

Shirley Climo , Alexander Koshkin

Atalanta's Race: A Greek Myth

United States (1995)

TAGS: [Aphrodite](#) [Atalanta](#) [Iasus](#) [Melanion](#) / [Milanion](#) [Rhea](#) [Zeus](#)



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| General information | |
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| <i>Title of the work</i> | Atalanta's Race: A Greek Myth |
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| <i>Country/countries of popularity</i> | United States |
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| <i>First Edition Date</i> | 1995 |
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| <i>Author of the Entry</i> | Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au |
| <i>Peer-reviewer of the Entry</i> | Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com |

Creators



Shirley Climo , 1929 - 2012 (Author)

Shirley Climo (1929 – 2012) was born in Cleveland, Ohio. She began to study at De Pauw University but dropped out when her mother died. She took over her mother's work writing radio scripts for *Fairytale Theatre*, a radio show for the Cleveland station WGAR. She lived for many years in California, and wrote over twenty picture books, drawing on fairytale, myth, and folklore from around the world.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England,
ehale@une.edu.au



Alexander Koshkin , b. 1952 (Illustrator)

Alexander Koshkin was born in Moscow and lives in Russia. His illustrations have appeared in many picture books since 1980, and he has illustrated a number of myths, legends, and folktales, including Elizabeth Winthrop's *Vassilissa the Beautiful* (1991) and Shirley Climo's *Stolen Thunder: A Norse Myth* (1994) and *Atalanta's Race: A Greek Myth* (1995). His work is known for its lush colour palette.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England,
ehale@une.edu.au

Additional information

Summary

Atalanta's Race is a picture book in which the myth of Atalanta is retold. King Iasus of Arcadia prays to Zeus and to Rhea for a son to be born, but when a girl is born, whom his wife calls Atalanta, he commands that she be exposed on the highest slope of Mount Cyllene. The guard lays the baby in the mouth of a cave, 'away from the bite of the wind,' a cave which is the 'den of a she-bear' (p. 6), that nestles the baby between her own cubs.

In Spring, Ciron, a hunter, finds the baby. 'If you are the princess Atalanta, then the gods must have chosen me to care for you' (p. 8) he says, and he takes her home and teaches her the "ways of the hunter." Atalanta becomes a fleet of foot and can outrun a stag, and starts to have ambitions to "wear a winner's crown of laurel" (p. 8). Atalanta travels to Sparta and Corinth and Olympia, and shows her skills. Her fame reaches King Iasus. He realises she is his daughter and asks her forgiveness, and asks her to come and live with him. Soon, he pressures her to marry (p. 14). She asks to choose her husband in her own way; on his agreement, a proclamation is made: "Be it known that any man of any nation who can out-distance Princess Atalanta of Arcadia in a race shall win her in marriage. The penalty for defeat is death." (p. 14) Among the suitors is Melanion, a young Greek warrior. Atalanta is reluctant: "a hero should not throw away his life" (p. 16). In his dreams, Aphrodite gives Melanion three apples of purest gold, which he uses to distract Atalanta from the race. "Atalanta gasped. Then she looked at Melanion and smiled. Losing the race was a small price to pay for finding love." (p. 27) They marry and have a son, Parthenopaeus. They carry out a life of sports and hunting, and are "too busy to honor the gods. They never offered thanks to Aphrodite for her gift of the golden apples" (p. 29) Aphrodite complains to Rhea, who says that if hunting and racing is all they desire, they shall do both "forevermore" (p. 30), and turns both Atalanta and Melanion into lions. It is not clear what happens to Parthenopaeus.

In terms of presentation, the book is presented in a picture book format, with text and illustrations. Illustrations are somewhat static, stylised images of scenes from the story, in bright colours, using gouache watercolour and tempera, and framing the images with columns and other architectural details appropriate to Ancient Greece. An Author's note concludes the story, explaining the origin of the myth, and contextualising it in the Ancient Greek love of strength and talent,



and contextualising Atalanta's race as an early Olympic competition of the "state," and suggesting her race would be about the length of a "present-day 1500-meter run." "Since 1900, track and other Olympic events have been open to women athletes. Atalanta would be pleased." (p. 32)

Analysis

Atalanta's Race is a fairly straightforward retelling of the myth of Atalanta. The tone is light, with sentimental touches, and the illustrations take up the consciously lapidarian style, using bright colours and lush imagery. A somewhat static stylisation of the images may be influenced by vase paintings, or by pre-Raphaelite and Art-Deco approaches to Greek myth. Images are confined in frames, further highlighting the artistic representation. Emphasis on Atalanta's sporting nature, and its unusualness in a woman, with an appeal to girls. A final image on the back cover shows a stylized vase painting of Atalanta surrounded by a lion and lioness.

This somewhat conservative retelling of the myth omits uncomfortable aspects, such as the killing of the suitors, and the emotional elements of Atalanta's rejection by her father, highlighting instead its decorative elements. *Publisher's Weekly* evaluates its target age group as 6-10 years.

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Aphrodite](#) [Atalanta](#) [Iasus](#) [Melanion](#) / [Milanion](#) [Rhea](#) [Zeus](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

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