



Rewriting the Myth of Atalanta: Cross-Dressing and Gender Equality in Emily Hauser's *For the Winner*

Daniel Nisa Cáceres
Universidad Pablo de Olavide  

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EN Abstract. This article studies Emily Hauser's *For the Winner* (2017), a contemporary reimagining of the myth of Atalanta. This novel belongs to a women-authored literary mode that gives prominence and a voice to classical female characters and myths. Close examination of the politics of cross-dressing, as well as how Atalanta's mythic identity is reconstructed as a heroine undaunted by gender lines reveals that Hauser's approach constitutes a central site for ascribing meanings of determination, agency, and gender equality, thus culturally repositioning the male-centredness of her canonical representations and providing a feminist reinscription of the myth.

Keywords: Emily Hauser; Atalanta; cross-dressing; remythologising; female-authored rewritings; *For the Winner*; gender equality

ES Reescritura del mito de Atalanta: travestismo e igualdad de género en *For the Winner*, de Emily Hauser

ES Resumen. Este artículo estudia la reescritura que Emily Hauser hace del mito de Atalanta en *For the Winner* (2017). Esta novela pertenece a una corriente literaria contemporánea de autoría femenina que da prominencia y voz a personajes y mitos femeninos de la tradición clásica. El escrutinio analítico del travestismo de Atalanta, así como de la reconstrucción de su identidad mítica ante las barreras de género revela los objetivos de Hauser: erigir un emplazamiento clave para atribuirle significados de determinación, agencia e igualdad de género, al tiempo que reubica culturalmente la centralidad masculina de sus representaciones canónicas y proporciona un replanteamiento feminista al mito.

Palabras clave: Emily Hauser; Atalanta; travestismo; remitificación; reescrituras femeninas; *For the Winner*; igualdad de género

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Reimagining the unimaginable: Gendering the classical tradition. 3. Donning her destiny: Cross-dressing and the politics of disguise. 4. Reconstructing Atalanta's identity: A power higher even than the fates. 5. Conclusion: Delivering the message that changes everything. Works Cited.

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1. Introduction

Through critical analysis, the objective of this article is to explore the myth of Atalanta in Emily Hauser's novel *For the Winner* (2017). By closely examining cross-dressing and the politics of disguise, as well as interrogating the reconstruction of Atalanta's mythic identity, this critical enquiry aims to demonstrate how this character's resoluteness, agency, and quest for gender equality are crucially ascribed in the process of gendering the myth, thus subverting proclivities towards androcentric bias in commonly-held assumptions about it. In *For the Winner*, the second volume of her eminently feminist *Golden Apple Trilogy*—which also comprises *For the Most Beautiful* (2016) and *For the Immortal* (2018), Emily Hauser reimagines Atalanta against the backdrop of the legendary quest of Jason and the Argonauts for the Golden Fleece. Acknowledging the fluidity of both myths, Hauser renegotiates them accordingly, in order to reinvest Atalanta with the power to dictate her own destiny. The novel draws on the versions of Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (1.16), where she is on the list of the Argo, and Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* (1.768–773), where Jason opts against including her. In neither version does she pretend, unlike Hauser's iteration, to be a man by donning a male disguise, being unequivocally perceived as a woman. Furthermore, in Hauser's novel it is Atalanta herself who tells her own story, which is narrated in a fluently colloquial style befitting her age. *For the Winner* alternates between her first-person intradiegetic narrative and six chapters, which—besides the Prologue and Epilogue—are set in Olympus, “where eternal beings live in endless time” (2). These interspersed sections are related by an omniscient narrator in italics, a pattern not dissimilar to that used in the other two volumes of the trilogy. Hauser makes here, however, a firm resolve to clearly separate both worlds, virtually leaving the gods and goddesses' plots and capricious interference in an oblique position so that Atalanta can fully develop, perpetually embattled as she is, constantly “running, beating away thorny brambles and ferns” (9), as a highly resolute, well-rounded character on a strictly human level.

Hauser's Atalanta is endowed with the same enviable strength, speed, fighting skills, innate determination and nonconformity of the sources. In *For the Winner*, instead of “cramping [her] limbs into the postures proper for a woman” as all “the farmers upon the slopes of Mount Pelion” (16) wished, Atalanta puts her own desire before the laws of men and gods. In doing so, she leaves her foster-parents in Kaladrosos in search of her genuine identity as the daughter of King Iasos of Pagasae, who ignominiously had exposed her to die despite being his first-born. Atalanta is nevertheless partly dispossessed of her traditional motif-structure—namely, her “misanthropy” or the fact that she is not “suckled by a she-bear” (Barringer 49); and her singularly stunning beauty (Franco Durán 29). More importantly, rather than being perceived as a stereotyped anomaly, Hauser's Atalanta subverts these assumptions by tracing her own road map to gender equity and equality. Additionally, she is divested of her canonical semi-divine associations

with Artemis as her priestess or virgin huntress. This is reinforced by the fact that the hunting goddess only makes a brief, casual appearance in the narrative (52–54), as opposed to other Olympian divinities—Hera, Zeus, the messenger goddess Iris, Poseidon, and Hermes—with whom the myth of Atalanta is not so closely associated. It is Iris who finds out that Prince Lycon, and not Atalanta, as they all had thought, is Zeus' offspring:

‘And yet it is the truth,’ Iris says, forcing herself to be patient. ‘By the very words of the Fates themselves, Atalanta is the daughter of a mortal. Her prowess with the bow, her swift-footedness—they are her own abilities, achieved by her own merit, her own labour.’ She hears a faint note of pride in her voice and almost smiles as she turns to Zeus. ‘I tell you, it is true. Lycon is your son.’ (297)

A different and mysterious destiny for Atalanta is written in the scrolls kept in the Library of the Muses, one related to the “prophecy of Pagasae's kingship” (299), but Iris clearly advances that it has not been the Fates who have determined who will ascend the throne of Pagasae. In point of fact, in *For the Immortal* (2018)—third and last volume in Hauser's trilogy, but whose events would precede chronologically those narrated in *For the Winner* and *For the Most Beautiful*—Zeus himself confirms that the Fates are an invention of his own devising (249) to keep order in Olympus, a circumstance that further delineates the fluid individuality of Hauser's Atalanta in contrast to the proverbial inexorability of destiny both in the myth and the classical tradition.

Left then, in retrospect, to her own devices, while the Olympian divinities are on the sidelines of the narrative, readers can recapitulate and resignify Atalanta's progress and her manifestly volitional sense of agency in adversity. Hauser's heroine builds her self “as an entity independent from the external world” (Jeannerod 1) by ably passing herself off as a humble slave once she is inside the walls of Pagasae. Later on, undeterred by binary restrictions, she cross-dresses as a nobleman called Telamon under two key circumstances. Firstly, in order to take a chance on becoming an Argonaut, a risky venture effectively executed until Meleager tries to rape whom he thinks is an effeminate boy—in actuality Atalanta in male disguise. She is recognised, a circumstance that does not go unpunished, as Jason disowns her as an equal, which destabilises both her self-recognition and her external recognition by others. However, rather than killing Atalanta, Jason sends her and Myrtessa, a slave woman who had accompanied her in the guise of a male slave, into exile in the land of Colchis. Atalanta resorts to cross-dressing for a second time when she returns to Greece empty-handed, but accompanied by Hippomenes. Passing herself off again as Telamon, she triggers her public anagnorisis and, not without difficulty, is recognised as King Iasus' “long-lost daughter” (311) and legitimate heir of Pagasae. It is at this juncture that she does her utmost to avoid being treated “as a chattel to be bargained in marriage” (312) with Jason and “gain [her] freedom” (314) by challenging him and any prospective suitors to a footrace. Aware of her own athletic capabilities, victory is a certainty. However,

contrary to these volitional expectations as well as to common assumptions about Atalanta's race in the Ovidian, male-centred version of myth in his *Metamorphoses* (X.645–650)—where she mindlessly picks up the three golden apples artfully dropped one by one by Hippomenes and is defeated, Hauser's Atalanta loses on purpose. In what constitutes a paradoxical win-win inner negotiation, she makes use of her determination to be second to none by consciously grabbing the golden apple¹ thrown by sensible Hippomenes, and thus willingly co-rule Pagasae with him. Given that her name in Greek means 'equal in weight', and there being no such thing as destiny, there is paradoxically all the more need for her to assume through equity the inspiring qualities of feminine leadership, consequently dispelling the discouraging prospect offered by Jason as a ruler and a spouse.

2. Reimagining the unimaginable: Gendering the classical tradition

For the Winner should be understood as part of "a literary mode" that brings a wider audience "closer to a lived-in perspective" by "repositioning through conventions of modern fiction, characters and consciousness originating in classical literature" (Nikolaou 12). The early twenty-first century has witnessed an emergence of a great many women writers that tackle from a feminist point of view questions left unresolved not only in the original classical texts, but also in less recent appropriations and overdetermined examples of reception. Female characters are given a voice and their stories tend to be recounted intradiegetically, while a greater emphasis placed on their experiences works to relegate more usually prominent male characters to a, if any, secondary position. This is the case with Hauser's Jason. Hence the implicit irony in the misleading subtitle added for commercial reasons to the U.S. edition of *For the Winner* published by Pegasus Books (2017)—*A Novel of Jason and the Argonauts*, echoed in early reviews but now discarded. It is as much to recognise the temporality of words as to emphasise that "the already and the not yet both exist in the here and now" (Coupe 58) that Hauser problematises past, present, and even future patterns of gender inequality. Hauser's critique is a constant in the aforementioned literary mode, as echoes of Erica Jong's *Sappho's Leap* (2003) and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005)—in their multiple seminal significances—make their presence specially felt in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008), Jo Graham's *Black Ships* (2008), Irene Vallejo's *El silbido del arquero* (2015), Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018), Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2019) and *Stone Blind* (2022), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*

(2018) and *Women of Troy* (2021), Hannah M. Lynn's *The Grecian Women Series* (20–22), Janell Rhiannon's *Homeric Chronicles* (2018–), Jennifer Saints' *Atalanta* (2023) and Hauser's own *Golden Apple Trilogy* (2016–2018). Other works, however, show a more indirect approach, transpositioning their reimaginings, more or less explicitly, onto a more contemporary, modern-day setting as exemplified by Margaret Drabble's *The Seven Sisters* (2002), Angela Green's *Cassandra's Disk* (2002), Joyce Carol Oates' *The Tattooed Girl* (2003), Natalie Haynes' *The Amber Fury* (2014), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017) or Sharma Shield's *The Cassandra* (2019).

As more reception studies are turning to these female-authored texts, such as Justine McConnell and Edith Hall (2016) and Fiona Cox and Elena Theodorakopoulos (2019), considerable critical attention is being paid to the rich cultural significance underlying this gendered power politics with which these retellings reinvest the classical tradition. Their preoccupations are being laid bare and their formal choices, untangled:

Further, this intense reading and reworking of the classics has coincided with comment on individual and social concerns at certain historical junctures, and has repeatedly illuminated the nature of the dialogue between poets, and between traditions.² (Nikolaou 1)

That is the case of Emily Hauser, a British novelist and classicist herself who, in her own words, combines "research and creative writing" (*Classics*, 165). In her trilogy, she deftly assists readers by means of glossaries, maps, calendars, and suggestions for further reading, but it is her succinct but compendious Author's Note that sharply delimits the world of *For the Winner* and her young protagonist, Atalanta. In it she identifies and brings the sources into direct relationship with the novel, pointing up her attempt at "nod[ding] to the many alternative versions of the myth", preserving "Apollonius' humorous and domestic gods [...] while keeping the fantastic elements [...] at a minimum to privilege Atlanta's very human story"; yet, she eloquently admits having given Atalanta a voice and the final say in her own story, thus counteracting centuries of male-centred assumptions made about her (331–332). This principle is further fortified by empowering Atalanta with a strong sense of determination and agency. Through a Bakhtinian stance against determinism while placing an "emphasis on the human capacity for choice, and therefore responsibility" (Justman 79), she reimagines what is commonly perceived as a flaw in Atalanta when she prioritises the golden apple over winning the race. As Rebeca Gualberto Valverde suggests in relation to Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*, it is

¹ In Hauser's *Golden Apple Trilogy*, the novels' eponymous titles come from each of the inscriptions upon the three golden apples stolen by Calliope at Zeus and Hera's wedding, which explains why Hippomenes can only throw one in *For the Winner*. Another significant departure from the Ovidian source can be found in John Donne's elegy "To His Mistress Going to Bed", where the speaker "imaginatively recombines and reconceives gendered images against the grain of their normative significations" (Filo 13) through his witty allusion to "Atalanta's balls" (36), namely accusing men of prioritising women's wealth and earthly possessions over female sensual beauty.

² Although this literary mode is mainly anglophone, it is also a point of critical necessity to provide coherent assessment of poetic and narrative remediations in Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian and other languages. In what might be loosely coined as galliclassical or hispaclassical, this pressing concern is addressed, amongst others, by Fiona Cox, who has compellingly contributed to a deepened critical understanding of women writers' retellings of the classical tradition in French and English (*Aeneas, Sibylline Sisters, Ovid's Presence*), or Daniel Nisa Cáceres and Rosario Moreno Soldevila (*Dream, Hopes*), in English and Spanish.

a quest through history, an appropriation and dismantling of tradition. Customs are evacuated, unmade. Gender, like myth, is discourse. It is symbolic. It can be rewritten and resignified. The reshaping of myth remakes gender; the unmasking of myth dissolves gender categories. (132)

Atalanta's own choice, free at least—and at last—from these categories and the direct influence of destiny and other external or supernatural factors once Zeus has retired his backing, ensures herself the hand of Hippomenes and the future possibility to make a difference through her sensible, equable, judicious rule of Pagasae.

Acutely self-aware narratives as they are, Hauser's *For the Winner*, Le Guin's *Lavinia*, or Miller's *Circe* go some way to hinting at the tensions inherent in the rewriting process, especially the near-impossible equidistance between faithfulness to the hypotexts and the need for gendering their remediations. In so doing, *For the Winner* ends on a note of self-assertiveness and unquenchable resolve. However, in her Author's Note Hauser does not mention what also seems to be a major deviation from Apollodorus and Apollonius by subtly transcending Atalanta's habitual identification with Artemis and the Amazons, as well as their hunting attire and attributes. Instead, she dresses as a female slave, and then dons a male disguise as a nobleman. Her motif-structure is rearticulated in order to gain access first to the royal palace at Pagasae, then to the group of heroes aboard the Argo in their search for the Golden Fleece, and finally, back in Thessaly, to King Iasus' morning audience. Similar non-canonical allusions, or occurrences of a cross-dressed or disguised Atalanta, can be found in doña Elvira's "hábito de hombre [...] / como otra Atalanta nueva" (ll. 803-814) in Lope de Vega's play *La Campana de Aragón* (1623), or in George Frideric Handel's pastoral opera *Atalanta* (1736), where Princess Atalanta of Arcadia feigns to be a lowly huntress. Consequently, cross-dressing makes a useful point of departure for considering Hauser's process of reimagining the myth while confronting the displacements and dialogic interrelations between gender roles and gender equality.

3. Donning her destiny: Cross-dressing and the politics of disguise

Cross-dressing or transvestism is inextricably connected with ancient Greek and Roman literature and culture, mainly through Thetis' ruse consisting in dressing Achilles as a girl in Scyros (Moreno Soldevila 428); the Greek festival known as the Tesmophoria in Aristophanes' play; the representations of a "ritual pattern of initiation" (Clark 117) or "initiatory rites" (Barringer 51) that allowed boys and girls to invert their roles temporarily; the Ovidian "Hercules and Omphale" and "Iphis"; and several characters in

Apuleius' *Golden Ass*.³ But gender-bending is also extensively inscribed in its medieval and early-modern reception in Europe, as attested by the multifarious ways it is situated within, for instance, Elizabethan, Jacobean and Spanish Golden Age drama. Their heroines became so popular that "not only did they in response frequently arouse metatheatrical allusions related to a keen awareness of the motif, but they served as models to be followed in everyday life as well" (Nisa Cáceres 38), a phenomenon also patent in its subsequent reception despite historical changes in cultural responsiveness.⁴

Although readers of *For the Winner* are only tangentially concerned with what Martha Ronk terms the "problematics of representation" with regard to the multiple identity layers the audience could perceive simultaneously in cross-dressed boy-actors (265), it is not a coincidence that Shakespeare's Orlando compares Rosalind with Atalanta, Lucretia, and Cleopatra in *As You Like It* (ll.141-149). Lesser ontological confusion, however, does not mean less complexity. Considering that "scholars must keep in mind the complex set of intersecting boundaries that can be variously 'crossed' (gender, class, sexuality, national)" (Wixson 242), for Hauser's Atalanta—as befalls most disguised heroines—adopting a male guise also involves the performative pretence of speaking and behaving as a man, and even taking on a new identity. It is a mechanism that makes social emancipation possible due to its levelling force (Nisa Cáceres and Moreno Soldevila, *Mujer disfrazada*, 539), in her case, as Telamon, a Cretan⁵ nobleman. This also applies to Myrtessa, a slave who becomes her confidant and comes up with the idea of cross-dressing. She thus becomes Dolius, Telamon's male slave, in order to accompany Atalanta in her personal quest; yet, it is easier for Myrtessa to transform into a slave, being a slave herself, and thus embody their proverbial social invisibility: "No one ever notices a slave—I know that much at least" (70). That also concerns Atalanta, whom Myrtessa sneaks "disguised as a slave within the kitchen quarters" of her owner so that she can plan her "next step unnoticed" (45). Being invisible rather than drawing attention to themselves is therefore a currency of their transformation that valorises their capacity to blend in as equals while diminishing the chances of being discovered.

Cross-dressing also involves being read physically as belonging to a different gender. Atalanta has then to hide or adjust "the gentle curve of [her] breasts, [her] slender arms, [her] long chestnut hair sweeping [her] waist" (63-64). In order to look the part and appear suitable, she picks a long-sleeved tunic, which also contributes to hiding her naturally "flat chest" and manly looks, while Myrtessa cuts off her hair "as the nobles of the city wore it", and her own "a little rough, perhaps, but unmistakably the style in which all male slaves had their hair—short, like a barbarian's" (69). Once that is attended to, they initiate a "performative

³ For MacCullough, "while women in the *Metamorphoses* can initiate and complete gender transformations, men cannot" (235).

⁴ There is no lack of literary examples of girls/women bravely disguised as boys/men to transcend binary gender constraints, ranging widely from Eowyn in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King* (1955), Isabel Allende's Eliza Sommers in *Hija de la fortuna* (2002), and Arya Stark in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga (1996-), to popular titles in young adult or children's fiction, such as Tamora Pierce's *Alanna: The First Adventure* (1983), or Anne Catherine Gaughen's *Scarlet* (2012), one of several gender-bending retellings of the legend of Robin Hood.

⁵ Interestingly, like Odysseus when he returns to Ithaca in the *Odyssey* (13.265-61, 14.199, 16.62, 17.52, etc.).

assumption of characteristics” (Carlà-Uhink 3). In this transitional period Atalanta rehearses her “name, birthplace and upbringing as a man”, while making an effort “to adopt the bearing and demeanour of a nobleman” by imitating tavern-goers and lords; but hers is such a steep learning curve that occasionally Myrtessa becomes “frustrated with [her] slow progress” (71), until she finally realises that the way she speaks, walks and behaves is that of a man, which signals the completion of her performative education.

But perhaps their biggest challenge when it comes to making adjustments is posed by the prejudiced, biased opinions and assumptions of heteronormativity voiced by the other slaves, who are witnesses to Atalanta’s second transformation. Neda and Philoetius think that “[n]o woman can wield a sword as well as a man”, let alone fight the “fire-breathing bull” guarding the Golden Fleece, having a predisposition to assimilate their owners’ rules and regulations inasmuch as they are “an acknowledged truth” whose contravention is “unnatural. It’s against the laws of the gods”. Atalanta is adamant that she will go, not giving “credence to myths and legends composed by bards too deep in their cups” (67-68) while showing a strong sense of determination and self-confidence. Cross-dressing is not always synonymous with a liberating reconfiguration of implicit gender issues. Hauser’s approach to female-to-male cross-dressing can be seen as the opposite of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century narratives of cross-dressing. Instead of exhibiting “a commitment to middle class ideology” that, “far from erasing the lines”, punished the transgressions of the cross-dresser in the interests of domesticity (Craft-Fairchild 188, 201), Atalanta does manifestly erase the lines, escaping the manacles of the domestic sphere that awaits her either at home with her foster-parents or married to Jason.

While being a man also allows free movement, eavesdropping is equally projected onto *For the Winner* as a convenient vector for acquiring crucial information, and hence power, without being seen. Essentially a transgressive act, it is associated with slaves and servants who happen to be in the right place at the right time. Overhearing private conversations, willingly or by chance, often marks a major climacteric, a measure of which is the acquired agency of Hauser’s enslaved Trojan women Krisayis and Briseis in *For The Most Beautiful* (2016). To this should be added spying from elevated vantage positions—*teichoskopia*, or surveillance from the wall. Nisa Cáceres and Moreno Soldevila observe that both strategies form intrinsic part of the skillsets of female protagonists in contemporary female-authored classical reworkings (*Dream*, 351-352). This is attested in *For the Winner* by how, “hidden in the boughs of an olive tree” (94-97), Atalanta spies on the Argonauts, waiting for the right moment to get aboard the ship; and, later on, again “in the boughs of an olive tree” in Pagasae, how she looks down on the sea and spots the Argo entering port (287). It is through eavesdropping—hearing others (recognitio or accidentally—how she finds out she is not “*her parents’ daughter*” (17; italics in the original), or, thanks to the “freedom” and unimaginably “liberating” advantages

of being dressed as a slave inside Pagasae, she gets updated on the latest developments:

I heard many things during my time in the city. I heard of King Iasus’ dislike of Prince Lycon. I heard of his hopes that Jason might one day become the heir of Pagasae, uniting the two cities of the bay. And I heard much of the Golden Fleece, hidden far away in the kingdom of Colchis past the empire of the Hittites, far beyond the wealthy city of Troy [...] Most importantly of all, however, we learnt that Jason was still with his uncle in the palace—and that he had gathered there twelve of the finest heroes in the land to join him in his quest. (71-72)

In these unobserved and unheard engagements with liminality, valuable information is acquired, becoming building blocks underlying these characters’ progress, and even amounting to decisive turning points plot-wise. Therefore, it is not only key knowledge that is rendered through the apprehended facts, but also agency and the necessary empowerment to implement it.

Given their essential epistemological and ontological ambivalence, disguises vary in their degree of (im)penetrability, depending on qualitative factors such as the intrinsic dramatic skills and shrewdness of those in disguise; the solidity and appropriateness of the garments and accessories—*i.e.* dressing fittingly; and the perceptive dexterity or perspicacity of those who interact with them, who may end up seeing through appearances. Atalanta’s manly disguise as Telamon of Crete is painstakingly put to these tests first when passing through the gates of the Palace; then in the hall, where she “could feel the eyes of all upon [her]”, being “a stranger to the king’s court”, a vicissitude especially stressed by her own father’s ironic conclusion that in her guise she is “clearly of the race of sceptred kings favoured by Zeus”, as well as Jason’s “clear, sharp, calculating gaze—as though he were looking directly through [her]” (74-76).

To be sure, this compelling tension—which continues while hunting the wild boar (79-98) and in the enclosed spaces on board the Argo—has a double-edged nature, as disguises may bring up underlying homoerotic concurrences and dissonances amongst those who reverse their roles, individually or in unison, and those who do not. When Atalanta sees Myrtessa, who had just “slipped the rough tunic over her head” and was imitating the “stance” of Philoetius—a slave friend, she “had the strange sensation that [she] was gazing at a beautiful young man with dark eyes and soft skin, just about to ripen into the brawn of manhood” (70). Yet, Myrtessa is a grown woman, whereas Atalanta is an eighteen-year-old girl, which adds up to her “flat chest” and Myrtessa’s observation that she has the advantage of “[looking] like a man” (69). These terms only confirm Meleager’s blatant homoerotic attraction towards her. Infatuated with the composite Telamon/Atlanta, but unable to see through the disguise, Meleager makes advances by smiling “intimate as a lover” and gazing intently into her eyes (146). Later on, he even offers him/her “a ritual gift”, a “one-handed cup”, the first of a “triad of offerings from the lover to his beloved”

that Telamon/Atalanta almost inadvertently accepts, to Dolius/Myrtessa's dismay (150-151). Nevertheless, it is Meleager's inebriated confession in the privacy of a cave that triggers off a chain reaction: "You are the most beddable boy I have ever seen, Telamon" (182). To Atalanta's surprise, despite turning down his proposal, he insists: "No, my Ganymede. There is more, much, much more!" (183). Homoeroticism and androgyny are inseparable in the aforementioned allusion to Ganymede, the cupbearer of the gods, but also the shepherd boy that Rosalind impersonates in *As You Like it*, a doubly liminal, gender-bending figure habitually inscribed in and hinted at by the device of cross-dressing, more specifically when it is carried out by young boys or girls who can be cognitively engaged as ambiguous, if not ambivalent.

This outburst of emotion is followed by Atalanta's failed attempt to swear his secrecy and her immediate fall from grace, since as quick as a wink Meleager tears and rips at the material of her tunic. Resultantly, her "bare breasts" become a categorical giveaway (184-185), which verifies the "complex role costume and body play in determining a person's gender" (Mansfield 29). What emerges here is a complex picture of the natural inconsistencies of the human condition that, admittedly, counterbalances the inevitable make-believe, farcical essence that underpins the disguise motif. Therefore, Atalanta's insights about Meleager's true intentions—who in most sources, including Apollodorus, Ovid or Suetonius, falls in love with her during the Calidonian boar hunt (Franco Durán 32-34)—are never accurate, fuelling them instead in the contradictory hope of heterosexual romance, of being loved as a woman regardless of the evidence of the senses, not to mention her highly effective, impenetrable manly facade.

4. Reconstructing Atalanta's identity: A power higher even than the fates

Although Hauser's Atalanta fully conforms to the parameters Lord Raglan and Otto Rank observe in the mythic hero, there are two major deviations: Iris' influence is largely confined to Olympus, and Atalanta is not really Zeus' daughter. Disguising and shapeshifting is a quintessential characteristic of the Olympian pantheon, but Atalanta is not even a demigoddess. Therefore, she exclusively relies on her human capabilities when pulling on a disguise and dealing with collateral risks. For example, after rescuing Hippomenes from a tempest, he offers Thalia, his own slave, to Telamon; but as Atalanta "abhorred the ways of war that made a slave of a free woman" (136), she tacitly declines her sexual favours by precipitously joining the company of Dolius/Myrtessa. This moment of confusion inherent in the disguise motif makes Peleus share aloud his impressions of what seems to be commonly acknowledged on board as a homoerotic affair: "But it looks as if young Dolius there has captured Telamon's heart. You must have noticed how much time they spend in each other's company" (137). Indeed, one could argue that Atalanta's routinised representation as a huntress in the sources and elsewhere might also generate questions about her lack of feminine qualities, as suggested by Adrienne

Mayor's description: "This bold tomboy of Greek myth was happiest roaming alone in the forest with her bow and spear" (1). This is probably the nearest the received figuration of Atalanta comes to providing the myth with a potent significance of freedom and autonomy, a position indirectly validated by Sylvia Plath's poem "Ariel": while riding on a horse like Lady Godiva—but inversely, as she needs not show her devotion or loyalty to her husband, the poetic voice removes her clothes and "dead stringencies" (l. 21), symbolic elements that constrict her freedom and agency. To attain a similar goal, Hauser's Atalanta ironically puts on precisely those garments—first a slave's, then a nobleman's apparel—that best symbolise, twice over, the diastatic conscriptions of social convention.

After having transformed herself into Telamon, "a lord of standing" (67), and shown her mettle with flying colours when hunting the wild boar (79-98), Jason's implicit refusal to include Atalanta within the "twelve finest men in Greece" (90) meets with her own sense of confusion and frustration, as she had "proven [her] valour [...] dressed as a man [...] with a man's strength and speed, a man's skill at arms" (90). It is precisely this uncertainty that fuels her decision to put an end to it by jumping aboard irrespectively of—and even freely taking—the grave consequences this act will have. However, Atalanta's apparently rash impulse ironically contrasts with Jason's overtly questionable moral stance, which lays the groundwork for examining the "dramatising of the myth of Jason and Atalanta" and the "highly effective dialogue between male and female conceptions of leadership and good governance" (Nikolaou 8) that also take centre stage in the novel.

In point of fact, this dialogic confrontation of both sensibilities is yet another instance of Hauser's strategy of debunking mythic prefigurations and canonical premises in the novel. In the same way as Leporini (39-43) applies Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking to Margaret Atwood's "Mud / Circe" poems in *You are Happy*, this procedure is built on a conscious methodology implemented to varying effects and degrees of intensity and success in most feminist rewritings when confronting the historical politics of restriction and oppression against women. It also explains that the "narrative tone is a modern one, occasionally tinged with irony" (White 7), as in Artemis' astonishment at Iris' not seeing that baby Atalanta survived—"I thought we were all-seeing?", to which Hera snorts "All-seeing, yes, but it depends on where we are looking, doesn't it?" (52; italics in the original). Iris secretly delights in Hera's rage:

How she would have loved to tell Hera then that it was she, Iris, who was responsible for Atalanta's continued existence—she, who had flown ahead of the mortal Eurymedon eighteen years before in the guise of a snow falcon and led him to the place where the child had been left to die. But it is in her disguise as Hera's loyal messenger, the self-sufficient, constant goddess, that Iris's freedom lies. That, she thinks, is the privilege of the messenger: to watch from the sidelines as the rest of the world meddles in its own affairs, then to deliver the message that changes everything. (101; italics in the original)

It is then that suddenly, when observing the Argo from Olympus, she notices something that has escaped her control. What anyone but a god would mistake for a male figure is actually a woman wearing “a man’s tunic, a quiver of arrows upon her back, her face set in determination”; despite what Hera may make of it, she quickly accommodates to the idea: “Destiny be damned, she thinks [...]: for who would understand better than the Fates that a woman can excel as well as a man?” (103). Unlike Iris, and contrary to expectations, Artemis stands aside as regards Atalanta, stating that she has “*never heard of the Fates troubling themselves for a woman before. The prophecies have always concerned men, have they not?*” (52; italics in the original). Through Atalanta’s subjective agency, at times elusive as “too many of its effects aren’t perceived, inferred, or foreseen” (Weissman 3-4), the myth looks at itself, and what emerges fortifies the process and principles of women’s rewriting as remythologising (Plate 159-181).

One of the most eloquent forms demythologising takes as a step prior to remythologising in *For the Winner* is a generally accepted statement, followed by a witty narratorial observation that exposes the weaknesses and lack of accuracy of it. This sequence is perhaps best epitomised by Hera’s indignation and “*outrage at Iris’s presumption in entering the Library of the Muses to discover the will of the Fates*”, a privilege only occasionally granted to Zeus, but “*unthinkable*” to any other god seeking

the twisting and turning of the thread of Fate [...] without the express permission of the three old crones who spin its fibrous web [...] A contravention of the only and most sacred law that ever bound the gods.

A law that the gods break almost daily. (299; italics in the original)

Even Iris’ ineffable transgression is demythologised, adding up to the fake existence of the Fates—as Zeus admits in *For the Immortal* (249), the hilarious domesticity of the Olympic gods and the way she puts Poseidon and Hermes to sleep “*and begin to snore*” (167; italics in the original), as well as the total absence of actual encounters with any fantastic beings⁶ associated with the quest for the Golden Fleece, such as the harpies or the fire-breathing bulls. Naturally, it follows that the accidental sinking of the Golden Fleece in the sea during Apollo’s attempted robbery of it from the Argo (259) should be, therefore, perceived as a debunking plot twist not only verging on the ridiculous, but definitely instrumental in empowering Atalanta in the last section of the novel.

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5. Conclusion: Delivering the message that changes everything

Steering a course between the patriarchal constraints, insurmountable barriers, and reiterative deterministic assumptions that plague the different male-centred renderings of her myth, as well as a whole panoply of prejudiced discrimination exerted against her by mortals and divinities alike in the narrative, Hauser reimagines Atalanta with capacities by dint of—and in excess of—her own struggles enacted entirely through her ultimately human condition. Absent from her classical iterations, which represent her as a huntress, Atalanta’s cross-dressing subterfuge to bypass patriarchal imperatives and androcentric subjugation, and therefore become an Argonaut in her own right, is a testimony to the enormous lengths her ingenuity goes to achieve her innermost desire to be equal. *For the Winner* is permeated with encouraging signs entailing that empowerment and equality are not beyond the bounds of possibility. What is more, this liberating note is somehow present in the nuanced fact that in those sources in which Atalanta is married to Hippomenes, she, “unlike Daphne or Kallisto, manages to continue her career as a hunter”, which indicates that the tradition of reversing roles “did not universally insist that a woman had to be tamed and domesticated” (Clark 118). Unfortunately, this is overlooked in recent male-centred adaptations of the myth, as evidenced in sequential art by Steve Moore’s gender-stereotyped representation of Atalanta in *Hercules: The Thracian Wars* (Gellar-Goad 634), which far from acknowledging and dismantling this practice, ends up reinforcing it.

In Hauser’s novel, disguise and cross-dressing become conflated with reinvesting and redressing both the classical tradition and its reception. This procedure follows a binary logic in the case of Iris, who admits that she disguises herself occasionally or on a permanent basis to back up her agency; and, pre-eminently, in the figures of Myrtessa and Atalanta. Fully aware and conscious here of the consequences of her own decision to not ignore the golden apple in the footrace, Atalanta’s supposed failure signals a conceptual and symbolic elevation of the text’s subversive resignification of previous socially-inflicted, male-centric remediations of the myth. Emily Hauser’s revisionism also facilitates cultural change, bringing to the fore the profoundly conflicted concepts of gender equality, determination, and agency. In doing so she gives Atalanta—just like Iris does in her Promethean-like actions, knowing the mortals in a way the other gods “never have” (301)—the power to “engage in a heroic quest” (153), to “prove [her] worth”, to not be treated as the king’s “property” (312-313), and eventually honour her name, truly becoming the “equal of all others” (37).

⁶ With the “everyday negative meaning” of the term *mythical* (White 35).

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