Anna Mik, "Entry on: Popeye the Sailor (Series): Greek Mirthology by Seymour Kneitel", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1323. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Seymour Kneitel

Popeye the Sailor (Series): Greek Mirthology

United States of America (1954)

TAGS: Heracles Hercules





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

General information	
Title of the work	Popeye the Sailor (Series): Greek Mirthology
Studio/Production Company	Famous Studios
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1954
First Edition Details	*Popeye the Sailor* (Series): *Greek Mirthology*, No. 205. Dir. Seymour Kneitel, Paramount Pictures Corporation, Famous Studios, August 12, 1954, 7 min.
Running time	7 min
Format	DVD
Date of the First DVD or VHS	DVD:
Genre	Animated television programs
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



Seymour Kneitel , 1908 - 1964
(Animator)

Seymour Kneitel was a famous American animator and producer. Due to the sudden death of his father, he had to work while still in high school. Kneitel worked after school at Bray Productions, the company responsible for serial animation featuring the character of Colonel Heeza Liar. After graduation, he worked as animator at L. F. Cornwell, and finally for six months at Metro-Golden-Mayer, before joining a newly developing company, successor to Bray Productions - Fleisher Studios - named first Inkwell Studios and "Out of the Inkwell" Studios and run by the Fleischer brothers, Dave and Max. There, he could finally become a proper animator, being in charge of such series as "Betty Boop" or "Popeye the Sailor". Kneitel was married to Ruth Fleisher, daughter of Max Fleisher, the co-founder of Fleisher Studios. Kneitel worked there with interruptions caused by health problems from 1928 to 1942, when Fleisher brothers resigned and Kneitel, Sam Buchwald and Isidore Sparber reorganized the studio and called it Famous Studios, The new studio functioned until 1956, when Paramount Pictures took it over as Paramount Cartoon Studios. Kneitel became its production director. His filmography includes many Popeye short as well as Caspar the Friendly Ghost's shorts. He died of a heart attack in 1964, three years later Paramount closed its Cartoon Studios.

Sources:

Ray Pointer, *The Art and Inventions of Max Fleischer: American Animation Pioneer*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017, 137–138.

Cartoons.fandom.com (accessed: August 9, 2021).

Seymourkneitel.blogspot (accessed: August 9, 2021).

Bettyboop.fandom.com (accessed: August 9, 2021).

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Additional information

Casting	Popeye, Pipeye, Peepeye, Poppeye, Pupeye – Jack Mercer, Bluto (the Big Bully) – Jackson Beck.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Previous episode: *Bride and Gloom*. Next episode: *Fright to the Finish*.
Summary	The episode starts with Popeye the Sailor trying to convince his four nephews (Popeye, Peepeye, Poopeye and Pupeye) to eat spinach instead of ice cream. As an example of a great spinach-eater he sets Hercules, the children's great ancestor. Popeye starts the story about the great hero as a fairy-tale: "Once upon a time, a long time ago…", taking his nephews to a distant land where Hercules lived (the location is not specified). Hercules looks just like Popeye (he even has a pipe). While riding in his chariot, Hercules sees a bird falling out of a tall tree. To get it back up, he sniffs garlic which gives him the strength to pull the tree down, so the bird can regain its nest. In a sign of gratitude, the bird sends Hercules a kiss. Popeye says that: "Hercules was awful strong, but very tender". However, nephews get suspicious since the story did not feature spinach – it was garlic which gave the hero strength. Popeye continues with the story, which now is about the feud between Hercules and the Big Bully, who challenges the hero for a strength contest. The Big Bully lifts an elephant to show his power, but Hercules, smelling garlic, lifts both of them. The nephews are again dissatisfied with the story, which still lacks the spinach impact. Popeye declares that this is not the end yet. In the next fight between the Big Bully and Hercules, garlic is not enough – Hercules is thrown to an ancient temple by his opponent, where a Hercules's (so – his own?) statute falls on his head. The Big Bully discovers Hercules's secret (garlic as a source of strength) and throws him again - this time into a field of spinach. The hero eats the plant by accident and discovers that spinach gives him way more strength than garlic ever did. He defeats the Big Bully who now does not stand a chance.

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Unfortunately, the story has not been effective - children skipped the end and went out to get more ice cream (from a man looking like the Big Bully from Popeye's story). They left their uncle a note: "Aw that was a bunch of spinach".

Analysis

Classical allusions start with the title of the episode ("Greek Mirthology"), where "mirth" replaces "myth" implying that maybe the cartoon's version of the ancient stories will be nothing more than a funny tale. The way Popeye starts off his story (with the "fairy-tale" opening) suggests the same – this is going to be an untrue or rather unrealistic tale, told just for amusement, not for the moral (here it would be spinach as a healthy and a divine meal).

Naturally, the main classical content in the cartoon is the story of Hercules and his strength. Actually, the strength is the only aspect of the ancient hero that figured in Popeye's tale. No other plot regarding Hercules (such as the Twelve Labours for instance) was alluded to here. The main thread of the cartoon is the conflict between Hercules and the Big Bully. The cartoon's creators drew on the stereotype of Hercules' strength, using Popeye's appearance and other traits such as pride (of his strength) or tenderness (as in the scene with the bird). The only elements taken from the ancient myth of Hercules are his strength, his name and the temple, which appears in the animation for 2 seconds and has no particular significance for the plot. Compared to Disney's full-length animation *Hercules* (1997) produced forty-three years later, this is basically just a humourous reworking of the mythical tradition of Hercules' superior strength as the predecessor of Popeye's physical spinach induced might. Other, much more complex mythical stories were presented, for example, by Walt Disney in his "Silly Symphonies" series (e.g. *King Neptune*, *Playful Pan*).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Heracles Hercules

Bullying* Conflict Good vs evil Heroism

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Furniss, Maureen, *Animation: The Global History*, London: Thames&Hudson, 2017.

Hodkinson, Owen, "Hercules in Children's Literature: a 'warts and all' Model of Masculinity?" in Alastair J. L. Blanshard and Emma Stafford, eds., *The Modern Hercules,* Leiden: Brill, 2020.

Maurice, Lisa, "From Elitism to Democratisation: A Half-Century of Hercules in Children's Literature", *Journal of Historical Fictions* 2.2 (2019).

Addenda

Allegedly, Popeye has Polish roots (see https://culture.pl/, accessed: May 27, 2021).

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