Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Zeus. King of the Gods (Olympians, 1) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/562. Entry version as of November 13, 2026.

George O'Connor

Zeus. King of the Gods (Olympians, 1)

United States (2010)

TAGS: Aphrodite Architecture Creation Myths Crete Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Erinyes Fate Gods Greek Philosophy Hades Hera Hestia Immortality Katabasis Metis Moirai Nymphs Olympus Poseidon Prometheus Titans Underworld Zeus



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

General information	
Title of the work	Zeus. King of the Gods (Olympians, 1)
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	2010
First Edition Details	George O'Connor, *Zeus. King of the Gods.* New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2010, 77 pp.
ISBN	9781596434318
Official Website	olympiansrule.com (accessed: October 24, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths
Target Audience	Young adults (teens)
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

Zeus – King of the Gods is the first instalment of the *Olympians* series. The series comprises stylish looking graphic-novels created in the superhero comic-book tradition. Each volume is dedicated to retelling myths about individual Greek gods, with the gods appearing in each other's volumes much as superheroes overlap in the DC or Marvel universes. While the title of this volume is *Zeus – King of the Gods*, the volume also establishes the *Olympians* universe by retelling Greek creation myths and by relating the births of a number of Olympian deities in addition to Zeus' birth and rise to power. As an origin tale for the universe and the elder Olympian gods, this is an ideal opening to the series.

The *About This Book* section of *Zeus* describes it as a story of: "How the ancient Greeks believed the world came into being, as well as the childhood and ascendancy of Zeus, who became the King of the Gods." The work does indeed focus on ancient Greek creation myths, conveying their forceful elemental quality while also expressing personality in a lively, engaging way.

The creation story begins, strikingly, with Chaos (here "Kaos"), the arrival of Gaea, and the subsequent emergence of Ouranos, Titans, the early Cyclopes, and the Hekatonchieres. The story is told with emphasis on Gaea's perspective, much as Hesiod's *Theogony* is; the reader hears about Gaea's distress when Ouranos devours their children and how she plotted to overthrow him. When Kronos attacked him, "Ouranos was wounded and rendered impotent" (explicit reference to castration is avoided). A new generation emerges from Ouranos' blood. Humans appear on earth and the Titans (not explicitly Prometheus) give them knowledge of the seasons, the stars, time, and their own mortality. Life is easy for the early humans but Gaea remains unhappy as some of her offspring are imprisoned – the Titans have locked their siblings in Tartarus. Kronos consumes his offspring as his father did before him. Gaea facilitates baby Zeus' escape from this fate and he is brought to a mountain cave on Crete to be reared. More super-naturals are born as Zeus grows to maturity in the secret of the cave. Once he has he form of a young man (with blonde hair and chin-tuft beard), Zeus leaves the cave to explore the world and his powers. The narrator says that Zeus and his siblings "were the first of a new race of gods." They are fast, strong, and untiring, they could not be killed, and, most distinctively, they had the "ability to change shape

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as others change their mind."

The story moves into a new phase. Zeus pursues a group of Oceanids who think they are *en route* to see him as a baby. When an adolescent Zeus surprises Metis in the water and brings her to the shore he asks for a kiss and receives a slap, his sexual assertiveness prefiguring future myths. Later, Zeus and Metis lie like young human lovers upon the beach under the night sky. They discuss secrets Gaea has shared with Zeus and they plot to overthrow Kronos. Metis offers to help Zeus and suggests that he will marry her afterwards and make her the queen of the new age of gods. Metis and a disguised Zeus approach Kronos, who is receiving offerings from frightened earth-dwellers. Kronos swallows Zeus when he realises who he is and, in doing so, inadvertently swallows the herb that Gaea has recommended to make Kronos disgorge his offspring. Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Hades, and Hestia spring forth.

The war between the generations of gods begins. Zeus outwits and kills the dragon, Kampe, to descend into Tartarus and free the Cyclopes and Hekatonieres. Meanwhile, Metis cannot shapeshift and fly from the Titans as the Olympians have done. Titan Atlas calls Metis a traitor. As the Titans depart to finish Zeus, Hades suddenly frees Metis, explaining that Zeus has requested that he do so. The reader now knows that the resentful Cyclopes are fighting *with* Zeus, who must therefore have claimed his mysterious "birth-right" in the tunnels of Tartarus. Zeus appears, now white-haired, bold and defiant before the Titans. A great struggle takes place. Zeus now has the power of lightning to use as a weapon and Poseidon has his emblematic trident. Zeus finally destroys Kronos, and the language echoes the account of Kronos' destruction of his own father, Ouranos. The narrator explains that humans cannot live simply as they had done on the now-savaged earth, so Demeter teaches them agriculture: "Innocent no longer, mankind now had to work and toil in order to survive." The female Titans, who took no part in the fighting, are accorded a place of honour; some male Titans – such as Atlas – receive punishing jobs; the other Titans are imprisoned beneath the earth, and their monstrous siblings descend once more to act as their jailors. Zeus establishes his home on Mount Olympus, where he rules with his queen, Hera, as the head of a new race of gods. The reader may deduce from this that something has happened to Metis, but her fate is not explained (it will be in the following volume, *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess*). There is a lively picture of all the Olympians together as if in a family portrait photo, but the story ends by noting intriguingly

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that Gaea is still unhappy, and that "that is a tale for another day."

The narrative is followed by an author's note on the origin of the *Olympians* series and the names of ancient sources (Homer, Hesiod, Apollodorus) used in this retelling. There are character breakdowns of Zeus, The Cyclopes, and Metis. There is a section of notes on the text, many translating the names of the monsters and titans. There are seven questions to consider *For Discussion*.

Analysis

The author of *Zeus*, George O'Connor, has gone to considerable lengths to include ancient traditions in his retellings of classical myths, as well as adding his own twists here and there. This, and the inclusion of ancient sources in the recommended reading section, invites those who have been grabbed by the series' modern look to explore antiquity further. The creation story reflects traditions that can be found in early classical literature (see e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony* and Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*; for Cyclopes, Hesiod, *Theogony* lines 139-146; 501–506). The decision to focus on Gaea's perspective echoes the narration of the creation stories in Hesiod's *Theogony*; the castration theme likewise reflects ancient tradition, while softening the detail (e.g. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 158–210; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 160ff.). Traditionally it is Prometheus who gave humans skills. In *Zeus* it is the Titans more broadly, although the examples given include examples cited in ancient literature as Prometheus' gifts: knowledge of the seasons, the stars, time, and their own mortality (Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 443–504). There is also a careful detail expressing Prometheus' special relationship with humans; when the war between the generations of gods breaks out, Prometheus can be seen protectively herding humans into a cave for shelter. The image is explained in the notes for those who have missed its significance. The idea that life was easy for the earliest humans is an ancient trope (see e.g. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 109–201). The story of Zeus' birth is also told with reference to ancient material, particularly his rearing in mountain cave (see e.g. Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.4–5; Callimachus, *Hymn 1, To Zeus* 42; Strabo, *Geography*, 8. 7. 5; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca*, 5.70.1). O'Connor invents the account of Zeus' first ventures outside the cave, and handles the storytelling with a typical light touch, humanising Zeus and making him a lively, relatable character.

The many stories of Zeus' pursuit of human women and nymphs that

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are featured in other works in the series demonstrate O'Connor's familiarity with these myths. That those stories are largely eschewed in *Zeus – King of the Gods* therefore indicates a deliberate choice to present Zeus with a degree of gravitas and to begin the *Olympians* series with a thoughtful exploration of the myths of creation and the struggles of the universe. The sense that Zeus essentially earns his place as the king of the gods gives him a legitimacy that helps to maintain his station even throughout the more undignified stories that follow in later volumes. The serious treatment of the early creation stories communicates the ambitious and philosophical aspect of much of Greek mythology, which similarly balances the many fun and more light-hearted stories that are also part of the Greek mythological world. It is made apparent that Greek mythology will be treated seriously in this series, even while it is a source of humour and enjoyment. *The G(r)eek Notes* help to extend this treatment, explaining, for example, that the devouring of offspring can be understood as a metaphor for "the fact that everything, from animals to people to stones to even gods, eventually gets worn away, or eaten, by time." This approach encourages young readers to approach the myths and text with an eye for metaphor and layered meaning.

The first gods, Titans and their brethren are depicted in a contrasting way to the Olympians. While the Olympians have very detailed anthropoid forms, the earlier deities are huge, faceless, awesome, and menacing. The Titans' speech is given in bubbles, but without the usual direction of speech markers that all the other characters have. This gives their speech an elemental quality; it is as if their speech resonating all around rather than coming from a specific being. These details convey their primordial force and difference. The nymphs nursing baby Zeus and baby Zeus himself are the first fully formed figures; this provides a visual marker of the shift into a new era, closer to our own. *Zeus* contains a fantastic sequence depicting the rebirth of the Olympians, which has a strong modern super-hero origin feel to it. Hestia is largely formless fire, having lain in Kronos' stomach the longest. The war between the Olympians and some of the Titans features a shocking return of the more formless shapes of the Titan Age. The Olympians, with their more anthropoid forms, provide a contrast, although they can also be seen fighting in the forms of their sacred animals (details of which are explained in the notes). In terms of colouring, it is noticeable that young Zeus is blonde-haired and blue-eyed, like a Northern European. The switch to white hair marks a change in his maturity and status. Hera is depicted noticeably paler

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	than the other Olympians, presumably in reference to her Homeric epithet "white-armed" (e.g. *Iliad* 1.54) *A brief note on names* explains that less familiar Greek names have been favoured over Latinised English versions; this includes "Kaos" rather than the naturalised English-Greek "Chaos", from Greek *Χάος*, an indication of how strongly a Greek feel was desired (with K for C being a typical way of achieving this). In another interesting choice, The Furies (Erinyes) are conflated with The Fates (Moirai). A distinction is drawn between them in the notes, which observes their different names and identities. The decision to amalgamate them was perhaps driven by a desire to simplify the pantheon, although this runs counter to the embracing of complexity that can be seen elsewhere in this volume and the rest of the series.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Architecture Creation Myths Crete Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Erinyes Fate Gods Greek Philosophy Hades Hera Hestia Immortality Katabasis Metis Moirai Nymphs Olympus Poseidon Prometheus Titans Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adventure Adversity Appearances Authority Childhood Coming of age Disobedience Emotions Family Freedom Hierarchy Humanity Journeys Masculinity Maturity Parents (and children) Past Punishment Relationships Revenge Sexuality Superheroes Transformation Violence War
Further Reading	Dowden, K., *Zeus* (Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World), London: Routledge, 2005. Gordon, Joel, "When Superman Smote Zeus: Analysing Violent Deicide in Popular Culture," *Classical Receptions Journal* 9.2 (2017), pp. 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.

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Lloyd-Jones, Hugh, *The Justice of Zeus* (Sather Classical Lectures), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Addenda

Series blog (accessed: October 24, 2018)

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