



Ovid's *Metamorphoses*  
Selections

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# Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

## Introduction

The various stories that are presented here are intended to be used with students who are making the transition from learning Latin to reading Latin authors. The running vocabulary is intended to allow the students to move through the story as quickly as possible; as readers of Ovid quickly realize, the poet's vocabulary is extensive and can change dramatically from one episode to the next. An asterisk is placed after certain words because I felt when I included the word that the students should really learn this word; there is neither a scientific basis nor a thorough review of these, so teachers can use them as they wish or ignore them, which is what many of the students do. The notes are aimed at leading the students to look at the Latin and provide help when I thought it appropriate. For most students this is their first exposure to poetic word order and to figures of speech; they are also learning meter and encountering a text without macrons. The work sheets, which may be distributed by the teacher, can provide the students with practice if assigned for homework or a quiz, and can serve as a review aid when studying for a test. C+R stands for Case and Reason (i.e. Ablative Means), FS for Figure of Speech, Intros for introduces (a clause), and TMV for Tense, Mood, Voice.

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# Atalanta X.560-707



*Johann Ulrich Krauss, Edition 1690*

## Atalanta (X.560-707)

The story of Atalanta is like the Russian matriushka or homuncule doll sets, one story enclosed within another in an almost endless series. Orpheus, mourning the loss of his wife at the start of Book X (1-85), goes to a grove where Cyparissus weeps forever because he killed a stag sacred to the nymphs and has become a cypress, the tree of mourning (X.86-142). There the sad singer tells of various loves and their outcomes. Gany- mede and Hyacinthus (X.155-219) become the cup-bearer of the gods and a flower because of the passions they rouse in Jupiter and Apollo. The Cerastae and Propoetides, females in contrast, to the males in the first two stories, offend the gods and are turned by Jupiter into sacrificial bulls (Cerastae) and by Venus into prostitutes who literally harden into stone (Propetides). Pygmalion (X.243-297), disgusted by the latter, becomes celibate and creates his ideal woman out of marble; after his love is recognized and made real by Venus. Myrrha (X.298-502), a granddaughter of Pygmalion's daughter Paphos, has an incestuous love for her father Cinyras, flees after the crime and is transformed into a myrrh tree as she gives birth to the handsome Adonis. The story of Venus' love for Adonis (X.503-739) is filled mainly with the story of Hippomenes and Atalanta. Venus has been unintentionally wounded by Cupid and falls in love with the handsome Adonis; while pursuing the youth and joining in his hunting expedition, Venus tells him the story of Hippomenes and Atalanta (X.560-707) as the two rest under a tree.

Atalanta wishes to avoid marriage because of a prophecy that she will turn into an animal if she marries. Blessed with unusual speed and confident that she can defeat anyone, she says she will marry only the man who can defeat her in a race. One of the spectators, Hippomenes, disparages men foolish enough to enter such a race; then he sees Atalanta and is panic-stricken that she might lose before he has a chance to race. His prayers to Venus are answered and the goddess supplies him with three golden apples to divert the maiden from the course. Once Atalanta sees the youthful contender, she is torn between her love at first sight and her reluctance to loose. Eventually, as is true in most fairy tales of this ilk, the princess is won by the handsome young prince and lives happily ever after; here, however, the prophecy does come true and she and her husband are turned into lions.

There are other versions of the story: the role of Hippomenes is taken by Meleager and with Atalanta, now the daughter of Iasus, he participates in the hunt for the Calydonian Boar. In some versions Hippomenes' name is changed to Milanion. But the point of the story remains the same: Venus is warning Adonis about what happens to those who did not listen to the advice of the gods and thank them properly, a warning that Adonis of course disregards. He winds up gored by another wild boar and his blood gives birth to a flower, the delicate and beautiful anemone. The idea of a contest to win the hand of a beautiful princess is a staple of many myths and folk tales; it suggests the power of love to overcome all obstacles, endorses social mobility (although the winner often is revealed as a prince in disguise), and affirms the concept that might makes right (and an acceptable husband), as it quite often did in earlier times.

### Outline:

560-566 Atalanta is frightened away from marriage by a prophecy.

567-574 Although death is the consequence of losing, many agree to her condition of racing to determine whom she marries.

575-586 Hippomenes condemns their rashness until he sees her and falls in love.

587-599 Atalanta defeats the suitors easily and they pay the penalty.

600-608 Hippomenes challenges her and boasts of his lineage.

609-637 Atalanta sees him, falls in love, and wishes that he were not as rash as he is.

638-651 Hippomenes prays for help and Venus provides three golden apples and instructions on how to use them.

652-680 The race is won by Hippomenes who diverts Atalanta by tossing the apples away from the course.

681-707 Unthanked by Hippomenes, the angry Venus makes the young couple dishonor a temple of Cybele, who then turns them into lions.