Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Hera. The Goddess and her Glory (Olympians, 3) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/563. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

George O'Connor

# Hera. The Goddess and her Glory (Olympians, 3)

*United States (2011)*

TAGS: Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Atalanta Athena Atlas Cerberus Crete Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Gods Golden Fleece Hebe Hera Heracles Hercules Hestia Hydra Jason Katabasis Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Olympus Poseidon Stymphalian Birds Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus




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



| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Hera. The Goddess and her Glory (Olympians, 3) |
| *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* | 2011 |
| *First Edition Details* | George O'Connor, *Hera. The Goddess and her Glory.* New York: First Second (an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, part of Macmillan Publishers Ltd), 2011, 77 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781596434332 |
| *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

*Hera* begins with a recap of the triumph of Zeus and the other Olympians over Kronos (from *Zeus. King of the Gods*). New aspects of the battle are shown, including Hera's participation in the fighting and her ability to command Zeus haughtily to assist her when she does not wish to put her full effort in ("Honestly, I almost broke a nail", she complains). Aspects of Zeus' seduction of Hera, seen in *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess*, are shown with Hera's perspective now supplementing the scenes. Hera is a reluctant partner, but eventually admits that, like Zeus, she feels that they belong together. She warns Zeus to treat her with respect. There are scenes of their wedding, again reflecting scenes from Athena, in which Metis lies trapped within Zeus's mind during the celebrations.

For three hundred years, gods and humans are happy as Zeus and Hera honeymoon. A new era begins with the births of Ares and Hephaistos, whom Zeus finds "wanting". Zeus begins visiting other partners and the reader follows Hera's search to find him. This leads into the myth of Io. Hera uncovers Zeus apparently picnicking with a cow; he desperately insists that the cow is a gift for Hera. Hera says that she will take the cow somewhere safe where it will be watched day and night. It is never explicitly stated that it is a woman rather than a cow, but it is heavily implied, with the scene played as dark comedy.

There are single-frame representations of the myths of Leto (see *Apollo* and *Artemis*), Callisto, and the persecution of Dionysus. These add to the picture of Hera's pre-occupation with Zeus' many affairs. The vast majority of the book is then dedicated to myths of Heracles.

The Heracles section begins with the myth of the Choice of Heracles. Heracles is torn between going to a cloaked and hooded woman on a steep path offering a life of toil and everlasting fame and a scantily-clad young woman on a softly sloping path offering pleasure. Heracles takes a long time to choose, but eventually appears to go left, towards the challenging, rewarding life. The narrative then cuts back to the founding of Heracles' family, including Perseus rescuing Andromeda from sacrifice (see *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess*). The myths of Heracles' birth and infancy follow. When baby Heracles saves himself and his twin from snakes, his mother recognises with horror that Heracles must be hated by Hera and exposes him. Athena and Hermes



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rescue baby Heracles and bring him to Hera to be suckled. Hera agrees, on the condition that adult Heracles will perform ten tasks assigned by his cousin, King Eurystheus, after which he will be permitted to ascend to Olympus.

The stories of the labours begin. There are scenes of Hera, Zeus, and other Olympians watching throughout; the interest amongst them builds as the labours go on.

The first labour is the Nemean Lion, followed by:

Lernean Hydra

Ceryneian Hind

Erymanthian Boar

Stymphalian Birds

The Augean Stables

The Bull of Crete

The Mares of Diomedes

The Belt of Hippolyta

The Oxen of Geryones

At this point, Heracles thinks that he has accomplished his tasks, but Eurystheus insists on two more. Heracles is given a choice (again), this time to complete the tasks or be run through by Eurystheus' soldiers: "Make your choice, O 'Glory of Hera'".

Heracles embarks with the Argonauts as they are heading to the northerly edges of the earth. The crew includes Castor and Polydeuces, Calais and Zetes, Orpheus, and Atalanta. Heracles is angered when he sees Jason worshipping Hera and grumbles about his difficult relationship with her. In flash-back scenes, Jason describes the origin of his quest – how he encountered an old woman and helped her to cross a flooding river, how he began to have new insights, went to Pelias' court and was set the trial. Heracles is enraged that even this quest with the Argonauts seems to have Hera's impetus behind it. Jason reassures Heracles and gives him a new way



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to look at his relationship with Hera. He observes that her enmity is the very thing driving Heracles to achieve greatness and the fame that he desires.

Heracles separates from the Argonauts when he searches an island for Hylas, a young man with whom he has a "particular friendship." Hylas' abduction by nymphs is depicted, followed by Heracles rampaging across the island. Heracles appears lonely and tiny on a huge landscape when he regains his composure and begins his journey onwards. He reaches Atlas, who is depicted as he and the other Titans are elsewhere in the series, huge and elemental. Hera watches with particular interest as Heracles manages to bear the weight of the sky. She is beginning to be impressed with this son of Zeus.

The reader does not see Heracles' descent into the Underworld to fetch Cerberus, but rather Heracles dragging the colossal form of the dog along a road after his re-ascent to the surface. A hooded Hera appears in the road to watch. This confirms what the reader may have come to suspect, namely that Hera was the hooded figure who presented the young Heracles with his choice of a hard or soft life. Eurystheus hides in a massive jar, terrified of the monstrous beast.

Even after the labours, Heracles continued to adventure, and when his end came, "even it was hard." The myth of the death of Heracles is told, flashing back to Heracles interrupting Nereus and Deianeira, Nereus giving Deianeira a false love potion, and Heracles' death when she administered it to him. A spire of golden smoke drifts up from Heracles' funeral pyre before he is welcomed into the halls of Olympus. Hera is the one seated on the great throne. Zeus stands beside her. Hermes and Athena smile reassuringly. Heracles questions, "Father?" Zeus replies, but it is Hera who completes the scene; with a frame full upon her sardonic face, she welcomes Heracles to Olympus as "O glory of Hera." This scene re-orientates the retelling of the labours as a myth of Hera. It is Hera who then offers Hebe in marriage to Heracles, confirming her acceptance of Heracles' presence on Olympus.

The final episode of the story subverts that of the earlier stages. Zeus roams the halls of Olympus looking for Hera, and Aphrodite reminds him of what *he* was doing when Hera sought him in a similar way. The king of the gods is anxious, disconcerted. Hera is alone on a moonlit beach, celebrating the one time a year that she bathes in the waters and regains her maidenhood. "How does she feel?" the narrator asks,



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and the novel finishes with her answer, "Glorious".

The main story is followed by an Author's Note, summary pages detailing Hera, Heracles, and the Hydra. There is a section of G(r)eek Notes offering further information on details of the story. There are eight questions *For Discussion*, and Bibliography and Recommended Reading.

Analysis

With Hera second only to Zeus in status, it is curious to note that *Hera* is the third volume in the *Olympians* series, after *Zeus* and *Athena*. That may, however, say more about the publisher's choice than the author's, for the author, George O'Connor, stresses in his Author's Note his desire to honour Hera – his favourite goddess – appropriately. He argues that reductive representations of Hera often caricature her as a shrewish wife with little personality beyond nagging at Zeus. O'Connor challenges this in *Hera* by providing her with stories that contain more than her relationship with Zeus and which demonstrate that Zeus is, after all, "a terrible husband." That O'Connor chose to dedicate this volume of the series to his own mother is further testament to the intention to provide a positive depiction of Hera, goddess of motherhood.

Throughout the graphic novel there is evidence of close use of ancient sources as well as innovations. When Hera grabs Zeus' beard it is reminiscent of Homer's *Iliad* 4.59-60. The wedding gift of the Garden of the Hesperides draws on Hesiod (*Theogony*, 215–216; 517–519). Zeus finds Ares and Hephaistos "wanting." This follows traditions of Zeus' dislike of Ares (see e.g. *Iliad*, 5.889), although it runs contra to e.g. Hesiod (*Theogony*, 921–928), for whom Hebe, Ares and Eileithyia are the children of Zeus and Hera, while Hera brings forth Hephaestus alone. The myth of Io is based on ancient traditions (e.g. those found in *Aegimius*, 4–5; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.1.3–4; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 561–886; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.583–750).

A high percentage of the book is devoted to the life of Heracles, but rather than squeezing Hera out of her own story this approach retells these myths with sympathy for Hera's perspective on them. It is perhaps for this reason that there is so much emphasis on Heracles' name meaning "Glory of Hera," when that interpretation of his name is uncertain (it is suggested by Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheke*, 4.10.1).



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The myths of Heracles' birth reflect traditions found in Homer (*Iliad*, 19.98-135, while *Iliad* 14.249–260 and 15.25 also show early traditions of Hera's antipathy for Heracles; also see Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 4.9.1–4.9.4). The story of the snakes in the cradle follows Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca* 4.10.1, with Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.4.8). The section in which Jason encourages Heracles to think positively about his difficult relationship with Hera and what that has led him to is thoughtfully written and has the potential to be inspiring to any young (or old) reader experiencing hardship. This also explains the decision to make Hera the embodiment of the "hard choice" Heracles faces, when this is typically a role for Virtue or Athena (see esp. Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 2.1.20–34). The characterisation of Hera as a queen who is humiliated by Heracles' successes is undermined by the stories of Hera's willingness to help him and her gradual warming to him over the course of the labours. In O'Connor's story, Heracles is compelled to complete the labours as payment for being suckled by Hera. After completing them, he is welcomed to Olympus. In antiquity, several tales were told as the origin of the labours, including the idea that they were atonement for murdering his family as a result of Hera's interference (see e.g. Apollodorus, *Bibliothec*a, 2.4.12 with Euripides, *Madness of Heracles*), and that they were the price of entry to Olympus (see e.g. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca*, 4.9.5–6). The decision to avoid the murder tradition softens the images of both Hera and Heracles while working the milk story in ties loose ends together.

This representation of Hera's ambiguous (rather than purely hostile) stance towards Heracles is extended by the focus on Hera during Heracles' ascendance to Olympus. It is she who takes on the role of welcoming him there from a position of power (literally on the throne and, more figuratively, as the one leading the exchange). This focus on reconciliation between Heracles and Hera is perhaps behind the decision to avoid the myth in which Heracles shot the Queen of the Gods, for example (*Iliad*, 5.392 ). Hera has a strong association with glory from an early stage (se e.g. *Homeric Hymn 12, To Hera*), so it is powerful that the story finishes with Hera confidently asserting her glory and feeling "Glorious". Hera here is a no-nonsense figure who knows her own mind and the respect that she is due yet while she can be humorous, flexible, and warm. This is a positive depiction of a mature female and step-mother figure.

O'Connor chose to follow the tradition in which Atalanta was part of the Argo's crew (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.9.16) rather than excluded from it (Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 1.768–773), adding a



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minor but active female character (i.e. one of the few who is defined by adventure rather than motherhood). Heracles' homosexual relationship with Hylas is suggested but not made explicit, leaving it to the reader to decide what they wish to read into the subtext of their "particular friendship" (see Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, 1.1207ff; Theocritus, *Idylls*, 13.36ff). Similarly, Heracles is depicted more as a mentor than a lover to his nephew, Iolaus. This comes across through frequent reference to their relationship ("uncle", "my brother", "your father", "nephew"), and use of "lad" which, combined with the familial terms, suggests aged-based hierarchy between them rather than intimacy. The depiction of King Eurystheus hiding from Cerberus in a large pot is an adaptation of ancient vase images of Eurystheus hiding from the Erymanthian Boar. The account of the death of Heracles is drawn from Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*.

Readers with little or no knowledge of classical mythology could enjoy this retelling of myths, although there are cases where pre-knowledge might make the text more enjoyable. This is the case, for example, in the myth of Io. A reader might guess that the cow is not really a cow, but it is perhaps more amusing for someone who knows and recognises the myth. That this rather sad myth is told humorously and without its sorrowful ending is further indication of the decision to depict Hera positively.

There is some sensitive treatment of the nature of myth. The final section mentions the phenomena of myths that women told amongst each other but not men – referring to the important institutions of female cults and sex-based experiences of mythology. There is also playful yet lyrical handling of the golden fleece: "Another quest, to another garden. Another dragon guarding another tree. For this was ancient Greece and the world was full of these things then." (p. 48). Room is made for multiple versions of myths – of which river it really was (p. 65), or who gave the gift (p. 10). These details encourage the reader to embrace the atmosphere and multiplicity of the mythological world rather than being caught up in details.

In terms of colouring, Hera is depicted noticeably paler than the other Olympians, presumably in reference to her Homeric epithet "white-armed" (e.g. *Iliad* 1.54). There are charming details regarding when Hera wears her hair up or down, reflecting the importance of this in ancient marriage rituals and customs. Heracles is depicted with quite dark skin by comparison with other heroes (or Hebe), perhaps as a way of expressing his descent from Andromeda, princess of Ethiopia,



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| | who was introduced in *Athena. Grey-Eyed Goddess* and who appears again here. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Apples of the Hesperides Architecture Ares Argo Argonauts Atalanta Athena Atlas Cerberus Crete Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Gods Golden Fleece Hebe Hera Heracles Hercules Hestia Hydra Jason Katabasis Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Olympus Poseidon Stymphalian Birds Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus |
| Further Reading | Blanshard, Alastair, *Hercules, a Heroic Life*, London: Granta Books, 2006.<br><br>Gordon, Joel, "When Superman Smote Zeus: Analysing Violent Deicide in Popular Culture", *Classical Receptions Journal* 9.2 (2017): 211–236.<br><br>Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W., eds., *Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.<br><br>Kovacs, George, and Marshall, C.W., eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.<br><br>Rawlings, Louis, and Bowden, Hugh, *Herakles and Hercules. Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, London: Classical Press of Wales, 2005.<br><br>Stafford, Emma, *Herakles*, London: Routledge, 2012. |
| Addenda | Series blog (accessed: October 24, 2018). |



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