



Pedagogická  
fakulta  
Faculty  
of Education

Jihočeská univerzita  
v Českých Budějovicích  
University of South Bohemia  
in České Budějovice

Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích  
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Bakalářská práce

# Characters from Greek Mythology in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series

Postavy z řecké mytologie v díle Ricka Riordana Percy Jackson  
a Olympané

Vypracovala: Iva Le, 3. ročník, AJ-ČJ  
Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D.

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## **Anotace**

Bakalářská práce se věnuje postavám z řecké mytologie v pětidílném literárním díle Ricka Riordana *Percy Jackson a Olympané (Percy Jackson & the Olympians)*. Teoretická část práce představí žánr moderní fantasy literatury a využití mytologie v tomto žánru s důrazem na antickou mytologii. Dále uvede autora a jeho dílo v kontextu současné tvorby v oblasti fantasy literatury pro mladé čtenáře. Praktická část práce se zaměří na analýzu způsobu využití a adaptace mytologických postav a jejich funkce v Riordanově pentalogii ve srovnání s jejich tradičním ztvárněním a rolemi ve starověké kultuře.

## **Abstract**

The bachelor thesis is devoted to the characters from Greek mythology in Rick Riordan's five-volume literary work *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*. The theoretical part of the thesis will introduce the genre of modern fantasy literature and the use of mythology in this genre with an emphasis on ancient mythology. It will also introduce the author and his work in the context of contemporary work in the field of fantasy literature for young readers. The practical part of the thesis will focus on the analysis of the way mythological characters are used and adapted and their function in Riordan's pentalogy in comparison to their traditional representation and roles in ancient culture.

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## Introduction

Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & The Olympians* series has captured audiences all over the world with its blend of characters from Greek mythology and our world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This thesis focuses on the usage of Ancient Greek characters in the novels by Rick Riordan and compares the portrayal of these characters to the classical tradition, focusing mainly on the differences and how these differences shape the story of a demigod hero. Throughout the research for this thesis, I have discovered that the characters are fairly accurately portrayed, and Riordan expands, adds humanity and personality to these characters, making them come alive and to be more relatable.

In an interview on YouTube *Rick Riordan talks about his Percy Jackson series*, Riordan explains the reason why he thinks the Greek mythology is still studied to this day and why the myths are considered timeless. He believes the Greek gods and heroes to be our first superheroes, meaning humans with superpowers, drawing a parallel of their popularity to the popularity of Marvel superhero stories. <sup>1</sup>

I have chosen to focus on this topic because the story of Percy Jackson and his friends resonated with me, the characters have become alive and to this day even upon rereading they still deliver important morals and message often seen in children's literature.

The theoretical part introduces the fantasy genre and its inception along with the definition of Greek classical mythology and lastly, the author Rick Riordan. The practical part of this thesis delves into the characters themselves and shows how the characters are used and the possible reasoning behind the techniques Riordan uses to build this meshed world of the mortal and the immortal.

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<sup>1</sup> The St.Louis Post-Dispatch. (2010). *Rick Riordan talks about his Percy Jackson series* [Video]. YouTube.

# 1. Theoretical Part

## 1.1. *Fantasy Literature*

According to both Pringle and Berry, fantasy stories have been around since the beginning of time, where people used to make up stories around the mysterious workings of the real world, which they could not explain.<sup>2</sup> Pringle goes as far to state that what makes us human is the ability to create worlds. Humans are humans for their imagination, not because of intelligence, for there are many other species with the gift of intelligence yet they have not invented stories about who it was that created thunder and lightning.<sup>3</sup>

The unique human “superpower” of imagination developed through oral storytelling where the myths served as primary explanations of the mystery workings of the world.<sup>4</sup> This art of creating stories around unexplainable occurrences is the foundation to all fantasy stories, mythology and religion. For authors who decide to use mythology in their work there is a clear upside for mythology is timeless, but it can also present a challenge to add or expand the known narratives in creative ways.<sup>5</sup>

The genre of fantasy mainly affects emotions such as desire, wonder, nostalgia but also laughter. Fairy-tale and heroic epic are the two main body of works for this genre, both with very different origins. Fairy tales, originate in oral folklore, whereas the heroic epic originates from warriors celebrating their courage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pringle, D., & Pratchett, T. (2003). *Fantasy: encyklopedie fantastických světů*. Albatros. Berry, D. (2005). *The Treatment of Mythology in Children's Fantasy. The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, 9(3).

<sup>3</sup> Pringle, D., & Pratchett, T. (2003). *Fantasy: encyklopedie fantastických světů*. Albatros. p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Berry, D. (2005). *The Treatment of Mythology in Children's Fantasy. The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature*, 9(3).

<sup>5</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>6</sup> Pringle & Pratchett, p. 8

In contemporary times, where originality holds significant importance for readers, fantasy stories distinguish themselves by the extent to which authors adhere to or deviate from mythological traditions. Writers like C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien closely adhere to the European mythological tradition, while Catherine Anthony Clark draws inspiration from the myths of native North America.<sup>7</sup>

The foremost decision for a fantasy author is also the most crucial one: what rules govern the narrative? Should the fantasy world be an enchanting, light-hearted realm or should it be a starkly realistic setting infused with tragedy? Should the fantasy world intersect with the real world or remain separate? Fantasy operates according to its own internal laws, established by the author.<sup>8</sup>

Adhering to tradition offers certain advantages, as most fantasy readers possess knowledge of European mythology, or at least possess a basic familiarity with its fundamental elements, thereby reducing the need for extensive exposition in the text.<sup>9</sup>

Clark, for example, employs various techniques to seamlessly incorporate a wealth of mythological background without disrupting the illusion of a coherent reality. One such method involves erasing the boundaries between the real and fantasy worlds, by making a seamless transition between the real and fantastical world, rendering it difficult for readers to discern when characters transition between the two.<sup>10</sup> As opposed to the characters of C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, who are abruptly transported through a portal in the wardrobe to an entirely unrecognizable land. Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* classifies this story as a portal-quest fantasy, where the characters, as the name suggests, enter a fantasy world through a portal, the defining characteristics being that the worlds do not leak into one another.

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<sup>7</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>8</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>10</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>11</sup> Mendlesohn, F. (2008). *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. Wesleyan University Press.



Instead, Clark's characters similarly to Riordan's gradually and subtly encounter events that appear only slightly larger than life and navigate a land that remains familiar to them.<sup>12</sup>

Introducing legends from unconventional sources expands the scope of fantasy in one direction. Another approach involves reinterpreting the conventions themselves by viewing myths and legends through a modern lens. This style of fantasy has a longstanding history, as successive generations offer new interpretations and imbue ancient tales with fresh meanings. Modern authors who adopt this approach differ from their predecessors primarily in the level of artistic freedom they enjoy. Modern retellings of Greek legends, for instance, treat these stories as malleable, with authors altering the plots, characters, and occasionally even the settings, while preserving only the essential framework of the original tales.<sup>13</sup>

According to Smit a key defining characteristics of fantasy is that it contains an unnatural or impossible element, which could not occur in the real world.<sup>14</sup>

Other characteristic elements include the use of magic of the supernatural, shifting of time, animals with the ability to speak, the hero's quest and above all the battle between good and evil.<sup>15</sup>

Smit classifies the following types of fantasy fictional novels: High Fantasies such as *Lord of The Rings* by Tolkien, which are set in completely made up worlds and contain many elements that differentiate them from reality, another type would be utopian, or dystopian, fiction such as the popular trilogy by Suzanne Collins titled *The Hunger Games* set in a post-apocalyptic world, in which the author's philosophical and moral stance are explored.

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<sup>12</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Berry, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Smit, J. (2020). How Fantasy Speaks to Adolescent Readers: The Development of Gender Equity, Heroism and Imperfection, and Good and Evil from an Exploration into Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson & the Olympians and Heroes of Olympus Series. *Study and Scrutiny: Research on Young Adult Literature*, 4 (1)

<sup>15</sup> Smit, p. 53

Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* pentology is characterized in terms as an intrusion fantasy, where, in Mendelsohn's terms, the fantastic invades the "normal world" and throws it into an unpredictable chaos.<sup>16</sup> This alienation nature of fantasy could lead to the assumptions that fantasy is purely escapism, and that fantasy does not contain important messages for its readers. "Yet proponents of fantasy claim that fantasy can explore real-life, political, personal, and spiritual issues."<sup>17</sup> In some instances, even more so, because a wider perspective is offered on such problems. "Fantasies allow readers to consider central and realistic themes in a way that can be more palatable than realistic fiction. Characters within fantasy are faced with the same challenges as we are in the real world thus by immersing ourselves in the fantasy world, experience can be gained and used in our own lives."<sup>18</sup>

### **Significance of Mythology in Fantasy Literature**

Furthermore Rabbi, a lecturer at Daffodil International University, states that "One of the major significances of mythology is to provide a guideline for living."<sup>19</sup> Mythology serves a significant purpose in providing moral guidance and illustrating the triumph of good over evil. Throughout history, authors have utilized mythology to convey these themes.

Similarly, Rick Riordan's five-book series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, envisions a utopian society that embraces and respects individuals with physical and mental challenges. By integrating Greek mythology into popular culture, particularly in children's literature, Riordan employs mythology to elucidate complex concepts and effectively convey messages to society.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mendelsohn, p. xxii.

<sup>17</sup> Smit, p. 53

<sup>18</sup> Smit, p. 53

<sup>19</sup> Rabbi, M. M. F. (2016). *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: Reincarnation of Greek Mythology as an Alternate Reality*. ResearchGate.

<sup>20</sup> Rabbi, p. 1

Mythology has long been employed as a tool for human enlightenment, imparting moral values and establishing connections between the present and the past. It serves to reconnect individuals with their roots and cultural heritage, enabling them to derive lessons from history. The enduring relevance of Greek mythology as a medium for creative expression is affirmed. However, Greek mythology traditionally portrays and endorses a class-conscious society. In contrast, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* offers a fresh interpretation of Greek mythology that challenges rather than legitimizes the contemporary class conflicts. Thus, Riordan revitalizes Greek mythology as an alternate reality.<sup>21</sup>

Mythology holds a crucial place in popular culture for various reasons. Firstly, it serves as a link between the present and the past, with every culture rooted in its own mythology. As defined in the American Heritage Dictionary, mythology encompasses traditional stories that address supernatural beings, ancestors, or heroes, providing fundamental insights into a people's worldview by explaining natural phenomena or delineating societal psychology, customs, and ideals.<sup>22</sup>

The primary function of mythology is to convey ideas that are not easily explicable in ordinary language. Riordan successfully resurrects Greek mythology and underscores its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The protagonist, Percy, is a demigod who embodies attributes of both gods and humans. However, Percy's heroism stems from his human qualities rather than his divine powers. Through Percy, Riordan exemplifies how humanity surpasses divinity. This attitude is reflected in *The Sea of Monsters* through the character of Chiron, the Centaur and mentor of the demigods.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Rabbi, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi, p. 3

<sup>23</sup> Rabbi, p. 11

## 1.2. *Mythology in children's literature*

According to Checkai, the enduring appeal of mythic narratives lies in their inherent power, which resonates with humanity. These stories have persisted across time since the early civilizations, arising independently in diverse cultures. Myths encapsulate fundamental emotions and experiences common to human existence. Therefore, it is unsurprising that they continue to resurface in contemporary literature, as individuals confront similar existential concerns as their ancestors. Authors, particularly in the realm of children's literature, are not content with merely borrowing themes and symbols from mythology. Instead, a growing trend can be observed where entire characters from mythic traditions are incorporated into narratives.<sup>24</sup>

## 1.3. *Ancient Greek civilisation*

Ancient Greek civilisation is dated from 1200 BCE to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and is considered one of the most significant influences on the Western civilisation as we know it. This period brought us Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and many others, it gave birth to democracy, the Olympic Games and most importantly for the purpose of this thesis, Greek mythology.<sup>25</sup>

The definition of Greek mythology from the online encyclopaedia Britannica reiterates that people from the beginning of time have developed myths to explain natural phenomena and that the Greek mythology “*have remained unrivalled as sources of imaginative and appealing ideas.*”<sup>26</sup> Greek mythology has remained an inspiration to many authors, who find timeless significance and the classical mythology themes relevant to this day.<sup>27</sup> The first and perhaps most significant texts include Hesiod's *Theogony*, Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey*.

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<sup>24</sup> Checkai, A. (2009). *The Function of Gods in Modern Children's Literature: A Content Analysis of the Gods' Roles in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series*. A Master's Paper.

<sup>25</sup> Hornblower, S. (2023). *Ancient Greek Civilization*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>26</sup> Pollard, J., Richard Thornhill, and Adkins, A.W.H. (2023). *Greek mythology*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>27</sup> Pollard & Adkins, *Greek mythology*

As to answering the question of when Greek mythology started, it is difficult to provide a precise timeline since it is believed to stem from centuries of oral tradition of the Minoan civilization in Crete, dating the myths to sometime between 3000 to 1100 BCE.<sup>28</sup>

Roman mythology itself is already an adaptation of Greek mythology, as can be seen in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Roman mythology is dated from ancient times until the beginning of Christianity in 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>29</sup> One of the most significant texts involving Roman mythology is Virgil's *Aeneid*.

#### **1.4. Rick Riordan**

Rick Riordan, whose full name is Richard Russell Riordan, Jr. is an American author. He was born on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1964 in San Antonio, Texas. Riordan graduated from University of Texas with bachelor's degrees in history and English. He was a history and English teacher for 15 years before he quit to dedicate himself to writing full-time.<sup>30</sup>

The idea that started the entire Percy Jackson series, as Riordan himself recalls,<sup>31</sup> is because his son Haley had asked him to tell him some bedtime stories about the Greek gods and heroes. Riordan, being a history major was happy to comply, after running out of stories though, his son asked him to invent more stories with the same characters. This is how the character of Percy Jackson was born and with him two very successful pentalogies, called *Percy Jackson & The Olympians* and *Heroes of Olympus*, respectively. The latter series, however, is not yet the end as there is now another series called *The Trials of Apollo*, where the sun god is sent on earth as a mortal in punishment from Zeus. However, Greek mythology is not Riordan's only subject of writing; *The Kane Chronicles* are inspired by Egyptian mythology and *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* by Norse mythology.

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<sup>28</sup> Pollard & Adkins, *Greek mythology*

<sup>29</sup> Grant, M. (2023). *Roman religion*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>30</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023). *Rick Riordan*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>31</sup>Riordan, R. (n.d.) *An Interview With Rick*. Rick Riordan.

### **Reception and legacy of Riordan's book series**

Retelling the Greek mythology stories and bringing them closer to the children has made them popular; oftentimes, as Rebecca Mead writes in her *New Yorker* article, “*her son and his peers know the tales of the Greek gods far better than she does.*”<sup>32</sup> Though perhaps skewed by Riordan's making the gods more modern and relatable to children, the clear benefit of increasing the Greek mythology literacy in children is undoubtedly present. Another legacy the series have left are several camps inspired by Camp Half-blood, where children have activities ranging from swordplay to ancient Greek arts and crafts.<sup>33</sup>

### **Adaptations of the Percy Jackson series**

On February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the movie *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, loosely based on the book of the same name was released. As Rick Riordan mentions on his website [rickriordan.com](http://rickriordan.com), he was not a part of the process. He neither wrote the script nor participated in the making of the movie in any other way. Furthermore, he did not even see that adaptation in fear of the adaptations changing the way he saw his characters and settings of the series. The same process applies to the sequel, *The Sea of Monsters* released in August of 2013.<sup>34</sup> The extent of his allowed involvement was reading the script and making some suggestions, for once the movie rights are sold, the “*author has no control over what happens in the movie.*”<sup>35</sup> A decision to sell the movie rights to *The Lightning Thief* was made even before the official release of the books in order to attract public attention.<sup>36</sup> In another blog post on his website he writes a hyperbolic letter to teachers who consider including the movies into their classes when teaching Greek mythology.

Here his attitude towards those movies can be seen, showing that he does not think they are a good adaptation of his novels whatsoever.

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<sup>32</sup> Mead, R. (2014, October 22). The Percy Jackson Problem. *The New Yorker*.

<sup>33</sup> Camp Half-Blood (n.d.) Camp Half-Blood.

<sup>34</sup> Riordan, R. (n.d.) *Frequently Asked Questions*. Rick Riordan.

<sup>35</sup> Riordan, *Questions*

<sup>36</sup> Riordan, *Questions*

*Please, for the love of multiple intelligences, DON'T show those "Percy Jackson" movies (ironic quotes intentional) in your classroom for a compare-contrast lesson or, gods forbid, a "reward" at the end of your unit. No group of students deserves to be subjected to that sort of mind-numbing punishment.<sup>37</sup>*

However, Riordan fully embraces an adaptation, since he is very much involved in the process of making one as a writer and a producer: a TV series adaptation of *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* with Disney+. Here he has full control of the production, including most importantly the script and casting of the series.

### **Reception and Impact**

The greatest impact of the series is in my opinion the destigmatisation of dyslexia and ADHD by reframing those disabilities as strengths and needed adaptations to survive.

According to Foster Riordan's take on the mythology and his creative process with Le Guin's in that both present distinct visions of the ancient past while drawing inspiration from diverse facets of antiquity.<sup>38</sup> Examining their works through the lens of ancient texts enables us to gain insights into the functioning of their own narratives. Simultaneously, their individual readings and interpretations of ancient texts offer alternative perspectives on how these texts can be perceived and operate.

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<sup>37</sup> Riordan, R. (n.d.) *A letter you can share with your teacher!*. Rick Riordan.

<sup>38</sup>Foster, F. (2015). Visiting the Ancient Land of the Dead in Le Guin and Riordan. *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*, 44(122), p. 1

## 2. Practical Part

### 2.1. *Percy Jackson & The Olympians series*

In the following pages, an introduction to the story and brief summaries of the books in the series will be given using the prophecies in each book to explain the plot and to illustrate the series before the analysis of the characters and their impact on the stories themselves. The following acronyms are used to refer to primary texts analysed in the practical part:

1LT = *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief*

2SM = *Percy Jackson & The Sea of Monsters*

3TC = *Percy Jackson & The Titan's Curse*

4BL = *Percy Jackson & The Battle of the Labyrinth*

5LO = *Percy Jackson & The Last Olympian*

#### ***Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief***

In the first instalment of the series called *The Lightning Thief* (2005), the world of Greek mythology is reintroduced and meshed into our world. Everything about this world is discovered through the main character called Percy Jackson, as he himself gets acquainted with the world of the Greek gods. The book starts with a monster attack, after which Percy is led to a camp for half-bloods. The term half-blood denotes a daughter or a son of a god, immortal and human, also called demigods. Once at the Camp, he learns that his godly parent is the Greek god of the sea Poseidon, making him a child of “The Big Three”, which is a term used to describe the three main gods Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. A war is brewing between the gods as a symbol of Zeus’s power his master lightning bolt has been stolen, presumably by either one of the brothers Hades and Poseidon. Therefore, Percy is sent on a quest to retrieve it and to return the master lightning bolt back to its rightful owner at Olympus by summer solstice, fast approaching in ten days, to prevent a war between the gods of The Big Three. On his quest Percy and his companions Annabeth, the daughter of Athena, and Grover, a satyr, are met with various challenges, which include: the evil Gorgon Medusa, the god of war Ares, the Underworld with Hades, Lotus Casino where one forgets themselves to games, and although unknowingly, Kronos, the Titan Lord who is trying to rise from the pits of Tartarus. The best way to summarize the books is to explain the prophecy that predicts the entire quest that each book revolves around.



In this first book of the series, the prophecy that foretold the entire quest of Percy's to retrieve Zeus's master lightning bolt, from the Oracle is as follows:

*“You shall go west, and face the god who has turned.  
You shall find what was stolen, and see it safely returned.  
You shall be betrayed by one who calls you a friend.  
And you shall fail to save what matters most, in the end.” (ILT, 141)*

The first line is initially interpreted by Percy to be about the god of the Underworld Hades but it is revealed later in the story to refer to the god of war Ares. The second line of the prophecy sees Zeus's master bolt and Hades's helmet of darkness returned to their rightful owners. The last line mentioning Percy failing to save what matters most is about his mother and shows an example of a line in the prophecy that offers multiple possible interpretations of meaning, and is not to be taken at face value, for “*what matters most*” (ILT, 141) to Percy is his mother, who had seemingly died by the hand of the Minotaur, is saved by the end, only not actively by Percy himself. The book ends with a revelation of the second-to-last line mentioning a betrayal of a friend, namely Luke, who has tricked the members of the quest by giving them flying shoes that were supposed to drag Percy down to Tartarus.

### ***Percy Jackson & The Sea of Monsters***

The second book called the *The Sea of Monsters* (2006) opens with a dream Percy has of his satyr friend Grover in grave danger, which sets up the premise of the entire book. Percy is concerned to save his friend from the Cyclops Polyphemus, who also happens to have the Golden Fleece, the only thing that could save a poisoned tree on Half-Blood Hill. The tree is not an ordinary one; aside from guarding the Camp from monsters and other intruders, the tree used to be a girl named Thalia, the daughter of Zeus, who saved her from death by turning her into a tree. To retrieve the Golden Fleece and save Grover they must sail through the Sea of Monsters, hence the book title. The challenges on this quest include for example Circe's island, the Sirens, or the encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus.

The book ends with the Golden Fleece working its magic on the tree too well, as aside from healing it from the poison, it also resurrects Zeus's daughter Thalia. Thus, creating the possibility of another hero who The Great Prophecy could be about. The Great Prophecy uttered by the Oracle long before Percy was born foretells that a child of the Big Three is destined to either destroy or save the Western civilization and the gods with it.

This Prophecy is one of the reasons the three gods Zeus, Poseidon and Hades made a pact not to sire any more children, as their demigods are more powerful than all the other demigods.

Clarisse's prophecy from the Oracle:

*“You shall sail the iron ship with warriors of bone,  
You shall find what you seek and make it your own,  
But despair for your life entombed within stone,  
And fail without friends, to fly home alone.” (2SM, 222)*

Clarisse, daughter of Ares, is sent on a quest to retrieve the Golden Fleece on a ship full of the dead. The most important line is the last one, which Percy figures out to mean that Clarisse needs to be the one who flies the Fleece back to Camp from the Sea of Monsters via plane (which Percy is not able to do), failing without friends here simply means without money, Percy, Annabeth and Grover lent her to be able to afford a flight ticket back to Half-Blood Hill.

### ***Percy Jackson & The Titan's Curse***

The third instalment of the series *The Titan's Curse* (2007) opens with a mission to retrieve two sibling demigods Bianca and Nico di Angelo, unknowingly the children of Hades. During this mission however, Annabeth is lost. The rest of the story revolves around a quest to save Annabeth and Artemis.

During this quest we meet the goddess of hunt Artemis and her Hunters, her brother Apollo, Zöe Nightshade, one of the Hesperides, and the Titan Atlas, who is cursed to hold up the weight of the sky. The prophecy of this quest is as follows:

*“Five shall go west to the goddess in chains,  
One shall be lost in the land without rain,  
The bane of Olympus shows the trail,  
Campers and Hunters combined prevail,  
The Titan's curse must one withstand,  
And one shall perish by a parent's hand.” (3TC, 84)*

Three hunters and two demigods set out on a quest to rescue the goddess of hunt Artemis. The one lost is Bianca di Angelo, who dies in battle, which is the only way a Hunter of Artemis, otherwise immortal, can die. The one who perishes by a parent's hand is Zöe Nightshade as she is killed by Atlas. The death of Bianca di Angelo gains Percy another enemy, her brother Nico, because he blames Percy for her death, as Percy has promised to keep an eye on Bianca.

### ***Percy Jackson & The Battle of the Labyrinth***

The fourth and second to last book of the series called *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008) takes place, as the name suggests, in the Labyrinth of Minotaur's. Luke, the arch-nemesis and lieutenant of the evil Titan Kronos, plans to invade the Camp and circumvent its protective border by the means of an underground labyrinth. Later in the book we meet Daedalus, the mad creator of the Labyrinth. Along the way we also meet again the mortal girl Rachel Elizabeth Dare with the gift of Sight, meaning she naturally sees through the Mist and become the guide through the Labyrinth that Percy, Annabeth, Grover and Tyson need.

*“You shall delve in the darkness of the endless maze,  
The dead, the traitor and the lost one raise.  
You shall rise or fall by the ghost kings' hand,  
the child of Athena's final stand!  
Destroy with a hero's final breath.  
And lose a love to worse than death.” (4BL, 330)*

Nico di Angelo, son of Hades is the ghost king who decides the fate of the quest. The last stand of an Athena's child believed to be Annabeth's turns out to be Daedalus's, as he is forced to choose sides, either siding with Kronos or with Percy, therefore with the gods. Grover's biggest dream comes true when he meets the great God of Nature Pan in the Labyrinth but shortly after finding out that the hero's final breath is about Pan. Losing a love to worse than death is a line of the prophecy that Annabeth was hesitant to share through the entire book and at the very end it is revealed that the love lost to worse than death meant losing Luke to Kronos as he sacrifices his body to become a host for the Titan Lord.

### ***Percy Jackson & The Last Olympian***

The final instalment of the series called *The Last Olympian* (2009), is where the story comes to a seeming end, for now. The Titan lord Kronos is defeated. At the very end of the book, the next Great Prophecy by the new Oracle in the body of Rachel Elizabeth Dare, Percy's friend, is uttered, opening the world into Roman mythology and another pentalogy called *The Heroes of Olympus*.

Percy takes on the curse of Achilles by bathing in the river Styx, as the only possible way to defeat Luke, and thereby Kronos, as he has taken Luke's body as a host. One of the most significant appearances in this book is the appearance of Hercules, who has joined the war on the side of Kronos. The Great Prophecy that sets up the entire series is as follows:

*“A half-blood of the eldest gods  
Shall reach sixteen against all odds.  
And see the world in endless sleep,  
The hero's soul, cursed blade shall reap.  
A single choice shall end his days.  
Olympus to preserve or raze.” (SLO, 48)*

The culmination of the series ends in a final battle in New York, where Kronos is defeated with the help of Luke and his old promise to Annabeth to be her family and to protect her. At the very end, we find out that Percy is not the hero of the Prophecy, Luke is. Percy's single choice of giving Annabeth's blade to Luke, which ended Luke's days. As a reward, the gods offered Percy immortality, which he refused. Instead, he wished for all the gods to have a proper cabin at Camp Half-Blood, and to be properly recognized, for the overlooking of the minor gods is one of the reasons Kronos was so successful in turning them against the elder gods. Another reason Luke and the other demigods, who joined Kronos, were so easily swayed is the neglect they suffered from their godly parents. To prevent this from happening again, the gods swore on the river Styx to claim all their children before they reach the age of twelve. The end of the books sets up another series, *The Heroes of Olympus*, where the world of Roman mythology is explored.

*“Seven half-bloods shall answer the call.  
To storm or fire, the world must fall.  
An oath to keep with a final breath,  
And foes bear arms to the Doors of Death.” (SLO, 348)*

## 2.2. Treatment of Greek Mythology

Generally, it could be said that the author's treatment of the Greek characters is in the majority of cases fairly accurate. The myths do not usually delve deep into the personalities of particular gods, but rather use them as a device to further the story of a hero. The purpose of the myths, as previously mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis, was to explain phenomena that people could not otherwise find an explanation for. For the purposes of his storytelling, Riordan adds personality features as he deems necessary but generally stays faithful to the characteristics of the gods, especially in regards of their powers, their familial connections and symbols of their power.

On his website, when asked why he changed the myths Riordan implores us to remember that Greek mythology has been retold and reshaped for thousands of years, with different storytellers changing the details as they were brought to different cities. Each myth has many different versions, and there is no such thing as a "right" version. Furthermore, he says that he tends to choose the version he deems best and "*the one that fits best into Percy Jackson's world.*"<sup>39</sup>

The author also explains his creative process and choices he makes regarding Greek mythology: "*I stick pretty closely to the myths, but I do favor some versions over others. Where I do bend the stories — like giving Athena demigod children or making Percy the son of Poseidon — I try to explain myself in the books.*"<sup>40</sup> Athena having demigod children and how Riordan went about their conception will be explored further in the thesis. As to making Percy the son of Poseidon, the reason for my opinion is the powers Percy inherits from Poseidon.

The main and titular character of Percy Jackson also serves as a window to learn about the mythological world. Because Percy does not remember most of the myths himself and has to be reminded of them. Thus, the author uses Percy's lack of knowledge to reintroduce the Greek myths to his readers. The general premise upon which the books seem to be written is limited knowledge of the Greek mythology, however, the series remains entertaining also to an educated reader.

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<sup>39</sup> Riordan, *Questions*

<sup>40</sup> Riordan, *Questions*

Throughout the book there are references enabling the reader to connect the dots themselves, before Percy is explicitly told, or figures out himself. Therefore, reading Riordan's books can be entertaining to both those well-versed in Greek mythology and those who do not recall any of the myths. To many, children especially, these five books about the demigod hero act as a gateway to Greek mythology. Furthermore, the series is entertaining even upon rereading, as with each rereading different hints can be discovered sprinkled throughout the story, offering a larger context, continuity and cohesion to the story.

### **Introduction to the world**

In the first instalment *Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief* (2005), Chapter 5, we discover along with Percy that the world of the Ancient Greek gods is still alive and well, meshed into our world. Chiron asks Percy whether he could imagine being immortal, whether people believed in gods or not.

*"You may choose to believe or not, but the fact is that immortal means immortal. Can you imagine that for a moment, never dying? Never fading? Existing, just as you are, for all time?" "You mean, whether people believed in you or not," I (Percy) said. "Exactly," Chiron agreed. "If you were a god, how would you like being called a myth, an old story to explain lightning?" (ILT, 68)*

In this excerpt Chiron introduces a timeless theme of immortality and the possible challenges that can come with it. In this exchange, an interesting point of view about religion is demonstrated, where gods, and religion in my opinion, are created by the believers. The very last line of this excerpt confirms the human tendency to invent stories to explain the nature's workings.

An example of situational humour Riordan uses when introducing the characters is demonstrated in the quote below, showing us the clueless Percy connecting the facts of the world just as we are introduced to the story. The humorous aspect of the mighty Greek gods in mundane situations with a clueless American teenager of modern age is one of the reasons the series is entertaining and popular.

*"What if I told you, Perseus Jackson, that someday people would call you a myth, just created to explain how little boys can get over losing their mothers?" (ILT, 69)* To which Percy answers he would not like it. But still maintaining that he did not believe in gods, thus prompting Mr. D to answer with *"Oh, you'd better," Mr. D murmured. "Before one of them incinerates you."* (ILT, 69)

As stated before, reading Riordan's novels can be entertaining to readers both with and without the knowledge of Greek mythology as hints dropped throughout the story help readers familiar with the myths connect the dots before being explicitly told in the story. One of the ways in which the author recapitulates the Greek myths is including them in Percy's inner monologues. For example, the following excerpt shows Percy being introduced to the god of wine, Dionysus, still not quite believing it yet.

*"I stammered, "your father is..." "Di immortales, Chiron," Mr. D said. "I thought you taught this boy the basics. My father is Zeus, of course." I ran through D names from Greek mythology. Wine. The skin of a tiger. The satyrs that all seemed to work here. The way Grover cringed, as if Mr. D were his master." (ILT, 70)*

The above excerpt demonstrates another tendency of meshing the worlds together by introducing mythological characters into the series through their cursing such as, "*Di immortales*". Another example could be "*Oh gods*" in plural form, as opposed to the usual *Oh God* in the singular form. Another example could be "*Oh, Styx*", invoking the river flowing in the Underworld. Tied to this river is also the most sacred, and most binding oath one can make and that is swearing on the River Styx. Riordan's methods of meshing the worlds together will be explored later in the thesis.

For the readers familiar with the Greek myths there is an intertextual allusion to Prometheus in the second book in Chapter 7 when Hermes is on the phone "*I don't care if he is chained to a rock with vultures pecking at his liver, if he doesn't have a tracking number, we can't locate his package.... A gift to humankind, great ... You know how many of those we deliver- Oh, never mind. Listen, just refer him to Eris in customer service. I gotta go.*" (2SM, 94) Readers familiar with the story of Prometheus recognize it as such through the references to vultures and gift to humankind, meaning the fire he stole from gods and gifted to humans. Ordinarily references of the myths are sprinkled throughout the story and only expanded upon when needed for the storytelling or for Percy's survival. The above excerpt also features a device Riordan uses to mesh the worlds together and that is the notion of "customer service" and "tracking number" phrases used in everyday language in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The series not only explores the traditional values and morals embodied by the heroes but also "mundane" relatable themes such as family, friendship, overcoming hardships (although admittedly, Percy deals with problems beyond our imagination) and even finding love.

## Language and the target audience

One of the ways to make the books readable to children and young adults is the use of their language as seen in the example below. The relatability of Percy is mainly in the language he speaks, for he uses the everyday language a boy of his age would. This choice of vocabulary and the light-hearted tone is what make the books relatable and readable for a young audience.

*"What do they say, these days, Grover? Do the children say, 'Well, duh!'?"*  
*"Y-yes, Mr. D."*  
*"Then, well, duh! Percy Jackson. Did you think I was Aphrodite, perhaps?"*  
(1LT, 70)

In *The Sea of Monsters*, Chapter 8, Percy cannot help but mention being embarrassed to be in a girls' bathroom when hiding from monsters, which adds humour into the dire situation, where a teenage boy focuses on being in a girls' bathroom rather than focusing on a monster who is trying to kill them.

*Annabeth gestured frantically toward the nearest hiding place the women's room-- and all three of us ducked inside. I was so freaked out it didn't even occur to me to be embarrassed. Annabeth looked at me. "We have to get out of here."*  
*"You think I want to be in the girls' restroom?"*  
*"I mean the ship, Percy! We have to get off the ship." (2SM, 114)*

A perhaps universally accepted fact is that most people, but especially children do not like to wake up early. In *The Titan's Curse*, Chapter 8, when Percy overhears the goddess of dawn Artemis speaking with a Hunter, he comments on the time of said exchange to be "ungodly"  
*"There were voices – two girls talking at one of the dining tables. At this ungodly hour of the morning? Well, unless you're the goddess of dawn, I guess." (3TC, 111)*

Another instance of children-targeted humour is shown in the excerpt below when Annabeth and Percy talk about whether they could be friends considering the relationship between their godly parents being rivals since the competition to be the patron of Athens where Athena won with creating the olive tree. This excerpt contains an exposition explaining the relationship, and one of the ways Riordan introduces the myths, where a character explains a myth to Percy and at the same time makes a joke at the end, again appealing to Riordan's readership.



*"Our parents are rivals."*

*"Why?"*

*She sighed. "How many reasons do you want? One time my mom caught Poseidon with his girlfriend in Athena's temple, which is hugely disrespectful. Another time, Athena and Poseidon competed to be the patron god for the city of Athens. Your dad created some stupid saltwater spring for his gift. My mom created the olive tree. The people saw that her gift was better, so they named the city after her."*

*"They must really like olives."*

*"Oh, forget it."*

*"Now, if she'd invented pizza--that I could understand."*

*"I said, forget it!" (1LT, 157)*

Riordan draws humour from his years as an English teacher, regarding the teaching and learning of the language itself and seems to either comment on it himself or reproduce a possible complaint from his students. The example chosen from the text is where Zöe Nightshade being significantly older uses the archaic terms *thee* and *thou* and after being corrected multiple times, she throws her hands up in exasperation and exclaims: *"I hate this language. It changes too often!"* (3TC, 169). In *The Lightning Thief* another joke regarding teachers can be noted when Chiron is explaining to Percy the quest to retrieve the stolen Zeus's master lightning bolt. Percy asks, *"By who?"*, to which Chiron corrects him with *"By whom,"* and Percy's immediate thought is *"Once a teacher, always a teacher."* (1LT, 135)

### **Play on words or common expressions**

Another example of the lore of the Greek myths in the stories could be the play with common phrases in the English language such as:

*The letters looked Greek to me. I mean, literally Greek."* (1LT, 83)

*"You're the man, Blackjack, I told him. "Er, the horse, I mean." (3TC, 266)*

*His goatee looked fuller, almost manly (or goatly?) (5LO, 103)*

Poseidon: *But my son, pray this works. "I am praying. I'm talking to you, right?"*

*Oh... yes. Good point. (5LO, 292)*

*"Go to Tartarus" (2SM, 125)*

*"That's when all Hades broke loose" (2SM, 232)*

*"And may the gods" – he glanced at Dionysus – "present company included; we hope – be with you." (3TC, 96)*

*"[Rachel] looked like a million golden drachma" (5LO, 1)*

In *The Sea of Monsters*, instead of figuratively speaking Percy uses *"mythologically speaking"* (2SM, 36)

## Humour

One of the ways humour is shown in language the characters use is exemplified in *The Titan's Curse*, Chapter 14, which is titled I Have a Dam Problem, the heroes are at the Hoover Dam and an unsuspecting Zoë suggests eating while they can and to go find “*the dam snack bar*”, thus prompting Percy, Grover and Thalia to laugh because of the homophony of the word dam to damn.

*"Let us find the dam snack bar," Zoë said. "We should eat while we can.  
Grover cracked a smile. "The dam snack bar?"  
Zoë blinked. "Yes. What is funny?"  
"Nothing, Grover said, trying to keep a straight face.  
"I could use some dam french fries.  
Even Thalia smiled at that. "And I need to use the dam restroom.  
Maybe it was the fact that we were so tired and strung out emotionally, but I started cracking up, and Thalia and Grover joined in, while Zoë just looked at us. "I do not understand."  
"I want to use the dam water fountain," Grover said.  
"And . . . Thalia tried to catch her breath. "I want to buy a dam T-shirt." (3TC, 197)*

In addition to language humour mentioned above, most of the situational humour comes from the absurdity of the great Greek gods in mundane settings, such as the god of wine, Dionysus drinking a Diet Coke, Hephaestus drinking Pepsi (4BL, 207), or the concept of Dionysus being “*grounded*” (1LT, 71) as a punishment by his father the great god Zeus.

The moments that prompt readers to laugh out loud more often than not is Percy’s narration itself, the voice he uses is oftentimes sarcastic and deadpan. In an interview, Riordan emphasises the importance of humour, for he would not read a book completely void of humour.<sup>41</sup> His fans have called him “sassy”, and he continues to joke about how his humour makes him get along with middle school children. He believes that comic relief brings sometimes much needed levity to serious and difficult situations. This is demonstrated many times through Percy making light of his dire situations or by the use of sarcasm. The dry humour is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

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<sup>41</sup> MPR News (2013). *Talking Volumes: Rick Riordan on using humor in his writing*. [Video] YouTube.

*"Europa fell off and died along the way, but that's not important."*

*"It was probably important to her."* (2SM, 82)

In this passage Annabeth is explaining to Percy that their quest would lead through the Sea of Monsters that Odysseus and Jason had to sail through on their quests. After Percy asks if she means the Mediterranean Sea, Annabeth answers with: *"No. Well, yes ... but no."* Percy's response shows the dry humour and sarcasm Riordan uses. *"Another straight answer. Thanks."* (2SM, 84). In Chapter 15 titled "A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers", there is a depiction of the comical situation of the god of war, Ares, buying cheeseburgers in modern time.

### **Family** and dynamics between siblings

Family humour is demonstrated below when Zeus is discussing Ares's behaviour in the first book, after discovering it was Ares who had given Percy the lightning bolt in hopes of starting a war between the gods of The Big Three with Poseidon. *"But that Ares would do such a thing ... it is most unlike him."* *"He is proud and impulsive, Poseidon said. "It runs in the family."* (1LT, 342) Poseidon lightly pokes fun at their family, pointedly at Zeus, calling him proud and impulsive.

Another element present throughout the entire series is the mythological characters' tendency to address Percy, and each other, according to their familial relations. In *The Lightning Thief*, for example, Ares addresses Percy as cousin: *"You know who I am, little cousin?"* (1LT, 226). For the reader, the notion of calling the Greek god of war cousin could be considered jarring and funny, and this aspect is only strengthened by the blasé way Percy accepts this reality.

In the following excerpt we can see the very human and playful sibling dynamic in *The Last Olympian*. After defeating Kronos and Typhon Zeus has a hard time thanking his brothers for the help they provided, without which, he must admit, the victory would be impossible. Hades and Poseidon tease Zeus for his obvious discomfort of having to thank them.

*"As for my brothers," Zeus said, "we are thankful" - he cleared his throat like the words were hard to get out-"erm, thankful for the aid of Hades." The lord of the dead inclined his head. He had a smug look on his face, but I figure he'd earned the right. [...] "And, of course," Zeus continued, though he looked like his pants were smoldering, "we must um... thank Poseidon."*

*"I'm sorry, brother," Poseidon said. "What was that?"*

*"We must thank Poseidon," Zeus growled. "Without whom ... it would've been difficult-"*

*"Difficult?" Poseidon asked innocently.*

*"Impossible," Zeus said. "Impossible to defeat Typhon." (5LO, 326)*

In the last book, when Hades comes to the rescue along with his brother Poseidon, when facing Kronos, who at first thought Hades has come to join him he retorts with: *"As much as I dislike certain upstart demigods, it would not do for Olympus to fall. I would miss bickering with my siblings. And if there is one thing we agree on it is that you were a TERRIBLE father."* (5LO, 297). Showing again the bickering love between the brothers of The Big Three, united in their discontentment with their father.

### **Percy's relationship with his mother**

An important theme in the series is Percy's relationship with his mother, his love for her is most prominent in *The Lightning Thief*. After seemingly losing her to the Minotaur, he goes on the quest to retrieve Zeus's lightning bolt with the hope of saving her from the Underworld. At the end of the book, he even considers using the cut-off head of Medusa to get rid of his stepfather Gabe for her. In the following excerpt, however, a playful dynamic between Percy and his mom can be seen. He is telling her the story of the quest including cleaning the stables of the monster Geryon, who wanted to hand them over to Luke in order to be free. *"When I got to the part about Geryon and the stables, my mom pretended like she was going to strangle me. 'I can't get him to clean his room, but he'll clean a hundred tons of horse manure out of some monster's stables!'"* (4BL, 230). Making of the perhaps universal way children have to be forced to clean up their own rooms. Their relationship can be summed up by this statement from Percy himself. *"My mom had always been there for me, always tried to make things normal for me, even with the gods and monsters and stuff."* (5LO, 97)

## **Familial relationship between the god of the sea and his son**

when Percy is asked not to speak of the chance of Kronos possibly coming back from the pit of Tartarus:

*"As ... as you wish, Father." A faint smile played on his lips.  
"Obedience does not come naturally to you, does it?"  
"No... sir."  
"I must take some blame for that, I suppose. The sea does not like to be restrained."*

We can see that the god of the sea loves his son and understands that the trait of not easily being obedient is something he passed down to Percy. In the next excerpt Percy is moved by his father being proud of him. This is at the end of *The Lightning Thief*, after a tumultuous journey, where Percy goes from thinking his father is dead, then finding out he is the god of the sea Poseidon and not being able to interact with him much, to Poseidon telling Percy he is proud of him.

*"Perseus." I turned. There was a different light in his eyes, a fiery kind of pride. "You did well, Perseus. Do not misunderstand me. Whatever else you do, know that you are mine. You are a true son of the Sea God." (ILT, 346)*

This contrasts well with Luke's relationship to his father Hermes where he feels abandoned and neglected up until the very end.

## **Reframing of the ADHD and dyslexia diagnoses**

The following excerpt from the first books shows a reframing of the traditionally negative connotations of the ADHD and dyslexia diagnoses in children. The author tries to reframe these diagnoses in a way that shows them as having a purpose for the demigods. The purpose of ADHD is to allow for survival or even success, and to make the demigods more efficient in a battle. Dyslexia is explained as a side effect of the demigod brain being designed to read ancient Greek.

*"The letters float off the page when you read, right? That's because your mind is hardwired for ancient Greek. And the ADHD – you're impulsive, can't sit still in the classroom. That's your battlefield reflexes. In a real fight, they'd keep you alive. As for the attention problems, that's because you see too much, Percy, not too little. Your senses are better than a regular mortal's. Of course the teachers want you medicated. Most of them are monsters. They don't want you seeing them for what they are." (ILT, 88)*

The last sentence of the quote about monsters being teachers who want to be kept in disguise is located in the first chapter where Percy is attacked by a Fury, previously disguised as Mrs. Dodds, a pre-algebra teacher.

Rick Riordan explains on his website that he was inspired by his own son's struggles with ADHD, and as a teacher himself, he has dealt a lot with children diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia. Nevertheless, when his son started struggling at school, he was able to see schoolwork from the point of view of a child struggling, instead of the other side of the table as a teacher. He found that many children were labelled as lazy but he knew from his own experience with his son that it does not always have to be the entire explanation. This is where his need to honour his son and all his students struggling with learning disabilities came from, and why the main protagonist of the Percy Jackson series suffers from both disabilities. He wanted to let his son and his students know that "*Being different wasn't a bad thing*", and that "*intelligence wasn't always measurable with a piece of paper and a number two pencil. Talent didn't come in only one flavor.*"<sup>42</sup> In the same blog post, the author, claims that since the publishing of the Percy Jackson series, he has received many appreciative e-mails from readers, many of them struggling with ADHD and dyslexia, who usually dislike reading.<sup>43</sup>

At the very end of the post, he sums up the impact the series has had: "*Like the Greek stories of old, The Lightning Thief is an attempt to explain a natural phenomenon — a myth to help my son make sense of who he is.*"<sup>44</sup> This statement ties everything back to why people have created myths, the reason being to make sense of their world, and explain the unexplainable.

The insights gained through his son Hayley's struggles with ADHD are included in the books, one example being that "*That's another thing about ADHD. Deadlines just aren't real to me until I'm staring one in the face.*" (, 360)

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<sup>42</sup> Riordan, R. (2005) *The Learning Disabled Hero*. Rick Riordan.

<sup>43</sup> Riordan, *Disabled Hero*

<sup>44</sup> Riordan, *Disabled Hero*

## **Gender perspective**

Goncea & Greenwood mention that the series is inherently chauvinistic or anti-feminist,<sup>45</sup> which is, in my opinion debunked in the main female character by Percy's side, daughter of Athena, Annabeth. "*What? You assume it has to a male god who finds a human female attractive? How sexist is that?*" (1LT, 95) By this quote I have concluded that Annabeth very much stands for males and females having equal rights and opportunities. Percy's treatment of female characters has never struck me as chauvinistic; he even repeatedly recognizes that Annabeth is in many ways superior to him and he would not have survived without her help. In *The Sea of Monsters*, Percy admits that Annabeth is smarter than him, although he would never admit it to Annabeth herself. She also saves him on many occasions, one of the first is from the Furies with the help of the invisible cap in *The Lightning Thief*. The equality of both these characters is depicted throughout the entire series, Percy and Annabeth are very much equals and take turns in saving each other, thus dispelling the notion of Annabeth being a damsel in distress. Rick Riordan, especially in his later works is very inclusive to minorities, people of colour and even represents people with different sexual orientations. The biggest example as of late of his inclusivity and recognition of the importance of its representation in media is casting a black actress named Leah Jeffries in the role of Annabeth Chase, originally conceived as a blonde-haired gray-eyed girl, in the upcoming Disney+ series.

## **Using the prophecies as a storytelling device**

The purpose of using a prophecy by the author could be to build suspense, as reader follows along and tries to guess, along with the characters in the story, what each line could mean. Since just as in the myths, the prophecies are cryptic and can be misinterpreted or interpreted in multiple ways, but eventually always come true. To better illustrate a cryptic prophecy from the myths, it is possible to use an example from a well-known story of Eros and Psyche from Petiška's *Staré řecké báje a pověsti* (1961).

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<sup>45</sup> Goncea, I., & Greenwood, D. (2021). How Does Male Readership Impact Character Portrayals in Contemporary Young Adult Adventure Novels?. *Journal of Student Research*. 10(3)

The prophecy there sounds as follows: "*Dress Psyche in a burial shroud, that will be her wedding dress. Take her to the top of the cliff behind the palace. A groom will come for her there. He is not of human race and can do cruel deeds.*"<sup>46</sup> The king misunderstands this prophecy as an immediate death sentence, while the princess goes to live in a palace with invisible servants, fulfilling her every wish and eventually lives happily ever after with her godly husband Eros.

### **Foreshadowing**

In the very first chapter when Percy's history teacher is lecturing about Greek myths, he specifically mentions Kronos, who becomes Percy's biggest enemy in the series. Furthermore, Percy's history teacher Mr. Brunner implores Percy to "*learn the answer to my question. What you learn from me is vitally important. I expect you to treat it as such. I will accept only the best from you, Percy Jackson.*" (1TL, 7) thus, foreshadowing the journey Percy is about to embark on.

The chapter titles are an example of foreshadowing in their own right. The titles represent a teenager's way of speaking and add humour and a childlike simplicity to much more complicated concepts, or makes light of their oftentimes dire circumstances. The first chapter is titled "I Accidentally Vaporize My Pre-Algebra Teacher". The pre-algebra teacher in question is actually Hades's monster called the Fury. The second chapter titled "Three Old Ladies Knit The Socks of Death" features three old ladies who are actually The Fates snipping a yarn and foretelling the end of Percy's life, however, it eventually turns out to have been the yarn of Luke's life.

In Chapter 11, titled "We Visit the Garden Gnome Emporium", Percy meets an "Aunty Em", from whose name an informed reader could piece together that M stands for **Medusa**. The chapter exhibits foreshadowing leading up to the revelation of the three characters, as demonstrated through an instance where Grover observes a collection of lifelike statues and comments on the resemblance of one to his uncle Ferdinand, stating, "*That sure does look like uncle Ferdinand. [...] That IS uncle Ferdinand!*" (1LT, 178)

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<sup>46</sup> Petiška, E. (1961) *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*, Albatros, p. 150? My translation.



After a closer inspection he realizes that the statue is in fact his uncle Ferdinand. Thus, piecing together that the monster they are facing right now is the Gorgon Medusa with the power to freeze anything she looks at into stone.

Another example of foreshadowing the developments across the entire series and especially the main antagonist of the series, the Titan lord Kronos, can be located in the very first chapter when the centaur Chiron in disguise as Percy's history teacher Mr. Brunner asks Percy about a picture during a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The picture represents Kronos eating his children, one of the few myths Percy seems to recall, where Zeus tricks Kronos "*into barfing up his brothers and sisters*". (1LT, 5)

Another example involving Chiron is when Percy thinks that "*There is no way I was going to remember the difference between Chiron and Charon.*" (1LT, 18) foreshadows meeting the guard of the door to the Underworld. Making Percy realise the difference between Chiron and Charon. Upon meeting Charon, he even states that he hates being mistaken for Chiron.

In the series whenever anyone calls Percy by his full name, Perseus Jackson, it is a clear sign that we have encountered a monster, for no one from the mortal world knows Percy's full name and therefore his real identity. In *The Sea of Monsters*, Chapter 2, the monsters Laystrigions call him by his full name.

### **The Themes in *The Last Olympian***

Because of unclaimed or neglected children that have in part enabled the war to brew and Kronos to get as strong as he did with so many joining his side, the book concludes with Percy asking the gods to claim their children and to prevent the neglect to lead to another war, shown in the quote below:

*"Kronos couldn't have risen if it hadn't been for a lot of demigods who felt abandoned by their parents," I said. "They felt angry, resentful, and unloved, and they had a good reason." (5LO, 332)*

Immortality was mentioned in the first novel in references to the gods but in the last sequel, immortality is further explored when Percy is offered the gift of immortality for saving Olympus. (This also happens to Odysseus, who is offered immortality by Calypso.) Percy realises that he likes his mortality and has a lot of life left to live and declines the offer.

### 2.3. Comparison of characters

In the following pages, an examination of character comparisons will be conducted, primarily emphasizing their differences rather than their shared traits. The analysis will particularly concentrate on “*The Lightning Thief*” as it serves as the foundation for the story's world and introduces the majority of the characters for the first time. Subsequent books will be analysed only if the newly introduced characters play significant roles in the narrative.

The comparison will be conducted using the books of the *Percy Jackson & The Olympians* series and *Classical Mythology A to Z: An Encyclopaedia of Gods, Goddesses, Heroes, Heroines, Nymph, Spirits, Monsters and Places* by Annette Giesecke in combination with *Staré řecké báje a pověsti* by Eduard Petiška. For the purposes of this part, the following acronyms will be used for the above secondary texts: CM for *Classical Mythology A-Z* and SRBP for *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*. The characters analysed are arranged in order of first appearance in the series, further information and expansion on the characters will be added to their first mention.

In general, Riordan stays faithful to the characters in Greek mythology especially regarding their appearance and powers, and therefore, the following pages will focus on the differences Riordan has made.

The examples where Riordan adheres closely to the source material include (the descriptions of) monstrous characters such as the Furies, the Fates, Cerberus, and others.

Other examples of a faithful portrayal of characters are **Orpheus and Hercules**, who are mentioned twice in allusions to their successful missions to the Underworld. The first mention is when Percy asks Grover in hopes of saving his mother and the second mention comes from a Nereid who gifts Percy with three pearls to ensure his safe return to the world of the living, out of Hades' realm. “*I know you journey to Hades's realm," she said. "Few mortals have ever done this and survived: Orpheus, who had great music skill; Hercules, who had great strength; Houdini, who could escape even the depths of Tartarus.*“ (ILT, 272)

**Minotaur** – All three sources (+ CM and SRBP) describe the monster living in Crete as half man and half bull.

### 2.3.1. *The Lightning Thief*

The first character from Greek mythology appearing in the book is the satyr **Grover**, whom the unsuspecting Percy describes as a scrawny person who cries when frustrated, with pubescent acne and a hint of a wispy beard on his chin, and with some kind of muscular disease in his legs for he walks in a funny way, but curiously runs fast to the cafeteria. It is later revealed that he has cloven hooves, where legs should be. In Chapter 4, he is described as having a big appetite. He even goes as far as to groan “food” after they are struck by lightning. I have not found any references to a satyr’s appetite in the source texts, so I assume this is something the author has added for the sake of humour and relatability. As for the description of satyrs: half goat and half human, with tails and horns, this is accurate to the description of satyrs in *Classical Mythology A-Z*. (CM, 296)

Another added trait to satyrs by Riordan is the ability to read emotions (1LT, 158) and smell monsters, which is discovered when Percy is worried about his mom and his stepfather Gabe and wondering why she married such an awful man. Grover tells Percy that the reason she did that was to protect him, for Gabe has a “*smelly*” (1LT, 158) aura that covers Percy’s demigod aura from the monsters, which is why Percy has been able to survive without monster attacks for so long. Both secondary sources (CM, SRBP) mention that satyrs were associated with the god of wine Dionysus. (SRBP, 29)

In the same first chapter, we meet the character of **Chiron**, a centaur disguised as Percy’s Latin teacher, possibly based on the author himself and his 15-year tenure as an English and history teacher, which offers humorous situations, such as Chiron’s making all the multiple-choice answers in a test B: “*The Latin teacher turned and smiled at me. His eyes had that mischievous glint they sometimes got in class when he pulled a pop quiz and made all the multiple choice answers B.*” (1LT, 5) Disguising Chiron as a teacher is very fitting considering the centaur originally was the teacher of heroes in the myths, with Jason (Iason), Achilles or Asclepius among his students. (CM, 282)

The description given of the centaur is accurate to the myths as being half man and half horse: “*torso of a man and body of a horse but differed from his kind in that he was wise, gentle and cultured.*” (CM, 282) The distinction of Chiron being the only one of his kind who was cultured is mentioned in *The Lightning Thief*.

*“My kinsmen are a wild and barbaric folk, I'm afraid.  
You might encounter them in the wilderness, or at major sporting events.  
But you won't see any here.”* (1LT, 82)

**Kronos** – Throughout the entire book series, Percy has nightmares about a dark and powerful voice from a pit of darkness Tartarus, which turns out to be that of the Titan lord Kronos, who inserts evil thoughts into the minds he invades, including Luke's and Ares's.

The history of Kronos and the Olympian gods is accurate; where the character differs from the classical original is the power of invading minds. there is no mention of such power in *Classical Mythology A-Z*.

**Poseidon** – The god chosen to be Percy Jackson' father, the god of the sea Poseidon, is analysed in more detail because of his role in the series and his characteristics shown through Percy who inherited them.

Percy's mother Sally Jackson describes Poseidon as: *“kind, tall, handsome, powerful. But gentle too. You have his black hair, you know, and his green eyes.”* (1LT, 38)

His attributes mentioned by the characters in *Percy Jackson* such as: *Earthshaker, Stormbringer, Father of Horses* (1LT, 126) and *God of earthquakes* (1LT, 202) are accurate, compared to *Classical Mythology A-Z*: *“Poseidon was also the god of earthquakes, described by Homer as the "Earthshaker" who caused the earth to tremble when he struck it with his trident. Furthermore he was the god of horses”* (CM, 92)

The way Riordan expands on this character is through modernising his attire: he is often clad in Bermuda shorts, a Hawaiian shirt and Birkenstocks. (4BL, 336). To increase relatability, Poseidon is given a mischievous, playful and kind nature. The excerpt that best describes the playfulness of the sea god comes from *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, Chapter 20, where Poseidon is meeting Percy's new stepfather. The passage also showcases the humour in a mortal meeting the god of the Sea. At the end of the quote, the expression of “ancient history” can be read as a pun for in this case the expression gains a literal sense.

'Hi, I'm Paul Blofis.'  
 Poseidon raised his eyebrows as they shook hands. 'Blowfish, did you say?'  
 'Ah, no. Blofis, actually.'  
 'Oh, I see, Poseidon said. 'A shame. I quite like blowfish. I am Poseidon'  
 'Poseidon? That's an interesting name.'  
 'Yes, I like it. I've gone by other names, but I do prefer Poseidon.  
 'Like the god of the sea.'  
 'Very much like that, yes! 'I couldn't miss Percy's fifteenth birthday, Poseidon said.  
 'Why, if this were Sparta, Percy would be a man today!'  
 'That's true, Paul said. 'I used to teach ancient history.'  
 'That's me. Ancient history.' (4BL, 337)

### **Poseidon's relationship with his children**

In Petiška's *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*, in the story about Odysseus, Poseidon's loyalty to his children is shown through Poseidon punishing Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus: *Poseidon heard the pleas of his son Polyphemus and pleaded with Zeus. "Odysseus you have grievously angered the god Poseidon, by blinding his son Polyphemus."* (SRBP, 196 own translation)

It can be compared to the kind nature shown towards Percy in *The Last Olympian* where Percy is describing a hug initiated by the godly father, mentioning that he had a kind smile.

*He held out his arms and gave me a hug. I realized, a little embarrassed, that I'd never actually hugged my dad before. He was warm - like a regular human - and he smelled of a salty beach and fresh sea air. When he pulled away, he smiled kindly at me. I felt so good, I'll admit I teared up a little.* (5LO, 325)

**Dionysus** – The god of wine in the series is called Mr. D. and he is a Camp director sent there as a punishment from Zeus for a century. He is described as a “*pudgy little man in tiger-print Hawaiian shirt.*” (1LT, 65)

Regarding Dionysus's powers, Percy's description correlates with the description in *Staré řecké báje a pověsti* by Petiška, in the story of Pentheus. However, what Riordan has added is the reverse of his powers, where he cures a demigod's Chris Rodriguez's madness in *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, Chapter 19. An expansion of this character's powers is exemplified in Chapter 15 of *The Last Olympian*, mentioning that wherever there is a celebration, his presence is invoked, and therefore he “*can exist in many different places at once.*” (5LO, 250). This allows Riordan to justify Dionysus's reachability among the war the gods were fighting on all fronts.

The god of wine is also described as a caring father as demonstrated in *The Last Olympian*: “*One last thing. My son Pollux. Is he alive?*” (5LO, 253). Here he, to Percy’s surprise, shows concern for his son and asks Percy to keep an eye on him.

**Hermes**’s attributes such as being the god of travellers and thieves, and a messenger of the gods are accurate; again, where this character differs is an expansion of his fatherly role. His attire is modernised by the choice of footwear: *The wings on Hermes's Reeboks fluttered restlessly* (5LO, 211). The aspect of modernisation is also portrayed in the way Hermes helps Percy against the sorceress Circe. In *Petiška*, he aids Odysseus by giving him an herb (SRBP, 200), whereas to Percy he gives Minotaur-shaped chewable vitamins. (2SM, 98) Hermes is also said to have invented the internet. (2SM, 99)

The goddess of wisdom, **Athena** is generally portrayed faithfully to the source texts. Where Riordan deviates is giving her demigod children even though she, along with Artemis, vowed to be a maiden goddess. The birth of her demigod children mirrors her birth from Zeus’s head. “*Children of Athena are sprung from the divine thoughts of our mother and the mortal ingenuity of our father. We are supposed to be a gift, a blessing from Athena on the men she favours.*” (4BL, 186)

**Hades** – The Lord of the Dead has rarely been depicted in art (CM, 54), therefore most of the characteristics in the series is of Riordan’s imagination. Hades’s symbol of power is the Helm of Darkness that allows him to “*become darkness. He can melt into shadow or pass through walls. He can't be touched, or seen, or heard. And he can radiate fear so intense it can drive you insane or stop your heart.*” (1LT, 204) The next line, where Grover explains the fear of the dark that many people and other creatures share “*Why do you think all rational creatures fear the dark?*” shows the way in which Riordan merges the worlds together, explaining that many creatures are afraid of the dark because of Hades. When Percy is in the presence of the god of Death, he feels numb and tempted to lie down and sleep forever. The following excerpt demonstrates the humorous aspect of Percy calling the god of death uncle, while depicting ADHD and the language and humour in the form of a joke targeted at the young readership of the series.

*"Lord and Uncle, I come with two requests." Hades raised an eyebrow. When he sat forward in his throne, shadowy faces appeared in the folds of his black robes, faces of torment, as if the garment were stitched of trapped souls from the Fields of Punishment, trying to get out. The ADHD part of me wondered, off-task, whether the rest of his clothes were made the same way. What horrible things would you have to do in your life to get woven into Hades's underwear?"(1LT, 310)*

Another theme explored through Hades is being an outcast as he is not allowed on Mount Olympus except for winter solstice, His grudge is a theme especially in the last book of the series, where he overcomes it to help his brothers against Kronos, thus earning a seat at the Olympus.

**Medusa** – When visiting the Garden Gnome Emporium, the only person suspicious of anything is Grover. He even proclaims that he smells monsters, but Annabeth and Percy are enchanted to enter and ignore his warning. Medusa, disguised as Aunty Em, mentions that she had two sisters. *"Her hair was moving, writhing like serpents"* (1LT, 179) As Percy racks his brain and tries to remember how Medusa was defeated in the myth. He remembers that it was his namesake Perseus who had defeated her. Medusa reveals that it was Athena, Annabeth's mother who turned her from a beautiful woman into the monster she is now. Annabeth later dispels this by reminding Percy that it was in fact his father Poseidon, with whom the Gorgon Medusa had been with, and decided to meet in Athena's temple. The only significant change is modernising the place she lives in as a statue emporium, where she lures her victims.

**Ares** – Giesecke in *Classical Mythology A-Z* mentions Ares's romance with Aphrodite and Hephaestus's jealousy, which correlates to what is mentioned about the god of war in the adaptation by Riordan. Where the author steers from the classical portrayal is the attire Ares wears throughout the story: he is described as a biker in a black leather jacket with *"the cruellest, most brutal face."* (1LT, 225)

Whenever Percy is near Ares, *"bad feelings"* (1LT, 225) start to boil in his stomach such as anger, resentment and bitterness. The presence of Ares makes a person have an urge to hit a wall or pick a fight with somebody.

Ares was tricked by Kronos through Luke as he stole the master lightning bolt from Zeus by planting an idea of a great war between the gods. The god of war is depicted as a brute who relies on his anger as the primary emotion. *"Ares has strength. That's all he has. Even strength has to bow to wisdom sometimes."* (1LT, 229) Perhaps this is why Percy is able to defeat the god of war in a later chapter.

**Zeus** – In regard to the lord of the gods, his dominion, powers and symbols of it, along with the details of Athena’s birth, are accurately described adhering to the myths. What Riordan has added to the character is Zeus’s attire and the childish bickering with his godly siblings. His pride and his explosiveness demonstrated in the story of Prometheus is very much intact in his interactions with Percy, where he constantly threatens to destroy Percy.

### 2.3.2. *The Sea of Monsters*

In the following books only characters who deviate from the myths will be compared to their templates in the Greek myths.

**Tantalus** - The fate of Tantalus is the same as in the myths, the difference is in the modernisation of the character. He is described to be wearing an orange prisoner’s jumpsuit, and also, he is not suffering from his triple torture for the time being because he came to replace Chiron as activities director at Camp Half-Blood. *"I am Tantalus," the prisoner said, smiling coldly. "On special assignment here until, well, until my Lord Dionysus decides otherwise.* (2SM, 55) The curse of always having to be hungry and thirsty continues in the Camp where whenever Tantalus wants to eat or drink, every beverage and food jump away from him.

### 2.3.3. *The Titan’s Curse*

**Apollo** - In Chapter 3 of *The Titan’s Curse*, we meet Artemis’s twin brother Apollo, whose most prominent added aspect is that he makes haikus, which reflects his being the god of poetry. Funnily though, his haikus are described by Percy as awful (3TC, 147)

Through this character Riordan offers another way of meshing the world of science and the world of ancient Greek gods together. When Nico asks how it is possible that science has taught him that sun was made of gas whereas here, he sees the sun god riding the sun chariot. The simple explanation is that the sun chariot is a manifestation of human perception of the sun.

The various accounts of the Hesperides in the myths have enabled Riordan to add a sister and name her Zöe Nightshade. They were nymphs who were tasked with safeguarding the golden apples of immortality. The number of the Hesperides vary between four and seven. Their names also vary some examples given in *Classical Mythology A-Z being*: “Aegle, Erytheia, Hestia, Arethusa, Hespere, Hesperusa, and Hespereia” (CM, 63)



#### 2.3.4. *The Battle of the Labyrinth*

**Daedalus** – the inventor of the Labyrinth trapping the Minotaur one of the changes is the name Perdix according to CM meant Daedalus' sister and in *The Battle of the Labyrinth* the nephew he killed, the nephew according to CM is named Talus. Another change in Riordan's portrayal to fit the story of him surviving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the mad creator made himself a new body. Riordan also changed the Labyrinth in his stories, which is no longer located in Crete but moves around the world and has multiple entrances. (CM, 164)

**Sphinx** – the hybrid monster asking riddles has undergone modernisation. The question she used to ask people, and when answered wrong, sent them to their deaths, until Oedipus had correctly solved the riddle after which she threw herself of the cliff, the riddle is referenced in Chapter 10. When Annabeth asks why she did not have to solve the same riddle, Sphinx explains that the reason is because Annabeth already knows the answer and that is "*exactly why we changed the test!*" (4BL, 173) The modernisation also allows Riordan to use jokes from his previous occupation when referring to schoolwork. One of these phrases are the repeating phrases when instructing students before they sit a test.

*'Please be sure to mark your answer clearly on your test sheet with a 2B pencil.  
[...] 'Make sure you bubble each answer clearly and stay inside the circle the Sphinx said. 'If you have to erase, erase completely or the machine will not be able to read your answers.'* (4BL, 173)

This passage points out the the standardisations of tests that often do not test the ability to think but rather to memorise facts:

*'It's just a bunch of dumb, random facts,' Annabeth insisted. 'Riddles are supposed to make you think.'  
'Think?' The Sphinx frowned. 'How am I supposed to test whether you can think? That's ridiculous!' (4BL, 174)*

The following sentence is perhaps the most telling of Riordan's personal experience with teaching. It shows Sphinx complaining about having to grade all the tests by hand.

*[...] We ran through the dark tunnels, listening to the roar of the Sphinx behind us as she complained about all the tests she would have to grade by hand. (4BL, 176)*

**Calypso** – In Petiška’s retelling of the story, Calypso, a beautiful immortal, intentionally tries to make Odysseus forget the outside world and keeps him from leaving her island Ogygia for seven years. Only after Athena takes pity on him and pleads with Zeus to allow him to come home does Zeus send Hermes to Calypso with orders to release Odysseus. (SRBP, 207) In *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, when Percy ends up in Ogygia, Calypso is not intentionally trying to keep him from leaving, she even goes out of her way not to get attached to Percy and willingly shows him the way out when Percy is strong enough to leave.

### 2.3.5. *The Last Olympian*

**Achilles** – While mentioned in the previous instalments of the series only in passing, the cursed hero makes a more significant appearance in Chapter 8 when Percy is at the river Styx, about to jump in and takes on the curse of Achilles. Riordan significantly expands the curse. In SRBP, there’s only a mention of Achilles being bathed in the River Styx by his mother who holds him by his heel and thus makes it the only vulnerable part of his body. Riordan expands the curse by adding rules to how the curse works, such as finding an anchor to his humanity and needing their mother’s blessing beforehand. The curse does not only increase a person’s combat prowess but along with that, it also increases weaknesses. Achilles explains that the only way to take on the curse is to think of an anchor to mortality, that is, if Percy loses sight of that mortal point, he will cease to be.

*"You mean I'll have a bad heel?" I said. "Couldn't I just, like, wear something besides sandals? No offense."*  
*He stared down at his bloody foot. "The heel is only my physical weakness, demigod. My mother, Thetis, held me there when she dipped me in the Styx. What really killed me was my own arrogance. Beware! Turn back!" He meant it. I could hear the regret and bitterness in his voice. He was honestly trying to save me from a terrible fate. Achilles lowered his head. "Let the gods witness I tried. Hero, if you must do this, concentrate on your mortal point. Imagine one spot of your body that will remain vulnerable. This is the point where your soul will anchor your body to the world. It will be your greatest weakness, but also your only hope. No man may be completely invulnerable. Lose sight of what keeps you mortal, and the River Styx will burn you to ashes. You will cease to exist." (SLO, 123)*

To conclude this comparison of characters, Riordan generally stays faithful to their depictions in the myths and where there are multiple variations, he chooses the one that best fits into the story of Percy Jackson. He expands characters utilized more for his storytelling by modifying them to fit into the world of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The characters in the myths, except for the heroes, are static, they do not undergo character development and are used as devices to further the stories of Greek heroes. In the last instalment of the series, the gods' characters evolve and even change. In Chapter 23 of *The Last Olympian*, Poseidon says when visiting Percy to thank him for saving Olympus: *"I've gotten so many thank-you cards from the other gods. Even Ares wrote one, though I think Hera forced him to. It's rather gratifying. So, thank you. I suppose even the gods can learn new tricks."* (5LO, 357) The same sentiment is expressed by Hermes in Chapter 21: *"Percy Jackson," Hermes said, "you might just teach us a thing or two."* (5LO, 339)

#### **2.4. The reanimation of the Ancient Mythology – The collision of both worlds**

The following part explores the tendencies Riordan employs to mesh the worlds of mortals and immortals.

##### **The 21<sup>st</sup> century and Americanisation**

The first interaction of Percy with Dionysus, the god of wine, demonstrates the way of Riordan's weaving the two worlds together by adding American brands and references to popular culture and everyday mundane life. Dionysus is portrayed as drinking a Diet Coke in substitution of wine. This is combined with manifestation of godly power of changing or materialising beverages. *"Mr. D waved his hand again, and the wineglass changed into a fresh can of Diet Coke."* (1LT, 69)

Popular culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also classical music, are mentioned when Grover gets ready to embark on the quest, packing a set of reed pipes, *"even though he only knew two songs: Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 12 and Hilary Duff's "So Yesterday"* (1LT, p. 150) (The second song mentioned is a song from 2003 by a popular singer and Disney actress.). In *The Last Olympian*, another reference to popular culture can be seen when Percy is describing Poseidon's underwater palace saying that *"They don't show you stuff like that in The Little Mermaid."* (5LO, 27)

Another modern-day adjustment to enable the characters to communicate, as they are not recommended to use phones because it could attract monsters, is “Iris-messaging” where the rainbow goddess Iris carries messages for gods and occasionally for half-bloods, provided they ask properly. (1LT, 222).

In *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, Chapter 5, another example of an American brand being included in the story can be seen, this time the food chain McDonald’s.

*Nico Buys Happy Meals for the Dead - He dropped the rest of the Cokes into the grave and pulled out a white paper bag decorated with cartoons. I hadn't seen one in years, but I recognized it - a McDonald's Happy Meal. [...] 'At least let me keep the toy, the ghost said. Nico had summoned the dead with Coke and cheeseburgers. (4BL, 83)*

The title of the Chapter *Nico Buys Happy Meals for the Dead* already is jarring because it pairs a modern-day menu item name with the son of Hades, lord of the dead, where the dead are summoned by Coke and cheeseburgers.

### **Integration of the mortal world with the gods’ world (21<sup>st</sup> century and Ancient Greece) Modern civilisation vs. Ancient civilisation**

One of the examples Riordan uses to mesh the two worlds together is explaining the mystery of The Bermuda Triangle, where ships get lost, as being the Sea of Monsters. In the following excerpt, the explanation is communicated through the conversation of Percy and Annabeth.

*"But a whole sea full of monsters - how could you hide something like that? Wouldn't the mortals notice weird things happening ... like, ships getting eaten and stuff?"*  
*"Of course they notice. They don't understand, but they know something is strange about that part of the ocean. The Sea of Monsters is off the east coast of the U.S. now, just northeast of Florida. The mortals even have a name for it."*  
*"The Bermuda Triangle?"*

The collision of Ancient Greek gods’ world with our world injects **humour** into the books, as depicted in the exchange further, showcasing two different understandings of the word Olympian, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means an athlete at the Olympic Games and in the Ancient Greek mythological world means one of the gods on Mount Olympus.

*"One of thy parents was mortal. The other was an Olympian."*  
*"An Olympian... athlete?" (3TC, 28)*

**Mist** – To explain how “mortals” have lived their lives unaware of the Greek mythology still alive in the world, the author invents the Mist, which is mist with the power of obscuring visions of humans. A half-blood can see things as they are, but a mortal interprets everything to fit into their perceived version of reality. (1LT, 155)

In order to not fully rely on the Mist, magic and disguise are used. For example, Chiron uses a magic wheelchair hiding his entire lower half of the body and Grover uses pants to hide his hooves and goat legs.

### **Christianity**

Riordan has invented a way to integrate Christianity and explain the presence of the Greek gods in 21<sup>st</sup> where a considerable number of people believe in the Christian God. In the following quote we can see a preacher being punished in the Underworld even though or perhaps because he believes in a different hell.

*"What're they doing to him?"  
"Special punishment from Hades,"  
[...] "But if he's a preacher," I said, "and he believes in a different hell..."  
Grover shrugged. "Who says he's seeing this place the way we're seeing it? Humans see what they want to see. You're very stubborn -er, persistent, that way." (1LT, 292)*

Riordan's attitude towards Christianity is not clear, he only mentions the religion this one time. This excerpt can be interpreted as both, the possibility of peaceful coexistence of multiple beliefs or perhaps the blindness of those believing in anything else but the Greek gods.

**Science** – In Chapter 5 of *The Lightning Thief* when Chiron is explaining the existence of the Greek gods in today's world, Percy's is dumbfounded because to this day, he believed that the myths about gods were made up by humans to explain natural phenomena before there was science. To which Dionysus just scoffs and says that humans have absolutely no sense of perspective.

*"Great powers are at work in your life. Gods-the forces you call the Greek gods-are very much alive."  
"I stared at the others around the table. I waited for somebody to yell, Not!  
"But they're stories. They're myths, to explain lighting and the seasons and stuff. They're what people believed before there was science."  
"Science!" Mr. D scoffed. "And tell me, Perseus Jackson, what will people think of your 'science' two thousand years from now? Hmm? They will call it primitive mumbo jumbo. That's what. Oh, I love mortals – they have absolutely no sense of perspective. They think they've come so-o-o far."*

What the character of Dionysus, (and Hermes), allude to is the human ignorance, they want to see what they want to and anything that does not fit into their understanding of the world, they dismiss. This tendency is mentioned in the part about the Mist, above.

Chapter 4 of *The Titan's Curse*, a more pronounced explanation of the coexistence of science and religion is delivered through Apollo, the god of sun. In the excerpt Apollo is explaining to Nico how his sun chariot works and what it represents for humans, because Nico thought the sun was just gas. Riordan treats the myths surrounding the godly characters that he did not decide to use in his reimagination of the stories by simply calling them rumours.

*"But how does it work?" Nico asked.  
"I thought the sun was a big fiery ball of gas!"  
Apollo chuckled and ruffled Nico's hair. "That rumor probably got started because Artemis used to call me a big fiery ball of gas. Seriously, kid, it depends on whether you're talking astronomy or philosophy. You want to talk astronomy?  
Bah, what fun is that? You want to talk about how humans think about the sun?  
Ah, now that's more interesting. They've got a lot riding on the sun ... er, so to speak. It keeps them warm, grows their crops, powers engines, makes everything look, well, sunnier. This chariot is built out of human dreams about the sun, kid.  
It's as old as Western Civilization. Every day, it drives across the sky from east to west, lighting up all those puny little mortal lives. The chariot is a manifestation of the sun's power, the way mortals perceive it. Make sense?" (3TC, 47)*

### **Western civilisation**

The concept of western civilisation is treated as an illusion. The gods see it as a dynamic force, a “collective consciousness” that is tightly connected to the ancient past. Chiron in the fifth chapter of *The Lightning Thief* explains to Percy that:

*"[I]t's a living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years. The gods are part of it. You might even say they are the source of it, or at least, they are tied so tightly to it that they couldn't possibly fade, not unless all of Western civilization were obliterated. The fire started in Greece. Then, as you well know-or as I hope you know, since you passed my course the heart of the fire moved to Rome, and so did the gods. Oh, different names, perhaps- Jupiter for Zeus, Venus for Aphrodite, and so on--but the same forces, the same gods."  
"And then they died."  
"Died? No. Did the West die? The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while. Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there. They spent several centuries in England. All you need to do is look at the architecture.*

The architecture Chiron is referring to include: “*statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center, the Greek facades of your government buildings in Washington.*” (1LT, 72)

## Rules and Ancient laws

One of the ways in which the author makes the merged worlds work is by adding rules that are not featured in the classical myths. The author establishes them in order to make sense of the ancient world still surviving within our modern world and explains through them how it is possible that the monsters from the myths still persist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

One of the rules is that monsters cannot die: they can be killed, but never actually die. They are only extinguished for a period of time but eventually get reborn. The reason given is that “[t]hey don't have souls, like you and me. You can dispel them for a while, maybe even for a whole lifetime if you're lucky. But they are primal forces. Chiron calls them archetypes. Eventually, they re-form.” (1LT, 86)

In *The Sea of Monsters*, Chapter 2, Percy explains that monsters dissipate into smoke and dust, (2SM, 19) which could be seen as another way the author helps to weave the mortal world into the immortal one. He explains how the world of gods and heroes has been disguised in the mortal one, by making monsters disappear and simultaneously sparing demigods the effort of having to clean up after them.

Another rule concerns the children of the Big Three, who made a pact not to have any more children with mortals, as mentioned in Chapter 8 of *The Lightning Thief* where Percy asks about the Camp cabins and their occupants. He notices that the cabins dedicated to Zeus, Poseidon and Hades are empty and asks about the reason: *"But Zeus and Poseidon they both had, like, a bazillion kids in the myths. Why are their cabins empty?"* To which Grover replies that:

*About sixty years ago, after World War II, the Big Three agreed they wouldn't sire any more heroes. Their children were just too powerful. They were affecting the course of human events too much, causing too much carnage. World War II, you know, that was basically a fight between the sons of Zeus and Poseidon on one side, and the sons of Hades on the other. The winning side, Zeus and Poseidon, made Hades swear an oath with them: no more affairs with mortal women. They all swore on the River Styx." Thunder boomed. I said, "That's the most serious oath you can make. (1LT, 113)*

The last sentence of this quote shows another one of Riordan's inventions to merge the worlds. Swearing on the River Styx that flows in the Underworld, Hades's realm, is the most binding promise one can make. This is later used by Percy on the gods themselves when requesting a reward for saving Olympus and “Western civilisation” from the Titan lord Kronos. Percy made sure to make the gods swear on River Styx after being tricked by Hades in the first instalment of the series.

*"Percy, children of the Big Three have powers greater than other half-bloods. They have a strong aura, a scent that attracts monsters. When Hades found out about the girl, he wasn't too happy about Zeus breaking his oath. Hades let the worst monsters out of Tartarus to torment Thalia."*

Hades is only allowed to visit Olympus during the winter solstice council meeting because it is the "*darkest day of the year*" (1LT, 204)

The first ancient law is mentioned in *The Lightning Thief*, when Percy is sent on his first quest, stating that "*a god cannot usurp another god's symbol of power directly--that is forbidden by the most ancient of divine laws.*" (1LT, 136). The second law justifying the use of heroes in the stories is that "*Immortals are constrained by ancient rules. But a hero can go anywhere, challenge anyone, as long as he has the nerve.*" (2SM, 17). Another law concerning heroes going on a quest is that demigods are "*allowed only two companions.*" (4BL, 72)

To explain and justify the possibility of a romance between demigods, especially between Annabeth and Percy, Riordan establishes that since gods do not pass down DNA to their children, they are not in fact related, the only demigod romances that are not happening is when the two half-bloods have the same godly parentage. Thus, Riordan adds a romance plot to the story of Percy Jackson.

*"Aren't all demigods related on the godly side, and doesn't that make dating gross? But the thing is, the godly side of your family doesn't count, genetically speaking, since gods don't have DNA. A demigod would never think about dating someone who had the same godly parent. Like two kids from Athena cabin? No way. But a daughter of Aphrodite and a son of Hephaestus? They're not related. So it's no problem. (5LO, 64)*

The most important rule established is that gods are forbidden to interfere and help their children directly, Zeus has forbidden interference for the sake of fairness and to avoid favouritism. The only help Percy receives from Poseidon is through his inherited powers or through sea spirits. When a god directly helps the heroes, it has to be with previous permission from Zeus and only when deemed necessary.



## Conclusion

My analysis has demonstrated that Rick Riordan incorporates the characters from Greek mythology fairly accurately as described in the myths, but he bends them in ways to serve his story, as expected from a wider use of the characters in the story than in their source texts. The gods in the source texts generally only serve as background characters to the heroes' journeys, therefore their personalities and characters are not shown in great detail. (In stories where gods play larger roles than just as devices to a hero's journey, as in Petiška's *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*, they are given personalities). Riordan's god characters have personalities and backgrounds explaining their actions, but their well-known attributes are derived from the source literature. Riordan expands their characteristics and offers an image of what these celestial beings would look like if they existed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Riordan employs various techniques to evoke readers' knowledge of the myths he selects to incorporate into the narrative, explaining their purpose within the texts itself. He either tells us through a character or Percy tries to recall the knowledge himself.

What started as bedtime stories for his son has turned into a very successful series that expanded into another one, and several standalone books, and eventually to further series such as *Demigod Diaries* etc. The success of the Percy Jackson series inspired another adaptation: *Percy Jackson & The Olympians*, a Disney+ TV series is currently in production. The fictional Camp Half-Blood has inspired fans to recreate the camp in real life.

In my opinion, Riordan's work has made a substantial impact on the children's education of Greek myths. Some could call it a gateway into Greek mythology. From my own experience reading the Percy Jackson novels has informed me better about the Greek mythology characters. One of the further uses was when I was sitting a test of the myths retelling by E. Petiška. Therefore, the Greek mythology through the stories of Percy Jackson has for many, just as in my own case, undoubtedly come alive.

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