Vashti Farrer [aka Vasthi Therese Waterhouse] , Naomi C. Lewis

Atalanta: the Fastest Runner in the World

Australia (2004)

TAGS: Aphrodite Atalanta Delphic Oracle Hippomenes Meleager Prophecy





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	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2004
First Edition Details	Vashti Farrer and Naomi Lewis, *Atalanta: the Fastest Runner in the World*. Melbourne: Pearson Education, 2004, 24 pp.
ISBN	9780123604248
Genre	Instructional and educational works, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (age 6–10)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Vashti Farrer [aka Vasthi Therese Waterhouse] , b. 1942
(Author)

Vashti Farrer was raised by her grandparents in Sydney. After studying English literature, history and archaeology, she worked at the Mitchell Library (part of the New South Wales State Library in Sydney). There, she developed an interest in Australian history. She has published over 50 titles for young readers, on topics in Australian and Colonial history, fantasy, humour and primary school readers. She was the President of the New South Wales Society of Women Writers, and Deputy Chair of the NSW Writers' Centre.

Sources:

Profile at biography.jrank.org (accessed: February 12, 2019)

Profile at 1.curriculum.edu.au (accessed: February 12, 2019)

Official website (accessed: February 12, 2019)

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



Naomi C. Lewis , b. 1930
(Illustrator)

Naomi C. Lewis is an artist and illustrator of children's books. She lives on the Sapphire Coast of New South Wales, and exhibits regularly at the Lazy Lizard gallery in Cobargo, NSW. Among her titles include *Puppy Puzzle*, *Puss in Boots*, *Koala Bedtime*, *I'm Walking*

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Barefoot, Irish Myths and Legends.

Sources:

Official blog (accessed: February 12, 2019)

Profile at aasd.com.au (accessed: February 12, 2019)

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Additional information

Summary

Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World is a picture book for primary-school children that retells the story of Atalanta. It is published under an educational imprint, through Pearson Education, called *Chatterbox*, in a series of stories called *Traditional Fiction*, and thus marketed around the world. Other stories in the series include *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *How Maui Stole Fire from the Gods*.

This short retelling of the Atalanta myth is written in simple language for young readers. The opening page shows a baby Atalanta, touching the cheek of a she-bear, which is licking her, while her two cubs look curiously on. The text explains the circumstances of Atalanta's abandonment in the forest. Next is explained how she was found by a group of hunters, and gained skill in archery, spear-throwing, and running. We see her shooting at some "ferocious centaurs," and the text explains that they "fell down dead" (p. 5). Atalanta's fame spreads through Greece. Next follows a double-page spread of the chase of the Calydonian boar (pp. 6–7); Atalanta 'was determined to be the first to hit it," so she shoots, lodging the arrow behind its ear (p. 8); Meleager finishes the job (p. 9), but insists Atalanta be given the hide and tusks as a prize. Atalanta is returned to her parents, who want her to marry (pp. 10–11), but she knows from the Delphic Oracle "that if she married she would be turned into an animal," and she makes her famous declaration only to marry the man who could beat her in a race, and that she would use any young man she happened to beat for target practice!' Hippomenes comes to see how fast she can run, and as he watches her running around a stadium, he falls in love with her (p. 12). He seeks help from Aphrodite, who gives him the famous golden apples (p. 13). The race takes place, and Hippomenes tosses his apples in her way (pp. 14–19); even then, he only just beats her (p. 20). He claims her as a bride, and we see Hippomenes standing victorious in front of a cheering crowd, holding the hand of an anxious-looking Atalanta, still clutching the golden apples (p. 21).

A double spread shows the wedding taking place in front of a group of musicians, dancers, and family members (p. 22-23). Atalanta honours her promise to marry him, "even though they both knew that he had not won her fairly. He had played a cunning trick on her." (p. 22). But the moment the wedding takes place, the Oracle's prophecy comes true. Atalanta and Hippomenes are turned into lions, and go back to the forest "to live out their days." (p. 24)

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	The pen and ink illustrations have a soft, even gentle palette, of blues and greens and gold. The representation of the figures is realistic, emphasizing a sense of a story with some truth to it, and from long ago.
Analysis	This picture book is presented as one of a series of readers for primary school students. The language is simple, and the illustrations are realistic. Farrer does not shy away from some of the more violent aspects of the myth, such as the killing of animals and centaurs (though she does not indicate that the centaurs were trying to rape Atalanta), and makes it clear that Atalanta does not wish to marry. The Delphic Oracle's warning provides the reason for Atalanta and Hippomenes' transformation into lions, allowing the cause related in the original myth to be elided (different versions tell that Atalanta had sworn her virginity to Artemis, or that Hippomenes and Atalanta, compelled by Aphrodite, made love in a temple of Zeus, and were turned into lions as a punishment). Interestingly, Farrer points out that Hippomenes has tricked Atalanta into marriage, unlike many versions in which he seems to be quietly forgiven, and that the story is sympathetic to Atalanta's desire to be independent and to make her own decisions. Though this is a reader for young children, there is no glossary or explanations of any challenging concepts or indications as to how to pronounce names. Its inclusion in a series of *Traditional Fiction Books*, the choice of which seems rather random, suggests a series that may not have been deliberately devised.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Atalanta Delphic Oracle Hippomenes Meleager Prophecy
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth	Emotions Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Sport

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Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Atalanta: the Fastest Runner in the World by Vashti Farrer [aka Vasthi Therese Waterhouse] , Naomi C. Lewis", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/658. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Culture

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