

Book Review

Celeris Pede. A Latin Novella

Cunning (R.B.) Pp xvi + 167, Independently published, 2023. Paper, US\$15. ISBN: 9798865818915.
<https://bombaxpress.com/celeris-pede-a-latin-novella/>

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Rachel Beth Cunning has continued Atalanta's narrative in the Latin novella entitled *Celeris Pede* from Bombax Press. Cunning has added great breadth and depth to the library of novellas available to today's Latin teacher by creating many novellas that cover a wide range of topics from mythology to history to complete fiction. The entire line-up of titles available through Bombax Press is available via her website, <https://bombaxpress.com>, among other resources for the novel-

las 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".

If *Atalanta Heroina* was a 30-minute cartoon about Atalanta's story, *Celeris Pede* would be the two hour, live-action movie. *Celeris Pede* is a Latin novella written ultimately for "university-level Latin students and even teachers", as Cunning states in the preface. Although its intended audience is a more learned crowd as evidenced by its complex sentence structure and syntax, the word order makes these big ideas very comprehensible to the reader. The fact that this novella is 22,500 words could put readers off, but as Cunning states in the preface, "I did still write this novella with the goal of limiting vocabulary to further students' ability to read and comprehend the story independently". *Celeris Pede* is a wonderful example of a common adage in using comprehensible language: "scaffold the vocabulary, not the grammar". If there was any

question about how to expose Latin students, and teachers, to more complicated grammar in a clear and comprehensible way, *Celeris Pede* proves to be the answer. *Cum* clauses, conditionals, indirect questions, etc. are all there but, due to the engaging way in which the novella is written, are not as arduous to understand as may be the case in more conventional Latin learning environments. *Celeris Pede* exemplifies what Krashen refers to as "Compelling Input". In an article for *The English Connection*, Krashen states that "Compelling input appears to eliminate the need for motivation, a conscious desire to improve. When you get compelling input, you acquire, whether you are interested in improving or not" (Krashen 2011). The compelling nature of what Cunning has written in *Celeris Pede* could indeed lend itself to be used in a Latin classroom in lieu of a conventional textbook which would allow for meaningful discussion and understanding of more intricate grammar structures with its engaging characters.

The preface of *Celeris Pede* is incredibly valuable and utilitarian when discussing the cultural topics that arise in the novella. Cunning is straightforward about her approach to this story. She is also very clear about how this version may affect readers who have had personal experiences with misogyny, personal attacks, or the loss of personal autonomy. A preface is helpful, but commonly deemed as optional to read. In the case of *Celeris Pede*, a reader would do themselves a disservice by not reading it thoroughly. The topics which Cunning explores throughout *Celeris Pede* are discussed frankly in the preface and therefore allow the reader to gain more insights into the characters that Cunning uses to deliver messages throughout the novella due to that guidance. Cunning admits that she took some liberties with Ovid's version of this story, but not without implicit intention.

Celeris Pede is told from a third person narration and chapters alternate between Atalanta's story of the foot race and Hippomenes' account of the boar hunt. These two storylines make ample room for character development that reveals great depth and unique personal struggles that intimately speak to the reader. All too often, ancient cultural norms are discussed in an essentialist way that makes it seem as though entire populations of ancient peoples operated within and strictly adhered to what was expected. The thoughts, opinions, and feelings expressed by characters in *Celeris Pede* reveal the forgotten reality that mythological characters are reflections of ancient humans with all of their personal intricacies and complications and therefore more relatable to today's readers. Atalanta's story is a constant struggle for independence and autonomy in a world where women are seen as pursuable objects in need of protection because of their inherent inadequacy. She encounters a frustratingly never-ending series of men who underestimate and demean her while being aware of, but completely disregarding, her own accomplishments and being part of the Argonaut crew with Jason. Cunning's Hippomenes serves as a foil to the other male characters in both the foot race and the hunt. He provides an outlet for Atalanta to experience a man who appreciates her independence and embraces her heroism as admirable and attractive. Cunning has built up

Hippomenes' role in the boar hunt in order to continue the growth of that relationship through the foot race episode. Hippomenes is witness to Atalanta's mistreatment and intimidation. She is able to look to Hippomenes to receive validation, respect, and honesty, not gaslighting and degradation. Atalanta's story is not unique, but having to witness the abuse and trauma that occurs in stories like hers first-hand *is* unique in Greek and Roman mythology. It can be a struggle for Latin students to see the ancients as people, but stories like *Celeris Pedes* provide an outlet through which they can

see how similar they are to others despite the millennia that would separate them.

Reference

Krashen, S. (2011) "The Compelling (Not Just Interesting) Input Hypothesis" *The English Connection (KOTESOL)*, 15, 3, 2011, IC1.

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