RICK RIORDAN'S MYTH-BASED NOVELS AS A GATEWAY TO LEGITIMIZING FAN FICTION

BY

TORUNN BYGSTAD

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Department of Foreign Languages

University of Bergen

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Summary in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven utforsker det engelske konseptet «fan fiction» som innebærer litteratur skrevet av fans av spesifikke TV-serier, bøker, filmer, personer, musikere osv. Målet er å utfordre folks generelle negative holdning til begrepet, litteraturen det produserer og felleskap det bygger. For å øke verdien til fan fiction regner jeg Rick Riordans vellykkede bøker *Percy Jackson: Lyntyven* (2005) og *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* (2014) som en del av fan fictions voksende arkiv. Fordi Riordans bøker er utgitt av profesjonelle forlag som ansees som 'godkjent' av folk flest, kan de bidra til å endre synet på fan fiction som en helhet. Jeg bruker også resepsjonsteorietikeren Hans Robert Jauss og hans teori «horizon of expectations» der han hevder at hver enkelt leser av et nytt verk bruker sin egen livserfaring og bakgrunnskunnskap fra tidligere tekster til å forstå den nye teksten. I tillegg bruker jeg Joseph Campbells bok *Helten med tusen ansikter* (2008) hvor han beskriver den grunnleggende historiestrukturen han kaller «monomyten» eller «heltens reise.» Fordi det er i menneskets natur å avvise det ukjente påpeker jeg, ved hjelp av Riordan, Jauss og Campbell, at adapsjon er normalt og at fan fiction har eksistert siden myter først ble fortalt. Forskjellen ligger hovedsakelig i menneskets endrede holdninger etter inntredelsen av opphavsrett, men det finnes fremdeles verk som ikke er avvist som fan fiction til tross for deres opplagte adapsjon, inkludert Riordans bøker.

Først gjør jeg rede for begrepet «fan fiction» og kategoriserer Riordans bøker innenfor definisjonen. Deretter utforsker jeg akademiske tekster innenfor fan fiction, Jauss' rolle i denne oppgaven, og kritisk arbeid tilgjengelig som omhandler Riordans bøker. Det første kapittelet plasserer *Lyntyven* innenfor fan fictions undersjanger «alternativt univers,» som innebærer transportering av karakterene til et nytt univers, som ga Riordan evnen til å kritisere problemer i vårt moderne samfunn. Kapittelet diskuterer også Riordans ulike lesergruppers forventninger og hvordan disse forventingene påvirket han som en forfatter. Kapittel to tar for seg *Lyntyvens* arketypiske «heltens reise» struktur med fokus på Percys møter med forskjellige klassiske figurer og hvordan deres oppdateringer påvirker både Percy og leseren. Det tredje kapittelet vurderer hvordan Riordans *Greek Gods* endret sjanger fra klassiske greske verk skrevet på episk gresk til moderne og realistiske noveller med Hesiods *Theogonien* som hovedeksempel, etterfulgt av kommaterer på endret språk og oppdaterte referansepunkt.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

'Fan fiction' is a relatively new term, and academics have only begun to scratch the surface of what it is or what it could be. Fan fiction studies can be considered a niche in reader-response theory because fanatics (fans),[1] and subsequently fan fictions that are fan-stories written by fans, respond to something they may have seen, heard or read and wish to interact with further. Reader-response theory is as flexible as the audience it concerns itself with, and so is fan fiction. Fan fiction constantly develops and changes as it becomes more and more popular among contemporary people of all ages. It allows writers to expand on an existing story they do not wish to end, as well as build their own stories without having to start from nothing, which is the appeal for many.[2] Of course, fan interactions are not only a modern phenomenon. They have occurred for hundreds of years as natural responses where people have, for example, created their own versions of popular plays of their time.[3] Furthermore, canonical authors such as John Milton created works from pre-existing stories like his *Paradise Lost* (1667) based on the *Book of Genesis* (ca 500 BC). Nevertheless, scholars have only recently taken an interest in fans and their creations as a serious and professional field of study. This recent emphasis on fan studies is most likely due to the rapid and ever-growing fan communities that flourished once the internet became easily accessible to the public, and from there fan culture has only grown in interest among laypeople and academics. It has become a cultural and social phenomenon as well as an increasingly interesting subject in academic studies. In particular, fan fiction keeps growing with entire websites existing for the sole purpose of publishing and promoting fan fictions.

There are two primary branches of fan studies. The first branch focuses primarily on the sociocultural where the fandom, meaning the fans as a collective group, is the primary subject of study, while the other focuses more on the fan creations themselves. The sociocultural is the most popular and widely explored field of study starting with Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith in 1992. Jenkins' foundational book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* addresses and discusses the importance of media fans and the community and culture

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[1] *Fanatics*, henceforth *Fans*, refer to regular people who show an invested interest in something or someone.
[2] Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (Brigend: Seren, 2005), 149.
[3] Robert Dale Parker, "Reader Response," in *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 150-151.

surrounding it, and Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* argues about women's position in fandom and why they write.[4] I aim to dive deeper into the latter branch of fan studies that focuses on fan creations and more specifically the aspect of fan fiction writing where Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse and Sheenagh Pugh lead the research. That is not to say that sociocultural aspects will be completely dismissed or excluded. The literary, the cultural, and the sociological are closely intertwined in fan fiction studies where one cannot really be discussed without the others.

Fan fiction writers have a whole world and an array of characters at their disposal that they can manipulate however they wish. They can spin a whole new story with a new plot and different narrative from an existing source. Even so, fan fictions are generally barred from professional publication because of their dependency on a canon. 'Canon' in the fan world refers to what is officially accepted within any given fandom. This includes the source texts, statements made by authoritative people such as the author, and sometimes plausible deductive theories made by avid fans. The scholars' literary canon similarly defines it as "the standard set of literature that critics and teachers typically study and teach," and it "changes over time as the readers who construct it change,"[5] which the fan fiction canon also does. The fandom canon, however, can both include or exclude information at the individual fan's leisure, although there is usually some consensus within the fandom. Some fandoms are large enough to have several different accepted canons where certain notions may not be accepted by one group within the fandom, but they are accepted by another group. An example is the *Harry Potter* fandom where some groups within the fandom accept that Albus Dumbledore is gay while others do not, which is based on the lack of evidence in the canonical works and J. K. Rowling's own statement about it. A piece of writing that knowingly and overtly bases itself upon an existing canon is, thus, usually marked as fan fiction, but not all works of writing that do this are necessarily considered fan fictions, especially not if they are published commercially.

What is classified as fan fiction and what is not, therefore, seems dependent on the author's choice of publication and perfectly legitimized works of writing could easily belong in a fan fiction archive. As it is, fan fiction is often unfairly and negatively pre-judged by the general

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[4] Henry Jenkins, "Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith at Gaylaxicon 1992 (Part One)," *Confessions of an Aca-fan*, accessed October 12, 2018, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/02/gaylaxicon.html
[5] Parker, "Reader Response," 340.

public as opposed to other published works of writing. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington write, "fan studies […] set out to rigorously defend fan communities," which includes fan fiction, as fans are often "dismissed as Others."[6] Academic and author Anne Jamison further states regarding fan fiction that "opponents call it 'stealing,'"[7] and Catherine Coker mentions the "low cultural value put on fan writing."[8] However, Robert Dale Parker notes, "the idea of what is good or not varies with the reader,"[9] and what qualifies as good writing depends entirely on a person's perception. Why, then, are certain works of writing based on pre-existing canonical texts seen as superior to fan fiction and exempted from the classification while others are not? For example, myth-based texts are sometimes classified as fan fiction and sometimes not. Myths pre-date copyright claims, and they are so old and widespread that, according to Pugh, "it is generally felt that the material of myth and folk-tale belong to all, and are for each author to interpret and develop as he or she sees fit."[10] Therefore, including myths, specifically Greek myths, in the canon of literature that could have fan fiction written about it invites alternative views of fan fiction where celebrated authors can proudly identify themselves with the genre. Note that, except in chapter three, I do not use the term 'genre' in the traditional sense because fan fiction can inhabit any genre depending on its relationship to the source text. This means that, for example, fan fiction does not conform to any "particular style or category"[11] of genres such as poetry, novels, romance, mystery, fiction or non-fiction. Instead, I refer to fan fiction as a 'genre' with reference to Pugh's usage in *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context* (2005) where she says, "I wanted to investigate it as writing, as I would any genre."[12]

This thesis aims to challenge the negative perception of fan fiction through examining Rick Riordan's Greek myth-based novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2005) and the

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[6] Jonathan Alan Gray, Cornell Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington, *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2-3.
[7] Anne Jamison, *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World* (Texas: Smart Pop, 2013), 17.
[8] Catherine Coker, "The margins of print? Fan fiction as book history," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 25 (2017).
[9] Parker, "Reader Response," 340.
[10] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 10.
[11] "genre, n," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 07, 2019, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77629?redirectedFrom=genre. (accessed May 11, 2019).
[12] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 7.

short-story collection *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* (2014) as works of fan fiction.[13] While these two young adult novels are my primary texts, I may also refer to the subsequent novels in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005-2009) series as needed. Furthermore, the reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss' discussion of what he calls the 'horizon of expectations,' which includes how a literary work "predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions,"[14] is useful when discussing fan fiction and Riordan's novels as fan fiction. Just like fan fiction readers have expectations that the writer must adhere to with regards to his or her source text, Riordan's novels must adhere to similar expectations with regards to his usage of Greek mythology in addition to his diverse readership. Jauss' theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between the author's texts and the reader's expectations through evaluating and analyzing literary works such as Riordan's. These highly successful novels can elevate fan fiction's currently lower status within literary culture by combining Jauss' horizon of expectations with studies done on fan fiction, mythology and Riordan's novels. If we view *Lightning Thief* and *Greek Gods* as fan fiction, these works demonstrate how fan fiction is not that different from legitimized published works of writing and thus deserves recognition as a genre in its own right. As a result, I also question the blurred boundary between fan fiction and commercialized fiction, what the differences may be and if they matter.

The first chapter explores and classifies *Lightning Thief* as an alternate universe fan fiction where Riordan transports the Greek gods and creatures to a contemporary America instead of keeping them in their traditional Greek setting. By utilizing the alternate universe and repositioning the Greek myths, Riordan can add current cultural values that he feels are important for contemporary readers to learn. One example I discuss is how Riordan gives his heroes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia and portrays them as advantages rather than disabilities. He further stresses the fact that readers with these 'disabilities' are normal by giving them to all the demi-gods in his novel.[15] The chapter also discusses how Riordan's novel must consider and satisfy diverse readership with different

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[13] While I remain aware of the genre distinction between my primary works, I will refer to them as 'novels' when mentioned collectively and their individual genre when discussing them apart from each other.
[14] Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in *Toward and Aesthetic of Reception*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 23.
[15] Emma B. Hawkins, "Rick Riordan: Classical Gods in Texas and America," *CCTE Studies* 76 (2011): 80-81.

expectations such as young readers as well as educated and adult readers. For example, Riordan's expected moderation of the gods' more obscene natures due to his varied readership sets him apart from fan fiction in one way, but it really only gives Riordan an additional challenge to tackle in his Greek mythology fan fiction, which is similar to how some fan fiction writers challenge themselves by adding limitations to their own writing.[16]

The second chapter deals with fan fiction on a more subtle level and centers around Riordan's modernizing and re-interpretations of the classical monomyth structure with Percy and his encounters with classical figures in focus. Despite Riordan's modernizing, Percy follows the Greek archetypical monomyth (the hero's journey) of separation, initiation and return as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).[17] Most, if not all, events and encounters that Percy experiences on his journey can be linked to other celebrated Greek heroes, and Riordan's displacement of the Greek figures makes the traditional encounters with them significantly different for both the novel's protagonist and the reader. The chapter's discussion continuously emphasizes the fact that remaking old structures and stories was common and accepted and should still be considered as such.

The third chapter focuses primarily on the genre, language and references in Riordan's *Greek Gods* and compares his modernized version of the Greek creation story against Hesiod's *Theogony* (ca. 700 BC). In this collection of short-stories Riordan changes the genre from didactic poems written in the epic dialect to realistic short-stories, and he uses the same easygoing, often mocking and sarcastic, language to decipher the stories of the Greek gods that he used in the original series. Primarily, what Riordan adds, that the Greek stories lack, is a sense of organization by incorporating contemporary realism. Riordan humanizes the gods and includes human descriptions as well as gives the Olympians' human emotions and reasons behind actions that would make sense for humans.[18] Furthermore, *Greek Gods* displays the fan fiction genre more plainly than *Lightning Thief*, so much so that Riordan acknowledges that *Greek Gods* only contains the stories as the character Percy 'knows' them: "I'm going to tell you

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[16] For more on fan fiction limitations see: Louisa Stein, and Kristina Busse, "Limit Play: Fan Authorship between Source Text, Intertext, and Context," *Popular Communication* 7, no. 4 (2009): 198-199.

[17] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Commemorative, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 23.

[18] Lily Glasner, "Taking a Zebra to Vegas: Allegorical Reality in the Percy Jackson & the Olympians Series," in *Collision of Realities: Establishing Research on the Fantastic in Europe*, ed. Lars Schmeink and Astrid Böger (Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter, 2012), 171-172.

the versions that make the most sense to me."[19] Just like any fan fiction writer, Riordan explicitly recognizes that he does not own the foundation story he is using to build his own. Similarly, fans are "acutely and painfully aware that those fictions do not belong to them,"[20] and fan fiction writers thus always have a disclaimer that they do not own the world and characters of the original book, series, movie etc. that they are using to create their own story.

The rest of the introduction is dedicated to tracing fan fiction's definition through history, narrowing down a definition suitable for my use and categorizing Riordan's novels within that definition. I will look at scholarly works done on fan fiction that consider both positive and negative views and weave in Greek mythology's role and relation to this thesis. I will then consider Jauss' horizon of expectations' usefulness with regards to fan fiction and Riordan's novels. Lastly, I will map out the critical work done on Riordan's novels, but only briefly since the chapters will explore his works extensively.

Fan fiction: Definition and Perception

Due to fan fiction's continuous development, the definition of the term is equally ambiguous. 'Fan fiction' essentially refers to fan-written works, but to understand what that means the umbrella term 'fan' needs a definition. The word 'fan' derives from 'fanatic' which stems from the Latin word 'fanaticus' which, according to Jenkins' *Latin Oxford Dictionary*, meant "of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee."[21] With this knowledge, one can easily imagine today's abbreviated term 'fan' simply meaning a person who is devoted to anything in particular, be it a novel, television series, movie, sport, or even a person.[22] From the parent term 'fan,' 'fan fiction' emerged as a specific reference to written fan creations.

While the term 'fan fiction' has only been actively used in the last few decades, the term's concept has been around for much longer. The earliest known fan fictions that can compare to today's usage, though, are probably those based on the famous Sherlock Holmes

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[19] Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* (England: Puffin Books, 2015), x. All further references to the primary texts appear in text.
[20] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture. Studies in Culture and Communication* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24.
[21] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 12.
[22] "fan, n.2," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed December 03, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68000?redirectedFrom=fan+fiction#eid4735563.

detective and the Jane Austen novels.[23] Most fan fiction studies, however, limit themselves to the last fifty years or so, defining fan fiction as "a rewriting of shared media […] starting in the 1960s with its base in science fiction fandom and its consequent zine culture,"[24] which can be attributed to the fact that the term did not appear regularly before then. However, as will be seen below, fan fiction studies does not necessarily restrict itself to this era, and neither will this thesis.

Today the term 'fan fiction' is defined, in simple terms, as a work "written by a fan rather than a professional author […] based on already-existing characters from a television series, book, film, etc." by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.[25] In addition to the definitions outlined above, Hellekson and Busse suggest the following variations when considering fan fiction:

> If we think of it as a form of collective storytelling, then the *Iliad* and the
> *Odyssey* might be tagged as the earliest versions of fan fiction. If we
> think of fan fiction as a response to specific written texts, we can trace
> fan fiction back to the Middle Ages. If the term is understood to include a
> legal component, then fan fiction could not exist before the development
> of authorial copyright.[26]

A wide range of texts seem to be included in these equally wide-ranging views, but this thesis will attempt the first view of fan fiction that Hellekson and Busse mention in this quote where we "take it all the way back to myth and legend"[27] through Riordan's Greek myth-based novels. At the same time, however, Riordan's novels clearly respond to "specific written texts," namely the Greek ones, but these myths have several accepted, all equally canonical, versions, which makes the second view only half suitable for this thesis. These multiple versions of certain mythological events will resurface as I compare the myths with Riordan's novels. The last view is obviously not applicable due to classical myths predating copyright. With respect to the view of fan fiction as a form of collective storytelling, though, I must mention that I do not mean to claim that Homer, the acclaimed author of the earliest versions of the *Iliad* (ca. 800 BC) and the

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[23] Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (University of Iowa Press, 2014), 5.
[24] Hellkeson and Busse, *Studies Reader*, 5-6.
[25] "fan, n.2," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 02, 2018, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/68000?redirectedFrom=fan+fiction#eid4735563.
[26] Hellkeson and Busse, *Studies Reader*, 6.
[27] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 25.

Odyssey (ca. 700 BC), was a fan fiction writer as that first interpretation alludes to. I agree with Tony Keen's discussion of how fan fiction and mythology as such are different, albeit they do have similarities such as both being "produced by small communities for prestige rather than for direct financial reward," and both are considered transformative works of their respective times.[28] Riordan's works differentiate themselves from Homer's by having concrete sources to build on, whereas it is unknown where Homer found his inspirations. In short, I mean to say that stories stemming from authors such as Homer have essentially taken over and become the original source texts seeing as they are the oldest versions of these stories in human memory.

While also mentioning these views, Sheenagh Pugh proposes another, more comprehensive, definition in *Democratic Genre* where she defines "fan fiction as writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers."[29] Within this definition Pugh includes any popular material with an agreed upon canon regardless of who wrote it as well as works that predate copyright. Despite the fact that the body of Greek mythology lies within the public domain it has a loosely agreed upon canon, which means that Pugh's definition covers Greek mythology as a part of "an accepted canon."

Fan fiction may be a wide-ranging and obscure genre, but its climbing popularity and society's treatment of it "can tell us much about our culture."[30] Unfortunately, society's general perception of the fan, according to Jenkins, is that the fan "constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture" and "whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality."[31] These negative impressions leave any term associated with 'fan' vulnerable to instant rejection by non-fans, which is only enforced through the vast amount of poor writing that exists within fan fiction. While what constitutes as 'poor writing' is highly individual, in this case it refers primarily to writing with improper grammar, spelling and lack of textual flow. Additionally, but to a lesser degree, writing without a plot or a story to keep the reader interested in longer works of writing falls into this category. Naturally though, given that anyone can write and post fan fiction at his or her leisure, the quality of writing can range from very poor to very good.

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[28] Tony Keen, "Are Fan Fiction and Mythology Really the Same?" *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016).
[29] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 25.
[30] Hellekson and Busse, *Studies Reader*, 1.
[31] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 15.

Unfortunately, the good writing tends to get buried and grouped in with the poor writing simply because it is labeled 'fan fiction,' which means that, according to professor Bronwen Thomas, it gets "dismissed as derivative and unoriginal"[32] without value on par with other literary genres and professionally published works of writing. Fans, which includes fan fictions, are viewed as inferior, but Jenkins refutes this by saying that "fans cannot as a group be dismissed as intellectually inferior; they often are highly educated, articulate people."[33] Even so, many hesitate to associate themselves with fan fiction, especially if they want to be taken seriously. Scholar and fan fiction writer Chelsea Murdock, for example, keeps her fan fiction writing a secret, only sharing with a select few, because of "the general negative perceptions of fan writing in academia."[34] Furthermore, job searches could become harder as employers appeared to consider writing fan fictions a negative quality in an employee.[35] However, scholar Kristina Busse emphasizes how more and more critics, academics and scholars conduct fannish studies to combat these negative notions about fans and fan creations, especially in the last decade.[36]

Arguably, fan fictions are more sincere than professionally paid fiction (profic) insofar that money is not a factor. Fan fiction writers write because they are not ready for the fictional world to end; they see a world filled with infinite potential stories besides the one told in the source text.[37] They see a multitude of expandable characters that can have their own stories. These stories can be as short as a 'drabble,' which is a short fiction containing no more than a hundred words, or as long as the source text itself, sometimes even longer. People can also shed light on other interests or issues that may have been hinted at, but not focused on in the original. In essence, fan fiction writers and readers want "either 'more of' their source material or 'more from' it,"[38] which is typical, and since they cannot get more from the original producers, as is the case in most older productions, or they are not getting what they want, they create their own. Fan fiction writers, then, write for enjoyment and aesthetic reasons whereas, according to Pugh,

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[32] Bronwen Thomas, "What Is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?" *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 3, no. 1 (2011): 10.
[33] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 19.
[34] Chelsea Murdock, "Making Fanfic: The (Academic) Tensions of Fan Fiction as Self-Publication." *Community Literacy Journal* 12, no. 1 (2017): 50.
[35] Murdock, "Making Fanfic," 50.
[36] Kristina Busse, *Framing Fan Fiction: Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities* (Iowa City, 2017), 12.
[37] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 134.
[38] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 19.

profic and freelance authors or writers "never write a word unless there's a good chance of getting paid for it."[39] Pugh's claim may be correct up to a point, but I do not agree that this is the case for all profic authors. However, I remain convinced that fan fiction writers have an inherent advantage by abstaining from publishing commercially. The claim effectively highlights how a profic writer may not care as much as a fan fiction writer whether or not their work contributes anything of value to the community or society, which one would think is the point of literary writing given the notion of how "literature is written by, for, and about people."[40] In other words, possible profits should not be an author's motivating factor, or at least not one as central as Pugh suggests it is. Regardless, Pugh's quote marks this distinction between a paid author and a fan fiction author. Furthermore, fan fiction creates communities populated by people across the world where "fans engage in all kinds of social networking and community building."[41] This constant web of fan-networking shows how fan fiction has cultural value today, but the degree of importance is up for individual interpretation, although, as my thesis will argue, I would say it is worthwhile.

Even so, the boundary between fan fiction and professionally published and paid fiction remains unclear. For example, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys and *Grendel* (1971) by John Gardner are both celebrated novels by equally celebrated authors that clearly fit within the boundaries of fan fiction as described above. The novels use characters and plots from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the old English poem *Beowulf* (first complete edition in 1815), respectively. They take characters from their chosen source texts and "veer off in a new direction" to create a new story with new perspectives and ideas, which is essentially what fan fiction writers do.[42] Of course, both of these examples were published before the internet allowed self-publication to reach a large online audience with little effort. Still, they remain good examples of works that could be viewed as fan fictions today yet are not despite the emergence of fan fiction. These examples lead to the blurred boundary between profic and fan fiction: Why are these two novels endorsed when other fan fictions are not? Especially when many fan fictions share the same characteristics as these novels?

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[39] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 144.
[40] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 105.
[41] Thomas, "What is Fanfiction," 6.
[42] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 25.

Riordan is an author who lives in the era of fan fiction publication. Riordan, like fan fiction writers, appeared to have wanted "more of" and "more from" his source material, but he chose to publish through an authorized imprint rather than self-publish online. The difference here may lay in the quality of writing. The majority of fan fictions are poorly written, as mentioned above, but *some* self-published fan fictions may have potential for professional publication. However, many authors with quality fan fictions have chosen to stay away from it because they want their writing to remain a hobby and not a job.[43] This, therefore, links into my earlier point about the difference between profic and fan fiction laying in the author's choice of publication. It is possible to talk more extensively about the differences between self-publishing and professional publishing, good and bad writing as well as who defines it, but this thesis will not discuss it further.[44]

While choice of publication is one aspect to consider in fan fiction, much modern fan fiction is unpublishable for profit due to copyright laws. Fan fiction writers have previously had trouble with copyright holders demanding their works and fan sites be shut down, but they were protected by copyright's Fair Use Defense that protects transformative works.[45][46] Arguably, according to Nathalie H. Montano, fan fiction can be published for profit if it is deemed to give "new meaning to the original, thus providing a social function that is not purely entertaining or aesthetic," which is the case for many fan fictions.[47] For example, the published novel *Bored of the Rings* (1969) by Henry N. Beard and Douglas C. Kenney is a parody of J. R. R. Tolkien's the *Lord of the Rings* (1954). Thus, I agree that "copyright laws do not give [authors] ownership over the reactions and commentaries that their works will garner among the public," as Montano writes,[48] and Riordan's novels are "reactions" and "commentaries" on the old Greek myths. However, Riordan was free from copyright complications with regards to publication and his

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[43] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 145.

[44] For more information on this point see Chelsea Murdock, "Making Fanfic: The (Academic) Tensions of Fan Fiction as Self-Publication." *Community Literacy Journal* 12, no. 1 (2017).

[45] See Henry Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write: Media Literacy and the *Harry Potter* Wars," in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 169-205. See also, Heather Lawver, "PotterWar," Heather Show, accessed December 03, 2018, http://www.heathershow.com/potterwar/.

[46] Natalie H. Montano, "Hero with a Thousand Copyright Violations: Modern Myth and an Argument for Universally Transformative Fan Fiction," *Northwestern Journal of Technology and Intellectual Property* 11 no. 7 (Fall 2013): 690.

[47] Montano, "Thousand Copyright Violations," 692.

[48] Montano, "Thousand Copyright Violations," 700.

source texts because "the notion of originality and ownership would have been foreign to ancient or medieval writers and storytellers, who drew from collective narratives and myths constantly."[49] I only mention this copyright complication because I do not aim to say that all fan fiction can be published for profit, though I leave it for others to discuss further since it is not applicable to Riordan's work.

Another article by Abagail Derecho tries to enrich fan fiction studies by introducing the term 'archontic.' 'Archontic' is a term Derecho borrows from Jacques Derrida, and it refers to how "any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents."[50] The archontic principle expands and adds to an already existing and ever-expanding archive of a source text, and according to Derecho, this term "better describes what fanfic is and how it operates as literature" while dissociating from the negative connotations evoked with previous terms such as "derivative" and "appropriative."[51] In Derecho's words, "the archontic principle is that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself,"[52] and archontic texts "do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text's archive, becoming a part of the archive and expanding it."[53] 'Archontic' functions as a stand-in for 'fan fiction' and revitalizes it through the untainted term that can compel adamant people to rethink a genre previously "denigrated or dismissed as lesser."[54] Fan fiction and archontic literature provide versions and additions rather than copies or imitations. The texts contribute something new to the archive, although it may not always be of tremendous significance. All myth-based novels are then essentially a part of this archive regardless of how, where, and to which genre the novels in question have been published. This claim is the basis for this thesis' argument that fan fiction deserves recognition as legitimate literature. Furthermore, *all* literary works are perceived through the reader's own past knowledge and experiences, which is what fan fiction writers count on and use to create their stories. I would suggest that Hans Robert Jauss' theory of 'horizon of expectations' provides a helpful means of analysis as I move forward with this thesis.

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[49] Montano, "Thousand Copyright Violations," 699.
[50] Abigail Derecho, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fanfiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, eds. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006), 64.
[51] Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 63-64.
[52] Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 64.
[53] Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 65.
[54] Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 73.

Hans Robert Jauss: 'Horizon of Expectations' in Fan Fiction and Riordan's Novels

Jauss' theory allows for easier understanding and analyzing a reader's expectations and reception based on his or her knowledge and experience. Jauss developed the horizon of expectations in literary studies where he claimed that a literary work was read and understood by virtue of the reader's past knowledge and interactions with other texts.[55] A literary work is, in his own words, "not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period."[56] Instead, it functions as a dialogue between the text and the reader as he or she "brings it to a contemporary existence,"[57] which means that the horizon of expectations is an important idea when considering contemporary works based on established works as it bridges the gap between them. In essence, the horizon of expectations refers to the assumptions a reader has of a text before reading it, and these assumptions change with the time and place of reading. While, according to Jauss, this is true for every text we read, it may be more transparently so when considering a text of fan fiction nature, such as Riordan's novels, where the "new text evokes for the reader the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced."[58] Though Jauss' article focuses on how the horizon of expectations benefits people's understanding of literature and history, it can be applied to fan fiction works as the source texts would be the 'history' of the new fan fiction.

Fan fictions may contain any of the abovementioned variations, corrections, alterations or reproductions. Fan fictions can actually not exist without them because a fan fiction is obviously a variation or alteration of a source text that reproduces parts of that source but with a difference, often with the intent to 'correct' or 'flesh out' events that were not satisfactory in the original. For instance, the original Greek mythical texts are 'fleshed out' and updated to, for example, reflect a modern-day American teenager's sense of familiarity with the settings described in Riordan's *Lightning Thief*. The Olympians reside above the Empire State Building in New York City rather than Mount Olympus in Greece, and Percy faces Echidna at the top of the Gateway Arch instead of in "the land of Arimi."[59]

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[55] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 19.
[56] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 21.
[57] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 21.
[58] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 23.
[59] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

Along the same lines, Riordan's *Lightning Thief* presents alternative versions of modernized heroes and encounters with classical Greek figures, which I discuss in greater detail in the second chapter of this thesis, and *Greek Gods* is a modernized reproduction of *Theogony*, which is the subject matter in chapter three. Furthermore, Ika Willis' myth-based fan fiction study shows that self-published fan fiction writers online display similar characteristics when he notes that on Ao3, "the most common kind of story […] is a retelling of a myth in a style that fleshes out the characterization of the classical gods and heroes according to contemporary fictional and psychological norms."[60] Both of Riordan's works contextualize the Greek myths to fit the new audience, which seems to satisfy his readers who might have been unable to comprehend the original texts without contextualization even if they could read them.

Critic Amanda Potter also discusses myth-based fan fictions that transport Greek figures, in this case Atalanta, to a modern setting where her story is retold.[61] Granted, the author of Potter's example makes it clear that she is a fan of Riordan's novels, and she might have gotten the idea of transporting Greek figures to modern times from him, but she does not feel the need to credit him in the way she does the Greek myths.[62] This is most likely because transporting characters is common, almost a norm, in fan fiction. Another interesting note about Potter's example is that the fan fiction author who can expect her readers to know her source text does not assume that they do, which deviates from the general statement that familiarity with the source text is a must for fan fiction readers and writers. Potter's author has added a chapter at the end of her story where she summaries the mythical version she has based her story on, which only goes to show how vast and nebulous Greek mythology is, or at least can be, when a fan fiction writer must clarify to her fan fiction readers what she is actually writing fan fiction about.

Similarly, Riordan contextualizes and explains Percy's various encounters with Greek figures in the modern setting by continuously referring to his specific original Greek mythology sources by having Percy remember, at least partly, the original Greek myths. This is because of Greek mythology's vastness, and its tendency to have multiple versions where the reader may

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[60] Ika Willis, "Amateur Mythographies: Fan Fiction and the Myth of Myth," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016).

[61] Amanda Potter, "'Atalanta Just Married': A Case Study in Greek Mythology-Based Fan Fiction," in *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction*, ed. Lisa Maurice (Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 141.

[62] HecateA, "Atalanta," Greek Mythology, *FanFiction*, accessed November 28, 2018, https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7552323/1/Atalanta.

not get the version he or she expects. Because of this, Riordan felt the need to justify his versions. Riordan said himself: "I try to explain myself in the books" and "I tend to pick the version I like best, and the one that fits best into Percy Jackson's world."[63] Riordan cannot and does not expect his readers to know his source texts, which, as said, is usually a requirement for both reader and writer of regular fan fiction, notwithstanding abovementioned example. However, Riordan as an author must know the classical Greek myths just as well as any fan would because *some* of his varied readership will be fans who know them and expect somewhat accurate retellings. In that way, Riordan writes partly as a fan fiction writer because fans of Greek mythology are a part of his audience.

Additionally, Riordan's varied readership perceive his novels "within the narrower horizon of literary expectations," which I take to mean the reader's knowledge of and expectations to the text's genre and form as well as language style.[64] They also perceive the novels "within the wider horizon of experience of life," meaning the reader's surrounding environment.[65] This relates to "aesthetics of reception" where Riordan's younger readership have a certain "ruling standard of taste" while his adult and educated readership might have another or differing standard.[66] As mentioned earlier in this section, however, according to Jauss a text's "aesthetic value" can change with the time and its audience depending on the audiences' past knowledge and current environment, which is referred to as the "aesthetic distance."[67] It is important to note, though, that not all of Riordan's various readership have or are aware of this aesthetic distance. His younger readership is likely more immersed in the action and plot of the novel as opposed to his adult and educated readership who may also appreciate the novel's aesthetic characteristics and qualities. This thesis analyzes the novels from both perspectives. Furthermore, as new and updated works of the old classical Greek myths, the readerships' "reception can result in a 'change of horizons.'"[68] The change of horizons in Riordan's novels differs from reader to reader depending on their previous knowledge of Greek mythology. For example, an educated reader might not be as surprised as an uneducated reader that "Aunty Em's

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[63] Rick Riordan, "Frequently Asked Questions," Rick Riordan, accessed December 03, 2018, http://rickriordan.com/about/frequently-asked-questions/
[64] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 24.
[65] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 24.
[66] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.
[67] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.
[68] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.

Gnome Emporium" where "the front garden was a forest of statues" (*Lightning Thief*, 171-172) turns out to house Medusa. These different horizontal changes are fascinating, but one can only speculate about how radically a reader's horizon might change as it is impossible to know the individual reader's familiarity with the canonical texts. Regardless, I am confident that a change of horizon does occur for each reader.

Essentially, a reader's horizon of expectations for any work of art differs from reader to reader depending on the reader's own personal knowledge, and how these differing horizons are satisfied is interesting. In the case of Riordan, he has rewritten the old classical Greek myths in a new modern context where he begins his story in a more realistic setting. Riordan can expect all his readers to recognize this setting before shifting towards new horizons in a mythical world that may become a part of the reader's aesthetic horizon of expectations in the future. Thus, Riordan can bring forth his desired messages by first catering to his various readers' familiar horizons in order to draw the readers into the story and make them care about the protagonist before incorporating and presenting possible new and unfamiliar expectations. Jauss' horizon of expectations proves useful because it illuminates the stigmatized notion that derivations are bad and unoriginal by emphasizing how past knowledge determines and influences a reader's current and future expectations and judgments of a new literary work. In that way, Jauss' theory contributes to changing the usually negative expectations fan fiction evokes through Riordan's myth-based novels that are, by their transformative nature and by Pugh's definition, fan fiction whether or not it has been labeled as such.

Rick Riordan: Scholarship

Rick Riordan's novels about the demi-god Percy Jackson quickly gained popularity after the release of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* in 2005. Riordan was able to create a narrative with an easy language and fast paced story that appealed to children all over the world, which may be partly attributed to his previous job as an English middle school teacher who taught Greek myths as well as his role as a father who retold Greek myths to his son, Haley, as bedtime stories. Percy Jackson was born on Haley's bedside when Haley wanted more hero stories after

Riordan had run out, which eventually resulted in "the first Percy Jackson book."[69] Given *Lightning Thief*'s climbing popularity, a number of critics have analyzed the novel, focusing mostly on children's education, Greek myths as representing Western civilization, and the American culture present in the novel. This thesis aims to address Riordan's novels as fan fiction with the following articles functioning as a research basis even though they do not focus on his novels as fan fiction.

Joanna Paul studies Riordan's novels as creative mythmaking in the twenty-first century where she claims that his novels create a "sense of identification […] that makes these myths meaningful for children."[70] Sheila Murnaghan similarly points out that that the novels speak to their target audience, although many adults also enjoy them, by catering to children's, generally assumed, natural aversion to school and further by giving the characters relatable flaws.[71] In terms of my study of fan fiction and Greek myths, these articles clearly show Riordan's evolution of the Greek myths and his ability to weave further lessons into his stories that would have been lost in the original time period where certain contemporary concepts did not exist and were, therefore, not factored into the stories.

Lily Glasner approaches the novels as an allegory that critiques contemporary Western culture,[72] as opposed to Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson whose article focuses on the novels as preserving Western Culture.[73] These contrasting articles bring attention to both positive and negative aspects of American Western culture in Riordan's novels. At the same time, Riordan himself points out that American culture, in part, stems for Greek mythology where we need "to know Greek myths to understand where our modern culture came from."[74] Riordan endorses and protects the overall culture by having Percy save Olympus, which in effect means that he is also saving "Western civilization itself."[75] Simultaneously, Riordan critiques aspects within the

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[69] Rick Riordan, "An Interview With Rick," Rick Riordan, accessed October 10, 2018, http://rickriordan.com/about/an-interview-with-rick/
[70] Joanna Paul, "The Halfbood Hero: Percy Jackson and Mythmaking in the Twenty-Frist Century," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, eds. Zajko, Vanda and Helena Hoyle (Wiley Blackwell Handbooks to Classical Reception, 2017), 232.
[71] Sheila Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children," *Classical World* 104, no. 3 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011): 349-350.
[72] Glasner, "Allegorical Reality," 158.
[73] Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson, ""A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers": Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson Series and America's Culture Wars," *Lion and The Unicorn* 39, no. 3 (2015): 237.
[74] Riordan, "An Interview."
[75] Morey and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 248.

culture through the various obstacles Percy goes through on his quest. These obstacles reflect current issues in our society such as overindulgence (the Lotus Hotel and Casino) and pollution (Pan's disappearance).

The critical sources on myths and fan fiction and Riordan's novels aid this thesis' examination of *Lightning Thief* and *Greek Gods* as valuable works of fan fiction. As works that balance on the boundary between fan fiction and original work, as do many others, they can contribute to challenging the current view of fan fiction. If we classify Riordan as a fan fiction writer, his novels may provide further insight into the world of fan fiction and enhance non-fans' knowledge of the genre. Subsequently, the continuous reflection upon Western civilization, the educational aspect of the novels and their motivating factor for children with learning disabilities are useful when thinking of the novels as fan fiction because they prove that fan fiction can carry important messages and cultural value for its readers. Furthermore, the articles on Riordan's novels demonstrate how Riordan wants "more of" and "more from" the source texts and he thus, unwittingly or not, becomes a fan fiction writer whenever he writes with his Greek mythology fandom readership in mind. One particular aspect of fan fiction he utilizes is fan fiction's subcategory called 'alternate universe.

Chapter 1: *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* as Fan Fiction Alternate Universe

Introduction

Fan fiction has subgenres to discern between the many different types of stories that exist within it. This chapter focuses on the subgenre that involves what is called 'alternate universe' (AU) stories, which to an extent also includes 'out of character' (OOC) behavior, and the reader's horizon of expectations when it comes to such stories. The AU, in its simplest form, tells a story with significant deviations from the source text it is built on, which usually means placing the "characters in contexts outside of the original."[1] This subgenre opens up a whole new world of possibilities for fan fiction writers and professional authors alike, and as such it functions as a significant tool for fostering new beliefs about fan fiction. The generally negative and prejudiced assumptions about fan fiction, discussed in the introduction, can be refuted through utilizing and then applying the AU to Rick Riordan's highly successful *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. This chapter will further consider what AU is and means, what the expectations of such stories are with Hans Robert Jauss in mind and how exactly *Lighting Thief* fits or does not fit within the subgenre by analyzing relevant section of the novel. Additionally, when a story is removed from its original universe into an AU it gains new perspectives, and *Lightning Thief's* AU allows Riordan to address some of them such as contemporary society's view on children with learning difficulties, overconsumption, environmental concerns and family problems. Furthermore, Riordan presents his readers with a hero who is mostly ridiculed by his peers, which is a significant alteration from the classical Greek heroes who were usually praised by the people in their community. Riordan's hero, however, is a relatable protagonist who has difficulties of his own, but he becomes a hero in spite of them. This favor towards the struggling human rather than the powerful divinity creates interesting new ideas and expectations only possible in an AU.

The "outside contexts," abovementioned, in an AU can vary greatly from writer to writer because they can choose to which degree they wish to diverge from the original contexts, but

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[1] Busse, *Framing Fan Fiction*, 74.

"the initial source text delimits and delineates the work"[2] because they have to keep some elements from the source text for a reader to recognize the original within the AU. The fact that AU stories need contextualization actually make them readable for people who have not read or seen the original. However, having some knowledge of the source text is usually an advantage, even if the new AU story tends to briefly explain exactly what is happening and provides relevant background information for choices made within it. This is because the reader will, of course, not be familiar with, for example, various characters' behaviors in the new contexts. Even so, as Tony Keen writes, "the writers are expected to make clear that they are deviating from canon"[3] and most AU writers do this in one form or another, be it in the story tags, an author's note, acknowledgments or somehow within the work itself. 'Tags' refers to specific words or short phrases found in a fan fiction's description. They are used to prepare the reader in advance for what the story contains and what to expect in it. Because fan fiction readers and writers generally do not enjoy stories where certain events and characters stray too far away from what is considered canon, tags are needed to signal possible canon deviations within a story. If the writer has prepared the reader through tags, he or she can avoid surprising the reader. The tags can signal change about main and secondary characters, relationships, setting, level of explicitness so on and so forth. A few examples of tags are 'MadArcher' (from the *Once Upon a Time* fandom), 'Jane Bennet/Charles Bingley' (from the *Pride and Prejudice* fandom), 'Shapeshifter Harry Potter' (from the *Harry Potter* fandom), 'Protective Obi-Wan' (from the *Star Wars* fandom) 'lots of fluff,' and 'Mentions of Sex.'[4] The tags are usually added in an author's note or in its own section called 'additional tags,' which is the case on fan fiction sites such as Archive of Our Own.

In the case of *Lightning Thief*, the AU tag would obviously be appropriate for deviations from canon events and the OOC tag might be added for character deviations, although the AU tag alone would suffice because the reader will expect an AU story to contain some OOC due to the main story already being canon divergent. For example, the traditional characters in *Lighting Thief* act OOC when they gain modern-day traits and mannerism, yet they retain their core

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[2] Louisa Stein, and Kristina Busse, "Limit Play: Fan Authorship between Source Text, Intertext, and Context," *Popular Communication* 7, no. 4 (2009): 196.
[3] Keen, "Fan Fiction and Mythology."
[4] Tags pulled from various random stories on Archive of Our Own: https://archiveofourown.org/

personalities and powers. In some cases another tag is added to further specify, such as 'Alternate Universe – Evil,' 'Alternate Universe – Time Travel' or 'Alternate universe – Modern Setting.'[5] In stories such as these, the writer usually asks "what if, this and not that, had happened?"[6] The possibility of adding tags further gives the writer freedom to play with characters and events without reprisal from the community about the change in canon, although most writers prefer to keep some canon in their stories. It is, after all, still fan fiction. Kavita Mudan Finn and Jessica McCall summarize succinctly that "the 'alternate universe' […] is in fact intended to illustrate the flexibility and adaptability of that source text to different contexts,"[7] whatever that source text may be. This is clearly visible in *Lightning Thief* as well as in the many AU stories in existence, some working better with the subgenre than others of course.

Although the AU appears more frequently in fan fiction, canonical sources apply the AU within themselves as well. TV series particularly and frequently make use of the AU within their own universes and demonstrate the flexibility and adaptability of the source. For example, the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Charmed* and *Supernatural* have all illustrated the AU within their own shows. In the *Buffy* episode "The Wish," Cordelia creates an alternate universe through a wish where Buffy had not come to town and as a result the vampires ruled. In the *Charmed* episode "Centennial Charmed," Paige sneezes her way into an alternate universe where she is dead, an event that changed everything and everyone she knows. Lastly, the *Supernatural* episode "The French Mistake" transports Sam and Dean into an alternate universe where they are actors who play hunters on a TV show called *Supernatural*.

In fact, Finn and McCall further write, "the AU quietly rewrites the rules of what […] texts are or can be,"[8] which means that an AU story does not have any limitations except the ones imposed upon it by the writer and reader depending on the AU. Finn and McCall illustrate this point by noting how the characters in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), a modern adaption of *the Taming of the Shrew* (1593), did not marry because a "twentieth-century American high

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[5] Tags pulled from various random stories on Archive of Our Own: https://archiveofourown.org/
[6] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 61.
[7] Kavita Mudan Finn, and Jessica McCall, "Exist, pursued by a fan: Shakespeare, Fandom, and the Lure of the Alternate Universe," *Critical Survey and Berghahn Books* 28, no. 2 (2016): 30.
[8] Finn and McCall, "Lure of the Alternate Universe," 32.

school setting does not allow for it."[9] Bronwen Thomas supports Finn and McCall by saying that the AU can "transgress boundaries of space and time."[10] Again, this allows the writer more room for experimentation. Similar to the TV series examples, Riordan's *Lightning Thief* demonstrates these characteristics, albeit *Lightning Thief* does not create an AU within itself as the TV series examples. However, since the world of Greek mythology is already established outside the novel, Riordan's world becomes a Greek mythology alternate universe removed from its original classical ancient Greek setting where Riordan asks the big "what if" question that is ever-present in fan fiction AU stories: What would happen if the Greek gods were removed from a classical Greek setting to a modern-day American setting?[11]

Of course, Riordan needed a plausible explanation as to how and why the classical Greek figures were in his modern-day AU at all. That explanation appears once Percy discovers that he is a demi-god, a child with one mortal and one immortal (god) parent, sometimes called a half-blood, and that the Greek gods exist. The centaur Chiron, a teacher and guide for Percy, explains that Western civilization is a "living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years. The gods are a part of it. You might even say that they are the source of it" (*Lightning Thief*, 67). Chiron goes on to say how the gods naturally moved with Western civilization wherever the flame was brightest, which now happens to be America, specifically New York, and so "Olympus is here. And we are *here*" (68, Riordan's italics). By linking the Greek gods, including creatures and monsters, to Western civilization and culture, Riordan ensures that the gods' movement and modernization from ancient Greece to modern-day America seems possible, perhaps even probable. To recall Jauss' theory, Chiron's explanations compel the reader to "a new perception"[12] of the Greek gods and myths where Riordan's transgressions appear almost natural and inevitable. Jauss idea of compelling a reader to a new perception through his or her own life experience applies to *Lightning Thief* because Riordan appeals to the reader's sense of logic in today's scientific world, and the narrator is also a modern-day teenager who expects a reasonable explanation for the Olympians' presence. This

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[9] Finn and McCall, "Lure of the Alternate Universe," 31.
[10] Thomas, "What is Fanfiction," 8.
[11] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 61.
[12] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 41.

further eases the reader into a new way of looking at the world while also pointing out people's generally dismissive attitude towards the unexplainable or unfamiliar.

Furthermore, Riordan's AU, Johanna Paul argues, "encourages a sense of familiarity and empathy in his readers" by giving voice to a struggling twelve-year-old demi-god whose character and "world make sense to them."[13] The Greek myths reinvented and retold in *Lighting Thief*, thus, become much more meaningful and relatable and they allow Riordan to address contemporary issues as the mythological stories, places and "figures are modernized and Americanized."[14] The combination, yet distinction, of our world and the Greek mythological world into one AU serves Riordan throughout the novel. It allows him to continuously juxtapose the classical and modern through Percy, who as a demi-god must navigate both, which further allows for fruitful discussions and interpretations that would be impossible without the AU.

Although it must be noted that while *Lightning Thief* criticizes certain aspects within modern Western civilization, the overall aim of Percy's quest is to protect and prevent an Olympian war that would devastate the mortal world. To demonstrate the destructiveness of such a war Chiron tells Percy that a war between Zeus and Poseidon would "make the Trojan War look like a water-balloon fight" (138). In essence, Percy's task is saving and preserving "not merely the Olympian status quo but Western civilization itself" as Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson discuss in their article "'A God Buys Us Cheeseburgers': Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson Series and America's Culture Wars."[15] However, while protecting the civilized world is Percy's goal, I disagree that he is meant to save the "status quo" because Riordan continuously notes the unfairness of pre-judging and stereotyping within his criticism of Western culture in the novel.

Lightning Thief and Contemporary Concerns

One of the most prominent issues that the AU enables Riordan the opportunity to address concerns children with learning disabilities such as ADHD and dyslexia, which are often viewed as negative traits in children today. In an interview, Riordan himself says that children with these difficulties are, "sometimes written off as lazy, unmotivated, rude, or even stupid."[16] Percy is a

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[13] Paul, "Half-blood Hero," 234.
[14] Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids," 348.
[15] Morey and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 248.
[16] Riordan, "An Interview."

twelve-year-old boy diagnosed with both ADHD and dyslexia who characterizes himself in similar terms. Indeed, on the first pages in *Lightning Thief*, Percy says that he attends Yancy Academy, a "private school for troubled kids," and he describes himself as a "troubled kid" and a "mental-case" (1-2). The reader further learns that Percy has been to six schools in the last six years because one disaster or another has caused his expulsion. However, the kids at Yancy Academy are, according to critic Lily Glasner, "only the sad product of our contemporary society, culture and education,"[17] which Riordan says he tries to combat by having Percy discover that he is actually "very, very talented."[18] This becomes clearer when Annabeth, a fellow demi-god, explains the reasons behind Percy's learning issues: "your mind is hardwired for ancient Greek. And the ADHD […] that's your battlefield reflexes. In a real fight, they'd keep you alive" (88). Most demi-gods have these 'disabilities,' but for people like Percy and Annabeth they are assets rather than disadvantages, which is an idea Riordan tries to promote. Emma B. Hawkins points out that what is an issue for Percy in the modern world is normalized when he is "among his own demi-god peers."[19] Since Percy had not realized his identity or figured out where he belonged in the world, he was always an outsider. He was misunderstood by those around him, but at Camp Half-blood Percy finds his place where "he is ordinary, just one of the group."[20] It seems like Riordan wanted to teach children, his son especially, that there is nothing wrong with them just because they learn differently from other children and require different environments to thrive.

Riordan's AU can highlight the positives of ADHD and dyslexia and the unique thinking these conditions can bring to a person's life while also acknowledging and criticizing today's expected 'troublemaker' label. He challenges the "unconscious social assumption" that ADHD and dyslexia are inherent disadvantages in today's society.[21] Since ADHD and dyslexia diagnoses did not exist in classical times, Riordan would not have been able to raise awareness of these conditions in a purely ancient Greek setting. Paul agrees with this when she writes, "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*

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[17] Glasner, "Allegorical Reality," 161.
[18] Riordan, "An Interview."
[19] Hawkins, "Classical Gods," 81.
[20] Hawkins, "Classical Gods," 81.
[21] Parker, "Reader Response," 347.

world."[22] Riordan created a stark contrast between the mortal world and the Greek mythical world where the former cannot comprehend the latter. Similarly, normal teachers in the novel do not appear to understand children with ADHD or dyslexia and, thus, cannot accommodate their needs in a regular classroom. According to Percy's school counselor, a part of his ADHD is his "brain misinterpreting things" (11), but it is really the counselor who misinterprets things. The counselor is the disabled one whereas Percy can see through the mist, a magical force that hides the mythical world from the mortal world, that clouds the eyes of regular mortals.

Another issue Riordan criticizes in his AU is contemporary Western culture's incessant need for personal pleasure, entertainment and indulgence, which leads to negligence of the natural world. Riordan continuously displays this throughout the whole series, but I will draw on three examples from *Lightning Thief*: The first example concerns itself with the representation of the Greek god Dionysus who "invented wine" and "mostly spent his time partying it up,"[23] the second example is about Percy's encounter with the Lotus Hotel and Casino, which is one of the many "commercial enterprises" that "often turn out to be traps,"[24] and the third example focuses on the environmentalist satyr Grover Underwood and the nature god Pan.

The way Riordan depicts Dionysus, the god of "wine, vegetation, pleasure, festivity, madness and wild frenzy,"[25] in *Lightning Thief* reflects his criticism of America's current and continuous desire for leisure activities. Riordan's reinvention of Dionysus is very much removed from the classical when considering his appearance and people's treatment of him. He is, however, still identifiable through modernized key traits, but instead of being praised, which he was in classical times, he is diminished. Percy describes the camp director, called Mr. D, before knowing who he is as "small, but porky," resembling "a cherub who'd turned middle-aged in a trailer park" and wearing a "tiger-pattern Hawaiian shirt" (62). The first two descriptions contain words with negative connotations that coincide with a child's general image of a reasonably good-looking man who is slightly dirty and villainous, and the last hints vaguely at the god's identity. Through the next few pages, Percy, who is "liking the camp director less and less" (65), and the reader ponder about who Mr. D may be, and Percy's observations provide clues.

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[22] Paul, "Half-Blood Hero," 238, Paul's italics.
[23] Rick Riordan, "Meet the Greek Gods," Rick Riordan, accessed November 3, 2018, http://rickriordan.com/extra/meet-the-greek-gods/
[24] Morey, and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 240.
[25] "Dionysos," *Theoi Project*, accessed November 5, 2018, http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Dionysos.html

Eventually, Percy realizes that Mr. D is Dionysus and succinctly summarizes his observations: "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" (70). Since little of Dionysus' physical appearance is described in the classical texts Riordan's descriptions tend to be a mix of symbolic attributes and contemporary children's expectations of the god in question based on the god's common traits and known powers. Therefore, Riordan often juxtaposes his versions and descriptions with classical symbolic attributes by having Percy run through what little basic knowledge he has of Greek mythology. This knowledge is likely on par with what the readers might also know, which proves how, as Jauss' argues, a "new literary work is received and judged against the background of other works of art as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life."[26] In other words, the reader can only appreciate Riordan's inventive descriptions by deriving them from his or her own knowledge. In this case, Percy thinks of what he knows of a Greek god similar to his impressions of Mr. D in order to identify the god. His choices of mostly negative descriptions are meant to evoke a distaste for Dionysus and his representations in the reader.

However, the question is if Dionysus' negative portrayal relates to criticism of contemporary society's overconsumption and disregard for the natural or if it is because Dionysus' main traits relate to activities not suitable for promotion in children's literature. It seems like Riordan tries to do both where he describes Dionysus in child-friendly terms, but the overall negativity placed on the god serves as criticism of his symbols in society. As the god of "drunkenness and sexual license,"[27] among other things, Dionysus' classical behaviors cannot be promoted in a children's novel, but Riordan uses him to discourage similarly immoral behaviors instead of excluding him. By having Dionysus and Percy dislike each other, Riordan encourages his young readers to reject Dionysus' behaviors and practices in favor of Percy's who is the relatable and likable protagonist.

Because Riordan has properly dissuaded his younger readership from the likes of Dionysus through Percy, he can also satisfy his older and more educated readership's need for authenticity. He does this by hinting at Dionysus' divinity and deserved seat on Mount Olympus (now relocated to the Empire State Building) when Mr. D looks at Percy, who can scarcely

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[26] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 41.
[27] Barry B. Powell, *Classical Myth* (England: Pearson, 2015), 286.

believe his status as a god, and Percy sees "visions of grape vines choking unbelievers to death, drunken warriors insane with battle lust, sailors screaming as their hands turned to flippers, their faces elongating into dolphin snouts" (70-71). These visions give the reader insight into Dionysus' classical past and the powers he possesses by referring to the classical tale of Dionysus and the Etruscan pirates told in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus* where he crushed the ship with vines and ivy and turned most of the crew into dolphins.[28] This passage effectively places Dionysus among the Olympians despite his appearance in the novel, and it may appease his educated readership who likely would not have been satisfied with Dionysus being written off as a sulky drunk. Chiron also explains that Dionysus "took a fancy to a wood nymph who had been declared off-limits" and that is why he has been sent to Camp Half-Blood (69). This simple explanation alludes to Dionysus' traditional identity as a fertility god in a child-friendly way. Riordan has thus successfully labeled Dionysus as a bad influence with unhealthy behaviors while also retaining his divine powers and traditional characteristics.

A more explicit example of overindulgence is the Lotus Hotel and Casino that serves as a test of temptation for Percy, Grover and Annabeth where they must avoid losing themselves in virtual reality and forget about the people who depend on the succession of their mission. The trio arrives off a truck in Las Vegas outside the Lotus Hotel and Casino (henceforth Lotus Casino) where hospitality and kindness greet them, something the trio has not encountered in a while, and they are quickly lured into staying. The Lotus Casino has everything a person can dream of, including "an indoor water slide," "a climbing wall," "an indoor bungee-jumping bridge," "virtual reality suits with working laser guns. And hundreds of video games" (258). Lotus Casino is essentially the "epitome of Western contemporary temptation and hedonism" where everyone who enters quickly forget who they are and lose themselves in an "addiction to virtual reality."[29] This hotel is a modern recreation of Odysseus' brief encounter with the Lotus Eaters who "consume a drug that makes men forgetful of their home and their purpose."[30] As in Odysseus' story, Percy and his friends must combat the strong desire to stay in the Lotus Casino forever. Percy breaks out of the thrall once he realizes that there are kids there from the seventies

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[28] Homer, "To Dionysus," in *Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer*, trans. M. L. West (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 185-189.
[29] Glasner, "Allegorical Reality," 163-164.
[30] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 603.

(1977), eighties (1985) and nineties (1993), and he forces himself, and his friends, back to reality only to find that they have been in the Lotus Casino for several days, which leaves them only one day to complete the quest (261-265). The Lotus Casino is one of the many challenges Percy faces and it, like most of the others, carries "pointed messages concerning our society."[31] In particular, the Lotus Casino signifies America's desire for idle pleasures and virtual entertainment above all else, and when given unlimited access to such leisure people lose themselves. As the kids in Lotus Casino forget who they are, the West has similarly forgotten the importance of the natural world and become indifferent to its treatment in favor of a virtual world.

Riordan's ecocriticism is a constant presence in *Lightning Thief* and the rest of the series through Grover the satyr, a nature spirit, who shows great care for the natural world and its animal inhabitants sans humans who are the ones destroying it. Throughout the quest, Grover helps several animals that he can talk to, but most significant is the trio's liberation of three wild animals trapped in cages where they are ridiculed and abused by humans for entertainment, which causes Grover, "a peace-loving herbivore," to look "downright murderous" (254). Grover also displays his dislike for humans when he explains to Percy about his search for Pan:

> The God of Wild Places disappeared two thousand years ago […] A
> sailor off the coast of Ephesos heard a mysterious voice crying out from
> the shore, 'Tell them that the great god Pan has died!' When humans
> heard the news, they believed it. They've been pillaging Pan's kingdom
> ever since. But for the satyrs, Pan was our lord and master. He protected
> us and the wild places of the earth. We refuse to believe that he died.
> (189)

Riordan tries to remind humans that only serving self-interest by plundering and wasting the natural resources of the world without much thought of future consequences will eventually cause the world, like the god Pan, to die. While Grover does try to explain his environmental concerns to Percy, Riordan acknowledges how difficult that is when Grover first tells Percy that "it's useless to lecture a human" (189). Furthermore, Rachel Elizabeth Dare, a character Percy first meets in *Percy Jackson and The Titan's Curse* (2007), is ashamed of her father's land

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[31] Glasner, "Allegorical Reality," 165.

developer business because it destroys Pan's kingdom.[32] While Pan is not mentioned extensively in *Lightning Thief*, he remains an important figure throughout the series because he "speaks to environmental concerns, and symbolizes the relationship between man and the natural world."[33]

The concerns discussed above are a few among many in *Lightning Thief* and its subsequent novels that are made possible by the fan fiction subgenre alternate universe. As the novel indicates, humans generally dismiss the gods that once served as the foundational explanation for all the natural phenomena in the world in favor of science, which is something Dionysus scoffs at in displeasure (68). Riordan argues that Greek mythology is a fundamental part of Western civilization's history and he claims that one has to "know Greek myths to understand where our modern culture came from."[34] Indeed, its language and symbols are still actively used, and its stories can teach new generations about ethics and morals in entertaining ways. The Greek stories were passed down from generation to generation and altered along the way to fit the current audience. Riordan did this so that his readers could identify with his new and modernized hero. Percy's mundane flaws only make him more endearing to a struggling young reader, and while Percy deals with contemporary challenges, he also goes through many of the same trials as the classical heroes in a contemporary setting. These diversions mark Riordan's novel, by definition, as Greek mythology alternate universe fan fiction, but the mix also makes *Lighting Thief* unique and original. Thus, it challenges the perceptions that assume fan fictions cannot be valuable or original.

Young Readers' Expectations and Families in *Lightning Thief*

I have indicated that alternate universe fan fiction readers have certain expectations to *Lightning Thief*, but the horizon of expectations may differ with Riordan's diverse readership. In particular, his younger readership's expectations do not necessarily always, or at all, coincide and overlap with the ones of an older fan or educated reader. Riordan's readership consists of two main groups. Children, tweens and teens make up the first group who mostly read for fun. They want a fast-paced novel that is easy to read and filled with action. The second group primarily consists

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[32] Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Battle of the Labyrinth* (London: Puffin, 2008), 302.
[33] Paul, "Half-Blood Hero," 239.
[34] Riordan, "An Interview."

of Greek mythology fans and educators who also read in hopes of learning and discovering possible lessons layered within the story, which ties into parents' expectations of appropriate content. These different groups exist because Riordan chose to publish a story created from a pre-existing canon of myths. Therefore, Riordan needed to account and provide for different readership's expectations, interests and motivations for reading his novel rather than just one fan readership. In that way, *Lightning Thief* has a broader horizon of expectations than the average alternate universe fan fiction. I have already provided examples of valuable lessons yielded from *Lightning Thief*, and one example also discussed appropriateness with regards to certain adult themes. I will now turn to Riordan's younger readership and that readership's expectations and experiences with the novel where the focus is on Percy as a relatable character with issues and experiences that can reflect the reader's own. Additionally, Percy's relationship with his family and how he chooses to handle his family situation is meant to set a specific example for the reader to follow.

Keeping a young reader's attention is not always easy, even if their expectations are relatively simple, and especially not when Riordan wrote the novel to "get kids interested in learning more about Greek mythology."[35] Learning is often associated with school for children, and Sheila Murnaghan is a critic who relies on that assumption. In "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children" Murnaghan notes Riordan's use of reverse psychology to teach his younger readers when she says, "Riordan aims to draw in and satisfy his child readers by catering to the distaste for school he assumes they feel"[36] and "by agreeing that school is boring, he can make kids want to learn."[37] While I agree with Murnaghan up to a point, she seems to believe that young readers inherently dislike learning because of its connection to school and all children dislike school, which is not true. Although it may be true for the majority of young readers, it does not apply to all. However, assuming that it is true for most of Riordan's young readership, a young reader will likely feel connected to Percy when he establishes his dislike for school and learning as well as his defiance towards authority figures who are "often presented as villainous."[38] The young reader will, thus, want to continue reading

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[35] Riordan, "An Interview."
[36] Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids," 350.
[37] Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids," 352.
[38] Morey and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 238.

about this relatable character that reflects his or her own "horizon of experience of life," as Jauss calls it.[39] As a result, Riordan has already achieved the goal of getting children "interested in reading."[40] Subsequently, he teaches them about the Greek gods and myths where Percy's brief recaps of various Greek mythology stories might be enough for a curious young reader to seek out the original story.

By the time the reader learns that Percy is not exactly ordinary, he or she is already immersed in Percy's world and has formed a bond of comradeship with the character. Regardless of the novel's quick turn from the natural to the mythical, that bond is continuously upheld through Percy's obvious mundanity whenever he interacts with the mortal world that sees him as a "troubled child" with "violent tendencies" (129). At the end of *Lighting Thief* Percy even muses whether or not he and his mother will survive for a whole year outside Camp Half-Blood with all the monsters after him, that is, he thinks, "assuming the spelling tests and five-paragraph essays didn't kill me" (361). Percy's constant struggle to navigate two worlds remains present throughout the series, which can feel similar to the various "pressures and conflicts involved in typical teenage life."[41] Percy and his battles with humans, monsters and gods alike have come to represent the readers' own personal trials, and, if they work through them, they can emerge victoriously, which is similar to how Percy overcomes his trials in order to save his family and becomes a hero.

The notion of family loyalty and love is highly relevant for Riordan's younger readership, and Riordan highlights that throughout *Lightning Thief* as it serves as the primary motivating factor for Percy to accept his quest. Percy admits this to Grover one evening on the quest: "I don't care about the master bolt. I agreed to go to the Underworld so I could bring back my mother" (192). Grover, however, does not believe him and replies: "You're glad your dad is alive" and "part of you wants to make him proud" even though Percy denies it (192). Percy's conflicted feelings about his father reflect the complex and complicated family structures both in real life and in *Lightning Thief* and no one, not even gods or demi-gods with divine heritage, are exempted from having family issues. In *Lightning Thief*, the traditionally perfect nuclear family is disregarded in favor of the single parent since the gods never stick around to help the mortal

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[39] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 24.
[40] Riordan, "An Interview."
[41] Hawkins, "Classical Gods," 79.

parent raise their children. The families in the novel, created by the single parent, are far from picture perfect. The most prominent case is, of course, Percy and his mother's situation with Gabe Ugliano who is a gambling drunkard nicknamed "Smelly Gabe" by Percy due to his horrendous odor (30-31). Just the surname 'Ugliano' signals to the reader that this man is ugly like his name and someone to heartily dislike. Furthermore, the Ugliano reference evokes the history of Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, remembered and featured by Dante. The Count was a treacherous power player in Pisa and was, eventually, imprisoned and left to starve with his own sons.[42] Percy's imperfect family stresses how one does not necessarily need the traditional family structure to be happy, which is further exemplified when Percy reminisces about his and his mother's happy summer trips to Montauk just the two of them without Gabe. As mentioned, this signals to the young reader that the norm is not always better, and different is not necessarily bad. In fact, it can be the opposite.

While Gabe may be a "world-class jerk" (30), the gods as parents are no better because they only appear to claim their children when it suits them or when they have need of the child in question, and that need usually includes a life or death situation. This demonstrates how, as Morey and Nelson say, "the gods see their children as expendable in the interest of maintaining control."[43] While my own view is similar, I would rather say that the godly parents in *Lightning Thief* simply appear careless with their children. The children are beneath the gods' notice until they are needed, and when they are needed the children are expected to rise to the challenge regardless of what it is, even if it might kill them. In other words, the demi-god children are not central to the gods for the sake of maintaining control as Morey and Nelson's article suggests. They are merely convenient pieces to use, although the children do become more central by the end of the fifth novel in the series. Poseidon, for example, only claims Percy in *Lightning Thief* because he needs Percy's abilities as a demi-god to clear his own name and prevent a generally unwanted war (145). Poseidon does not appear to claim Percy out of love. He is doing it out of necessity, which hurts Percy, but that does not prevent Percy from wanting to please his father. The manipulative nature of the gods and their tendency to ignore their children angers Percy who

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[42] Frances A. Yates, "Transformations of Dante's Ugolino," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 14, no. 1/2 (1951).
[43] Morey and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 246.

believes that "gods should behave better" (96). Poseidon's negligence and Percy's anger may also signal the importance of parental behavior to Riordan's adult audience. Psychoanalysts Angie Voela talks about the gods and their absolute authority in her article where she claims that the children in *Lightning Thief* are little more than soldiers.[44] Voela's argument about the demi-gods in *Lightning Thief* being mindless soldiers that follow orders blindly appears a little farfetched given Percy's continuous disobedience and impertinence. However, Voela does mention how "inflexible" and "short-tempered" the gods are and how they "demand respect and compliance,"[45] which are descriptions that fit with the general knowledge of the Greek gods, according to various myths, being indifferent or endearing towards mortals on personal whims. Riordan has kept these classical traits in his portrayal of the gods, but he does so in a way that teaches kids, and adults alike, about the importance of family. He wants his young readers to break this pattern that people have followed for centuries. He wants to instill care for the natural world and each other without severing family-ties through Percy, an adaptable youngster who is fiercely loyal to those he loves.

While gods such as Zeus, Poseidon and Hades hang onto old prejudices, Percy rises above such petty thoughts of revenge and self-pity, instead choosing to forgive and love his family for who and what they are, even if they do not return the favor. Even so, Riordan acknowledges how hard that is through instances where Percy relates to and understands characters such Luke, another demi-god, who have given in to revenge and bitterness at the gods and their carelessness for their children: "I started to understand Luke's bitterness and how he seemed to resent his father" (108). However, Percy resists what Luke succumbed to in the end, defending the gods and saving Olympus and the Western world because he realizes that "individual wants must occasionally be subordinated to a larger social entity."[46] Additionally, Percy remembers that "a hero's story always ended in tragedy" and, by resisting revenge on Gabe, he breaks the pattern of "what a Greek hero would do in the stories" (351). This serves as another allusion to millennials' ability to evolve as opposed to the old gods who only "know how to […] replay their past" (366). Annabeth even questions Percy's sanity when he cannot comprehend how there are so many demi-gods running around by asking, "what's the most

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[44] Angie Voela. "The Abyss of the Other's Desire or Greek Myth for (Neoliberal) Children," in *Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Myth in Contemporary Culture: After Oedipus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 143.
[45] Voela, "The Abyss," 141.
[46] Morey and Nelson, "Culture Wars," 244.

common thing gods did in the old stories? […] Do you think they've changed their habits in the last few millennia?" (95). By having Percy be different and fighting for more than himself, namely the world and his family, one that arguably does not really deserve it, Riordan encourages his young readers to rise above and beyond what has always been and try to make it better. Percy may be preserving the Western world, but he also evolves, grows and learns from mistakes within the world he is protecting, which is what Riordan wishes his readers to do as well. In the last novel, *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian* (2009), Percy rejects the gift of immortality that would essentially freeze him in time, which would hinder further evolution, and instead he makes the gods promise to claim all their children before the age of thirteen, even the ones belonging to lesser gods.[47] Percy's ability to compel such a promise from the gods despite his mortality and various difficulties makes him an admirable hero for young readers, and it gives them a feeling of empowerment where perhaps they too can impact society one day. Percy's journey teaches the readers that a person, regardless of their past or status within society, has the power to affect change in one way or another if they work hard and battle through their struggles. Percy was "a juvenile delinquent […] a nobody, from a family of nobodies" (22), or at least he believed that for a long time, but he conquered his fears and became a great leader in the end. What is more, following this promise Percy has another chat with Hermes where Percy insists that the gods can change although Hermes remains seriously doubtful,[48] which further demonstrates the youths' innovative power to embrace change and inspire evolution if only one is willing to fight for it.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter demonstrates how Riordan's *Lightning Thiefs* fits largely within the world of Greek mythology alternate universe fan fiction removed from its original classical Greek universe. It proves how crucial the fan fiction AU is in terms of addressing contemporary concerns and issues as well as making, in this case, Geek myths continuously relevant for a contemporary readership. As Jauss says, "the next work can […] present new problems" and Riordan successfully created a "next work" that contained contemporary and, therefore, "new problems"

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[47] Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Last Olympian* (London: Puffin), 331-333.
[48] Riordan, *Last Olympian*, 338.

throughout Percy's journey while also solving some of the "formal and moral problems left behind by the last work" through Percy's evolution and breaking free of the problematic hero cycle from the classical times.[49] In other words, the AU provides Riordan with opportunities to help his readers evolve and learn alongside Percy in a familiar and relatable setting.

Furthermore, the majority of the characters, present or mentioned in *Lightning Thief*, are classical Greek mythology figures or stem from them, Percy included, which further classifies *Lightning Thief* as fan fiction. Even though Percy is an original character, he possesses the traits of a classical and traditional Greek hero, like most of the demi-gods in the novel do, and adding original characters is not unusual in a fan fiction story. Despite modernization, the Greek figures are present and central with the same names and powers as in the original Greek myths, and thus Riordan's novel would not have been out of place if he had chosen to post it on Archive of Our Own or FanFiction.net under the category of 'Greek mythology' with appropriate tags to indicate his displacement of the myths and use of original characters. Classifying Riordan's novel as alternate universe fan fiction, thus, helps elevate and legitimize fan fiction as a whole and as a genre in its own right. Just because a majority of fan fiction cannot publish commercially, it should not be marginalized. As a work that was published for profit, but could have been published as fan fiction, Riordan's *Lightning Thief* proves that a work of writing can belong to both categories, which also shows that the line between fan fiction and commercial publication is blurred.

In the next chapter, I will analyze Percy's archetypal monomyth (the hero's journey), as termed by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in greater detail. Not only is Percy's quest a perfect example of Campbell's monomyth, but it is essentially Riordan's take on many of the Greek mythology hero journeys where the trials Percy encounters are clearly recreated from classical Greek mythology texts. Campbell maps out the hero's journey and traces it through various cultures where he notices that such stories always retain certain characteristics. *Lightning Thief's* structure mirrors this old hero's journey and its characteristics that have survived from classical times to contemporary times. This updated structure in *Lightning Thief*

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[49] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 32.

highlights how what Riordan does in his novel is not unlike what fan fiction writers do with their choice of canon, which can include Greek mythology.

Chapter 2: Fan fiction, the Monomyth and Archetypes in *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

Introduction

The previous chapter situated Rick Riordan's work within fan fiction based on usage of pre-existing characters and plots, but his texts are far from the only ones to derive from mythology that may be counted among fan fiction. Myth-based texts, such as Riordan's, have become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon in today's society, but the degree to which they adhere and conform to their chosen source myths with regards to plots, characters and structure further decide their placement within the world of fan fiction regardless of their professionally published status. This means that not all myth-based works of writing are necessarily fan fiction. Many texts utilize parts of myths without actually qualifying as fan fiction because the plots and characters are radically different from any source text, and even if certain characters appear very similar nothing in the text alludes to the character stemming from a certain source. For example, the character 'Fluffy' in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone* (1997) is a three-headed dog clearly inspired by Cerberus from Greek mythology, but the connection is never mentioned, and the content of the novel is so far removed from Greek mythology that it is not thought of as Greek mythology fan fiction. Another example is the harpies that guard the land of the dead in Phillip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) who resemble Greek mythology's harpies, but, again, are never connected to the myths by any mentions in the novel. Similar to Riordan, however, is Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001). *American Gods* specifically links old gods of several myths by name, even though they have different names in the present of the novel. For example, the character 'Wednesday' is a reincarnation of the Norse god Odin. While Gaiman's chosen names link back to the god in question, they do not overtly do so until later in the novel. However, once it is done, *American Gods* falls within mythology fan fiction as per Sheenagh Pugh's definition given in the introduction, albeit perhaps more loosely so than Riordan's novels given the myriad of different myths and names present.

In these examples, the stories follow a set structure and contain certain archetypes, but novels similar to Riordan's display this structure more prominently than novels such as Rowling's or Pullman's. This structure or guideline is commonly referred to as the 'monomyth'

or the 'hero's journey.' Joseph Campbell popularized the term with his study of it in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which was first published in 1949 and reprinted in 1968 and 2008. Campbell borrowed and developed the term 'monomyth' from James Joyce. For Campbell, the monomyth is the basic structure of a myth, and he derives it from studying myths across cultures where many of the Greek myths he used and studied also inspired Riordan. Campbell defines the monomyth as a basic formula of "separation-initiation-return," meaning when "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."[1] This formula is the skeleton of the monomyth that a writer can build on, and it works particularly well with novels such as Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*. In it, we can see how Riordan utilized the hero's journey and updated it to fit the expectations of the present audience.

Hans Robert Jauss' concept of 'horizon of expectations' arises as an important background component when considering the formula of the monomyth together with a text's expected and unexpected twists and turns and the reader's reactions to them. The concept brings together and helps facilitate an understanding of how, in this case, the updated monomyth of a text affects its readers. The horizon of expectations in the monomyth usually refers to typical characteristics, patterns and stages, usually called 'archetypes,' that one can expect the reader to be familiar with, as per M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*' definition.[2] However, certain archetypes are included or excluded depending on the story in question, and a reader will, assuming he or she is familiar with hero's journey stories, recognize these archetypes, even if he or she might not necessarily know that they are archetypes. The text, in Jauss' words, "awakens memories of that which was already read."[3] Furthermore, the flexibility and adaptability of the monomyth and its archetypes are interesting as they resemble how fan fictions display their original source's flexibility and adaptability. This chapter will, therefore, discuss the monomyth by moving through various archetypal stages often displayed in a hero's journey with Riordan's updated monomyth and archetypes as examples.

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[1] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 23.
[2] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 10th ed. (USA: Cengage Learning, 2011), 16.
[3] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 23.

Campbell's study can show those who dismiss fan fiction for being 'unoriginal' and 'derivative' that plenty of sanctioned works of writing are also 'derivative' and 'unoriginal' insofar that they base their works on other pre-existing works. His study is, thus, immensely helpful because it provides definite articulation of the archetypes and a clear pattern of recognition in myths within and across cultures. Through Campbell, the realization that people have built stories on other stories for centuries becomes apparent. People have continuously reshaped characters, plots and structures, and what fan fiction writers do is not all that different from these retellings. The difference is that modern fan fiction writers often use what are now considered copyrighted works. Before copyright, however, no one claimed exclusive rights to the stories they told. The notion of ownership over creative works was foreign. Once a story was told it belonged to everyone who had listened, and each of these individuals had every right to further the story with their own retellings without anyone condemning them for stealing or violating someone else's work. The fact that we can trace the existence of the monomyth and archetypes in legible stories across cultures suggests that derivative stories can be meaningful.

However, Campbell's study of the monomyth uses theories related to psychoanalysis, which differs from this thesis' usage. Campbell claims that people possess a collective unconscious where patterns of the monomyth and the myths themselves are a part of that unconsciousness realized. He explores how the same monomyth stories exist and overlap in people's psyche across cultures, but this thesis does not depend on this collective unconscious argument. What fan fictions and Riordan do is work within pre-existing patterns of expectations fitting the audience or fandom of choice. In this case, the fandom is Greek mythology fans, but Riordan also writes for children, tweens and teens of various ages. Thus, Riordan has intentionally, frequently and *consciously* consulted the canonical Greek mythical texts to create a story fitting the expectations of his diverse readership, one in which is the structure of the hero's journey. Despite the different theoretical groundings, Campbell's book is useful because it provides a clear overview of what the average hero's journey looks like and what a hero is supposed to be. We can see in Campbell's representations how Riordan has fitted the modern world around the classical hero's journey and updated it as necessary.

As stated, Campbell's monomyth consists of the overarching categories called separation, initiation and return, but within them lay several other, more specific, stages that a hero's journey may or may not include depending on the writer's choice. These may also appear in whatever order the writer sees fit for his or her story. There are seventeen stages divided into the three overarching categories in Campbell's book: the call to adventure, refusal of the call, supernatural aid, the crossing of the first threshold, the belly of the whale, road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as the temptress, atonement with the father, apotheosis, the ultimate boon, refusal of the return, the magic flight, rescue from without, the crossing of the return threshold, master of two worlds and freedom to live.[4] By focusing on a few of the archetypal stages and figures most prominently displayed in *Lightning Thief* this chapter shows how we, readers and writers alike, need to change and remake existing stories into something new or different to remain interested. Pugh states that "writers who like to work with myth and folklore are finding they need to work with

Figure 1: A visual representation of the hero's journey

new forms of it in order to do anything original."[5] Riordan is obviously among these writers, and they know that updating is necessary because there is always something new to uncover from ancient tales as times change, and people are exposed to different environments, histories, beliefs, ideas etc. In a similar way, fan fictions uncover new stories in their chosen fandom. Both fan fictions and stories drawing on archetypes recycle existing plots and characters. The mere existence of archetypes reinforces the fact that retelling used to be common. Those storytellers from ancient times basically created fan fiction. It is merely people's mindset and attitude that has changed. Campbell's book proves this by pointing out recurring archetypes in different
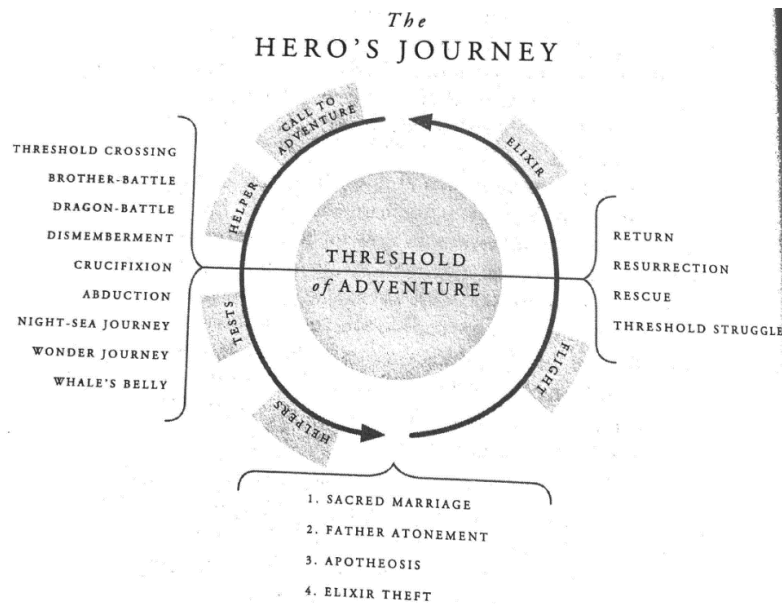
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[4] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 28-29.
[5] Pugh, *Literary Context*, 150.

ancient myths, and *Lightning Thief* provides an excellent modern example that uses this sanctioned hero's journey structure and its archetypes while also functioning as fan fiction of Greek mythology.

Archetypal Characters: Hero, Mentor and Enemy

To start with I will look closer at a few archetypal character types that appear in *Lighting Thief* and how they may conform to or differ from their classical counterparts so famous in the ancient myths before moving on to the archetypal stages and trials of the hero's journey. A few archetypal characters stand out in Riordan's novel: the hero, the mentor and the enemy. As common archetypes, the way in which the author decides to represent them largely influences a novel's success or failure because archetypes are, by their very nature, often overused, trite and sometimes plain boring. Of course, Riordan's *Lightning Thief* was and is successful despite its many archetypes, and it is therefore interesting to study how his representations of these archetypes contributed to that success, especially when considering Riordan's need to stay true to his source myths.

The hero is an ever-evolving and transforming character whose definition has changed with the times, and a modern hero does not always correspond with either classical mythology's or Campbell's definition. The classical mythological definition of a hero, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "a man (or occasionally a woman) of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favored by the gods; *esp.* one regarded as semi-divine and immortal,"[6] but today a hero does not necessarily need to exhibit all, or even any, of the classical characteristics mentioned in this definition. Today almost anyone can be called a hero simply by performing a selfless act. These acts can range from carrying groceries or rescuing a kitten from a tree, to talking someone off a ledge or taking a bullet. In literature, though, the modern hero often battles ordinary everyday problems as opposed to the fantastical battles of, for example, Heracles' twelve labors or Theseus' defeat of the Minotaur. Campbell updates the definition where he brings the classical and modern together in his description of the hero as a "man or woman who

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[6] "hero, n.," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 15, 2019, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86297?rskey=SNERXM&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations […] the hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn."[7] Essentially, the hero is someone who has moved past his own immediate "modern" environment and society, and he becomes the "eternal man" who considers the welfare of the world beyond himself. The hero is the embodiment of humans' image of the universally perfect man. In simpler terms, the hero values others' needs before his own, but he still possesses relatable qualities for the everyman. The hero may even be or have been an everyman. This is the kind of hero Percy is. He is not simply either a classical hero or a modern hero; he functions as both, but he starts out as neither. Johanna Paul further observes how "there is no undue reverence for the canonical versions; ancient narratives […] are adapted and reshaped to suit their new context."[8] Riordan did exactly that and Paul, thus, points out how Riordan neatly tied the old together with the new by introducing Percy as any teenager with teen challenges and then evolved him into a modern yet classical hero with classical challenges later in the novel while still retaining the modern issues in his life. In that way, Riordan effectively balances Percy between the two worlds all while, in Campbell's words, "his journey varies little in essential plan."[9]

However, it must be noted that Percy is not *only* a hero archetype. As a realistic novel, *Lightning Thief* must have rounded characters, which means they embody several archetypes in order to mimic the complexity of a real person. Percy is such a character. He inhabits different archetypes that he can lose or gain throughout the story. While Percy does remain a hero archetype throughout, he is not restricted by or limited to it. Within his general archetype as a hero, Percy also embodies archetypes such as, for example, 'ally' from the perspective of his friends, fellow campers and father; he is the 'enemy' from the perspective of Luke and Kronos as well as from the perspective of Zeus and Hades for most of the novel; and he functions as the more modern archetype called the 'orphan' for a while when his mother appears to have died and before he knew about his father.

The mentor or the 'Wise Old Man' is more straight forward than the hero, largely because the definition of a mentor has not changed much since its classical usage. The mentor is

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[7] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 14-15.
[8] Paul, "Half-blood Hero," 233.
[9] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 30.

a figure who "assists the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure."[10] The classical Greek hero *always* has a mentor figure. He or she is often a god or goddess, like Athena who advises Perseus,[11] but the mentor can be other figures such as the Oracle at Delphi who advised Heracles.[12] For Percy in *Lightning Thief*, the mentor figure is Chiron who Homer's *Iliad* describes as "most righteous of the Centaurs,"[13] and who raised and mentored other ancient heroes such as Asclepius, Jason and Achilles among others. Similarly, Percy was delivered to Chiron for raising and mentoring by his mother who could no longer protect him. In Riordan's modern-day novel Chiron is transformed into Camp Half-Blood's activities director, which is fitting because it makes him Percy's natural teacher, trainer and guide in preparation for his quest. This allowed Riordan to create a natural hero-mentor relationship between Chiron and the demi-gods at the camp without having it appear as a strange old custom that does not particularly fit with the contemporary image of Camp Half-Blood as a summer camp. Chiron's status alone alludes to the fact that he has mentored many heroes throughout his life. The fact that Chiron is disabled while in the mortal world further identifies him as a kindred spirit for the demi-gods to look up and listen to.

While on the road, however, Annabeth becomes a substitute mentor to Percy, in addition to a friend and ally as well as a hero in her own right, because she is highly knowledgeable about both the Greek and mortal world, present and ancient. Of course, Poseidon also functions as a type of mentor along the way, but he appears more like a patron who provides supernatural aid for Percy during battles when he needs it, which is discussed later in this chapter.

In *Lightning Thief*, the archetypal enemy appears in the form of Hades who is "great and conspicuous in the seat of power."[14] Percy fortifies this image of a classical enemy through his descriptions of Hades who sits on a "throne of fused human bones, looking [...] dangerous as a panther" (309). However, Campbell does not extensively talk about the enemy beyond this quote because his focus is the *hero's* journey, but it is implicit that the journey contains a variety of enemies and threats that the hero must defeat or overcome in order to move forward. All the monsters that Percy meets on his quest are enemies of sorts, but they are merely Hades' lackeys,

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[10] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 6.
[11] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 371.
[12] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 390-392.
[13] Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 276.
[14] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 289.

and he is eventually absolved of guilt in the mystery of the master bolt's disappearance, which means that he was never the enemy at all. This makes the enemy figure in *Lightning Thief* trickier because he has no rules to follow or moral code to uphold like most other character types. The enemy can slip away and become someone else in the blink of an eye if the author so chooses. Who the reader believes to be the enemy can turn out to be an ally or vice versa. In Percy's case, the enemy in the initial novel is not the enemy of the overall series, even if there are plenty of minor obstacles that appear like enemies along the journey.

The two primary enemies are Luke and Kronos, the former working on behalf of the latter. Kronos himself does not even show up in person in *Lightning Thief*, but he "enters men's nightmares and breathes evil thoughts" (334), which enforces the importance of dreams in myths and how the gods sometimes spoke to their chosen heroes through their dreams. Luke, however, only reveals himself as an enemy during the last ten pages of the novel. As a result, he becomes a personal enemy for Percy because, up until these last pages, he was Percy's friend. Furthermore, Luke appears to embody all the negative aspects of being a demi-god. He is essentially the opposite of Percy. He is who Percy could have become, which shows when Percy notes that he can understand Luke's bitterness at the gods (108). There are many types of archetypal enemies, as there are many types of heroes, but Riordan likely chose his archetypal enemies with a purpose. Kronos is a purely evil foe while Luke has redeemable characteristics. This sharp contrast demonstrates how a young Luke has the ability to evolve and change while the ancient Kronos cannot.

These individual archetypes clearly demonstrate Riordan's ability to balance and mix the classical and the modern in *Lightning Thief*, which evidently appeals to readership of all ages and is, thus, a big part of the novel's success. However, well-developed character types alone do not make a novel successful. The characters must be situated within a larger context, which in this case is the hero's journey, starting with the Call to Adventure.

Separation and Departure from the Familiar: The Call to Adventure

Percy Jackson's first call to adventure appears early in *Lightning Thief*. Note that I say first because it is neither his only nor main call to adventure. However, in the beginning, Percy

merely sets the stage by explaining his everyday situation. Recalling Jauss' theory, the first few pages of *Lighting Thief* cater to the reader's "horizon of expectations of his lived praxis" and sense of normalcy and familiarity before something fantastical kicks off the real story.[15] Jauss' horizon of expectations is helpful here because his theory celebrates the fact that any literary work is filtered through and relies on the reader's past knowledge, experiences and interactions, which fan fictions also do. This initial grounding in the 'world of common day' allows the reader to continuously relate to the protagonist despite the many unfamiliar, often supernatural, elements and events appearing throughout the rest of the novel. Percy's first call to adventure begins once he is attacked by his math teacher, Mrs. Dodds, who turns out to be a fury (a vengeance creature that torments the guilty). Percy manages to defeat the fury when Mr. Brunner, his favorite teacher and later revealed to be Chiron the centaur, throws him a ballpoint pen that magically turns into a sword (12-13). Even though Percy has not quite yet entered the mythical world and accepted it, the pen that turns into a sword essentially serves as Percy's primary supernatural aid in this scene, throughout the novel and the rest of the series. I will return to the significance of Percy's sword when discussing magical items and supernatural aid.

This tiny battle, while being a call to a bigger adventure, also functions as a micro hero's journey where Percy accepts the challenge of fighting off and killing Mrs. Dodds to save the rest of his class. Mrs. Dodds first leads him away, separating him from his class, and when she turns into a fury Percy is faced with acceptance or denial. He then receives magical aid from Mr. Brunner, and he successfully dispatches the threat and returns to the class. Riordan's choice of making Mrs. Dodds a fury helps the educated readers deduce that Percy is supposed to have committed a crime. Since the furies are known as vengeful creatures meant to deliver justice as told in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (and other tales), this may prompt the educated reader to continue reading because it leaves him or her with questions about what this twelve-year-old boy is supposed to have done wrong to deserve such torment. Presumably, the additional lines "it was only a matter of time before we found you out. Confess, and you will suffer less pain" uttered by the fury are to help the uneducated readers realize the same (12). Furthermore, Riordan makes school a metaphorical battleground for all students who must survive dislikeable teachers. By having Percy battle a teacher and win, Riordan indicates that simply getting through the school

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[15] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 39.

day is a won hero's journey in itself.[16] Just as Percy must return to and survive school each year, Riordan encourages his readers to stay in school, too.

After this scene, both Percy and the reader know that the world Percy lives in is about to change and, as Campbell writes, "the familiar life horizons has been outgrown,"[17] or is about to be outgrown. Even so, it takes a while for Percy to really realize that supernatural forces are at work around him and endangering him. Instead, he tries to return to his normal life after the bizarre event that he cannot explain, and no one seems to remember (16). The following unease Percy feels is evidence of what Campbell describes as how "old concepts, ideas, and emotional patterns no longer fit,"[18] and "even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations […] a series of signs of increasing force […] become visible until […] the summons can no longer be denied."[19] The first signs are visible in Grover, Percy's best friend, whom Percy quickly observes remembers and knows more than he lets on, especially when he finds out that Grover secretly talks to Mr. Brunner about him (16, 19).

Thus, Percy's beginning is quite different from the classical Greek heroes who, while not necessarily knowing they were going to be heroes, were aware that the world of Greek mythology existed, and they were taught to fear and respect the Greek gods from an early age because that was the religion believed in at the time. This change, or update, fits well in *Lightning Thief* because the audience is likely to be in a similar situation as Percy where they are relatively unfamiliar with the ancient Greek gods, creatures and religion as opposed to the readers, or more likely listeners, of the original versions. Additionally, the heroes in the classical Greek myths are all consciously aware of the call to adventure when they receive it whether they accept it willingly or not. For example, Theseus was called once his mother showed him the big rock he needed to remove to retrieve his father's sword and sandals that proved he was Aegeus' son and a hero;[20] and Agamemnon was called upon to sacrifice his daughter to appease Artemis, whom he angered by shooting one of her deer in her sacred grove, so he and his men could set

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[16] Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids," 350.

[17] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 43.

[18] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 43.

[19] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 46.

[20] Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Mythology*, trans. Robin Hard (New York: Oxford's World Classics, 1998), 136.

sail for Troy.[21] Percy, however, is clueless when his first call to adventure happens. He does not understand what is going on and his confusion allows for a more chaotic and realistic introduction where Percy must follow the instructions of others (his mother and Grover). Essentially, he has no choice but to answer the call and travel to Camp Half-Blood as his mother, Sally, rushes him and Grover there once she realizes what has happened.

Percy meets the first threshold he needs to cross right outside Camp Half-Blood, namely the boundary to Camp Half-Blood that is marked by Thalia's protective tree.[22] Before he can cross, however, he must fight the Minotaur who stands in his way. The Minotaur is much like a threshold guardian who, Campbell reminds us, represents "the dangerous aspect of the presence"[23] and stands "for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon" wherein what lies beyond is a mystery.[24] Classically, the Minotaur is a monster trapped in a labyrinth where "seven youths and as many maidens" were sacrificed "every nine years" to keep the peace in Athens.[25] Of course, this begs the question of how the Minotaur is alive when Theseus killed him. Riordan explains, through Annabeth, that monsters never really die and will "eventually […] re-form" (86). Additionally, "Chiron calls them archetypes" (86), which in this context refers to a cycle of everlasting resurrection comparable to literary archetypes that, like the hero's journey and its stages, never really die but are recycled through time.

The choice of the Minotaur as the first threshold guardian is first and foremost because this monster is widely known to most people, as are most of the other monsters that Percy encounters on his journey, but that is not the only reason. The choice of this particular monster alludes to Percy's heritage as a son of Poseidon like Theseus. It also allows Percy to demonstrate his raw skills and potential as a hero, and it foreshadows Percy's future as well as his overall hero's journey where he must save the world and all the people in it. This is similar to how Theseus volunteered to walk into the Minotaur's labyrinth alone to slay the monster to save the

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[21] Aeschylus, *The Oresteia: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Classics, 1984), 110-111.
[22] This tree has a story of its own, but I only mention it here as a visible border that Percy must physically cross to enter the new unfamiliar world.
[23] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 77.
[24] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 64.
[25] Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus of Sicily: In Twelve Volumes: 3: Books IV (continued) 59-VIII*, trans. C. H. Oldfather. (London: William Heinemann, 1939), 11.

fourteen people sacrificed every nine years. Additionally, once Percy crosses the threshold, he "undergoes a metamorphosis"[26] where he is reborn as a demi-god and enters a world and life he will never be able to leave, which is similar to the Minotaur's entrapment in a labyrinth it could not escape.

However, Percy's descriptions of the Minotaur are what first alerts the reader to Riordan's crafty updating. The Minotaur is generally depicted and described as "a man-eating monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man,"[27] although in later times it has sometimes been depicted as a monster with the head of a man and the body of a bull, which may be due to Ovid's lack of specification on which part was man and which was bull in his Romanized version.[28] While the Minotaur Percy fights is described in similar terms, Percy also notes that the Minotaur has "legs like something from the cover of *Muscle Man* magazine" and wears "bright white Fruit-of-the-Looms" underwear (50, Riordan's italics). These humoristic descriptions add something more for a contemporary reader who can then imagine precisely the look of the Minotaur in a slightly sardonic way, which tones down the other more grisly descriptions. Riordan not only updated the plot and character of the ancient Minotaur myth, but he updated the language and modernized the frame of reference. Using wry, sarcastic and sometimes ridiculous descriptions and comparisons is a recurring theme throughout *Lightning Thief*.[29] This was a risk because such descriptions require the reader to know what *Muscle Man* magazine and Fruit-of-the-Loom are. While the former may be rather self-explanatory, the latter is not, although the reader can likely imagine that it is a clothing company from the context. The risk was evidently one Riordan thought worthwhile in order to bring the ancient creature up to date in a specific image.

Between the battles with the fury and the Minotaur, there are two distinct departures or separations that Percy goes through in this preliminary call to adventure. The first is Percy's departure from the ordinary world he knows, although he does not physically leave it, as he is exposed to the mysterious and unfamiliar supernatural world of Greek mythology. Campbell describes this as when the hero "reveals an unsuspected world" and is "drawn into a relationship

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[26] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 77.
[27] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 455.
[28] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Charles Martin (New York: Norton, 2010), 208.
[29] Riordan's usage of contemporary language and references will be dealt with more extensively in chapter 3.

with forces that are not rightly understood."[30] Secondly, Percy is separated from what is familiar to him, namely his mother whom he believes was killed by the Minotaur, and he must respond to the call to adventure and accept his destiny as a demi-god if he is to have any hope of getting her back. The latter is similar to Perseus, Percy's namesake, from the classical Greek myths who started on his hero's journey to save his mother, Danaë, from Polydectes' advances.[31] But, Percy does not boast like Perseus that he could, for example, fetch the Gorgon's head, which results in Polydectes ordering just that.[32] On the contrary, Percy rather diminishes himself as a nobody without any special talents (22). This contrast shows how the "hero-deed […] is not today what it was"[33] because people value different traits in modern hero characters as opposed to the ones in ancient Greece. As a more troubled and complicated character than the confident and ready-made hero that is Perseus, Percy's humble beginning allows for a more realistic connection to the hero in this initial stage.

Percy's second call to adventure happens shortly after his arrival at Camp Half-Blood. This call launches Percy's main hero's journey in *Lightning Thief*, albeit being only one hero's journey within the larger hero's journey of the whole series. Before the quest begins, however, Percy and the reader are given a little time to get used to the new situation. This small pause in an otherwise continuously action-filled novel allows Percy and the reader to re-adjust to the new horizon of expectations that follow the realization that Greek gods are real, at least real in Percy's world. The reader soon learns that, because Percy is a son of Poseidon, he is accused of stealing Zeus' master bolt for his father, and if he does not embark on a quest to find it a war between the gods will erupt and devastate the earth, which is what convinces Percy to accept the quest in the end (135-139). Even though Percy's situation is more dire than most, that basic concept of being wrongfully accused is relatable for most people. Thus, Percy's feelings in this moment resonate with the reader's own personal experiences, which increases the reader's empathy with Percy. This second call to adventure is more clearly the beginning of a hero's journey than the first, it is even called a 'quest,' which is relatively synonymous with the phrase 'hero's journey.' As is tradition, the call is followed by a clear refusal but eventual acceptance

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[30] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 42.
[31] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 370.
[32] Apollodorus, *The Library*, 65.
[33] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 334.

and even eagerness once Percy realizes the quest will take him to the Underworld where his mother is (144).

Following Percy's acceptance of his quest, Percy, accompanied by Grover and Annabeth, leaves Camp Half-Blood with key items that serve as supernatural aid throughout the journey: powerful healing ambrosia and nectar; Annabeth's Yankee's cap that can turn the wearer invisible, which was a gift from her mother, Athena; a pair of sneakers that gain wings upon a special command gifted by Luke that he got from his father, Hermes; and Percy's sword, Riptide, which was a gift from his father, Poseidon, that can turn into a pen when not in use (149-153). Here Riordan disguises classical supernatural weapons as ordinary modern-day objects, which the reader may expect at this point due to Riordan's continuous merging of the old and the new. It has become a part of the reader's "future aesthetic experience, as a henceforth familiar expectation," to quote Jauss.[34] Annabeth's cap and Luke's sneakers are modern versions of Hades' cap that turned the wearer invisible and Hermes' winged sandals, respectively. Riptide's transformation from a sword to a pen when not in use may appear rather peculiar because it invokes the proverb 'the pen is mightier than the sword,' which does not coincide with the reader's expectation of violent battles to the death experienced in the novel thus far. The fact that Riptide is both a pen and a sword conflicts with and plays off of the proverb. It contrasts how Riordan uses his writing to convey messages through a character with a sword that is also a pen. Riptide as a pen symbolizes both Riordan's and Percy's desire to make peace instead of war, which makes that choice especially creative and pleasurable. However, even if the reader deduces that Percy ultimately wants peace, the fact that the pen is a sword that Percy does not hesitate to use when he must also satisfy the reader's expectation of future epic battles. Additionally, the familiarity of the disguised items does not only benefit the reader, but it is likely also out of necessity in order to make the story believable because teenagers carrying such items across America would not have gone unnoticed. Furthermore, it is not unnatural or unexpected that the Greek gods could make shapeshifting objects given their many shapeshifting abilities.

Now that the stage has been set, the quest has been accepted, the hero has received his mission, advice from his mentor (Chiron), help from his friends and companions (Grover and

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[34] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.

Annabeth), and magical gifts to help him on the way, the hero is ready to embark into the unknown "where he must survive a succession of trials."[35] The novel now enters into the initiation stage where Percy's first legitimately acknowledged hero's journey takes place.

Trials on the Journey

Percy and his friends encounter and go through several modernized archetypal trials and traps filled with creatures and monsters on their way to retrieve the master bolt from the Underworld where they believe Hades has it. It is in the various encounters and confrontations on the journey that we see Riordan's updating and evolving of the hero's journey. I will provide a couple of examples in this section to illustrate how Riordan does this and why his updating is interesting, particularly when considering the reader's expectations and possible knowledge of the original Greek myths.

One of the first and most notable modernized trials Percy experiences in *Lightning Thief* is a meeting with the Gorgon Medusa who is a widely known and recognized figure, and her story is one of the most famous stories from Greek mythology. While many variations exist, the basic myth revolves around Perseus who, on a quest for Polydectes, tracks down Medusa and slashes her head off while she sleeps with the help of his supernatural gifts received from the nymphs: "some winged sandals, and the *kibisis*, which is said to have been a kind of wallet. They also had the cap of Hades […] he got an adamantine sickle from Hermes," and Perseus possessed a "bronze shield in which he could see the reflection of the Gorgon" without turning into stone himself.[36] Percy, Annabeth and Grover have between them almost these same supernatural gifts as well as knowledge of Medusa, and they must work together to defeat her. While the classical heroes usually worked alone, Riordan appeared to prioritize the notion of friendship and teamwork in his novel. Riordan emphasized this by sharing the objects needed for defeating Medusa between three people, and he demonstrated how different people have different strengths and skills. Riordan seemingly wanted to convey to his audience that one can overcome obstacles by working together with what you have and figure out a way to use it to your advantage. In this scene specifically, Annabeth and Grover do not have the power to kill Medusa themselves, and

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[35] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 81.
[36] Apollodorus, *The Library*, 66.

so they distract Medusa to give Percy time to dispatch her. Another concrete example of the trio's teamwork is how Annabeth and Percy remember Medusa's origin story together and replace Perseus' bronze shield with a modern-day gazing ball because they do not have a bronze shield, which also happens to fit more naturally than a shield in the setting of Medusa's modern-day garden of statues (180-183).

Moreover, Medusa is traditionally depicted as a hideous beast in various Greek paintings with features such as snakes for hair, wings, a wide mouth and obscenely large tongue. Conversely, in *Lightning Thief* Medusa is disguised as the kind sculptor maker Aunty Em.[37] Even though the mist will probably cloak Medusa's true form from the mortals, she still chooses to hide behind a nice, humble and welcoming disguise because she wants to receive demi-gods unsuspectedly. Given Percy's frequent reliance on his own knowledge of the traditional Greek myths to defeat various monsters, having a disguise is a smart, as well as probably necessary, revolutionary choice on the monster's part. Without the disguise, Medusa would not have been able to lure Percy and Annabeth into their deaths because they would identify her instantly and would have either fled or killed her immediately. As Percy and Annabeth demonstrate their knowledge of the Medusa myth while battling her, one can assume that other demi-gods also have knowledge of the old stories. This expectation matters because, as a mythical monster, Medusa was classically part animal, which means she was likely not perceived as particularly intelligent,[38] and thus this type of innovative thinking might appear out of character. However, since Riordan's demi-gods evolved, it makes sense that the monsters evolved as well. Medusa's change in appearance thus appears natural in order for her to survive.

A trial similar to Medusa's is when Percy and his friends flee into "Crusty's Waterbed Palace" from "a gang of kids" chasing them (276-277). Crusty turns out to be Procrustes who traditionally, according to the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, "compelled the travellers who passed by to lie down upon a bed, and if any were too long for the bed he cut off the parts of their body which protruded, while in the case of such as were too short for it he stretched their legs," but he was "put to death" by Theseus.[39] Siculus' records lack descriptions of how Theseus

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[37] Aunty Em is also a reference to L. Frank Baum's Oz character.

[38] "monster, n., adv., and adj," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed February 12, 2019, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=xj9Xh7&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

[39] Siculus, *Twelve Volumes: 3*, 5.

killed Procrustes, but most classical mythology sources say that Theseus "forced Procrustes to fit into one of his own beds."[40] In *Lightning Thief*, Percy recalls how Theseus defeated Procrustes and uses a similar method by flattering Procrustes and then tricking him into laying down on a bed, which results in Percy being able to trap him and, presumably, cut his head off (280-282). This particular trial is only significant insofar that it proves how Percy can think and talk himself out of tricky situations. Rather than immediately using the sword end of Riptide he figuratively uses the pen and his persuasiveness, even if the encounter does end in a violent act. Additionally, while the classical Procrustes only had one or two beds, Riordan's Procrustes has "every kind of waterbed you could imagine" where some had "satin sheets" and "built-in Lava Lamps on the headboard" (278). The cleverness of turning Procrustes' scheme into a legitimate business fitting the luxuries available in today's world will not be lost on a knowledgeable reader.

These confrontations demonstrate the elegant way in which Riordan juxtaposes the old myths with new updated versions without losing the essence of the classical or the familiarity of the contemporary. This creates what Jauss calls a "horizonal change" and decreases the aesthetic distance, which can become a part of the reader's "future aesthetic experience."[41] A reader of *Lightning Thief* has certain expectations to both our own 'common day' world and the 'Greek mythical' world as he or she starts reading, but they are challenged when brought together in *Lighting Thief*. The expectations are gradually and gracefully integrated throughout the novel, which creates a continuous change of horizon that eventually settles into a new horizon of expectations and aesthetic experience when it comes to Riordan's novels. The old familiar expectations are altered but still present in order to create one united world where both fit in.

Another classical but modernized point in this united world is how Percy cannot survive the journey and its trials without help, as did none of his predecessors. While the classical heroes usually did not travel with companions as Percy does, it is not in the hero's nature to singlehandedly achieve success without aid. Help and support appear in many forms for Percy, and while Annabeth with her intelligence and Grover with his nature-skills serve as immediate assistance in a crisis, they are hardly the only helpers and not by far the most powerful ones. Campbell notes that "the hero is covertly aided by the advice […] and secret agents of the

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[40] Powell, *Classical Myth*, 434.
[41] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.

supernatural helper."[42] In Percy's case, Poseidon himself serves as the greatest "supernatural helper," but a Nereid tells Percy that Poseidon is not allowed to directly interfere with Percy and help him because "the gods may not show such favoritism" and, therefore, he "can work by indirect influence only" (272). Poseidon aids Percy by giving him extraordinary control over water such as, for example, being able to breathe underwater as well as draw strength and heal from it. Poseidon also provides assistance through creatures under his command such as the Nereid who gives Percy magical pearls (272-273).

However, the fact that Annabeth and Grover have less power does not mean that they do not provide ample and life-saving support. An example is when they must get past Cerberus, the three-headed hellhound who guards the entrance to the Underworld, where Annabeth takes charge, and the other two follow her instructions. While Annabeth distracts Cerberus with a red rubber ball, drawing on her knowledge from "obedience school," she orders Percy and Grover forward before dashing after them (295-297). Additionally, as mentioned in the previous section, the reader should not be too surprised at Annabeth's choice of distraction because of Riordan's continuous and successful incorporation of modern solutions for most of Percy's obstacles in ways that seem natural for the situations in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the meeting with Cerberus symbolizes how a person's treatment of an animal matter: Annabeth's kind treatment received a positive and kind reaction whereas Hades, who likely neglects Cerberus, created a fearsome beast.

This interdependence between the trio, which I touched upon earlier with Medusa, remains present throughout *Lighting Thief*, and each trial the trio endures further emphasizes it. Every time Percy, Annabeth and Grover rely on each other Riordan signals the importance of friendship, loyalty and trust. Even so, the clearest demonstration of their ever-strengthening friendship happens when both Annabeth and Grover volunteer to stay in the Underworld to save Percy's mother and Percy reflects: "They had both been with me through so much […] They had done nothing but save me, over and over, and now they wanted to sacrifice their lives for my mom" (316-217). As Percy realizes how much his friends have done for him, Riordan urges the readers to, once again, remember that they are not alone in their struggles. More specifically, his son, Haley, is not alone in his battle with ADHD and dyslexia. He uses this climactic and

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[42] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 81.

transformative stage of the hero's journey to stress a point he has progressively built throughout the novel.

Once in the Underworld, in what Campbell calls 'the belly of the whale,' Percy "undergoes metamorphosis"[43] once again where he has a self-revelation and becomes a hero. As Percy confronts Hades and Hades accuses Percy in turn, Percy discovers Ares' trickery because the master bolt has appeared in the backpack Ares gave him, which makes Percy seem guilty despite his claim of innocence (312-314). Percy's second and most important metamorphosis happens in this moment when he realizes how he and the big three gods have been tricked (316). He further realizes that he cannot only think about himself and save his mother at the expense of his friends, who have kept him alive, the gods and the whole world: "I desperately wanted to sacrifice myself and use the last pearl on her, but I knew what she would say. She would never allow it. I had to get the bolt back to Olympus and tell Zeus the truth. I had to stop the war" (317). Percy's thoughts display his understanding that the good of the many must take priority, and he cannot be selfish. He recognizes that it is his duty and destiny as a hero to return the bolt to Zeus and explain, even if he did not choose it. This internal revelation and decision reveal Percy's maturity and personal growth. He has truly become a hero with the identifying traits that Campbell described in his definition where the hero evolves from what he calls the "modern man" to the "eternal man."[44] Percy figuratively dies as a 'modern man' when he enters the Underworld, but he changes and emerges reborn as an as 'eternal man,' ready to confront Ares' trickery.

Return and Aftermath

Percy's confrontation with Ares serves as a kind of apotheosis where Percy ascends from the Underworld armed with new knowledge and "egoless" after having resisted the strong personal desire to save his mother.[45] 'Egoless' is a term used by Campbell with reference to Jungian's Self where the hero transcends beyond his "personal ego" in either a literal or metaphorical death

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[43] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 77.
[44] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 14-15.
[45] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 141.

and arises "in the Self."[46] This ascension marks the beginning of Percy's return journey to deliver the master bolt. As expected, being the god of war, Ares wants the war to happen, although the scene foreshadows that Kronos controls Ares. The impending war between the Olympians and Kronos is the overarching hero's journey of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and the four subsequent novels: *The Sea of Monsters* (2006), *The Titan's Curse* (2007), *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2008) and *The Last Olympian* (2009). Regardless, Percy quickly goads Ares into a fight where the victor gets to claim the master bolt and the helmet of darkness (223-325). Riordan overtly acknowledges the differences between the classical Greek myths and his modernizations when Ares asks, "how would you like to get smashed: classic or modern?" in which Percy holds up his sword and Ares replies "classic it is" (325). The reader now expects a typical duel, as far as mythical fights go, without modern weapons. Epic fights within the greater war were common in Greek mythology, but gods actively participating was not quite as common. However, the gods did intervene physically on both sides during the Trojan War as told in the *Iliad*. Comparable to Percy's fight is Diomedes' who also fought Ares and won.[47] As Percy received help from his father through his powers, Athena guided Diomedes. In both instances, Ares fled once he was physically wounded. The difference in the fights might be the characters' motivation. Percy fought for the overall goal of avoiding an Olympian war while Diomedes fought for the Achaeans against the Trojans for the possession of a woman, namely Helen of Troy. Even so, both Percy and Diomedes fought for their own lives in their respective battles, but, ultimately, they fought Ares with aid from gods in service of the gods and their agendas. Furthermore, incorporating a classical fight such as this shows how dedicated Riordan was to the source texts and characters he borrowed and updated. It would not have been within Ares' character to refuse a fight, and so Riordan did not attempt to turn him into a character who would. As Percy wins and receives the rewards, he enters the stage that Campbell calls 'the magical flight.'

This last trial may be the most dangerous one yet for Percy because it lands him aboard a plane in the air, in Zeus' domain, which Chiron has explicitly warned Percy against because he "would never come down again alive" (147). However, true to Campbell's words, "the hero in

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[46] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 209.
[47] Homer, *Iliad*, 168-169.

his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron."[48] In this case, the "elixir" that will restore society is the return of Zeus' lightning bolt and, as its deliverer, Percy wins the blessing of safe passage through the air when Zeus' does not "blast him out of the sky" (341). Of course, Poseidon is Percy's natural supernatural patron, but Zeus' support is still a blessing from a god.

By making Percy a son of Poseidon rather than Zeus, Riordan avoided questions about why Percy did not fly where he needed to go with the readily available modern-day airplanes. This is a neat and quite simple way to avoid such pitfalls while also creating a new original hero that is not a simple copy of the classical Greek Perseus who was a son of Zeus and could use Hermes' sandals to fly where he needed to go. Additionally, as a son of Poseidon "the second most powerful god" Percy must "try a little bit harder" to achieve his goals than the original Perseus, although they do have many similarities.[49]

Percy's father is particularly important in *Lightning Thief*, and it is at the end of the return journey at Olympus after he has delivered the master bolt to Zeus and recounted his journey that Percy goes through the stage called 'atonement with the father,' which proves how the stages can shift according to the needs of the story and the writer's choice. Even though Poseidon was present throughout the journey, he is not introduced in person until the last fifty pages or so. At the beginning of *Lightning Thief* Percy seems to be struggling between feelings of resentment at abandonment and a desire to make his father proud once he finds out who he is (39, 192). However, by the time Percy meets Poseidon he has changed, he has started to let go of "the attachment to ego itself,"[50] as Campbell calls it, although he still clearly struggles with "not to feel hurt" at Poseidon's distant attitude (346). Riordan utilizes this stage by giving voice to Percy's internal struggle and turmoil of emotions with regards to his father that has been subtilty present throughout the novel but has largely been overshadowed by external conflicts up until this point. Percy has mixed feelings upon meeting Poseidon where he first wonders if he was "a wrongdoing? The result of a god's mistake?" before thinking, "in a strange way, I was glad that Poseidon was so distant. If he'd tried to apologize or told me he loved me, or even smiled, it

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[48] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 170.
[49] Paul, "Half-blood Hero," 232.
[50] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 110.

would've felt fake" (341). At the same time, Percy cannot shake his disappointment when he thinks, "here was my own dad, telling me he was sorry I'd been born" (346). Percy has already proven that he is as wild and unruly as the sea, and his thoughts and emotions can be equally volatile. These rolling thoughts and feelings speak to readers of all ages without a father figure, or with a weak parental figure, in their life. On a more fundamental level, they may also represent the general insecurities a tween or teen reader likely possesses. Riordan created "a more complex characterization and emotional life" than the classical Greek hero stories that for the most part only depict the heroes' great deeds and conquests.[51] The classical stories conspicuously lack descriptions of the emotional struggles that are so important for contemporary readers in order to become truly invested in a story. This difference between *Lighting Thief* and its source texts, however, is largely due to the change in genre and time of writing, which will become clearer when discussing *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* in chapter three.

Now that Percy has reached the end of his hero's journey he returns home to find his mother returned to him as a thank you from Hades for recovering his helmet of darkness because "even the Lord of Death pays his debts" (345). The return of his mother is Percy's personal 'ultimate boon,' although receiving recognition from his absentee father is also a boon for Percy. According to Campbell, though, tradition says that the ultimate boon a hero usually seeks from the gods and goddesses is "the power of their sustaining substance," meaning their grace.[52] Percy is different. He asks for family recognition, loyalty and peace both now and by the end of the last novel in the series. Percy's ultimate boon acknowledges how family and good parental figures are essential to a youth's life, much more important than immortality or power. Divine power comes secondary to family for Percy because he knows that his mother's genuine care and love has kept him happy and safe whereas his godly family, including his father, largely view him as a pawn.

The significance of Percy's request from the gods, as well as the general updating from ancient Greek values and concerns to contemporary ones, have already been discussed in chapter one, but it is worth repeating insofar that Riordan somewhat normalized fatherlessness in

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[51] Paul, "Half-blood Hero," 232.

[52] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 155.

Lightning Thief, although he does not exclude absent mothers. It is more common for a child to have an absent father, but all of Riordan's heroes are missing one parent, if not both. The mortal parent may or may not be good for a demi-god child. Percy is an example of a demi-god with a caring mother whereas Annabeth's father resented her because of her tendency to attract monsters and, therefore, trouble to his new family (201). Furthermore, while many of the children at Camp Half-Blood are claimed, they are not necessarily gaining a parent. The gods remain distant and usually only care when it benefits them. Sometimes the gods never bother to claim their children at all, leaving them "sullen and depressed" (96). Chiron, who teaches most of the demi-gods at camp is an orphan, too. While this is not overtly mentioned in any known Greek mythology source, Roman sources explicitly mention how Chiron's mother, Philyra, convinced Jupiter (Zeus) to change her into a linden tree, which would, presumably, leave Chiron without anyone to care for him.[53] Riordan's frequent use of orphan-like figures seems to be a theme in the novel, and it speaks to the general rising number of children living with only one parent.[54] Riordan acknowledged his potential single-parent-raised readers by creating a hero from a strong single-parent family who is taught by another strong completely parentless figure, which enforces the reader's sense of importance and value regardless of his or her missing parent(s). In some ways, they may even be stronger and more capable than children with both parents. At the same time, Riordan critiqued this rise by having Percy force the neglectful parents (the gods) to claim their children in the end.

The reunion with his mother concludes Percy's first hero's journey, but certain elements are not explicitly revealed until after the journey is over because *Lightning Thief* is the first novel in a series of five. One of these elements is the primary enemy or betrayer that the reader thought was Hades and then Ares who both turned out to be mostly innocent in the grand scheme of the novel. The ultimate enemy that Percy faces is Kronos who works through an angry and revengeful Luke, which I mentioned in the archetypal characters section of this chapter. Luke is not revealed as an enemy and thief of Zeus' bolt and Hades' helmet until the end of *Lightning Thief* where he makes a final attempt at killing Percy, which launches the events of the next

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[53] Gaius Julius Hyginus, "Hyginus' Fabulae," in *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology,* trans. R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trazaskoma (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), 146.
[54] "The Majority of Children Live With Two Parents, Census Bureau Reports," United States Census, accessed February 2, 2019, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-192.html.

novel (364-369). This last ordeal confronts Percy with his greatest fear: "You shall be betrayed by one who calls you a friend" (141, 365). This is the "final test of the talent of the hero,"[55] but it has nothing to do with women and love as this stage should according to Campbell's 'meeting with the goddess' because Percy is a young boy and *Lightning Thief* a novel for children. Furthermore, the reader has just learned that Percy's hero's journey is not over and, therefore, the "boon of love" should not appear yet.[56] Instead, Riordan transforms this stage into another last trial of Percy's "ultimate experience"[57] where he must draw on everything he knows to escape this life-threatening situation as he realizes Luke's betrayal. This twist of events on Riordan's part surprises the reader and Percy as it becomes clear that the quest for Zeus' master bolt was merely a sort of call to the overarching adventure that unfolds through the rest of the series. Indeed, *Lightning Thief* is only the beginning of Percy's whole life as a hero, just like a person's life does not end after the defeat of one challenge or the victory of one goal.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has sought to investigate the usefulness of Campbell's monomyth structure as a supporting point for certain updated novels with a basis in mythical texts, such as Riordan's, possibly being fan fiction. Although, it is necessary to note that a novel's overt links to and reliance on its chosen sources decide to which degree it is fan fiction. I begin by outlining a few archetypal characters in *Lightning Thief* before situating them in various stages of the novel's hero's journey. I argue that the hero's journey as described by Campbell and updated by Riordan cater to the reader's expectations where Riordan further develops the expectations to Campbell's hero's journey. I suggest that the development, or updating, of the expectations of the hero's journey feed the reader's thirst for "more of" as well as "more from"[58] the Greek myths by presenting interesting new ideas about Greek mythology that "preserves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and hereby opens paths of future experiences,"[59] as Jauss says, in a

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[55] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 99.
[56] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 99.
[57] Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 101.
[58] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 19.
[59] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 41.

modern setting while staying true to the source myths and, thus, labeling *Lightning Thief* as Greek mythology fan fiction.

Furthermore, the fact that Percy experiences several micro hero's journeys throughout *Lightning Thief* and the revelation that his journey is not over by the end of the novel, and will likely not be over as long as he lives, symbolizes that the reader's life is also filled with hero's journeys where the reader must face tough choices and challenges throughout his or her life.[60] *Lightning Thief* covertly teaches children as well as entertaining them while simultaneously being, arguably, classified as derivative fan fiction. This counters the general assumption that fan fictions cannot be educational. By viewing *Lighting Thief* as fan fiction through Campbell's monomyth, I point to its derivative nature in a positive light. Together it challenges people's negative view of fan fiction by pointing out that most literature is derivative by nature.

As Riordan updated the hero's journey for a contemporary readership, he also changed the genre, language and contexts of the original Greek myths to fit his audience. Chapter three focuses on these changes in Riordan's companion book *Greek Gods*.

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[60] Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids," 349-351.

Chapter 3: *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* as *Theogony* Fan Fiction

Introduction

Rick Riordan's novels about Percy Jackson in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005-2009) and the following series titled *The Heroes of Olympus* (2010-2014) became so popular that he decided to write the companion book *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* where he recounts the Greek creation story from Hesiod's *Theogony* along with various stories about the twelve Olympian gods and goddesses found in other Greek myths. This chapter will discuss how Riordan's change of genre, updated language and frame of reference contribute to preserving and keeping the old Greek stories relevant for a contemporary readership. Viewing *Greek Gods* as fan fiction highlights the commonness and the necessity of making changes such as these when adapting a text to a new audience or context. As in the initial series, the stories are told from Percy's perspective where his continuous insubordination towards the Greek gods shines through his irreverent narrative voice. This makes the book enjoyable, humorous and comprehensible for the contemporary reader as our own modern-day expectations of realism in fictional stories make the originals appear intricate, chaotic and sometimes tedious. Riordan's change of genre from stories written in the epic dialect known in ancient Greece to modern-day realistic short-stories make the fantastical stories more engaging for a contemporary reader when told from Percy's perspective, a character already known and loved by most of the readers. Riordan further marks *Greek Gods* as fan fiction by adding inventive details of various places, motivations for actions within the stories, and a constant sardonic tone of voice without changing the chain of events and main plots of the stories. *Greek Gods* may even be closer to fan fiction than *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* precisely because it attempts to protect the history and plots of its Greek sources rather than creating new and original plots with original characters (sans Percy himself). Furthermore, the updated frame of reference is much more convenient for describing otherwise unfathomable actions and events, and it helps to contextualize them into coherent narratives.

Additionally, readers familiar with *the Olympians* series, presumably, already have a set of pre-determined expectations to *Greek Gods'* narrative with Percy as the first-person narrator. The overarching relatability to Percy continues to follow the reader in *Greek Gods* from *the Olympians* series through Riordan's added realism and Percy's mundane narration, which further

functions as a continuous tool for enjoyable learning as well as boosting a young reader's self-confidence. Thus, awareness of Hans Robert Jauss' theory of horizons of expectations remains relevant, especially as Riordan acknowledges that *Greek Gods* does not contain original stories, but stories derived from, in Percy's words, "forty bajillion different versions" and "I'm going to tell you the versions that make the most sense to me," and he further says that he got them "straight from the Ancient Greek and Roman dudes who wrote them down in the first place" (*Greek Gods*, x). This disclaimer also declares that Riordan knows he has knowledgeable fan readers, and he addresses them to avoid future backlash for possibly telling the wrong versions as he proceeds.

However, any reader is usually aware that a story of derivative or fan fiction nature is bound to be different from its original source or sources. It is actually expected because otherwise there would be no new story. As mentioned, though, the purpose of *Greek Gods* is keeping the old Greek myths' plots, and other changes are therefore made in their place, starting with the change of genre. Note that 'genre' is, of course, not a rigid concept although certain characteristics tend to remain at a genre's 'core.' Genres are fluid and change over time as works are added to a genre and people provide new or different interpretations. A text can also inhabit different genres, and different genres can overlap and share similar characteristics. Even so, one genre is usually more prominent than others and serves as the overarching genre of the whole work, which is, in this case, the realistic short-story.

Genre: From Epic Dialect to Modern Realistic Short-Story

Hesiod's *Theogony* and other classical Greek stories and myths are known for their grandiose narrative style that was common at the time and is more often than not found in ancient Greek stories, but today's readership usually prefers a more mundane and realistic style. Heroic epics such as Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey* were the most famous type of story to display this style. M. H. Abrams even says that an epic is usually "a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style,"[1] but he further states, "the term 'epic' is often applied, by extension, to narratives which differ in many respects […] but manifest the epic spirit and grandeur."[2] In

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[1] Abrams, *Literary Terms*, 107.
[2] Abrams, *Literary Terms*, 109.

short, some epic characteristics appear in most ancient Greek stories, but they are not necessarily considered epics.

Theogony is the primary source for information about the beginning of the Greek gods and goddesses, and it appears like an epic in many ways as it is "composed in the same hexameter metre, Ionian (epic) dialect, and formulaic diction as those of the Homeric tradition,"[3] but it is actually a didactic poem recounting the Olympians' genealogy. *Theogony* does, however, start with an invocation of the muses, which is traditional for epics, but they sing, "we know to tell many lies that sound like truth, but we know to sing reality, when we will."[4] This implies that *Theogony's* purpose "is to tell the truth, not a well-integrated, riveting story, in which the characters, gods and men alike, move the plot forward,"[5] as professor of classics Hanna M. Roisman says is the norm for epics. However, while the content of *Theogony* makes it a didactic poem, it shares the same epic performance model as Homer's works, and it thus functions in part as an epic, but its fragmented narration and organization relates to a genre that surfaced as a distinct genre in the nineteenth century, namely the short-story. Other stories about the Greek gods such as the *Homeric Hymns*, which likely served as another source for Riordan, similarly contain some epic characteristics even though they are not epics.

Theogony functions like a collection of short-stories insofar that it contains stories of many different characters unified under a larger predetermined purpose and plot, namely, the creation of the cosmos and the Olympians' eventual reign. Additionally, a short-story keeps a much faster pace with less detail, fewer complications and a shorter resolution than a novel.[6] *Theogony* falls within the short-story genre as it, too, leaves out the somewhat lengthy and extravagant descriptions of epics such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. However, a short-story is similar to a novel where the "action, thought, and dialogue of its characters"[7] drive the story forward, which differs from *Theogony* where the narrator drives the story forward by telling the reader what happens next rather than having the characters advance the story. Furthermore, the narrator of *Theogony* often presents the resolution before actually telling the story, which leads to the somewhat disorienting structure in *Theogony*.

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[3] Hesiod, *Theogony*, ix.
[4] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 3.
[5] Hanna M. Roisman, "Greek Epic," in *A Companion to Greek Literature*, ed. Martin Höse and David Schenker (Wiley Blackwell: West Sussex, 2016), 143.
[6] Abrams, *Literary Terms*, 365-366.
[7] Abrams, *Literary Terms*, 365.

Given *Theogony's* resemblance to short-stories, in addition to the many different sources and versions found in stories and myths about the Olympians spanning across centuries, it makes sense that Riordan continued writing short-stories about the Olympians rather than a novel because it would be impossible to meet the reader's expectations of a coherent, factual and realistic novel. Riordan could, however, easily adapt and restructure the stories from *Theogony* and various scattered stories about the Olympians into comprehensible short-stories for a contemporary reader where the structure is, not only made logical but, also much more realistic.

Riordan had already changed the genre of Greek myths once before when he inserted them into his original novels where it was convenient, and it thus stands to reason that he realized the potential for doing something similar with other Greek myths. As his two first series remained successful, both relying chiefly on Greek (and Roman) mythology, Riordan could consider more direct methods of teaching and getting "kids interested in […] Greek mythology," which was his goal with *Lightning Thief*.[8] For *Greek Gods*, Riordan needed a way to insert his originality and create something exciting and new without losing or changing the essence of the original myths in his retellings. He did that by reworking *Theogony* and other myths into a genre that would allow him more freedom with a first-person narrator that he knew the audience already enjoyed and was familiar with. In doing so, Riordan could update the language, spend more time on descriptions and details, and explain the reasons behind the characters' decisions without changing the storylines or outcomes. The result became the short-stories found in *Greek Gods*.

Thus, Riordan's retellings incite feelings of realism, but, the myths are beyond what any person today would consider truly 'realistic.' Even so, the reader still expects a certain level of realism in the retellings, especially with Percy as the narrator. Abrams provides an overarching definition of realism in fictional literature: "realistic fiction is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might very well happen."[9] Obviously, no one who reads either *Theogony* or *Greek Gods* believes that the events occurring in them could happen in real life, but *Greek Gods*, as opposed to *Theogony*, feels realistic when reading it because of Riordan's realistic form of writing. Ian Watt provides more specific traits of this

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[8] Riordan, "An Interview."
[9] Abrams, *Literary Terms*, 334.

realistic form in his chapter "Realism and the Novel Form" in his book *The Rise of the Novel* than Abrams' definition, and Riordan utilized many of them.

According to Watt, one of the most important traits in realistic fiction is "to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience."[10] This means that Riordan needed to infuse the ancient stories with human characteristics in order to create a somewhat plausible impression of reality. Using different methods of characterization helped Riordan accomplish this. For example, in both *Theogony* and *Greek Gods* Gaia creates Ouranos, and they have several 'sets' of children together where one of the titan children, Kronos, ends up killing his father. Riordan's version, however, elaborates on the motivations behind the actions through Percy's running commentary. He describes Gaia and Ouranos' relationship where Gaia "decided maybe if they had another set of kids it would bring them closer" (4), and he explains that Gaia's creation of the adamant scythe happened through several earthquakes caused by her anger at Ouranos, followed by the titan's discussion of whether or not to kill Ouranos (6-7). Gaia and Ouranos' relationship when described in this fashion resembles that of any human's relationship and ascribing feelings of anger and uncertainty further humanize the fantastical creatures, which create a more realistic narrative. The dialogue between the titans especially drives the story logically forward when all but one mumbles excuses to avoid taking on the task of killing Ouranos. Not only does this elaborative humanizing make the story more realistic, but it is only possible with the new genre because such 'superfluous' detailed dialogue would likely be unacceptable in a traditional story told in ancient Greece.

Another essential feature in realism concerns character individualization and detailed descriptions.[11] Hesiod's *Theogony* contains very little description in general. At best, descriptions of physical attributes appear in rather factual manners to emphasize might and power in a character or battle. Even so, *Theogony* remains rather bland as the characters blend together as types rather than individuals, meaning that *Theogony's* gods, like Zeus and Hades, were merely classified as Greek gods without distinct individual personalities. Riordan, however, not only describes appearances in detail, but he allows the characters' actions and speech to display certain individual personalities, which immediately makes Riordan's versions appear

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[10] Ian Watt, "Realism and the Novel Form," in *The Rise of the Novel* (Vintage Books: London, 2015), 13.
[11] Watt, "Novel Form," 18.

much more realistic than the originals. Watt's states, "the character is to be regarded as though he were a particular person and not a type,"[12] but I must clarify that a character can be both "a particular person" *and* "a type." While Zeus and Hades remain a part of the larger category type of 'Greek Olympian Gods' they also gain individuality in *Greek Gods*. For example, Zeus is identifiable as a confident leader as he commands his siblings to fight with him to overthrow Kronos, which no one contests although Poseidon grumbles about how Zeus "thought he should be in charge just because he had rescued them" (46). He is further noted as a philanderer with his various exploits with various women throughout *Greek Gods*, and Percy even says, "you can't swing a cat in Ancient Greece without hitting at least one of Zeus's ex-girlfriends" (209). Hades' individuality is radically different from Zeus' confident leadership and never-ending love affairs. He appears as a moody teenager who is used to being invisible (52) and receives the worst of everything as he has "rotten luck" (61). Percy even mentions that Hades has a "gloomy personality" (61, 90, 146). Additionally, and fitting the lord of the Underworld, Hades prefers dark and dangerous places such as Tartarus: "the idea of descending into the most dangerous, vilest part of creating somehow appealed to him" (47-48). These attributes and behaviors are meant to signal that the Olympians are people with individual personalities and emotions like any human being in today's society and not just powerful gods as they all appear as in Hesiod's *Theogony*, though they are that as well.

Related to the above feature, "the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances."[13] This means that the characters in the story must generally speak for themselves rather than having an omniscient narrator always inform the audience. Zeus' battle with Typhoeus is a myth that displays this updating.[14] In *Theogony* the battle between Zeus and Typhoeus takes place during a single paragraph, and Zeus defeats the monster relatively easily,[15] but Apollodorus' *the Library* later elaborated slightly on this by adding a section where Zeus was weakened for some time because Typhoeus "cut the tendons from his hands and feet" and Hermes had to fetch them.[16] In the former version, Typhoeus was thrown into Tartarus, but in the latter he was trapped under Mount Etna for eternity. Regardless, both accounts have a narrator

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[12] Watt, "Novel Form," 20.
[13] Watt, "Novel Form," 15.
[14] Typhoeus is sometimes called Typhon, but I refer to him as Typhoeus as Riordan does.
[15] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 28.
[16] Apollodorus. *The Library*, 36.

who merely states what happened. Riordan further stretched the story to cover about ten pages in *Greek Gods*, which is much longer than either Hesiod's or Apollodorus' version. He describes the story in more detail where he allows the characters to "act out" the plot. For example, instead of placing Zeus' tendons with him (though guarded) and say that Hermes and Aegipan "made away with the tendons and fitted them back into Zeus,"[17] Riordan spins a tale where Zeus, Hermes and Aegipan must trick Typhoeus because he took the tendons with him (220-223). Thus, this prolonged scene once again appeals to the reader's sense of realism as Riordan shows the story rather than just telling it, which further caters to the modern reader's horizon of expectations because he or she expects the character to go through a problem where he realizes something that changes him and from there discovers a solution to his problem. Any fictional story without these elements in sensible order makes little sense to the contemporary reader because a story's atmosphere lies in the details.

Epics and other mythological stories may have been magnificent in their time but keeping them so would have made them alien and, therefore, relatively uninteresting for a young contemporary reader. Riordan clearly understood this when he decided to change the genre and, thus, structure for his retellings. However, Riordan could not fully exclude epic characteristics in his retellings. Some epic elements remained in order to create authentic retellings in *Greek Gods*. A reader will expect, for example, grand battles to stay grand such as the battle between Zeus and Typhoeus. Simultaneously, the reader has expectations to *Greek Gods* as a book written by Riordan in Percy's understandable, mundane and relatable narrative voice. In Jauss' words, Riordan's *Greek Gods*, "satisfies the desire for reproduction of the familiarly beautiful; confirms familiar sentiments; sanctions wishful notions" and "makes unusual experiences enjoyable."[18] Balancing these expectations proved relatively manageable for Riordan due to the flexibility of genres and their ability to change and overlap with each other. As the plots largely remained the same as in the canonical texts, however, Riordan could not provide "more of" or "more from" his source texts as Pugh points out is the norm for fan fictions.[19] Thus, language became an important tool for him in order to create something interesting and new and distinguished enough from the originals to publish.

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[17] Apollodorus. *The Library*, 36.
[18] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 25.
[19] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 19.

Language: Through the Eyes of a Rebellious Teen

The choice of a modern-day teenage narrator heavily influenced Riordan's casual language style and radically changed it from the epic style of the ancient Greek since today's American youth do not think in that style, and they certainly do not speak Greek. Additionally, leaving the formal writing conventions of the old Greek stories in favor of a prose style enables Riordan "to give an air of complete authenticity," which Watt lists as an important element in realistic writing.[20] With Percy as the narrator, though, Jauss would say that Riordan also works within "the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts."[21] In this case, the earlier texts are the five novels in *the Olympians* series where the reader became accustomed to a certain writing style. The reader will, therefore, expect that same writing style in *Greek Gods* regardless of its source texts' original style. Riordan's narrator choice thus confirms what professor R. Kelly Aune and Toshiyuki Kikuchi say, "people will attempt to converge towards the speech styles […] of their message recipients as a strategy for eliciting positive responses from the recipients."[22] In order to capture young people's interest in Greek mythology Riordan adapted their speech style and applied them to the Greek myths. Furthermore, the myths can be much more easily understood by the modern everyman reader when the language resembles his or her own, and Riordan's target audience is young adults like the character he uses to retell the stories. Since *Greek Gods* is a first-person narrative, naturally, Percy's personality remains present. One can define Percy's character as an impulsive and troubled teenager with a sharp tongue, sarcastic sense of humor and a rebellious streak. I will, therefore, consider how Riordan updated and utilized language style, choice of vocabulary and humor to his advantage with the help of modern slang as well as frequent interruptions to make personal comments that appear to come naturally to a narrator such as Percy.

The first and most obvious, difference between Riordan's retellings and the old Greek myths is the transition from ancient Greek to modern American. However, no evidence that Riordan knew ancient Greek, or knows it now, and was able to read the original myths exist, and

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[20] Watt, "Novel Form," 13, 27.
[21] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 23.
[22] R. Kelly Aune and Toshiyuki Kikuchi, "Effects of Language Intensity Similarity on Perceptions of Credibility Relational Attributions, and Persuasion," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 12, no. 3 (September 1993): 225.

I therefore assume he studied and used English translations, which means that extensive linguistic analysis across languages with regards to his works seems rather redundant. Although, of course, other scholars such as Glynn Patrick Edwards in his book *The Language of Hesiod in its Traditional Context* and Cora Angier in her article "Verbal Patterns in Hesiod's *Theogony*" have studied linguistic features in ancient Greek epics. In Riordan's case, however, discussing language becomes relevant when considering modern fiction's need for commonality with the reader.

Even if Riordan used English translations, the many versions in existence allow for some comments on his different structural organization with regards to phrasing and word choice. For example, Hesiod's *Theogony* was poetry written in the epic style meant for oral performance where oral techniques such as pace, intonation and tone of voice were important. Riordan's retellings in *Greek Gods*, on the other hand, are not as orally oriented, although Percy does make a few oral-like remarks. For example, Percy's speech in *Greek Gods* mimics oral storytelling whenever Percy makes a personal comment intended for the reader such as "harsh, right?" (5) and "you can guess what happened" (237). This matches how a teenager such as Percy would most likely retell fantastical stories like those found in *Greek Gods* orally today. Furthermore, since the Greek myths are a little dark and grisly for a young reader, these comments keep the stories more lighthearted and fun by pulling the reader slightly back from the originally morbid and gruesome myths where, for example, incest was pretty much the norm, fathers ate their children, children murdered their fathers, various creatures were chained in darkness and some were mauled in various ways. Riordan also uses these comments to forewarn the reader about what comes next in phrases like: "Prepare yourself. This is gross" (217) or "okay, deep breath, because things are about to get *weird*" (246, Riordan's italics). Additionally, these introductory phrases make what follows appear less serious, which makes possible inappropriate content more child-friendly because of the comical phrasings.

Comical phrasing and wording further satirize the Greek gods when their conversations consist of dialogue like: "Listen, babe, it wasn't going to work out with that kid" (29), "you're freaking me out" (53), "okay, well, nice try" (177), "I can return it to the cow store" (372), "sorry about that" (398) and so on. Percy makes these great Greek gods and goddesses appear more like angsty teenagers making mistakes and blundering through life just like any other person. The fact that their mistakes impact the world and other people much more significantly

than any contemporary teenager's mistake is shrugged off as normal, which of course it was for them. However, Percy does acknowledge that it is not normal today by pointing out relatively early that "in modern times, we have a word for this sort of behavior. We call it *psycho*" (7, Riordan's italics). This very causal language style resembles that of a modern-day teenager's and is meant for entertaining and attracting them as readers. The change of genre allowed Riordan to use this popular style, that he developed in his original series of five novels, to further positively inform and educate kids about Greek mythology in *Greek Gods*.

Another language style choice that adds to the general commoner atmosphere in the short-story collection is Riordan's use of modern teen slang. Percy uses typical teenage vocabulary like "dude" (6, 26, 52, 60 etc.), "emo" (146) and "swag" (285, 311). He also refers to Artemis and her huntresses as "Artemis and the gang" (350) and uses phrases such as "don't sweat it" (35), "out of his league" (90), and "kicking back" (108). Riordan offers little explanation for the meaning of these terms and phrases when they appear. He was clearly confident that his readers would already know them, which they did, and they do. This further proves that Riordan subscribed to the general belief that "when you want to reach or attract young people, you should speak to them in their own language, i.e. you should use their 'lingo,'" as academic Elvis Saal writes.[23] I agree with Saal as well as Riordan's assumption here because my own experience confirms it. Generally, I find myself simplifying explanations if the person I am talking to is young or unfamiliar with the subject or topic, and I welcome simplified explanations if I am unfamiliar with a subject or topic. One specific example is when I first came across Riordan's works. I was a young adult and relatively unfamiliar with the original Greek myths, although I had some basic knowledge of it. Riordan provided easier versions to read and understand as the original Greek myths were chaotic and confusing. While I have read many original Greek myths in later times at an older age, I still recall what I learned from Riordan's works whenever the topic of Greek mythology arises in general conversation because his way of telling the stories resembles my own language style and is, thus, much simpler to use as a point of reference than the ancient Greek versions.

Generally, the vocabulary used in professional English translations of *Theogony* and other Greek myths is tedious and often littered with specialized language that would not appeal

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[23] Elvis Saal, "The Effect of Teenage Language in Health Communication: A Study among English and Sepedi Teenagers," *Language Matters* 42, no. 1 (August 2011): 84.

to a young contemporary reader. Riordan, however, generally chose more common and straightforward explanations, words and expressions. For example, while including words such as "girdle" and "dowry," he casually explains the words' meaning as a "magical belt" (259) and "a bunch of presents" (311), respectively. This makes Riordan's retellings appear more authoritative while also retaining their contemporary framing.

References: Contemporary Comparisons and Contextualization

Since the language needed modernization to fit contemporary readerships, naturally the contexts of the myths in *Greek Gods* needed similar updating. This is primarily shown in Percy's contextualization of certain events by comparing them to modern-day concepts and frequently making pop-culture references.

Percy in *Greek Gods* explains the myths through very mundane concepts to help the modern reader comprehend them and make better sense of them, which creates a stark contrast to the originals' grandeur. By doing this, Percy points to the fact that the Greek gods and goddesses are not all that much better than the humans they rule over and look down on. For example, Hades is compared to a stalker (91), Ares to a bully (275), and Hermes to a juvenile delinquent (367). Regardless of their immortality and mighty powers, Percy simplifies the Olympians as people who may let their emotions get the better of them and behave foolishly. This signals to the reader that even the best and greatest of us make mistakes. Indeed, the great Greek gods and goddesses appear to repeat their mistakes more frequently than regular mortals. This, however, could be because they are divinities who make the rules but need not follow the rules themselves.

A secondary observation related to these repeated mistakes is how rules and punishments appeared flexible when applied to gods or goddesses, which can be seen when comparing, for example, Hermes' theft of Apollo's cattle to Prometheus' theft of fire from Zeus. When Hermes stole Apollo's cattle, as told in *Homeric Hymns to Hermes*, Zeus, who was ruler, judge, jury and executioner, merely told them "to be reconciled,"[24] and Hermes and Apollo worked out an agreement in the end. Prometheus, however, was a titan, and he suffered much more severely for stealing fire from Zeus to give to the mortal man. *Theogony* tells the tale where Zeus "bound

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[24] Homer, "To Hermes," in *Homeric Hymns. Homeric Apocrypha. Lives of Homer*, trans. M. L. West (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 145.

crafty Prometheus in inescapable fetters […] and he set a great winged eagle upon him, and it fed on his immortal liver, which grew the same amount each way at night as the great bird ate in the course of the day."[25] Granted, the severity of Hermes' theft may not technically have been as serious as Prometheus', but Zeus' differing treatment of other Olympians, as opposed to any other creature of a different race, is noticeable in these examples. *Greek Gods* includes both of these stories, and they arguably point to issues of racism in today's society.

Similar to how Percy ascribes various human characteristics and behaviors to the Olympians, he also references pop-culture for both comical purposes as well as easier understanding. For example, Percy explains how Kronos is the titan of time, but "he couldn't pop around the time stream like Doctor Who or anything" (16). Assuming that the reader knows what and who "Doctor Who" is and what he can do, Riordan manages to easily explain the limits of Kronos' powers through the pop-culture reference. Percy further explains Kronos' control over time and contextualizes his abilities by using contemporary examples when he says, "whenever you're in an incredibly boring lecture that seems to take forever, blame Kronos. Or when your weekend is *way* too short, that's Kronos's fault, too" (16, Riordan's italics). Through these contemporary examples, a reader of *Greek Gods* can imagine exactly how Kronos' powers worked because everyone has gone through one of the situations Percy describes or a similar one. Percy refers to other pop-culture concepts such as "reality TV show" (4) and "American Idol" (153) for similar purposes throughout *Greek Gods*. These references bring the past highbrow myths down to a contemporary youth's level without sounding condescending because Percy is a youngster like themselves.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has explored how contextualizing myths through language and concepts the contemporary reader already knows helps the reader learn faster because he or she can now associate certain myths and gods with familiar concepts and ideas. Furthermore, the stories' humorous presentation makes them even more memorable. Riordan skillfully retold the old Greek myths by using modern-day social concepts and slang in order to create a refreshing new narrative without changing the historical significance of the original myths. He essentially used

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[25] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 18.

fan fiction as a strategy for teaching. The difference between most other fan fictions and *Greek Gods* is that instead of keeping the language and behaviors of the canon characters and create a new story or expand on an existing one, *Greek Gods* preserves the stories as they were, and Riordan created updated versions of the canonical characters instead.

Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to question adverse attitudes towards fan fiction as a legitimate and serious genre of writing equal to other writing genres by considering professionally published works of writing such as Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and *Percy Jackson and the Greek Gods* as possible works of fan fiction. Despite its growing popularity fan fiction has remained a genre generally dismissed by laypeople and academics alike. However, some academics, especially in the last decade or so, have emerged as avid defenders of fan fiction since Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* and Camilla Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* both from 1992.

Hans Robert Jauss' theory of 'horizon of expectations' is immensely helpful for my re-evaluation of fan fiction, because it points out in a positive way that any reader will always perceive, understand and judge new texts through their past knowledge and experiences. While many non-fans scoff at fan fiction for being derivative and unoriginal, Jauss argued that all works of writing are derivative to a certain degree: "A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new."[1] Thus, this lack of originality that largely served as the main argument for fan fiction being subordinate to other writing genres by non-fans does can be mitigated in this way. I coupled Jauss' theory with fan fiction studies and Riordan's Greek myth-based novels to elevate the derided genre. I created a plausible argument for fan fiction writing and reading having value by using professionally published novels that functioned as sources for creative teaching and learning while also being fan fiction.

Key Aspects of Thesis

I began the thesis by outlining fan fiction studies' place in academia and clarifying various positions both for and against its legitimacy, and then examined the history of fan fiction, which proved to stretch back to the very beginning of storytelling. From that history, several definitions

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[1] Jauss, "Literary Theory," 23.

of what constitutes as fan fiction emerged depending on various factors, but one definition given by Sheenagh Pugh appeared more appropriate and inclusive than other definitions. Pugh defines fan fiction as "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings and plots generated by another writer or writers."[2] As mentioned in the introduction, Riordan's works fit into the definition as works based on Greek mythology because, while there are many variations of Greek myths, there are some versions that dominate over others and are, therefore, considered 'canon' within the Greek mythology fandom. As an author writing novels heavily based on Greek mythology, Riordan needed to consider his updated versions carefully because Greek mythology fans would likely show interest in reading them and criticize his ability to create worthy versions of the myths present in his novels. As a result, Riordan wrote as any fan fiction writer writing a story based on a pre-existing canon with a pre-existing fan base with pre-existing expectations. Although one must remember that the existence of canonical versions does not necessarily mean they are the ones always used, which Riordan himself noted in an interview, "I tend to pick the version I like best, and the one that fits best into Percy Jackson's world."[3]

An examination of Riordan's *Lightning Thief* as a work of fiction within the fan fiction subgenre called alternate universe demonstrated one reason for legitimizing fan fiction. Because of the AU's extreme flexibility, Riordan was able to create a unique world. Where other myth-based novels usually faced restrictions with regards to discussing contemporary issues given their usually ancient setting, *Lightning Thief* faced no problems with addressing modern-day concerns because of Riordan's utilization of the AU, where mixing the old and the new appeared natural. I illustrated this by pointing to Riordan's ability to criticize contemporary society's view on learning disorders, wastefulness and family structures with ease, which he could not have addressed without moving the mythological figures into his modern AU. Additionally, Riordan's juxtaposition of the old and the new into one plausible alternate universe was, I argued, a smart choice given his desire to educate his readers about Greek mythology because the myths became easier to understand as they were put into modern and more familiar contexts for the readers.

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[2] Pugh, *Democratic Genre*, 25.
[3] Rick Riordan, "Frequently Asked Questions," Rick Riordan, accessed December 03, 2018, http://rickriordan.com/about/frequently-asked-questions/.

My analysis of *Lighting Thief* as a monomyth story with archetypal stages, as per Joseph Campbell's definition in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, provided another argument for counting Riordan's novel as a work of fan fiction, and further categorized other myth-based novels within fan fiction as well as pointed out that recycling old stories was common and natural before society decided otherwise. With Campbell's theories and notions about the monomyth story backed by Jauss' horizon of expectations, I highlighted some of the most common archetypal characters and stages of the monomyth found in Riordan's *Lighting Thief*. The chapter focused on archetypal characters that are visible in modern creations as well as classical, and it particularly showed the societal relevance of Riordan's derivativeness and updating for contemporary readerships. For example, the importance of community and friendship is shown through encounters with various monsters where Percy, Annabeth and Grover must cooperate and rely on each other to survive. The chapter also explored Riordan's attempt to connect with his readers' emotions through Percy's inner struggles and feelings, especially with regards to his learning disabilities and absent father. The monomyth in Riordan's novel thus functioned as a tool for gathering positive attitudes about stories built on a pre-existing pattern and demonstrated its value and exactly how common derivative storytelling to varying degrees was and still is in the form of fan fiction.

The examination of Riordan's *Greek Gods* in the third chapter viewed fan fiction from a different angle where changes related to genre, language, and contexts stand in focus. Those changes allowed professional publication, but they also brand *Greek Gods* as fan fiction, perhaps even more so than *Lightning Thief* given its protection of the original plots and characters. All these changes happened primarily due to the reader's expectations to any story told by the persona Percy Jackson. An ancient Greek story written in the epic dialect would never contain the descriptions and vocabulary Percy uses and, thus, the genre needed changing. Throughout, the chapter emphasized further how Riordan did not provide original plots, but rather a new way of telling the same stories in order to teach a contemporary readership. *Greek Gods'* success proves that a derivative work can be original despite using "someone else's old story."[4]

My findings show that it is strictly speaking impossible to create something entirely original if originality means that one cannot draw from other and older works, which generally appears to be the working definition for negative critics of fan fiction. Fan fiction merely

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[4] Jamison, *Fic*, 17.

displays its derivativeness more plainly than other works of writing because it exists within pre-existing literary categories. Furthermore, originality does not determine quality and vice versa. For example, works from recognized writers such as Shakespeare and Milton became classics despite their derivativeness. This thesis thus proposed different ways of looking at originality as it applies to literary works and storytelling by analyzing Riordan's works as fan fiction and applying relevant theory.

Contributions and Future Research

As research in fan fiction studies thus far usually focus on the sociocultural and anthropological aspects of fan fiction, this thesis has contributed a unique study by focusing primarily on the fan fictions themselves where Riordan's *Lighting Thief* and *Greek Gods* were counted as fan fictions. Rather than analyzing a work's surrounding environment and the fans, I analyzed the texts and what a reader may learn from them in order to elevate fan fiction's societal status. Furthermore, I chose professionally published works that had not yet been considered fan fiction or studied as fan fiction precisely to highlight that they could be. The chosen works themselves thus proved fan fiction's flexibility. While a few critics have discussed non-profit fan fiction with relation to mythology such as Ika Willis, Tony Keen and Amanda Potter, none of the critical work available on Riordan's novels appeared to make any connection to fan fiction. A gap thus remained in the study of published, in this case, myth-based novels and fan fiction, which this thesis has aimed to close. People today still enjoy the classical world and its countless stories and fascinating creatures who impose new meanings and lessons on the listeners without any issues as they are retold across the globe. Fan fiction writers do the same with a story they find fascinating. The difference lies primarily in contemporary people's attitude towards a fan fiction's source material.

This thesis offered new ways to view fan fiction and suggested that some literary works fit better within the fan fiction genre than others where a person's definition of the term matters to a certain degree. Furthermore, I mentioned other definitions of fan fiction that ended up being insufficient for this study, but they could be useful in further studies that aim to continue the battle against prejudice beliefs about fan fiction. I also questioned differences between self-published and professionally published works, which relates to fan fictions using copyrighted

material. However, the focus of this thesis was on novels with source texts predating copyright, and these issues were, therefore, not discussed at length. It is my hope that this thesis and the continuing fascination with the fan fiction phenomenon will inspire future research on the subject.

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