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Atalanta: The Exception to Social Normality Presented in the Ancient World

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Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apollodorus' *The Library* Explain the Roles of Women in Their Respective Societies Within Their Accounts of the Myth of Atalanta

This thesis is an analysis of two ancient authors: the Greek Apollodorus, and the Latin Ovid, and how they both handle the ancient views of societal gender roles. The two authors write more than one hundred years apart (the 2nd century BCE and the mid-1st century BCE - early 1st century CE respectively), yet the two of them write unique accounts of the myth of Atalanta. Atalanta is a heroine of Greek and Roman mythology, and is one of the few examples of strong women that survive to the present day. However, Apollodorus and Ovid portray a very different view of Atalanta (within *The Library* and *The Metamorphoses* respectively), and both of them reveal some interesting possibilities of how Atalanta may have been viewed by both ancient men and women of Greece and Rome.

Since first looking up at the stars and into the heavens, mankind has struggled to understand its role in the universe; what is the purpose to existence; why is the structure of the universe what it is; is there someone up there controlling everything going on? Humans have attempted to answer these questions in a variety of ways: religion, science, or simply not posing philosophical questions because one thinks it does not apply to life and one moves on. The most popular explanations have been religion or science, and the two have battled it out for centuries. In the ancient world, science and religion were one in the same. At this time, there was no such thing as atoms, the world was a flat disk, and the Earth was considered the center of the universe. The problem now is trying to explain the nature of things without the knowledge of advanced science. The ancients solved this problem by telling stories from mythology. Going back to the Egyptians and beyond, man told stories to explain origin, structure, how to conduct oneself in daily life, and how to keep fortune on its good side. Most of the ancient cultures used a polytheistic point of view.[1] Within this polytheistic mythology, deities had responsibilities indicating who ruled over what realm, and sometimes were even personifications of natural elements. More often than not, it was the male deity that dominated the divine sphere of influence; consequently, female gods would take a proverbial back seat to the males. However, as with nearly all mythologies to have existed, there were exceptions. More specifically, in Greek and Roman mythology. The writers of ancient mythology used stories in order to comprehend the result of a stronger woman who would not submit to a predominantly male civilization, and the myth of Atalanta is the perfect example.

[1] The polytheistic view indicates a belief in multiple deities that dictate the course of events and are responsible for all happenings, whether good or bad, in the universe.

When people today hear the word "myth" or "mythology", they often think "untrue" or "not real". Linguistic connections such as this need to stop. Yes ancient mythology was used for religious purposes, but the stories were most commonly used to teach lessons of morality or to explain the origin of something. One of the reasons misconceptions develop is due to the lack of knowledge modern people have about ancient religions. As a result, when students take classes that teach concepts from polytheistic religions,[2] they are fascinated and believe a whole new realm of ideas has opened up.[3] Joseph Campbell, a renowned scholar of mythology and author, discusses why he believes ancient mythology is so fascinating to students today. "What we have today is a demythologized world. And, as a result, the students I meet are very much interested in mythology because myths bring them messages. When the story is in your mind, then you see its relevance to something happening in your own life" (4-9).

The ancients often told stories to explain what was happening around them, or to comfort themselves in harsh or violent times. If there was a war or a battle going on, such as the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE or the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, a general could tell the story of Homer's *Iliad*, in which the Greeks fought for ten years to conquer the Trojans, as a source of inspiration to the troops. The interesting thing about mythology is how deeply connecting it seems to be to people today. Rick Riordan, renowned author and former teacher of classical mythology, suggests an explanation might be because "the stories explore such basic human conditions as jealousy, envy, anger, greed, revenge, forgiveness, fate, and fortune. The demi-

[2] Monotheistic religions dominate the world today, with the top three being the most widely known: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

[3] In ancient times, the concept of monotheism (the idea that there is only one all-powerful God that controls and knows all) was not a popular one. Polytheistic religions were more commonplace, as it seemed logical to have multiple deities ruling over different realms and have one God (or Goddess) that ruled over the rest.

gods of Greek myth are half-human, half-god. They are caught between two worlds, and don't really belong in either. This is a powerful metaphor" (xiii). Reading through Greek mythology is like watching a soap opera: tragedy around every corner, relatives popping out of nowhere, drama a consistent factor, and characters appearing and reappearing in different stories. The reason the comparison of the modern soap opera is being used here is because of how influential the myths of Greek and Roman culture became for western civilizations on the subconscious level. According to Philip Matyszak, a classical scholar and renowned author of mythology, the influences have been all around mankind since these stories were first told. "They have inspired countless painters, sculptors, composers and writers from the Renaissance onwards, and so separate box features highlight the post-classical afterlife of each myth. Moreover in our own time we use language and handle objects associated with the ancient gods, frequently while being totally unaware of the fact" (8).

General themes such as the ones previously mentioned appear frequently throughout many mythology tales. One theme in particular however is not often seen in myth: that of the strong woman. More specifically, the theme of the strong woman in the myth of Atalanta. The story of Atalanta, Edith Hamilton tells us, "is told in full only by the two late writers Ovid and Apollodorus, but it is an old tale" (244). The story is told in partials by Homer in the *Iliad* and also a poem ascribed to Hesiod. Ovid is a Latin writer of the first century CE, and Apollodorus was a Greek writer who composed his work approximately one hundred and fifty years before Ovid. Both authors have their own unique styles and compose a different picture of Atalanta as the myth proceeds. The authors, their respective presentation of the myth, and also the content of the myth itself, will all be analyzed throughout the expanse of this paper.

As Apollodorus' account of the adventures of Atalanta, his will be approached first. Sir J.G. Frazier, the man responsible for translating the work of Apollodorus, explains in his introduction of the Loeb Classical Library edition of Apollodorus' work what is known of the ancient author. "Nothing is positively known, and little can be conjectured with any degree of probability, concerning the author of the *Library.* Further than this we cannot go with any reasonable certainty in attempting to date the work. The author gives no account of himself and never refers to contemporary events: indeed the latest occurrences recorded by him are the death of Ulysses and the return of the Heraclids. Even Rome and the Romans are not once mentioned or alluded to by him" (ix-xi). Since Apollodorus readily ignored his contemporaries, his contemporaries readily ignored him, as the surviving works from Apollodorus' time do not reference him at all. "As Apollodorus ignored his contemporaries, so apparently was he ignored by them and by posterity for many generations. The first known writer to quote him is Photius in the ninth century CE, and the next are John and Isaac Tzetzes, the learned Byzantine grammarians of the twelfth century, who made much use of his book and often cite him by name" (Frazier, xiii). However sparsely Apollodorus is cited throughout history, his account of the myth of Atalanta is crucial, as it is one of only two that tell the tale in its entirety. Apollodorus writes his version of the Atalanta myth within his work, *The Library*. *The Library* is meant as a catalogue of the history of Greek mythology, from Ouranos, the first ruler of the heavens, down to the most well-known structure of the Olympians, with Zeus at the helm. However, it is not until the final few passages that the myth of Atalanta is finally told. The account of Apollodorus is relatively cut and dry, and the author does not linger on long descriptions of people or places. The myth reads as a catalogue of sorts, something to expect from a man such as Apollodorus, for he was a librarian, an historian, and a scholar; unlike Ovid, who is almost exclusively a poet by trade.

Iasus had a daughter, Atalanta by Clymene, daughter of Minyas. This Atalanta was exposed by her father, because he desired male children; and a she-bear came often and gave her suck, till hunters found her and brought her up among themselves. Grown to womanhood, Atalanta kept herself a virgin, and hunting in the wilderness she remained always under arms. The centaurs Rhoecus and Hylaeus tried to force her, but were shot down and killed by her. She went moreover with the chiefs to hunt the Calydonian boar, and at the games held in honor of Pelias she wrestled with Peleus and won. Afterwards she discovered her parents, but when her father would have persuaded her to wed, she went away to a place that might serve as a race-course, and, having planted a stake three cubits high in the middle of it, she caused her wooers to race before her from there, and ran herself in arms; and if the wooer was caught up, his due was a death on the spot, and if he was not caught up, his due was marriage. When many had already perished, Melanion came to run for love of her, bringing golden apples from Aphrodite, and being pursued he threw them down, and she, picking up the dropped fruit, was beaten in the race. So Melanion married her. And once on a time it is said that out hunting they entered into the precinct of Zeus, and there taking their fill of love were changed into lions. But Hesiod and some others have said that Atalanta was not a daughter of Iasus, but of Schoeneus; and Euripides says that she was a daughter of Maenalus, and that her husband was not Melanion but Hippomenes. And by Melanion, or Ares, Atalanta had a son Parthenopaeus, who went to the war against Thebes. III.2

Compared to Ovid, who will be discussed in depth later on, Apollodorus does not seem very interested in specific details and descriptions of people or places. The author seems to want to simply tell the story and move on. However, there is far more to this myth than meets the eye.

Apollodorus makes note that there is a discrepancy as to who Atalanta's father is. He presents her as the daughter of Iasus, but earlier accounts portray Atalanta as the daughter of Schoeneus, or Maenalus. Regardless of who Atalanta's real father was, all accounts say that she is the daughter of a king and is left in the wild to die. Dr. Judith Barringer, reputed author and classical archaeology expert, sheds some light on what the tale Atalanta means culturally. "Although the Atalanta vases are of different periods and fabrics, a comparison of the variant ways in which she is portrayed reveals striking similarities across time and distance. Combining aspects of male and female, insider and outsider, this devotee of Artemis is not only a female hunter but also a female ephebe, a paradox" (49).

A paradox such as the one described by Dr. Barringer is becoming a more common occurrence as research goes further in depth into the culture of Ancient Greece. Dr. Laurel Bowman, a classical scholar and author, speaks of growing evidence of a "women's tradition" in Greek poetry. "It has become increasingly common for scholars to speak of a 'women's tradition' in Greek poetry, and to attempt exegesis of what female authored poetry survives in terms of such a tradition. Even those scholars who do not refer specifically to a 'women's tradition' tend to describe women's poetry in the ancient world in terms that assume one" (1). This evidence suggests that strong women, in literature or otherwise, were more commonly seen in the ancient world than modern scholars think. Apollodorus does not fluff his account of Atalanta at all, merely telling a story for its own sake. Unlike a poet, as can be seen in Ovid, Apollodorus does not attempt to tell of any specific details, nor does he go in depth about any of the charac-

ters. Though digging deeper into specific lines will reveal more details than what the surface provides.

Looking into the first few lines of Apollodorus' account, a glimpse into past views of gender roles can be seen. "This Atalanta was exposed by her father because he wanted male children" (2). A deduction can immediately be made that this was a male-dominant society, where it was viewed that women were subservient and less prized from birth. Using the word "exposed" provides emphasis into the act of abandonment, so it is not like Apollodorus is composing this account without feeling. Apollodorus' choice of words and tone in expressing the father's want of male children is another clue into how social gender roles were structured. In ancient times, men were far more dominant than today; women had few rights to speak of, and the concept of having a male heir to continue lineage was highly sought after amongst a majority of families, common or wealthy. Consequently, the idea that a father would abandon a daughter in favor of a son might not be so outrageous. However, in Apollodorus' account, his tone indicates disgust with Atalanta's father, like Apollodorus has allowed his personal feelings to slip into his account of the myth. Regardless of whether or not Apollodorus allows his feelings to be placed within the myth, the story itself portrays a strong woman in what was a patriarchal society, and authors going much further back than Apollodorus have done the same thing.

Apollodorus continues in the myth with the story of the Calydonian boar hunt. This part of the adventures of Atalanta is one of the most frequently told tales throughout mythological accounts, making appearances in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (to be discussed later), in the works of the ancient Greek playwright Euripides of the 5th century BCE, and many others. According to Dr. Charles Segal, a Professor of Classics at Harvard University, many of the older authors prior to Apollodorus' time clearly told the tale based on male experi-

ence. "In Homer and Bacchylides the myth of Mileage and the Calydonian boar is concerned primarily with male experience. The *Iliad*, to be sure, powerfully addresses female experience through figures like Andromache, Briseis, Hecuba, Helen, and, on the divine plane, Thetis and Hera; but, inevitably, the male heroes dominate this poem of battle" (302). The account of Atalanta's presence could have been added later than the account that Homer tells in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, because in neither does Homer refer to Atalanta when telling the tale of the boar hunt. One of two things may have happened to explain this phenomenon: either Homer left Atalanta out of the myth intentionally to keep focus on the characters in his epic poems, or possibly that Atalanta was not a popular character during Homer's time and therefore was not included in the myth of the boar hunt for quite some time. The idea of the strong woman was not a thrilling concept to the ancient Greeks, but there are many times in which the idea appears in mythology, indicating that authors could have possibly been experimenting with what a strong woman would look like and how the attitude would affect other characters. Regardless, the account Apollodorus gives of the Calydonian boar hunt is very telling of the psychology of gender roles in ancient times.

After the boar hunt, Apollodorus tells that Atalanta finally meets her parents for the first time since being left to the wilderness as an infant, but she is uninterested in them, especially her father. Considering that her father is the one to have abandoned her, one can understand Atalanta's feelings towards men in general. When Atalanta's father attempts to force her to wed, Atalanta runs away to a place that Apollodorus describes as might be considered to be a race-course. Atalanta announces that a contest will determine her husband amongst her vast number of wooers; if the contestant is able to outrun Atalanta in a foot race, he may have her hand in marriage, and if he does not, he will be put to death. Despite the possibility of death, many suitors line up

for a chance to call Atalanta his wife. Many men fail to win, but there is one man that apparently will not be intimidated: Melanion. With the help of Aphrodite, goddess of love, and the gift of golden apples Melanion is able to defeat Atalanta and claim her as his wife. Dr. Judith Barringer explains the cultural influence behind the footrace. "The activities of Atalanta - the Calydonian boar hunt, the wrestling of Peleus, the footrace - are all typical rites of passage for the ancient Greek youth and maiden. There were very clear roles and rites for boys and girls in ancient Greece. At moments of initiation, boys dress as girls for certain rites, or girls perform typically male activities, the explanation for this being that in order to become one thing, one must first experience the opposite" (50). Perhaps this rite of passage is a way to explain why the author would use a footrace as a way to allow Atalanta to decide her husband, or using the Calydonian boar hunt as the event that proclaims Atalanta's reputation and fame. Since both the hunt and the footrace are primarily male-dominated activities, these initiation events could be a way in which the author allows Atalanta to gain the respect of her peers, because the author believes that performing activities secured mostly for women that Atalanta would not have the same result.

Regardless of the author's choices, the myth concludes with Atalanta and Melanion performing sexual intercourse inside a temple to Zeus, and as punishment is changed into lions. But why lions? In a footnote, Sir J.G. Frazier explains why the characters were changed into lions specifically. "The reason why the lovers were turned into a lion and a lioness for their impiety is explained by the ancient mythographers to be that lions do not mate with each other, but with leopards, so that after their transformation the lovers could never repeat the sin of which they had been guilty" (401). Sir Frazier cites multiple ancient sources to corroborate the explanation, including Pliny and Servius (in his commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid*).

Thus concludes the tale from the perspective of Apollodorus the scholar and historian. From Apollodorus' account the image of a strong, no nonsense woman that defies the typical gender roles of ancient Greek society comes to mind. Through the view of a modern person, such an image would be inspirational to any looking for a model to build themselves off of, but in ancient times that was not necessarily the case. Women had no rights amongst the community in ancient Greek society, and were considered to be amongst the lowest class of people.[4] In Roman times the extent to which women had roles in society was not so low. Women were in charge of the children, could help their husbands campaign for political office (but could not hold office themselves or vote in the actual election itself), but women were still considered citizens. A comparison between ancient Greek and Roman societies does give some hope to women since their status was elevated in the latter of the two civilizations, but that would change when the Western Empire fell in 476 CE and most societies in Western Europe collapsed into turmoil. As a result, one can see the effect the myth of Atalanta could have had on ancient peoples looking to better themselves. Apollodorus' account is something to be studied further in depth at a later date, as it could very well provide further evidence of how women were viewed in ancient Greece or even the author's own perspectives of gender structures in society. Yet there is another author that incorporates the full adventures of Atalanta into one of his works: Ovid, a 1st century CE Latin poet.

Unlike Apollodorus, modern Classical scholars know far more about Ovid because Ovid talks about himself in his works. Being a poet and not a scholar, the idea that an author would

[4] According to most scholarly accounts, women were usually grouped with foreigners and slaves when it came to classifying people in a community. Women were not considered citizens, had no say in political issues, and were most often kept in check by their husband even in household matters.

talk about his life in his works is not inconceivable. Frank Justus Miller, a translator for the Loeb Classical Library collection of Classical works, provides an in depth introduction to Ovid the person as well as the poet himself. "Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC - AD 17), born at Sulmo, studied rhetoric and law at Rome. Famous at first, he offended the emperor Augustus by his *Ars Amatoria*, and was banished because of this work and some other reason unknown to us, and dwelt in the cold and primitive town of Tomis on the Black Sea. He continued writing poetry, a kindly man, leading a temperate life. He died in exile" (ix-xiv). Many of Ovid's works: *Metamorphoses*, *Amores*, etc. are filled with tales of love, loss, suffering, and everything in between. Consequently, Ovid becomes an indispensable source in interpreting one of the ways in which Romans viewed women and women's roles in society. Alison Keith, a contributor to the work *A Companion to Ovid*, describes how Ovid's style treats sexuality and gender in the chapter *Sexuality and Gender*. "Classical poets repeatedly feminize and sexualize the landscapes in which they set male action, and Ovid participates in this tradition not only in the *Ars* but also, especially, in the *Metamorphoses*" (361). As it so happens, *Metamorphoses* is the source in which Ovid completes his account of the adventures of Atalanta.

To say that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* differs from other epics or poems that had existed prior seems to undersell the work. Indeed, the poem strays from many qualities that had characterized previous works for many years before Ovid was ever born. E.J. Kenney, yet another contributor to the modern work *A Companion to Ovid*, explains just how much Ovid steps away from tradition. "Fifteen papyrus rolls, a poem in fifteen books, signals a distance from tradition-

al epic which is instead characterized by a number corresponding to a multiple of six,[5] and an affinity with elegy, which favored multiples of five" (142).

Spread out between two books, Ovid's account appears at two different points within the *Metamorphoses*, and as such both will be cited separately to differentiate between the two.[6] Because Ovid writes in such detail and spends a lot of time fluffing his tale to be more pretty, it becomes difficult to separate Atalanta's tale from the rest of the characters and side stories going on at the same time. However, his style needs to be shown as much as possible to fully grasp the knowledge of how Ovid is writing and why he writes in such a manner. The description of the Calydonian boar hunt is first, and it is immediately obvious that Ovid's style is flowery and detailed.

> While Peleus was helping him to rise, Atalanta notched a swift arrow on the cord and sent it speeding from her bent bow. The arrow just grazed the top of the boar's back and remained stuck beneath his ear, staining the bristles with a trickle of blood. Nor did she show more joy over the success of her own stroke than Meleager. He was the first to see the blood, the first to point it out to his companions, and to say: 'Due honor shall your brave deed receive.' The men, flushed with shame, spurred each other on, gaining courage as they cried out, hurling their spears in disorder. The mass of missiles made them of no effect, and kept them from striking as they were meant to do. Then Ancaeus, the Arcadian,

[5] See also Merli 2004: 36 on the number of books in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
[6] Lines 380-436 of Book VIII tell the account of the Calydonian boar hunt from the moment of Atalanta's first mention in its participation to the end when the other participants snatch away the prized skin of the boar. Though Atalanta is mentioned first in line 317, the action of the Calydonian boar hunt with Atalanta does not begin until line 381. Lines 560-707 of Book X tell the tale of the footrace that would decide Atalanta's marriage and also the lustful defilement within the temple.

armed with a two-headed axe raging to meet his fate cried out: ‘Learn now, O youths, how far a man’s weapons surpass a girls; and leave this task to me. Though Latona’s daughter herself shields this boar with her own arrows, in spite of Diana shall my good right arm destroy him.’ So, swollen with pride and with boastful lips, he spoke: and lifting in both hands his two-edged axe, he stood on tiptoe, poised for a downward blow. The boar anticipated his bold enemy, and, as the nearest point for death, he fiercely struck at the upper part of the groins with his two tusks. Ancaeus fell; his entrails poured out amid streams of blood and the ground was soaked with gore. Then Ixion’s son, Pirithous, advanced against the foe, brandishing a hunting-spear in his strong right hand. To him Theseus cried out in alarm: ‘Keep away, O dearer to me than my own self, my soul’s other half; it is no shame for brave men to fight at long range. Ancaeus’ rash velour has proved his bane.’ He spoke and hurled his own heavy shaft with its sharp bronze point. Though this was well aimed and seemed sure to reach the mark, a leafy branch of an oak-tree turned it aside. Then the son of Aeson hurled his javelin, which chance caused to swerve from its aim and fatally wound an innocent dog, passing clear through his flanks and pinning him to the ground. But the hand of Meleager had a different fortune: he threw two spears, the first of which stood in the earth, but the second stuck squarely in the middle of the creature’s back. Straightway, while the boar rages and whirls round and round, spouting forth foam and fresh blood in a hissing steam, the giver of the wound presses his advantage, pricks his enemy on to madness, and at last plunges his gleaming hunting-spear right through the shoulder. The others vent their joy by wild shouts

> of applause and crowd around to press the victor's hand. They gaze in wonder at the huge beast lying stretched out over so much ground, and still think it hardly safe to touch him. But each dips his spear in the blood.
>
> Then Meleager, standing with his foot upon that death-dealing head, spoke thus to Atalanta: 'Take thou prize that is of my right, O fair Arcadian, and let my glory be shared with thee.' And therewith he presented her with the spoils: the skin with its bristling spikes, and the head remarkable for its huge tusks. She rejoiced in the gift and no less in the giver; but the others begrudged it, and an angry murmur rose through the whole company. Then two, the sons of Thestius, stretching out their arms, cried with a loud voice: 'Let be, girl, and do not usurp our honors. And be not deceived by trusting in your beauty, lest this lovesick giver be far from helping you.' And they took from her the gift, and from him the right of giving. VIII. 380-436

This account of the Calydonian boar hunt may seem unnecessarily lengthy, but that is simply Ovid's style. As a poet he is of course entitled to fluffy language and exaggeration of details, as well as being very in depth about details, however this becomes problematic when mythologists attempt to decide whether to take Ovid seriously in his account. Regardless of how the myth is presented, certain details within this account of the Calydonian boar hunt reveal the psychology of social gender roles.

Referring to the account of the Calydonian boar hunt cited previously, the first revealing detail about social gender roles comes in how the other men participating in the hunt react when Meleager decides on his own that Atalanta would be the one rewarded for her efforts in bringing down the boar. The men believe themselves shamed in the eyes of respectable company, for to

be bested by a woman in the act of hunting is not something to help one's reputation. Even though Atalanta was in fact the first to wound the boar, the other men still believed themselves above Atalanta in all things, including hunting skills. As a result, the men react impulsively and some are either wounded or killed. Atalanta's traits and skills seem to remove the act of hunting from the male gender, a quality seen in few characters of mythology. Dr. Ayala H. Gabriel, a respected anthropologist and classicist, sheds some light on this concept. "Gender, unlike anatomically sexed bodies, is extraneous to things, and can, like a manufactured label, be attached to, and detached from, such things as roles, acts, events, and objects. This gender on/off process is often imperceptible. Humans and nonhuman entities can be in one context gender-free and in another genderized" (348). Atalanta seems to strip away any gender assigned to the activity of hunting, perhaps giving reason to why the other men participating in the hunt are angered. Another example of gender conflict appears at the end of Ovid's account of the hunt, where the other men are again angered at Meleager when he decides to award the prize of the boar's skin to Atalanta without so much as consulting the others. After handing Atalanta the prize (which Atalanta is pleased by and Ovid describes it as such), the other men simply take it away. The field of studying gender roles and sexuality is becoming a more popular area of research today. "Although the theoretical position that sexuality is socially constructed has become a dogma in the field, much scholarly writing still presents it as a new and radical idea. This is because it is counterintuitive and has had little effect on attitudes outside the academy. Fundamentally, social constructionism argues that the categories in which we think about sexuality are not universal but are a creation of our culture" (Karras, 1251).

Continuing on with Ovid's account of Atalanta's adventures, the next appearance of Atalanta comes in Book X, between lines 560-707, in which Ovid describes the footrace. Again, it

is a lengthy event and seems unnecessarily fluffed, yet that is how Ovid chooses to present his stories. Unlike the account of the Calydonian boar hunt, the footrace is narrated not by Ovid directly, but by Venus.

> 'You may, perchance, have heard of a maid who surpassed swift-footed men in the contest of the race. And that was no idle tale, for she did surpass them. Nor could you say whether her fleetness or her beauty was more worthy of your praise. Now when this maid consulted the oracle about a husband, the god replied: "A husband will be your bane, O Atalanta; flee from the intercourse of husband; and yet you will not flee, and, though living, you will lose yourself." Terrified by the oracle of the god, she lived unwedded in the shady woods, and with harsh terms she repulsed the insistent throng of suitors. "I am not to be won," she said, "till I be conquered first in speed. Contest the race with me. Wife and couch shall be given as prize unto the swift, but death shall be the reward of those who lag behind. Be that the condition of the race." She, in truth, was pitiless, but such was the witchery of her beauty, even on this condition a rash throng of suitors came to try their fate. Now Hippomenes had taken his seat as a spectator of this cruel race, and had exclaimed: "Who would seek a wife at so great peril to himself?" and he had condemned the young men for their headstrong love. But when he saw her face and her disrobed form, such beauty as is mine, or as would be yours if you were a woman, he was amazed and, stretching out his hands, he cried: "Forgive me, ye whom but now I blamed. I did not yet realize the worth of the prize you strove for." As he praises, his own heart takes fire and he hopes that none of the youths may outstrip her in the race, and is

filled with jealous fears. "But why is my fortune in this contest left untried?" he cries. "God himself helps those who dare." While thus Hippomenes was weighing the matter in his mind, the girl sped by on winged feet. Though she seemed to the Aonian youth to go not less swiftly than a Scythian arrow, yet he admired her beauty still more. And the running gave a beauty of its own. The breeze bore back the streaming pinions on her flying feet, her hair was tossed over her white shoulders; the bright bordered ribbons at her knees were fluttering , and over her fair girlish body a pink flush came, just as when a purple awning, drawn over a marble hall, stains it with borrowed hues. While the stranger marked all this, the last goal was passed, and Atalanta was crowned victor with a festal wreath. But the conquered youths with groans paid the penalty according to the bond.

"Not deterred by the experience of these, however, Hippomenes stood forth and, fixing his eyes upon the girl, exclaimed: 'Why do you seek an easily won renown by conquering sluggish youth? Come, strive with me! If fortune shall give me the victory, 'twill be no shame for you to be overcome by so great a foe. For Megareus of Onchestus is my father and his grandfather is Neptune; hence I am the great-grandson of the king of the waters. Nor is my manly worth less than my race. Or, if I shall be defeated, you will have a great and memorable name for the conquest of Hippomenes.' As he said this, the daughter of Schoeneus gazed on him with softening eyes, being in a strait betwixt her desire to conquer and to be conquered. And thus she spoke: 'What god, envious of beauteous youths, wishes to destroy this one, and prompts him to seek wedlock

with me at the risk of his own dear life? I am no worth so great a price, if I am the judge. Nor is it his beauty that touches me - and yet I could be touched by this as well - but the fact that he is still but a boy. It is not he himself who moves me, but his youth. What of his manly courage and his soul fearless of death? What that he claims by birth to be the fourth from the monarch of the seas? What of his love for me, and that he counts marriage with me of so great worth that he would perish if cruel fate denies me to him? O stranger, go hence while still you may; flee from this bloody wedlock. Marriage with me is a fatal thing. No other maiden will refuse to wed you, and it may well be that a wiser girl will seek your love. - Yet why this care for you, so many suitors he was not warned, and cares so little for his life. - And shall he die, because he wished to live with me, suffer undeserved death as the penalty of love? My victory will be attended by unbearable hatred against me. But the fault is none of mine. O sir, I would that you might desist, or, since you are so madly set upon it, would that you might prove the swifter! Ah, how girlish is his youthful face! Ah, poor Hippomenes, I would that you had never looked on me! You were so worthy of life. But if I were of happier fortune, and if the harsh fates did not deny me marriage, you were the only he with whom I should want to share my couch.' So speaks the maid; and, all untutored, feeling for the first time the impulse of love, ignorant of what she does, she loves and knows it not.

Meanwhile the people and her father demanded the accustomed race. Then did the Neptunian youth, Hippomenes, with suppliant voice call on me: 'O may Cytherea,' he said, 'be near, I pray, and assist the thing I dare and smile upon

the love which she has given.' A kindly breeze bore this soft prayer to me and I confess it moved my heart. And there was but scanty time to give him aid. There is a field, the natives call it the field of Tamasus, the richest portion of the Cyprian land, which in ancient times men set apart to me and bade my temples be enriched with this. Within this field there stands a tree gleaming with golden leaves and its branches crackle with the same bright gold. Fresh come from there, I chanced to have in my hand three golden apples which I had plucked. Revealing myself to no one save to him, I approached Hippomenes and taught him how to use the apples. The trumpets had sounded for the race, when they both, crouching low, flashed forth from their stalls and skimmed the surface of the sandy course with flying feet. You would think that they could graze the sea with unwed feet and pass lightly over the ripened heads of the standing grain. The youth cheered on by shouts of applause and the words of those who cried to him: 'Now, now is the time to bend to the work, Hippomenes! Go on! Now use your utmost strength! No tarrying! You're sure to win!' It is a matter of doubt whether the heroic son of Megareus or the daughter of Schoeneus took more joy of these words. Oh, how often, when she could have passed him, did she delay and after gazing long upon his face reluctantly leave him behind! And now dry, panting breath came from his weary throat and the goal was still far away. Then at length did Neptune's scion throw one of the three golden apples. The maid beheld it with wonder and, eager to possess the shining fruit, she turned out of her course and picked up the flying golden thing. Hippomenes passed her by while the spectators roared their applause. She by a burst of speed made up for her delay and

the time that she had lost, and again left the youth behind her. Again she delayed at the tossing of the second apple, followed and passed the man. The last part of the course remained. 'Now be near me, goddess, author of my gift!' he said, and obliquely into a side of the field, returning whence she would lose much time, with all his youthful strength he threw the shining gold. The girl seemed to hesitate whether or not she should go after it. I forced her to take it up, and added weight to the fruit she carried, and so impeded her equally with the weight of their burden and with her loss of time. And, lest my story be longer than the race itself, the maiden was outstripped; the victor led away his prize.

'And was I not worthy, Adonis, of being thanked and of having the honor of incense paid to me? But, forgetful of my services, he neither thanked nor offered incense to me. Then was I changed to sudden wrath and, smarting under the slight, and resolved not to be slighted in the future, I decided to make an example of them, and urged myself on against them both. They were passing by a temple deep hidden in the woods, which in ancient times illustrious Echion had built to the mother of the gods in payment of a vow; and the long journey persuaded them to rest. There incontinent desire seized on Hippomenes, who was under the spell of my divinity. Hard by the temple was a dimly lighted, cave-like place, built of soft native rock, hallowed by ancient religious veneration, where the priest had set many wooden images of the olden gods. This place he entered; this holy presence he defiled by lust. The sacred images turned away their eyes. The tower-crowned Mother was on the verge of plunging the guilty pair beneath the waves of Styx; but the punishment seemed light. And so tawny manes

> covered their necks but now smooth, their fingers curved into claws, their arms changed to legs, their weight went chiefly to their chests, with tails they wept the surface of the sandy ground. Harsh were their features, rough growls they've for speech, and for marriage chamber they haunted the wild woods. And now as lions, to others terrible, with tamed mouths they champed the bits of Cybele. These beasts, and with them all other savage things which turn not their backs in flight, but offer their breasts to battle, do you, for my sake, dear boy, avoid, lest your manly courage be the ruin of us both.' X. 560-707

As previously stated earlier, Venus acts as the narrator for the duration of the myth, and provides an interesting perspective into the mind of Ovid. By allowing Venus to tell the tale of the foot-race rather than doing so himself, Ovid creates a first-hand account that the reader can experience rather than a secondhand narration from the author. Gianpiero Roast, a contributor to *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, composes a perspective on the narrative techniques within Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. "The action which gives birth to the poem is continually replicated internally through the mediation of *mise en abyme*, a narration within a narration. It has been estimated that about a third of the length of the poem, including about 60 of the episodes is narrated not by the external narrator, but by about 40 internal narrators" (272).

This interchanging of narrators creates a different perspective for the reader, though is not always the best poetic device when attempting to create an account that is swift and meaningful rather than fluffed and detailed. Venus herself says so within the passage in stating "And lest my story be longer than the race itself". Roast says the same in his composition. "The narrator sets up a confrontation between the time of the narration, inevitably slow, and the swift passing of the metamorphosis itself. It is not always possible to find a correspondence or a balanced relation-

ship between these two times" (285). Ovid's account is clearly different from that of Apollodorus in many qualities, yet there are a few that stand out most prominently: his handling of the Atalanta character, the emotion of Hippomenes (Melanion), and the description of the race itself.

The first feature to standout is how Ovid describes Atalanta's character, and does not simply remove it from the equation as Apollodorus does. In Ovid's account, Atalanta does not approve of how men would have their way, yet when Hippomenes comes along and asks for his turn, he is apparently so youthful and handsome that Atalanta practically begs him to think twice and go marry some other beautiful maiden. Atalanta actually shows care for Hippomenes, a quality absent in Apollodorus' description of Atalanta. Another feature is the emotion Ovid provides Hippomenes with when he spots Atalanta, when Hippomenes prays to Venus for help, and when Hippomenes and Atalanta come upon the temple in a fit of lust. A poet and storyteller such as Ovid would logically write of the emotions which characters felt as events were happening around them, as opposed to scholars and librarians like Apollodorus, who only want to relate a summary of what happened and then move on. The third and final feature is the description of the race itself. Ovid goes into great detail when describing the apples that Hippomenes uses to distract Atalanta during the race, the outcomes of the other suitors who fail to overtake Atalanta, as well as character background. Ovid describes where the apples came from, how the other suitors felt after they lost, and Hippomenes' heritage (being the great-grandson of Neptune), all of which are absent details in Apollodorus' short-hand account of the adventures of Atalanta.

The accounts presented by Apollodorus and Ovid in their respective works are almost polar opposites in terms of composition and attention to detail; yet both tell the same general story at heart: a woman abandoned at birth defies the social gender roles set by civilization to become a the model concept of the strong woman before being changed into an animal as punish-

ment for angering the gods. This idea of the strong woman may seem as though it contradicts what modern people think about the ancient societies of Greece and Rome, but conclusions should not be jumped to so quickly. "This governing paradigm of ancient sexuality may be very different from the scholarly construction of sexuality today but not so far from a view widely held among the North American public, that gay men are effeminate and lesbians masculine" (Karras, 1256). The sexual orientation of Atalanta is irrelevant; what is not is that ancient Mediterranean views of gender may not have been as far off as people may think.

Ovid and Apollodorus both present similar accounts of a myth that has been a source of enduring inspiration and popularity throughout the course of time: the adventures of Atalanta. Atalanta's character is one that defies the odds and is the model of what a strong woman might look like in ancient societies, ones that so often did not allow for such an occurrence based on laws and views of the time. As a result, the ancients turned to mythology to understand what the consequences might be if a strong, independent woman took control of her own life and her own choices before destiny took over. Further research needs to be done in order to fully understand how the ancient peoples would view social gender roles in regards to mythology, and if the ancients really had the views modern classical scholars peg them to have. However, it is clear that telling stories from mythology was a way of experimenting with gender roles, and the myth of Atalanta is the perfect example.

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