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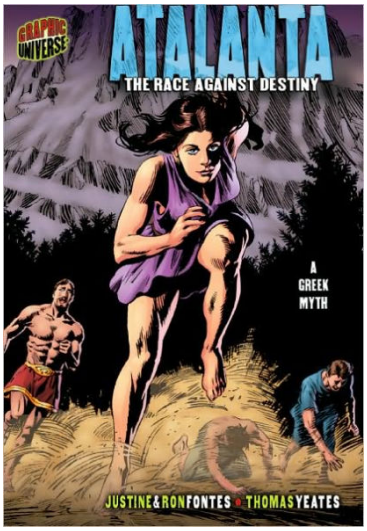
Justine Fontes , Ron Fontes , Thomas Yeates

Atalanta. The Race Against Destiny

United States (2007)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Argo Argonauts Artemis Atalanta Athena Centaur(s) Demeter Divination Eros Fate Gods Hera Jason Meleager Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metamorphosis Minotaur Moirai Nestor Oracles Ovid Poseidon Theseus Zeus



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General information	
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Creators

Justine Fontes (Author)

Justine Fontes is prolific writer from the USA. Justine received a BA degree in English Literature New York University, before beginning work in publishing. Justine met her husband when they were both working at *Little Golden Books*. They began writing together, and have published over five hundred children's books. Their titles are varied, including many retelling of myth, history, and other traditional stories, such as *How the Zebra Got Its Stripes* (Golden Books, 2002); *Abraham Lincoln: Lawyer, Leader, Legend* (DK Publishing, Children, 2009); and *Star Wars, Episode 1: Anakin's Pit Droid* (LucasBooks for Young Readers, 2000). To the Graphic Universe Graphic *Myths and Legends* series, which features Greco-Roman and other myths, they have contributed titles including *Trojan Horse. The Fall of Troy* (2007); *Demeter and Persephone. Spring Held Hostage* (2007), and *Sunjata: Warrior King of Mali. A West African Legend* (2009).

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Ron Fontes (Author)

Ron Fontes is prolific writer from the USA. Ron met his wife when they were both working at *Little Golden Books*. They began writing together, and have published over five hundred children's books. Their titles are varied, including many retelling of myth, history, and other traditional stories, such as *How the Zebra Got Its Stripes* (Golden Books, 2002); *Abraham Lincoln: Lawyer, Leader, Legend* (DK Publishing, Children, 2009); and *Star Wars, Episode 1: Anakin's Pit Droid* (LucasBooks for Young Readers, 2000). To the Graphic Universe Graphic *Myths and Legends* series, which features Greco-Roman and other myths, they have contributed titles including *Trojan Horse. The Fall of Troy* (2007); *Demeter and Persephone. Spring Held Hostage*

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(2007), and *Sunjata: Warrior King of Mali. A West African Legend* (2009).

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Thomas Yeates , b. 1955
(Illustrator)

Thomas Yeates is a prolific American comic book artist. He has worked for DC Comics, Dark Horse Comics, Topps comics, Marvel, and many others.

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Additional information

Summary

The myth of Atalanta is retold here to familiarise young people with her myths and with ancient Greek culture more broadly. Atalanta is exposed as an infant, reared by a bear, then taken to live with hunters. She learns from the Delphic oracle that she will 'lose [her]self' if she marries. She takes part in the Calydonian boar hunt, challenges potential suitors to race her for her hand in marriage, and experiences metamorphosis once she finally marries.

Chapter Headings:

- *Abandoned*
- *Found*
- *Answers and Adventures*
- *The Race of her Life*
- *A Bride After All*

A note on the text explains that the authors drew particularly on Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* and Michael Grant's *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*. Depictions of clothing, armaments, and architecture place the events in antiquity.

Analysis

The novel opens with the gods gathered around, looking down on events on earth as Atalanta is born, somewhat in the style of *Clash of the Titans* (1981), a film that is referenced in the recommended follow-up material. Poseidon is depicted with a fishtail and trident, others with familiar markers such as lyre, bow, looking glass, and owl. Initially the gods do not intervene in the events, but they play a more active role as the story goes on. Artemis is depicted taking umbrage at being forgotten in a sacrifice, releasing the Calydonian Boar. Aphrodite and Eros feature twice towards the end; Aphrodite appears too and helps Hippomenes in answering his prayer, and she and Eros plot Hippomenes' downfall when he forgets to show his gratitude. Rhea appears in a swirl of red above her statue to condemn Atalanta and Hippomenes for cavorting in her shrine, and again with the transformed couple pulling her chariot. Aphrodite has the last words of the novel: *No matter how fast you run, you can't beat love*. The ancient Greek world thus appears as one alive with supernatural power and deities who take a direct interest in the mortal world and

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directly influence the lives of its inhabitants.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator notes that 'legends disagree about exactly where Atalanta was born', something that acknowledges the complex nature of mythic traditions. The novel features Atalanta's father ordering her abandonment in the mountains because he does not want a daughter, offering young readers a stark encounter with misogyny and its role in infanticide. Atalanta is raised by a bear (following traditions in Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.9.2; and Aelian, Varia Historia, 13.1). The story omits the centaur attack (Callimachus, *Hymn 3, To Artemis*, 215–224; Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.9.2; Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 13.1), and moves on to Atalanta wondering how she should live her life. Examples are given of what normal Greek women do, and her discovery of the existence of oracles prompts her to visit Delphi. The Pythia there discourages Atalanta from marrying, suggesting she will lose herself if she does so (as per Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.560ff). The handling of this section foregrounds the theme of women's lives, autonomy, and place in the world without too heavy-handedly telling the reader what to think.

There is no discussion of whether or not Atalanta can join the Argonauts (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica,* 1.769-773, said she was rejected; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 9. 16, said she joined). The Argonauts are mentioned however, as several of them are said to join the Calydonian Boar hunt (named after Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.302-324), to which she receives an invitation. There is bad feeling about her receiving the prize (as in Diodorus of Sicily, *Library*, 4.34.1-7; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.426–451; contra Callimachus (*Hymn 3, To Artemis*, 215–224; and Pausanias, *Arcadia*, 41.2–3). Meleager's mother causes his death in a graphic sub-plot. This is drawn from an ancient tradition, but slightly reworked; in ancient tradition Meleager's life is fated to be as long as a burning brand, his mother keeps it gently smouldering but throws it into a fire when Meleager kills her brothers (Apollodorus, *Library*, 1.8.2–3; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.444–546), in this retelling Meleager will die if the brand goes out and his mother throws a bucket of water over it. It was perhaps thought that putting out a fire would be a more comprehensible metaphor than consumed-by-fire, and the result is much the same.

Atalanta is reunited with her birth family, but struggles to adapt to palace life. When the king, her father, declares she must marry, Atalanta comes up with the idea to test the suitors by footrace, on the

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assumption that few will risk their lives, and that she will always beat those that do and so avoid marriage. Hippomenes (the suitor found in Hesiod, *Catalogue*, bk.2; Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.9.2; Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, 10.560–680) is initially scornful of the race, his words paraphrase those in Ovid, *Is any woman worth such a risk? That's just silly*. When he then comes to compete, his feelings for Atalanta appear superficial (*Her hair, her cheeks, her eyes. I must marry Atalanta!*). This is a contrast to the treatment in, for example, Simon Spence's *Atalanta* (2016, see elsewhere in this database), in which there is emphasis on the suitor's appreciation of Atalanta's character. This may leave some readers somewhat disconcerted by the marriage, yet this accords well with this retellings inclusion of the oracle's warning. They are depicted kissing in Rhea's sanctuary and several frames are given over to the morphing process as they change into animals.

This is a thoughtful retelling of the myths of Atalanta which prompts the reader to consider moral issues around temptation and which raises questions about fate and about women's role and rights in society – in the past and, indirectly, in the present. Some gruesome details from the myths are retained, such as Atalanta's abandonment against the wishes of her mother, Meleager's murder of his uncles and death at the hands of his mother, and the horrible realism of the metamorphosis. This presents the young reader with an ancient Greece in which they encounter a degree of harshness that they will not find in all works for young people. Lerner publishing is specifically orientated towards educational material. With Atalanta, the reader is familiarised with a culturally significant mythic tradition and with challenging subjects that may help to prepare the young reader for the difficulties of their own lives.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Argo Argonauts Artemis Atalanta Athena Centaur(s) Demeter Divination Eros Fate Gods Hera Jason Meleager Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metamorphosis Minotaur Moirai Nestor Oracles Ovid Poseidon Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Animals Authority Conflict Family Prediction/prophecy Step-parents

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for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Barringer, Judith M., "Atalanta as Model: The Hunter and the Hunted", *Classical Antiquity* 15.1, (1996): 48–76.

Boardman, John, "Atalanta", *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 10, The Art Institute of Chicago Centennial Lectures, 1983, 2–19.

Addenda

Historical Consultant: David Mulroy, University of Wisconsen. Author of *75 Classical Myths Condensed from their Primary Sources* (Cognella Press, 2012).

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