Andy McCormack, "Entry on: Athena's Champion (Olympus, 1) by David Hair, Catherine Mayo", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1181. Entry version as of November 04, 2026.

David Hair , Catherine Mayo

Athena's Champion (Olympus, 1)

United Kingdom (2018)

TAGS: Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Athens Gods Greek History Hades Helen Hera Hittite Empire Homer Iliad Ithaca Odysseus / Ulysses Persephone Prometheus Prophecy Pythia Sisyphus Theseus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Athena's Champion (Olympus, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, New Zealand
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2018
First Edition Details	David Hair, Cathrine Mayo, *Athena's Champion*. Beaconsfield, Bucks: Canelo, 2018, 343 pp.
ISBN	9781788634212
Official Website	canelo.co (accessed: February 9, 2021)
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Crossover (Young Adult)
Author of the Entry	Andy McCormack, University of Cambridge, apm73@cam.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators



David Hair , b. 1965
(Author)

David Hair is a New Zealand author who now resides in Thailand. Having started his career in financial services, Hair's first novel (*The Bone Tiki*) won Best First Book at the 2010 NZ Post Children's Book Awards. He has since gone on to publish 16 fantasy and historical novels, drawing on his university training in both mythology and history.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: February 9, 2021).

bookseriesinorder.com (accessed: February 9, 2021).

Bio prepared by Andy McCormack, University of Cambridge, apm73@cam.ac.uk



Catherine Mayo (Author)

Catherine Mayo is a musician and violin maker as well as an author from New Zealand. She was born in Auckland, New Zealand. Her university training is in history, and in Ancient Greek – passions she discovered when she was a child reading Barbara Leonie Picard's retelling of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Mayo attended Auckland University and studied history, philosophy, French, music, art history and geology. She is part of a bluegrass band called *Gentle Annie* which has toured as far as Alaska, and is a professional luthier (building and restoring violins). Mayo's first book was *Murder at Mykenai* published

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in 2013; her second was *The Bow: Win or lose?* published in 2014. She also contributed to *The Book that Made Me* (edited by Judith Ridge), published in 2016, all three books were published by Walker Books Australia. Her first novel won a Storylines Notable Book Award for Young Adult fiction in 2014, and her subsequent novels are set in Ancient Greece.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: September 30, 2017).

bookcouncil.org.nz (accessed: September 30, 2017).

walkerbooks.com.au (accessed: September 30, 2017).

canelo.co (accessed: February 9, 2021).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Sequels: David Hair, Cath Mayo, *Oracles' War,* Beaconsfield, Bucks: Canelo, 2019. David Hair, Cath Mayo, *Sacred Bride*, Beaconsfield, Bucks: Canelo, 2019.
Summary	*Athena's Champion* begins Hair and Mayo's *Olympus* trilogy, which follows the early stages in Odysseus' story. This novel details his discovery of his true parentage and divine lineage, and awakening to the world of the Gods as Odysseus is selected as Athena's champion. As her champion, he is required to fight for her on earth alongside – and eventually against – Theseus, another of her celebrated servants. Odysseus begins the story as he attends a coming-of-age ceremony at the temple of Pythia, where his true parentage is brought to light by his grandmother, a priestess and seer. Sworn against his ancestor Prometheus – a God being punished for eternity for giving humanity the gift of knowledge – Odysseus's grandmother attempts to have him assassinated, but he is saved by the Goddess Athena. Athena awakens his magical abilities as a God-descended *theoi* in exchange for his servitude. He is trained by other theoi servants of the Goddess in fighting and thinking, and numerous episodes follow Odysseus accompanying Athena into the realms of the Gods, and into Hades' underworld, where he learns of the intrigues which will trigger the Trojan war. Each chapter begins with a note as to the locations Odysseus visits, as he travels around Greece, Troy, and divine realms. *Athena's Champion* provides an introduction to key characters and events which will go on to lead to the Trojan War. It concludes [spoiler!] with the death of Theseus, and Odysseus' crowning as Athena's primary favourite after rescuing Helen from her first abduction.
Analysis	*Athena's Champion* was conceived at a meeting between David Hair and Cath Mayo, two established authors of young adult novels who have drawn upon historical and mythological sources in their previous

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fiction. Their decision to focus on pre-*Iliad* and *Odyssey* Odysseus was a means of imagining the roots of his more familiar, adult persona in these epics, and the training and experience which shaped his subsequent sagacity, cunning, and maturity. Their decision to seriously examine and explore the implications of Odysseus' potentially Sisyphean heritage comes from a brief Homeric reference in *The Iliad*, which has often been read more as a reference to Odysseus' cunning rather than actual genealogy as an illegitimate son of Sisyphus (and descendant of Prometheus). Their decision to do so provides an interesting context for the restlessness and individuality which so famously characterize him in the epics and modern retellings. Their decision to follow Odysseus in his late teens and twenties was to broaden the appeal of the series to provide a crossing between their young adult fanbases and mainstream readers.

In a rather different mode to the lyrical, romantic style which has brought such success to Madeleine Miller who has also found crossover success with *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, however, Hair and Mayo render Odysseus' "origin myth" rather more in the vein of the traditional action/ adventure monomyth. In *Athena's Champion*, Odysseus is initiated into the fantastical environments and battles which will define his life. Both Hair and Mayo trained in classical history and mythology at university, and their writing approach was to discuss plotting in tandem, ensuring fidelity to classical sources as to timelines and personages which they then imaginatively expanded. Hair wrote the story's first draft with its emphasis on action, adventure, and fast pacing, and Mayo brought her historical/mythological expertise (and training in Homeric Greek) to bear in redrafting, editing, and finalizing the draft.

Athena's Champion provides a glossary of key Greek historical and mythological concepts, italicized and often explained when they initially appear within the text proper, as an appendix. The novel is populated by Gods and mortals of classical mythology and literature, and re-tells episodes contributing to the matters of Troy: a key scene, for example, sees Odysseus witness the contest between Aphrodite, Hera and Athena and the judgement of Paris (*Parassi*). Each chapter opens with relevant quotations from Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Pindar, Plutarch, Euphorion, Aeschlyus and Statius, and indications as to the geographical/ mythological location in which that chapter takes place.

Hair describes his and Mayo's approach to writing *Athena's Champion* as one in which they sought to treat "the Gods as actual Gods – i.e.,

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beings worshipped by powerful religious cults – but also real as real beings, not omnipotent and subject to specific forces, whose cults are powerful entities in an Aegean world under siege from powerful eastern kingdoms and empires". They chose to do so in an attempt to "solve the riddle" they have observed in other contemporary fiction set in the ancient world, in which the problem of the Gods (and their powers) are either left undefined, unpredictable or unknowable; diminished from divinity to a more contemporary understanding of superheroism; or ignored entirely. Hair and Mayo's approach therefore represents a more challenging progression for readers of series like Caroline Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries*, by providing competing accounts of the Gods' powers depending on the perspectives of the Gods themselves and mortals.

Nevertheless, it is Odysseus' *theoi* or God-touched insight which illuminates the story's compelling vision of the pecking order between Gods and mortals in which the characters of *Athena's Champion* operate. As powerful as they are however, the Gods can only ever be as strong as mortals believe them to be. The story particularly embraces this understanding of divine politics at the root of the Trojan war, as Gods of rival kingdoms seek to align themselves with Greek counterparts (and vice versa) in anticipation of imperial conquest. Zeus, wary of rising support for a religious cult worshipping a similar figure to himself in Troy, is keen to broker a form of union between the Greeks and Trojans to shore up his own adoration.

Trojan characters – Gods, such as Zeus' rival, and mortals alike – are described by Trojan epithets of Hair and Mayo's design, cognate to how we know them today ("Cassandra" becomes "Kyshanda", for example). The sense generated is one of history forming, rather refreshingly, rather than the narration of history and mythology as we know it now. Seeing the cogs turn and the machinery fall into place which will lead, inexorably, to the Trojan war, allows us to reflect on how conflicts in our own world can often be the result of forces – like dominoes – which begin falling in to place long before the first shot is fired. Odysseus plays the role of cypher, of sorts, for the contemporary reader – providing context and commentary on the ancient morality by which most of his co-characters operate, and offers a complicated but compassionate analysis of the situations and interpersonal/political/theological dynamics in which he finds himself at the heart. His desire to return to Ithaca, after the revelation of his true parentage at the opening of the book, for example, offers at once a foreshadowing for his lifelong journeying to come. It allows him, too,

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	to reflect on the feelings of his adoptive father and his mother, come to terms with the hatred of his grandmother, and start to understand the competing allegiances they have sworn to the warring Gods – and his own role as a diplomat between the mortal and divine.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Athens Gods Greek History Hades Helen Hera Hittite Empire Homer Iliad Ithaca Odysseus / Ulysses Persephone Prometheus Prophecy Pythia Sisyphus Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Authority Coming of age Family Heroism Identity Individuality Parents (and children) Past Relationships Society
Further Reading	Hair, David, *A Collaborative Vision: How the Olympus Series Was Born* [blog post], avidhairauthor.com, published October 11, 2018 (accessed: February 9, 2021). Hair, David, *The Wonders of Greek Myth* [blog post], avidhairauthor.com, published November 11, 2018 (accessed: February 9, 2021). Mayo, Catherine, *Cath's New Book Athena's Champion is Out Next Month* [blog post], catherinemayoauthor.com, published October 18, 2018 (accessed: February 9, 2021).

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