Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Hephaistos. God of Fire (Olympians, 11) by George O'Connor", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/879. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

George O'Connor

# Hephaistos. God of Fire (Olympians, 11)

*United States (2019)*

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Greek Art Hephaestus Hera Hermes Leto Zeus

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

| General information | |
|---|---|
| *Title of the work* | Hephaistos. God of Fire (Olympians, 11) |
| *Country of the First Edition* | United States of America |
| *Country/countries of popularity* | United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada |
| *Original Language* | English |
| *First Edition Date* | 2019 |
| *First Edition Details* | George O'Connor, *Hephaistos. God of Fire*. New York: First Second, 2019, 77 pp. |
| *ISBN* | 9781626725287 |
| *Official Website* | olympiansrule.com |
| *Genre* | Action and adventure comics, Comics (Graphic works), Graphic novels, Mythological comics, Myths |
| *Target Audience* | Crossover (teens, adults ) |
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

## 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

*Hephaistos*, an attractive graphic novel focusing on myths connected to Hephaestus, opens with hammering reverberating around mountain tops. Hephaestus is revealed, working with his hammer, but the narrator goes on to tell a story of Prometheus. The giant elemental Titans are shown and then compared to Prometheus, a small human-like child of the Titans, but with the gift of foresight and prophecy. Living under the Titans he knows what it is to feel helpless. He chooses to live amongst the humans; he anticipates the arrival of further deities; and when the new war of the gods comes he protects humans out of empathy. The scene returns to the mountain and Hephaestus is revealed to be hammering in shackles, securing Prometheus to the mountainside.

Prometheus tells Hephaestus the story of Hephaestus' birth. Zeus is with Leto, so Prometheus attends Hera as she gives birth. She dislikes the look of the baby and is angry with its father, Zeus, so she throws baby Hephaestus off Olympus. The Oceanids catch him. Hephaestus then takes up the tale of what happened to him next. He relates how he began making things on Lemnos; how he transformed Olympus; and he confesses that he prefers to be at his forge rather than amongst the other gods. Hephaestus describes some of his creations: his bellows, his gold assistants and tripods, "weapons of the gods" (p. 17), Talos, Helios' chariot and boat, Ares' chariot, and Aphrodite's girdle.

Prometheus asks Hephaestus if he knows why he is being punished. He does know, but Prometheus begins to tell the story anyway – the myth of the sacrifice at Mekone. In response to the division of the sacrifice, Zeus ordered Hephaestus to recall fire from the humans. Back on the mountain, Hephaestus rebukes Prometheus for patronising him. He begins to relate his experience of living amongst the other Olympians. That experience is difficult; the reader sees scenes of several of the Olympians interacting with Hephaestus, treating him with slight regard. Hephaestus is saddened by Aphrodite giggling conspiratorially with Ares. Helios then sees Aphrodite and Ares together and tells Hephaestus, who is enraged. Prometheus steals fire from the forge as Hephaestus works furiously on a new creation. Prometheus spreads fire amongst the humans. Zeus sees the fires spark as he looks down from Olympus; he knows that Prometheus is responsible. The story returns to the present;



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Prometheus asks Hephaestus what he was making that night. Hermes has since arrived. He laughs and asks Hephaestus to tell the story. Hephaestus relates the tale of how he forged a net that trapped Aphrodite and Ares in bed together and then demanded a divorce. When the scene returns to the mountain-side, Hermes is still laughing.

Hermes then tells Prometheus that he is not being punished for stealing fire – he has had the punishment for that. This leads into a retelling of the myth of Pandora. Hephaestus created her; other gods adorned her. Prometheus advised Epimetheus not to accept the gift, but he did it anyway. Zeus had given Pandora a jar and told her not to open it. The temptation was too strong and Epimetheus convinced Pandora to open it, unleashing suffering on the world. Hermes then speculates on why Hope was in the jar – whether it is a force for good, or actually one of the evils – torturing humans with the idea that things might improve. Hermes teasingly offers to free Prometheus if he will tell him about the future over throw of Zeus. This, we infer, is the real reason that Prometheus is being punished. Prometheus rejects him scornfully. "Your choice" says Hermes (p. 48).

Hephaestus begins to reflect on the notion of choice. Even the gods are bound by the consequences of their choices – how they choose to behave. From examples featuring his parents he goes on to include his own choices – how he has tried to calm things between them, and how Zeus responded angrily by throwing him from Olympus. This is followed by a story of Hephaestus choosing to do things differently. Thrones arrive on Olympus; the gods are delighted until Hera is trapped in hers. Ares visits Lemnos to demand Hephaestus release her. Hephaestus angrily refuses him and Ares returns to Olympus scorched and defeated. Hermes, Apollo, and Athena consider if they can help, but Dionysus puts himself forward. Dionysus drinks with Hephaestus, who pours out his sorrows. Dionysus persuades him to return, empowered. Hephaestus enters halls of Olympus and releases Hera with an undignified plop onto the floor. She greets him graciously. He takes his place on a throne. The narrator returns to the language of the opening, "Once there was a god…" (p. 65). Hephaestus knew how it was to be put upon by others, but he found his place. The scene shifts to the interior of a house. Pandora calls Epimetheus to bed; he is telling their daughter bed-time stories. The reader realises that Epimetheus has been the book's narrator. He begins to retell the story of Prometheus, who did what he did despite knowing what would come. An eagle can be seen circling the mountain top. The final frame shows Pandora and Epimetheus' child



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asleep in a cradle before a lit fireplace.

The main narrative is followed by character profiles of: Hephaestus, Helios, Prometheus, and Pandora. There are then notes on the text, an Author Note, and Recommended Reading.

Analysis

A complex Ovidian structure enables *Hephaistos* to tell a number of ancient myths which come together to explore the character of that god and the relationships between gods and between gods and mortals. The combination creates an opportunity for philosophical reflection on the nature of choice.

Much of the framing of the story draws on Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, in which Hephaestus binds Prometheus to the mountain. O'Connor's Hephaestus is a more sympathetic figure, however, which enables the conversation between them to develop less confrontationally and more revealingly. The narrative of Hephaestus' birth reveals the god's vulnerability and introduces the issue of his difficult family relationships. Attention is then paid to Hephaestus' achievements. Prometheus notes that Olympus looked different when Hephaestus was born, and the god acknowledges that he was the one who adorned it and made it grander. O'Connor manifests this visually by contrasting a simple Olympus indicating the past and images of a grander, more Ionic style later Olympus (he draws attention to this in the notes, explaining that he used Minoan architecture as the model for early Olympus, followed by classical architecture for later Olympus, p. 70; n. 15). Images of Hephaestus' other creations then touch on other myths (e.g. Talos), and reinforce the idea of Hephaestus' skill. Reference to Aphrodite's girdle (p. 17) is followed by a self-deprecating joke (p. 18), which both anticipates a forthcoming story and adds a relatable touch. The reader learns that Hephaestus loves his work and being at his forge and this encourages respect for the god albeit combined with sympathy for the difficult position that he is in with regards to the other gods. The less palatable myth of Hephaestus' attempt to rape Athena is included only through indirect allusion (p. 27 with p. 61). Even the explanatory note that goes with these allusions refers rather coyly to Hephaestus' "aborted attempt at a union" (p. 71 n. 27.5). The retellings of several Hephaestus myths conclude in the myth of Hera's throne. This ordering creates the sense of an arc; of Hephaestus moving from put-upon figure to one who has taken some control over his situation. This



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is satisfying for the reader. Myths in which Hephaestus is humiliated are thus turned towards something more positive. Indirectly these retellings encourage readers to reflect on their own relationships with others, particularly with their families.

In order to establish Hephaestus as an outsider, the other Olympians are represented in a more negative light than they are elsewhere in the series (for which see elsewhere in this database). For example, Apollo is shown taunting him childishly for being unsteady on his feet (p. 27), Athena is shown to be contemptuous towards him (p. 27). The depictions of Zeus and Hera throughout focus on their conflict and rejection of Hephaestus. Aphrodite and Ares are characterised in terms of their attempts to deceive Hephaestus (esp. pp. 26–42), when their own volumes depict them in a more rounded manner. Hermes is still amusing and lively, but he appears more callous in this volume due to his inability to sympathise with Hephaestus' anguish. For readers of the whole series, this creates an opportunity to consider the gods from a fresh perspective. Dionysus plays a greater role in this volume than he does elsewhere. In this rare appearance he is knowing, mischievous, but ultimately benign; the sequence in which he goes to drink with Hephaestus is amusing but also a sympathetic treatment of both gods.

The retelling of the myth of Pandora is somewhat unusual. It follows ancient traditions in framing the story from the start as a punishment upon humans (see esp. Hesiod, *Theogony* and *Work and Days*). There is little sense that Pandora has free-will in this situation; her choice has essentially been made for her. This reduces the sense of blame in the myth, but also helps to explore the idea of the nature of choice; she seems to have free choice but her actions have been set in motion from before her creation. That Epimetheus *makes* Pandora open the jar extends the sense that this retelling is a rehabilitation of Pandora. Hermes' comments on the nature of Hope add a further philosophical element to the myth which offers the reader a fresh perspective on this familiar story. Pandora's re-appearance at the end of the story (calling to Epimetheus) adds another de-familiarisation – one which humanises Pandora and encourages the reader to consider her life *after* the jar. The decision to combine the myth of Pandora with the myth of the sacrifice at Mecone, as in Hesiod, also improves the impression of Pandora. This myth also serves to extend the exploration of the power of choice; Prometheus chooses to try and help humanity at the expense of his family while Zeus' choice at the sacrifice extends the breach between them.



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The final frames of the work shift the focus of the story. Hephaestus and Prometheus have been seen interacting in the mountains throughout the story. There have been references to Prometheus' foresight and knowledge of what is to come. The end reveals that Epimetheus has been telling the story – emphasising how his brother chose to help humans although he knew what would come; the circling of the eagle reminds the reader who knows this myth that this is a reference to Prometheus being pecked for aeons as much as it is a reference to his binding. If the reader does not know this tradition, they can read about it in the book's notes, which explain what happens to Prometheus as well as the story of *Prometheus Bound* and the loss of *Prometheus Unbound*. The final image of the baby being warmed at the hearth ensures that the story concludes with a sense of the benefit that Prometheus brought to humanity through fire. The book's unusual combination of myths and the decision to extend *Prometheus Bound* to explore Hephaestus further creates a reflection between Hephaestus' choice to change his relationship with his family and Prometheus' choice to defy his family to help the humans. Both choices are brave, in different ways, although the consequences are different for each party. Both choices are explicitly informed by the chooser's empathy and understanding of what it is to be powerless. The repeat phrasing, "Once there was a god" (p. 1, with p. 52, and p. 65), helps the reader to recognise that a pattern is being expressed, which in turn encourages them to look for meaning.

*Hephaistos* creates a mythosphere in which the gods are callous to the point of being cruel. They are amusing and glamourous, but also harsh to one another and to those less powerful than themselves. The most sympathetic figures are those who seek to help others: the Oceanids who rescue baby Hephaestus, Hephaestus himself who is always trying to improve the lives of his family, and Prometheus, who pays a terrible price for helping humanity. In this manner, the myths become a vehicle for encouraging readers to be good to others, even while many of the characters behave otherwise. Despite this strong primary message, this is also a work that encourages the reader to see ancient myth as a route into more complex philosophical questions – about the nature of free-will, fate, and choice. Young readers who are experiencing difficult family lives may feel empowered by the message that even a kind person may push back against mistreatment and that it is possible to change relationships and gain more respect. Hephaestus is perhaps not the most famous Greek god, but *Hephaistos* finds a way to give his myths a unified and coherent



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| | meaning that urges respect and sympathy for kindness and for the outsider's perspective. |
| Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts | Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Ares Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Greek Art Hephaestus Hera Hermes Leto Zeus |
| Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture | Abandonment Adversity Authority Child's view Coming of age Conflict Disability Diversity Divorce Emotions Family Gaining understanding Good deeds Humour Identity Masculinity Maturity Morality Oppression Parents (and children) Peers Philosophy Punishment Rejection Relationships Resilience Respect Revenge Self Values |



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