

Ubi Fera Sunt: Where the Wild Things Are in Latin

By Maurice Sendak, translated by Richard A. LaFleur

Review by: Nadya Williams, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* - June 6, 2016

The past twenty years have been a veritable “Golden Age” for Latin translations of children’s literature, from some of Dr. Seuss’s best-known titles¹ to the first two books in the Harry Potter series,² and even *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid*,³ as well as many others. The latest to join these ranks is *Ubi Fera Sunt*, a delightful translation of Maurice Sendak’s beloved children’s classic by Rick LaFleur, himself a classic, best known for his thorough updating of Wheelock’s Latin.

The translation stays true in meaning to Sendak’s original and is as literal as possible in idiomatic Latin. One illustrative example is Max’s exchange with his mother at the beginning of the book:

mater eius eum appellavit “FERUM!”
et Maximus dixit, “COMEDAM TE!”

At the same time, LaFleur also strove to recreate in Latin the puns and alliterations that make the original text so entertaining. Therein lies the greatest virtue of this translation: while literal, it does not sacrifice the joy of playing on words and sounds. For example, to welcome Max, and (with a slight modification of word order) later to bid him farewell, the wild things:

terribiles fremitus fremebant et fredebant dentes terribiles
et volvebant oculos terribiles terribilesque unguis monstrabant.

The result is a text that sounds as amusing and engaging in Latin as Sendak’s original does in English. Even my non-Latin-speaking eleven-month-old found it funny!

Some readers may be dismayed to find no translation aids whatsoever in the text. The book looks exactly the same as the original version, except that the text is, of course, in Latin. This was the requirement stipulated by the copyright-holders, that with the exception of translating the text, the book was not to be altered in any way. Still, resources — including a vocabulary list, an audio recording of the Latin text, and a variety of quizzes for classroom use — are all provided free of charge on the [Bolchazy-Carducci website](#).

Although *Ubi Fera Sunt* is more expensive than the average children’s book, it is not significantly pricier than the English-language original. Thus this book could be suitable as a fun extra text for middle-school or high-school Latin classes, as well as for family libraries, and as “chicken soup” for the tired Classicist’s soul.

Notes:

¹Dr. Seuss (author), Jennifer Morrish Tunberg and Terence Tunberg (trans.). *Quomodo Invidiosulus Nomine Grinchus Christi Natalem Abrogaverit: How the Grinch Stole Christmas in Latin*. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 1997; and *Cattus Petasatus: The Cat in the Hat in Latin*. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2000.

²J. K. Rowling (author), Peter Needham (trans.). *Harrius Potter et Philosophi Lapis*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA Children’s, 2003; and *Harrius Potter et Camera Secretorum*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA Children’s, 2006.

³Jeff Kinney (author), Daniel Gallagher (trans.). *Diary of a Wimpy Kid Latin Edition: Commentarii de Inepto Puero*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2015.