Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess (Olympians, 2) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/561. Entry version as of July 15, 2025.

George O'Connor

Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess (Olympians, 2)

United States (2010)

TAGS: Andromeda Arachne Architecture Ares Athena Athens Cronus / Kronos Fate Gaia / Gaea Gods Graeae / Graiai Greek Art Hera Hermes Juno Medusa Mercury Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metamorphosis Metis Minerva Moirai Nymphs Olympus Ovid Pegasus Perseus Poseidon Zeus

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess (Olympians, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States, Canada, United Kingdom, other English speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	George O'Connor, *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess.* New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2010, 77 pp.
ISBN	9781596434325
Official Website	olympiansrule.com (accessed: October 24, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths
Target Audience	Young adults (teens)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators

George O'Connor, photo uploaded by Nxswift. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: January 5, 2022).

George O'Connor , b. 1973
(Author, Illustrator)

George O'Connor (1973) is an author, illustrator, cartoonist, and graphic novelist from the USA, based in Brooklyn, New York. His work is predominantly aimed at young people and frequently contains historical subjects and themes. O'Connor has cited Walt Simonson's mythology-rich editions of Marvel's *Mighty Thor* as a significant early influence on his own work. His first graphic novel, *Journey into Mohawk Country*, was based on the journal of a 17th century trader. He illustrated Adam Rapp's adult graphic novel *Ball Peen Hammer* (2009). He contributed to First Series' *Fable Comics* (2015, ed. Chris Duffy), a collection of myths retold by cartoonists. Between 2010–2022 O'Connor published the *Olympians* graphic novel series.

In an interview (see here, accessed: April 17, 2015), George O'Connor has said that he wanted the series to be educational. He also said that he spent a long time researching for each title by reading ancient literature to access different versions of myths, and that he consciously tried to avoid reading modern "people's retellings because everybody puts a spin on it. I purposely put spins on the stories too, but I don't want to accidentally steal somebody else's spin".

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 24, 2018).

Former Author blog (blog no longer updated; accessed: October 24, 20018).

Twitter (accessed: October 24, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

These tales of Athena are narrated by the Moirae, the Fates. They are all-seeing and know what happened in the earliest times, and even what happened inside Zeus' head. They know who Athena is, and here they tell stories of her birth, followed by three stories of Athena establishing her identity: young Pallas, monster Pallas, Perseus and Medusa, and finally a story of fully-established Athena – the myth of Arachne.

The Fate Klotho narrates at first. She recaps the myth of the triumph of Zeus over Kronos, including the role of Metis (as told in *Zeus. King of the Gods*). Zeus receives a prophecy from Gaea that his child with Metis will overthrow him (this is a subtle change from the tradition in Hesiod's *Theogony*, 886–900, in which Gaea and Uranos warn Zeus jointly; and in which Zeus consumes Metis just before the birth of Athena because he fears the birth of Athena and, more importantly, Metis and his future son). The reader is shown Zeus' interest in Hera, which is followed by Zeus' betrayal of Metis, whom he tricks into transforming into ever smaller creatures until he swallows her (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 899–900; 929). There are chilling scenes of Metis awaking in darkness and realising what has happened, interspersed with scenes of Zeus marrying Hera. "In the subconscious of Zeus", Metis gives birth to Athena, depicted as a babe in arms. Athena grows and at night fights her father's dream-based anxieties. Metis "pour[s] the last of her essence" into Athena's clothing to prepare her for her birth on Olympus. Poseidon and Ares hold down Zeus so that Hephaistos can attempt to trepan him, and Athena bursts forth (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 924–926; 929; *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* 3.307–323; Pindar, *Olympian*, 7.33 ff). Several gods are depicted reacting with shock.

The next Fate, Lakhesis, then narrates the myth of, 'How Athena came to use the name "Pallas" (for which see Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.144). Athena is contrasted with Ares in being less bloodthirsty (a modern and highly schematised way of regarding the two deities which is contradicted by traditions such as *The Homeric Hymn to Athena*, which notes the similarity between the two, see Deacy, 2000, in bibliography). She is also contrasted with Hephaistos in having skill but disliking the hot workshop, and with Demeter in her disinterest in children. Lacking sympathetic companions, Athena travels to Triton's camp in Libya to train and to develop her sense of self. Pallas, daughter of Triton is also there. Athena and Pallas fight in

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Games for Zeus. Zeus distracts Pallas with his aegis, unwilling to see Athena bested (as in Apollodorus). Athena accidentally runs her through. Athena is distressed by the killing, and Zeus makes a gift of his aegis to her in an attempt to console her. Athena resolves never to be clouded by anger in combat and takes the name Pallas to honour her friend and to remind herself of her resolution.

The Fate, Atropos (here unnamed, but implied by the naming of the other two Hesiodic figures) takes on the story, to tell "another tale, another Pallas, and curiously, another tale of the aegis." The reader now sees that the Fates are seated in a wasteland of giant bones. The reader hears the tale of the Gigantomachy – the giants' attack on Olympus. The Olympians fight back against the attack. Athena faces Pallas, a giant whose skin cannot be pierced by blade. In dramatic scenes, she hacks out one of his eyes with her spear and peels the skin off his body. She adapts his skin to add its impenetrable layer to her aegis. This latter grisly detail is drawn from Apollodorus on the Gigantomachy (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.35).

The next tale told by one of the Moirae is a tale of the gods' "wrath" and their "favor." This is the story of Medusa - how Poseidon seduced the young priestess, Medusa, in Athena's temple, and how Athena took vengeance upon her for this disrespect by turning her into a monster that could not be looked upon (see e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 274–279 and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.790; contra Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.46, in which she is transformed for comparing her own beauty to Athena's). There is a brief re-telling of the story of Danae, Perseus' mother – how her father locked her away to avoid fulfilling the prophecy that Danae's son would kill him; and how she became pregnant after Zeus came to her in a shower of gold. The reader sees a chest containing Danae and her baby cast into the sea, rescued, and the baby, Perseus, growing. The king hears of Perseus' survival and sends him on a quest to bring the head of Medusa as a wedding present (there are many ancient versions of why the king demanded the head). Perseus, now a young adult, wanders through a Greek town unsure what to do. He is led into a dark room, where Athena and Hermes reveal themselves to him. They give him gifts – winged sandals and a sickle sword (in the book's notes, the author remarks that he deliberately left the helmet of invisibility out of the gifts as it made the challenge too easy). Athena and Hermes instruct Perseus to visit the Graeae witches for information on Medusas' whereabouts. The episode with the witches is retold comedically. Perseus travels on and lands in a plain filled with, apparently, broken humanoid statues. He finds and

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decapitates Medusa. Pegasus is born from her neck (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 280–283). Perseus flees the approach of Medusa's sisters.

As Perseus flies up the coast of Africa, he sees a beautiful young woman chained to a rock (see Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.43–44; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 5.1–238 for this myth). The reader learns that the queen of this area, Kassiopea, had boasted that her daughter, Andromeda, was more beautiful than the nymphs of the sea (as in Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 64, contra Apollodorus, who has Kassiopea boast that she herself is the more beautiful). Poseidon sent the sea-monster, Cetus, to exact revenge – the sacrifice of princess Andromeda to the monster. Perseus rescues Andromeda and, the Fate tells us, in time they fell in love, married, and travelled together to Greece. Perseus used the head of Medusa to kill the king who had tormented him, and then killed his grandfather (as prophesised) in a discus accident (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.47–48; Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* 63). Athena takes the head of Medusa, absorbs its powers and adds its snakes to her aegis (as evident in *Iliad*, 5.741; 8.349; 11.36).

The final tale is the myth of Arachne, now known from antiquity only through Ovid's version (and perhaps invented by Ovid himself (*Metamorphoses*, 6.5–145). The reader sees images of Arachne's marvellous tapestries, depicting myths and hung for crowds to see as if in a gallery. She boasts that "the gods could do no better." Arachne is advised by an old lady to be humble, but will not. Athena reveals herself and a contest ensues. Athena depicts Zeus vanquishing the titans – it looks like the scenes from *Zeus. King of the Gods* (i.e. "real" to a reader of the series). Arachne depicts cartoonish versions of the gods' failings – Bull Zeus chasing Europa, Swan Zeus appearing before Leda, Athena spearing Pallas by mistake, and Zeus swallowing Metis (these final two have recently been told in this volume, so the reader knows that they will be sore points for Athena). Athena acknowledges Arachne's skill but scoffs at her insignificance; the goddess appears to turn Arachne into a spider (implied not shown). The Fates stand before a giant impressive tapestry of Athena, with complete aegis.

An Author's Note follows, in which O'Connor explains the disparate nature of Greek myths and the need for an author to select pieces and work them together. He then explicitly notes that the myths of Athena emerged in a patriarchal society in which women and girls' choices were severely curtailed. He concludes that he is "glad that [he] live[s] in a time when girls can be more like Athena – a time when women are

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breaking athletic records, making scientific discoveries, and on the whole, succeeding in ways they've never been allowed to before. Ladies, you rock."

Summary pages on Athena, Perseus, Medusa, and the Moirae follow.

G(r)eek Notes provide further information on the myths and on the meaning of names.

There are seven questions in a *For Discussion* section, and a *Bibliography* and *Recommended Reading* section.

Analysis

O'Connor is creating his own version of the Olympian mythosphere with his series, *Olympians*, selecting myths from ancient literature and synthesising them into accessible, exciting stories. The sense of a unified mythosphere is also conveyed through the way that the gods have consistent characterisations and bisect each other's stories, conveying the sort of unity found in e.g. the Marvel universe. The Marvel/superhero quality of the O'Connor's Olympians is particularly clear in Athena, where the gods fight together to defeat the Giants.

The Olympian world that O'Connor presents is vibrant, beautiful, and sexy; it also contains moral difficulties and ambiguities and thought-provoking topics that are drawn out implicitly within the choice of stories and the telling of the stories, and explicitly through the *For Discussion* questions.

O'Connor urges readers to consider the nature of the Olympian gods through the frequent focus on their conceptions, births, and early lives. This trend can be seen in the *Athena*, where Athena's origin becomes a defining aspect of her ongoing relationship with the other Olympians, and where the focus is placed on her as a developing individual rather than as a stable, eternally adult figure. This aspect also helps to establish a vulnerability and relatability in the deities of the series, with identity formation being a particularly relatable subject for teenage and young adult readers. Athena is frequently regarded as a prominent stalwart of the Olympians. In this version, Athena is presented as a figure with an uncertain future; we see her as a vulnerable infant – before her fully-grown "birth" – and as a teen-like figure, and as an individual regarded with some suspicion by other gods owing to her unexpected arrival. She succeeds in finding a place for herself through

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her determination and skills. In the Perseus and Medusa myth the reader sees Athena in the familiar roles of vengeance-taker and helper of heroes. In this sense, we see her move from an individual establishing herself, to one defending her status and using her powers to help those she favours. The vengeance-taker side emerges again in the Arachne myth, although this too is told quite sympathetically to Athena; Arachne's boasting and taunting of Athena is depicted as extreme, and the tradition of the girl's suicide is edited out in favour of an immediate transformation. As such, Athena appears formidable but not excessively cruel. In the final scene, the Fates standing before an enormous tapestry of Athena, Athena appears awesome – she has become a fully-fledged goddess.

These retellings of myths are very open about the complex nature of mythology. This is expressed particularly clearly through the direct exploration of the origin of Athena's "Pallas" name and the multiple explanations available for it. The author, O'Connor, also addresses this issue explicitly in his author's notes, encouraging readers to understand the origins of myths in a more sophisticated way.

As is frequently the case in the *Olympians* series, O'Connor gives consideration to issues of gender and ethnicity. It is explicitly noticed, for example, that it is unfair that Medusa rather than Poseidon is punished for their intimacy in Athena's sanctuary ("Poseidon, for his part, slunk back into the sea. When gods tangle with mortals, it is seldom the gods who pay."). There is no counter-narrative – Medusa, not Poseidon, suffers the consequence, as in traditional versions of the myth – but by addressing this imbalance directly, it is at least challenged. The matter of ethnicity is addressed less directly, but is perhaps the more unusual treatment. Andromeda, princess of Ethiopia, is depicted as a black African, with several close-up images and some medium-length images which emphasise her colour through contrast with her bright white gown. While it makes sense to depict an Ethiopian princess as a black African, this runs counter to the very long iconographic history of Andromeda, in which she is typically depicted as a white European (as seen on ancient Greek vases, see e.g. Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 63.6223, and British Museum, 1843.11–3.24, in which she is contrasted with black African servants; Getty Museum, Malibu 84.AE.996, and in Renaissance and later art). O'Connor's depiction is a welcome innovation.

In an interesting layering of classical reception, Arachne's tapestries are displayed heavily framed and viewed in the manner of Renaissance

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	paintings. The birth of Aphrodite is depicted in a cartoon form of Botticelli's famous painting of that subject. While this is primarily playful, it also confronts readers with the complex visual history of these myths.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Andromeda Arachne Architecture Ares Athena Athens Cronus / Kronos Fate Gaia / Gaea Gods Graeae / Graiai Greek Art Hera Hermes Juno Medusa Mercury Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metamorphosis Metis Minerva Moirai Nymphs Olympus Ovid Pegasus Perseus Poseidon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adventure Adversity Authority Character traits Child, children Childhood Coming of age Conflict Diversity Divorce Emotions Family Femininity Freedom Friendship Gender Journeys Maturity Names Parents (and children) Princes and princesses Race Revenge Self Sexuality Superheroes Transformation Violence War
Further Reading	Cheney, Liana De Girolami, "Edward Burne-Jones' "Andromeda": Transformation of Historical and Mythological Sources", *Artibus et Historiae* 25.49 (2004): 197–227. Deacy, Susan, "Athena and Ares: war, violence and warlike deities", in Hans van Wees, ed., *War and Violence in Ancient Greece,* London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000, 285–298. Deacy, Susan, *Athena (Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World*), London: Routledge, 2008. Gordon, Joel, "When Superman Smote Zeus: Analysing Violent Deicide in Popular Culture," *Classical Receptions Journal* 9.2 (2017): 211–236. Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W. eds., *Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011. Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W. eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015. McGrath, Elizabeth, "The Black Andromeda", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 55 (1992): 1–18.

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Murnaghan, Sheila, and Roberts, Deborah H., "Arachne's Web: the Reception of an Ovidian Myth in Works for Children", in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, 141–161.

Addenda

Series blog (accessed: October 24, 2018).

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