Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Aphrodite. Goddess of Love (Olympians, 6) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1032. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

George O'Connor

Aphrodite. Goddess of Love (Olympians, 6)

United States of America (2014)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Artemis Athena Athens Cerberus Charites Cronus / Kronos Cupid Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Eris Eros Gaia / Gaea Galatea Gods Greek Art Hades Helen Hephaestus Hera Hermes Hestia Iras (Handmaid) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Olympus Paris (Trojan Prince) Poseidon Priam Psyche Sirens Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Venus Zeus



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



General information	
Title of the work	Aphrodite. Goddess of Love (Olympians, 6)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2014
First Edition Details	George O'Connor, *Aphrodite. Goddess of Love.* New York: First Second, 2014, 77 pp.
ISBN	9781596437395
Official Website	olympiansrule.com (accessed: June 16, 2020)
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths
Target Audience	Young adults (teens; adults)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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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).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

Aphrodite is the sixth instalment of the tremendous *Olympians* series. It is narrated by the Charites and begins in a time before time, with the ancient Greek creation myths – Gaea and Ouranos, unfocused Eros, and the rise of the Titans leading to Kronos' castration. "The seat of Eros' power in Ouranos" is depicted falling into the sea in a mass of pink foam. The foam churns while more of the creation story plays out. The Olympians, humans, and animals all develop and begin to populate the earth, all subject to the unfocused power of Eros, until, one day, the foam develops a mind of its own in which the power of Eros is suddenly "aware." Aphrodite takes form in the foam and then emerges radiantly onto a beach. The Charites are instantly drawn to her and become her fond attendants. All over the earth and above and below it, the arrival of Aphrodite is felt.

The Olympians' sudden awareness of Aphrodite is played amusingly yet cleverly. They all feel her presence and wonder what it is, even the virgin goddesses. With the gods jostling to be first to meet whatever has arrived, Zeus declares that the Olympians will go together to Cyprus. They stare at Aphrodite in amazement. Hera's amazement turns to resentment when Aphrodite lays a suggestive hand on Zeus' chest. Aphrodite insults Athena and flirts with Ares. As the gods begin to crowd around her, Zeus is troubled by the thought of the power of Eros; he does not wish to experience another conflict between the gods, not least because it could end his rule. Inspired, Zeus declares Aphrodite his daughter and promptly insists she is now married to his son, Hephaestus. The Charites recall with sorrow how the goddess of love was trapped into a loveless marriage.

The scene moves to Hephaestus' forge, where the smith god is busy making beautiful things for Aphrodite. Ares often visits the forge now to flirt with Aphrodite and quarrel with Hephaestus. Aphrodite walks out into the sunshine and reminds the Charites that she does not need her husband to have a good time. They dance together, and there are then single-frame summaries of a number of Aphrodite-centred myths: she transforms the Kerastai, saves the Argonaut Boutes from the Sirens, frolics with Adonis, and punishes Narcissus. A longer story then unfolds, a retelling of the myth of Pygmalion. Pygmalion works so much that he does not have time to find love, then before he realises what is happening he has fallen for one of his statues, a life-size female nude. He makes a pilgrimage to Aphrodite's sanctuary and

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prays to her to make the ivory figure human. Aphrodite visits the statue, prefers it to the one of her in her temple, and grants Pygmalion's wish. Pygmalion is delighted; the statue takes the name "Galatea", and they live happily ever after.

There follows an introduction to Aphrodite's son, Eros. The Charites explain that no one was sure who his father was, perhaps Hephaestus, Hermes, Ares, or perhaps Aphrodite was born pregnant by Ouranos and he is the "father". Eros is beautiful, laughter-loving, and full of mischief. He has two sorts of arrows, one which sows love, the other deflects it. There are scenes of the chaos he creates amongst humans and lesser immortals and of his subsequent laughter, shared with his mother. We also see him create mischief amongst the Olympians. He shoots Zeus, who falls for Thetis. Only as he kisses her does he recall the prophecy that Thetis' child will be greater than its father. Zeus hastily arranges for her marriage to Peleus, and he and Poseidon share a knowing exchange about dodging the prophecy. Many gods attend the wedding, but Eris is excluded. Zeus steps in and welcomes her into the celebrations. Still piqued, Eris causes conflict by throwing a golden apple to be owned by "the most beautiful one." Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena all lay claim to it; Hera calls on Zeus to decide, but he turns the task over to Paris, a humble shepherd who is really a lost Prince of Troy. Aphrodite wins the contest and provocatively tosses the apple away. She shows Paris a vision of Helen and sends him off to win her. Hera chastises this as an attack on marriage, but Aphrodite angrily declares that loveless marriages should be "torn down." As she leaves with Eros, Eris and Zeus look on from a distance. Eris is disappointed that there has not been a more dramatic fall-out, but Zeus assures her that its consequences will "consume the age of heroes." The narrative closes with him observing that that "is a tale for another day."

An *Author's Note* follows in which O'Connor discusses his thoughts on the Judgement of Paris. There are character summaries for Aphrodite, the Charites, and Eros. *G(r)eek Notes* add further information on the text. There are seven suggested questions for discussion and suggestions for further reading.

Analysis

With humour and style, this volume of O'Connor's series of graphic novels explores varied aspects of Aphrodite's myths and her different significances within Greek mythology. In Hesiod's poetry

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(*Theogony* 176 ff; with *Homeric Hymn, 6 To Aphrodite*), Aphrodite is an ancient deity, while in Homeric epic she is referred to as a daughter of Zeus (Homer, *Iliad* 5.370ff; Homer, *Odyssey* 8.267ff, with Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.13). This work resolves this apparent contradiction cleverly by making Aphrodite an ancient force who becomes a deity who is co-opted by Zeus as his daughter in an attempt to control her power. As well as resolving the conflicting traditions, this also presents a convincing characterisation of Zeus' behaviour towards potential rivals and develops the story of the Olympians' power struggles. Aphrodite is depicted as finding his "adoption" of her over-bearing, a characterisation that suggests her awareness of his machinations. This Aphrodite is intelligent, soulful, and charismatic as well as beautiful; as a deity she is taken just as seriously as any of the others in the series. In a sensitive nod to her Homeric characterisation as "laughter loving Aphrodite" in the *Iliad*, she is shown frequently laughing and smiling while Eros delights "in laughter just like her". The repeated scenes of Aphrodite and Ares flirting with one another reflects the ancient traditions of their affair (see e.g. Homer, *Odyssey* 8.267ff, with Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.170ff).

The story of Aphrodite's relationship with the Olympians is complemented by a story of her involvement with humans and one of her roles in the age of heroes. The retelling of the myth of Pygmalion avoids the casual misogyny that frequently appears in retellings of this myth. Pygmalion does not despise women, he has simply been too busy working to attend to his love life. He does fall for a likeness of a woman rather than an actual person, but that is a fundamental of the myth, and we get Aphrodite's endorsement of the purity of his love for her. Galatea is given a degree of agency in choosing her own name. The statue of Aphrodite in the temple is based on Praxiteles' *Aphrodite* (O'Connor leaves an explicit note about this in G(r)eek notes); Aphrodite says that she prefers Pygmalion's statue, which depicts a figure standing naked yet confident, in contrast to the look of having been caught by surprise which is present to a degree in the Praxiteles. Ivory-wrought Galatea is depicted as pale and blonde, while Pygmalion is dark-skinned. This reflects the variety of skin-tones found in the Mediterranean and offers readers a variety of physical appearances within the mythological world to identify with. This is also the case with the Charites.

The longest myth by far is the story of the Judgement of Paris (for which see e.g. *Iliad*, 24.30). The Trojan War has huge significance within Greek mythology and in the Olympians series itself, so it makes

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	sense to explore this element of it in detail. It is a story that will be familiar to many (although by no means all) readers, yet here there is a fresh take on it. A great deal of attention is given to the goddesses' motivations in taking part in the contest and particularly to Aphrodite's perspective on it. This adds a personal element to the myth and fleshes out the goddesses as three-dimensional characters. While the story as told here begins with an apparently playful attempt to involve Zeus in a love affair, by the end it has taken on a cosmic force, with Zeus almost wistfully conscious of the impending end of the Age of Heroes. This serves as a sort of cliff-hanger that may send many a reader in search of more material. Fortunately, the next volume in the series is *Ares. Bringer of War*, a retelling of the Iliad from Ares' perspective.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Agamemnon Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Artemis Athena Athens Cerberus Charites Cronus / Kronos Cupid Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Eris Eros Gaia / Gaea Galatea Gods Greek Art Hades Helen Hephaestus Hera Hermes Hestia Iras (Handmaid) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Olympus Paris (Trojan Prince) Poseidon Priam Psyche Sirens Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Venus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Authority Coming of age Conflict Desires Emotions Family Femininity Hierarchy Humour Judgement Love Relationships Sexuality Transformation
Further Reading	James, Paula, *Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion on Screen. In Pursuit of the Perfect Woman*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

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