Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Olympians (Series) 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/1037. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

George O'Connor

Olympians (Series)

United States of America (2010)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Aesop Aesop's Fables Afterlife Agamemnon Amphitrite Anteros Aphrodite Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Arachne Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Ariadne Artemis Asclepius Athena Athens Atlas Bacchus Baucis Centaur(s) Cerberus Ceres Charybdis Chimera / Chimaera Crete Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Delos Demeter Diana Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Egypt Egyptian Mythology Epimetheus Erinyes Eris Eros Europa Fable Furies Gaia / Gaea Galatea Gods Golden Fleece Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Philosophy Griffins / Gryphons Hades Harpies Hecate Hector Helen Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hestia Homer Hydra Icarus Iliad Immortality Jason Juno Jupiter Katabasis Labyrinth Laurel Wreath Leto Mars Maze Medusa Menelaus Mercury Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metempsychosis Metis Minos Minotaur Nymphs Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Olympus Oracles Ovid Pan Pandora Pandora's Box Paris (Trojan Prince) Pasiphae Patroclus Pegasus Penelope Persephone Perseus Philemon Polyphemus Poseidon Priam Prometheus Sirens Sisyphus Sphinx Stymphalian Birds Styx Theseus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Underworld Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Olympians (Series)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	Published by First Second, 2010–2019. See individual entries in this database for further details.
ISBN	See individual entries in this database

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Official Website	olympiansrule.com (accessed: June 17, 2020)
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths
Target Audience	Young adults (teens; young adults)
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).

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

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Additional information

Summary

Olympians is a series of graphic novels that takes one deity per volume as the focus, retelling numerous myths related to that god.

Volume 1. *Zeus. King of the Gods*. Featuring creation myths and the war between the Titans and Olympians. Narrator unspecified.

Volume 2. *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess*. Featuring the myth of Athena's conception and birth; Pallas; the attack of the Giants; Medusa and Perseus; Arachne. Narrated by the Moirae (The Fates).

Volume 3. *Hera. The Goddess and her Glory*. Featuring the myths of marriage of Hera and Zeus; Io; Heracles' Choice; the Labours of Heracles; the Quest for the Golden Fleece; Heracles' assent to Olympus. Narrator unspecified.

Volume 4. *Hades. Lord of the Dead*. Featuring the myth of the rape of Persephone. Narrator unspecified.

Volume 5. *Poseidon. Earth-Shaker*. Relating the myths of the division of the realms; Odysseus and the Cyclops; Theseus and the Minotaur; the contest with Athena for Athens; the war between the Titans and Olympians. Narrated by Poseidon.

Volume 6. *Aphrodite. Goddess of Love*. Featuring the creation myths, including the birth of Aphrodite; marriage of Aphrodite and Hephaestus; Aphrodite's favourites; Pygmalion; Eros; the marriage of Thetis and Peleus. Narrated by the Charites (The Graces).

Volume 7. *Ares. Bringer of War*. Tells the story of the Trojan War. Narrated by Ares' son, Askalaphos.

Volume 8. *Apollo. The Brilliant One*. Featuring the myths of the birth of Artemis and Apollo; the foundation of the oracle at Delphi; Daphne; Marsyas; Hyacinth; Asklepios. Narrated by the Muses.

Volume 9. *Artemis. Wild Goddess of the Hunt*. Featuring the myths of the birth of Artemis and Apollo; Niobe; Actaeon; the Aloadai; Orion the Hunter. Narrated by Apollo, the companions of Artemis, Leto, and Artemis herself.

Volume 10. *Hermes. Tales of the Trickster*. Retelling the myths of Io

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and Argos; the dogs' embassy to Zeus; the birth of Hermes; Hermes' infancy and theft of Apollo's herd; the invention of the lyre; the many spheres Hermes became god of; the children of Hermes; the invention of Pan Pipes; the battle against Typhon; Baucis and Philemon. The majority of Hermes is narrated by Aesop.

Volume 11. *Hephaistos. God of Fire*. Relating the myth of creation, featuring Prometheus' role and punishment – this appears throughout the work in dialogue between Hephaestus and Prometheus; the birth and rejection of Hephaestus; the creations of Hephaestus; the affair of Aphrodite and Ares; Pandora; the imprisonment of Hera. Narrated by Epimetheus.

Each volume concludes with a short essay by the creator; summary notes on key characters; notes providing extra details on the myths, images, and sources; and reading lists – one for adults and one for children.

Analysis

Olympians is a lively and often humorous series of graphic novels that is nonetheless deeply informed by ancient sources. The series is established like a super-hero universe, so that while each volume focuses on a particular Olympian deity there is continuity of visualisation and characterisation across the volumes – the Zeus who is the main character in *Zeus* is the same Zeus who appears as a secondary character in further volumes, for example. The tone is generally light and humorous although serious topics are addressed.

The series title and shared characters bind *Olympians* as a unified whole, yet a fundamental of the series is the deities' struggle to define and express themselves as individuals. This emphasis on individualism arguably reflects the American origin of the series, but it is nonetheless a familiar trope from youth literature internationally, which frequently deals with questions of identity and coming-into-being. The issue of identity is strongly felt in the volumes relating to the children of Zeus. Different gods have different experiences. There are those who struggle to find a sense of purpose or belonging, such as Hephaistos, those who feel the weight of pre-determination (*Ares*), those for whom identity comes more naturally, such as Artemis, Athena, and Hermes, and those whose who find definition through another (Persephone in *Hades*). More unusually perhaps, the series also addresses the identity formation of the previous generations:

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Poseidon depicts that god struggling with his sense of self following his emergence from Cronus' stomach and the division of the realms; Hades is more ambivalent – he shows security in who he is, but no pleasure in existence prior to his capture of Persephone; Demeter has no volume of her own and she too is depicted in relation to Persephone; Hera is largely presented through her relationships with Zeus and with Heracles however the end of the volume is a real celebration of her as her own person (or, rather, goddess). Zeus is secure in his sense of self and his story in *Zeus* is more of a coming-to-power story rather than coming-of-age in a more personal way. Aphrodite is also secure in her self-hood, but the telling of her birth story and arrival amongst the gods is an unusual story within a collected volume of myths and it prompts the reader to consider the impact of her arrival upon the other deities and her own unusual status amongst them. The creation myths dominate the series as the founding story of the Olympians and a turning point for their dynasty. The vivid depictions of the giants and other creatures from that era provide a visual of creatures who are not often addressed in modern retellings and their presence adds depth to the rest of the series.

The use of pre-existing myths to explore the individuality of the gods operates by applying a very human psychology to the deities. This creates scope for exploring well-known (and sometimes les well-known) myths with an up-front psychological focus. For example, the story of the birth of Artemis and Apollo is familiar, but here we see it in a fresh way, exploring the long-term effect that it has had upon the twins – Apollo has a certain neediness and a troubled relationship with Zeus, Artemis has a difficult relationship with Hera while her relationship with Leto is depicted as having a closeness born of their first challenging days together. The gods all have opinions on each other and varied outlooks. This is also reflected in a nuance of characterisation throughout the work. Apollo has a consistent characterisation, and yet different aspects of him are reflected in the varied views that other deities have of him: in *Artemis* he is generally jovial yet somewhat vulnerable, in *Aphrodite* he is an outrageous flirt, in *Hermes* he appears anxious about status, while in *Hephaistos* his capacity for cruelty and bullying comes to the fore. On the one hand this human-like psychology is a modern take on the myths, but on the other it simply extends the all-too-human view of the gods laid down in the Homeric epics, where the gods argue, bicker, and make-up much like humans.

The myths are related in a very Ovidian manner (i.e. reflecting Ovid's

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Metamorphoses). Many are told by a variety of narrators and they are frequently enfolded one myth within another in ingenious ways. This both echoes an ancient literary practice and creates an absorbing, engaging effect. The variety of narrators enables an extension of the different point of view. This is most pronounced in *Apollo*, when two Muses tell the tale of Marsyas. The Muse of Tragedy considers it tragic, that of Comedy thinks it very funny and they openly disagree about it. Many narrators offer their versions of Artemis' life, and her self-assertion is reinforced when she finally becomes her own narrator at the end of the volume. In his notes, O'Connor said that Poseidon was a very hard deity to get a personal angle on, and for that reason he has Poseidon as the narrator of his own tale too. A huge number of myths are told in the series. This gives a sense of the richness and variety within Greek mythology. In some cases we get familiar myths told from a novel angle, such as the retelling of Theseus and the Minotaur (*Poseidon*) and in others there is fresh focus on less commonly told myths, such as that of the Aloadai's attack on Olympus (*Artemis*) and the death of the two Pallases (*Athena*).

The series very much focuses on the mythic aspects of the gods rather than their historical role in cult. Cult does occasionally feature, however, within the context of myths about the foundation of cults or the origin of sacrifice (*Hephaistos*). The gods' pursuits are those familiar from ancient sources – feasting, crafting, watching and visiting humans, and sex. The series shows an interest in the morality of the myths and in the morality of their retelling. The gods' behaviour can appear cruel at times, yet the series gives a sense of why the gods act as they do while also offering occasional guides to interpretation of their acts with modern sensibilities in mind. Athena seems cruel when she punishes Arachne (*Athena*), but she is not blamed as such; the narration ensures that the reader can see that the human acted inappropriately towards a goddess. *Hephaistos* addresses Zeus' punishment of Prometheus; this is done in a way that is intensely sympathetic towards Prometheus, and yet the reader is encouraged to balance that with Zeus' longer struggle for power and control. Sexual politics is sensitively handled. Apollo can still be seen pursuing nymphs and humans (*Apollo*), but the narrating Muses provide a counter-point by being saddened by his behaviour when he goes too far. The death of Actaeon is gruesome, but the reader is given a clear message that Actaeon was the one at fault (a perspective actively reinforced in the author's own voice in the notes) (*Artemis*). The arguable exception to this is *Hades*, in which the reimagining of the

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myth essentially condones the rape of Persephone by recasting it as a love story. In *Ares*, a retelling of the *Iliad*, the violence wrought by Ares is represented as a horrifying infliction upon human-kind, yet he is rather sympathetically cast as one struggling with predestination, necessary evil, and the dizzying exhilaration of conflict. There is a limit to the gods' power, and philosophical issues around death, fate, and purpose are all touched on in the series in addition to the themes of identity, power, and morality. For a young audience, this makes the series quite an adult read, yet the topics are handled in an approachable way allowing myth to act as an effective introduction to challenging subjects.

The choice of Olympians included is a matter of interest. While there are famously twelve Olympians, there is always a question over who "the twelve" are. Each volume in the series features a family tree inside the front cover. This picks out fourteen figures in a different colour to the others. Of these eleven have their own volume, while Hestia, Demeter, and Dionysos do not. Hestia is low on myths and is frequently absent from the top twelve, so her omission is unsurprising. Demeter was merged into Hades' volume. O'Connor addresses this decision explicitly, noting that while Hades is not actually an Olympian, he judged that "readers are going to get more excited about *Hades: Lord of the Dead* than *Demeter: Goddess of the Harvest*" (*Hades*). Dionysos may not have his own volume, but he appears in several other volumes (most notably in *Hephaistos*). He is represented as an ambiguous but ultimately benign figure who is something of an outsider within the pantheon.

The series demonstrates the author's extensive knowledge of ancient material. The myths are retold from ancient sources and appreciation for the variety of traditions behind each myth is also communicated. In the follow-up notes, O'Connor is explicit about his process of selecting traditions, which traditions have been used, and his own layer of interpretation. This is an effective way of communicating the nature of mythic traditions and the role of modern creators in shaping their retelling. Non-literary sources also inform the series. For example, an inscription, the Seikilos Epitaph, features, being sung by a character in *Hermes*. That same scene also includes the popular Herm statues of antiquity, with an accompanying note explaining what both of these things are. Influential artworks from across the ages are reproduced throughout the series, such as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* in *Athena*, and Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos in *Aphrodite*. These features add to the richness of the series and their explicit mention in

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	the notes (along with other source references and etymologies etc) encourages the reader to recognise the varied impact of antiquity upon subsequent cultures. The follow-up questions at the end of each volume further encourage readers to think with myth and explore their own thoughts on the themes raised. The tone of the series is light, but it is a colossal piece of work that leaves the reader in no doubt that classical myth has a great deal to offer.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Aesop Aesop's Fables Afterlife Agamemnon Amphitrite Anteros Aphrodite Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Arachne Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Ariadne Artemis Asclepius Athena Athens Atlas Bacchus Baucis Centaur(s) Cerberus Ceres Charybdis Chimera / Chimaera Crete Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Delos Demeter Diana Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Egypt Egyptian Mythology Epimetheus Erinyes Eris Eros Europa Fable Furies Gaia / Gaea Galatea Gods Golden Fleece Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Philosophy Griffins / Gryphons Hades Harpies Hecate Hector Helen Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hercules Hermes Hestia Homer Hydra Icarus Iliad Immortality Jason Juno Jupiter Katabasis Labyrinth Laurel Wreath Leto Mars Maze Medusa Menelaus Mercury Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Metempsychosis Metis Minos Minotaur Nymphs Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Olympus Oracles Ovid Pan Pandora Pandora's Box Paris (Trojan Prince) Pasiphae Patroclus Pegasus Penelope Persephone Perseus Philemon Polyphemus Poseidon Priam Prometheus Sirens Sisyphus Sphinx Stymphalian Birds Styx Theseus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adventure Adversity Authority Character traits Childhood Coming of age Conflict Death Disobedience Diversity Emotions Family Freedom Good deeds Good vs evil Hierarchy Humanity Humour Identity Individuality Journeys Judgement Justice Life Loss Love Morality Parents (and children) Peers Philosophy Prediction/prophecy Psychology Punishment Rape Relationships Revenge Sacrifice Self Storytelling Superheroes Values Violence War Water Witch Youth
Further Reading	Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W., eds., *Classics and Comics,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

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Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W., eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Series blog (accessed: June 17, 2020).

Addenda

For the last volume of the series see the entry *Dionysos. The New God (Olympians, 12)*, published in 2022.

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