Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Apollo. The Brilliant One (Olympians, 8) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1033. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

George O'Connor

# Apollo. The Brilliant One (Olympians, 8)

*United States of America (2016)*

TAGS: Aetiology Apollo Architecture Artemis Asclepius Athena Chiron / Cheiron Cyclops / Cyclopes Daphne Delphi Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Faun Gods Greek Music Hades Hera Hermes Hyacinth Iris Laurel Wreath Leto Marsyas Metamorphosis Muses Olympus Oracles Zeus






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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Apollo. The Brilliant One (Olympians, 8) |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, other English speaking countries |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2016 |
| *First Edition Details* | George O'Connor, *Apollo. The Brilliant One*. New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2016, 78 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781626720152 |
| *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; young adults) |
| *Author of the Entry* | Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk |



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.

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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

The Muses narrate this collection, taking turns to tell different myths about Apollo:

- The birth of Apollo and Artemis.
- Apollo establishes the oracle at Delphi.
- Daphne.
- Marsyas.
- Hyacinth.
- Asklepios.

A thoughtful Author's Note on Apollo follows. Profile summaries of Apollo, Asklepios, and the Muses are included along with eight points for follow-up discussion and a bibliography and recommended reading list that includes explicit reference to works used in the creation of the graphic novel (Hesiod, Aelian, Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, the *Homeric Hymns*).

Analysis

The novel begins with one of the Muses, Polyhymnia, entering a temple of Apollo and then turning to address the reader directly. She says that she senses that the reader wishes to know more about Apollo, and that she will "cast illumination on blessed Apollo... and how he came to be." Clothing and architecture place the events in antiquity.

The story of Leto follows, with Hera persecuting Leto and summoning Python. Artemis is born first upon Delos, followed by Apollo, his birth is marked by a frame in which Leto and Artemis look out at the reader. Hera abandons her anger. Artemis and Apollo are introduced to Zeus, who asks them what they wish for; Artemis requests to remain unmarried and free; Apollo, looking defiant does not answer, but is given gifts anyway. Apollo is now depicted as an athletic, blonde young man. The Muse, Kalliope, tells the story of Apollo taking revenge for the treatment of Leto by slaying Python in "the dark valley of Pythia". Apollo gives his first two prophecies (that Python will die; that the land will become sacred to him), and he establishes a bright oracle on the land now known as Delphi. Further stories are then told by each of the Muses, replicating an Ovidian style that places stories within stories, giving the impression of drawing the reader deeper and



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deeper and conveying the sense of antiquity as a place of unlimited stories and storytelling.

Muses, Euterpe and Terpsichore, tell the myth of Daphne. Initially Apollo looks love-struck, but when Daphne runs, he looks hostile, and a Muse refers to him as "not used to being denied." A two-page spread of the chase scene includes the Muses' words to Apollo, rebuking him for being unable to see the position he had placed Daphne in. He looks remorseful when he sees what has happened to Daphne; now wreathed, he says "since my bride you'll never be, at least, my sweet laurel, you'll be my tree", a line taken from Ovid. This is a sensitive treatment of a difficult subject, which does not shy away from the traditional contents of this myth (as found in e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1. 450–568), while communicating an anti-rape message that is suitable for a modern audience – particularly a young modern audience. Muses, Melpomene and Thalia then tell the myth of Marsyas. They differ over whether the story is a tragedy or a comedy. The story of Athena's invention, and rejection, of the aulos is included. Dionysus and Hermes are presented as light-hearted figures, while Apollo appears over-sensitive about the glory of his reputation, and, when faced with an apologetic Marsyas, cruel (indicated by a close-up on his narrowed eyes and sadistic flexing of his knife). The other gods are characterised here as they appear in the rest of the *Olympians* series. Apollo's ambiguous characterisation, as marvellous, sometimes helpful, yet potentially terrifying, cruel figure is an ambitious depiction that suits a gods associated with such varied behaviour. Next, Erato relates the myth of Hyacynthus (here "Hyacinth"). He is "beloved of Zephyros", but, once he meets Apollo, "the young mortal and shining god admired each other." This telling of the myth is unusually open about the homoerotic element of the story. The Hyacinth flower metamorphosis ends the story.

Clio provides "the account of Asklepios, son of Apollo." Aetiology for the black colour of crows is included. Apollo is depicted snatching the unborn baby, Asklepios, from the funeral pyre of Koronis, whose death he had ordered. Apollo is proud of Asklepios' work, but Hades considers it "a glitch in the system". The shade of prince Hippolytus of Athens is depicted disappearing from Hermes' grasp during his journey to Hades. Zeus kills Asklepios. Apollo takes revenge against Zeus via Cyclopes. Zeus almost kills Apollo, but relents, and Clio speculates ("not part of the historical record but rather the result of informed speculation…"), that "Zeus saw a chance to redress old wrongs". Muse, Ourania, concludes the story with Asklepios set in the



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heavens as the constellation, Ophiuchus. The Muses conclude the work by inviting the reader to reflect on what they have read.

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.

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| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Aetiology Apollo Architecture Artemis Asclepius Athena Chiron / Cheiron Cyclops / Cyclopes Daphne Delphi Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Faun Gods Greek Music Hades Hera Hermes Hyacinth Iris Laurel Wreath Leto Marsyas Metamorphosis Muses Olympus Oracles Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Authority Child, children Coming of age Conflict Disobedience Family Identity Morality Obedience Parents (and children) Sexuality Violence |

Further Reading

Graf, Fritz, *Apollo*, London: Routledge, 2009.

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.

Series blog (accessed: June 16, 2020).



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