

Web resources for *Ubi Fera Sunt* • Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*

Translated into Latin by Richard A. LaFleur (a.k.a. Doctor Illa Flōra)

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Mauritiō Sendaciō, Magistrō Fābulārum et Pictūrārum

—For Maurice Sendak, Master of Stories and Pictures—

About the Translation

I was inspired to compose this Latin version of *Where the Wild Things Are*, first because of my profound affection for Maurice Sendak's enchanting tale of boyhood mischief and imagination, and because my mind, immersed for decades in the magical phrasings of Latin, "The Mother Tongue," has long been afflicted by an autonomous twitch to turn all things written or spoken in English into this marvelous antique language in order to see how lovingly the words might wed.

The Latinity of this translation is arguably "correct," in terms of word choice and grammar, and for the most part "classical," language that an educated Roman of the late Republic or early Empire would have readily understood. Now this is not to say that the style is what some purists might call strictly "Ciceronian," as I have now and then opted for a usage that, while attested, may not have been entirely first-century mainstream and for diction that one might in an instance or two term "Sendakian." The audience I envision for *Ubi Fera Sunt* will surely include, besides some children-at-heart classicists, a fair number of readers I'd call "semi-Latinists," folks who studied the language, loved it, and remember some, and who, likewise loving their Sendak and his whimsical *jeu d'esprit*, will appreciate word and syntax choices that make the correspondences between the translation and the English original as clear and as artfully playful as possible, without actually violating the rules of Latin. To facilitate intelligibility for this readership, I turn to an occasional non-Ciceronian usage (e.g., *sine* + gerund, freely employed by none other than the grammarian Varro himself), and in an instance or two the English idiom has required a bit of translational creativity.

An example of the latter is seen when Max "waved good bye" to the Wild Things, a gesture not attested in classical Latin literature and apparently not customary in ancient Rome (though in funerary art there are a few scenes in which mourners raise their arms in what might be interpreted as a farewell to the deceased). I have Max wave his hand (*manum iactāvit*) "having said his farewells," with recourse to Apuleius's *valefactō* (*Metamorphoses* 4.18; see the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* [OLD] s.v. *valefaciō*), an impersonal ablative absolute, rarely attested to be sure but obviously correct and clear to Apuleius's readers and reasonably intelligible (as *vale-* and *fac-* are such common stems) to ours as well.

One anonymous reader of the manuscript for this book helpfully raised the question of what speech verbs to use with the story's several snippets of dialogue, as in "Max said 'I'LL EAT YOU UP!'" While *inquit* ("says/said"), as that reader pointed out, was indeed very commonly employed in classical Latin with direct quotations (*ōrātiō rēcta*), in the end I decided on other options for three reasons: (a) *inquit* was regularly positioned within or following the quoted material, rather than before the quotation, something our "semi-Latinist" readers may find at least a tiny bit perplexing when they (you!) compare the English original to the Latin, as many doubtless will be doing; (b) past tense forms of *inquit* are rare, and though the present tense, with historical sense, routinely sufficed, it seemed to me that a common past tense verb like *dixit* might be just a bit clearer to our readers when Sendak himself uses the past and not a historical present; and, finally and importantly, (c) forms of *dicō* are in fact used with direct quotations by such major classical authors as Cicero, Horace, and the younger Seneca, as well as Ennius, Persius, and others (OLD s.v. *dicō*, 2.d).

In some instances I preferred one word to another because its English derivatives might make it more readily recognizable to readers who have "small Latin and less Greek." In other instances sound effects like alliteration, assonance, and prose rhythms—such an essential element of Sendak's artistry—were a consideration. The title *Ubi Fera Sunt* replicates the trochaic cadence of *Where the Wild Things Are*. I liked *sōlus* (rather than the more intense *dēsōlātus*) for "lonely," as both are disyllabic. In a wholly neutral way I asked my brilliant wife Alice, who is not a Latinist but has a keen musical ear, "What do you think about my possibly using *turba* for "rumpus"?—without hesitation she replied, "Love it—because the words sound alike with that roaring UR/RU sound!" The aural effects are ever present in my head when processing texts like this. Classical Latin literature was written always with the LISTENING audience in mind—indeed the Romans themselves virtually never read silently, even when alone. Likewise, Mr. Sendak's books—whether in his own startlingly sonorous English or in some simple admirer's translation to another tongue—absolutely demand to be read aloud; so, gentle reader: *turba fera incipiat*, "let the wild rumpus begin!"