

A STUDY ON NEWFANGLED MYTHOLOGY IN RICK RIORDAN'S *PERCY JACKSON AND THE LIGHTNING THIEF*

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Abstract

The paper titled “Newfangled Mythology in Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*” explores the author’s newfanglement of ancient mythology in which the ancientness is revived by the author to fit that into modern era. This paper also analyses the newfanglement elements and provides a comment on the reason behind recreation mythology. The writers of antiquity had already commenced this technique of recreating mythologies. This idiosyncratic method occurred in a smooth manner but the source from which it has been occurred but the source from which it has been recreated might be unknown to some modern readers.

Keywords: ancient mythology, new fangled mythology.

Greek Literature is an ancient stream of literature in which some of its works derived influences from Greek mythology. The ancient Greek myths might have been strong enough to pierce the minds of writers, because even centuries after the birth of Greek mythology or literature the reproduction and recreation of it occurs even today in the contemporary literature too. The most recent of such recreation could be seen in Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and in the other series followed by it. This paper analyses how the ancient mythology is newfangled in the hands of Rick Riordan. It also analyses the new methods of portrayals and the difference between the portrayals. Greek mythologies and stories were read by readers with great enthusiasm.

The stream in which the work *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* belongs to is American Literature. American Literature is an emerging literature. American Literature and its writers conveyed a message of its own to the world, because of the varying problems that exist in American culture. Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* is an example of a contemporary literary work. The contemporary American Literature in the hands of Rick Riordan saw the emergence of a new stream which contains a blend of myths and modernity.

Greek mythology is concerned with Gods, titans, nymphs, cults, giants, legendary creatures and legendary tribes. It is a civilization or community of antiquity that had its own ritualistic practices. These beliefs of ancient Greeks were strong enough to influence literary writers and eventually that works based on this mythology got penned. These obviously were classical writers who derived sources from Greek mythology and they not only derived sources but also paved way for the writers of posterity to extract sources from Greek mythology. When the classical writes of literature interpreted and thus reproduced the Greek mythology in their work a creative output work was produced. This method of recreation of classical mythology commenced by ancient writers still exists.

American literature also has traces of Classical mythology. The nineteenth century American writers believed that myth should provide pleasure. According to Bulfinch "The so called divinities of Olympus have not a single worshipper among living men. They belong now not to the department of theology, but to those of literature and arts" (Bulfinch). Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief* is one such work that has recreated Greek Mythological elements in it ranging from Greek Gods, Demigods, goddesses and Medusa to satyrs, monsters and Minotaur. Greek Gods can be Olympian gods, titan gods, rustic gods, agrarian gods, sea gods, primordial gods, underworld gods and so on. The Olympian gods were the major concern for Rick Riordan. Thus he had recreated Greek mythology that revolved around Olympian gods. The twelve Olympian gods are Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Hera, Hermes, Poseidon and Zeus.

When coming to the newfangled Greek mythology, demigods are of the major concern here. The traits of the traditional Greek mythology demigods were unique, and their uniqueness is reveled through their abilities. The demigods in the work selected are even unique but this uniqueness is of an updated or upgraded level, and the readers could connect them to modern day humans because the demigods were carved with modern traits. In common, an offspring of a human being and a god is called as a demigod. The term demigod is also known as half-god and the term was coined by the Roman God Ovid. The angels were considered as demigods by John Milton in his work *Paradise Lost* which is yet another proof that literature used demigods in different kinds of portrayal even during the previous age. Demigods being the half divine off-springs they possess superhuman capabilities. When taking their powers demigods are superior to humans. The demigods born out of the top three Olympian gods were even stronger than the other demigods like Zeus, Hera and Poseidon. Percy Jackson can thus be considered as more stronger than their demigods for he is the son of Poseidon. The healing power of demigods is quicker and they could recover and repair themselves more swiftly. Immediate speedy recovery as a result of their belonging element is another specialty. For example, Percy Jackson's perfunctory recovery from his injuries once he touched his belonging element water for his divine parent is Poseidon, the God of the Seas.

In *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief*, Riordan has discussed about some of the prime demigods like Percy Jackson, son of Poseidon, Annabeth Chase, daughter of Athena Luke Castellan, son of Hermes. The modernization of Percy Jackson is the matter of concern here. Percy Jackson is newfangled with modern traits. It is very obvious that he was born as a demigod into the modern world and one cannot expect Percy to be traditional demigod of the past. What makes the modern demigod more special is that the ides of a modern demigod deconstructs the idea that the readers already and normally had about demigods. The concept of a modern demigod aroused as a result of Percy Jackson's popularity among the readers. It makes readers think of the possibility of the presence of a demigod among us. It aroused questions mainly among the children that what if I am a demigod or what if my friend is a demigod or what if my parent is divine? Even though those questions are fictional the readers do think of such a possibility. The main reason for this is the newfanglement. If Percy Jackson was portrayed as a normal demigod of the past with ancient portrayal no readers would have attracted towards it. He author himself has confessed that:

Monty Python was a huge influence on me but I'm hardy the first to modernize Greek myths. We live in a self-reflective age. It doesn't seem enough anymore to say 'Zeus turned into a swan so he could seduce a woman'. I can hear my former students asking 'Why a swan?' I try to anticipate that skepticism and answer it with humour. (Tim 03)

The modernization occurred because the new era would never accept ancient ideologies. Nothing is particularly ancient about Percy. Unlike Perceus he was not a part of a kingdom but rather he grew up in a human constructed building like every modern kid did. He had his education in a college but no demigods of the past did it. Even after Percy recognized himself as a demigod the life at Camp Half Blood was in a modern way too. No demigods of the past might have had such an experience. Several demigods under one large umbrella called the Half Blood Camp, which is quite interesting. When Percy entered the camp as a newbie the following happened: "Most of the campers were older than me. Their satyr friends were bigger than Grover, all of them trotting around in Orange CAMP HALF BLOOD T-shirts. They eve wore T-shirts" (75).

The demigod even read newspapers like New York Daily News. The letter by Eileen Smythe that says: "Boy and mother still missing after freak car accident" (128). The demigods here even had cars and car accidents. It is very clear that the newfanglement occurred here purely because of the modern day setting. But normally demigods are considered a thing of the past but adding a modern flavor to it made it worth reading. Annabath Chase is the prime female demigod here born out of Athena and Mortal human. Her mother Athena was the goddess of wisdom, craft and war. As water gave Percy some healing power Annabath Chase was predominately a warrior a trait that she had inherited from her divine mother Athena. Annabath even says that: "No alone no. Athena watched over me guided me towards help. I made a couple of unexpected friends who took care of me for a short time anyway" (34). Annabath does not resemble any Greek demigods like Percy Jackson resembled Perseus. In the real myth Perseus

was after Princess Andromeda but here Percy Jackson had an attraction towards Annabeth Chase. The entire story is based on a demigod community. Annabeth was a part of the community and helped Percy Jackson to find out the real culprit of the lightning bolt. She had traits that helped her to fit into the demigod community and she is modern ofcourse. The goddess Athena had no offsprings who are inhabitants of America but here she joined hands with an American mortal who is a professor in American history. Annabeth once said that: "My dad is a professor at West Point, she said. I haven't seen him since I was very small. He teaches American history" (95).

It is also important to remember that to the ancient people who believed in these myths, the gods were both grand, in that they provided an explanatory narrative for the deep mysteries of existence and fate, and quotidian, in that ordinary people prayed to them for everyday things, such as a good harvest. When Riordan places these figures in a secular, pop-inflected world, he largely loses both aspects. Apart from vague talk about the gods representing the spirit of the west, their battles in his books don't impinge that much on the ordinary world; in fact, whenever the gods are around, a magical force prevents ordinary humans from seeing them in their true form.

Apart from these touches, Riordan plays it straight with the classic myths. The arch-villain of the series isn't a pastiche like Rowling's Voldemort, who is basically Milton's Satan by way of Tolkiens Sauron, but the titan Kronos, the father of Zeus. And amid the breathless pacing the author manages to sneak in some actual Greek history and culture. Riordan is also attuned to the myths' powerful subtexts; Percy's chief weapon is a magic pen, which at the touch of a finger becomes a mighty sword, an effect that no doubt strikes the teen reader as way cool but would also have had Freud smiling around his cigar.

The story of the demigods can also be interpreted in another manner in connection with the modern world. Since the demigods portrayed here are abandoned by their mortal parents they lived their entire life dreaming about that single parent. Percy abandoned by her own divine mother Athena leaving all the responsibility to her dad. Both of them had feelings concerning their one missed parent. At "They neither had memories about the other parent nor the mortal parent explained about the divine parent. They lived entire life thinking about their parents and that was heart breaking. Percy shared his memories of his dad that: "I don't have any memories of him. Just this sort of warm glow, maybe the barest trace of his smile. My mom doesn't like to talk to him because it makes her sad. She has no pictures" (30).

The interpretation here is the reality of the modern world where children are abandoned by their parents. Here for the demigods the abandonment happened because of the divine parents, the divines cannot stay with mortals and if so the divines should have opted to not have children. There are many abandoned children in the modern world mainly abandoned by one parents.

They lived life seclusion after that and they feel for it the entire life. No matter what if a parent can't take care of a child then they should opt not to have it.

The next demigod is Luke the son of Hermes. Hermes is the guardian of the hell. Luke is actually the villain here who stole the lightning bolt and Percy was wrongly accused for it. He can be considered as a modern boy who is a symbol of a culprit who acts as he is good. Luke was always a good friend of Percy during the first half and even helped him with objects on his mission on killing Medusa the Gorgon. Things turned upside down and took a nasty turn when it has been revealed that it was Luke who stole the lighting bolt.

The question is how Gods can possess so much of powers were not aware about the real culprit of the lightning bolt. The other newfangled characters include Grover, Mr. Brunner, Mrs. Dodds, Hermes and Persephone. Here Grover is a satyr. Satyrs are male companions of Dionysus which had goat like features. Here Grover was half human and half-gat. Throughout the journey of Percy, Grover acted as a protector for even at the beginning Grover was aware about the demigod quality of Percy. Percy was admitted into the camp half-blood by Grover and when Percy recognized Grover as a satyr for the first time he was astonished. Moreover satyr had newfangled qualities. Imagine a satyr having his education at school, obviously unimaginable but still Grover did. In the book it has been said: "satyrs mature as fast as humans, Percy. Grover has been the equivalent of a middle school student for the past six years" (77).

Similarly many other characters and circumstances were subject to newfanglement. The main reason for this should be analyzed. The modern readers must be the major reason for this. The newfanglement happened because ancient can't compete with modernity. If there is a war between modernity and ancient times the winner is already fixed and it is obviously the modernity. If Percy Jackson lived during the ancient centuries the readers might have not had an attraction towards him. But rather Percy was modern that mad readers to have an imagination in their mind.

Camp half-blood is an extremely newfangled arena especially designed foe demigods. No so called ancient aspects could be seen there. One could wear t-shirts there, demins are allowed, modern systems could even be witnessed there. If it happened the other way for example, if Percy was trained in a temple like Perseus was trained and if temple was the substitute for the camp half blood, the readers would have found no uniqueness there. The search for Gorgon equally happened in a newfangled manner. The previous chapter that shows the resemblance between Perseus and Percy Jackson shows it all. Perseus and all his ancient circumstances were completely in contrast with that of Percy Jackson and his modernity. This newly found modern essence was more appealing. Some modern readers seek for updated information in their work and in this case the modernity was uniquely updated.

The author penned the newfanglement as per the need of the age. The current age would expect from the readers something interesting and different. Rick Riordan with his single

demigod concept had created a magic newfanglement. The film adaptation of the book is even more newfangled. The writer has obviously satisfied the modern generation. The evolution of the demigod concept is visible here, from the ancient heroic demigod Achilles to the present day demigod Percy Jackson. It is clearly evident that fictional characters are penned by the authors as per the traits shown by the people of that age. Achilles was penned in an era where wars were famous and his shield played a great role. Percy Jackson was given the modern traits and so his modernity is popular. But there are still works which were set in ancient times. If the setting of Percy Jackson was in an ancient century then everything would have turned upside down but the modernity was unique.

He attaches wheelchair to Chiron the Centaur, Hawaiian shirt into Dionysus the god of wine, sandals and short for Poseidon the god of sea, glasses and bikers looks for Ares the god of war, and so on and so forth. Related to the antagonists of the story, Riordan also has his reasons of why they become the villains. If we look at what happens in Greek mythology, Kronos can be classified into the dark area and thus fits the characteristics of a villain. Luke has something happened in the past related to his father, Hermes, and many other things. It becomes his reason why he was on Kronos' side. Ares joined the side simply because he desired a great world war to happen. This story uses the first person point of view, with Percy Jackson as its narrator. The whole plot is built upon what came into Percy's life what he described, thought, and felt, and also his conversations with the other characters. The first person point of view shortens the distance between the story and the readers as they can feel like they are talking to Percy or reading his diary. It also raises the acceptability of the story, helping the readers to understand the situations and accept the blend of modern reality and ancient mythology as Percy thinks. It may happen due to the difference on their age. When Percy is apt to think about himself negatively, Riordan tries to say that actually Percy is not like what he thinks he is. Riordan wants to objectify Percy's opinion about himself.

The study thus proves the newfanglement that has occurred in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief*. The main idea of concentration here was Greek mythology and its newfanglement. Futher study on the exploration of author's Norse and Egyptian mythology which also underwent newfanglement can also be done. The newfanglement of mythology so far seen in the paper is done purely by taking into consideration the modern readers.

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