

The Mythic World in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson Novels

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti i sociologije

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Mitski svijet u romanima o Percyju Jacksonu Ricka Riordana

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Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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Abstract

Mythological places, characters, and events have been the topic of many tales, epics, poems, plays, and other literary works. Mythology continues to serve as an inspiration to many authors across all literary periods, even to modern young adult fantasy writers such as Rick Riordan who in his Percy Jackson series skillfully and creatively merges the world of Greek mythology with the modern world we live in. He takes mythological elements and gives them a new, modern form, which enables their blending into real-life modern-day society. This paper will focus on the mythological elements in Riordan's novel series, in particular *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief*, and the ways in which they are adapted to function in the modern world. The analysis will include the examination of mythological characters, objects, and locations in the modern setting as well as how the mythical and modern world interact. Riordan's series will also be analyzed with regards to his writing concept.

Key words: Percy Jackson, mythological elements, Rick Riordan, Greek mythology, young adult literature, fantasy

Introduction

This paper analyzes the mythological elements in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series, in particular the novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. The paper focuses on the incorporation of the mythological elements such as Greek gods, mythological monsters, mythological locations and objects as well as mythical traits of the heroes in the novel's modern setting. The analysis of the mythical elements is based on their differences and similarities to the original myth and what changes Riordan makes to them to fit into the modern world.

The paper first examines Rick Riordan's writing concept that resonates with many young adults and makes the novel interesting and relatable to the readers. The second chapter analyzes Greek gods, mythological locations, creatures, monsters and objects in the modern setting with regards to what makes them recognizable and what changes Riordan makes to enable their existence in the modern world. It continues with the exploration of the mythological traits in the main characters themselves such as enhanced capabilities of Percy and Annabeth and the satyr powers of Grover. Finally, the paper focuses on the mechanics that allow the mythological to blend with the modern.

1. Rick Riordan's Writing Concept

Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson novel series is intended for teenage readers and up until April 2011 it was on the list of Children's Series best-selling novels (Hikmat 71). Riordan uses a witty and fun way of narration that is easy to read and appeals to younger readers because of its simplicity and humor. His use of the first person point of view – that of Percy Jackson's – helps the readers find out about the events Percy Jackson takes part in as well as his opinions and feelings about certain situations. Such a narration “shortens the distance between the story and the readers as they can feel like they are talking to Percy or reading his diary” (Mugijatna, Habsari, and Putri 81). Percy Jackson is a boy with dyslexia and ADHD who finds out he is a demigod – a child of a Greek god and a mortal parent. His father is Poseidon, the god of the sea, and his mother is a mortal woman named Sally Jackson. One summer he is forced to go to Camp Half-Blood, a camp designed for all demigods – also known as heroes, to stay at during the summer or permanently. It offers demigods protection from the monsters that lurk in the mortal world looking for the children of the gods. Percy is caught off-guard as he was not aware of his godly descent and has to gradually learn about the gods, Olympus, the Underworld, monsters and his own powers, which offers the readers the opportunity to gradually familiarize themselves with the world that is a blend of mythology and modernity. The first person narration from Percy's point of view, therefore, “raises the acceptability of the story, helping the readers to understand the situations and accept the blend of modern reality and ancient mythology as Percy himself also could hardly believe in what had happened to him at first” (Mugijatna, Habsari, and Putri 81). In addition to the first-person narration, Riordan's concept of writing includes a hero's quest, the use of relatable story, and the adaptation of mythology to the modern setting.

1.1. A Hero's Quest

Greek mythology is full of stories about heroes on quests and tasks they need to undertake for the greater good. It is present in the epics like *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in which there is a hero undertaking a dangerous task with gods sending them help or setbacks. Since Riordan incorporated so many mythical elements in the novel, it makes sense that the plot revolves around Percy having his own quest, which he has to succeed in to avoid a major disaster. As the quest “serves as a favorite theme and plot device for both traditional and

modern writers . . . [and] [i]t is quite common in fantasy literature” (Prasannan 8), Riordan creates a story in which “recognizably ‘classical’ heroic quests play out in the modern world” (Paul 231). His quest is adjusted to fit the new modern world and instead of faraway islands it takes place in modern day America. Similarly, going to the Underworld seems to be a recurring theme in many epics and stories in Greek mythology. Many heroes such as Odysseus, Heracles, Orpheus and Theseus went to the Underworld as a part of their quest. Percy reaches the Underworld relatively easily, with a descent of the elevator, but the danger of the feat remains as no one leaves the Underworld alive. Percy’s quest consists of retrieving the lightning bolt that has been stolen from Zeus in order to prevent a war between the gods as Zeus suspects Poseidon of using a hero to make the theft.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the novel contains many archetypes typically used in the quest plots, the most prominent ones being the hero, the ally, the mentor, the shapeshifter, and the shadow. Firstly, the heroes are the “characters we as readers mostly identify with, the characters who have both admirable and imperfect qualities that we can recognize in ourselves or strive for” (Zandelin 4). They are “motivated by universal needs that everyone can relate to” and “grow the most and make active choices to bring the story forward” (Zandelin 4). Percy takes the role of a relatable hero who deals with family problems, lack of self confidence and self-esteem but also succeeds in accomplishing his quest (Yudistira 58). The archetype of the mentor is embodied by Chiron whose job is “to teach and prepare Percy for his upcoming quest” (Zandelin 9). He introduces Percy to Riptide, which is his most important weapon throughout the novel besides his own powers. Chiron “pushes Percy hard in Latin class and beyond, he sets with high confidence for him” (Hakim 18) and becomes the person Percy looks up to and asks for advice. Some other characters can fit the role of mentor as well, such as Annabeth and Grover, because they teach him about gods and monsters and familiarize him with the way the modern world interacts with the mythological. Another role that is present in the novel is that of an ally: “[a]llies’ main function is to serve the heroes and keep them safe. They can either be compliant, listen and defend the heroes’ actions no matter what, or they can challenge the heroes to open themselves up, becoming more balanced in the process” (Zandelin 6). Many characters fit this role but the most typical examples are Annabeth, Grover, and Percy’s mother Sally. The opposing archetypes can also be noticed in the novel, such as Luke who fulfils the role of shapeshifter: “[u]sually they start out as allies but later on reveal their true side by betraying the heroes” (Zandelin 7). The role of a shadow can be attributed to Kronos

who is never seen in the novel but appears in Percy's dreams and communicates frightening messages and visions to him (Zandelin 15). It can be concluded that Riordan utilizes the original archetypes of a quest story but he makes the characters more complex so they can double as multiple archetypes. Riordan also challenges “the common belief . . . that the mentor is the main source for the hero’s change, whereas the other archetypal roles have not been given the same importance” (Zandelin 2). It can be argued that even though Chiron fulfills the typical role of the mentor, he does not have as big of an impact on Percy and his growth as Annabeth and Grover. So, Riordan changes some dynamics between the archetypes but stays true to the formula of the plot.

1.2. The Significance of Mythology and the Use of Relatable Story

Choosing to incorporate mythology into the novel that takes place in a modern world is no small feat and this certainly makes the novel very interesting to young adults. However, mythology is not only a means to make the novel more appealing. “Riordan sees the use of mythology as a way to entertain his readers, but he is also teaching them so much about these two ancient cultures. He is constantly reminding his readers too that America has them to thank for the inspiration for many of its physical structures” (Swanson 4). Riordan’s novels are often dismissed as young adult literature but his “stories should not be dismissed simply because they are written for young adults. If anything, they should be exalted in their combinations of simplicity and complexity. Riordan is able to bring in so many of the ancient Greek and Roman myths, without overwhelming the readers” (Swanson 4). Prasannan argues that Riordan “uses mythology to explain something that is difficult to understand; and shows how mythology still can be used as an effective tool to give a message to the society” (3-4). Similarly, using the first person narration helps in bringing the story closer to the readers and enables them to better connect with the character of Percy Jackson.

Another reason why Riordan’s novel is so successful is because “it incorporates so many different myths while staying true to the original” (Swanson 20) story. The readers do not have to possess previous knowledge about the mythology because Riordan “is finding a way to interest them in the ancient works by writing about the gods today” (Swanson 20). The character of Percy Jackson is a direct reference to Perseus given that they share the same name. His mother named him after the mythological hero, which is significant because, throughout the novel, it is repeatedly stated that names have power. Moreover, much of the

novel's "appeal comes from its careful interweaving of ancient and modern, a tactic exemplified by the characterization of the central protagonist, Percy" (Paul 232). Percy and Perseus have many similarities: both are heroes that undertook quests and even succeeded in defeating the same monster – Medusa. Their differences lie in having a different father and different stories: Perseus is the hero who is both well-known and not so well-known to modern audiences – especially not in terms of his "troubling attributes like anger, excessive slaughter, or incest – that . . . can't be molded into new narrative shapes and made suitable for children" (Paul 232). Riordan here sees the opportunity to create a new, more complex and more relatable, version of Perseus that would still stay recognizable. By blending mythology and modernity, "Riordan encourages a sense of familiarity and empathy in his readers. Percy and his world make sense to them" (Paul 234). What is more, the novel is often described as having the beneficial effect on young readers:

Riordan's revised myths offer children something distinctive. Instead of transporting them to a distant, frequently alien, classical past, antiquity is brought to them and made a part of *their* world. By injecting these ancient narratives with the trappings of the present day, their potential to entertain finds a new level; but also, crucially, their didactic potential may be subtly strengthened. (Paul 234)

What makes this novel so amusing and relatable is also the fact that Riordan attempts to establish his narrative as the truth: "Writers of metafiction make us believe their world to a great extent by incorporating the essence of magical realism. In other words the technique of fabulation is presented with an effect of reality where one feels part of the make believe world and finds oneself involved to a great extent" (Prasanna 11). Riordan achieves this in the very first pages of the novel: "If you're a normal kid, reading this because you think it's fiction, great. Read on. I envy you for being able to believe that none of this ever happened" (Riordan 1). This appeal to the reader to fully give in to the unbelievable stories and mythological creatures is what makes this novel series incredibly appealing and entertaining.

2. Rick Riordan's Mythic World

2.1. Greek Gods in the Modern Day World

In order to weave mythology into the modern setting, Riordan alters the mythological elements to bring them closer to the readers and to better fit them into the modern narrative. In the novel, Greek gods as characters also receive modified appearances and mortal jobs, which allows them to move freely among humans. Ares, the Greek god of war, does not appear in his god form while he is visiting the mortal world but is rather described as a motorcyclist:

He was dressed in a red muscle shirt and black jeans and a black leather duster, with a hunting knife strapped to his thigh. He wore red wraparound shades and he had the cruelest, most brutal face I'd ever seen – handsome, I guess, but wicked – with an oily back crewcut and cheeks that were scarred from many, many fights. (Riordan 225)

This presentation of a Greek god of war as a simple motorcycle enthusiast helps bring him closer to the readers and makes him more familiar as a character. Dionysus, the god of wine is presented as the Camp Half-Blood's director who got the position as a punishment by his father Zeus for taking interest in a wood nymph. Being a hedonistic god, he is described as "small but porky," having "a red nose, big watery eyes and curly hair so black it was almost purple" and wearing "a tiger-pattern Hawaiian shirt" (Riordan 62). He is portrayed as disinterested in the camp and its residents as his only interests are playing cards and drinking wine, which fits the original description of Dionysus. It is evident that Riordan not only reimagines the gods looks to better incorporate them in the modern setting but he also assigns them different "mortal" occupations. When Percy meets Hades in the Underworld, he states: "He was the third god I'd met but the first who really struck me as godlike" (Riordan 309). Riordan here opts for a more intimidating image of a god, even in the modernized version, but rightfully so as Hades is the god of death and the afterlife: "He was at least three meters tall, for one thing, and dressed in black silk robes and a crown of braided gold. His skin was albino white, his hair shoulder-length and jet black. He wasn't bulked up like Ares but he radiated power" (Riordan 309). He is in charge of running the modernized version of the Underworld resembling an airport; he is not normally seen outside of his palace so he does

not need to appear as a normal mortal. It seems as if he kept more of the original Greek god's appearance and representation considering the silk robes and the crown so his reincorporation into the modern setting relies more on his appointed job in the bureaucratized Underworld.

In the novel series, the gods appear as very human-like but they do have their "god form" as shown in *The Lightning Thief* when Percy meets Poseidon and Zeus in Olympus: "The gods were in a giant human form, as Hades had been, but I could barely look at them without feeling a tingle, as if my body were starting to burn" (Riordan 339). Their appearance seems human but strong power radiates from them, signifying their real power. Their clothes are modernized but still fit their individual characters: "Zeus, the Lord of the Gods, wore a dark blue, pinstriped suit. He sat on a simple throne of solid platinum. He had well-trimmed beard, marbled grey and black like a storm cloud" (Riordan 339). Poseidon wears "leather sandals, khaki Bermuda shorts, and a Tommy Bahama shirt with coconuts and parrots all over it," his skin is "deeply tanned" and his hands "scarred like an old-time fisherman's" (Riordan 340), meaning that his whole appearance is connected to the sea and his powers. Adapting the appearance and the occupations of Greek gods ensures that Greek mythology is still present in the novel but it is not overwhelming or unfamiliar to the young adult readers because they can feel closer to the characters.

2.2. Mythological Locations in the Modern World

Not only does Riordan modernize the mythological characters but also the locations such as Olympus and the Underworld. He showcases his creativeness in the placement of these locations as well as in the design of the manner in which they function. In Greek mythology, Olympus is a temple high up on the mountain top in which the gods reside (Mount Olympus). In the modern setting, it is located in Manhattan, in the Empire State Building. The heroes must reach Olympus by walking into the lobby of a skyscraper and asking to be taken to the 600th floor. When they reach the right floor, Olympus looks closer to what one would imagine based on the Greek mythology:

From the top of the clouds rose the decapitated peak of a mountain, its summit covered with snow. Clinging to the mountainside were dozens of multilevelled palaces – a city of mansions – all with white-columned porticos, gilded terraces and bronze braziers glowing with a thousand fires. (Riordan 337)

Even Percy himself observes: “It was an Ancient Greek city, except it wasn’t in ruins. It was new, and clean, and colorful, the way Athens must’ve looks twenty-five hundred years ago” (Riordan 338). This is perhaps an instance of a more blunt merge in the series as it consists of an Ancient Greek city located on the top of the skyscraper, a symbol of modernity: “The tip of a mountain hanging over New York City like a billion-ton asteroid? How could something like that be anchored above the Empire State Building, in plain sight of millions of people and not get noticed?” (Riordan 338). Similarly, the Underworld is located in DOA (Dead on Arrival) Recording Studios where it is not so easily detectable by humans. The interior slightly hints at the Underworld theme while still looking like a normal lobby: “The carpet and walls were steel grey, pencil cactuses grew in the corners like skeleton hands. The furniture was black leather, and every seat was taken” (Riordan 284). As with Olympus, the heroes must take the elevator, this time to descend into the Underworld. Once they descend, the Underworld is less modernized and resembles the ancient mythological place: “When I blinked again, the elevator wasn’t an elevator any more. We were standing in a wooden barge. Charon was poling us across a dark, oily river, swirling with bones . . . Mist curled off the filthy water. Above us, almost lost in the gloom, was a ceiling of stalactites” (Riordan 289). The system by which it runs, however, seems to be adapted to the modern setting because “[t]he entrance to the Underworld looked like a cross between airport security and the Jersey Turnpike” (Riordan 291). Placing the Underworld in a recording studio might also be the author’s criticism of the Hollywood movie industry, implying that the actors are “dead inside” due to the media controlling their lives and leaving them no privacy (Sršić 53-54).

In the series, there is also a reference to mythological lotus-eaters from Homer’s *Odyssey*: when Odysseus and his men go off course returning home from the war, they stumble upon an island full of music, kind and friendly people, and various food and narcotics that lull the warriors into peace and apathy, making them forget their homes and refuse to leave the island. Riordan turns this magnetic mythological island into a hotel to better fit it into the modern setting. Named the “Lotus Hotel and Casino,” it, without doubt, hints at the lotus-eaters: “The entrance was a huge neon flower, the petals lighting up and blinking . . . the glittering chrome doors were open, spilling out air conditioning that smelled like flowers – lotus blossom maybe” (Riordan 258). The hotel is mentioned to have indoor water slides, climbing walls, bungee-jumping, virtual-reality, videogames and snack bars (Riordan 258), which all serve a purpose to occupy the children and teens that find themselves staying at the hotel and make them stay forever, not realizing how much time has

passed. Percy and his two friends stay at the hotel until he notices that some children are convinced they are still living in a certain year in the past. This points to the hotel having a magical or supernatural element to it as none of the children age even though they stay at the hotel for many years: “there are people here from 1977. Kids who never aged. You check in, and you stay forever” (Riordan 263). The hotel therefore disrupts the sense of time passing and aims to keep its guests inside forever.

2.3. Mythological Creatures and Monsters in the Modern Setting

Like the gods, the monsters and other mythical creatures roam the modern mortal world concealed from unsuspecting everyday citizens. At the beginning of *The Lightning Thief*, it is revealed that Grover, Percy’s best friend, is in fact a satyr – a mythological nature spirit that has a body of a human, legs of a goat, and horns. He claims to be crippled: “He had a note excusing him from PE for the rest of his life because he had some kind of muscular disease in his legs. He walked funny, like every step hurt him” (Riordan 3) and wears a disguise when he is among humans: “Grover wore his fake feet and his trousers to pass as human. He wore a green rasta-style cap, because when it rained his curly hair flattened and you could just see the tips of his horns” (Riordan 150). When he gets to Camp Half-Blood, Percy discovers that his teacher (and later mentor) is in fact a centaur – a half-man and a half-horse. While working in school, he conceals his true form by being in a motorized wheelchair and pretending to be disabled (Riordan 74). Another monster from Greek mythology that lives in the modern world is Medusa, typically shown as a woman with snakes instead of hair, who can turn whoever looks her in the eyes to stone. Riordan incorporates her into the modern setting by making her an owner of the garden statues shop that doubles as a small diner. All the sculptures showcased are very lifelike – “The detail was incredible, much better than you see in most garden statues” (Riordan 175-76) and turn out to be petrified people and creatures. “The Gorgon is to be found at ‘Auntie Em’s Garden Emporium,’ for the simple reason that her petrified victims make perfect ornaments for lawns and flowerbeds, the ideal front for her monstrous deeds” (Paul 233). She is also given a different name as an alias. “Riordan has used certain humorous modern day names for some of his characters” (Prasanna 5), which is visible not only on Medusa’s example but also with Dionysus who is named Mr D. Later on their quest, Percy and his friends meet Procrustes who is known as “Crusty” and works in “Crusty’s Waterbed Palace” as a salesman. Percy remembers the

mythological Procrustes as “the giant who’s tried to kill Theseus with over-hospitality on his way to Athens” (Riordan 280). Originally, he killed his victims by making them lie on an iron bed and then stretching their limbs out to make them fit the bed perfectly or cutting their limbs off if they were hanging off the bed. Selling the mattresses and beds allows Procrustes to trap his victims in the modern world by offering them to try out the beds.

Another example of creatively masking mythological monsters to fit into the modern world can be observed on Echidna and Chimera. Echidna is a mythological monster that is half-woman and half-snake and a mother to many monsters such as Chimera – a fire-breathing beast with “the head of a lion with blood-caked mane, the body and hooves of a giant goat, and a serpent for a tail” (Riordan 207). In the novel, Echidna is disguised as a fat lady with a Chihuahua that is in fact Chimera. Once they catch the smell of a hero, they simply transform into their monster form but otherwise they are undetected by the mortals. The Furies, originally goddesses of vengeance, have a similar method of concealing their true forms. One of them infiltrates Percy’s school and acts as a teacher of mathematics. Once she sees the opportunity to harm Percy, she simply transforms into her true form: “Her eyes began to glow like barbecue coals. Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. Her jacket melted into large, leathery wings. She wasn’t human” (Riordan 12). When the group of friends descend into the Underworld, they encounter the mythological three-headed monster guarding the entrance – Cerberus. In his appearance, he does not differ much from the original description, given that even in mythology he is envisioned as a watchdog with three heads. In the novel, however, instead of being the ruthless monster, he starts acting like any other house dog – reacting to commands like “Sit!” and playing with a ball.

2.4. Mythological Objects and Mythological Traits of the Characters

In addition to gods, locations and monsters, Riordan also incorporates certain objects from various Greek myths into the modern world and Percy’s quest. Before even setting off to the quest, Percy must go to the Oracle and listen to the prophecy. Many heroes in Greek mythology went to get advice from the oracles about what the future held for them. Usually the oracles were women that were believed to be delivering words of the gods and could be found in temples. In the novel, the Oracle is located in the attic of the main house in Camp Half-Blood and she appears as a mummy:

By the window, sitting on a wooden tripod stool, was the most gruesome memento of all: a mummy. Not the wrapped-in-cloth kind, but a human female body shriveled to a husk. She wore a tie-dyed sundress, lots of beaded necklaces, and a headband over long black hair. The skin of her face was thin and leathery over her skull, and her eyes were glassy white slits as if the real eyes had been replaced by marbles. (Riordan 140)

Furthermore, winged sandals worn by Hermes in Greek mythology become sneakers that grow wings on command in the novel. They were given to Percy by Hermes' son to help in his quest. Percy's mentor also gives him a special sword that was allegedly previously owned by Hercules. To stay hidden, it transforms into a ballpoint pen when it is not used. All Percy needs to do is uncap it and it grows into a sword: "I took off the cap, and the pen grew longer and heavier in my hand. In half a second, I held a shimmering bronze sword with a double-edged blade, a leather-wrapped grip and a flat hilt riveted with gold studs" (Riordan 153). The object that their quest revolves around is the lightning bolt that Zeus wields. When it is first shown in the novel, it is described as "a sixty-centimetre-long metal cylinder, spiked on both ends, humming with energy" (Riordan 314). This is its alternative form as in Zeus' hands it assumes a different form: "As he closed his fist, the metallic points flared with electricity, until he was holding what looked more like the classic thunderbolt, a five-metre javelin of arcing, hissing energy" (Riordan 342). Another magical object that comes in handy in their adventures is Annabeth's Yankees cap that she received from her mother, Athena. Whoever puts on the hat instantly becomes invisible, which becomes a perfect tool for hiding from enemies and monsters during the quest.

As for the characters themselves, Percy and Annabeth also have some extraordinary abilities and qualities stemming from their godly parents. Percy is the son of Poseidon, the god of sea, so he is able to control water and even heal by getting into a body of water: "I stepped back into the creek, the whole camp gathering around me. Instantly, I felt better. I could feel the cuts on my chest closing up" (Riordan, 125) When underwater, he stays dry and can breathe, but he also has a gift of understanding and communicating with horse-like creatures since Poseidon is also a creator of horses. Annabeth has some impressive qualities too: being extremely intelligent like her mother Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is one of them. Given that Athena is also a goddess of handicraft and a protector of various Greek cities, Annabeth also takes a particular interest in architecture and has a good sense of space. Grover is a satyr and therefore has some special abilities like controlling animals when

playing a pipe and understanding what animals are saying as well as reading the emotions of others. In addition, it is explained that he cannot die but reincarnates as a part of nature: “‘I’m a satyr,’ Grover said. ‘We don’t have souls like humans do. He can torture me until I die, but he won’t get me forever. I’ll just be reincarnated as a flower or something’” (Riordan 316). Further on, the golden net, originally made by Hephaestus to trap his unfaithful wife Aphrodite and her lover Ares, is also to be found in the novel. Percy and Annabeth found themselves trapped by it as well in an abandoned water park. In the original myth, Hephaestus caught the lovers “in a golden net, and invited all the gods to come and laugh at them” (Riordan 232); in the novel, however, “[o]ut came video cameras. Spotlights rose up all around the pool, blinding us with illumination, and a loudspeaker voice boomed: ‘Live to Olympus in one minute’” (Riordan 236). The modern element of the live broadcasting using technology blends into the original Greek myth.

3. The Mechanics of the Modern World Blended with the Mythological Elements

As already mentioned, Riordan “successfully blends the contemporary setting with th[e] . . . concepts of mythology” (Hikmat 73). In order for mythology and modernity to coexist in the modern world as we know it, Riordan had to come up with some rules and mechanics of how the mythological interacts with the modern. Since gods move freely in the human world, they produce many children who are then demigods or heroes – half mortals and half gods. Depending on their godly parent, heroes have different abilities and personalities, but what is common amongst all of them is that they all suffer from dyslexia and ADHD. “These conditions are something that numerous middle-grade students struggle with on a daily basis, and, as we discover later on, are key traits of many demigods” (Ward 8). In the novel, it is explained that this occurs because their brains are hardwired 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 your attention problems, that’s because you see too much, Percy, not too little. Your senses are better than a regular mortal’s. (Riordan 88)

The Percy Jackson novel series originates from the stories that Riordan used to tell his son. Riordan attributes the characters with these traits because his son struggled with dyslexia and ADHD. They are normally considered to be disabilities but Riordan incorporates them into the series protagonists and gives them a positive connotation: “Usually children and people afflicted with those disorders are misunderstood and treated badly by the society trying to forcefully make them improve or is judgmental based on their difficulties in their studies or work. Riordan thus transforms these disorders into qualities” (Sršić 54).

Another instance of a modern world blended with mythology is the special diet of heroes who are partially human but exhibit some god-like traits. Traditionally, Greek gods were said to eat and drink only nectar and ambrosia, and heroes being partially gods also experience beneficial effect from it: “The food and drink we were giving you to make you better. That stuff would’ve killed a normal kid” (Riordan 88). The special diet and the

difficulties that they face physically differentiates heroes from humans in the novel. In this world where the gods are free to walk amongst humans, a deal was made between Hades, Zeus and Poseidon that they would not be with any mortals and have children with them because children of these three most powerful gods could have great power and potentially turn against gods when they grow strong enough: “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” (Riordan 113-14). Poseidon broke the oath and Percy was born. Had this rule not been enforced, the novel and the plot would lose its realism as there would be too many powerful half-bloods that would be noticed for their strength – therefore, Riordan likely invented this principle to keep the appearance that the plot is happening in the world we know.

Riordan also connects the events of the real world to the acts of gods. As a result, events such as wars are the results of disputes between gods (Riordan 114). The actions that the gods wish to do against each other must be done through the heroes only: “Gods cannot cross each other’s territories except by invitation . . . Heroes, on the other hand, have certain privileges. They can go anywhere, challenge anyone, as long as they’re bold enough and strong enough to do it. No god can be held responsible for a hero’s actions” (Riordan 145). Given that so many monsters and gods exist in the world and sometimes fight the heroes, Percy wonders how humans are still oblivious to their existence. For this purpose, the Mist is introduced, which is a type of magic that works on humans and masks their vision. It acts in the way that it transforms the magical and unbelievable events into something that is not supernatural – Percy’s fight with Ares is therefore interpreted as a kidnapper shooting the police car, hitting a gas station, and causing an explosion. Any witnesses to the real fight later have their memories changed to fit the narrative that does not include supernatural elements. That is what keeps the humans from learning about the Greek gods and monsters. Camp Half-Blood is a location that enables the heroes to socialize and train their skills. It is safe from monsters because the camp has a protective barrier around it, keeping the monsters from entering. It provides a sanctuary for heroes who have to avoid the monsters during the school year. Monsters easily track down a person of a godly origin by the smell they emit. It is explained in the series that the stronger the hero is, the stronger scent it emits to monsters and therefore faces more danger than the others. Percy’s sword, Riptide, has the ability to only hurt and kill monsters and anything that is not completely human – for humans it would be

harmless. Heroes like Percy are, however, vulnerable to both mythological weapons similar to Riptide and human weapons. Chiron sums it up in the following way:

The sword is celestial bronze . . . It's deadly to monsters, to any creature from the Underworld, provided they don't kill you first. But the blade will pass through mortals like an illusion . . . And I should warn you: as a demigod, you can be killed by either celestial or normal weapons. You are twice as vulnerable. (Riordan 154).

While on the quest, Percy, Annabeth, and Grover are able to communicate with the camp via iris messaging: "The rainbow goddess Iris carries the messages for the gods. If you know how to ask, and if she's not too busy, she'll do the same for half-bloods" (Riordan 220). In order to activate the messages, they offer the goddess a drachma – a special currency used by gods, half-bloods, and other mythological creatures. All of these rules, mechanics, and the ways in which the mythological interacts with the human world enable the story to be incorporated into the modern world. The readers learn about the interactions between the two worlds and their coexistence alongside Percy, which eases the readers into its complex mechanics without it being overwhelming.

Conclusion

Riordan's Percy Jackson series is characterized by the intriguing writing style in the first person that enables the readers to connect with the main character – Percy Jackson. The plot follows Percy as he discovers his real hero descent and the world of Greek gods that exists in the modern day without being detected by humans. Since the main character himself is stunned by new facts that he learns about, he has many questions and asks for explanations, which enables the readers to easily follow along with all the new facts being presented about the world intertwined with Greek mythology.

In order to make the mythological elements function within the modern setting, Riordan had to make some changes to the original Greek gods, creatures, objects, and locations. The gods in the novel are, therefore, dressed in modern clothes and are given some amusing personality traits that were not that well known in the original myths. The locations such as the Underworld, Olympus, and the island of the lotus-eaters morph into something more suitable for the modern infrastructure – Olympus resides on the top of the skyscraper whereas to access the Underworld one must take a descending elevator in an old recording studio. The interiors of such locations often have elements or color palettes that hint to ancient Greek motifs or even morph fully into ancient Greek architecture on the inside like Olympus. Riordan also utilizes quite a few Greek monsters and creatures such as the Furies, centaurs, satyrs, Cerberus, Chimera, Procrustes, Medusa, and others. All of them are in some way disguised or hidden from the humans but morph into their true shape before the heroes. Some mythological objects such as the Oracle or the flying sandals (which became sneakers) also find themselves in the novel with the addition of some objects that are not mentioned in ancient Greek myths like Annabeth's cap and Percy's sword Riptide. Riordan also introduces some rules and ways in which the mythological interacts with the modern. To hide the monsters and mythical creatures, Riordan uses the Mist that makes everything supernatural appear normal to humans. In addition, the gods are forbidden to enter each other's territories and can act only through their hero children. This is likely done to prevent them from influencing the world greatly through their disputes – otherwise the modern world mixed with mythology would not function.

Riordan also takes the motif of the quest and reinterprets it to fit the modern setting. The main characters must go on a quest to prevent the war amongst gods but instead of it being on a remote island or in another foreign location, the heroes simply roam through the

modern-day America and find places like Olympus and the Underground inside modern buildings that do not seem extraordinary. Riordan includes mythology in his novel series because it can deliver many important messages to the readers even today. By modernizing the characters and the setting, Riordan brings the story closer to the readers and makes it more relatable.

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