Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World by Normand Cousineau , Priscilla Galloway ", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/493. Entry version as of November 12, 2026.

Normand Cousineau , Priscilla Galloway

Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World

Canada (1995)

TAGS: Aphrodite Artemis Atalanta Iasus Melanion / Milanion





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World
Country of the First Edition	Canada
Country/countries of popularity	Canada; United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1995
First Edition Details	Priscilla Galloway, Normand Cousinea, *Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World*. Toronto: Annick Press, 1995. 76 pp.
ISBN	9781550374018
Genre	Mythological fiction, Picture books
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Normand Cousineau (Illustrator)

Normand Cousineau was born in Montréal, Quebec, where he studied Graphic Arts. He is an illustrator and an art teacher.

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



Priscilla Galloway , b. 1930
(Author)

Priscilla Galloway (1930) is a Canadian writer of children's books, and an English teacher. She was born in Montréal, Quebec, and trained as an English teacher, completing a PhD in Educational Theory at the University of Toronto in 1977, and beginning her writing for children in the 1980s. She has published a wide array of non-fiction as well, including teaching guides published by Annick Educational. Her "Tales of Ancient Lands Series," also published by Annick Press (Toronto), include *Atalanta: the Fastest Runner in the World* (1995), *Aleta and the Queen: A Tale of Ancient Greece* (1995), *Daedalus and the Minotaur* (1997), and *My Hero Hercules* (1999).

Source:

"Priscilla Galloway," in *Something About the Author*, Volume 227, 72–76.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England,

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Additional information

Translation

French: *Atalante, la coureuse la plus rapide au monde*, Toronto: Annick Press, 1997.

Spanish: *Atalanta: la corredora más veloz del mundo*, Mexico: Ediciones Samara 1996.

Summary

Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World retells the myth of Atalanta, with a detailed text by Galloway and handsome illustrations by Cousineau. The illustrations are stylized in a way influenced by Greek art, drawn in ink and gouache, and surrounding the text. A prologue (pp. 11–13) explains the early part of the Atalanta myth – her exposure by her father, with a commentary about the reasons for which Greek society might put infants out to die. "However painfully, a parent might decide that a quick death for an infant might be better than a slow starvation for the whole family. The ancient Greeks were a practical people." (p. 12) Discussion follows on the Greek belief in the gods' pervasiveness. A map of the Greek world appears on page 14, followed by an index to the pronunciation of Greek names (p. 15).

Chapter One, "A Bear and A Baby," tells of Atalanta's exposure by Iasus. Artemis changes into a deer and leads a pair of hunters, Telamon and Saurus, hunters, to find the baby. Telamon's wife, Merope, is furious, but Telamon and his friend Saurus help look after the child. Atalanta grows up to be strongly influenced by the huntsmen, and to have a difficult relationship with Merope, who is more versed in traditionally female arts (spinning, baking). In Chapter Two, "Advice from the Oracle," Telamon and Saurus visit the Oracle of Delphi, where Artemis tells them "I have set Atalanta free to follow the wind and woods and to walk in the beds of streams and rivers. She does not serve Hestia, goddess of hearth and home, or Athene, goddess of weaving. Atalanta has promised her life to me." (pp. 28–29) In Chapter Three, "The Great Boar Hunt," Atalanta goes on a hunt for a wild boar. Meleager, the son of the king (Oenus of Calydon) is on the hunt; together, they take down the boar. A fight with his uncle over the spoils results in the uncle's death. In Chapter Four, "A Father Finds his Daughter," Iasus learns that his daughter is still alive, and sends for her. Atalanta reluctantly goes. In Chapter 5, "Trouble in the Family," Iasus pressures Atalanta to marry. As a result, she is angry

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and goes for a run to think things through. "I need to respect the man I marry," says Atalanta to Iasus. "If I'm going to respect him, he has to risk his life to win me." (p. 52). The competitors come from all over Greece. She has built a black altar, and tells the men "Here is where I will sacrifice you after you lose the race." She is trying to warn the men, as she does not want to kill them or marry one of them either. (p. 53). In Chapter Six, "A Deadly Contest," Melanion arrives. She races with Nikos and Maron, and Artemis forces Atalanta to kill them. "Now she knew what Merope had meant, all those years ago. What had she said? Sometime you may be sorry you did not learn to weave." (p. 59) Atalanta thinks of them as wounded deer and gives them the mercy of being quick.

Melanion sees Atalanta's distress and tells her "This isn't right. It mustn't happen again. You must race against me, Atalanta. I shall win the race." (p. 61) In Chapter Seven, "Melanion Asks for Help," Melanion calls on Aphrodite for help, and the apples appear for him. "Goddess, what must I do?" "If you really love her, your love will tell you. Serve me faithfully, Melanion. Remember, I am love." (p. 68) Melanion sits holding the apples and discovers that he can make them light or heavy with his thoughts. In Chapter Eight, "Love of Death," the pair run the race. Melanion holds the apples, keeping them light in his thoughts, and as he throws them, they become heavy for Atalanta. "He's not playing fair, Atalanta thought. But I'm the best. I can get that apple and still win the race. . . . Too late. Melanion crossed the finish line one step ahead of her." (p. 73) Atalanta agrees to marry Melanion. "I can't serve Artemis the way she wants any longer. It feels very strange. I hope she won't be too angry with me when we get married." "Do you want to marry me?" asked Melanion. Are you sure?" "I promised to marry the man who could win the race, but I never said I'd want to. I think I want to marry you, Melanion, but I'm not sure."

Analysis

This retelling of the Atalanta myth is presented in a lavish picture book with vibrant illustrations, designed to look like ancient frescoes. The images are stylized in the form of ancient Greek vase paintings. The text, which is quite plentiful, sometimes is presented in full-page, but at other times, is inset in the illustrations. The story and illustrations encourage a reflective stance, emphasizing the emotions and meaning for Atalanta of her life story as a girl with

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	unconventional abilities. Galloway emphasizes the gendered nature of her upbringing – her exposure by her father, who had wished for a boy; her clashes with her adoptive mother over traditional feminine skills; the pressure to marry. Artemis stands both for Atalanta's unconventional desires, but also for the implacable nature of the gods, in insisting that Atalanta kills the unsuccessful suitors. These elements of the story underscore a late 20th-century retelling of the myth, to highlight the emotional aspects as it would apply to a girl's coming of age. The illustrations add a mythic quality, in their presentation of the figures, animals, and gods of Greek culture.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Artemis Atalanta Iasus Melanion / Milanion
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Femininity Gender expectations/construction Sexuality Sport

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