jennie meets a cat milkman. Seizing the opportunity to snack on something else, she bluffs her way through a conversation with the cat, claiming to be heading to the Big White House outside of town to work as the new nurse for Baby. Jennie devours the full contents of the cat’s cart en route as she learns that Baby’s previous six nurses had likely been eaten by the downstairs lion at the manor for their failure to make Baby eat. Unable to comprehend not wanting to eat, Jennie is confident that she’ll succeed with Baby. She thanks the cat for the ride, and rings the doorbell.⁶⁴

The door is opened by Rhoda, the parlour maid, who assumes she must be there as Baby’s new nurse. Snapping back, “I’m certainly not nurse’s new baby!”⁶⁵ Jennie is ushered in. As soon as Jennie gains entrance to the Big White House she makes an impressive display of

⁶² Ibid, 5.

⁶³ Ibid, 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 17.

swooning, claiming to be afflicted by a condition doctors call “jumping stomach,”⁶⁶ the cure for which is buttermilk pancakes, sugar, syrup, and coffee. Enjoying her third feast since leaving her master’s house, Jennie assures Rhoda that she never faints on the job, and they bring a breakfast tray to the nursery.⁶⁷

Reminding Jennie that she has only one chance to make Baby eat, Rhoda leaves her to contend with the child. With little patience for coaxing and cajoling, Jennie decides Baby’s refusal to eat her breakfast is an invitation for Jennie to dine. After gobbling up the meal, Jennie realizes that in so doing she has failed her experience. After tussling with Baby, Jennie stuffs her into her bag and tries to think of a way to reach Baby’s parents.⁶⁸

Jennie recalls Rhoda mentioning that Baby’s parents had gone to the Castle Yonder, and finds the familiar-sounding extension in the phone book. She is assured by Baby’s mother that if she tells the downstairs lion Baby’s name, he can be counted on to bring Baby there without eating her. The line goes dead just as Jennie asks what Baby’s name is, and what will happen to her. Resigned to facing the lion, Jennie takes her bag and goes downstairs into the depths of the basement. Baby retaliates for having been stuffed in Jennie’s bag by breaking her thermometer, smashing her bowls, ripping her pillows, and unravelling her sweater.⁶⁹

Begging the lion not to eat Baby, Jennie offers him the contents of her bag, which Baby has destroyed. With his refusal of this meager offering, Jennie asks him to please eat her instead, as she needs the experience any way. She puts her head in the lion’s mouth as she begins to explain that without experience the World Mother Goose Theatre might never

⁶⁶ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 28.

contact her. Upon hearing this, the lion asks Jennie to repeat her last statement, picks up Baby by her nightdress, and rushes away.⁷⁰

Certain that Baby has been eaten and that she will never again be so happy as she was in her master's house, Jennie leaves the manor and finds herself in conversation with a large ash tree. Convinced that this ash tree truly has everything, she is taken aback to find that it still longs for more than it has. Miserable and hungry, Jennie curls up and goes to sleep at the base of the tree.⁷¹

Rhoda, Pig, and Milkman arrive at the ash tree, interrupting a Jennie's dream of eating supper. She is surprised to see them, and even more surprised to learn that they are actors in the World Mother Goose Theatre, come to welcome their new leading lady. Mother Goose arrives to clarify the details of Jennie's contract, revealing that she is Baby, all grown up, and that Jennie mentioned her name to the lion just in time to avoid their being eaten. A very special play has been selected to showcase Jennie: "Higglety Pigglety Pop!" The lion, also a member of the World Mother Goose Theatre, arrives to assure Jennie that only the leading lady gets to eat in "Higglety Pigglety Pop!", so she needn't worry about him. The troupe sets off for the park at the Castle Yonder to stage their new production.⁷²

The epilogue reveals that "Now Jennie has everything. She is the finest leading lady The World Mother Goose Theatre ever had. Jennie is a star. She performs every day and twice on Saturday. She is content."⁷³ The book closes with Jennie's letter home to her master:

⁷⁰ Ibid, 37.

⁷¹ Ibid, 41.

⁷² Ibid, 49.

⁷³ Ibid, 69.

Hello,

As you probably noticed, I went away forever. I am very experienced now and very famous. I am even a star. Every day I eat a mop, twice on Saturday. It is made of salami and that is my favorite. I get plenty to drink too, so don't worry. I can't tell you how to get to the Castle Yonder because I don't know where it is. But if you ever come this way, look for me.

Jennie⁷⁴

Higglety Pigglety Pop! is Sendak's longest published text at sixty-nine pages. Modeling illustrations of Jennie on photographs of his pet throughout her life, depictions of Baby on a family photograph of Sendak, himself, and Mother Goose on his mother, autobiographical elements pervade the illustrations as well as the text of Sendak's major prose work.⁷⁵ With characteristic attention to detail, Sendak's dummies of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* went through several transformations between conception and publication. Jennie's process of eating the mop was combined with Rhoda's narration to minimize the number of pages in the finale, a change of scene was eliminated between the second and third lines of the nursery rhyme, and it took multiple reimaginings of setting and interaction of characters to smoothly incorporate the lion into the play.⁷⁶ Significant textual simplification— particularly in the scenes of Jennie's coronation as Leading Lady, and material regarding Jennie's master following her letter home— took place between submission to Harper and Row and publication.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Lanes (1999), 160.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 166.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

1.2.3. Sendak, Illustration, and Music

Sendak has compared illustration for stories to the setting of poetry to music, saying, “I like to think of myself as setting words to pictures. A true picture book is a visual poem.”⁷⁸ As depth of understanding and “illumination” of subject matter can be developed through musical expression, “so can pictures interpret texts.”⁷⁹ He has said of interpretive illustration that “An illustration is an enlargement, an interpretation of the text, so that the child will comprehend the words better. As an artist, you are always serving the words. You serve yourself, too, of course, but the pleasure in serving yourself is in serving someone else as well as possible.”⁸⁰ Sendak credits nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott with developing the genre of picture book, explaining,

There is a juxtaposition of picture and word, a counterpoint, which never happened before. Words are left out and the picture says it. Pictures are left out and the word says it. To me, this was the invention of the picture book. This is what the illustrator’s job is all about, to interpret the text as a musical conductor interprets a score.⁸¹

With respect to music in particular, Sendak draws explicit analogies between illustration and the musical setting of a text: “I think of ... drawings as a musical accompaniment to [text], harmonic inventions that give color and fresh meaning in much the same way that a Hugo Wolf setting illuminates a Goethe poem.”⁸² Sendak’s relation of illustration to musical composition has roots in his creative process, as well as his interpretation of other illustrators’ art. Beyond his high school realizations of *Peter and the Wolf* and *Louise*, Sendak illustrated *Lullabies and*

⁷⁸ Ibid, 110.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 109.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 110.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Maurice Sendak, “The shape of music,” in *Caldecott & Co.*, 7.

Night Songs (1965), a song book edited by lyricist William Engvick with music by composer Alec Wilder. A fan of classical music, and opera in particular, Sendak notes,

All of my pictures are created against a background of music. More often than not, my instinctive choice of composer or musical form for the day has the galvanizing effect of making me conscious of my direction. I find something uncanny in the way a musical phrase, a sensuous vocal line, or a patch of Wagnerian color will clarify an entire approach or style for a new work. A favorite occupation of mine, some years back, was sitting in front of the record player as though possessed by a *dybbuk*, and allowing the music to provoke an automatic, stream-of-consciousness kind of drawing. Sometimes the pictures that resulted were merely choreographed episodes, imagined figures dancing imagined ballets. More interesting to me, and much more useful for my work, are the childhood fantasies that were reactivated by the music and explored uninhibitedly by my pen.⁸³

In 1972 producer Sheldon Riss approached Sendak to develop and direct a twenty-four minute animated film special for a half-hour television time slot.⁸⁴ A member of the National Board of Advisors for the Children's Television Workshop during the development stages of *Sesame Street*, Sendak was no stranger to the world of children's animated television. His long-held admiration of animation inspired two segments for *Sesame Street* in 1970 on the numbers seven ("Seven Monsters") and nine ("Bumble-Ardy").⁸⁵ Sendak designed the original "Bumble-Ardy" with Jim Henson, who voiced the main character in the sequence. Adaptations of both segments were eventually published as the picture books *Seven Little Monsters*⁸⁶ and *Bumble-Ardy*.⁸⁷ Despite Sendak's affinity for animation he refused Riss' initial offer, and didn't agree to the project until 1973. The special was to use Rosie's storytelling to her audience of Brooklyn

⁸³ Ibid, 4.

⁸⁴ Lanes (1999), 209.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Maurice Sendak, *Seven Little Monsters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

⁸⁷ Maurice Sendak, *Bumble-Ardy* (New York: Michael Di Capua Books, 2011).

neighbours from *The Sign on Rosie's Door*⁸⁸ as the framework for the four stories of *The Nutshell Library*⁸⁹. Rock composer Carole King wrote music for the special, with the *Nutshell* texts completely set to song, as well as three original solo songs performed by Rosie. Pleased with these first musicalizations of his stories, Sendak said of King, "She added her own emotional quality and gave my words a reverberation that they didn't originally have. They've taken on a new edge and weight."⁹⁰ *Really Rosie, starring the Nutshell Kids* was aired on CBS in February and June 1975. A subsequent musical of the same name with book, lyrics, and design by Sendak and King's music opened in 1978. CBS sold the film to Weston Woods, a production company specializing in short films on well-known children's books.⁹¹ Plans for a second television special on *Very Far Away* were proposed in 1975 but abandoned when Sendak became "disenchanted" with the process of working with television networks.⁹²

Other than his original works with Oliver Knussen, Sendak's first operatic engagement was his 1980 production and poster design for Houston Grand Opera's production of *The Magic Flute*. The favorite work by his favorite composer in his favorite art form was a "dream project" for Sendak, who has called Mozart "the passion of my life."⁹³ Executed with director Frank Corsaro, the production marked the beginning of Sendak's most productive professional collaboration outside of children's literature. He and Corsaro went on to design productions of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* for New York City Opera in 1981, Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* for Glyndebourne and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City in 1982, Ravel's *L'Enfant et*

⁸⁸ Maurice Sendak, *The Sign on Rosie's Door* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960).

⁸⁹ Maurice Sendak, *The Nutshell Library* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962).

⁹⁰ Lanes (1999), 210.

⁹¹ Ibid, 212.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ "NEA Opera Honors: Maurice Sendak on Frank Corsaro," YouTube Video, 14:16, Posted by The National Endowment for the Arts, 2 May 2010, <http://arts.gov/video/nea-opera-honors-maurice-sendak-frank-corsaro>.

les Sortilèges and *L'Heure Espagnole* for Glyndebourne (1987), Stravinsky's *Renard*, and Mozart's *L'Oca del Cairo* for the Dutch National Opera in 1986, *Idomeneo* for LA Opera in 1989, and a never-produced design of *La Clemenza di Tito* in 1990. After initially distancing himself from such a typically child-associated work, Sendak agreed to design a 1997 production of *Hänsel und Gretel* with Corsaro, a co-production between six companies, premiered by Houston Grand Opera and broadcast in a *Live from Lincoln Center* special later that year.⁹⁴

Elsewhere in the realm of classical music, Sendak designed a production of *The Nutcracker* in 1982 with Pacific Northwest Ballet's artistic director and choreographer Kent Stowell.⁹⁵ Their production aimed to embrace "the gritty, slaphappy German Märchen that never quite explains itself but is fiercely true to a child's experience," as detailed by E. T. A. Hoffmann, set to "Tchaikovsky's music, bristling with implied action [...] alive with wild child cries and belly rumbles. It does justice to the private world of children."⁹⁶ In 1986 the production was adapted for film by director Carroll Ballard of Lone Dog Production Company.⁹⁷

Beyond his collaborations with Carole King, Sendak has overseen several musicalizations of his books. *Where the Wild Things Are* has been set to music as a seven-minute animated film by Weston Woods with a score by Gene Deitch (1973), later recomposed by Peter Schickele (1988),⁹⁸ and in Randall Woolf's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1997) for the American Repertory Ballet.⁹⁹ Gene Deitch's *musique concrète* score layers various household and city sounds (clanging pipes, a radio announcer's voice, traffic noises, etc.) over a mellow 1940s-style big

⁹⁴ Kushner, 216.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 126.

⁹⁶ Maurice Sendak, "Nutcracker," *Caldecott & Co.*, 202.

⁹⁷ Kushner, 216.

⁹⁸ Gene Deitch, "Maurice Sendak, the Wild Thing Who Was," *The Comics Journal* 302 (2013): 127.

⁹⁹ "Randall Woolf," <http://www.randallwoolf.com/compositions.html#wild>.

band number. As Max's anger mounts the household sounds fade out, emphasizing the Doppler-like tonal warping of the woodwind-heavy tune. Max's sea voyage is accompanied only by ocean sound effects, and it is not until his arrival in the land of the Wild Things that musical accompaniment returns. The underlying big band number returns to its original form more and more clearly as Max's travels bring him closer to home, and eventually back into the comfort of his room. Deitch recalls Sendak's detailed involvement in the development of the film: "The production was long and arduous with Maurice demanding change after change."¹⁰⁰

Peter Schickele's reimagining of the score highlights the menacing potential of the Wild Things in an Ivesian polytonal introduction to the film, featuring piano and percussion overlaid with brass.¹⁰¹ An arch-classical sonatina-like piano piece underscores the beginning of Max's story. His misbehavior is audible as a strident high woodwind *idée fixe*, interrupting the calm of the sonatina, augmented by brass, percussion, and lower woodwind figures. Timpani brings the music to a halt as Max is sent to his room. His transition to the land of the Wild Things is dream-like in colour with its use of triangle and strings before woodwinds, brass, and piano are introduced. The high woodwind theme reappears as Max's forest thickens. The sea voyage has a ponderous alternating figure for trumpet and piano over the rest of the ensemble. Max's arrival in the land of the Wild Things is announced with a trill and consonant descending figure in full ensemble. Percussion and the menacing opening music return as Max encounters the Wild Things, stopping abruptly when Max tames them. There is a brass fanfare for his coronation, and the Wild Rumpus is set to 1930s-style tribal jazz with percussion and the

¹⁰⁰ Deitch, 135.

¹⁰¹ Peter Schickele, "Where the Wild Things Are," *Maurice Sendak Library*, New York, New York: Weston Woods, 1988. VHS.

reappearance of Max's high woodwind misbehavior theme. The reemergence of the piano sonatina underscores Max's desire to return home. The Wild Thing's dissatisfaction at Max's departure is heard in sliding figures in the brass and woodwinds, and their earlier menacing music returns, followed by the music from his first sea voyage, and eventually, the solo conclusion of the piano sonatina.¹⁰²

Both Weston Woods scores are highly programmatic and treat music as the accompaniment to Sendak's story.¹⁰³ They represent literal more than interpretive musicalizations, with an onomatopoeic announcement of plot points. In the same stylistic vein, Randall Woolf's 40-minute ballet uses the same tribal jazz influences heard in the Schickele score, modernizing his instrumentation with synthesizer and electric guitar.¹⁰⁴ All three Sendak-supervised versions are tonally-derived, if not tonal, and accompany the story, rather than telling one independently.

Sendak's *Zlateh the Goat*¹⁰⁵ and *In the Night Kitchen*¹⁰⁶ (1987) have also been musicalized under Weston Woods in 1969 and 1987, respectively.¹⁰⁷ Taking the opposite tack, Sendak collaborated with playwright Tony Kushner to adapt Hans Krása's children's opera *Brundibár* first as a stage play, a co-production by Berkeley Repertory Theater and Yale Repertory Theater, and then as a picture book in 2003.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Gene Deitch, "Where the Wild Things Are," *genedeitchcredits.com*, 3:32, 2011, <http://genedeitchcredits.com/roll-the-credits/61-maurice-sendak/> and Peter Schickele, "Where the Wild Things Are," *Maurice Sendak Library*, 35 minutes, VHS format.

¹⁰⁴ Randall Woolf, *Where the Wild Things Are*, USA, Cri-Composers Recordings Inc., 090438084420, 2000, Audio CD.

¹⁰⁵ Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

¹⁰⁶ Sendak, *In the Night Kitchen* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

¹⁰⁷ Gene Deitch, "Zlateh the Goat," and "Maurice Sendak," *genedeitchcredits.com*.

¹⁰⁸ Charles Isherwood, "Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak Adapt 'Brundibar,' a Czech Children's Opera," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/09/theater/reviews/09brun.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

1.3. Oliver Knussen

Born 12 June 1952 in Glasgow, (Stuart) Oliver Knussen grew up outside of London. His father Stuart Knussen was principal bassist for the London Symphony Orchestra for nineteen years, including five years as Chairman of its Board of Directors, and was a founding member of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the Fields.¹⁰⁹ Both paternal grandparents were professional musicians, and Oliver Knussen often accompanied his father to rehearsals and performances. He spent much of his childhood at orchestra events and met musical luminaries such as Stravinsky and Stokowski at an early age, saying, “I was immersed in music from the beginning and it never occurred to me that not everybody thought it was the most important thing in life.”¹¹⁰ He began composing at age six, around the age when he first met Benjamin Britten:

I came up to Aldeburgh with my dad who was playing bass in the English Opera Group and the English Chamber Orchestra. I must have been six or seven. So it was in the late 1950s. My dad didn't tell me anything except that we were going to the seaside. I remember we arrived at a kind of Scout hut and the orchestra was there getting ready to rehearse. Dad said: “You see that man over there? Go over and ask him if he minds if you sit in on the rehearsal.” So I went over to “that man over there” and asked. He said: “And who do you belong to?” I pointed at my dad and he smiled at him and said that's fine, go and sit quietly or whatever.

So I went back to my dad and he said: “Do you know who that was? That was Benjamin Britten.” I already knew *The Young Persons' Guide to the Orchestra*, so I was pretty awestruck. They were playing some Mozart or Haydn and he was conducting. I remember not being bored which was very unusual for me in those days with Haydn and Mozart as I liked much fancier stuff.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ The following biographical material is largely taken from Julian Anderson, “Oliver Knussen,” *Oxford Music Online* (2007), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.exproxy.library.ubc.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/15217>, and Bayan Northcott, “Oliver Knussen,” *The Musical Times* 120 (1979): 729-732, and Fiona Maddocks's 2012 interview series with Knussen for *The Guardian*.

¹¹⁰ Fiona Maddocks, “Oliver Knussen: 'It never occurred to me that not everybody thought music was the most important thing in life',” *The Guardian*, June 6, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jun/06/oliver-knussen-fiona-maddocks-interview>.

¹¹¹ Fiona Maddocks, “Oliver Knussen: 'Britten pointed me on the right path in the simplest, kindest way',” *theguardian.com*, November 15, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/nov/15/when-oliver-knussen-benjamin-britten>.

Knussen has said that he began composing music

the moment I could read it, which was really as soon as I had piano lessons. If I never made the decision to be a musician, I did make the active choice of being a composer. Once I was reading music, I began to imitate it. I was a terrible piano student but it was clear I was more keen on making up my own stuff. Dad probably thought it would eventually go away at first. He always wanted me to become a conductor. After a while he asked a couple of people what to do, and they said I'd better have some lessons, so off I went to the Watford School of Music where, luckily, my teacher was John Lambert, who had been a student of Nadia Boulanger. I continued with him privately until I was 16 or 17.¹¹²

Knussen studied with John Lambert from 1963 to 1969 and continued with Gunther Schuller from 1970 to 1973 at the Tanglewood Music Center and in Boston.¹¹³ Crediting his father as his earliest instructor, it was through a Rediffusion Television documentary on Stuart Knussen's involvement with the LSO that Oliver Knussen received his first commission at age 14 from the Independent Television Network.¹¹⁴ The result, his Symphony No. 1, premiered 7 April 1968 at the Royal Festival Hall with the LSO. Scheduled conductor Istvan Kertesz fell ill before the performance, and Knussen made his conducting debut at age 15.¹¹⁵ Knussen was then invited by Daniel Barenboim to conduct the first two movements of the symphony at Carnegie Hall a week later, and several commissions followed this "nine-day wonder – press photographers on the doorstep next morning and all that."¹¹⁶ In the following year Knussen wrote *Pantomime*, Op. 2 (1968) for chamber ensemble, recomposed and renamed *Processionals* in 1978, *Masks*, Op. 3 (1969), for solo flute and glass chimes 'ad lib.', and *Concerto for Orchestra* (1969). The latter work, commissioned for the 1969 Florida International Music

¹¹² Maddocks, "Oliver Knussen," *theguardian.com*, June 6 2012.

¹¹³ Anderson (2007), 1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Northcott, 729.

¹¹⁶ Maddocks, "Oliver Knussen," *theguardian.com*, June 6, 2012.

Festival where Knussen was composer-in-residence, drew harsh criticism at its premiere by the LSO, conducted by the composer. Critics cast aspersions on Knussen's talent and suggested that his orchestral connections enabled his exposure as a composer far more than the quality of his work.¹¹⁷

His father played in several Britten premieres including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Curlew River*, a part written for him, and Knussen was brought back in contact with Britten several times as a very young composer.¹¹⁸ In 1964, during rehearsals for *Curlew River*, Knussen won a prize for composition at the Watford and District Music Festival. Britten congratulated the young composer,

Then he asked if I'd like to come and talk to him about what I was doing... Then he asked me: "Do you plan what you write?" And I said: "No, I just sit down and I start." And he said: "Well, personally I find it very helpful to carefully plan what I write. Maybe you'd find it useful to try that, too." It was such a nice way of passing on a bit of wisdom to a kid without making the kid feel stupid... So that was that encounter, and if it's possible to point someone on the right path in the simplest, kindest way, Britten did that. I've never forgotten it. I've lived by those bits of advice ever since.¹¹⁹

An early supporter, Britten sent Knussen a telegram for the premiere of his First Symphony wishing him well: "All good wishes for great success Sunday wish I were there to cheer Benjamin Britten."¹²⁰ Britten then offered the sixteen-year-old Knussen his first commission following his debut. Knussen wrote *Fire* for flute and string quartet ("long since deservedly withdrawn,"¹²¹ according to the composer) for Aldeburgh that year, but the piece missed its premiere when the Snape Maltings Concert Hall burned down a week before the performance. That Aldeburgh season would be the last time the composers would meet in person, but they

¹¹⁷ Northcott, 729.

¹¹⁸ Maddocks, "Oliver Knussen," *theguardian.com*, November 15, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Maddocks, "Oliver Knussen," *theguardian.com*, 15 November 2013.

¹²¹ Ibid.

continued their relationship through correspondence. Says Knussen, “[Britten] was seemingly always ready to give advice by return of post.”¹²²

From his first trip to New York in 1966 contemporary American music fascinated Knussen. Foremost among his American influences has been the music of Elliott Carter, particularly his uses of metric modulation and the all-interval tetrachord as foundation for composition.¹²³ In addition to the experiences of hearing and playing Carter’s music he has noted the value of visually assimilating his scores. In an interview with Paul Griffiths Knussen commented on his first impression of the score for Carter’s *Piano Concerto* (1964): “I’d never seen anything that looked so fearsome but was actually built practically from very basic materials— pulses and intervals. And I was especially impressed by the attitude of treating individual intervals (or pairs of intervals) with respect.”¹²⁴ This reverence for small-cell musical construction has formed the basis of Knussen’s composition. On other influences Knussen notes, “I always say there are a few composers embedded in one’s consciousness that determine the very notes one writes. For me Britten is one. Stravinsky, Berg, Debussy would be the others.”¹²⁵ Knussen has acknowledged the influences of American expressionist composers Gunther Schuller, his teacher, and Charles Ives.¹²⁶ The influences of Mussorgsky, Shostakovich, Messiaen, and Ravel are also frequently observed.

Affected by the public scrutiny following his early fame in the United Kingdom, Knussen temporarily removed himself from the British music scene from 1970 to 1975: “I simply decided

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Paul Griffiths, “Oliver Knussen”, *New Sounds, New Personalities* (London: Faber Music Ltd., 1985), 55.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 56.

¹²⁵ Maddocks, “Oliver Knussen,” *theguardian.com*, November 15, 2013.

¹²⁶ Northcott, 729.

to go away and start again from scratch somewhere else.”¹²⁷ He felt his recognition as his father’s son and the accompanying connections so coloured his reception as a composer that “it wasn’t until I got a fellowship to Tanglewood, where I was greatly encouraged by Gunther Schuller, that I felt in an environment where I was judged for what I actually did, rather than as a result of my background.”¹²⁸ The years 1970 to 1973 were Knussen’s most prolific as a composer, and resulted in *Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh*, Op. 6 (1970) for soprano, flute, cor anglais, clarinet, percussion and cello, *Three Little Fantasies*, Op. 6a (1970) for wind quintet, his Symphony No. 2, Op. 7 (1970–71) for high soprano and chamber orchestra, *Choral*, Op. 8 (1970–72) for wind, percussion and double basses, and *Rosary Songs*, Op. 9 (1972) for soprano, clarinet, piano and viola. He also began several significant works completed in following years, including *Océan de Terre*, Op. 10 (1972-73/76), for soprano and chamber ensemble and *Music for a Puppet Court (after John Lloyd)*, Op. 11 (1973/83), for two chamber orchestras after Lloyd’s puzzle canons. Knussen and horn player Susan Freedman met at Tanglewood in 1970 and married in 1971.

Of Knussen’s American compositions his first works for voice, *Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh* and his Symphony No. 2, which won the Margaret Grant Prize at Tanglewood, have particular consequence to his later output, marking Knussen a significant composer for voice. *Hums and Songs* is adapted from A. A. Milne’s 1926 children’s literary classic *Winnie-the-Pooh*. In the program notes for his 1983 revised version of the score Knussen says,

It isn’t exactly a setting of the episode with tree, bees and balloon near the beginning of A.A. Milne’s *Winnie-the-Pooh* – indeed, words are rarely discernible; neither is it a small-scale tone poem, though there are many onomatopoeic devices. It is, rather, a sequence

¹²⁷ Griffiths (1985), 55.

¹²⁸ Maddocks, “Oliver Knussen,” *theguardian.com*, June 6, 2012.

of faded snapshots and reflections, by an unwilling grown-up, on things remembered from the book, and on what those things meant to him as a child. So the piece is whimsical: it hops back and forth between Pooh-like expressions and the inner world of a child just after the light is switched off, following no particular pattern – I allowed the music to take itself where it wanted to go. The two worlds meet in the last song during which, perhaps, the child falls asleep.¹²⁹

Knussen's engagement of a standard of children's literature, the significance of nocturnal themes to the work's program, his treatment of text as having secondary importance, and instances of "stratospheric," diction-obscuring tessitura for the singer are elements that continued in much of his later music. Griffiths notes that *Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh* established Knussen as "an expert composer of music for former children,"¹³⁰ indicating Knussen's dream-like, nostalgic soundscapes for childhood themes.

As explained by Julian Anderson, "Knussen's compositional personality abruptly appeared, fully formed,"¹³¹ with his Second Symphony (1970-71), identified by the composer and commentators alike as the first representation of his mature compositional style. With this work Knussen moves beyond referential acknowledgments of musical influences (including Schuller, Carter, Stravinsky, Berg, Debussy, and Ravel) to achieving their integration into an enduring personal style.¹³² The four movements of this "moonstruck song-cycle"¹³³ on texts by Georg Trakl and Sylvia Plath form a narrative arc from falling asleep at night to awakening at dawn. Hallmarks of Knussen's mature style developed in this work include nighttime themes, use of recognizable and, in context, jarringly tonal harmony at programmatically important

¹²⁹ Oliver Knussen, Notes for *Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh*, <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/hums-and-songs-of-winnie-the-pooh-1171#sthash.liSSdtpE.dpuf>.

¹³⁰ Paul Griffiths, "Oliver Knussen," *Miller Theatre Program Notes Composer Portraits*, April 18, 2013, 2.

¹³¹ Julian Anderson, "The later Music of Oliver Knussen. Catching up with Knussen in his 40th Year," *The Musical Times* 133 (1992), 393.

¹³² Julian Anderson, "Oliver Knussen," *Oxford Music Online* (2007), 2.

¹³³ Northcott, 729.

moments (here, the arrival of dawn heralded by the A major triad at the opening of the fourth movement), vocal writing for high soprano, a Stravinskian rotational matrix and Carterian approach to rhythmic modulation, and the use of small cells of pitch material based on the two all-interval tetrachords [0146, 0137] and one all-triad hexachord [012478].¹³⁴

Explaining the harmonic language of Knussen, Laurie A. Middaugh notes:

The harmonic language of Knussen combines the more twelve-tone aspects of serial treatment of small cells of pitches, while at the same time retaining a sense of tonality. One can hear a general tonal center but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to assign a label of major, minor, or any one of the church modes to any of his works. The tritone is to Oliver Knussen what the perfect fifth was to Mozart. It is the fulcrum on which he bases his tonality.¹³⁵

Knussen's return to the United Kingdom in 1975 yielded *Trumpets*, Op. 12 (1975), *Ophelia Dances*, Op. 13 (1975) commissioned by the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress for the Koussevitzky centenary, his *Triptych Autumnal*, Op. 14 (1975–77); *Cantata*, Op. 15; and *Sonya's Lullaby*, Op. 16, written as "an incantation to sleep" for his four-month-old "insomniac"¹³⁶ daughter; *Scriabin Settings* (1978), *Coursing*, Op. 17 (1979), dedicated to Elliott Carter on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, *Processionals*, Op. 2 (a recomposition of his 1968 *Pantomime*), and his Symphony No. 3, Op. 18 (1973–79), a commission for the BBC Proms.¹³⁷ He also began *Frammenti da Chiara*, Op. 19a (1975/86), for two antiphonal *a cappella* female choirs. Knussen began travelling frequently between Britain and America, and was composer-in-residence at the Aspen Music Festival in 1976 and the Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts in 1978. He was an instructor at the Royal College of

¹³⁴ Arnold Whittall, "'Into the Breach': Oliver Knussen in his time," *Tempo* 265 (2013), 19.

¹³⁵ Laurie A. Middaugh, "The Solo Piano Music of Oliver Knussen" (DMA diss., University of Alabama, 2011), 9.

¹³⁶ Oliver Knussen, Notes for *Sonya's Lullaby*, <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/sonyas-lullaby-1175>.

¹³⁷ Anderson (2007), 5.

Music junior department from 1977 to 1982 and a guest teacher at Tanglewood in 1981, where he would serve as Coordinator of Contemporary Music Activities from 1986 to 1990.¹³⁸ He received his first Brit Award nomination as conductor in 1977.¹³⁹

The Third Symphony marks several important developments in Knussen's mature style.¹⁴⁰ A way of thinking with roots in his approach to *Hums and Songs of Winnie-the-Pooh*, Knussen no longer requires a text's articulation to express its affect. A purely instrumental work, according to Knussen it is inspired by Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning in *Hamlet* IV, vii, lines 138–155:¹⁴¹

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendant boughs her crownnet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down the weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ "Oliver Knussen," Artist Profile, <http://www.harrisonparrott.com/artist/profile/oliver-knussen>.

¹³⁹ Judy Moore, "Nemmers Prize 2006 Winner Press Release," <http://www.music.northwestern.edu/about/prizes/nemmers-prize/2006-press-release.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Faber notes for *Symphony No. 3*, <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/symphony-no-3-884>.

¹⁴¹ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," *Oliver Knussen Brochure* (1992), <http://www.fabermusic.com/composers/oliver-knussen>, 4.

¹⁴² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* IV, vii, lines 138–155 in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Knussen's "snatches of old tunes" are drawn from Schumann's "Sphinxes" from *Carnaval*, Op. 9 (1834–35) for solo piano.¹⁴³ These *soggetti cavati*, literally "carved-out subjects," after the technique pioneered by Josquin, take the form of themes [A-E flat-C-B] and [A flat-C-B], noted in German as A-Es-C-H and As-C-H, spelling "Asch," the hometown of Schumann's then-sweetheart.¹⁴⁴ Knussen's use of musical cryptograms is a hallmark of his writing, developed to sophistication with his Third Symphony.¹⁴⁵ Schumann's sphinxes were treated by adapting the intervals of these spellings into three- and four-note matrices to generate melodic content. Knussen's serial rotation is strongly Stravinskian, while his strict access to limited pitch class content and use of rhythmic modulation are Carterian in derivation.¹⁴⁶ This hybridization of Stravinsky's and Carter's compositional principles under Schuller's guidance results in a version of tonality "whose roots are in ordered matrices rather than in functional harmony."¹⁴⁷ Schuller's influence is notable in a suggestion of tonality within post-tonal pitch class content, with [E] serving as "tonic."¹⁴⁸

The original sketches for this symphony inspired both *Ophelia Dances, Book 1* and *Trumpets*, on a text by Trakl. *Ophelia Dances, Book 1* draws on material for a second movement Knussen ultimately found incohesive with his plans for the Third Symphony. *Trumpets* develops a clarinet fanfare from the symphony's first movement and shares narrative arc with the Shakespeare in its juxtaposed horror against a peaceful willow setting.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Anthony Tommasini, "A Prodigy's Grownup Pieces: Oliver Knussen in Composer Portraits," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/20/arts/music/oliver-knussen-in-composer-portraits.html?_r=0.

¹⁴⁴ Griffiths (2013), 1.

¹⁴⁵ Julian Anderson, "Harmonic practices in Oliver Knussen's music since 1988: Part II," *Tempo* 223 (2003), 17.

¹⁴⁶ Julian Anderson, "Harmonic practices in Oliver Knussen's music since 1988: Part I," *Tempo* 221 (2002), 3.

¹⁴⁷ Whittall, 18.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Faber program notes for *Trumpets*, <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/trumpets-1177>.

The Third Symphony and *Frammenti da Chiara* were Knussen's last major compositions preceding his operatic collaboration with Maurice Sendak. Compositional hallmarks of Knussen's writing from the use of musical cryptograms, development of narratively-related musical material by other composers, a "playful"¹⁵⁰ approach to expressing literary themes, and his mature harmonic language were established as tenets of his writing by 1975 and provided the stylistic backdrop for his two operas.¹⁵¹

1.3.1. Collaboration with Sendak

Knussen returned to Tanglewood in 1975 to study with Olivier Messiaen. While there he was approached by illustrator Mitchell "Mike" Miller Jr., a friend of Jack and Maurice Sendak.

At one point someone I didn't know came up to me at a concert and said, "Are you interested in writing an opera?" I said, "Do you always ask people questions like that?" and he replied, "Actually, I've been casting around. Can you meet for lunch in the cafeteria tomorrow?" His name was Mike Miller. There were only two or three pieces of mine he could have heard in Boston around that time, and I have to say, for the life of me, I would have never thought, "Oh, he'd be a good person to write an opera."¹⁵²

When Miller and Knussen met to discuss the potential project, Miller presented a bag of Sendak's books and explained that the author wanted to write an opera.¹⁵³ Reportedly intimidated by Sendak's fame Knussen refused to reach out to Sendak: "It's like calling up Bernstein and saying I want to be a conductor."¹⁵⁴ After several weeks Sendak contacted Knussen. As the composer recalls, "Maurice asked me what my favorite children's opera was. I

¹⁵⁰ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Mark Swed, "Oliver Knussen knows the monsters well." *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/oct/07/entertainment/la-et-cm-oliver-knussen-maurice-sendak-20121007>, 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Swed, 2.

told him it was the second act of *Boris Godunov*, and we took it from there.”¹⁵⁵ In Sendak’s recollection the story went the other way around, with Knussen asking for Sendak’s favorite children’s opera. “I said: *Boris Godunov*, and he loved that and he knew just what I meant.”¹⁵⁶ With a shared appreciation of musical theatricality, Sendak and Knussen began discussing the operatic potential of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* Sketches for the opera were in preparation when they received the Opéra National commission for *Where the Wild Things Are* in early 1979, to be performed in November 1980.¹⁵⁷ Knussen had Sendak’s libretto by summer 1979, but was unable to complete the score by the 28 November 1980 premiere: “I disgraced myself by being late and the Brussels production was totally chaotic, with percussion cadenzas and God knows what patched in at the last minute.”¹⁵⁸ The production, directed by Rhoda Levine and conducted by Ronald Zollman, received mixed reviews. Of this early version divided into two acts Robin Holloway wrote, “Act 2, shorter anyway, was hurt by glaring incompletions, notably of the all-important Wild Rumpus which should be the concerted centre of the whole action; a big later hole, Max’s voyage back home, was temporarily plastered over by music from the Act 1 voyage.”¹⁵⁹ Though the visual sphere of the opera was designed by Sendak in strict adherence to the aesthetics of the picture book, criticism was leveled against elements of the opera’s plot and design that were not consistent with the picture book original, from the presence of Max’s

¹⁵⁵ Selma G. Lanes, “Here Comes Higglety: Sendak and Knussen’s Second Fantastic Opera,” *Connoisseur* 215 (1985), 36.

¹⁵⁶ Mick Gowar, “Monsters and music: The private worlds of Maurice Sendak and Oliver Knussen,” *Book 2.0* 2 (2013), 73.

¹⁵⁷ Lanes (1985), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas Kenyon, “From Britain, a ‘No-Holds Barred’ Approach to Music,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/08/arts/music-from-britain-a-no-holds-barred-approach-to-music.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Robin Holloway, “Where the Wild Things Are,” *Tempo* 137 (1981), 37.

mother to the significantly expanded text.¹⁶⁰ Reviewer George R. Bodmer took issue with the degree of operatic interpolation required to complete Max's story:

There is delight at the color and drama of the staged rumpus, but in expanding the story it is limited in implication. The music is stridently modern, and ends with an ascending phrase, which robs Max's discovery that his supper is still hot of any final resolution of triumph. While Sendak made the decision in the book to present the climax of his story facing a blank page rather than a picture, in opera no such option is open; everything must be sung and shown.¹⁶¹

The opera was revised several times before the final version was presented under Knussen's baton on 9 January 1984 at the National Theatre in London by Glyndebourne Touring Opera and the London Sinfonietta, taking the form of a Fantasy Opera in one act and nine scenes.¹⁶² The timeframe of Knussen's final revisions overlapped with the debut of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* to the detriment of the latter's progress, an incomplete version of which was debuted by Glyndebourne on 13 October 1984.¹⁶³ A touring double-bill of *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* directed by Sendak's operatic collaborator Frank Corsaro had already been publicized and sold, and the five-and-a-half completed operatic scenes were performed for the five-city preview run.¹⁶⁴ As described by Selma G. Lanes,

The musical chasms— the entire middle of the opera and other key moments at the end— were bridged by readings from the Sendak book. Reportedly, Bamber Gascoigne, the narrator, “disarmingly” announced that the appearance onstage of a figure in a dinner jacket at the start of an opera is generally an indication of bad news, and alas, so it proved.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ George R. Bodmer, “Sendak into Opera: Wild Things and Higglety Pigglety Pop!” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 16 (1992), 169.

¹⁶¹ Bodmer, 172.

¹⁶² Lanes (1985), 3.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

A later, but still preliminary, version of the opera was performed on 5 August 1985 with “a sort of bit of a wallpaper that I did” to bridge missing sections, according to Knussen.¹⁶⁶ “The reason *Wild Things* took almost four years to finish and missed two deadlines in the process,” Knussen explained, “is that it’s less a short opera than an extremely big one in miniature— like a very detailed doll’s house.”¹⁶⁷ A completed version of the opera was presented at the Los Angeles Music Center on 5 June 1990,¹⁶⁸ but further revisions from 9 March 2002 to scenes VI and IX were released by Faber Music and are now included as appendices to the published score.¹⁶⁹

As the book of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* tells significantly more of its story through text than *Where the Wild Things Are*, much less alteration to the source text was needed in order to craft the libretto.¹⁷⁰ Much of Sendak’s libretto is direct quotation from the picture book, and the story is largely unaltered. The visual realm of the opera, according to Sendak’s design, is a direct representation of the original illustrations.¹⁷¹ In contrast with *Wild Things*, alterations to the content of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* are minimal until the end of the opera. In the book, the play within the story presents the contents of the nursery rhyme once, the cast bows, and the book closes with the epilogue and Jennie’s letter to her master. The operatic version of events shows Jennie settled in her dressing room at the Castle Yonder writing her letter home before the opera within the opera begins. The rhyme is then presented as a scene and seven variations, repeated twice, the second time down a tone. The opera, and the opera within the

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Jaffé, “Oliver Knussen,” *compositiontoday.com*, March 13, 2011, http://www.compositiontoday.com/articles/oliver_knussen_interview.asp.

¹⁶⁷ Lanes (1985), 2.

¹⁶⁸ Christian Herzog, “Maurice Sendak’s Opera Librettos,” *Bloghead*, May 10, 2012, originally published in *The La Jolla Light*, June 28, 1990, <http://christianhertzog.com/2012/05/10/maurice-sendak-oliver-knussen-opera/>.

¹⁶⁹ Knussen, *Where the Wild Things Are* (London: Faber Music Ltd., 2010).

¹⁷⁰ Bodmer, 171.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 172.

opera, end with a coda presentation of the nursery rhyme marked *Allegretto Spettrale* which trails off mid-sentence.¹⁷²

Like *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* was given a mixed reception upon its premiere. The singers' "cumbersome masks, which made them less expressive," and alterations to the book's plot drew criticism. Calling the end of Sendak's original story "strangely muted by the opera," Bodmer states,

The elaborate but essentially pointless production of this play ends the opera version, following a letter which Jennie writes to her master. By contrast, the letter ends the book and sums up the whole difficult story. Here the decision to end with spectacle has buried and diminished the point of the story.¹⁷³

Concerns over identifying the two operas' target audience loom large in critical commentary. Citing "the difference of immediacy in the apprehension," of the visual and musical spheres of *Where the Wild Things Are*, Robin Holloway asserts,

It constantly requires sophisticated ears prickled at full attention. Just when it pleases adults most, the kiddies become audibly restive; and when they are most (audibly) delighted, no one can hear a note! So I find myself wondering (as with *L'enfant et les Sortilèges* and even with *Hansel and Gretel*— two clear ancestors of *Wild Things*) who the piece is really for. All three are scores of great technical and stylistic subtlety whose music (putting on one side the choice of stories that makes them suitable for children) calls actually for rather rarified responses, more diverting to consenting adults than sulky juveniles.¹⁷⁴

In spite of their source texts' distinction as children's literature, the Sendak-Knussen collaborations are listed in their published editions as fantasy operas, not children's operas. The distinction seems of particular importance to Knussen, who stresses that the music is "not

¹⁷² Ibid, 173.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Holloway, 37.

specifically for children. It's about the feelings one had as a child in that moment before the light was turned out."¹⁷⁵

In his review of the October 1984 Glyndebourne double-bill Bodmer states,

It is ironic that *Wild Things*, one of the most accessible of books, be so obscured in its musical incarnation. The desire to open up the books and make something public of them on stage, as well as to link them with important music, has not found a successful marriage.¹⁷⁶

The majority of criticism of both operas is leveled against Knussen's scores.¹⁷⁷ Of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* critic Geoffrey Norris of London's *Daily Telegraph* wrote that the opera "exerts its charm rather more strongly through Sendak's irresistibly imaginative designs than through any particularly assertive qualities in the music."¹⁷⁸ From their debut performances forward many reviewers have been critical of compositional and design features in both operas that obscure intelligibility of text, from Max's "obstreperous", "vertiginous" tessitura to the *Wild Things'* Yiddish-nonsense hybrid language, Sendak's animal costume masks, and the "stratospheric" tessiturae maintained by the Potted Plant, Baby, and Mother Goose:

The [Wild] things delivered only a single line in English, begging their boy king not to leave them. It was one of the few intelligible lines in the performance, for most of Max's lyric declamation is cast so unrelentingly high that soprano Karen Beardsley, who otherwise gave an excellent portrayal of the vagrant child, could not make herself understood... [In *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*] again scarcely a word of the text was intelligible, so that on October 24, Minnesota Opera's experiment with Surtitles— the first time in twenty-three seasons that the English-touting company has performed in a foreign language— was greeted with enthusiasm.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Lanes (1985), 2.

¹⁷⁶ Bodmer, 174.

¹⁷⁷ Lanes (1985), 6.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Bodmer, 170.

Selma G. Lanes suggests that,

in the long run, it may be that audiences will no more settle for the Knussen-Sendak scores without the Sendak stage images than most children would sit still for a reading of Sendak's books without being allowed to look at the pictures.¹⁸⁰

In spite of production difficulties and critical response, both Sendak and Knussen have praised the other's contribution to their double-bill. Of the moods Knussen has evoked for each piece, Sendak believes that "the first opera had a canny primitivism that was absolutely right for its subject. *Higglety* has a cool sophistication—again right for its subject. Olly's instinct for each piece is right on."¹⁸¹ Perhaps most crucially for someone who so resented being considered "just some kiddie book artist,"¹⁸² Sendak said of the operatic *Wild Things*, "Together, Oliver Knussen and I fashioned a work that, for me, begins to step beyond the book—that enriches Max's mighty little adventure and adds a further dimension— a crucial emotional color and weight that in the end only music— great music— can provide."¹⁸³

Musical episodes from both operas have been adapted as short works for orchestra and published separately.¹⁸⁴ Knussen has assembled *The Way to Castle Yonder: Pot-pourri after the opera Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, Op. 21a (1990), a "concise digest of orchestral interludes,"¹⁸⁵ and *Songs and a Sea Interlude*, Op. 20a (1979–81),¹⁸⁶ for soprano and orchestra, and *The Wild*

¹⁸⁰ Lanes (1985), 6.

¹⁸¹ Lanes (1985), 5.

¹⁸² Gloria Goodale, "From our files: Maurice Sendak interview, 2002," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 2012, originally published September 25, 2002, www.csmonitor.com/Books/2012/0508/From-our-Files-Maurice-Sendak-interview-2002.

¹⁸³ Lanes (1985), 5.

¹⁸⁴ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," 4.

¹⁸⁵ Knussen, Notes, "*The Way to Castle Yonder: Pot-pourri after the opera Higglety Pigglety Pop!*," <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/way-to-castle-yonder-the-881>.

¹⁸⁶ Knussen, Notes, "*Songs and a Sea Interlude – from the Opera Where the Wild Things Are*," <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/songs-and-a-sea-interlude-882>.

Rumpus, Op. 20b (1983)¹⁸⁷ from *Where the Wild Things Are*. These selections have been extremely popular, with *The Way to Castle Yonder* alone presented in over 100 performances.¹⁸⁸ *Wild Things* has been produced in Germany, the United States, the Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Iceland, Switzerland, and Finland.¹⁸⁹ The opera has been recorded three times on CD, first in 1985 on the Arabesque label,¹⁹⁰ and as a double-bill with *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* by Castle Vision in 1994,¹⁹¹ and also by Deutsche Grammophon in 2001.¹⁹² The 1985 Glyndebourne double-bill of the Sendak-Knussen operas was recorded for video by Kultur.¹⁹³

1.3.2. Knussen's Style

Called “a synthetic composer rather than an original as [was] Britten or, for that matter, Mozart,”¹⁹⁴ Knussen has been noted for his extensive musical vocabulary from his First Symphony onward. Allusions in that piece to Britten, Shostakovich, Walton, Copland, Mahler, Bernstein, and the less well-known *Symphony* by Irving Fine and William Schuman's *Third Symphony* have been acknowledged by the composer.¹⁹⁵ Indication of other works aside, the

¹⁸⁷ “*The Wild Rumpus* – from the Opera *Where the Wild Things Are*,” <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/wild-rumpus-the-885>.

¹⁸⁸ Knussen, Notes, “*Songs and a Sea Interlude* – from the Opera *Where the Wild Things Are*,” <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/songs-and-a-sea-interlude-882/performances>.

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/where-the-wild-things-are-1464/performances>.

¹⁹⁰ Oliver Knussen, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Oliver Knussen/London Sinfonietta, USA, Arabesque, Z 7535, 1985, CD.

¹⁹¹ Oliver Knussen, *Where the Wild Things Are and Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, Oliver Knussen/London Sinfonietta, London, Castle Vision, 1994, CD.

¹⁹² Oliver Knussen, *Higglety Pigglety Pop! and Where the Wild Things Are: a double bill of fantasy operas*, Oliver Knussen/London Sinfonietta, London, A Deutsche Grammophon/BBC Radio 3 Co-Produktion, 469 556-2, 2001, CD.

¹⁹³ Oliver Knussen, *Where the Wild Things Are & Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, Oliver Knussen/London Sinfonietta/Frank Corsaro, 1985, Glyndebourne, Glyndebourne Productions Ltd, D4451, 1985 VHS, rereleased on DVD.

¹⁹⁴ Northcott, 731.

¹⁹⁵ Northcott, 731.

melodic content of the Symphony No. 1 is dodecaphonic, as is much of his early work including *Masks* and the *Concerto for Orchestra*.¹⁹⁶ Throughout his career Knussen has embraced a combination of twelve-tone and serialist writing, refining approaches to both from his Symphony No. 2 onward in distinctly pre-*Wild Things* and post-*Higglety Pigglety Pop!* styles.¹⁹⁷ Though strict structure is characteristic of all his writing, his ideas of development of small-scale musical units and transparency of voicing are expanded in scale and complexity through the two operas. Somewhat reactionarily, length and compositional density in his post-operatic writing condenses again as he embraces shorter works, smaller-scale forms, and less instrumental textural density.¹⁹⁸ Uncharacteristically long works at forty and sixty minutes each, his operas are over twice the length of his longest works otherwise, the Second Symphony and *Violin Concerto*, both seventeen minutes in length.¹⁹⁹

The majority of Knussen's works are strictly planned before musical sketching occurs.²⁰⁰ Techniques of small-cell rotation of pitch class material determined by combinations of all-interval tetrachords along horizontal (melodic) and vertical (harmonic) axes are the basic melodic building blocks of Knussen's composition.²⁰¹ Rhythmic material is determined largely by rotation and inversion of metric cells and metric modulation. When not dictated by commission the instrumentation is determined by the "casting" of certain instrumental timbres as dramatic characters, a technique established in *Processionals*, similar to Prokofiev's example in *Peter and*

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Julian Anderson, "The Later Music of Oliver Knussen: Catching up with Knussen during His 40th Year," *The Musical Times* 133 (1992), 394, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1002662>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ "Oliver Knussen: Works," <http://www.fabermusic.com/composers/oliver-knussen/works?PageSize=0>.

²⁰⁰ Maddocks, *theguardian.com*, November 15, 2013, 3.

²⁰¹ Middaugh, 4.

the Wolf.²⁰² Serial techniques are not employed to the exclusion of traditional tonal elements, though, and are often used to achieve certain standard tonal relationships, as in *Coursing*, Op. 17 (1979). Here, the use of a serial system of transposition allows movement from discernable tonic to dominant in E-flat major.²⁰³

Knussen recognizes the irony of his obsessively detailed composition yielding “spontaneous-sounding” music:

I’ll spend days puzzling over a problem... and then when it’s played people say, “But your music sounds effortless!” It’s quite ironic, really— but then I suppose one doesn’t “hear” the effort in Brahms, or Debussy either, to take two favourite composers of mine— though I think Berg is probably the composer I feel closest to, and one certainly sensed it there.²⁰⁴

Much of this effort is the result of a belief that “there is only one possible way to make the phrase, progression or texture do precisely what is needed in the context,” leaving Knussen “looking for answers to the vexed question of what constitutes the right notes in a post-diatonic age.”²⁰⁵

Careful encoding of musical humour and references has been a staple of Knussen’s composition from his early twenties.²⁰⁶ Unity in his works, when not aurally distinct from tonal structure, often arises from use of typifying rhythmic or gestural figures.²⁰⁷ Though rare in his composition, unordered moments of spontaneity exist in emotionally-delicate passages, such

²⁰² Ibid, 8.

²⁰³ Northcott, 731.

²⁰⁴ Griffiths (1985), 57.

²⁰⁵ Oliver Knussen, Preface to *The Right Notes: Twenty-Three Selected Essays on Twentieth-Century Music* by George Perle (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1995), ix.

²⁰⁶ Julian Anderson, “Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen’s Music since 1988: Part I,” *Tempo* 221 and “Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen’s Music since 1988: Part II,” *Tempo* 223.

²⁰⁷ Middaugh, 7.

as *Sonya's Lullaby*, Op. 16 (1978-79), written for his daughter,²⁰⁸ and *Requiem: Songs for Sue*, Op. 33 (2005-6), in memory of his ex-wife.²⁰⁹

The value of a score's visual impression, of its "musical images,"²¹⁰ is a concept Knussen has related to his own work. Much as Sendak relies on musical imagery in discussing picture books,²¹¹ Knussen speaks in visual-artistic terms when discussing composition.²¹² From his early impressions of Carter's *Piano Concerto* score as a visual artifact,²¹³ to his consideration of Stravinsky's *The Flood* ("like an incredible comic-strip race through Genesis,"²¹⁴) Knussen has commented on the concrete visual aspects of scores, and imbues his own with many elements more visually- (than aurally-) evident, from musical spellings to performance indications tantamount to inside jokes with performers of his works.²¹⁵ Many of his works contain embedded musical references to dedicatees, as in *Flourish with Fireworks*.²¹⁶ The work was written to commemorate Michael Tilson Thomas's first concert with the London Symphony Orchestra following his appointment as Chief Conductor. As explained by Julian Anderson, Knussen generated pitch material from the cipher LSO-MTT, musicalized via the solfège syllables [L^A, ^ES, ^SO^L, M^I, T^I, T^I]. In a fixed Do system this translates to the five distinct pitch classes [A, E-flat, G, E, B].²¹⁷ *Flourish* is also an homage to Stravinsky's *Fireworks*, and his late

²⁰⁸ Griffiths (1985), 63.

²⁰⁹ Tom Service, "I had to write it," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/oct/19/classicalmusicandopera.music>.

²¹⁰ Anderson, "Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen's Music since 1988: Part II," *Tempo* 223, 17.

²¹¹ Lanes (1985), 110.

²¹² Griffiths (2013), 2.

²¹³ Griffiths (1985), 56.

²¹⁴ Josiah Fisk, "Oliver Knussen" in *Composers on Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 475.

²¹⁵ Performance indications include distinctions between "complaining" and "bitching" in Tzippi's line in scene IV of *Wild Things*, m. 40 and 41; Variation 6, rehearsal 149 in the 2002 supplement to *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* is marked "L'istesso tempo, ma nauseante" for orchestra.

²¹⁶ Anderson, "Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen's Music since 1988: Part I," *Tempo* 221, 2.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

compositional method of rotational technique is used for Knussen's melodic development. The initial expression of [A, E-flat, G, E, B] is rotated so that,

Each successive [statement] starts from the next pitch in the cell, and cycling to the previous one. Each rotation is transposed onto the same initial pitch- A- so that we obtain a transposing sequence of circular melodic statements of the initial cell each revolving around the same initial pitch.²¹⁸

The statements of Knussen's cell of five pitch classes generated by this rotation are:

- I. [A, E flat, G, E, B]
- II. [A, C sharp, B flat, F, E flat]
- III. [A, F sharp, C sharp, B, F]
- IV. [A, E, D, G sharp, C]
- V. [A, G, C sharp, F, D]²¹⁹

Knussen derives spellings from a combination of solfege syllables, standard English-language pitch class namings, and German pitch name equivalencies. Various transformed, dedication cells of three to twelve pitch classes are a common feature of Knussen's mature style, such as the basic set [F, R^E, E, D, ^ES, H, E, R^(RY)] in *Songs without Voices* for Fred Sherry, Artistic Director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center,²²⁰ and in *Organum* for the twentieth anniversary of the Schönberg Ensemble of Amsterdam, Knussen's combinations of Berg's *Chamber Concerto* cipher of Schönberg's name [A, D, S, C, H, B flat, E, G] and his own for Dutch conductor Reinbert de Leeuw [R, Ein, B, E, R, T, D, E, L, E, E, UW].²²¹ These two pitch class sets provide the complete pitch material for Knussen's piece.²²²

²¹⁸ Ibid, 3.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Anderson, "Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen's Music since 1988: Part II," *Tempo* 223, 17.

²²¹ Ibid, 24.

²²² Ibid.

Knussen's musical spellings have taken other forms, as well. In *Prayer Bell Sketch*, Op. 29 commissioned in memory of Toru Takemitsu, Knussen used a signature chord of Takemitsu's own composition to generate his foundational pitch class cell.²²³ Takemitsu's SEA chord [E-flat, E, A], referring to the German naming of [E-flat] as [Es], was an element of "virtually every one of his pieces in the '80s,"²²⁴ and a collection of pitch classes he called a "sea of tonality from which many pantonal chords flow."²²⁵ Knussen drew content from the pitch classes of the chord itself, as well as its intervallic structure.

The important combination of audio and visual information in Knussen's scores reflects his first interactions with Carter's *Piano Concerto*.²²⁶ His reaction to the visual impacts of the score informed his musical experience and encouraged creative thought regarding the contribution of a score's appearance to the value of the work as a whole. Careful spelling choices that are aurally indistinct from their enharmonic equivalents and thus do not contribute directly to a passage's tonal structure, provide more visual information than aural information.²²⁷

Knussen speaks of visual art with the same reverent tones with which Sendak discusses music. On what inspires him outside of the musical realm Knussen has said:

I'm crazy about art— though I have no aptitude for it at all. I'm a fanatical gallery-goer when I'm on tour. I'm nuts about the Flemish Renaissance painter Joachim Patinir, a contemporary of Dürer. He's a large-scale miniaturist! And the Russian illustrator Ivan Bilibin. More recently I've discovered Georges de la Tour, and have come to appreciate Goya hugely, in much the same way that I've come to love Beethoven much more than I

²²³ Middaugh, 46.

²²⁴ Jaffé, 2011.

²²⁵ Peter Burt, *The Music of Toru Takemitsu*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 181.

²²⁶ Griffiths (1985), 56.

²²⁷ Julian Anderson, "Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen's Music since 1988: Part I," *Tempo* 221 and "Harmonic Practices in Oliver Knussen's Music since 1988: Part II," *Tempo* 223.

did ...And yes, you could say it all relates to how I think about music. It's no coincidence that I did my operas with an artist.²²⁸

The importance of the visual creative sphere to Knussen's music is relevant to the preparation of his scores. Compositional choices with visual but not aural impact contribute a pictorial element to the experience of assimilating one of Knussen's pieces. Despite his proclaimed lack of aptitude for visual art, the narrative impact of his musical visualizations creates a sort of picture book of Knussen's own.

²²⁸ Maddocks, "Oliver Knussen," *theguardian.com*, June 6, 2012.

2. THE SENDAK–KNUSSEN OPERAS

2.1. Children's Cultural Products

Music has been significant in the world of children's cultural products throughout history, with music designed specifically for a child audience a construct with roots in the nineteenth century. This is not to be confused with music designed for performance by children, which predates the idea of composing to perceptions of a child audience's whims and needs by centuries, at least. The three seminal works of Camille Saint-Saëns's 1886 *Le carnaval des animaux*, Sergei Prokofiev's 1938 *Peter and the Wolf*, and Benjamin Britten's 1946 *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* are representative of the genre of children's music. Prokofiev was commissioned by Natalya Sats and the Central Children's Theatre in Moscow to write a new musical symphony for children, designed specifically to entice young listeners to become lifetime audience members of classical orchestral music.²²⁹ Saint-Saëns wrote his work as a performance project for his students at the École Niedermeyer,²³⁰ and Britten's *Guide* was commissioned for an educational documentary film called "Instruments of the Orchestra" with the purpose of introducing young listeners to the effect of the whole orchestra and the capabilities of its constituent instruments.²³¹

The Saint-Saëns, Prokofiev, and Britten works were all designed with an audience of children in mind. Spoken text plays a significant role in each of these works, serving to clarify programmatic intent and points of interest. While *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety*

²²⁹ Christopher Palmer, *Prokofiev's Music for Children*, Ronald Corp/ New London Orchestra, London, Helios, CDA66499, 1991, CD Liner Notes.

²³⁰ Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns: a critical biography* (London: Cygnus Arts, 1999), 149.

²³¹ Philip Brett, et al. "Britten, Benjamin." *Grove Music Online: Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg4>.

Pigglety Pop! are operas, and therefore dense with libretto text, the communicative function of the text is quite different than in music traditionally designed for a child audience, where the text is critical in bridging gaps of understanding between composer and audience.²³² Arguments that composers maintain moral superiority by refusing to “write down”²³³ to an audience of children ignore the fact that an audience of children will, at least in part, require an introduction to the tools required for processing musical information.

Though the consideration of children’s cultural products is a broad pursuit, certain hallmarks of content are evident in works designed for children, regardless of media or message. As noted by Shirley R. Steinberg, these underlying characteristics include simplicity, uniformity, and hyperbole.²³⁴ Subject matter notwithstanding, simplicity of content ensures maximum accessibility: the more familiar the content, the greater the audience is able to relate to it. Uniformity is important because familiarity and relatability are increased through repetition. Hyperbole is also a notable feature, as exaggerating a point is a means of stressing its importance. These features serve to enhance an audience’s apprehension of unfamiliar material. While the combination of all three characteristics may inform children’s content, each element in isolation has the potential to engage an audience uninitiated in the subject matter.

In an effort to more concretely identify the elements of children’s opera that determine its success with an audience of children I conducted e-mail interviews with composers and

²³² Richard Ginell, in “Press comments,” *Oliver Knussen Brochure*, <http://www.fabermusic.com/composers/oliver-knussen>, 13.

²³³ Anderson, “The Knussen-Sendak Fantasy Operas, *Higglety Pigglety Pop! & Where the Wild Things Are: A double bill of Fantasy Operas*, Oliver Knussen/ London Sinfonietta et al., London, A Deutsche Grammophon/BBC Radio 3 Co-Produktion, 469 556-2, 2001, CD, liner notes, 12.

²³⁴ Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe, eds., *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997). This is a concept expressed in William Swinton’s *Studies in English Literature* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1897).

producers of operas written specifically for an audience of children. Composers Isaiah Bell, Dean Burry, John Greer, and Ramona Luengen have written children's operas at different points in their careers and represent different generations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers. Diane Garton Edie, Artistic Director of Opera for the Young; Kim Mattice Wanat, Artistic and Managing Director of Opera Nuova; Ann Cooper Gay, Executive Artistic Director and Conductor of the Canadian Children's Opera Company; Katherine Semcessen, Education Manager for the Canadian Opera Company; Colleen Maybin, Education and Community Engagement Manager for Vancouver Opera, and Melissa Tsang, Education Associate for Vancouver Opera were interviewed for their perspectives on programming and reception of operas for children. A seemingly obvious voice is absent from the list of interviewees, that of the child audience for whom these works are designed. However, it is the perspective of the purveyors of children's opera that will be of principal interest in this discussion.

The composers interviewed responded to questions of style with remarkable consistency. Composers discussed their desire to write for an "inner child," either producing music they feel they would have enjoyed as children or seeking inspiration from music that resonated with them when they were young.²³⁵ Rather than altering their typical compositional language to appeal to children, they felt their musical vocabulary was inherently suitable for that audience.²³⁶ To achieve this suitable musical language Dean Burry has emphasized a compositional credo of "clarity,"²³⁷ stating "for me, everything is about the story in opera. The

²³⁵ Isaiah Bell, e-mail message to author, November 26, 2012: "I felt I was writing for – to – the child in me, or to myself as a child."

²³⁶ John Greer, e-mail message to author, December 1, 2012; Ramona Luengen, e-mail message to author, December 3, 2012; Dean Burry, e-mail message to author, December 13, 2012.

²³⁷ Dean Burry, e-mail message to author, December 13, 2012.

music, the design and the staging all serve the story equally.”²³⁸ Isaiah Bell has developed a consistent bi-scalar system of all major versus all minor intervals used for narrative effect, John Greer has striven particularly for intelligibility of text, and Ramona Luengen has included popularly recognizable melodies and repeated musical themes. It bears mentioning that the operas discussed are all scored for voice and piano, so issues of orchestral density, instrumental voicing, and balance between voices and orchestral forces were minimal, at best.

John Greer and Dean Burry have both composed for the Canadian Children’s Opera Company, and Burry has composed for the Canadian Opera Company as well.²³⁹ Isaiah Bell’s triptych of children’s operas was commissioned by Opera Nuova,²⁴⁰ and Ramona Luengen’s children’s opera was commissioned by Vancouver Opera.²⁴¹ Development and production of all operas discussed have taken place under the administrators interviewed, with the exception of Diane Garton Edie,²⁴² who is unaffiliated with these four composers. Administrators were asked to evaluate the success of the children’s operas presented from the perspectives of audience engagement/response, feedback and subsequent bookings from paying patrons, and their personal impressions of the works. Impressions of reception were not always consistent between composers and administrators.

Dean Burry’s *The Brothers Grimm* draws on three Grimm stories, “Rapunzel,” “Rumplestiltskin,” and “Red Riding Hood,” interspersing the development of the stories with interactions between the two brothers. Since its 2001 premiere it has become the most

²³⁸ Opera Canada, “GrimmFest”, p. 14

²³⁹ Greer, *The Snow Queen* (1993), *The Star-Child* (2000); Burry, *The Brothers Grimm* (1999) and *Isis and the Seven Scorpions* (2006) for the COC, *The Hobbit* (2004) and *The Secret World of OG* (2010) for the CCOC.

²⁴⁰ *The Lives of Lesser Things* (2010), *Mr. Moreover’s Magic* (2011), *The Sorceress and the Camel* (uncompleted).

²⁴¹ *Naomi’s Road*, 2003.

²⁴² Kim Mattice Wanat, Ann Cooper Gay, Katherine Semcessen, Collen Maybin, and Melissa Tsang.

performed children's opera on record.²⁴³ Receiving its 500th performance on 7 December 2012, it has been staged in numerous productions by the Ensemble Program of the Canadian Opera Company for which it was commissioned, by Opera Lyra Ottawa, Manitoba Opera, Saskatoon Opera, Calgary Opera, Opera Nuova, Nashville Opera, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and made its European debut in Cardiff, Wales. At the time of the interview, plans were being made for a production in Brazil. The opera was recorded by the Canadian Opera Company and has been orchestrated for three different ensembles. In addition to being highly commercially successful, the impressions of both Burry and COC administrator Katherine Semcessen concerning the opera's success with children are, unsurprisingly, extremely positive. Both credit humour in the libretto, the familiar Grimm stories, and Burry's "text first" style for the opera's popularity. The singers regularly transition from recitative-like singing to spoken text, allowing for maximum intelligibility; more lyrical, arioso-style vocal lines often repeat text. Burry's opera engages all three children's cultural themes of simplicity, uniformity, and hyperbole. The music is texturally simple, for voice and piano. There is uniformity of theme in the familiar plot and characters, and hyperbole is a regular element of the plot and libretto.

In 2009 Opera Nuova commissioned Isaiah Bell to compose a triptych of children's operas for their school tour. *The Lives of Lesser Things*, *Mr. Moreover's Magic*, and *The Sorceress and the Camel* explored

three different facets of the theme of responsibility. *TLOLT* was about responsibility to the environment, *MMM* was focused on responsibility to oneself (i.e. hard work to achieve potential, not giving up on dreams when things are hard), and *The Sorceress and the Camel...* was to be about our responsibility to others in the world.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Lydia Perović, "GrimmFest", *Opera Canada*, Winter 2012, 14.

²⁴⁴ Bell, e-mail to author, November 27, 2012.

According to accounts from Bell, Artistic and Managing Director for Opera Nuova Kim Mattice Wanat, and cast member Christopher Mayell, *The Lives of Lesser Things*, a high-energy opera about the life cycle of insects and their environment was well-received by audiences of children. Simplicity of content is emphasized in plot, setting, and intelligibility of text. Uniformity is found in musical thematic material and repeated text, and hyperbole takes the form of bright colours, “over-the-top characters,”²⁴⁵ and outsized jokes about elimination (one of the Lesser Things is a dung beetle).

The second installment of Bell’s triptych was so unsuccessful with audiences that the third opera was cancelled while still in preparatory stages. Bell says,

MMM received a very lukewarm response from the company, and the kids seemed frequently bored [...] I had taken care in writing the text for MMM to allow for more traditionally operatic sections– duets, soliloquies, and “songs”– that is, songs that are songs to the characters and not just spoken dialogue or thoughts put into music.²⁴⁶

According to Bell,

I think the explanation for its failure is simple: TLOLT was about events and MMM was about ideas... Children, who are still minute-by-minute discovering what life is all about, generally respond to doing rather than talking. A child audience is incredibly unforgiving. As a performer it is immediately clear when a child audience has lost interest- and it usually boils down to this: is something happening, or are we discussing something that just happened or is about to happen?²⁴⁷

Though Bell’s writing presents stylistic uniformity in terms of adherence to traditional operatic forms, his child audience was largely unfamiliar with operatic convention, negating potential formal familiarity. Simplicity was lacking in terms of direct message: philosophizing took the place of action. Moreover, a mad scientist, is an exaggerated character who encourages

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Bell, e-mail to author, November 26, 2012.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

main character Doris in her dream of building a flying machine. By Bell's account the musical language of his second opera was more diatonic than that of *The Lives of Lesser Things*, but the general lack of simplicity and uniformity in the former piece outweighed the impacts of musical familiarity and dramatic hyperbole.

The concept of writing to an inner child is a recognized motivation of creators of children's culture. As explained by an inspiration of Sendak's, Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman,

My films are my interior studios, and these studios were shaped when I was a child. All of us collect fortunes when we are children- a fortune of colours, of lights and darkness, of movements, of tensions. Some of us have the fantastic chance to go back to this fortune when we grow up.²⁴⁸

In a similar fashion, examining the ways Sendak and Knussen discuss childhood will help situate *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* within the greater context of children's culture. Both Sendak and Knussen have discussed writing for an inner child in their operas, though the two have very different impressions of who that child is. Sendak's impression is that

I don't really believe that the kid I was has grown up into me. He still exists somewhere, in the most graphic, plastic, physical way for me. I have a tremendous concern for, and interest in, him. I try to communicate with him all the time. One of my worst fears is losing contact. The pleasures I get as an adult are heightened by the fact that I experience them as a child at the same time... I am trying to draw the way children feel- or rather, the way I imagine they feel. It's the way I *know* I felt as a child. And all I have to go on is what I know- not only about my childhood then, but about the child I was as he exists now.²⁴⁹

Though both men experienced disrupted childhoods, the circumstances and outcomes for each are very different. Sendak's childhood was disrupted greatly by illness, resulting in coddling from parents, grandparents, and siblings. He was made aware of his sensitivities by others and

²⁴⁸ Quoted in Lanes (1985), 27, original source not cited.

²⁴⁹ Lanes (1985), 27.

protected from familial expectations of maturity and self-sufficiency until after he was an established, working adult. Disruption to Knussen's childhood took the form of expectations of personal maturity beyond his years to accompany his musical maturity. The precocious composer was exposed to intense public scrutiny before the age of sixteen, a public exploitation of his personal and professional insecurities resulting in an over-cautious, self-critical approach to creativity.

Selma G. Lanes and director Netia Jones, staunch admirers of Sendak and Knussen, respectively, have written about the artists and their works. Lanes has said of Sendak that "all refinements in his illustrations move toward simplification,"²⁵⁰ noting Sendak's habit of painstaking artistic revision to reduce published content to the most economical, emotionally-direct expression possible. On the relation of Knussen's work to child audiences Jones has written that "Oliver's music is startlingly original."²⁵¹ While simplicity in and of itself does not qualify a work's suitability for children, and non-traditional register doesn't serve to disqualify a work's child-friendliness, the implication is that the artists communicate to different audiences, and believe different approaches to communication to be effective in reaching their audiences.

Though questioning of the child-appropriateness of Sendak's work is now culturally gauche, this was not always the case. Sendak and his proponents were called on repeatedly to justify his willingness to expose children to "frightening," "shocking," and "mature" themes:

Clearly the brothers Grimm and Mr. H. C. Andersen never bothered their heads about providing so-called healthy or suitable literature for children. How fortunate for us they were only interested in telling a good story! And they are stories charged with originality and a tremendous understanding of the fascinating tangle of life – written with style and

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 92.

²⁵¹ Netia Jones, "How Maurice Sendak helped me stage his operas," *The Guardian*, May 28, 2012.

taste, offering a real world distilled into fantasy, which upsets the delicate insides of children less than it does the adults.

Ursula Nordstrom, children's book editor at Harper and Row, said it best:

It is always the adults we have to contend with— most children under the age of ten will react creatively to the best work of a truly creative person. But too often adults sift their reactions to creative picture books through their own adult experiences. And as an editor who stands between the creative artist and the creative child I am constantly terrified that I will react as a dull adult. But at least I must try to remember it every minute!²⁵²

In that same vein, Knussen has been required to explain his presentation of “challenging” material to young audiences:

I must add a little story about my own experience with *Wild Things*, which is— I think— a very accessible piece anyway, partly due to the subject matter and partly to the wide stylistic net thrown out by the music. When Glyndebourne did it at the National Theatre, the only people who— in my earshot, anyway—complained about the difficulty of the music were some music teachers!²⁵³

The choice to label their works fantasy operas and not children's operas was a conscious one for both men, but with different motivations. Knussen's motivation— a wish to end an operatic tradition of insisting works on children's themes, but not designed for children, are still “children's operas”— is a striking counterpoint to Sendak's reverence for the traditional dominance of fantasy in child life:

Fantasy is all-pervasive in a child's life. I believe there's no part of our lives- our adult as well as child lives- when we're not fantasizing, but we prefer to relegate fantasy to children, as though it were some tomfoolery only fit for the immature minds of the young. Children do live in fantasy and reality, in a way we no longer remember. They have a cool sense of the logic of illogic, and they shift very easily from one sphere to the other. Fantasy is the core of all writing for children, as I think it is for the writing of any book, for any creative act, perhaps for the act of living. But these fantasies have to be given physical form, so you build a house around them, and the house is what you call a

²⁵² Sendak, “Balsa Wood and Fairy Tales,” *Caldecott & Co.*, 159.

²⁵³ Griffiths (1985), 60.

story, and the painting of the house is the bookmaking. But essentially it's a dream, or a fantasy.²⁵⁴

To Knussen, the implications of “fantasy music” are culturally and personally historical, representing cultural artifact more than present day construct:

I think what I did was subconsciously to invent a tradition that this piece [*Where the Wild Things Are*] belonged to: not only the obvious ancestors, like *Hansel and Gretel* and *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, but also things as far back as Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*, the magic music in Mahler's First Symphony- one particular passage there had a strong harmonic influence- early Stravinsky; all pieces which I had been fanatical about as a kid.²⁵⁵

Sendak's child who never grew up is a striking foil to Knussen's truncated childhood. By their own estimations, Sendak nurtured his pre-adult self, and Knussen progressed past the inconvenience of his childhood and its weaknesses as quickly as possible. These distinctions greatly shape the creative output of both men, which is most obviously out-of-step when their approaches to creating for an audience of children is examined.

2.2. *Where the Wild Things Are* as Opera

Simplicity, uniformity, and hyperbole are clear within Sendak's concept, design and libretto for *Where the Wild Things Are*. The concept– that a little boy misbehaves, is punished, daydreams himself away until his anger subsides, and closes the chapter happily– is a simple one. Hyperbole is present in the degree to which Max's vivid daydream takes over, and uniformity is found within repeated text, Max mirroring his mother's disciplinary action when settling the Wild Things, and the visual continuity between the picture book and operatic design. Knussen's approach to the opera seems less accessible from the outset. Though the

²⁵⁴ Sendak, “A Conversation with Virginia Haviland,” *Caldecott & Co.*, 174.

²⁵⁵ Kenyon, 1987.

small-scale building blocks of Knussen's composition seem simple in origin, their transformation from source material to musical content is a complex operation yielding texturally dense layers of melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, and tonality. While the operation of each layer may be derived from "simple" principles, these become apparent only with careful study of the score and risk eluding aural detection, even by the trained ear.

Further distinction between the picture book and the operatic versions of the story is the treatment of the Wild Things as individuals, instead of as a troupe. In a 2009 interview with Ramin Setoodeh for *Newsweek* Sendak explained that the Wild Things "finally received monikers when Wild Things was made into an opera. We had to have names to tell [the actors] when they were screwing up. They had Jewish names: Moishe, Schmuel. But the names were dropped after the opera. They never had names until they became movie stars."²⁵⁶ For simplicity's sake they have since received titles. Tzippy, Beard, Goat, Horns, Rooster, and Bull are vocal throughout scenes four, five, six, and eight, in contrast to the six nameless picture-book Wild Things, with no text other than their entreaty for Max to stay.

An example of Knussen's complex treatment of material, Max's battle cry of "Vildachaiahmimahmeeooh!" is heard throughout the opera in multiple iterations in terms of transposition, rhythm, meter, tempo, and dynamic marking. Though one of the strongest examples of compositional uniformity within the opera, each alteration distances subsequent presentations from the original.

²⁵⁶ Ramin Setoodeh, "Exclusive: A Talk With the 'Wild Things' Creators," *newsweek.com*, October 8 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/exclusive-talk-wild-things-creators-91881>.

Ex. 1 a. Max's battle cry, scene I, m. 53-54²⁵⁷

Vil - da- chai _____ ah - mi - mah - mee - ooh! _____

Ex. 1 b. Scene III, m. 98-101

Vil - da- chai _____ ah - mi-mah - mee - oh, _____ ah - mee mah - mee - ooh!

Ex. 1 c. Scene IV, m. 134-138

Vil - da- chai _____ ah - mi-mah- mee - oh! _____

An even more disparate presentation of potentially familiar material comes at the end of the opera when Max is beckoned back home by the sound of his mother's humming and the smell of his dinner waiting for him. In scene VIII he repeats the text, "I smell good things to eat!" four times within 15 measures. The pitches, intervallic structure, and melodic contour are different for each of the four statements, making the music that much less familiar-sounding.

²⁵⁷ Musical examples from *Where the Wild Things Are* are transcribed from Faber Music Ltd. vocal score, published in 2010.

Ex. 2 a. Scene VIII, m. 69-70

Max

far a-way I smell good things to eat!

light

Mama

p dolciss

m

Ex. 2 b. Scene VIII, m. 73

Max

p to himself

I smell good things to eat!

Mama

m

Ex. 2 c. Scene VIII, m. 78

Max

mp

I smell good things to eat!

Mama

m

Ex. 2 d. Scene VIII, m. 83

Max

p

f

I smell good things to eat!

Mama

mf

mp

m

The transformation of Max's room into forest, sea, and foreign land is set to some of the most tangibly programmatic music of the opera. Knussen's typically rich, atmospheric soundscape²⁵⁸ captures the initial excitement of the daydream, the relative calm of the sea voyage, the drama of Max's encounter with the sea monster, and his arrival in the land of the Wild Things.

Critics and programmers have issued advisories regarding the child-appropriateness of the music, explaining that "these operas are in no sense 'music for children,'" ²⁵⁹ with the Los Angeles Philharmonic stating in advertisements for its 2012 Sendak-Knussen double bill that "this two-hour program is not a 'kids' concert,' it may be appropriate for some children based on parental discretion. All patrons, regardless of age, must sit quietly through the performance. No one under 6 will be admitted."²⁶⁰ Anderson clarifies that the operas "impose real demands on the listener. It [*Wild Things*] requires many hearings simply to apprehend the music

²⁵⁸ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," 3.

²⁵⁹ Anderson (2007), 2.

²⁶⁰ "Dudamel Conducts Where the Wild Things Are," October 10, 2012, <http://www.laphil.com/tickets/where-wild-things-are/2012-10-11>.

properly, let alone to perceive all the textural and harmonic subtleties and sleights of hand,"²⁶¹ and the music for the Wild Rumpus has been called "defiantly adult in its construction, its sophistication, and expressive violence."²⁶²

One of the most striking indications of the general complexity and unfamiliarity of the musical language in Knussen's "children's opera for adults"²⁶³ comes when the Wild Things beg Max to stay with them. Their homophonic pseudo-barbershop quintet harmonies sound startling in their familiarity:

²⁶¹ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," 5.

²⁶² Service, Tom Service On Classical, *theguardian.com*, December 3, 2009.

²⁶³ John Rockwell, "City Opera: Mozart and Knussen Duo," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1987.

Ex. 3 Pseudo-barbershop quintet, scene VIII, m. 16-18

Recitative $\text{♩} = c.96$ **calando** **a tempo** **pochiss. meno mosso**

senza vibrato
angelic ***p***

Tzip
Oh please don't go____ we'll eat you up we love you so!_

Brd
Oh please don't go____ we'll eat you up we love you so!_

Hrns
Oh please don't go____ we'll eat you up we love you so!_

Rstr
Oh please don't go____ we'll eat you up we love you so!_

Bull
Oh please don't go we'll eat you up we love you so!_

The central action of the story, the Wild Rumpus that follows Max's coronation, is completely untexted, expressed through a six-page illustration spread, illustrated to the edges of the pages. The operatic Wild Rumpus, by contrast, is a densely-orchestrated, highly percussive episode. Humorous musical references to Mussorgsky and Bernstein pervade the

metrically- and tonally-complex score, appealing to an audience familiar with *Boris Godunov* and *West Side Story*, references likely beyond the musical backgrounds of most school-aged children. As noted by reviewer Christian Herzog, “Knussen’s score owes a large musical debt to Debussy and Ravel, and much of the musical material is generated from the famous alternating dominant sevenths from the Coronation scene in *Boris Godunov*.”²⁶⁴ Echoing a musical acknowledgement of *West Side Story*²⁶⁵, director Frank Corsaro evoked Jerome Robbins’ original choreography of “Dance at the Gym” and “Rumble” from the musical in the finished Glyndebourne production, a further referential element likely unassimilated by a child audience.

Ex. 4 a. *Boris Godunov*, Prologue, scene II, m. 1-2



²⁶⁴ Herzog, May 10, 2012.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Ex. 4 b. Where the Wild Things Are, scene V, m. 79-80

$\text{♩} = \text{c.64}$ "Andante alla marcia"

f *p* *f* *p*

Bull

Orch

f *poco f*

Ex. 5 a. Boris Godunov, Prologue, scene II, m. 7-8

martellato

sf

Orch

sf *sf* *sf*

8^{va}

Ex. 5 b. Where the Wild Things Are, scene V, m. 82-83

The musical score is for measures 82-83 of 'Where the Wild Things Are, scene V'. It features six staves: Tzipie, Beard, Horns, Rooster, Bull, and Orch.

- Tzipie:** Treble clef. Measure 82 has a whole rest. Measure 83 has a half note G#4 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A4 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *p* (piano).
- Beard:** Treble clef. Measure 82 has a half note G#4 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A4 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *molto f* (very loud).
- Horns:** Bass clef. Measure 82 has a half note G#2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *mf* (moderato-forte).
- Rooster:** Bass clef. Measure 82 has a half note G#2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *mf* (moderato-forte).
- Bull:** Bass clef. Measure 82 has a whole rest. Measure 83 has a whole rest.
- Orch:** Treble and Bass clefs. Measure 82 has a half note G#2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *poco f* (moderato-forte). Measure 83 has a half note G#2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin, followed by a half note A2 with a slur and a crescendo hairpin. The dynamic is *mf* (moderato-forte).

Additional markings include 'bell-like' above the Beard staff, 'like little bells' above the Tzipie staff, and 'martellato' above the Orch staff. The score also includes various musical notations such as slurs, crescendo hairpins, and dynamic markings.

Deviations from the original story undermine familiarity of plot as a point of uniformity.

As dominant a presence as the suggestion of Max's mother is, she never appears and has just two words of text assigned to her in the picture book. In the opera, she features prominently in

scene two, and the sound of her humming throughout scene eight accompanies Max's longing to return home (see examples 2a, b, c, and d).

In addition to issues of registration interfering with clarity of text delivery, the secondary position of the text is further confirmed by the role of off-stage singing. The Wild Things are all voiced at times, or for the entirety of their roles, by off-stage singers via microphone (note that this is true as well for the characters of The Potted Plant, Baby's Mother, The Lion, and Mother Goose in *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*). Indications in the score for virtually imperceptible vocal amplification levels against a swelling, dense orchestral texture²⁶⁶ often render Sendak's text unintelligible, if not inaudible.²⁶⁷

Soprano Claire Booth, a Knussen advocate and Max in Netia Jones' 2012 Aldeburgh/Los Angeles Philharmonic co-production of *Where the Wild Things Are* has called Knussen "a musician's musician, and a composer's composer"²⁶⁸ Here, he lives up to reputation, writing an achingly intricate, deliberate score:

Each scene comprises between one and four small musical units... and the whole can be seen as a large mosaic of some twenty-six of these interdependent microforms, resulting in an intricate network of cross-references, developments, and internal symmetries.²⁶⁹

The importance placed on visual appreciation of notation, extreme rhythmic and often harmonic complexity, the obscuring of narrative text by extremely high or low tessiturae and voice casting, and the opposing dynamic indications for singers and orchestra indicate a desired

²⁶⁶ Knussen: "Wild Things is big and opulent – the orchestra's playing hell for leather most of the time – and there's very little singing," in Jaffé (1999).

²⁶⁷ The Wild Things make their vocal entrance in scene IV at a *pianissimo* dynamic over full orchestra; In *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, scene I the Potted Plant sings over full orchestra for ten measures before the score indicates for the singer's voice to reach "Amplification Normal."

²⁶⁸ Claire Booth, "Taking Maurice Sendak's fantasies to the opera" *The Guardian*, October 27, 2012.

²⁶⁹ Lanes (1985), 3.

audience of musically-informed, mature listeners. Knussen's fantasy operas "occupy uncertain domain between authentic innocence and implicitly adult knowingness,"²⁷⁰ not excluding children from appreciating the works, but providing significant obstacles to "accessibility."

Knussen described his detailed compositional process for the opera in conversation with Paul Griffiths:

O.K.: In the first interlude of *Where the Wild Things Are* there's a long horn melody over mixed piano and harp arpeggios on each beat. The arpeggiated chords start at two notes and build to twelve, while the actual harmony shifts gradually. Now the way those chords are distributed and arpeggiated each time was more than a week's work. It may seem nonsensical to fuss that way, particularly as this is only one of three or four layers operating in that section, but the point to me is that you can focus your ear, if you so choose, on that accompaniment figure and find that those arpeggiations are doing something constructive.

P.G.: Is this a feeling of responsibility to your material in itself, or of responsibility to the listener?

O.K.: In an ideal world, those would be one and the same, of course!²⁷¹

In that same conversation Knussen justifies elements of his writing potentially challenging to listeners within the context of children's opera: "From the *audience's* point of view the musical theatre is a good place to open the ears to unfamiliar symbols, because the 'story' and the theatrical spectacle can function as access points."²⁷² This suggests that Knussen sees opera in general as an access point for children's introduction to new and unaccustomed musical vocabulary.

²⁷⁰ Anderson, "The music of Oliver Knussen," 4.

²⁷¹ Griffiths (1985), 58.

²⁷² Ibid, 59.

2.3. *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* as Opera

The hallmarks of children’s cultural products mentioned before— uniformity, simplicity, and hyperbole— are again markers of Sendak’s and Knussen’s different intended audiences of this work. From picture book to opera, Sendak’s plot, libretto, and design are consistent, with the exception of the altered order of the epilogue and play. The outsized ramifications of tasks not completed to satisfaction are impressively hyperbolic, and the terms of Jennie’s ultimate contentment are simple and uncomplicated. Knussen’s approach to this opera is, in some ways, more child-friendly than his composition for *Where the Wild Things Are*. Elements of uniformity and hyperbole have more prominence in this score, identified by reviewer Christian Herzog:

The music frequently underscored characters and their actions, sometimes via leitmotifs. There was “horse-and-buggy” music replete with sleigh bells. When Jenny [sic] the canine protagonist, fainted (or pretended to), the music appropriately swooned in a mad, downward rush. When a doorbell was rung on stage, a horrendous clanging set the mood for Jenny’s [sic] encounter with the tantrum-prone Baby.

The music heard at the onset of the nursery scene was a sweet invocation of Mozart; when the devilish Baby appeared, one or two other innocent-sounding tunes were superimposed to form perverse dissonances.²⁷³

Knussen’s score manages to create a seemingly spontaneous soundscape— atmospheric and evocative of the uncertainties Jennie faces along her journey. It is all the more remarkable, then, that the score, pitch by pitch, interval by interval, is so precisely constructed. Though much of this purpose may not be aurally obvious upon first listening, Knussen has crafted a score visually telling of his intentions. In his tradition of embedding musical spelling jokes and dedications in his compositions, Knussen uses this device to encourage Jennie to pack her “bag all black with gold buckles” and set out on her adventure with regular use of the pitch classes

²⁷³ Herzog, May 10, 2012.

[B, A, G] when she is on the move. Enharmonic respellings throughout the opera serve the purpose of maintaining the alphabet of the word expressed.

Musically, this opera bears significant resemblance to *Where the Wild Things Are*, but represents a greater stage of maturity in Knussen's compositional style. Julian Anderson identifies the composer's broader use of quoted material and precision of characterizing intervallic content as evidence of this maturity.²⁷⁴ The *dramatis personae* of *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* are musically characterized by typifying intervals and intervallic/melodic patterns, and emotional content is often accompanied or foreshadowed by leitmotif. Particularly notable are Rhoda's typifying fourths, the pig's major thirds, the cat's minor thirds, and the lion's minor sevenths. Mother Goose's music combines all of these.

Jennie's music is notable for her Longing Motive, an intervallic pattern of M3, m3, ⁰5, and P5. She sings this pattern, or a modification of it when expressing her longing to see, do, and have more.

Ex. 6 a. Scene I, rehearsal numbers 1 and 2:

Calmo ♩ = 75
p espr. ma tranquillo

Jennie

Why am I long - ing to be a - way some-where When ev' - ry-thing's here?_____

5

più p, dolce

Why am I long - ing And lone-ly for some-one When some-one is here?

²⁷⁴ Anderson, "The Later Music of Oliver Knussen," 394.

Ex. 6 b. Scene III- Cat, m. 97-98:



In scene II with the pig, Jennie sings this music when expressing her desire to be leading lady.

With the milkman, the score indicates that Jennie is “positively aching for the contents of the wagon” when the motive is heard in the orchestra. The figure is heard again in the strings during “Interlude 1: The Journey to the Big White House.”

Ex. 6 c. Interlude 1, m. 9:



When Baby destroys her possessions, Jennie sings her longing motive as she itemizes her losses (6 d) and again when she resigns herself to spending a cold night under the ash tree (6 e).

Ex. 6 d. Scene V- Baby, m. 167-170:

Jennie

Orch

p

The pillows are ripped and my

p

Ex. 6 e. Scene VII- The Ash Tree, m. 5:

Jennie

No pillows to sleep on No soft place to fall

p

pp

Orchestrally, this music appears throughout, when Jennie's longing is greatest. When the cat announces that the troupe has come to welcome their new leading lady, the music is heard again (6 f), and makes a final significant appearance in the orchestral fanfare before the overture to the opera within the opera (6 g).

Ex. 6 f. Scene VIII- Recognition, m. 16:

Musical score for Cat and Orch in Scene VIII- Recognition, m. 16. The Cat part is in 3/4 time, marked *mf cool*. The lyrics are: "And we've come to wel - come our new lea - ding la - dy." The Orch part is in 3/4 time, marked *f*. The Cat part features a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) and a triplet of eighth notes (C5, B4, A4). The Orch part features a triplet of eighth notes (G3, A3, B3) and a triplet of eighth notes (C4, B3, A3).

Ex. 6 g. Scene IX, Fanfare I, m. 3-4:

Musical score for Orch in Scene IX, Fanfare I, m. 3-4. The Orch part is in 6/8 time, marked *f*. The score shows two measures of music. The first measure contains a descending eighth-note scale (G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3) and a descending eighth-note scale (F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F2). The second measure contains a descending eighth-note scale (G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3) and a descending eighth-note scale (F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F2).

Knussen recognizes Sendak's theme of change and decline in this story with a general descending figure, as identified by Anderson.²⁷⁵ Text, such as in the nursery rhyme finale, is often transposed lower with repetition, and Jennie's various presentations of the Longing Motive, if not transposed to lower pitches, are often enharmonically respelled to indicate this motion. Few musical phrases throughout the opera end with ascending intervals. The impact of that distinction is saved for moments of dramatic tension, including Jennie's guessing of Baby's name and Mother Goose's notification to the players to report to the Castle Yonder.

²⁷⁵ Anderson, "The Knussen-Sendak Fantasy Operas," 13.

As in *Where the Wild Things Are*, few truly harmonically familiar moments are heard throughout the opera. They stand out when they do appear, and are used for dramatic effect. Quoting the music of undermining the Count's authority in the Act II finale of *The Marriage of Figaro*, the innocuous sounding melody of the opening of scene V— the introduction of Baby— indicates that the standard balance of power between caregiver and child is in jeopardy.

Ex. 7 a. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Act II Finale, m. 400-402:

Il Conte



Fi - ga - ro que - sto fo - glio chi ver - gò?

Ex. 7 b. *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Act II Finale, m. 443-445:

Figaro



men - te e al - l'u - san - za te - a - tra - le u - n'a -

Ex. 7 c. *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* Scene V, m. 1-4, “Baby”:

The image shows a musical score for the song "Baby" from the musical *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*. The score is for piano and voice. The piano part is in the upper system, and the voice part is in the lower system. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The piano part begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a tempo marking of "sweetly but audibly". The piano part features a series of chords in the right hand and a melodic line in the left hand. The voice part begins with a five-measure rest, indicated by a "5" above the staff. The voice part then enters with a melodic line. The score is for measures 1-4 of the song.

The striking dominant seventh harmony the World Mother Goose Theatre troupe invokes in scene VIII, announcing Jennie as their new leading lady, is jarringly consonant, the same way the Wild Things' entreaty to Max is in the earlier opera.

Ex. 8. Scene VIII- Recognition, m. 18-19:

The musical score for measures 18-19 of Scene VIII- Recognition features four staves. The vocal parts (Rhoda, Cat, and Pig) all sing the word "You!" in a crescendo from *sfz* to *f*. The orchestral part (Orch) features a *p dolciss.* melody in the right hand and a *sfz* to *poco f* accompaniment in the left hand.

Finally, Knussen's "wonderfully-displaced classical-style mini-overture"²⁷⁶ to the opera within the opera sets the scene for a play truly bizarre in content and construction. The substance of the play is the text of Samuel Goodrich's 1846 nursery rhyme parody, written to ridicule the content of nineteenth-century children's poems:²⁷⁷

Higglety, pigglety, pop!
 The dog has ate the mop
 The pig's in a hurry,
 The cat's in a flurry--
 Higglety, pigglety--pop.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ Anderson, "The Knussen-Sendak Fantasy Operas," 12.

²⁷⁷ Nicolas Tucker, *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 32.

²⁷⁸ Samuel Goodrich, "Nursery Rhymes: a dialogue," *Robert Merry's Museum*, August 1846, 54.

This text is declaimed and acted out by the players of the World Mother Goose Theatre, showing Jennie eating and vomiting up the above-mentioned mop while being attended to by a frantic Rhoda and a bustling Dr. Schwein. The cat's flurry is attributed to the appearance of the lion whose menace is thwarted by Rhoda hitting him on the head with the mop and Jennie biting his behind. The text is declaimed in seven variations over eighty-four measures, first in a modified D major tonality,²⁷⁹ then repeated in its entirety down a tone. The text is presented again in a seventeen-measure coda marked *Allegretto spettrale* at its original pitches, trailing off mid-sentence the second time through the rhyme.

Overt quotation is rare in the majority of Knussen's works, which makes his treatment of referential material here all the more remarkable. Use of surface level quotation is a device deliberately employed to make his writing more accessible.²⁸⁰ This motivation is telling, as the audience to whom the majority of these references are identifiable is likely not of Sendak's target child age. Though Knussen himself was exceptionally musically literate before the age of ten, he is certainly in the minority. Critic Rupert Christiansen writes,

For us grown – ups, it's a delight, with gorgeously sensual and richly textured music embodying a plot that illustrates the need that infants have for imaginative freedom as well as domestic security. Yet for a child, it is surely just too sophisticated. It offers nothing you can sing along with or tap your feet to... I just don't think the seven-year-olds in the audience really got it.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Anderson, "The Knussen-Sendak Fantasy Operas," 13.

²⁸⁰ Jaffé, 4.

²⁸¹ Rupert Christiansen, "Where the Wild Things Are/Higglety Pigglety Pop!, Aldeburgh Festival," *The Telegraph*, June 11, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/9324527/Where-the-Wild-Things-AreHigglety-Pigglety-Pop-Aldeburgh-Festival-review.html>.

The finale's "classical" overture, framing references to great operas past, is another indication of the depth of musical background Knussen's intended audience possesses. As explained by Mark Berry,

In the land of the Mother Goose World Theatre [sic], all the world's a stage— a tribute, surely as much to Stravinsky and his *Rake's Progress* tribute to Mozart, the latter parodied in Knussen's final scene, as to Ravel. (both *Higglety* and *Don Giovanni* end "outside" their drama, in bright if tarnished D major).²⁸²

Ex. 9. Mock Classical overture for the opera within the opera, Scene IX, m. 11-14:



²⁸² Mark Berry, "Oliver Knussen: Where the Wild Things Are and Higglety Pigglety Pop!" *Opera Today*, November 10, 2012, http://www.operatoday.com/content/2012/11/oliver_knussen_.php.

3. CONCLUSION: SENDAK, KNUSSSEN, AND AUDIENCE

When creating children's cultural products Sendak and Knussen operated from the same philosophical standpoint, recognizing depth of emotional knowledge as the province of childhood. They felt no need to censor the emotional realities they experienced as children and reacted against pressure to sanitize their visions. In Sendak's words

I don't think I'm stretching the point when I suggest that this "let's-make-the-world-a-happy-easy-frustrationless-place-for-kids" attitude is often propounded in children's literature today... I believe there exists a quiet but highly effective adult censorship of subjects that are supposedly too frightening, or morbid, or not optimistic enough, for boys and girls.²⁸³

Drawing on their own childhood experiences, Sendak and Knussen knew complex emotional responses to be very much an element of childhood, and included that recognition in their works. According to Knussen

The first musical idea to be jotted down was the gentle clip-clopping of the milk wagon, which makes a brief but unmistakable appearance in *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* After seeing a performance of *Higglety*, my mother gave me a miniature model of a milk wagon with a horse, and asked if I remembered that virtually every day before I was five years old, I used to run out of the house to meet the milkman and his horse as they came past. I was very touched, doubly so because the memory had almost completely vanished: the idea had spontaneously welled up from my subconscious, it seemed. This confirmed a feeling I'd had about *Higglety* since I began to work on it. If the music of *Where the Wild Things Are* could be said to embody a big "thank you" to the music I liked to listen to as a child, then *Higglety* is an evocation of the music I wanted to write at that age but didn't know how. There are only a few passing references to things actually remembered, but the whole is couched in the flavour of what I used to hear in my head. I was conscious, during the process of composition, that ideals of stylistic consistency were being instinctively swept aside, in a way that consciously disturbed me but that I felt compelled to follow. Perhaps, half-consciously, I tried to build a bridge between musical "innocence" (my earliest attempts to compose) and "experience" (the means learned since then) – a bridge which can only ever remain illusory, I'm afraid. Apart from the elegiac character which subtly shades Maurice's book, and which perhaps music

²⁸³ Sendak, "Balsa Wood and Fairy Tales," *Caldecott & Co.*, p. 158

brings to the surface a little more, there was something strangely sad for me in the composition of *Higglety* – as if one was turning to wave good-bye to those days, and that music, for one last time.²⁸⁴

Knussen's and Sendak's pursuit of these ideals took different forms, yielding different results.

Sendak's extended experience of childhood provided a framework for the consideration of childhood emotion through an adult lens. Knussen's rather adult experience of childhood caused him to process adult experiences and their emotional responses from a child's perspective. As a result, when the pair, "saw eye to eye on the fact that we wanted to write something which wasn't for kids to do but for kids to watch, and which put in all the things that we wanted to watch when we were kids,"²⁸⁵ their impressions of appropriate content revealed different intended audiences. As explained by Rupert Christiansen

Most of what describes itself as "opera for children" is not so much "for children" as "about children" – in other words, an attempt from an adult perspective to recapture and explore lost innocence. Ravel's *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* falls into this category, as does Oliver Knussen's adaptation of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.²⁸⁶

It is revealing to consider Sendak's and Knussen's comments regarding their creative goals for these operas. Regarding *Where the Wild Things Are*, Knussen said, "I did not set out to write an accessible piece [...] My intention, then, was not to dilute my own musical speech to write a 'children's opera'." Asked if the work had been written for children, he responded, "I certainly had always wanted to write something for children to *hear*, as I'm not particularly good at devising music for them to participate in (I have tried, on several occasions), and *Wild*

²⁸⁴ Oliver Knussen, <http://www.fabermusic.com/repertoire/higglety-pigglety-pop-1462#sthash.WMwHXT6n.dpuf>

²⁸⁵ Kenyon, 1987.

²⁸⁶ Christiansen, 2012.

Things is certainly the best present I could think of for them.”²⁸⁷ Sendak, on the other hand, wrote less for other children than for himself as a child:

I have an unusual gift. It’s not that I draw better or write particularly better than other people- I’ve never fooled myself about that. Rather, it’s that I remember things other people don’t recall: the sounds, feelings and images– the emotional quality– of particular moments of childhood.²⁸⁸

Herein lies the distinction between Sendak’s and Knussen’s intended audiences of these works: while both considered their writing from the perspectives of their own childhoods, Sendak represented an inner child who never grew up, while Knussen, “an unwilling adult” forced to mature far sooner than he was ready, never had a traditional childhood. In spite of their creative differences, the team presented and honoured their commitment to completing both works. Though not standard children’s musical fare, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* hold a fascinating place within twentieth-century operatic repertoire, appealing to a musically-informed audience of nostalgic adults, at least as much as to children or a traditionalist operatic audience.

²⁸⁷ Griffiths (1985), 60.

²⁸⁸ Gary Groth, “Introduction: The Maurice Sendak interview,” *The Comics Journal* 302, 2013, 32.

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