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Maurice Sendak, trans. Richard LaFleur,  
*Ubi Fera Sunt.*

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Nothing better at the end of a long Latin lesson on, say, adjective agreement, than to settle everyone in a circle on the floor and to read a story. *Latine, certe*. Contemporary children's books translated into Latin offer a break from grammar and are still Latin. Most of the students know the books in English, so reading aloud provides a rare chance for students to comprehend without translating. Recently translated as *Ubi Fera Sunt* by Richard La Fleur, *Where the Wild Things Are* is an obvious choice for this genre.

Maurice Sendak's classic follows a hero's journey and stars a cute kid, but few adults liked it when the book came out in 1963. Bruno Bettelheim denounced Sendak because his book fed into a child's 'primal fear' of being sent to bed without food. Rebuttals pointed out that this is going a bit far in a world where starving children appear on the television. Parents and teachers worried that the book taught kids it's fine to talk back to Mom. But what better response to Mom calling her kid, "Wild Thing!" than the reply, "I'll eat you up"? Family humor, hardly a threat. Comments from reviewers ranged then from "a pointless and confusing story" to "the child will accept it wisely and without inhibition."

Proof of the book's value: children read it over and over. So why not read it with adolescent students whose Latin is elementary but whose imaginations are middle or high-school? With a clever translation, some useful, imaginative Latin might stick. Richard La Fleur, translator of *Ubi Fera Sunt*, imitates Sendak's English closely. This works beautifully in some places, such as the over-the-top anaphora and assonance at "terribiles fremitus fremebant et frendebant dentes terribiles et volvebant oculos terribiles terribilesque ungues monstrabant." Don't forget to draw out those Rs and generally ham it up so the students hear the adjectives agreeing.

More often, the Latin of *Ubi Fera Sunt* is not so easy to navigate. Richard La Fleur writes on the Bolchazy-Carducci website that he was concerned to make the Latin intelligible for all readers, even rusty ones. He consulted Roman texts and the OLD with questions of grammar. The translator says he consulted, "Cicero, Horace, and the younger Seneca, as well as Ennius, Persius, and others (OLD s.v. *dīcō*, 2.d)" before choosing *dixit* over *inquit*. I agree, based on a goal of simplicity in children's

texts. Dialogue tags should not draw attention to themselves; what the character says is more important.

Other choices made in *Ubi Fera Sunt* do not lie so comfortably in a children's book: translating every English word and keeping the English word order. For example, compare "so he was sent to bed without eating anything" with "missus est, igitur, ad lectum sine edendo quidquam." *Igitur* and the commas are distracting; *edendo quidquam* complex. I don't think it matters, as Richard La Fleur researched, that Varro occasionally used *sine* with a gerund (whether he would have used an object with that gerund is more doubtful). The gerund and object structure impedes the flow. The point, as Bettelheim noted, is that Max is hungry. *Esuriens* not only works grammatically but also would directly summons the reader's empathy with Max. And *esuriens* is showy, a useful word for students to pick up.

Richard La Fleur says the line, "He waved good bye," presented a challenge because the Romans didn't wave good bye. Max isn't a Roman! This is a story in Latin about a presumably North American mid-nineteenth century child. La Fleur renders the phrase *manum iactavit*, which is understandable by the reader who can see the picture where Max waves. Again, simplifying for cultural difference, what's wrong with *valefecit*?

The Latin often lacks rhythm. Matching the English syllable for syllable, Richard La Fleur composed the title, *Ubi Fera Sunt*, to imitate *Where the Wild Things Are*, but slavish following of English word-order makes for a rough Latin read. I stumbled on "dolo intuendi in omnes oculos luridos eorum sine semel convivendo." First, *dolo intuendi* strikes me as pressing something out of *dolus* and the genitive that isn't there. Second, the unnecessary *eorum* breaks the comparison of Max's unblinking stare away from the Wild Things' *oculos luridos*. In such places, word-for-word translation eliminates the rhythmic swing which more Latin's flexible word-order could exploit.

We today can't appraise a children's book in Latin by imagining whether Cicero or Horace would find it appealing. The Romans didn't have children's books, and certainly not illustrated ones dedicated to encouraging children use their imaginations. Translators build new roads between cultures, choosing what should be translated (the sense or the words, or both if you can) and attempting to translate it elegantly. For instance, as small a task as translating *Where the Wild Things Are* into *Ubi Fera Sunt* engages some cultural biases. *Fera* can certainly be translated as "wild things," but the neuter plural does not, for me, bring up images like Sendak's creatures, which are clearly animal/people. Sendak in fact claimed that the Wild Things were his overbearing relatives. In American parent-language, we don't imply

a neuter when we call our kids “wild things.” I’m treading a slim trail above a chasm here, but using the neuter might be understood as a gender-fluid choice, which is contemporary and politically correct in 2016. However, the neuter in this sense is anachronistic, both for Romans and for Sendak. Avoiding all this, I might have chosen a noun over an adjective. for the Wild Things. The French translator titled the book, *Max et les Maximonstres*; it’s *Donde Viven los Monstros* in Spanish.

I acknowledge the deep research and difficulties involved in every decision made while bringing a classic to life in an alien culture. Translators bear the weight of presenting oddities of foreign cultures as normal in context. Cicero and Horace aren’t the readers of *Ubi Fera Sunt*. The book’s readers will vary widely in ability: from the accomplished Latinists to the unsuspecting child whose parents want something different to have around to read. Most readers will be those irrepressible adolescents who might *volunt oculos terribiles* over yet another passage of Vergil, demanding instead that *turba fera incipiat!*

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