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George O'Connor

# Artemis. Wild Goddess of the Hunt (Olympians, 9)

*United States (2017)*

TAGS: Apollo Artemis Atalanta Demeter Giants Jason Leto Niobe Pelops Poseidon Tantalus Theseus






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

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## Creators



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Former Author blog (blog no longer updated; accessed: October 24, 20018).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

This collection of myths about Artemis opens with an account of her birth and early childhood narrated by her mother, Leto. This section compliments material from volume 8 in the series, *Apollo, The Brilliant One*, telling the reader more about Leto's seduction by Zeus, her flight from Hera, Artemis' assistance in the birth of Apollo, and the twins' introduction to their father on Olympus. Once Artemis has received gifts from Zeus, she looses her arrows, striking a tree, then an acorn, then a rampaging boar, and finally a man who is attacking a woman and child. Artemis now has her entourage and the section finishes with her urging, *Come, everyone – to the hunt!*

The second story is narrated by Apollo. He reflects on how it must have been difficult for Leto on Olympus and how protective Artemis and Apollo felt towards their mother. This provides the contextualisation for the myth that follows, namely the myth of Niobe, the queen whose many children were killed by Artemis and Apollo after she slighted Leto. The story concludes with Leto uttering words of solace to Niobe, who is then transformed into an outcrop of rock.

Myth three is narrated by two of Artemis' handmaidens, who peek out cheekily from the undergrowth, changing the tone from the sorrowful ending of Niobe to something lighter. The handmaidens stress what an honour it is to serve Artemis, and how seriously they take guarding her "privacy." They go on to tell the story of Actaeon and his metamorphosis.

Hera narrates the fourth myth, that of the attack on Olympus by the Aloadai, Otus and Ephiates. Hera describes how the Aloadai grow each year, and each year come closer to their aim of overthrowing Zeus and abducting Hera and Artemis. Artemis tricks the brothers by offering to marry whichever can capture the Ceryneian Hind and causing them to kill each other in the process. Hera acknowledges that Artemis did well on this occasion, although she *Still annoys the hell out of me with her dirty looks, though*.

The fifth myth is narrated by Orion the Hunter. He describes the stories of his origin, boasting of his greatness and preferring the tradition in which he was created by the gods. Orion goes on to describe his accomplishments in hunting and how frustrated he became when Artemis did not respond to the offerings he made to her.



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The creatures he kills get more and more fantastic, including Gryphon, Manticore, and finally Unicorn. At the Unicorn hunt, Orion encounters Artemis for the first time and she invites him to chase her through the forest in fun. Orion is allowed to join Artemis on her hunts. They hunt together with her companions until Orion reaches out to touch the goddess with his hand, causing her to snatch her hand away and explain that she is not interested in him romantically, being pledged to the hunt and to celibacy. Artemis then takes over the narration. She tells Orion the myth of Atalanta in order to help him to understand her own position. Orion interrupts Artemis at the end of the story and will not heed Artemis' meaning. They quarrel and Orion vows to destroy the wild creatures that Artemis holds dear. Artemis visits her mother on Olympus to ask for her advice. They talk of love and its difficulties. Apollo overhears. Leto induces Gaea to bring forth a monster that will do away with Orion. Apollo now narrates. He takes the reader through Orion's fight with Gaea's beast and Apollo inducing Artemis to shoot Orion. Artemis reclaims the narration. She explains that while Apollo thinks that he tricked her helpfully, she knew exactly what she was doing all along. With a tear falling from her eye, she brings down Orion. As she returns to the hunt with her entourage, she explains what was wrong with Orion's trophy-hunting view of the natural world and her own respect for it and for herself. She completes her tale with an assertion of who she is.

The graphic novel's stories are followed by a thoughtful Author's Note in which George O'Connor discusses his admiration for Artemis. A visual character summary of Artemis follows, then notes on the text, a character summary of Leto, one of Orion, some questions for follow-up discussions, a bibliography with brief notes on how the works informed the text, and finally a character summary of Atalanta.

## Analysis

As in other volumes in this series, the Ovidian use of multiple voices within *Artemis* adds complexity and nuance to the presentation of this goddess. The first story establishes her background, character, domain, and attributes, combining a sense of her power with areas of vulnerability. With Artemis' mother, Leto, telling of the story of Artemis' birth, the reader is prompted to consider the concept of a god's origins, and to appreciate Artemis' special relationships with her mother and brother. By following Callimachus' *Hymn (3) To Artemis* for Artemis' birth (as attested explicitly in the book's notes; see



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also *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo* (3)), the story moves quickly to Artemis' precocity, as she supports her mother through labour and makes her requests to Zeus (requests made paraphrasing the account in Callimachus, *To Artemis 3*). Reference to Artemis helping Leto give birth recurs throughout the book, reinforcing the focus on the bond between them. The dynamic between Leto and her children had been explored in *Apollo. The Brilliant One* (2016, see elsewhere in this database). This is revisited in *Artemis*, which emphasises the twins' desire to avenge Leto; the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* (4) and its account of the killing of Python is drawn on to express that intent. This exploration of the dynamic between Leto and her children adds a personal aspect to the depiction of relationships on Olympus and within the pantheon.

The account of Artemis' first shots is drawn from Callimachus' *Hymn (3) To Artemis*. The fourth arrow is said to be shot at "the city of unjust men, those who to one another and those who towards strangers committed many wrongs" (lines 121–124). By depicting that via an image of Artemis killing someone who is attacking a woman and child, a connection is established between her characterisation as a deity with a sense of justice and her role as a protector of mothers and the young. The fully-grown Artemis is depicted as strong and confident, wearing a silver hunting dress and pixie hair cut – a cut with a historical association with independence and women's liberation.

The retelling of the Niobe myth is well-balanced. The story remains brutal and becomes shocking through a cinematic montage-like sequence depicting the deaths of each of Niobe's children plus her own increasing shock, horror, and grief. Nonetheless, Apollo is a sympathetic narrator for *Niobe*, as the only other who knows it from Artemis' perspective. The reader is given a clear sense of why Artemis and Apollo would elect to avenge their mother so vehemently. The book's notes are explicit about the use of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as the source of the retelling (for which see 6.144–316), and the influence of a line from a fragment of lost Aeschylus' tragedy about Niobe. They also reiterate a moral of the story: "Quality not quantity, Niobe!." It is fair to say that the graphic novel places more emphasis that Ovid does on the twins' concern for their mother. Ovid's Niobe boasts about her own semi-divine lineage and her abundance of children. Leto bids her children punish Niobe for her presumption (*Metamorphoses*, 201–212); her offence is chiefly that of a mortal considering herself superior to deities. In *Artemis*, Leto is not



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indicated to be aware of Niobe's actions and it appears more as if the divine twins step in against Niobe to spare their mother's feelings. The difference creates a much more sympathetic impression of the gods' actions and avoids emphasis on the hierarchical ideas of what a mortal owes to the divine. This greater degree of sympathy is also present in moving scenes at the end of the story, when Leto comforts Niobe in Artemis' presence just prior to Niobe's metamorphosis (for which see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 300–310; Pausanias, 1.21.3). Visually, the graphic novel uses illustration to capture the otherness and distance present in Ovid's reference to the gods attacking "clothed in cloud" (*Metamorphoses*, 6.217). Some of the deaths come from *Metamorphoses*, including Ovid's unique tradition of the suicide of Niobe's husband, Amphion. Additional deaths are invented in order to provide visualisations of all of the deaths, and *Artemis* avoids the Ovidian double-killing of sons who are wrestling (*Metamorphoses*, 6.238–250).

The retelling of the myth of Actaeon also draws on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.131–254), but conveys a subtlety different message that is arguably more constructive for a young modern readership. Ovid twice asserts that it was Fate not fault that led Actaeon to Artemis/Diana, and closes by saying that opinion was divided on whether she had been just in her response. Fundamentally that gives the impression that the narrator, at least, considers Artemis to have been too harsh. In O'Connor's *Artemis*, the tale is narrated by some of Artemis' nymphs, who are certainly sympathetic to Artemis' position, and they open by stating how seriously they take their vows and the protection of Artemis' privacy; "woe to ...any who violates our lady Artemis' privacy. Whether they meant to or not". The view then switches to Actaeon hunting. The reader sees that his discovery of Artemis was indeed accidental, yet a frame is added that communicates a shift from Actaeon seeing Artemis accidentally to deliberately stopping to watch her. The lascivious look on his face makes it clear that he is being disrespectful; that he is doing something wrong. Notes on the text clarify this in case any doubt is left ("No Actaeon! Not cool! Get out of there!"). After a moment of being disconcerted, Artemis acts. She flicks water at Actaeon (as in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 188–190) and his transformation begins. Artemis becomes formidable; her eyes glow red and enormous power is expressed in her command that he run. We see Actaeon's dogs chase the stag, then a silhouette against a red sky shows them feeding. The nymphs, mischievous now, reiterate the honour that



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*they* have in sharing Artemis' private moments. In illustrating the scene of Artemis bathing, the images are consistent with the principle of respect communicated in the story; although the reader sees Artemis bathing, she is not rendered fully nude. In place of Ovid's emphasis on ambiguity, this retelling of the myth expresses a clear lesson about respect and consent.

Hera narrates the following myth, expressing her grudging respect for Artemis. This is the myth of the Aloadai, based on the tradition found in Apollodorus (*Library* 1.4; see also Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.305ff; Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.582). The myth is related comedically, with humour at the expense of the giants and others (Zeus to Poseidon [their father]: "You really need to stop having kids." Poseidon to Zeus: "Look who's talking."). Essentially following Apollodorus, the giants are defeated by Artemis' trickery, as she morphs into a deer they attack, with one brother accidentally killing the other. The uninjured brother is killed when the wounded one attempts to attack Artemis in revenge. In Apollodorus they both try and kill the deer and hit each other (for an alternative tradition, see Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 28). The difference, although slight, renders the giants more unlikable still. The interesting decision to make Hera the narrator adds a further sympathetic strand (as Hera was the other disgusted object of the giants' advances), and links this myth into the wider storyline of Artemis' place on Olympus and within the family of gods.

The final myth is a lively yet sensitive retelling of the myth of Orion. Initially Orion is the narrator. He describes a range of traditions about his birth, and prefers the one in which he comes from the gods. His clearly enormous pride, or arrogance, is undercut by humorous frames depicting the tradition of his creation through Zeus, Poseidon, and Hermes urinating on a bear skin (for which see Pseudo-Hyginus, *Astronomica*, 2.34). Orion haughtily objects to those who dismiss that tradition as a joke. A note on the text explains the wordplay at work in this tradition, a typical example of how the notes offer readers a richer reading of the text if they want it. This is also applied when Orion begins to list the beasts he has killed; in-text they are called by rarely translated names, e.g. "river horse", and the text note explains why. The note also adds that "rhinoceros" was kept because "'nose horn" would make Orion sound like a weird caveman"; an informal remark which nonetheless offers insight into the expression of his character.

The statue of Artemis to which Orion presents offerings is much more



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akin to historical statues of the goddess than to her depiction in the graphic novel – an effective bridge between the various ideas of her. The reader sees that Orion is becoming indignant that Artemis does not respond to his offerings. His self-satisfied look in a close-up frame once she has made herself known to him prepares the reader for Orion misreading the goddess' intent. Several frames are devoted to expressing the awkwardness of the moment when Orion reaches out to touch Artemis, having, as anticipated, presumed too much. Sorrowfully, Artemis reminds him of who she is and explains herself further by beginning to narrate the myths of Atalanta.

Atalanta's tale is told biographically, with Artemis including her own responses to events which connect her to Atalanta's life. "As goddess of childbirth and protector of the young", she steps in when Atalanta is abandoned as an infant and induces the bear to care for her (for which see Apollodorus, *Library*, 3.9.2; Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 13.1). We see how, "a group of hunters 'rescued' Atalanta", a formulation which expresses Atalanta's actual self-reliance and the aggression of the men she encounters. We see Atalanta devote herself to Artemis, followed by a switch back to Orion's face as Artemis reiterates that this means celibacy, reminding him – and the reader – of the purpose of Artemis' story. Two frames of Atalanta fighting off centaurs follow, described by Artemis as "those who didn't understand or respect her choice." This follows the tradition in Apollodorus (*Library*, 3.9.2), and again reiterates the focus of the story-telling. The story moves on to the Calydonian boar hunt, opening with Meleager's father failing to honour Artemis at harvest time. Theseus, Jason, Iphicles, Iolaus, Castor, Polydeuces, and Meleager are assembled for the hunt when Atalanta joins them. There are objections, but Meleager over-rules. Meleager also responds respectfully if disappointedly when Atalanta reveals that she has vowed to remain unmarried. She defeats the boar, receives the prize (see Callimachus' *Hymn (3) To Artemis*, 215–221; a note on the text invites the reader to look up the traditions surrounding this aspect of the myth), and ventures onto the Argo with a still respectful Meleager. Artemis asks Orion if he understands why she is telling this story. He takes over the story-telling to insist that Atalanta did get married after being tricked in the race. A now angry Artemis asks '"Is that how you would have me, Orion? Through trickery?"' Orion responds indignantly and puts his hands on Artemis a second time. A close-up of her face shows how wrongly he is behaving. As Orion's anger escalates as they argue, the reader is again guided to see Orion's misplaced presumption and to interpret his following



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threats accordingly.

When Artemis then visits her mother, the colours change to white and light blue to indicate the calmer atmosphere on Olympus. Artemis is characterised as one who is not too proud to seek and take advice, while the recurring theme of her relationship with Leto is developed further. Leto's subsequent conversation with Gaea establishes the developing theme of environmental respect. Gaea agrees to send a monster against Orion not to help Artemis but to protect the earth's creatures from Orion's aggression. As the beast rises, Apollo takes on the narration. As god of prophecy, he explains, he knows what is happening and that his plan to help Artemis will work. We see him lure Artemis into loosing an arrow at Orion, then Artemis takes over the narration of her own tale. A series of close-ups show her to be moved and knowing as she shoots Orion down (see e.g. Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*, 2. 4. 72; Apollodorus, 1.4.5.; Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.539). The boastful hunter is reduced to a tiny figure plummeting through the deep sea in a trail of blood. There is a touching moment as Artemis considers her affectionate bond with Apollo and Leto. The final two pages return Artemis to her territory in the forest, pursuing game in the company of her hunting party. Her final remarks help to reinforce the messages that have been established in the rest of the text. Artemis condemns the sense of entitlement that Orion had, which caused him to ruin his relationship with Artemis and which made him approach the natural world in a very different way to her. She ends on a confident note, asserting her values and enjoying herself amongst her followers. In a note on the text, O'Connor explains that there are several traditions about the death of Orion; he chose to include the tale of Apollo's trickery because it is a good story, but undercut it by having Artemis ultimately having Artemis aware of what she was doing, because he "felt it was most important that Artemis have her own agency." This is reinforced by Artemis having her own voice at the end of the novel. Having been described by her mother, brother, companions, and step-mother, she takes control of her own story.

*Artemis* is a sympathetic account of the deity which emphasises her strength and sense of identity, and her care for her family and those under her protection. It contains sensitive treatments of difficult subjects, narrating traditional myths, yet communicating anti-rape messages and positive messages about consent that are suitable for a modern audience – particularly a young modern audience. This is linked to a theme of environmental care, something which is present in the ancient material, but which has a new urgency in the modern



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| | world.<br><br>The tone of this graphic-novel is light, with some humorous touches, yet there is a serious strand to the whole and an attempt to convey the complexity of the god and his myths. O'Connor is creating his own version of the Olympian mythosphere with this series, *Olympians*, selecting myths and versions of 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 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. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Apollo Artemis Atalanta Demeter Giants Jason Leto Niobe Pelops Poseidon Tantalus Theseus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Authority Child, children Coming of age Environment Family Gender expectations/construction Heroism Identity Justice Knowledge Learning Magic powers Morality Parents (and children) Sexuality Siblings |
| Further Reading | Budin, Stephanie Lynn, *Artemis*, London: Routledge, 2015.<br><br>Kovacs, George, and C. W. Marshall, eds., *Classics and Comics,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.<br><br>Kovacs, George, and C. W. Marshall, eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.<br><br>Roberts, Deborah H., "The Metamorphosis of Ovid in Retellings of Myth for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient* |



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| | *Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015. |
| Addenda | Series blog (accessed: July 12, 2018). |



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