Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Hades: Lord of the Dead (Olympians, 4) 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/564. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

George O'Connor

Hades: Lord of the Dead (Olympians, 4)

United States (2012)

TAGS: Afterlife Apollo Ares Athena Ceres Demeter Eleusinian Mysteries Erinyes Furies Gods Greek History Greek Philosophy Hades Hecate Hermes Immortality Katabasis Medusa Metempsychosis Moirai Olympus Persephone Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Sisyphus Underworld Zeus



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

General information	
Title of the work	Hades: Lord of the Dead (Olympians, 4)
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	2012
First Edition Details	George O'Connor, *Hades: Lord of the Dead*. New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2012, 77 pp.
ISBN	9781596434349
Official Website	olympiansrule.com (accessed: October 24, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (teens, young adults, 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

Hades is the fourth instalment in the *Olympians* series. The graphic novel, told in a style akin to a modern super-hero comic, introduces the Greek Underworld and tells the myth of Persephone. The story opens in darkness, with words announcing that this is what happens when you die. The narrative follows Hermes, who goes on to the banks of the Styx. With the use of a perspective familiar from first-person computer games, the reader can see "their" shadow in the water; their greeny-white hand reaches out to offer Charon a coin. The boat transports the recently departed to the crowded lands of the dead. The shade of "a woman, cursed in life by the gods", who may be recognised as Medusa, scatters others before her. The mortal part of Heracles stands off to one side, brooding after Olympus. Following the entrance to Tartaros there are scenes of the wicked being punished: Titans and Hekatonchieres, Ixion, Tityus, the Danaides, Sisyphus. The shores of Lethe are reached; you see your reflection reach out to drink the waters of forgetfulness: "You are now one of the anonymous dead in the underworld." The perspective opens wider and wider to reveal the vast crowds of mindless shades who "wait… and wait. What they wait for, even the great god who rules over these sunless lands cannot say." Hades is revealed, slouched despondently upon a huge ebony throne staring into the masses of dead. The scene moves in closer and closer to a close-up of his chiselled, brooding face.

The scene then moves from dark Hades to a bright and fun-filled celebration on high Olympus, thus establishing the contrast between the life of Hades and those of the other gods. Zeus descends and dances amongst the humans. There is a depiction of harvest festivals and humans honouring Demeter and her daughter, Kore, for enabling the fields to flourish. There is a close-up of Kore. She is presented as a female version of Hades; short-cropped black hair, large dark eyes, dark lips on a pale face, and a dark dress that contrasts with the various bright colours worn by the Olympians. Apollo is singing to Kore, wooing her. Demeter appears, her face distorted by fury. She drives Apollo away, angrily noting the dreadful fate of those he pursues. Kore rounds on Demeter and they argue, with Kore accusing her mother of over-protectiveness and Demeter replying that she is protecting Kore from male aggression that Kore does not yet understand. The reader infers that this argument is not uncommon between these two. Kore screams at Demeter to leave her alone; Demeter leaves. The maidens distract Kore by drawing her to a field

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of flowers.

As the girls pick flowers, an alternate perspective reveals that they are being secretly watched. The weather changes. Clouds cover the sun. Hades dons his helmet of invisibility, first seen in *Zeus: King of the Gods*. Hades, in chariot, swoops in and grabs Kore, drawing her down into a crack in the earth that he creates with his staff. Kore cries out for her mother. The chariot descends lower and lower. Once in the Underworld, Hades drops Kore without a word and she watches as he stalks away from her, shedding his armour. Hades throws himself despondently onto his throne. He tells Kore to make herself comfortable. Kore angrily accuses him of kidnap, but Hades calmly replies by introducing himself and telling her that she will "be [his] bride." He tells her that he has had separate quarters prepared for her and that a banquet will be held in her honour. He leaves. Kore is left in darkness, covering her face with her hands.

The story switches to Earth, where a distressed Demeter is searching everywhere for Kore. She transforms the maidens to Sirens as a punishment for their failure to protect or locate Kore. Zeus looks guiltily away from Demeter. Meanwhile, Hades hosts Kore at a banquet. He then leads her through the dead, explaining that Kore would be their queen. Kore looks dazzled. A suddenly shy and hesitant Hades asks Kore to join him on a further tour the following day. Once alone in her room, Kore embraces a gothic look, changing her dress and necklace for something more vampish and donning black lipstick, eyeshadow and braids. The narrator explains that "a daughter who has never been allowed to grow" is creating a "new self" to reflect her "innermost thoughts." She takes the new name, Persephone.

On Earth, Demeter, "abandoned her godly responsibilities" in her grief; crops began to fail and the humans suffered. Resentful King Tantalos determined to shame the gods by tricking them into eating his son, Pelops. Only a Demeter distracted ate the boy's flesh. Zeus punished Tantalos, the gods restored Pelops, and they determined to be more distant from humans in future. Demeter walks the desolate Earth alone.

The scene reverts to Hades. The god appears in darkness, then turns towards the reader and says, "Oh. You're here." Kore is revealed walking down a dramatic staircase. Hades compliments her and Kore retorts that she did not change her appearance for him and asks him not to call her Kore, "Now I am Persephone." Hades takes Persephone

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on a tour of his kingdom. Persephone is concerned about the suffering of the waiting shades. Persephone recognises the Fates; Hades prefers to call them the Furies, or Kindly Ones (a conflation established at the beginning of the series in *Zeus*). They warn Persephone that she must avoid eating food in the Underworld or she will be bound to stay. They move from darkness into a cavern bright with gem stones. Persephone basks in the light and smiles as Hades admires her.

Demeter continues her desperate search. Hekate advises Demeter to consult the god Helios, who sees all. Meanwhile, Hades and Persephone reach the Elysian Fields. Persephone is struck by how few shades have made it into this favoured area. Hades is indifferent, but Persephone insists that there must be a solution. Demeter discovers that Zeus gave permission for Hades to take Persephone. She storms like one demented into the halls of Olympus. The other Olympians look on bewildered. Zeus asks Athena for counsel and she notes that things have got very bad on Earth. Demeter, in a close-up on her enraged face, screams that the world can starve and the underworld choke on the dead. Zeus sends Hermes to fetch Persephone.

A sorrowful Hades is once again shown in the darkness. He knows that Persephone is being recalled and is uncertain what to do. The Fates/Furies remind him about the binding power of the food of the dead. Hades takes Persephone to a pomegranate orchard and hands her a fruit. They lie amongst black flowers. An impending kiss is interrupted by the arrival of Hermes, who explains the pressure that Demeter is applying. Hades menacingly insists that he and Zeus had "an understanding." Persephone feels insulted, but a consoling Hades urges her to return to her mother, insisting that no one will love her as he does.

Persephone is disconcerted to be back on Olympus. Zeus tries to greet her, but a deranged Demeter bursts through, calling out Persephone's former name, Kore. Mother and daughter hug. Demeter, once again furious, demands to know if Hades has hurt her. In an aside, Zeus notes to Hermes that she does not seem glad to be back. Persephone, smiling guiltily, reveals that she ate from the pomegranate. She tells her mother that she, "couldn't stay a little girl forever" and that Demeter will have to let her go. Persephone bids Demeter restore life to the Earth, which she does with a touch of her hand. Once harvest has come, Hermes takes Persephone to the Underworld. Hades' face lights up as Persephone appears. She is glad to be back but also

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announces that there will be changes. She and Demeter have developed new rites at Eleusis. The story of what happens when you die repeats, but this time initiate humans are happily reborn and when that cycle of rebirth completes, the dead find themselves in the Elysian Fields. The final scene closes with Persephone and Hades seated side by side on twin thrones and the narrator's observation that it is luckier for the dead to come before Hades when Persephone is there.

The graphic novel is followed by an Author's Note, which explains the decision to focus on Hades and Persephone rather than Demeter (an Olympian). There are summary pages for Hades, Persephone, Demeter and Tantalos. A section of G(r)eek Notes provides more information on details in the text. There are eight questions *For Discussion*, including a question asking what Hades could have done differently to show Persephone that he liked her. A Bibliography and Recommended Reading conclude.

Analysis

This visually modern graphic novel offers an accessible entry point for people who enjoy comics o explore Greek mythology. *Hades* is particularly good at evoking the physical environment of the Underworld and at expressing the experience that the ancient Greek dead were thought to go through. The use of point-of-view is highly effective in this respect, helping to immerse the reader.

Other aspects of the retelling of this myth may well be regarded as more problematic. A myth in which a male god abducts a less powerful, female deity and in which that abduction leads to her becoming his wife is a challenging myth to retell without perpetuating the patriarchal values which are inherent within it. Writers tackle this in numerous ways, more or less inclined to address the misogyny within the story (see numerous other examples in this database, e.g. Fontes and Fontes, *Demeter and Persephone*; Lawrence, *Myths and Legends*; Lupton, *Greek Myths*). This retelling attempts to recast the myth as a story of Persephone's empowerment. The relations between Hades and Persephone are represented as a love story. This was presumably intended to rehabilitate the story, so that Persephone's (almost immediate) acceptance of the situation and the burgeoning romance that follows makes the myth seem like a positive story. There *is* something positive for young readers about the idea that Persephone is content to be with Hades in the Underworld (that is,

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about a depiction of a young woman's confident sexuality). There are, however, a number of factors which render the retelling a sexist narrative which potentially reinforces harmful social behaviours. Not least amongst these aspects is the retention of the abduction element in a story cast as a romantic one. One might argue that the abduction is a key aspect of the myth and that removing it would alter the myth; one response to that would be to observe that many aspects of the myth are changed in the retelling, so changing the abduction element would not be inconsistent with that pattern and would make a romance narrative more genuinely empowering, i.e. it would remove the key element of what makes this a rape narrative rather than a romance.

The practice of recasting the myth as a love story has been common since the mid-twentieth century, when young people became more able to pursue relationships against the wishes of their parents. This recasting is typically done at the expense of Demeter. The central ancient tradition of this myth has Demeter as the central, sympathetic protagonist, and the narrative follows her sorrowful search for her daughter and her attempt to help a human family who shelter her (*Homeric Hymn 2, To Demeter*; with Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 5.338–569). *Hades: Lord of the Dead* draws heavily on the *Homeric Hymn* for its narrative, yet, as in other love-story style retellings, Demeter is presented in a far less sympathetic way, marginalised within the narrative and made unsympathetic through the use of sexist tropes. There is an age-specific form of sexism in the depiction of Demeter's interaction with Kore/Persephone ("Persephone" hereafter) as introduced at the start of the novel. The older woman's behaviour is depicted as unreasonable; the idea that the older woman is in the wrong is represented not just as the younger woman's view, but communicated by the depiction of Demeter as hysterical and possessive (repetition of "my", aggression, accusatory pointing). The older woman's concern is represented as an object of ridicule. This negative representation of Demeter continues, through depictions of her wild-eyed and out of control of her emotions. Demeter even appears this way on the book's cover, where a commanding Hades sits between a knowing Persephone and a resentful Demeter. The hostile tradition in which Demeter transforms the maidens into Sirens comes not from the *Homeric Hymns* but has rather been adopted from the Roman writer Ovid. (*Metamorphoses*, 5.552–558). The narrator reports that Demeter, "abandoned her godly responsibilities." (p. 32). While this essentially bridges into the section in which Earth loses its

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fertility, it is done in a reproachful way which implies that Demeter is being selfish. From a different point-of-view, Demeter has no duty to humans. She does not work for them, anything that she gives to them is a blessing, not something owed, and at this time she does not bestow the blessing. The omission of the section of the myth in which Demeter stays with the family at Eleusis exacerbates the unbalance. The introduction of the Eleusinian Mysteries is presented as Persephone's idea.

There are different issues at work in the depiction of Persephone's experience. As Kore, she looks like a female Hades; as Persephone, the mirroring is less precise, but the colouring and styling still makes them similar to each other but not the other gods. It might be argued that the similarity comes from a shared ancestor, yet this aspect, if not completely erased (it is mentioned that Zeus is her father, and that Hades is Zeus' brother), is essentially suppressed. The uncle/niece relationship is never explicitly referred to, meaning that their physical similarity conveys the idea that she and Hades are suited to each other – a natural couple. This is innapropriate in an abduction narrative, as it encourages the reader to "ship" the parties involved, that is, to expect or hope that they will become a romantic couple, when abduction should not be represented as a "starting point" for a relationship. It also gives the impression that Persephone is fighting the inevitable when she complains about her kidnap (akin to a *tsundere* character in Japanese manga); this discourages people from taking such complaints seriously.

Also problematic is the rapidity with which O'Connor's Persephone adapts to Hades' wishes. The *same evening* that she arrives, Persephone transforms herself physically in a way that indicates that she has accepted her role as Hades' wife (pp. 30–31). The narrator, not Persephone, describes it as an expression of Persephone's "innermost thoughts"; this is another means of normalising her relations with Hades, although there has been little to suggest why she would react in this way. The narrator's account implies that Demeter has stifled Persephone and that a highly sexualised appearance and acceptance of an abductor's advances is the natural next step for one beyond maternal control. This is coupled with a consistently sympathetic depiction of Hades. It is worth noting that the novel is effective in exploring the many names of Hades and his ambiguous place in Greek thought. Rather unusually, this smouldering Hades is beardless, perhaps in an attempt to remove the sense of generational difference between uncle and niece. His hair is cut in the

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manner of a modern metaller or emo, another youthful trope. In the first scene following the abduction, Hades removes his armour and stalks away. This acts as a visual metaphor for him becoming vulnerable to Persephone, literally revealing a softer self from under a hard exterior. The manner in which he leaves Persephone, the stress placed on him arranging separate quarters for her, and his occasional shyness in front of her all serves to suggest that he is being respectful, despite the fact that he has abducted her and that she is not free to leave. He is a "good" rapist. This is extended in the emphasis on Hades' "love" for Persephone (e.g. p. 50). This theme is unknown in the *Homeric Hymn*, stemming rather from Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, 5.525–527), who has Zeus telling Demeter that the abduction is love not rape. Hades tells Persephone that he has "watched [her] grow into the woman, the goddess, [she] was meant to be," again suggesting the inevitability of their union, but not exploring why abduction was the chosen method. Hades tells Persephone that no one will love her as he does. This is an example of what is sometimes called "negging", a form of manipulation which involves saying something negative or critical under the guise of a compliment in order to wrong-foot a woman and make her more susceptible. Usually depressed and harsh, Hades becomes happier and milder in Persephone's presence. She has "cured" him.

It is worth reiterating that it is difficult to retell a rape narrative without perpetuating patriarchal messages. Nonetheless, by retelling a rape narrative in a way that rehabilitates the rapist, makes the victim acquiesce, and ridicules the concerned relative, patriarchal messages are indeed expressed. If Persephone is empowered, then Hades has done her a favour. When that is the message of a rape narrative, it is a problematic narrative for young – or mature – people. Ultimately the narrative suggests to young men that if they can just isolate a young woman and encourage her to resent her family then that young woman will soon fall for them – a message which encourages abusive behaviour. The narrative encourages young women to think that behaving sexually, even with someone who has treated them abusively, is how one "become(s) a woman"; emotional maturity is not required. It is further implied that a miserable man who has treated a woman badly will transform into a wonderful partner if only the woman works hard enough to bring out his good side; it is her responsibility to change him. What appears to be a story about a young woman discovering her sexuality and maturity more readily encourages poor life choices.

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The trope in which an abducted woman falls for, or cures, her abductor is well-established in mythology and literature, ancient and modern. While the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* does not present Persephone adapting to Hades' desire, this theme can be seen in, for example, the ancient myth of the Rape of the Sabine Women (Livy, 1.9–13), retold in film as *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954); also in *Beauty and the Beast* (a French fairy-tale first published in 1740 and retold in many forms; and more recently in successful films such as *The Running Man* (1987), *V for Vendetta* (graphic novel 1983–1985, film 2006), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), or *Passengers* (2016). Aspects of it can be seen in *Jane Eyre* (albeit subverted, 1849 with numerus adaptations), in *Dracula* (1897, numerus adaptations), and in Edward Cullen's character in the *Twilight Saga* (2005–2008, films 2008–2012). Ultimately, these narratives are distinctive for the way in which men, "violate women's rights and autonomy and are then rewarded with a romantic relationship" (Jonathan McIntosh, see bibliography).

The author reveals in the notes section that *Hades: Lord of the Dead* was written for the *Olympians* series, despite the fact that Hades is not an Olympian, because: "human nature being what it is, readers are going to get more excited about *Hades: Lord of the Dead* than *Demeter: Goddess of the Harvest*." That seems plausible. It is nonetheless noticeable that the whole novel is devoted to the Hades-Persephone myth to the exclusion of other traditions about Hades, such as the division of the realms (*Iliad*, 15.187–93; *Theogony*, 453–506), his conflict with Heracles (*Iliad* 5.393–402), stories of the dead in the Underworld (some of which are touched on but not explored), stories of Cerberus, or further stories of *katabasis* (Theseus or Orpheus and Eurydice, or Odysseus' visit to the dead, *Odyssey* bk.11). This retelling reshapes the traditional narrative to present an unsympathetic Demeter and a sympathetic Hades; it may be empowering that Persephone gets a greater role in the narrative than she has in ancient traditions, but the manner in which she is foregrounded communicates anything but empowering messages to a young audience.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and

Afterlife Apollo Ares Athena Ceres Demeter Eleusinian Mysteries Erinyes Furies Gods Greek History Greek Philosophy Hades Hecate Hermes Immortality Katabasis Medusa Metempsychosis Moirai Olympus Persephone Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Sisyphus Underworld

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Concepts	Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Adventure Appearances Child, children Childhood Coming of age Death Femininity Gender Gender, female Gender, male Ghosts Identity Initiation Innocence Journeys Life Loss Love Masculinity Maturity Names Parents (and children) Philosophy Punishment Rape Reincarnation Relationships Religious beliefs Sexual abuse Sexuality Teenagers Youth
Further Reading	Fant, Maureen B., and Mary R. Lefkowitz, trans., "Homeric Hymn to Demeter", *Women's Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation*, 4th ed., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. 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. Jonathan McIntosh (Pop Culture Detective), Abduction As Romance, posted June 24, 2018 at popculturedetective.agency (accessed: October 29, 2018).
Addenda	Series blog (accessed: October 24, 2018)

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