

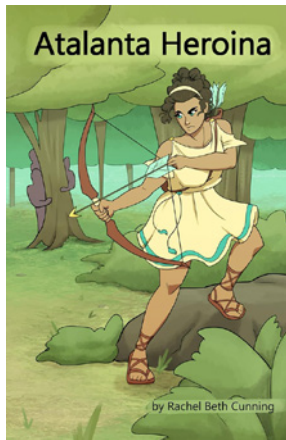
Book Review

Atalanta Heroína

Cunning (R.B.) Pp vi+86, ills. Independently published, 2023. Paper, US\$10.50.
ISBN: 9798377113713. <https://bombaxpress.com/atalanta-heroína-a-latin-novella/>

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From Bombax Press, Rachel Beth Cunning has added another novella to her impressive catalogue. Cunning is responsible for over ten Latin novellas, written for varying proficiency levels. Topics range from mythology to history to complete fiction and are all for use by anyone seeking to improve their reading proficiency through engaging and comprehensible Latin. The entire line-up of titles available through Bombax Press is available via her website, <https://bombaxpress.com/>, among other resources for the novellas and blog posts about Latin

pedagogy. Cunning also co-hosts a YouTube channel, *Bene Narras*, with fellow writer and Latin teacher, Arianne Belzer-Carroll, about the processes of writing Latin novellas. As stated on her website, ‘Ms. Cunning’s goal as a novella writer is to produce a compelling story that makes accessible those stories that so inspired the ancient Roman world.’

Cunning’s approach to portraying Atalanta in *Atalanta Heroína* is primarily to focus on the depth of her self-reliance and determination as an independent female character. The first six chapters focus on Atalanta’s life when she is abandoned by her father upon seeing that he has a daughter instead of a son. Atalanta is subsequently raised in the woods by Diana, disguised as a bear. Atalanta then grows up to become a *fortis et celeris virgo* who sails with Jason for the Golden Fleece, although she is ridiculed at first by the sailors. Cunning also includes the episode where Atalanta kills two centaurs who verbally assault her. Then, she journeys to Calydonia to ultimately lead the hunt to kill the boar which is terrorising the city. Despite being a woman, Atalanta’s bravery and skill with her bow and arrow are recognised by the rest of the hunting party, so Atalanta is awarded the boar’s head. The writing is a mixture of third-person omniscient narrating and Atalanta speaking from her own perspective with her own thoughts, through which Cunning is able to further develop Atalanta’s individuality and voice.

In chapter seven, we finally have the return of Atalanta’s father who claims her as his own, now that Atalanta has achieved her own accolades, and then the infamous footrace is both the climax and ending of the novella. Cunning’s recounting of the relationship between Atalanta and Hippomenes goes past the story of a patriarchal footrace from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Cunning underscores the root of Atalanta’s name, *ἀτάλαντος*, meaning ‘equal in weight’ or ‘equivalent to’, by using the Latin adjective *pār* when describing both Atalanta and Hippomenes. The famous competition takes place, but Cunning adds scenes of conversation between the two runners as they race through the forest. Sensing Atalanta’s strong dislike of giving up her identity to become an *uxor*, Hippomenes vocalises great respect and admiration for Atalanta’s achievements. Atalanta’s thoughts of being just another *uxor* are eased as Hippomenes gives her credit where credit is obviously due. Cunning repeats the word *pār* or *pārēs*, emphasising the equality felt by both characters about the other. Through this conversation and Atalanta’s internal dialogue, we are given a glimpse into a mutually considerate and budding relationship between Atalanta and Hippomenes. With the race over, when Atalanta has her golden apples and Hippomenes now has a wife, we are left with a very different impression concerning the power dynamic of the couple than the traditional outcome.

Cunning states her intentional use of the Dickinson Core Vocabulary and the Essential Latin vocabulary as the bases for this novella in order to ‘ensure that students who are reading this novella are being exposed to high-frequency words in Latin literature’. Given the timely publication of Keeline and Kirby’s article, ‘Latin Vocabulary and Reading Latin: Challenges and Opportunities,’ in *TAPA* on this very topic of core vocabulary, Cunning’s rationale on vocabulary use is both sound and supported through various data. Cunning has sufficiently scaffolded the presentation of vocabulary in the novella for the ease of the novice reader as well as the teacher who may use it in a more structured way. Each page has footnotes for unfamiliar vocabulary and/or illustrations that convey the meaning of sentences that may not as readily be understood. The novella has both a glossary as well as a dictionary in its last pages. The glossary lists the *lemmata* of given lexemes for easier access to the novice reader. The dictionary is more standard in its presentation of Latin vocabulary by providing the principal parts of verbs and nominative and genitive singular forms of nouns. There is frequent repetition throughout the novella which adds to developing understanding of the 146 words used throughout.

The centering of Atalanta in *Atalanta Heroína* follows the recent emphasis on female narrative in classical literature, such as *Circe* by Madeline Miller, *Lavinia* by Ursula K. Le Guin, and *Stone Blind* by Natalie Haynes. Cunning has made the myth of Atalanta more accessible to beginning Latin learners and therefore opened a door for cultural discussions around gender and authority in the ancient world as early as Latin 1. Cunning’s decision to begin the novella with Atalanta’s birth instead of the footrace provides the space to develop Atalanta as a person using comprehensible Latin that would resonate with the student reader today. This novella could easily be used in conjunction with the *Metamorphoses*’ account in upper-level Latin courses in order to examine gender and identities expressed through mythology as a reflection of social perspectives.

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