Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Go for the Gold, Atalanta! (Myth-O-Mania, 8) by Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/691. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Kate McMullan , Denis Zilber

Go for the Gold, Atalanta! (Myth-O-Mania, 8)

United States (2012)

TAGS: Aphrodite Artemis Atalanta Atropos Calydonian Boar Castor Clotho Hades Hera Hercules Lachesis Melanion / Milanion Meleager Peleus Persephone Polydeuces Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Go for the Gold, Atalanta! (Myth-O-Mania, 8)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom, United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Kate McMullan, *Myth-O-Mania: Go for the Gold, Atalanta!* Mankato: Stone Arch Books, 2012, 192 pp.
ISBN	9781434234414 (pb)
Genre	Humor, Mythological fiction, Novels, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Children (8–13)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Photo courtesy of Kate McMullan.

Kate McMullan , b. 1947
(Author)

Grew up in St. Louis, Missouri, but now lives in Sag Harbor, New York. McMullan began her career as a teacher after which she studied Early Childhood Education. She worked as a teacher in Los Angeles and an American Air Force base in Germany. She is married to and works with the illustrator Jim McMullan.

She has commented: "As soon as I could, I began reading my way through the Children's Room shelves at our local public library in St. Louis, Missouri. I carried my books home, settled in with a cat or dog or my guinea pigs on my lap, and read for hours. My favorites were Greek myths, Nancy Drew mysteries, Pippi Longstocking, and animal stories, but only if the animals didn't die. I also read *Little Women* (it was sad but acceptable if people died) and *The Borrowers*, about tiny people who lived behind the walls of houses. I loved comic books, too, and *Mad Magazine*. When asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I answered, "A reader."

"After college, I taught fourth grade in an inner-city Los Angeles school and on an American Air Force base in Germany. Every day after lunch I read to my students, and in time I started to wonder if I could write books like the ones I read to my class. I tried, but after a day of teaching, I had little energy left for writing, so I moved to New York City, where I'd heard writers lived, and took a job in publishing, which was less tiring than teaching."

"And I kept writing – stories about Fluffy, the Classroom Guinea Pig (who will never die), a Greek Mythology series, books set in a medieval school for dragon-slaying, and picture books with art by my favorite illustrator, Jim McMullan." (source, see here, accessed: February 21, 2019).

Since she started writing, McMulland has published over 100 children's books. Her book *Pearl and Wagner: One Funny Day* was a Geisel Honor Book, and her book *I Stink!* was a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor Book.

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Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at penguinrandomhouse.com (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at harpercollins.com (accessed: June 26, 2018).

Profile at amazon.com (accessed: February 21, 2019).

Bio prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com and Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@gmail.com

Questionnaire

1. What drew you to writing / working with Classical Antiquity and what challenges did you face in selecting, representing, or adapting particular myths or stories?
I have always loved the ancient Greek myths, even as a child. I write books for kids, and thought it would be fun to retell some of the myths with a bit of twist, and what I came up with was using Hades as my narrator. In some versions of the myths, Hades is Zeus's older brother, and I thought having his little brother be the ruler of the Universe would annoy Hades quite a bit, so I figured that would make his retelling funny and engaging for kids.

2. Why do you think classical / ancient myths, history, and literature continue to resonate with young audiences?
I believe it's because the dieties are, for the most part, depicted as very human, with great character flaws as well as the capacity to do great good. I think humans connect with these gods and goddesses because of they show different aspects of the human heart.

3. Do you have a background in classical education (Latin or Greek at school or classes at the University?)
NO.

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4. What sources are you using? Scholarly work? Wikipedia? Are there any books that made an impact on you in this respect?
I used the *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* and *Theoi.com* as well as various other sources. Although I wasn't telling the myths in the traditional way, I did try to stay faithful to the way each myth is usually presented.

Prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com



Photo courtesy of Denis Zilber.

Denis Zilber , b. 1962
(Illustrator)

Denis has a diploma in Advanced Character Animation Studies and has won the following awards for his freelance work as illustrator and character designer: “CG Choice” award of CGSociety.org (3 times), Animation Mentor Showcase 2009, *Frontpage Exellence* award of 3DTotal.com (twice). He has publications in *Expose 4 – Finest digital art in the known universe* by Ballistic Publishing, Australia, as well as in *2D Artist magazine* and *CGWorld magazine*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Allison Rosenblum, Bar-Ilan University, allie.rose89@gmail.com

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Additional information

Summary

This is the eights book in the Myth-O-Mania series, which offer alternative versions of the Greek myths, narrated by Hades. Hades, who is a self-professed shy and serious god, promises to tell the whole truth about the Greek myth; he claims that his brother Zeus, is a myth-o-maniac (that is, a liar) and that he fabricated the myths and wrote his version so that he and his children will appear noble and praiseworthy. Hades' versions offer the "true" story of the myths.

In this book, Hades relates the story of the female athlete Atalanta. Hades discovers Atalanta as a baby, who was discarded from her home since her father wished for a boy; her mother was also banished. Hades and Persephone ask Artemis for help and she gives Atalanta to a female bear she knows to raise her. After many years, Hades meets the now adult Atalanta and joins the hunt of the Calydonian boar which is being held by Meleager, prince of Calydonia, and his parents. Atalanta finds the boar first yet prevents his being killed since she recognizes him as her old wrestling coach (this boar who can also speak and sing is apparently a famous wrestler as well).

Later, Meleager is dying, due to machinations of his uncles. To save him Atalanta decides to raise money. Meanwhile, she meets her father, Iasus, who, however, locks her in the palace and orders her to find a suitor. Iasus suggests a race between Atalanta and the suitors, declaring that whoever is able to defeat her would be the man she would marry. Meanwhile Hera and Aphrodite, who resent Artemis and Atalanta, due to Atlanta's declaration that she will never fall in love or get married, cook up a scheme with the mortal Melanion. They give him Hera's golden apples and tell him to throw them throughout the race so that Atalanta will pick them up and thus lose the race. Hades discovers their plan and warns Atalanta. Atalanta decides to collect the apples and win the race – and does so. In the end, she uses the apples to save Meleager and is even permitted to participate in the Olympic games, which are only for the gods. She then decides to travel the earth with her companions and help those in need.

Analysis

This is a story about female empowerment. The female heroine is repeatedly referred to as a "hero". That is, she fulfills the male requirements for being heroic, mainly because of her unbelievable

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strength. This poses a question, whether Atalanta is a hero because she fulfills male criteria or because she is a strong woman. I think the emphasis in the story is on her being a strong woman in a male world. She competes with the men and triumphs over them yet she does not try to be a man (she is more bear-like in her behaviour than manly). Atalanta is judged by the ancient heroic standards which were male-centric and therefore she is also hailed as a "hero" because she was so unique, even the language had to adjust. Yet she is a woman and she does try to maintain her own special identity. The author treats this unique character in Greek mythology with care; while she is a model for empowering girls, the author wishes to emphasize that it is most important for one to follow her own heart. The author is playing with the original myth but distances it form its conclusion which was Atalanta's marriage. She is more interested in the character of Atalanta as a single, strong-minded woman and less in the original story of finding her a husband.

Atalanta is in fact dominated not just by the patriarchal world she lives in, but also by the very domineering female goddesses (Artemis, Hera and Aphrodite). Artemis especially tries to force her to follow a certain path that she believes is more suited for a "daughter of Artemis". Artemis leaves infant Atalanta with the care of a mother bear and her cubs; it is her decision. She basically decides to make the young baby girl a fearsome warrior and hunter in her own image. This is no less dominating behaviour than that of Atalanta's father who cast out her and her mother for not producing a son (a baby in his own image). Thus Artemis could be seen as Atalanta's saviour on the one hand, yet also trying to control the young woman and decree her life for her. Artemis is also forcibly trying to make Atalanta a feminine (or feminist) model. She tells her "Your races are a big victory for females everywhere!" Artemis said. "Every time you run you show the world that we are powerful." (pp. 112–113). Artemis is using Atalanta no less than her father, even if her cause seems nobler and justified; for Atalanta, Iasus and Artemis are working together against her wishes.

Hera and Aphrodite are no better than Artemis, in that they only care for their own cults and sacrifices, with little thought for Atalanta (or women's empowerment). In fact, the feud between the three goddesses, and Artemis' boasting that Atalanta does not need love or marriage, makes matters worse for the heroine. The three gods also use her as a pawn in their own power game of ego and prestige.

Yet Atalanta wishes to be more than just a model for women, she

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regards herself an athlete, beyond the boundaries of gender: “I earned the title of fastest runner in Greece. Not the fastest female runner, but the fastest runner, period.” (p. 157). Atalanta is not interested in being a “poster-child” for women’s rights (there is a hint to this at the beginning of the story, when Artemis explains to Persephone about goddesses’ rights); she wishes to remain true to herself, to all the different parts which comprise her nature, both the animal part and the human. The only thing left for her is to compete against the gods in the Olympics, thus securing her fame for eternity, as any other hero.

This is why eventually Atalanta decides to pick the apples in order to help Meleager (although she is aware of the golden-apples scheme) yet also win the race against all odds. She becomes confident in her own abilities and principles and is not willing to forsake them; she is not willing to endanger her male friend by running to save herself from marriage. By embracing her feral self (she runs on all fours like a bear) and her human side (her care for her friend), Atalanta finally becomes a whole person and finds her own path, as she explains her decision to travel the world and help those in need: “I’m a hero,” said Atalanta. “That’s what heroes do. That’s all I have to say.” (p. 167). Atalanta embraces the male identity of a mythological wandering hero with her female identity as a woman and creates the first real female hero of myth.

The author chooses to end the story of Atalanta here, without her transformation into a lion. The story of Atalanta in this series seems to be specifically tailored for young female readers. While the author uses her usual tongue-in-cheek approach to the myth, she is serious when it comes to Atalanta expressing herself and her own voice and decisions. Hades is more of an advisor than an actual participant here, Atalanta reaches most of the decisions by herself and out of her own will.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Aphrodite Artemis Atalanta Atropos Calydonian Boar Castor Clotho Hades Hera Hercules Lachesis Melanion / Milanion Meleager Peleus Persephone Polydeuces Theseus

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Expectations Family Femininity Gender Humour Masculinity Parents (and children) Storytelling

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