Nick Willing

Olympus

Canada; United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Aegeus Anagnorisis Ariadne Chronos Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Hades Hero(es) Medea Minos Nymphs Olympians Oracle of Gaia Oracles Pandora Zeus



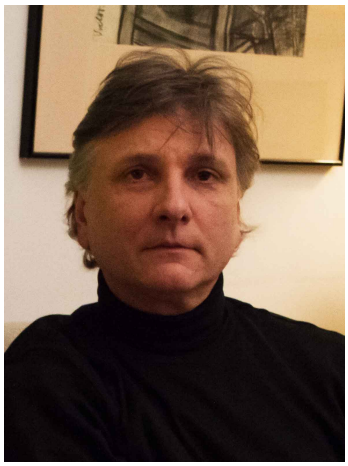


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General information	
Title of the work	Olympus
Studio/Production Company	Reunion Pictures, Great Point Media, LipSync Productions
Country of the First Edition	Canada, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	*Olympus*. Created and written by Nick Willing; directed by Nick Willing (4 episodes), Martin Wood (3), Amanda Tapping (4), Andy Mikita (2); cinematography Brian Johnson; composer Rich Walters; Vancouver: Reunion Pictures et al., April 2, 2015.
Running time	13 episodes of 46 min each
Format	October 20, 2015 (DVD: released by Olympus Productions Inc./Olympus TV (London) Ltd. on five DVDs)
Official Website	olympustv.com (accessed: August 17, 2018)
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Mythological fiction, Television series
Target Audience	Young adults (DVD recommended “for persons of 15 years and over)
Author of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators



Courtesy of the Author.

Nick Willing , b. 1961
(Director)

British film and television writer and director. Born in London to an English father (artist Victor Willing) and a Portuguese mother (artist painter Paula Rego), Willing spent most of his childhood until age 12 in Portugal before moving to London, where he later attended The National Film and Television School graduating at the age of 21. He began his cinematographic work producing music videos and writing scripts. He is currently best known for his 2017 BBC documentary about his mother (*Paula Rego, Secrets & Stories*), several feature films (*Photographing Fairies* 1997, *Alice in Wonderland* 1999, *Doctor Sleep* 2002, *The River King* 2004, *Altar* 2014), and a number of TV mini-series and series, among them two inspired by Greek mythology, *Jason and the Argonauts* 2000 and *Olympus* 2015, both featured in OMC Survey.

Official website (accessed: May 29, 2018).

Bio prepared by Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Additional information

Casting	Tom York as Hero, Sonya Cassidy as Oracle, Sonita Henry as Medea, Graham Shiels as King Aegeus, Alan C. Peterson as King Minos, Sophia Lauchlin Hirt as Ariadne, Matt Frewer as Daedalus, Colin McFarlane as Hades, Cas Anvar as Xerxes, Wayne Burns as Lykos, Tom York also as Zeus.

Summary

In a strange world where gods have been banished and jailed in the Underworld and their gigantic statues lie shattered on the ground in the realm of the living, a young man tries to find his destiny with the help of, or in spite of hindrance, deception and manipulation by, people he meets who try to use him for their own purposes. Against all odds he manages to conquer even the inexorable Time and unexpectedly frees Zeus from captivity in the depths of Hades: Zeus who has the young man's face (and is played by the same actor) but the lower body of a giant snake. In the first episode, entitled *The Temple of Gaia*, the young protagonist, cryptically named Hero (a curse will fall on those who would say aloud his real name), is looking for the Oracle of Gaia who could help him unravel the secret of his true origin. He rescues three women from the Cyclops' clutches, one of whom proves to be the Oracle. Hero takes her back to the temple where she reveals his fate. The mythological fantasy is intruded upon by events in the world of mortal people, mythological reality: the city of Athens ruled by King Aegeus is being besieged by King Minos of

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Crete; Aegeus' wife Medea hopes that their son Lycos inherited the Lexicon, a genetic imprint giving the right of entry to Olympus and immortality, passed from father to firstborn son. *Daedalus*, episode 2, follows Hero, Oracle and Daedalus in their search for the Ring of the Magi. In Athens, Queen Medea, after learning that Hero is Aegeus' firstborn bastard son, suspects that the Lexicon never passed to Lykos and dispatches priests to bring Hero to her.

Hero, Oracle and Daedalus are taken prisoners by the besieging troops and cruelly tortured by Ariadne who displays strong masochistic tendencies. Daedalus finalizes and presents his war machine, a decisive weapon against Athens where Medea and Aegeus persuade Hero to solve the riddle of the Lexicon and save the city. Hero is hesitant. Episode 7, *Love and Time* see both Hero and Medea journey to the temple of Aphrodite. There, Medea meets her sister Chalciope intent on recovering the sacred ring. King Minos takes Athens. Hero and Ariadne travel to Olympus and, during the journey, in spite of their not so friendly history, they unexpectedly fall in love. They find Pandora's tomb where Medea fails to prevent Hero from opening it and Ariadne dies. A strange freezing mist escapes from the tomb and spreads. Hero and Medea flee the mist and reach the palace as it is being frozen by the mist. Hero has a vision in which Gaia warns him that if he attempts to enter Olympus, he will die. To fulfil his mission, Hero needs Medea's faith in the gods, Daedalus' scientific skills and Oracle's gift of prophecy. In episode 12, *Door to Olympus*, Medea pledges her body and soul to the sorceress Circe as price for taking all four of them to the door of Olympus. On their way, they are attacked by the Fates and by Hermes. When they finally reach the door, it is not what they expected.

The final episode (13), *Truth*, takes place inside Olympus/ Underworld where they are repeatedly tested, meet unexpected people and go through terrifying trials. In a surprisingly moving and thought provoking sequence, Medea is judged by her and Jason's two small sons whom she had killed. The children are joined by Lykos who hates his mother even more than do his two half-brothers. Hero finds Zeus who had been imprisoned by the other gods including Gaia, a supernaturally sized, rather untrustworthy giantess. Hero manages after many complications to free Zeus chained and transformed into half a monstrous serpent by CGI.

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Analysis

Blood flows down the title screen with drops from the title *Olympus* dripping. The action takes place in 2015 BC in Athens ruled by king Aegeus and currently besieged by Minos. There is a huge amount of green screen and awkward CGI – a rather low cost production; with bad actors, constant change of action and some memorable, unusual scenes, or lines. In the pilot, Hero sees dozens of rotting human feet in Cyclops' cave severed and painted blue by Cyclops who seems to be a more complex (read degenerate) character than the Homeric Polyphemus. This Cyclops is a fetishist curio collector with a single eye not traditionally placed on his forehead but in his mouth. King Aegeus on the other hand alludes to the Trojan War saying: "No more cowardly schemes to hide men inside wooden horses! I need something bold!" There are many battle scenes seen in closeup instead of panoramic views, unsuccessfully masking the fact that it is the same few warriors who participate in each fight.

One of the important characters is Daedalus, in a mad scientist or plain crazy version, possibly because of traumatic effects of Icarus' death; he succeeds in creating a horrific weapon but unfortunately for the other side of the conflict, for Minos, against Athens. Later on, he serves as a guide through the Underworld able to solve or guess how to overcome successive obstacles. While clearly deranged, he is dishonest and follows his own agenda without any regard for Hero's quest.

Anagnorisis, a literary device used to suddenly identify heroes as important people connected to those in power and not just some insignificant figures – drives the action. Hero learns that Aegeus is his father and that he must have inherited the Lexicon – a riddle which, when solved, will open the entrance to Olympus and ensure immortality. Other characters are provided with features specific to the series for the needs of the plot and are unknown in ancient sources. Minos is a brutal, primitive, and bloodthirsty aging ruler, Ariadne is a sadistic psychopath. Zeus in his hybrid shape resembles Aladdin's antagonist Jafar, after he was tricked into transforming into the most powerful jinn.

The atmosphere of the series strongly resembles a fairy-tale where most of the characters are naïve and remain in constant awe faced with what is happening to them. The mythological setting allows for such childlike behaviour and produces conditions for mythical fairy-

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tale populated by innocent and psychologically flat characters who communicate using minimalistic banter, amusing occasionally when it does not take itself seriously.

For a classicist used to deal with dead languages and with long-dead authors, being able to interview an author is enormously exciting. Unfortunately, most of the "additional features" included in the DVD are rather disappointing, like the not-properly-edited interview with Nick Willing (scifi talk March 27, 2015): his idea is allegedly to look for stories not only in mythology but also in tragedies… as if the latter were not important mythological sources; he also enumerates important storytellers and mixes real ones, like epic and tragic poets, with philosophers (even if they also have stories to tell) – Homer, Sophocles, Socrates, Aristotle. Aired on Scifivision, April 9, 2015.

The production was rather negatively received by the critics, one of whom went as far as say "Welcome to ancient Greece … or at least its low-rent digital facsimile," and "The new Syfy channel adventure series *Olympus* looks like *300* as shot for $300, a green-screen-heavy eyesore that still manages to charm for being so devotedly shoddy."*

* Keith Uhlih, *"Olympus": TV Review*, hollywoodreporter.com, April 2, 2015 (accessed: August 17, 2018).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aegeus Anagnorisis Ariadne Chronos Circe Cyclops / Cyclopes Daedalus Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Hades Hero(es) Medea Minos Nymphs Olympians Oracle of Gaia Oracles Pandora Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Character traits Death Emotions Family Heroism Judgement Prediction/prophecy Violence
Further Reading	Ashby, Emily, *"Olympus": Tv Review*, commonsensemedia.org

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Addenda

First Release Date:

April 2, 2015 – July 2, 2015 on Super Channel in Canada,

In the UK and Ireland premiered on Spike on April 15, 2015,

July 2, 2015 on Syfy in the US.

Medea is occasionally spelled in credits as Madea.

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