Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Ares. Bringer of War (Olympians, 7) 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/1034. Entry version as of October 10, 2026.

George O'Connor

Ares. Bringer of War (Olympians, 7)

United States of America (2015)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Athena Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Eris Hector Hephaestus Hera Hermes Homer Iris Leto Olympus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus

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

General information	
Title of the work	Ares. Bringer of War (Olympians, 7)
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	2015
First Edition Details	George O'Connor, *Ares. Bringer of War*. New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2015, 78 pp.
ISBN	9781626720138
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
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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).

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Additional information

Summary

Ares: Bringer of War presents the figure of Ares through a retelling of the myths of the Trojan War with Ares as a major focus point. The book closes with an author's note on adapting Homer's *Iliad* and his preference for a version of the Trojan War which includes the gods. Profile summaries of Ares, Eris, and Achilles follow, along with eight points for discussion, a Bibliography and Further Reading recommendations.

Analysis

The book opens with the phrase, "To know the great god Ares, you must first know how he differs from Athena." Illustrations appear from the next page, with armaments (and, later, architecture) placing the events in antiquity. A contrast is then established between Athena as deity of organised elements of war, and Ares as the bringer of chaos and violence. Although this was once a popular view, more recent scholarship has shown this to be a false dichotomy (see Deacy, 2000*).

Ares, accompanied by Eris, Deimos, and Phobos, are depicted riding across the battlefield in a fearsome chariot taking a direct part in battle. The reader then learns that the novel is being narrated by Askalaphos, mortal son of Ares, who is talking about his father around the campfires of Troy. The novel then unfolds as a retelling of Homer's *Iliad* with Ares in focus.

The gods' debate is depicted with them standing around a large table-like surface on which they watch events at Troy unfolding. The gods move back and forth between Olympus and earth with magical ease; they appear giant, magnificent, sometimes human-like, sometimes more ethereal.

When Aphrodite drops Aeneas in shock at being wounded by Diomedes, Apollo saves him, saying, "He is fated to do other things", an indirect reference to the foundation of Rome. Askalaphos is killed in battle moments after Ares has been wounded by Diomedes-Athena in a striking set of images; yellow ichor drips across the halls of Olympus.

Scamander rears up, anthropomorphised, when Achilles fills the waters with bodies. Fighting breaks out between the gods, until Hermes calls their attention to the death of Hector. When Thetis

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supplicates Zeus, Zeus' eagle says that Achilles' "actions will determine his fate." The reader is encouraged to regard this initially as a reference to whether or not Achilles kills Hector, however they are then led to regard Achilles' mutilation of Hector's corpse as Achilles "making his choice." Instead of ending with Achilles reconciliation with Priam, the gods are depicted as losing interest in the war once "the whole endeavour as soured" by Achilles' actions. Achilles' death, the gift of the horse, and the fall of Troy summarise the end of the war with a frame each. The novel ends with an intense exchange between Ares and Zeus, struggling with power, violence, and legacy. The decision to present Achilles' and Ares' actions in this way invites the reader to reflect on the conduct of war, while ending on a more pessimistic note than *The Iliad*.

Antiquity in *Ares* is an unpredictable, violent, hyper-masculine environment. As the focus is upon battle, the characters are largely judged (by each other and the reader) on the basis of their military performance. Death and injury come in a myriad of forms (as they do in Homer's *Iliad*), yet, also like *The Iliad*, the violence is not abstract or purely glamorised, there is a frank inclusion of fear, horror, bereavement, and moral judgement against those who violate social norms. Warfare *is* glamorised in the sense that it is the subject of the material, it brings glory to the characters, and it looks tremendous in the illustrations, yet only a serious mis-reading of the text would create the impression that war (of this sort at least) is an attractive, consequence-free activity.

The gods are very involved in the lives of the mortals in this work. To some extent this communicates an idea of antiquity as a place of closeness between the two kinds of beings. As in Homer's *Iliad*, the gods are interested in the developments of the war and in the conduct of its participants; they experience grief when favoured humans die. Yet O'Connor has balanced this with a sense of the gods distance from mortals. At times they are like modern comic-book heroes, each with their own powers, assembled to watch over humans. But less like comic-book heroes, the gods can lose interest in the mortals, as they do in disgust towards the end, and even their interest can have a distanced quality. Hermes, always depicted as a somewhat flippant surfer-type in this series, calls to the others, "Over here, everyone, quick. Grab a front row seat – to witness the wrath of Achilles!" The illustration of this is magnificent, and there is some well-considered use of Homeric phrasing, potentially initiating young readers into a culturally potent expression (the wrath of / the wrath of Achilles);

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nonetheless the phrasing also expresses the gods' remoteness from mortals – this emotionally-charged killing spree is given the distancing treatment of gods treating the event as humans might treat a drama or other entertainment. In this antiquity, the gods are ever-present, yet distant; ambiguous in their relationship with mortals. Humans are tiny and weak beside them. In this O'Connor creates a complex vision of antiquity in which modern readers can reflect on both their own humanness or mortality and in which they are presented with an ancient-style perspective on the gods' relationship with mortals. In that sense, while the graphic novel is accessibly easy to read and visually engaging, the young reader is given plenty to think about, presented with antiquity as a complex, thought-provoking environment.

O'Connor is creating his own version of the Olympian mythosphere with this series, *Olympians*, selecting 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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* Susan Deacy, "Athena and Ares: war, violence and warlike deities", in Hans van Wees, ed., *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000, 285–298.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Athena Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Eris Hector Hephaestus Hera Hermes Homer Iris Leto Olympus Thetis Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures,	Authority Bullying* Conflict Death Friendship Heroism Morality Parents (and children) Siblings

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and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Darmon, J-P., "The powers of war: Ares and Athena in Greek mythology", in Yves Bonnefoy, ed., *Greek and Egyptian Mysteries*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 114–115.

Deacy, Susan, "Athena and Ares: war, violence and warlike deities", in Hans van Wees, ed., *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000, 285–298.

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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).

Author blog post featuring 32 depictions of Ares by different graphic novelists (accessed: June 16, 2020).

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