

## The Return of the Olympians: The Justice League as the Olympians

As part of the long overdue study into classical reception in popular culture, one medium has yet to be studied in any real sense. That medium is the comic book. In the past few decades, superheroes have become the most important characters in popular culture. Thus, it has become more important than ever to study this genre in relation to the classics. Superman made his first debut in 1939, after which the age of the superhero began in comics. Since then these larger than life figures have appeared in comics, television shows, films, books, radio shows and we even wear their symbols as paraphernalia. DC Comics eventually brought their biggest heroes together to form the Justice League in 1960. This team of mismatched heroes tackled threats to the world together, reminiscent of the Argonauts. However, in the late 1990's there began a shift in tone with this team of heroes. Grant Morrison relaunched the title series *JLA* in 1996, and the effects of how the Justice League was represented changed the way we not only look at those beloved characters, but also suddenly classical themes flooded their way into these stories.

In this paper, I will argue that the writers of *JLA* purposefully based the main characters in the series off the Greco-Roman Olympic gods, thereby transforming these characters from superheroes into gods. They did this by drastically changing the characterization of each character, using art work and design to incorporate divine-like imagery and investigating certain themes that are distinct to the Olympian gods. I will prove my argument by examining three specific characters. Superman, Aquaman, and the Flash. I will argue that this depiction is classical reception made deliberately. I will also argue that these representations of the Justice League permeated through the years even after Grant Morrison's run and have changed the very way we see these characters. Through television series and films, we now associate these characters when they come together as gods. When this is emphasized, classical images follow

which furthers our association between this modern pantheon and the Greco-Roman deities. Ultimately, this will show that classical mythology, religion and symbolism is alive and well even in the modern day. But, more importantly not only in obvious aspects such as when mythical characters literally show up. These themes and myths have seeped into our stories to the point that even our most beloved superheroes have something to say about the ancient world in the modern day. My paper will draw on largely from the comics themselves, specifically from Grant Morrison's work between 1996 and 2006. I will also use comics from 2011-2016 as the aftermath of this shift in characterization. Alongside the comics themselves I am examining reception theory as well, as comic books are a relatively new medium at which to look at classics. To this end I am citing Lorna Hardwick's *Classical Receptions* (2003) and *A Companion to Classical Receptions* (2008). As a resource, I will also be pulling from George Kovacs *Classics and Comics* (2011). Finally, to accomplish this task I will be examining evidence from Grant Morrison's own book *Supergods* (2011).