

**Echoes of Olympus: Exploring the influence of Greek mythology on
select 21st century novels**

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CHELSEA VALERIE AZAVEDO

Seat Number: 22P0110011

ABC ID: 112547093739

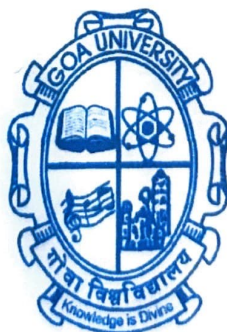
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Under the Supervision of

MISS PRIYANKA VEREKAR

Shenoi Goembab School of Languages & Literature

Discipline of English



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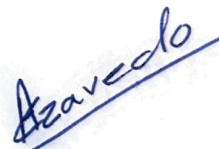
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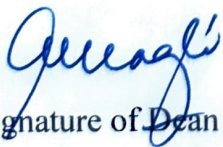
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Ms Priyanka Verekar

Date: 16th April 2024



Signature of Dean of the School/HoD of Dept

Date: 16th April 2024

Place: Goa University



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ABSTRACT

Greek mythology has transcended time and cultural barriers to cement itself into literature. This dissertation explores the profound influence of Greek mythology on 21st century novels. Through an in-depth analysis of Rick Riordan's "*Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*" as well as "*The Hidden Oracle*" and Madeline Miller's "*Circe*" this research investigates the thematic concerns and narrative evolution evident in these modern adaptations. It examines the ways in which Riordan and Miller reinterpret ancient myths to address contemporary issues and resonate with modern audiences. Through a comparative analysis, it also explores the transformation of mythological characters, as well as the preservation of their essential archetypes. Understanding the themes that are predominant in Greek mythology will aid in understanding the appeal for it. By examining the thematic concerns and narrative evolution in 21st century novels, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the enduring relevance of Greek mythology in contemporary literature.

Key words: Greek mythology, Rick Riordan, Madeline Miller, thematic analysis

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: The Reign of Greek Mythology

1.1. The importance and influence of Greek mythology

In an age where individuals can earn a living by being influencers, understanding certain concepts that have influenced media for a long time is not only intriguing but imperative. Human beings are built from everyday little things, the food you eat, the media you consume and so on. Understanding the how and why of influence is the means through which we'll gain a better comprehension of ourselves and society. Therefore, this research aims at examining the ever-growing influence of Greek mythology on contemporary novels.

Mythology from each culture reflects its own unique history and diversity which are valuable for understanding various human experiences during ancient times. Greek mythology has greatly influenced the English language and western culture over the ages. We have tremendous information about Greek mythology which aids in its prevailing presence. Greek mythology is among the most well-documented and complex mythologies of the ancient world. The mere fact that we know more about Greek mythology compared to perhaps Norse or Egyptian, makes it more complex.

Producing images of high and mighty gods and goddesses, of adventure, deceit, love, lust and everything in between, Greek mythology is a plethora of entertainment. We've got heroes who seem larger than life, always setting an example whether good or bad. And yet its mythical nature doesn't distract from the relevant ideas they contain even a thousand years later. Greek myths are strongly rooted in reality and therefore have helped in shaping modern thinking in more

ways than one. On the surface, myths might sometimes seem like simple moral tales, but they have so much more depth to them. We need to remember that a large portion of these stories were transmitted by individuals like Hesiod and Homer. They largely contributed to making these myths immortal in human history.

Thomas Mann (1936) once argued that a myth could be defined as the very foundation of life. Myths are very often considered to be a symbolic narrative, whose origins are unknown. They ostensibly relate to actual events over the course of history and are very often associated with religious beliefs. Myths are in fact a system that allows communication, it gives its listener a message. Therefore, myths can be considered to be a type of speech. Human history often goes on to convert its reality into literature. Communication through myths which exist today are ones chosen by our own history. This communication is not confined through oral speech, rather it manifests in various modes of representation or of writing. We see it in photography, cinema, sports and so on.

According to critics over the last decade, the current modern concept of myth has no equivalent in early Greece. Therefore, myths are nothing but modern constructions that are only projected into Greek antiquity. Writer Rick Riordan states that “Myths are universal and are totally ingrained in our culture” (Thrope) and that even today we are struggling with similar issues and hence myths fit neatly into the frame of the modern world.

The fact that Greek mythology has always had an exceptional appeal about it is unprecedented. Over the course of history, mythology has always been prominent in literature. It imbued itself in literature and hasn't stopped till date. Numerous words commonly used in the English language today have been derived

from the Greek language. An estimated number of 150,000 words currently used in English have been originally from Greek. We also see the consistent use of allusions to Greek mythological instances and figures in 21st century literature.

However, the last few decades have witnessed a surge in novels retelling old myths. Today in the 21st century, numerous works of literature contain allusions to Greek mythology and when you figure it out, they're like tiny easter eggs. Many of the bestselling novels today are simply retellings of old Greek mythology legends or characters around whom entire new worlds are built. Numerous authors have chosen to go back to earlier myths and craft newer interpretations. By doing so writers are not only paying homage to ancient works but also creating narrative modern audiences can relate to. These new works are more approachable and relevant to modern readers. And therefore, are more amicable to a younger audience who at certain instances may relate to myths. It's a sphere with fascinating origins and facts that intermingle to connect with so many aspects of the world as we know it today.

The renaissance played a major role in reviving Greek mythology. It involved the rebirth and rediscovery of classical texts. It aimed at the development of a novel aesthetic norm that was originally based on classical methods. One of the best illustrations would be Shakespeare's tragedy *Troilus and Cressida* which is a medieval tale. This play isn't completely Greek mythology, but it greatly draws from it.

T.S. Eliot once said, "We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." By making use of Greek mythology,

writers are taking from tradition something that's good and making it even better. Numerous texts over the years have made use of some or the other characters or legends from Greek mythology which has only enhanced its narratives. By referring to mythological aspects' writers boasted a well-read mind and artistic talent.

Today in the 21st century the power of Greek myths still has a very dominating presence. We see numerous upcoming novels retelling Greek mythology. This is due to how they excavate the extremes of human experiences. We have long left the initial religious and political framework within which myths first circulated. And now it's simply about our experiences and how we relate to these ancient tales.

1.2. Scope and limitations

Greek mythology has stood the test of time and only gotten better. The reasons for undiminishing appeal would be valuable when explored. Understanding phenomena that are still prevalent in literature will only aid in our better comprehension of it. Abundant English vocabulary today has been influenced by Greek Mythology today and hence we would also see the immense influence Greek culture has had on the English language which is the most widely spoken language today.

Greek mythology is no longer an area restricted to the Greeks rather it has spread its wings worldwide. People from every corner of the world use at least a few phrases or idioms that have originated from Greek mythology, knowingly or unknowingly. But it's not only the ancient texts containing legends of Greek mythology that are educating people on this particular culture but many other new and upcoming novels which aim to world-build with Greek mythology at its core.

With this in mind, studying how much of an influence Greek mythology has had on novels of the 21st century will help understand its appeal. It would also shed spotlight on whether or not the current books are more appreciated than the ancient texts.

The limitations of this research would include, first off, the unavailability of interaction with individuals who lived when Greek mythology was at its prime. I would also not be able to first-hand interact with people from Greek culture who would have so many more interesting insights than an outsider. Dating back correctly to the ancient texts that narrated Greek myths would also be an extensive task to accomplish. Finally, a major limitation would be restricting this study to the analysis of only three novels.

1.3. Rick Riordan and Madeline Miller

In the current decade one cannot speak about Greek mythology in literature without immediately associating it with Rick Riordan. The legend and myth himself, the creator of more than a dozen works revolving around not only Greek mythology but various others too. He has blended a very contemporary world within the world of ancient Greek myths. Conjuring a perfect blend of a modern outlook and lifestyle that makes his works more relevant and relatable to readers.

Rick Riordan intricately created an entire world revolving around Greek mythology and yet rooted in modern times. A gateway to explore many admired Greek myths. He creates a narrative that's easy to understand and captivating to not only children but adults as well. This study will analyse *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, published in 2005. A novel focusing on a modern demigod thrust into the world of Greek mythology. Riordan

showcases Greek myths as representation of Western civilization and American culture. This greatly aids in making his works more relatable and approachable. Joanna Paul states that the works of Riordan can be seen as creative mythmaking of the twenty-first century. She asserts that his novels go to create a “sense of identification [...] that makes these myths meaningful for children.” Many of Riordan’s works weave further morals that may have been lost during the original time where certain more contemporary concepts and ideas did not exist which lead to them not being factored into the original myths.

Madeline Miller, author of not one but two *New York Times* bestsellers that pummelled into the literary world with its retellings of ancient Greek myths and characters. With her novel *Circe* Miller gives voice to the subdued and represents a character who was previously disregarded. We are forced to reckon the reality of those with less power in the world of myths. That being immortal is not as black and white as it may appear. We also see how important perspectives are in modern retelling. Miller breaks away chip by chip the gender stereotypes that Greek mythology has entertained and perpetuated throughout history. Alicia Ostriker (1982) goes on to define the revisions of myths, specifically by female writers as follows “*old stories are changed, changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy*” (11).

1.4. Title, Objectives, Hypothesis and Methodology

The title, “*Echoes of Olympus: Exploring the influence of Greek mythology on select 21st century novels*” attempts at capturing the entire essence of this research. Since its primary goal is to trace the influence of Greek mythology, what we are

essentially seeking are the various echoes Greek mythology has created over the centuries, may those be retellings, small cameos or representation through certain characters. A retelling focuses on an ancient Greek character or myth and puts it forth once again as a modern rendition. The world *Olympus* is used due to its predominant presence in Greek mythology. The Olympians are considered to be the greatest generation of Greek mythology. This research in particular will be highlighting novels that focus on the characters of this era, the repercussions of their actions as well as their unique aura. Many supreme beings such as the titans prevailed before the Olympians, nevertheless it is the gods from Olympus who cemented themselves in history. The greatest rule encouraging tales of their strength and valour sprung from this generation. It is myths of this generation in Greek mythology that will be explored in this research. It will highlight just how much of an impact the 21st century has been subjected to due to Greek mythology weaving itself in contemporary times.

The objectives of this research include,

- Tracing the influence of Greek mythology in present times.
- Understanding the characteristics that make Greek mythology popular.
- Exploring the developments in 21st century novels due to Greek mythology.
- Examining the difference between original Greek mythological characters and their 21st-century counterparts.
- Examining prevalent themes in novels influenced by Greek Mythology.

The hypothesis to back this research is as follows, Greek mythology is popular in the contemporary era due to the inclusion of modern elements and lifestyles in 21st century novels and the fascination of readers towards ancient texts

lead them to pick up retellings which provide additional insights into a particular Greek myth or character.

This research would employ textual analysis and close reading to achieve its objectives. By using this theory, all prominent themes and motifs in the novels will be analysed. This would also lead to an insight on how ancient narratives continue to shape modern storytelling. We would also examine the difference between ancient Greek mythological characters and their modern counterparts through a close reading of various texts.

1.5. Chapter Plan

Chapter one *Introduction: The Reign of Greek Mythology* introduces the research as a whole. Understanding the process behind taking up this research and what makes it important. Here we also get a glimpse into the novels and authors who will be the highlight of this research.

Chapter 2 *A Literary Odyssey: Tracing the Roots of Greek Mythology* focuses on the roots of Greek mythology. What are the origins of the whole new complex world that still permeates the present times centuries later. How were the literature centuries ago different from the current one and what is still predominantly the same.

Chapter 3 *Circe's Enchantment: A Humane Voice among Immortal Intrigue* highlights modern retellings of Greek mythology by Madeline Miller with her work *Circe*. It delves into the life of the mythological character Circe previously known very sparingly. Miller tackles various myths around the character as well as presenting issues women faced in ancient Greece and how these situations are not a far cry from our own in the 21st century.

Chapter 4 *Riding the Waves of Mythology: A Deep Dive into “Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief”* enters the world of Greek mythology created by the author Rick Riordan. It examines the blend of mythology and modernity to create new narratives. We see ancient mythological themes in great detail in this novel, it focuses on godly parents, quests and adventures.

Chapter 5 *Olympian Heights to Mortal Plights: Apollo’s Quest through “The Hidden Oracle”* puts forth an interesting concept of an immortal god being punished to go through numerous trials as a mortal. It presents a narrative that is humorous and engaging. This work presents to us additional insights into the power dynamics in the immortal world. It also reacts to certain myths revolving around the god Apollo, while presenting a different side of him than previously known.

Chapter 6 *Conclusion: Navigating Modern Mythology* concludes the entire research by putting forth key findings and analysis.

1.6. Literature Review

As this research focuses on exploring the influence of Greek mythology on contemporary novels, it only seemed appropriate to begin by understanding what exactly myth and mythology is. A research paper titled “*Approaches to the Study of Myth and Mythology*” attempted at understanding myths and the idea that a world of myth provides guidance for crucial elements of human existence. It focussed on allegorical interpretations and the flexibility in reinterpreting myths.

Thomas Mann (1936) once argued that a myth could be defined as the foundation of life. Following Mann’s theory, the myth has become the timeless founder of storytelling as history has evolved and new stories have come into

existence. These myths very often contained strong morals used to warn and guide human beings.

“Research on the Value of Greek and Roman Mythology to English Language” authored by Bakhrom Rajabov, Feruza Rajabova, and Gulkhayot Jurakulova stated that the development of western culture was due to Greek and Roman cultures. He stated that the foundation of the English system is Greek mythology. This paper explored the facets of both Greek and Roman mythology briefly. There should’ve been more discussions on the statements made earlier to solidify the arguments. It fleetingly focuses on the influence of Greek and Roman mythology on the English language vocabulary. This section was particularly intriguing as it highlighted some interesting origins of widely used English idioms and phrases. The paper also explored the prototypes of Greek and Roman mythology used in the works of Shakespeare and other well-known poets like Lord Byron, and John Milton.

The renaissance has been believed to have brought about new aesthetic standards, but these were often based on classical models that were slowly developed. In the same way, Greek mythology has been slowly modified and shaped to fit into modern narratives.

Cara Leigh Sailors in her paper titled *“The Function of Mythology and Religion in Ancient Greek Society”* interestingly states that there are eight functions of mythology, and each myth falls primarily into these categories. The paper discusses the role of mythology in Greek society. It also focuses on the problems that arise while studying myths. Many myths were passed down orally by narrators or poets; hence they were catered to the liking of the audience. Therefore, “new

myths or unacceptable versions of old ones would be rejected by the public and, surely, not repeated in further performances.” (Leigh 3)

Kylie Rogers puts forth three poignant texts inspired by Greek mythology in her thesis *Why Myth Matter: The Value of the Female Voice in Greek Mythology*, that is Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*, Madeline Miller’s *Circe* and *The Medusa Reader* by Nina MacLaughlin. She brings out the prominent features seen in these retellings of Greek myths. By making use of analysis through a female perspective we gain insights on the importance of these myths and their relevance till date. It demonstrates the effectiveness and power of the messages that stem from these retellings and how it contributes towards future feminist progress.

The article “*Apollo, Paenitentia, and Ovid’s Metamorphoses*” by Laurel Fulkerson compares several instances of repentance as seen in the character of Apollo in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. It tries to illustrate the way Apollo is characterised in the poem as well as raise questions as to why he is portrayed in that particular way. It goes on to highlight the key differences between mortals and gods.

P. J. Conradie in his work *The Literary Nature of Greek Myths: A critical discussion of G.S Kirk’s views* puts forth the key ideas about Kirk’s opinion on Greek mythology as literature and the views in it that he agrees and disagrees with. We find the key qualities that make Greek mythology an interesting narrative, giving way to its repeated use till date.

Roza Khabibullaeva presents a paper analysing the pastiche in the novel. It is straightforwardly titled as *Analysis of Pastiche in the novel “The Lightning Thief” by Rick Riordan*. She begins by explaining the term pastiche and where in literature can it be seen applicable. Pastiche refers to works that exhibit a broad

mixture of concepts, themes and characters all imitated or inspired by different literary works. Therefore, the use of ancient Greek mythological characters and gods seen in new literary works are worth examining. Even newer models of characters created using pastiche adopt certain features from their ancient counterparts and hence become a mixture of modern and ancient.

Percy Jackson's Greek Gods by Rick Riordan presents to us the origins of the major Greek gods and their stories. It's a narrative that is simplified and humorous which compels the readers to turn pages and dive into the world of Greek mythology. Various myths are tackled and explained. The narrator also looks at the most probable version of a myth since myths are usually exaggerated and sometimes have different variations. We get to know the genesis of Greek mythology followed by the battle between the Titans and the Gods. The source behind the powers of most Gods is also explored as well as why they are associated with certain objects. For example, Apollo and Hyacinthus. This novel greatly aided in my understanding of Greek mythology.

The Gods of Homer by G. M. Grube explains the flexibility and depth of Greek gods presented throughout Homer's works. We can note their prime characteristics and how different or similar they are to other representations of Greek gods. It presents to us the ancient forms of some Greek gods which would help in the analysis of the modern representations of the same gods. It also presents the existing power dynamics within the Olympian family and how it impacts the mythology surrounding them.

In *Percy Jackson's Greek Heroes* Rick Riordan provides a simplified narrative of various adventures surrounding popular Greek heroes in detail. The

language is easy to understand and appropriately covers many of the Greek legends we've heard so often. From the hero Achilles to the hero Jason no stone is left unturned. We get to know about the semi-godly parentage of these heroes and how it affected their day-to-day life. Reading this novel made me realise that the narrative structure of every legend is very intriguing and worth studying.

Rick Riordan's *The Hidden Oracle* centres around the life of the Greek God Apollo as a mortal. Riordan creates a world where Apollo will have to survive without any godly powers. He includes various legends related to Apollo to show how it affects his life now as a mortal. But the focus is not entirely on said legends instead they are only used to propel the plot. One interesting technique used is the inclusion of a haiku at the beginning of each chapter, in keeping with the fact that Apollo is the god of poetry. We also see a lot of integration of Greek and Roman history from the point of view of a god.

"Name a hero who was happy": A Gender studies analysis of Madeline Miller's The Song of Achilles by Carla Jiménez Otero presents an in-depth study of mythological characters and gender roles. She analyses the character of Patroclus from Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, a character who she calls "The voice behind the story". In Homer's *The Iliad* Patroclus was a very minor character, but his death was very altering. It immensely affected Achilles and hence the events of the Trojan War. Yet he is very briefly mentioned in Homer's works. Miller gives a voice to this character in her novel. It's a retelling that aims at breaking traditional gender roles and existing misogyny. In an interview for Miller's novel *Circe* (2018) she states that one of the main reasons that motivated the creation of this novel was the reaction of numerous female students to the misogynistic values behind each myth.

All the above research papers, thesis and books aided in my comprehension of Greek mythology and its current standing. They also shed light on how to go about while conducting research related to Greek mythology from a modern perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

A Literary Odyssey: Tracing the Roots of Greek Mythology

Throughout ancient literature myths have posed as the means of illustrating and clarifying several questions about human existence. It is what enabled humans to explore their own relationship with society, nature as well as morality. Charles Segal describes the poignant role Greek myths played when he states,

“In a culture which was formed before the development of abstract thinking and logical classifications, the figures of myth constituted the large basic categories which men have always needed to understand their experience. Through these concrete lucid images, beyond familiar reality and yet part of it because rooted in local legend and song, man could grasp the mystery of his life, arrest its rushing movement in timeless figures of legend for reflection and contemplation. The unformed, freshly unfolding experience of each new generation could thus take on a shape, clarity, and coherence, for it could be matched against long- known intelligible counterparts in the great reservoir of archetypal experience which are the myth” (Segal 371)

Greek mythology contains a body of stories which were originally passed down by oral traditions. These myths had a considerable element of fiction which was later recognized by critical Greeks philosophers. Nevertheless, they were often viewed as true accounts by popular piety. Greek mythology then influenced the art as well as literature of the Western civilization.

Greek myths possess many desirable qualities which could be the reason for the enormous influence they’ve had on literature. The hallmark of Greek myths are its rich and neat details even amongst the most complex myths. The large array of

Greek gods all with their own unique forms and characteristics. Their power is so formidable that ever since their invention one could not simply strip them off from the imaginative implications they created. Even when it comes to heroic myths, there is what the critic G. S. Kirk classifies it as “narrative interest” which only enhances the complexity of myths. This along with the combinations of numerous themes in myths go on to produce both richness and realism which the audiences connect to. Therefore finally, the last main quality that made Greek myths popular was the realism it entailed. Myths now seemed to hold onto human emotions as well as attain emotional value which transcended mere narrative appeal.

Throughout the history of Greek literature, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are considered to be the earliest literary monuments. There have always been concerns regarding the origin and authorship of these Homeric poems, one which the learned world is still engaged in. Nevertheless, the historian Herodotus remarks that it is Hesiod and Homer who gave the Olympian gods characteristics they are well known for. As we know by now, storytelling was one of the most prevalent traditions in Ancient Greece. These mythical stories were often performed widely until physical texts of Homer’s epics were being produced. In these works, we see the very origins of lyric poetry which became greatly insightful to modern audiences who wished to learn and comprehend Greek beliefs and customs.

Homer’s work showcases archaic lyric poetry, which is a narrative storytelling that encompasses heroes and myths. These works were initially created with the intention of teaching morals to society. The Athenian philosopher Plato states that Homer due to his works soon gained the title as “the educator of all Greece”. This illustrates the immense impact Homer had, not simply during his time but till today.

One of the most significant themes in Homer's *Iliad* is the preservation of memory. We see how not only people but even their past and actions can be immortalised. Homer states that through the "inspiration of the Muses", who in fact were the daughters of Memory, poetry can be the means of preserving memories from the past. The events that took place during the Trojan War have been depicted in the *Iliad* which is an epic believed to have originated from the Bronze Age. It is in this epic that we are introduced to who became a heroic archetype, Achilles. He was one of the central figures in Ancient Greek mythology. We see the vital role he played during the war and his dilemma of whether to live a good long life or die as a hero for his cause.

The Odyssey on the other hand provides insights into Greek society and culture. The central theme of this epic is hospitality. The Greeks believed that it was their core duty to provide and welcome whoever would seek them, may it be travellers or mere strangers. The way they treated others became the basis of their own honour and virtue. In *The Odyssey* we see both the negative as well as positive examples of hospitality which then illustrated the importance of social interactions. Throughout the epic we see numerous interactions between mortals and gods, it reveals the belief of a polytheistic pantheon that the Greeks followed and how much of an active role it played in their lives.

Through the character of Odysseus, we see a thirst for adventure and glory. He leads various quests encountering trials of all sorts on the way. He navigates through all hardships with his cunning and wit and this can be witnessed in his interaction with the Polyphemus the Cyclops when he argues that his name is Nobody to confuse him. He also overcomes the witch Circe's magic through the use of Moly and succeeds to take refuge at her island.

The theme of loyalty is one which the epic constantly grapples with. The character highly regarded for her loyalty is Penelope, Odysseus' wife. Throughout her husband's journey away from home, she has to repeatedly keep her suitors at bay. She uses every weapon in her arsenal to delay their advances while she waits for her husband's return strongly believing he was alive. Despite the changes in Odysseus' character after his return Penelope is seen to still stand by his side.

Finally, we see how the religious beliefs of ancient Greek culture were not only strict but well defined. The Olympian gods ruled over them and were the sole beings to make or break their future. The Greek believed in following the will of these gods even if it leads to their deaths. The notion of sacrifice is also a prominent one in Greek culture. With the correct prayers and sacrifices one could turn the gods' wills. When in danger or threat their patron god would provide them with aid. In *The Odyssey* we see the goddess Athena play a major role in the success of Odysseus as she was his patron goddess. This epic puts forth an era where men would fight with their hands and where the gods were seen dominating cultures.

Hesiod's *Works and Days* gives us additional insights on Greek culture and mythology. He was considered to be an oral poet active during the 750 BCE more or less. A substantial portion of Hesiod's *Work and Days* address the various myths that explain the hardships of human life. This poem is essentially a tribute to the advantages one gains through devoting themselves to prudence and work. The historian Dorothea Wender is of the belief that *Works and Days* succeed Hesiod's earlier poem *Theogony*, which she considers to be unpolished. Nevertheless, the *Theogony* to the modern world becomes a fundamental text while acquainting yourself with Greek mythology.

It is in the *Theogony* by Hesiod (730-700 BCE) that provides accounts for various myths and the origins of the gods in the form of poetry. It traces the rich history of the world as far from its creation to the rule of the Olympians. It portrays the battle led by Zeus to overthrow his father the Titan Kronos and free his siblings. Later it's simply a battle between the gods and the titans. We then see the rule of the Olympians and the poem ends without addressing the interactions between the mortals and immortals. Therefore, much of what we know about Greek gods and mythology today is derived from Hesiod's works.

Over centuries, the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid has had an immeasurable influence on both art as well as literature. It's a collection of 15 books which form one long poem highlighting various legendary and mythological stories. Metamorphosis, that is transformation, is the one common theme in all these stories which have been written in a chronological order beginning with the creation of the universe and ending with the death of Julius Caesar. Ovid's appeal stems from the very humanity seen in his writings. It's filled with the qualities of exuberance, sympathy and gaiety. Through this narrative Ovid succeeds in giving us Greek myths which were previously less known, therefore this work in particular becomes one of the most attractive avenues towards the riches of Greek mythology.

CHAPTER THREE

Circe's Enchantment: A Humane Voice among Immortal Intrigue

3.1. Circe's voice

In classic Greek mythology, Circe is known to be an evil enchantress exiled for eternity. Madeline Miller's *Circe* presents itself as a coming-of-age novel, focused on the character of Circe: an independent woman, powerful sorcerer and a terrifying foe. Firstborn of the mighty titan Helios and an astute nymph, Perse.

It was in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* that we first get a proper glimpse of Circe, portrayed to be cunning, vengeful and submissive towards male authority. Her duty there was to be nothing but supportive of her male counterparts. No expanse of power or cleverness could amount for the fact that at the end of the day she was a woman. Someone helpless and doomed all by herself. Homer's perspective focuses on the male and their adventures but little to no limelight on the female and their experiences. Miller challenges the male-centred narratives we often come across in ancient Greek mythology and by doing so she creates a novel point of view that offers justice to the character of Circe.

The different ideas or perceptions one might've had of Circe before are now dismantled by Miller. She goes on to endorse a statement made by Atwood (2005) where she strongly asserts "But Homer's *Odyssey* is not the only version of the story" (xiv). By retelling the story of the Greek mythological character *Circe*, Miller presents to us a whole new perspective than what we had previously known from Homer's *The Odyssey*.

Miller's Circe is contrary to that of Homer's simply due to the fact that the latter is written from the male point of view. *Circe* presents a narrator who is a female and by doing so Miller has given Circe the control to put forth her own perspective. In the retelling, we come across no huge differences in the character of Circe rather just an inclusion of a more detailed perspective. Now, Circe is able to present her reasonings and feelings on the events taking place in her life that were previously left unexplained. No longer are there assumptions but hard facts.

Right from the onset Circe states, "*When I was born, the name for what I was did not exist*" (Miller 9) establishing a clear distinction between herself and the other. It foreshadows the struggle she would undergo to establish her identity and the tug of war between morality and divinity. The statement instantly hints at her inability to fit in. Even as a child it's made clear that she is unlike her seemingly superior siblings. This leads to her growing up believing that she's not good enough to live among her powerful and confident family. Circe is then deemed as an outsider due to the fact that she looks nothing like the other children Helios fathered. We later get to know that she has an uncanny voice unlike any the others around her are accustomed too. This only adds to what the other gods consider to be a flaw, an absurdity. A voice that is too human, instead of divine. None of her powers manifest as a young immortal, she has neither her fathers' godly powers nor her mother's nymph powers. Hence begins the neglect and cruelty, a young immortal endlessly growing in the shadow of a mighty place, invisible to all.

Relationships are what we would consider to be the core of many ancient myths. May it be friendship, romance or even a rivalry. Relationships are what drive character to be what they do and become who they are. We see disagreements and fights between major gods or heroes, for anything from power to fame just as we

find in human society today. Human emotions of anger, love, disgust, jealousy, comfort are so often reflected in myths. Sometimes reading about them can help us connect to our own emotions better. Form a deeper understanding of how the intricacies of emotions work. Therefore, the two worlds of mortality and immortality are not separated by any clear boundaries.

One of the most poignant themes in this novel is reflected in Circe's constant determination at forging good and meaningful relationships, and that is the quest for love. Right from Circe seeks for love, an understanding or simply acceptance. To be loved as much as she did others because the humongous landscape of the immortal world can prove lonely if not loved and cherished. Therefore, family is what Circe first looked up to. She sat at her father's feet on his throne, looking up at him, observing. Trying to be the perfect child. And yet at the end of the day Circe was left unloved and an imposter in her own home.

Circe was constantly seen being abandoned as a child and this only gets worse. Growing up she craves for the attention and love she should've been given without having to ask. She couldn't help but make excuses for her mothers and siblings' behaviour. We also see how Perse, Circe's mother, had very narrow and self-motivated goals. The birth of her children was nothing, but a mere task done in hopes of giving birth to someone divinely blessed. A child who would make her renowned and unforgettable. If the child didn't receive a mighty prophecy from their father Helios, she would just leave them to fend for themselves. They had no other value. It was due to this mentality that all of Circe's apparent faults were highlighted beginning by her mother. She was isolated and abandoned. This led to Circe getting accustomed to seeking scraps of love from her family, from accepting everything she gets good or bad, and not complaining. Keeping her head low and

existing. The feeling of being just another nymph child crowded her senses and took root in her being. Circe's life at Helios palace was hence simply filled with "*dull miseries*". (Miller, 17)

One may question her naivety considering the treatment she received from her family. Always being on the receiving end of their hatred, cruelty or indifference. Being subjected to bullying that completely destroyed her self-esteem as a growing immortal. But family was important to her, as an immortal and a woman in ancient times. The power dynamics always favoured the ones in good graces with powerful gods and titans. Helios, Circe's father being one of them. For Circe being under his wing was both safety and harm. A paradox she learns to come to terms with throughout the book. And yet she cannot help but rely on this toxic sense of support her father provides her with. always hyper aware because, "*However gold he shines, do not forget his fire.*" (Miller, 11). Around her father Circe realised the power dynamics of the immortal world. Power that could build or destroy in no time. How one can wield it as a tool to attain their goals, to make friends, to be safe. Especially as a woman in Greek society.

Hence, she failed to understand that love can be toxic too. People can lie, hate, deceive and completely destroy you. It took exile for her to understand that she was just a mere pawn in the game of unending life. Someone who can be played with, moved around and tossed aside when done.

Circe spent so many lonely days and suffered heartaches trying to find the right family. A process with so many trials and errors that shaped her into the immortal we see at the end of the novel. Someone who is ready to get up and keep trying no matter how many times she has to repeat the process. Circe's experience

with her first love brings this to the fore. It also accurately portrays the universality of Greek myths. It puts forth such a mutual human experience. We mortals so often fall hard and fast, giving it all for our first romantic experiences. Exceptions exist, but many times we have all these passionate feelings only to be mercilessly crushed by the so-called love of your life.

It was at the peak of loneliness that Circe met Glaucos, a human man. He entered her life like a beacon of light exposing her to the world of mortals. It was in his presence that for the first time Circe asserts, *“But it was not until that moment that I think I had ever been warm.”* In his presence was the most comfortable she had ever felt, so much so that it blurred the lines between mortality and immortality. Circe fell for Glaucos hard and fast. She fell for the simple things he did, showing her how to build a fire, getting her bread and cheese, communicating with her about his troubles and woes. Nobody had ever confronted or relied on Circe, so it wasn’t a surprise that these little things started making her feel special.

Yet, Circe’s story with Glaucos ended before it could even start. It showed us how far love can push someone. Circe uncovered her true potential while fighting to have a normal life with Glaucos. She pushed herself until she found a solution to have forever with him. All this simply because Glaucos and Circe couldn’t transcend over their differences. At the end of the day Glaucos was still human and Circe a goddess. Glaucos failed to comprehend how older Circe was compared to him, he was tricked by her appearance. This provided the first sign of his shallow interest in Circe. He knew little to nothing about Circe’s life, the struggle and loneliness she went through. But Circe had made Glaucos the centre of her life. When Glaucos faced any trouble, she went above and beyond to help him, and that is exactly how she discovered her godly powers.

Circe soon realised that Glaucos would eventually die and that she would be lonely again. The mere thought of spending her eternity alone terrified her, thinking of her past terrified her. So, she tried everything she could to make things right. This resolution was in idea a simple solution, make Glaucos an immortal. She went to whoever she thought could help her and after receiving no aid she decided to take matters into her own hands. She remembered the powers of *pharmaka* as Aeëtes had described and sought out to find it.

Circe broke the laws of the fates when she transformed Glaucos into a god. She thought that now life would be different, and nothing could hinder their union. No barriers of species or class. Alas, human or god the emotion of greed will always be present. Long story short, Glaucos got greedy, his new powers overwhelmed him. They blessed him with respect and importance he had never felt before. Now Circe was the least of his concerns. With his new form he could have anyone he wanted, as a man and an immortal now he reigned above her. He began ignoring her and pursuing others. Even Helios considered Circe to not be a good match for Glaucos. Seeing this shift in behaviour it was no surprise when Glaucos abandoned Circe leaving her all by herself again.

In the midst of this betrayal by Glaucos, Circe's life is made even more difficult by the treatment of the other nymphs in the palace. Even though she is of superior status the lack of respect from her own family leads to everyone else disrespecting her. The others are still unaware of her powers and continue to see her as a harmless being. That is until Circe uses her magic to transform Scylla, a nymph who Glaucos wanted to marry. In a fit of jealousy and rage Circe commits this crime and is later filled with intense guilt which leads her to confess her unforgivable deed.

This incident brings to the fore a very poignant point, that is the difference between how powerful men are treated compared to powerful women. When Circe confesses that she has the power to transform at will, she is completely disregarded. Even punished for trying to convince her father Helios that she needs to be punished for transforming Scylla, a nymph she did not like into a monster. It is only when her brother Aeëtes comes forth and confirms their this that Circe's powers are even acknowledged. While to Circe her actions initially brought about a sense of guilt this isn't the same for Aeëtes, he doesn't go on to condemn her but rather quietly mull over these powers they've been born with. Like it was a completely normal course of action to utilise these powers the way they were.

Such immense power cannot be hidden and while Aeëtes gets away with minimal repercussions, Circe is exiled for eternity. Her entire life at the palace is erased in a simple verdict. Here we see how fleeting the existence and value of a lesser god, no less women are within the might of powerful gods and Olympians. It portrays the predicament of women in society, may it be mortal or immortal. Despite it all the beginning of Circe's self-growth takes a leap when she arrives at the island of Aiaia as an exile. She begins to explore the way she never could in the cold dark walls of Helios's palace that only let him shine the brightest. With the absence of her brutal family holding her back she could finally bloom.

Circe's exile brought about numerous changes in her way of living and how she perceived the world. It helped her grow as an immortal and understand the world as she never did at Helios' palace. Of course, her exposure to the real world was still limited, yet we see her make the best use of opportunities when presented to her.

Love at its most pure and raw form is depicted within the relationship between Circe and her son Telegonus, her first child. She gives him the kind of conditional love that she never received, sometimes skirting the line of controlling. The constant abandonment Cice faced only pushed her to protect her son from all worldly and otherworldly dangers. So, when she figured out that Athena was out to get her son, Circe did not cower like she previously would against higher powers. She pushed herself and her magic to do everything to protect her child. This particular action would resonate with all mothers universally, across time or species. Most, if not all considering Circe's own mother, would do everything they can for their child. The sort of unconditional love mothers have for their children will always be unprecedented. Therefore, Circe's actions to protect her son may not be understood by all but a mother would.

Right from the onset, the goddess Athena seeks to eliminate Circe's son. Due to this Circe goes through the most painful childbirth that almost ends her. She has no help, no salve to ease her pain and has to take matters into her own hands and pull her child out by cutting open her stomach. The time period after the birth of her son highlights the immense changes and troubles Circe had to go through. Adjusting to taking care of a child who is not immortal but instead human and needs constant care. To make matters worse Telegonus was constantly in danger due to Athena. When Circe figures this out she stands up for her son like nobody did for her. Athena presents her an option of giving up her son and forever having the aid of an Olympian god, something that is a very rare gift. One that any immortal of lesser power would jump upon, but Circe disagrees. She uses all her power to keep the island hidden from and dangers that could harm her son. For years she goes on

to maintain the magic that would aid her son to live a comfortable life. So that he would never have to face the horrors that she did.

As an adult, Telegonus like any other wishes to go explore the world. Circe cannot forever keep him contained at the island no matter how safe it would be. She knew she had no other option but to let him go therefore she takes up another dangerous quest which only proves her unconditional love for him. Aeëtes had once mentioned a god called Trygon, whose tail had some of the most potent poison that could condemn even an immortal to an eternity of pain and torment. Circe decided that she would win this tail for her son, so that he could keep himself safe while away from the island. But obtaining this tail was no easy task, even Aeëtes, the sibling who was considered to be the most powerful, tried and did not succeed. To obtain the tail the condition was that you had to touch it yourself which was simply a test of the spirit. Circe cemented herself to be different from other immortals when she moved forward to touch it. She would do anything for her loved ones, and this proved it. Ultimately, Trygon sees her bravery and moves his tail before she comes in contact with the poison, and she succeeds in obtaining this powerful weapon.

Throughout the novel a small but consistent theme we encounter is Circe's fascination with humans and human life. Miller brings forth issues of poverty and human terror. Beginning with Glaucos' condition as a human to the poverty displayed by the crew who ended up at Circe's Island. We also see the immense fear humans harboured for the gods through their action and tributes. Circe figured out the power immortals had over mortals in Helios' palace itself. She saw the hold gods had over mortals, how human life was seen to be so short and insignificant. In her earliest years she saw the repercussions of helping mortals in the public punishment of Prometheus, a titan who gifted mortals with fire. Circe firsthand

witnessed how even the greatest of her kind can be brutally punished for showing a humane emotion as simple as empathy. None of Prometheus' fellow brethren were willing to defend him. Prometheus once stated, "*Not every god need be the same*" and we see how Circe goes on to embody this statement. Millers Circe is powerful, independent and unapologetic as times pass. She grows from her discrimination, pain and faults.

Through retellings we can note how identification can occur, may it be with particular heroes or situations. These experiences can be seen as universal both across cultures as well as time periods. Through these myths readers are able to confront contemporary concerns within the framework of ancient narratives. Issues such as repression, inequality, identity crisis and so on. Rewritings today can be considered a practice to gratify the readers' imagination, yet it's so much more.

Our main source of knowledge about Greek mythology today stems from the old epic poetry that has been retold and rewritten throughout the ages. From retelling in prose to reimagining in Renaissance paintings we've come a long way. Today a myth rewritten can stand on its own as we see in the novels that will be analysed in this research. The past is simply being used to form the groundwork for these texts which highlight looking at present issues and concerns.

Ancient Greek myths are filled with issues of betrayals, sudden manifestations of love and loyalty, brutal revenges, honour and so all. It is a complex brigade of various relationships and how they reflect society and culture. A lot of practices back then can be considered to be very problematic today. Contemporary writers often take up this task to shed new perspective to these

myths, to represent characters who are in the minority, who haven't been given the voice to make their statements and arguments.

The universality of myths leads to them being adapted in different mediums as well as mindsets. They often focus on some of the very basic ideas regarding a hero's journey. This led to audiences from various age groups as well as mindsets equally enjoying this new work. The emotional impact of combining ancient narratives coupled with facing modern problems can form an intense impact.

It was Circe's exile that led to the formation of her identity and journey of self-discovery, two poignant themes in the novel. Circe never felt like she belonged at Helios' palace, never felt like her family cared about her and this is proven true when she is heartlessly exiled from her home without a second glance. When Circe confesses to her powers and her ability to transform beings into their truest forms as she believed, she is laughed at and mocked. Her father also goes as far as physically hurting her for talking back and making up tales. It is only when Aeëtes confirms her words that they are given any consideration. A power so mighty cannot be kept under wraps and hence Helios decides to use this to his advantage. He goes up to Zeus and contorts a solution which ultimately ends up with Circe's exile. Even her own mother is more heartbroken by the fact that she can no longer bear children because of the special powers they are born with. Nobody checks up on Circe as if she was simply a pawn that could be moved around to win an invisible game. Circe also realises that she has had nothing of value in the palace for a long time. As a lesser immortal Circe soon realised that *"Every moment of my peace was a lie, for it came only at the gods' pleasure."* (Miller 193)

And even though she is terrified of the new world she'll be pushed into, this will be her one chance at a new and better life. It is during this exile itself that Circe learns some harsh truths about herself and the world. When we are in an environment where the only entity we can rely on is ourselves, we are forced to mature. The same instance happens to Circe, she could no longer wallow in self-pity. She had two choices, to either rot for eternity or get up and make a life for herself, one that is worth living for all eternity.

This is what leads Circe to bring about a transformation into her life, the most dominant theme throughout this novel. Circe's exile in Aiaia only multiplies her loneliness. She realises that no matter the luxuries at hand "*A golden cage is still a cage.*" (Miller133). Try as she may to find things to occupy her time she is still trapped on this island. It restricts her from going out into the real world, from exploring and most importantly from living. At the end of it all, Circe comes to an understanding that immortality isn't as glamorous a blessing as it seems. It's simply an unending cycle of living through the same pain, mistakes, love and horrors over and over again.

Yes, she does learn to be independent, experiments with her magic but there's always this emptiness within her. Miller right from the get-go presents the character of Circe as someone brimming with love to give as well as receive. Someone who, unlike the other gods, is not completely self-centred. Has a deep-rooted love for life and the living no matter how strong or weak. We see this in her behaviour towards the animals she brings forth in her island, in her treatment towards the humans who stumble for shelter at her island.

Miller establishes an ocean of difference between the character of Circe who first met a mortal to the exiled version who is now accustomed to the presence of mortals. Circe's power of transformation is originally seen as destructive in Homer's *Odyssey*, where she simply performs the transformative act of reshaping men into swine. In Miller's *Circe* this power of transformation is seen as the unique ability to turn anybody, objects, men, animals or gods into their truest forms. Miller fills the void by providing a justification for Circe's actions when she puts forth an explanation of her own: on the island of Aiaia the very first men who seek refuge with Circe sexually assaults her after figuring out that she is a lone woman with no men in her life. Her hospitality is met with sheer disregard and unforgivable actions. Due to the absence of a patriarch in the house the men believe that their actions would not lead them to face any retribution and hence they can get away freely.

Circe's curiosity and good nature led her to go out of her way to help lost and hungry sailors who ended up at her island; she did not expect gratitude but company. Anything to fill in the loneliness permeating the island. Yet she was met with cruelty. The men insisted on thanking any male figure present in her life. The moment they realised that there were none, that is when Circe stated,

"If you would thank your host, thank me. This house is mine alone."

(Miller 158)

They turned into monsters, a complete one eighty from the demure and grateful guests they first appeared. Therefore, Circe's brutally transforming her disgusting attackers is simply the smallest retribution she could muster up at that moment. This instant retribution is something that is widely seen in many

mythological narratives. Circe merely says a word that activates the herbs present in the sailors' body after ingesting the wine:

“His ribcage cracked and began to bulge. I heard the sound of flesh rupturing wetly, the pops of breaking bone. His nose ballooned from his face and his legs shrivelled like a fly sucked by a spider. He fell to all fours. He screamed, and his men screamed with him. It went on for a long time. As it turned out, I did kill pigs that night after all.” (Miller 165)

Due to Homer's lack of detail as to the reasons behind Circe's transformation, she is simply seen as an evil, mysterious and vindictive witch out to get all men who end up in her territory. Miller shatters this image, she addresses this issue in an interview, ““In the *Odyssey*, Circe is very clearly the incarnation of male anxiety about female power—the fear is that if women have power, men are getting turned into pigs. The word 'witch' is still used today as a slur against women with an amount of power that makes society nervous” (Wiener).

Throughout the novel the men who were subject to Circe's transformation were the same ones who first saw a lonely woman as an object to be exploited, both physically as well as materialistically. It showcases their innate animalistic form which only proves that Circe's transformation does indeed bring forth the true nature of what it touches. Her ability reflects, *“the innately animal-like nature of her victims is already hinted at in the *Odyssey* and has been an inspiration for allegorizing accounts of the myth ever since antiquity”* (Murnaghan and Roberts 197)

In line with the above we can conclude that Greek myths are woven in betrayals, big or small. The very essence of the existing gods is deep rooted in

various schemes of betrayals. Helios himself chooses to fight for the gods despite being a titan and, hence, betraying his kind. He helped the gods torture and tame the titans to take over. Helios being the titan of prophecies perhaps saw the outcome of the war. He decided that to stay on top, betraying his kind was the only option. After all, at the end of the day it's the survival of the fittest, both physically as well as mentally. So, it's no surprise that his children decided to pursue this way of life. Out of all four children Helios had with Perse, Aeëtes was considered to be the favoured heir. He was different from his siblings and actually spent time with Circe in the onset of their immortal lives. He becomes a rock to Circe during when things deteriorated with her other family members. Through him Circe begins to question and seek answers. Directly or indirectly, it was Aeëtes who became the first source of cunning and manipulation. Unlike Circe he knew exactly when to speak and what to say, what should be kept a secret and what should be revealed to his advantage.

We see numerous discrepancies in the world of myth, specifically the treatment between sons and daughters. While Circe was exiled and her sister Pasiphaë was married off to Minos, the king of Crete, both her brothers were given free rein to go establish their own kingdoms. During Circe's stay at the island of Aiaia we see several daughters being sent to her island as a sort of punishment and yet no sons were sent, purely because "Sons were not punished" (Miller 155). These may not be seen as a big deal during this era but were in fact small betrayals that should not be overlooked in the least.

Ancient Greek society was ruled by power dynamics, falling at the end of this hierarchy would lead you nowhere. You'd just be another forgotten and meaningless immortal. To be remembered, revered and respected power played a major role. One glance at mortals and Circe discovered the "*great chain of fear*"

(Miller 37) where Zeus was at the top and everyone else just followed. Miller emphasises on how Circe sees the humane side of everything. Being looked down upon her entire life she empathises with mortals who are seen as powerless beings with insignificant and fleeting lives. Among everything else this is the one quality that makes Circe unique.

Moving on, Pasiphaë, Circe's sister and the queen of Crete is the best example to demonstrate the need for power. The picture of Pasiphaë presented to us on the onset of the novel is that of a cruel and cunning sister. Her actions at first seem to be powered by her mother's maliciousness and loathing towards Circe. And later in Crete as a witch who controls those around her through magic and manipulation.

The only time Circe visits Pasiphaë, that is, after her exile she uncovers the truth that shaped her sister into the woman she was. How Pasiphaë figured out early on that as a woman she would always be subject to the whims and fancies of the men around her, a mere puppet to be used and traded for greater purposes. No matter the formidable power she possessed she would always need the protection of a man. That's what she saw her mother Perse do when she married Helios on the condition that he could have as many affairs as he wanted but all away from the palace where she would live. This would give Perse the dignity and standing the other women wouldn't have.

Circe always craved a sibling relationship like that between Pasiphaë and Perse, their brother. When Aeëtes was born she thought she found one but he too left her as soon as he could to build a better life. Nevertheless, to Circe's immense surprise Pasiphaë hints at the abuse she had to face with Perse around. How their

relationship was a faux so that she would not get bullied like Circe did. Pasiphaë just quickly learned that to be safe you needed power, whether around you or with you. After all, *“nymphs were allowed to work only through the power of others.”* (Miller 126)

Therefore, when Helios arranges for her marriage with Minos, son of Zeus the King of Crete she agrees. This marriage was constructed to benefit Helios and his alliance with the Olympians. Pasiphaë just made best use of the situation that presented itself to her. She uses her power as a witch to deal with the misogyny and infidelity she faces in Crete.

Pasiphaë calls Circe when she gets to know that she would be giving birth to the Minotaur, a half bull monster. Instead of killing him off or completely hiding him from the world she uses the Minotaur to her advantage. He becomes the means to gain fame and power, both among men as well as gods. The Minotaur becomes a *“whip to use against her husband Minos.”* (Miller 119) Because of the monster she would be able to exercise immense power over the others.

Although the manifestations of power can be seen in various forms, even in the little unnoticed things one does. While all the other gods were watching Prometheus, one of their own get mercilessly punished for giving mortal fire to survive, it is only Circe who empathises with him and assists him. This action pinpoints the difference between her and the others. She defies authority when she gives Prometheus a drink to soothe his pain. An action that could ruin her father's reputation and standing in the godly world. We also see how an older and wiser Circe makes complete use of this fact to attain true freedom. It becomes a source of power she can wield against those already stronger and higher than her.

A glaring theme in this novel is presented through Circe's hunger for knowledge. It is Circe this very same hunger for knowledge, for answers that pushes her out of her comfortable life at the island. When her sister, Pasiphaë calls for her help during her pregnancy, Circe decides to grant her another chance. Not because she forgave everything she went through while she lived with her family but because she wanted to have answers. She wanted to know after all these years why exactly was she treated the way she was. Circe was done living in oblivion and denial, weaving her own conclusions because nobody else would provide them. So, she took up the first chance she had to obtain answers and left. Leaving the island for the first time would also bring to her knowledge about the world she could not experience. She could see how human life existed together. In essence, this would be a whole new world for her.

No matter the daunting experiences she was aware she would eventually face on her journey, for example her encounter with Scylla, the monster she unknowingly created, Circe didn't back off. She knew that upon reaching her sister she would also gain insights regarding her magic, and it would all be worth the distress.

The loom Daedalus gifts Circe after her first visit into the mortal world can be seen as one of the most poignant motifs of the novel. It not only emphasises her relationship with Daedalus but also the passing time as an immortal. It highlights her fervour to move on at times. It expresses her creativity, hard work and patience. The loom also becomes the object that forges a connection and eventually friendship between Circe and Penelope.

On a deeper analysis we can say that the image of weaving can hint towards the very creation of stories. The fates in ancient Greek mythology are known to weave individuals' fate into their tapestry. Once they stop and cut the thread, it symbolises death. In this novel, Miller makes use of this metaphor by portraying how much attention Circe pays while weaving. The careful selection of material to the colour. She goes on to weave a life for herself despite the unpromising material life threw at her. All of her struggles, joys are woven into it. Finally, this idea of weaving also fits into the bigger picture of Miller weaving ancient narratives into her work.

With every person who ended up at her island, Circe would probe for information on the outside world. Her curiosity peaked with every interaction and every tale. For a long time, the god Hermes, messenger of the sky became the prime source connecting her to the outside world. He brought into light that there's nothing wrong with her voice like she was brought up to believe all her life. Instead, she had the voice of a mortal, something that was actually not very common since only "*lesser nymphs are born with human voices.*" (Miller 82) Hermes stated that this would become a characteristic that would not aid Circe as a goddess because the mortals would notice and "*they won't fear you as they fear the rest of us.*" (Miller 83) This proves to be a shiver inducing foreshadowing for what Circe would eventually face. And yet, one of the biggest mysteries of Circe's life was unravelled in no time by the messenger god.

Circe has always been an astute observer and over time she began to notice that not all knowledge was meant to help you. Some would trick and deceive; would probe for your weakness and leave you bare to the world. Hermes was one of those entities, neither a friend nor an enemy. It was simply his curiosity and boredom that

led him to Circe. They soon became lovers, but Circe knew better than to trust everything that Hermes said. Most of the time, he was just seeking reactions from Circe to then weave his own stories about her. This was their relationship dynamic and at the end of the day Circe believed that *“He was a poison snake, and I was another, and on such terms we pleased ourselves.”* (Miller 84)

Miller hints on how Circe’s nymph heritage is responsible for her description to be alluring as well as appealing. Often it is also hinted that due to this she becomes a target despite her other godly parentage. Circe grows up listening to the horrors that nymphs of lower status go through. The appalling and degrading view others have about them. During a visit, Hermes, the god of messengers once asserted, *“But I’ll tell you a secret: they are terrible at getting away.”* (Miller 154) Implying that with enough power you could do as you please to them. This goes on to reinforce the idea of power dynamics playing throughout the novel. Each action of the characters is motivated by the need to attain power, because as an immortal that’s the only way one could be remembered and not fade into nothingness.

3.2. Circe and the *Odyssey*

During an interview for *Public Books* Miller remarks on the portrayal of Circe in Homer’s epic which she believed created space for a creative revision of the ancient mythological story:

The Circe section is not only contained within kind of the traditional male heroic model but is actually one of the parts of the Odyssey that is narrated by Odysseus himself, telling the story to the Phaeacians. If you look at it [in] that light, it becomes an incredibly self-serving story. Here’s Odysseus: he shows up on the island of this terrifying witch; he defeats her; she throws

herself on him, and falls in love with him, and invites him to stay! It's a story designed to make him look really good. So, I felt like I could push back.
(Plotz and Turigiano)

The title *The Odyssey* goes on to imply who this narrative is going to heavily revolve around, that is Odysseus. We see his trials and tribulations, the journey towards an unforgettable adventure that changes his life permanently. During the prime of this poem Odysseus is the only poignant character, the others simply supporting characters. *The Odyssey* as times have proven grew to be equally popular for its so-called villains, for example Circe. These characters initially had only one goal, that is, serve as stepping stones for Odysseus' character development. To highlight his bravery, cunning, charisma and wit. Circe was one of the most memorable characters who encountered Odysseus. She was shown to mirror qualities we saw in Odysseus himself such as his trickster nature, his undeniable wit and cunning. Although she is indisputably described as a mighty and powerful creature, she still doesn't hold a candle to Odysseus. Her power is derived from the ancient magical abilities she was born with. Circe is portrayed to be powerful enough to single-handedly bewitch men who end up at her island, someone to be feared and wary of.

Homer's Circe was known to lure men into her island on pretence of providing food and accommodation for lost sailors. She then goes on to bewitch and turn these men into pigs. We're not given any reasoning behind her actions and intentions. When Odysseus' men arrive at the island, half of them are turned into pigs. With the help of Hermes, Odysseus is shown to have outwitted Circe and turned his crew back to normal. Yet an air of mystery and power continues to loom over Circe. Odysseus' crew never get over their fear of her after once already being

turned into pigs. Throughout the tale woven about Circe, her excellence in the field of sorcery terrifies men enough to see her as a threat, with or without a man in her life.

In Homer's epic the departure of Odysseus is a bitter-sweet moment for them all. The crew as well as Odysseus himself were getting comfortable within the hospitality provided by Circe. Nevertheless, we see how Circe still remains detached to an extent. There are no sorrowful acclamations at Odysseus' departure nor are there professions of any passionate feelings. Odysseus observes how *"Meanwhile Circe had gone ahead and tethered a ram and black ewe by the ship. She had slipped past us with ease; when a god wishes to remain unseen, what eye can observe his coming and going?"* (Homer 139, lines 570-573). This emphasises how Circe maintained her role as a supreme being and yet a counterpart to Odysseus.

A character who was portrayed to be so powerful and mysterious is reduced to a mere hurdle. Yet years later, Circe is shown to be, *"the proud witch undone before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy."* (Miller 174). However, it is poignant to understand that the relationship between Circe and Odysseus is beyond this picture of a man who has outsmarted and asserted his dominance over a woman. Odysseus earns Circe's respect and builds a bond of trust with its foundation. Him ending up in her bed does not signify victory or a fighter who's going to claim a prize, rather I believe it portrays Circe's own desire and choice. It's her assertion of female needs and wants that have for centuries been repressed. It's her mode of expression and grappling with reality.

Circe may have been powerful, but she is presented as a villain. Someone who is opposed to Odysseus not only because of her power, godly descent or gender but also as a counterpart to his bravery and cunning wit. Circe's actions highlight the complexity of her character. She embodies female power. A woman not afraid to embrace her sexuality or the fulfilment of it.

We can intriguingly note that the Circe Miller presents is well-conscious of how she has been portrayed by Homer,

"Later, years later I would hear a song made of our meeting. The boy who sang it was unskilled, missing notes more often than he hit, yet the sweet music of the verses shone through his mangling." (Miller 181)

This can be seen as her reaction to the image put forth of her. Not even her divinity and status of a powerful sorceress could help protect her from being used as a mere device to showcase Odysseus' strength and intellect in the *Odyssey*.

Miller challenges the original myth when she lays emphasis on Circe's voice. In book X of Homer's *Odyssey*, he describes Circe to be a "*dread goddess who speaks like a human*" (10.137) we get no explanation as to why a goddess has a voice that of humans, one of the many other instances left unexplained. Miller takes this up in her novel and relegates great emphasis on this detail; it becomes one of the most crucial issues that Circe faces. Time and time again Circe is sidelined because of her appearance and her voice during her early years.

Miller goes on to transform this originally minor detail to the driving force that distinguishes Circe from the other deities who never truly accepted her to be among their ranks. In this way we see her voice being into a propelling device which

crucially plays the role *“into the evolution of her character”* (VanRy). Her voice is the root of her complex relationship with both gods as well as men.

Just like Homer presented Circe’s role in Odysseus’ life within two books, Miller wraps up Circe’s encounter with Odysseus within three chapters. It is only one of the several other romances in her life, only one among the other lovers she took: Hermes, Daedalus as well as Telemachus. The original protagonist is therefore transformed into a relatively minor character and the character originally relegated to a minor role is brought into the spotlight.

3.3. Miller’s Circe

Miller tackles the often-discussed issues of marginalisation and perception by redeeming the Greek mythological enchantress Circe. Through this work Miller bestows upon Circe all of her formerly unsung glory. Miller presents to us a fictional autobiography that dives deeper into the character and experiences of Circe. We get to know much more about her life as a shunned immortal. Odysseus’s entrance into her life is not the only main event but just another in the tapestry of her life, just another thread among many. This novel’s focus is on her personal development, a bildungsroman if you must. Miller goes on to reinterpret Greek mythology to highlight many contemporary issues and dilemmas. Things that would generally be dismissed are now highlighted. For instance, how did Circe go from devotionally loving her brother to dismissing him completely. The immortal years may fade the answers but through the progression of the novel we see the small but poignant shifts in characters and their relationships. Portraying her uniquely female strength, quest for independence and strong will. Circe goes from a meek character to one who shouldered the sky for her loved one.

Circe also retells a series of well-known myths and references to mythological characters like Prometheus, Minotaur, Scylla, The Golden Fleece and so on. All of these are retold in the first-person perspective of the narrator Circe. This emphasis on her own role in these myths which haven't been the focus before, with little to no mention. Hence Miller showcases the blurred boundaries between events and memories.

The role Circe plays in Miller's novel goes beyond what we've previously known of her. She is given a chance to voice her story, the course of events that led up to the image created to her. She was no longer a misunderstood and cunning witch. Circe might've unknowingly created the monster Scylla who took numerous human lives, but she didn't cast a blind eye to it like other gods would. She knew the risk she would be facing if she encountered Scylla again and yet she takes it up. She is filled with fear, she gets hurt, but this brings her to the realisation that *"this is what it means to be alive."* (Miller 324)

Circe might've had the power to transform objects and beings but what she truly wished for was to transform her life into something meaningful. To live a good life rather than a long one and we see this at the end of the novel when she risks it's all to be her true self. Circe declares that she already has a mortal's voice so *"let me have the rest"* (Miller 324) hinting at her wish to be finally human. To willingly choose fleeting human years compared to the rich immortal years she was born with. to have one good life rather than a thousand filled with miseries because gods are *"more dead than anything, for they are unchanging, and can hold nothing in their hands."* (Miller 324)

CHAPTER FOUR

Riding the Waves of Mythology: A Deep Dive into “*Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*”

4.1. Riordan’s myth

Sneaking into Young Adult literature through works filled with adventure, friendships, betrayals, animated action and a whole new world is the swiftest way to hook the audience. Greek mythology has done exactly that through the pentalogy of Rick Riordan *Percy Jackson and The Olympians*. This series has persisted on the New York Times Bestseller list for more than 600 weeks. The first novel in this series, *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* has also been turned into a movie. It even inspired the musical, *The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical*, which went ahead to make a Broadway debut (Van Syckle)

The novel focuses on a young boy faced with the reality that Greek myths and its mythical characters could be a real and unignorable force in his life. Riordan skilfully and with creativity manages to merge the mystical world of Greek mythology with the modern world that we live in today. In the novel *Percy Jackson and The Lightning Thief* that’ll be examined in this study Riordan takes various mythological elements and provides them with a new and modern form which then goes on to enable their blending into the nonfictional modern society we live in.

Throughout this novel we see the incorporation of numerous mythological elements ranging from mythological monsters, locations, objects to Greek gods. We also see references to other previously well-known Greek heroes. All this in the setting of modern America and the point of view of a young demigod, Percy

Jackson. It's target audience was intended to be for young adults, but the novel series was nominated for Children's best-selling novels in April 2011 (Hikmat 71). Riordan's narratives make use of wit in a way that makes his works an easy read even though it deals with heavy Greek myths. The novel is presented in the first-person point of view where Percy aids the readers navigate through the events taking place in his life as well as various Greek myths. The world of Greek mythology is completely novel to our protagonist and hence we too as readers explore this new world alongside him. It is specifically narration of this type that *"shortens the distance between the story and the readers as they can feel like they are talking to Percy or reading his diary"* (Mugijatna, Habsari, and Putri 81).

4.2. Troubled waters to heroic adventures

Percy Jackson, our twelve-year-old protagonist states *"I didn't want to be a half-blood"* (Riordan 9) right in the first line of the novel. The reason simply being that his identity as a half-blood is the very root of all his problems in the modern world. Wherever he went, trouble soon followed. Not simple day to day hiccups but problems that threaten his life and that of others around him. To add to it all, Percy was diagnosed with both dyslexia and ADHD, something he later figures out is due to his godly heritage. The shortcomings his learning disability brings forth has been so deeply ingrained into his mind that he can't comprehend being of any value in society. When Mr. Brunner, later revealed to be the centaur Chiron, sees potential in him Percy thinks it's probably pity or worse lies. All his life Percy was dragged around because of these conditions, he was certified as a "trouble" child moving from one school to another. Treated almost like a nuisance who needed constant supervision.

By creating a character who has ADHD and is diagnosed with dyslexia too, Riordan breaks the stereotypes around children with the similar conditions. The predominant notion that being differently abled hinders you from doing anything worthwhile in your life is shattered here. Riordan showcases just how courageous, intelligent and quick-witted Percy can be despite his dyslexia. He doesn't let his differences bring him down; instead, he turns the tables by making use of them in situations of life and death where his hyperactivity helps him to stay focused in the battles of the mythological world.

While Percy was learning more about demigods, we clearly see how his differences were used to shape his perception of himself and other kids like him. In a conversation with Annabeth, the following comes to the fore:

Annabeth frowned. "Don't you get it, Percy? You are home. This is the only safe place on earth for kids like us."

"You mean, mentally disturbed kids?"

"I mean not human. Not totally human, anyway. Half-human." (Riordan 103)

Percy's entire life took one eighty when he realised that he is in fact not a regular human child. That it is his half godly ancestry that is responsible for all the strange things that kept happening in his life. For every class trip he took, weird things happened to him and those around him and yet nobody would see the reality he saw. Percy was constantly told that his hyperactive mind is what leads to an overactive imagination. He gives us an instance where his teacher turned into a monster who then attacked him only to be later deemed as non-existent. Even with zero knowledge of the monster or its existence, Percy is forced to fight for his life.

Thrown into such dangerous situations without any preparation, mental or physical. Riordan lays bare all the emotions Percy is experiencing in vivid detail which creates a strong sense of empathy among readers.

We later get to know that the reason for his dyslexia is because his brain “*is hardwired for ancient Greek.*” (Riordan 98) And his ADHD is due to the battle reflexes he’d need in a real fight because that’s what would keep him alive in a real fight. As a demigod Percy’s body is wired in a way that would aid in his survival against the threats he would eventually face. His disability is now turned into a special power, something that becomes his strength. As the novel progresses, we see how this stereotype affected him. Life as a regular student is hard for him. He wouldn’t pass his classes and could hardly stay at one school for more than a year. We can see how this physically and mentally affected Percy. He began to believe that he’s only a burden to his mother. For once Percy wants to achieve something and make his parents proud. His awareness of the sacrifices his mother makes only adds to the list of endearing qualities he possesses, making him a character readers instantly love.

On the same class trip where his teacher turned into a monster, a fellow student Nancy Bobofit was bullying Percy’s friend Grover. Percy lost his cool and all of a sudden Nancy was seen falling into a fountain. Even though Percy did not physically push her it was seen as follows, “*The water- like it grabber her*” (Riordan 19) Percy has no idea how this occurred and yet we get a foreboding of some supernatural powers at play. A foreshadowing of who his godly parent might be, cementing his own power and potential.

Initially, Percy is seen having trouble believing in this world of myths along with the fact that he too is now a part of it and rightly so. This world exposes him and his loved ones to threat and danger. No sooner did Percy digest the fact that the Greek gods he was taught about were real, he is accused of stealing. There is no way he could pull a feat like that when he doesn't even know about this new mythical world. Percy would completely dismiss the other children at Camp Half Blood as lunatics if it wasn't for the very own signs he himself experienced. How his brain could understand the Greek language when spoken despite never having learned it. The way his body instantly healed when submerged in water no matter his injury, the way water energised him could only be magic. There were other clear signs that Percy belonged to this world; we see it when Clarisse, a fellow camper, tries to bully Percy by shoving his face in a toilet. What she didn't expect was Percy's reaction to it:

"I felt a tug in the pit of my stomach. I heard the plumbing rumble, the pipes shudder. Clarisse's grip on my hair loosened. Water shot out of the toilet, making an arc straight over my head, and the next thing I knew, I was sprawled on the bathroom tiles with Clarisse screaming behind me."

(Riordan 100)

The water came to Percy's aid when he was in trouble. Deep down he began to realise that this was now his reality, the monsters, magic and constant adventure. Riordan masterfully crafts the build-up that leads to the final reveal of Percy's godly parent. He throws tiny hints along the way but nothing to completely confirm it once and for all. This builds the readers excitement and intrigue. This stirring of intrigue is one of the most prominent features of Riordan's writing, he always manages to keep you on your toes. He achieves this feat right from the get-go when

he exclaims, *“If you’re a normal kid, reading this because you think it’s fiction, great. Read on. I envy you for being able to believe that none of this ever happened”* (Riordan 1). This draws the readers to the normally unbelievable stories we see in mythology. It makes you question the truth in these myths all the while being immensely entertained.

When Percy got to know that his dad is actually an immortal and not someone lost at sea, he felt neglected. All his life he spent earning for his family. To spend his days with his mother and see her happy. Sally Jackson married Smelly Gabe, Percy’s stepdad who was nothing but a menace to them. All he did was play poker and order the mother son duo around. It is only later that Percy realises that his mother did that to save him, so that the monsters don’t catch on to his demigod scent and arrive to attack him. The revelation of this fact sent Percy to a spiral. He knew of rich parents sending off their children to Yancy Academy, the school he attended but *“gods should behave better”* (Riordan 104). Even with all that power and immortal years to spend, the children of gods almost never received any assistance or acknowledgement from them. They were mostly abandoned or forgotten which eventually has its own consequences as we’ll see in this novel.

When Percy showed up at Camp Half Blood, he was all the talk for being a demigod who defeated the minotaur. Soon enough questions were raised about the possibility of him being a child of one of the Big Three. Percy went from being invisible to having all the attention on him, from having to worry about a silly little Latin quiz to the possibility of a war. This kind of pressure would go on to affect even the strongest. On top of it all Percy thought he had lost the most important person in his life, his mom. All the comfort he’d ever known was snatched away by

this world of Greek mythology he entered. The gods who didn't care about him, monsters who were out for him and dangerous quests he had no choice but to accept.

The moment Chiron exclaims that Percy's has been determined, his entire life takes a new turn. "*Poseidon,*" said Chiron. "*Earthshaker, Stormbringer, Father of Horses. Hail, Perseus Jackson, Son of the Sea God.*" (Riordan 135)

Riordan's phrasing and the words he uses here are impeccable, it perfectly conveys the depth of this declaration. The importance of Percy's being and the role he is destined to have. While to the readers this declaration may sound grand and draw a distinction between others and the protagonist, Percy himself has a very different opinion. At the Hermes cabin Percy had finally begun to feel at home, surrounded by others like him, enjoying the chaotic conversation and even the little tricks. Now suddenly, everything changed. In cabin three that is Poseidon's cabin Percy was again all alone and that too when he had just begun to feel accepted. He claims, "*And I was absolutely miserable.*" (Riordan 136) He states that it made him feel like he had "*been separated out as if (he) had some rare disease*" (Riordan 136)

The incident itself sent out the message that as the son of the sea god, monsters would stop at nothing to kill Percy and that no space was safe enough for him as long as he had enemies. This led to the other campers steering away from him. And it simply repeated the same cycle again. This constant feeling of being isolated played a major role in developing Percy's character and spirit. It gave him the space to feel and think. It reconsiders how his life has now changed and will never go back to how it previously was. Riordan creates this space as an oasis for him to rest after all the shocks he had been receiving since the beginning. To add to

it all, the mortal world believed that Percy and his mother met with a freak accident. There was no clue about their whereabouts and no body found. Later it was determined that Percy was a troubled kid, a delinquent as put forth by the testimony of his step- father Smelly Gabe. He even went as far as stating that Percy “*has expressed violent tendencies in the past.*” (Riordan 137) this fact did no good to the already concocted shady reputation Percy was being assigned.

This theme of negligence is constantly seen throughout Greek mythology. It’s always some sort of negligence that leads to problems that demigods then need to solve, or simply negligent parenting on the side of the gods. Greek gods are known for having multiple children over the centuries with various other gods and mortals as well, so much so that they often lose count and move on with their life. Demigod children often grow up lonely and constantly in danger because of their godly blood which would attract all sorts of monsters. This also leads to feelings of resentment among demigods due to the abandonment they endure, we see the manifestation of this further in this novel.

Before Percy got publicly acknowledged by Poseidon as his son, he was put in the Hermes cabin at Camp Half Blood. It was the cabin where all undetermined demigods went. Luke, an older camper and a close friend of Annabeth once stated, “*Hermes isn’t picky about who he sponsors*” (Riordan 108). The underlying bitterness in his voice is evident here. Through Percy’s description we get to know that the camp has twelve cabins for the campers to stay in, each one representing an Olympian god. Some cabins had nobody in them while others like the Hermes cabin were full of campers, it’s where the undermined camper stayed along with Hermes’ own children. It is easy to feel small and insignificant when your parent doesn’t

even acknowledge your existence. And it only goes on to foster a kind of hatred and misery towards yourself and the world.

These young adults were already thrown face first into danger the moment they hit puberty, facing things regular children would never have to. It shapes their mind to be constantly alert and, on the run, hence the stress they face is unprecedented. To add to it all some of them don't even feel the comfort and safety a family could provide you. We see how this leaves these young demigods feeling helpless and lost. The antagonist of the novel, revealed to be the titan Kronos, takes full advantage of the demigod's dilemma. He feeds into their loneliness and insecurities promising a better future where they would have everything they wished for.

Riordan strongly emphasises on the theme of friends and found family. This is where the importance of Camp Half Blood comes to play, a safe haven for all demigods. A power hub to help them mature both mentally and physically. With daily camp activities, an occasional quest and other like-minded individuals around. It protects them not only from external dangers but the dangers they could pose to themselves too. It is the small rituals and traditions at camp that bring some normalcy into their lives, no matter how bizarre they may seem. For instance, making a food offering of the best part of your meals to your godly parent. It helps forge a connection where there might not even be one initially. The tradition of having a campfire where everyone sang along. These moments help readers connect to the texts, you can almost believe it's just another regular camp and there's no life-threatening danger out there.

Camp Half Blood was supposed to be a safe haven for the demigods. A place where they could practise life skills with ease and comfort, where they did not have to constantly look over their shoulders. All of this is disrupted the moment a hellhound from the Fields of Punishment, a vicious monster is unleashed onto camp territory. It leaves the campers feeling dismayed and plants the seed of fear into them. If not for the camp, there would be no space for these children and this threat to the camp was directly a threat to them.

According to the rules of the camp no monster could enter camp territory without being summoned from someone inside the camp. Therefore, when this monster went to attack Percy, it was clear that someone had betrayed them. The theme of betrayal is almost always present in Greek mythology, very often one that would leave be cruel and jarring. Here too the same feelings are at play, all the demigods considered each other to be their found family regardless of their godly parentage. They'd all suffered similar circumstances to understand and empathise with each other. This kind of trust is only possible after a connection that's founded on comforting each other through tough times. So, the possibility that one of their own betrayed them is heartbreaking.

It is in Annabeth and Grover that Percy finds true friendship. From day one Grover has tried to do anything and everything in his power to protect Percy. From hiding his own identity to risking his future. At Yancy Academy, Grover was Percy's only friend, one Percy was very protective over and vice-versa. He was assigned to protect Percy and help him get to camp safely. Grover was adamant to not let past mistakes repeat itself, when he lost a demigod, he had to be brought to camp safely. When Percy's mother is believed to be dead while driving them to camp Grover starts to blame himself. It doesn't help when the Council of Cloven Elders and

Dionysus decide that Grover will need to prove himself once again if he wants a searcher's licence.

"Grover has big dreams, Percy. Perhaps bigger than are reasonable. To reach his goal, he must first demonstrate great courage by succeeding as a keeper, finding a new camper and bringing him safely to Half-Blood Hill."

(Riordan 85)

Grover had one goal in life, that is to find the god Pan who disappeared centuries ago. For this he would need a searcher's licence and would only get it on the successful completion of the quest he undertakes with Percy and Annabeth. This quest tests the limits Grover is ready to go for his friends. Pushed to make tough decisions for their safety and his own future. Grover takes on this quest despite knowing that he would have to go to the underworld. For a satyr this in itself is a huge sacrifice. Satyrs are nature spirits, they thrive in nature and its abundant beauty. It serves as a fuel to them to go on with their day. Riordan also puts forth concerns of the ever-depleting nature of our environment through Grover. We see the destruction of nature in the name of advancement. Multiple forests and nature reservoirs being invaded only to be replaced by a concrete jungle. The 21st century is on the crux of destroying everything natural around it and bringing awareness to this fact is of prime importance.

Riordan pairing up Annabeth and Percy, children of Athena and Poseidon respectively is a very interesting move in the novel. In original Greek mythology we come across many instances where the two gods don't get along. They constantly try to up each other in one way or the other. Annabeth uses this fact as the reason she very often ends up having disagreements with Percy. Nevertheless,

Riordan breaks this infamous rivalry when Percy and Annabeth end up being the closest of friends and even dating later on in the series. The two of them complete each other by making use of their best assets, Annabeth with her clever mind and Percy with his raw power. Their rough childhood and life as demigods help them bridge the gap from acquaintances to friends.

If one would wish to describe Greek mythology in one word it would be “adventurous”. The theme of quests and adventures is central to this novel. Nothing in this world is on standstill for long, always in constant shifts and changes. Heroes come and go, quests are taken and succeeded or failed at. The adventure never stops, only its consequences remain. We’ve seen this present in well-known epics like the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, which are filled with heroes undertaking a perilous task, encountering mythical monsters and facing the wrath as well as blessings of the gods. In this novel too, the demigod hero gets his own quest. As the quest “*serves as a favorite theme and plot device for both traditional and modern writers . . . [and] [i]t is quite common in fantasy literature*” (Prasannan 8), Riordan formulates a narrative in which “*recognizably ‘classical’ heroic quests play out in the modern world*” (Paul 231). Percy is selected to go on his very first quest despite the lack of training he received. After barely spending any time at Camp Half Blood he receives a prophecy which leads him on a quest to find Zeus’ lightning bolt. Percy’s quest is visibly adjusted to the setting of the modern world compared to the usual fantastical faraway islands we see. He goes to places well known in America.

To survive Percy had to accept his reality as a demigod and prove his innocence as the son of one of the Big Three. The term ‘Big Three’ is used to refer to the gods Hades, Poseidon and Zeus, the three sons who defeated their father, the titan Kronos to rule over Olympus. In Riordan’s novel the gods make a pact to not

sire any more children. This is due to the fact that as some of the strongest gods their children are also born with immense power and are known to often wreak havoc. And yet these gods break the rules when Thalia, daughter of Zeus and Percy, son of Poseidon are born. Thalia meets a sad fate when she is killed by the monsters sent forth by Hades as a punishment to his brother for breaking the pact. And now Percy seems to be facing a similar problem. Someone has stolen Zeus' most cherished weapon and needs to be held accountable. In this case, Percy being the son of Poseidon falls victim. He faces death if he doesn't return the lightning bolt before summer solstice. Even his mother Sally has been believed to be dead and the only way he could meet her again was through a journey to Hades' realm, the Underworld.

Time and time again we've seen hierarchical power plays take stage in Greek mythology emphasising on the theme of power. If you have the power or the cunning, you could get away with numerous situations. In this case, lost your most prized possession? Blame a powerless twelve-year-old demigod. It doesn't matter if the accusation has any basis or not so long as someone gets the brunt of it.

The lost lightning bolt creates havoc in Olympus. Each of the gods turn on one another and play the blame game. There is little to no trust in the immortal world. We see how at the smallest inconvenience the gods are at each other's throats. The moment Zeus realised that someone stole his lightning bolt, without consideration or thought he directly accused Poseidon of doing so. This led to the gods having "*their worst quarrel in centuries*" (Riordan 142) It is during this chaos that Poseidon finally claims Percy as his own, but the true question that arises is why now. The answer is as simple as it gets, seen in the following dialog between Chiron and Percy:

“You’re saying I’m being used.”

“I’m saying it’s no accident Poseidon has claimed you now. It’s a very risky gamble, but he’s in a desperate situation. He needs you.”

My dad needs me. (Riordan 151)

Regardless of whether or not god’s love and admire their children, one thing is clear, they will always look out for them when they need someone to sort out their messes. To send heroes on quests that are too insignificant or simply troublesome for them. As we see Percy was conflicted between feeling *“resentful or grateful or happy or angry.”* (Riordan 151) Poseidon had ignored him all his life and now suddenly Percy had to face the consequences of being the child born by breaking an immortal oath.

Another recurring theme in many stories and epics from Greek mythology is a quest to make it back and forth from the Underworld, territory of the eldest Olympian god Hades. This projects as a nearly impossible task, one that is against all odds. Percy’s journey to the underworld is portrayed to be relatively easy. He descends through an elevator, nevertheless it doesn’t diminish the danger that he would have to face as nobody enters or leaves the underworld alive.

Furthermore, we can note many archetypes in the novel when it comes to the quest’s plot. This can be argued to be the main hero, an ally, an enemy as well as a mentor. Firstly, who we consider to be heroes are simply, *“characters we as readers mostly identify with, the characters who have both admirable and imperfect qualities that we can recognize in ourselves or strive for”* (Zandelin 4). They are *“motivated by universal needs that everyone can relate to”* and *“grow the most and make active choices to bring the story forward”* (Zandelin 4). Here Percy takes up

the role of a hero the readers can relate to, one who is dealing with an identity crisis, self-confidence, uneven family dynamics and yet seems to overtake every hurdle thrown at him.

The archetype of a wise mentor is taken up by Chiron, the centaur who has been training heroes for centuries. Many well-known Greek heroes such as Jason and Hercules had him as a mentor. These characters then went to achieve great glory, so it's no surprise Riordon chose him as Percy's mentor. His sole goal is "*to teach and prepare Percy for his upcoming quest*" (Zandelin 9). Chiron is the one who introduces Percy to the weapon he would use for the entire series and beyond, a celestial bronze sword called *Anaklusmos* translated to Riptide. It is also important to note the immense impact Chiron's words and actions had on Percy. The trust he put in him built up his confidence in small things and then large. We see how he "*pushes Percy hard in Latin class and beyond, he sets with high confidence for him*" (Hakim 18) this makes Chiron into someone Percy can trust, confide in and rely on. Even the friendships Percy forges are one that help him learn and grow.

In Annabeth and Grover, Percy finds comfort, security and above all support. They familiarise him with the daunting world of Greek mythology and the crucial way in which the current modern world they live in interacts with the mythological. They can also be considered to be Percy's closest allies whose "*main function is to serve the heroes and keep them safe. They can either be compliant, listen and defend the heroes' actions no matter what, or they can challenge the heroes to open themselves up, becoming more balanced in the process*" (Zandelin 6). Throughout the quest we see their faith and trust in each other only growing. It is with each other's support that they are able to get through difficult situations and

deadly monsters. To trust someone with your life is no laidback task but this is exactly what the three of them go on to do till the end of the novel.

The theme of betrayal is further emphasised when it is revealed that it was Luke who betrayed Percy when he tried to take his life and thus became his enemy. Percy had put his faith in Luke as a senior camper, someone he looked up too, someone who taught him how to fight. All this is ruined when Percy realises it was simply a ploy to get him out of the picture. Luke was being brainwashed by Kronos into thinking nobody cared about him, and he would fade away as an irrelevant demigod. He made use of the fact that Hermes, Luke's father, was never present in his life. Luke states that it was Kronos who, *"showed me that my talents are being wasted. You know what my quest was two years ago, Percy? My father, Hermes, wanted me to steal a golden apple from the Garden of the Hesperides and return it to Olympus. After all the training I'd done, that was the best he could think up."* (Riordan 363) the lack of validation Luke received also played a major role in his turning. One can say that it was due to these conflicting feelings he had that Kronos could easily manipulate him.

"He convinced me to steal something worthwhile, something no hero had ever had the courage to take. When we went on that winter-solstice field trip, while the other campers were asleep, I snuck into the throne room and took Zeus's master bolt right from his chair. Hades's helm of darkness, too. You wouldn't believe how easy it was" (Riordan 363)

For a few seconds of glory Luke gave up the comforts Camp Half-Blood provided. Riordan showcases the intensity of his emotions, how he had been left

feeling suffocated to a point he decided to leave. It also puts forth how negligence from gods is essentially the root of the problems they face.

Throughout the novel Riordan reincarnates the various monsters we read in ancient Greek mythology, a few being the Minotaur, the fury, Cerberus, Medusa and so on. These beings have their own role to play in the story that aids to Percy's character development all the while portraying his growth and potential. The Minotaur was first exterminated by the hero Theseus in a myth well known for the adventure he went through in the labyrinth. Now Riordan reintroduces the Minotaur in Percy's life.

Most monsters are believed to eventually reincarnate, may it be within a century or after many, but the point is they never die. They have the same powers and manifest the same fear by their presence. By making use of these well-known monsters Riordan creates an anticipation to how Percy would deal with these monsters compared to the heroes who came before. It hooks the audience while giving them more insights on these mythical creatures. Riordan puts forth new creative ways to deal with them and gives alternate endings to their roles in myths.

Riordan's most prominent style in his narratives is the use of humour and wit. When dealing with his dyslexia we see how Percy tries to always make the best out of his situation. One could rightly say that he makes use of humour as a defence mechanism. While trying to read the title of a book Annabeth was reading, he states, *"the letters looked Greek to me. I mean, literally Greek"* (Riordan 93) Percy might not be able to read regular English properly without jumbling all the words together but Greek instantly translates into his brain, this is later explained to be due to his godly blood. Nevertheless, the phrase *'it's Greek to me'* is often used as an idiom

describing something that is rather difficult to read, and Riordan makes a clever play with it by phrasing the sentence like that concerning a dyslexic demigod.

One of the best narrative technique Riordan uses in this novel is his foreshadowing. It's simple and yet complex. It changes the pace of the novel and makes it fascinating. We've seen this happen before Percy was determined as the son of Poseidon. Other than that, it's the dreams demigods have, which are often considered to be foretelling of the future. Dreams used as a foreshadowing tactic though are claimed to not always be reliable. This is due to the fact that many facts can be missed, or situations can be interpreted differently. Yet it gives us a probable glimpse into future happenings. This way we also can get background information that may not be confirmed explicitly. For example, the titan Kronos shows up in Percy's dream, but his form is unrecognisable. Even though Percy himself doesn't know it is Kronos, the readers do. It helps us understand the bigger picture. That this incident of stealing Zeus' lightning bolt is not simply a squabble or a prank amongst the gods but may be a bigger issue of extracting ancient revenge.

4.3. A blend of mythology and modernity

Incorporating mythology into a novel that is taking place in a modern world setting is not a small feat, it makes the work highly relatable even with the foreign elements introduced in it. It also plays a huge role in making the work interesting to a larger audience than just young adults. The entire novel doesn't simply revolve around ancient mythology, instead it incorporates into the modern world our protagonist lives in. *"Riordan sees the use of mythology as a way to entertain his readers, but he is also teaching them so much about these two ancient cultures. He is constantly*

reminding his readers too that America has them to thank for the inspiration for many of its physical structures” (Swanson 4).

This novel specifically draws from Greek mythology, Ken Dowden states that it “*is a shared fund of motifs and ideas ordered into a shared repertoire of stories. These stories link with, compare and contrast with, and are understood in the light of, other stories in the system*” (Dowden 6). To put it simply, Greek mythology is full of various other stories such as that of Prometheus, Perseus and so on. All of these are connected to each other as well as the whole system of Greek mythology.

Interestingly we see real individuals were well aware of being incorporated in these myths. These are both hilarious as well as a source to forge a common ground between myths and reality. While navigating the Underworld Percy questions:

“There’s a court for dead people?”

“Yeah. Three judges. They switch around who sits on the bench. King Minos, Thomas Jefferson, Shakespeare—people like that. (Riordan 288)

These individuals are very well known in the 21st century, almost revered. Shakespeare is one of the biggest names in the literary world and makes use of his persona to emphasise on the important role he might be playing even after death.

Even the way gods are represented in this contemporary Greek mythology novel is intriguing. Of course, the image portrayed by Riordan would not be the way authors did during ancient times. Nevertheless, the causal and suave image that is put forth while referring to many gods is something that stands out. The gods despite all their might and power have begun to adapt themselves according to

modern styles. To effectively weave Greek mythology into our current modern setting, we see Riordan alter various mythological elements so as to bring them closer to modern readers. This also helps to better fit and blend into modern narratives. Therefore, many Greek gods in the novel receive modified appearances. This does not only help them to blend in but to also move among humans freely, without hindrance. Poseidon at first glance seems like a chill surfer dude waiting for his next big wave instead of an immortal who rules over the majority of the earth.

The god Ares meets Perce and the other while they were in the middle of their quest and his appearance jars them at first, the god of war is described as follows:

“The guy on the bike would’ve made pro wrestlers run for Mama. He was dressed in a red muscle shirt and black jeans and a black leather duster, with a hunting knife strapped to his thigh. He wore red wraparound shades, and he had the cruelest, most brutal face I’d ever seen—handsome, I guess, but wicked—with an oily black crew cut and cheeks that were scarred from many, many fights. The weird thing was, I felt like I’d seen his face somewhere before.” (Riordan 227)

The god once described as bloodthirsty and fear inducing has now been presented as a mere motorcycle enthusiast. This helps bring the character closer to the modern reader as well as make him accustomed as a character. Although despite his appearance, we see he gives off the same bloodthirsty and frightening aura. He may look mortal but is in fact a supreme being not to be messed with as the demigods concluded when Annabeth stated, *“you don’t ignore the gods unless you*

want serious bad fortune.” (Riordan 231). Hence it is once again proven that power and hierarchy like anywhere else play a major role in Olympus. Percy was already burdened by the responsibility of finding Zeus’ lightning bolt and to add to this Ares demanded a favour from him. The mere fact that a god sought him out was not good. It always signals as an omen; you just have to wait to see if it’s a good or awful one.

Another god who may have been misunderstood as harmless at first glance is Dionysus, the god of wine and Camp Half Blood’s resident Director. With his careless attitude and bored expression, you’d never guess that he’d be one of the twelve Olympians.

One of the boldest ways Riordan intertwines mythology with modernity is seen in the settings he puts forth. Riordan blends in modern elements into his novel so as to help readers connect to it better. While describing the forest surrounding Camp Half-Blood Percy exclaims that the trees were “*so tall and thick, you could imagine nobody had been in there since the Native Americans.*” (Riordan 88). This may seem like a humorous description, but it also connects the ancient mythical world to the modern one, where humanity has lived for aeons and have their own history.

The architecture of the camp is built with reference to ancient Greek architecture, especially the cabins where the campers stay. Each cabin represents the twelve Olympian gods, and their demigod offspring are the ones the cabins are built for. Nevertheless, we also see cabins for the gods who do not sire children like Hera the god of marriages, vowed to be faithful to her husband Zeus or Artemis the maiden, and yet they have their own cabins as an “*honorary thing*” (Riordan 120).

Here we see how easy it would be to earn a god's wrath. It is in fact not very difficult to upset an Olympian and set their wrath upon you, which makes others from the low end of the hierarchy walk on threads among them.

Chiron once exclaimed, *"All you need to do is look at the architecture. People do not forget the gods. Every place they've ruled, for the last three thousand years, you can see them in paintings, in statues, on the most important buildings"* (Riordan 81) The times may have changed but the gods are still around among mortals. They simply move around along with the civilization, *"Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there."* (Riordan 81) and currently the power of the West was proclaimed to be in America, making it the heart of the flame. Riordan insinuates that the very own symbol of America is *"the eagle of Zeus"* (Riordan 81), *"the statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center"* (Riordan 81) even the architecture contains Greek façades.

Even while dealing with mythical beings, monsters and situations, the setting of the quest is very modern. Percy, Annabeth and Grover make use of a bus, train and an airplane to move around and make various stops. We see them encounter various mortals who are oblivious to the situations around them because of the mist. A mist is a powerful illusion that deludes the mortals into perceiving magic as something mundane. Percy is also seen taking refuge at fast food chains, and even the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Finally, even while having to focus on his quest Percy had to also keep out a look for the mortal police who wanted to detain and question him. Posters of him were put around the city so he couldn't navigate around without being on constant alert. Even in a mythological quest he has to look out for mortal problems further ingraining mythology in modernity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Olympian Heights to Mortal Plights: Apollo's Quest through "*The Hidden Oracle*"

5.1 The mortal god

Hereby showcasing

A tribute to Apollo

The light of Greek myths

Commencing the analysis of *The Hidden Oracle* with a haiku inspired by its author Rick Riordan. Since this novel is about the god of poetry, Riordan's creative genius comes forth when he begins each chapter with a Haiku. This mini poem with its 17 syllables encompasses the events that will then take place in each chapter. It serves as a little treat for all poetry lovers all the while accomplishing its task to set the tone for every chapter from the very start.

Like the series title *The Trials of Apollo* suggests, the novels focus on several trials the former god Apollo would now go through as a mortal. Despite having lived for "*four thousand six hundred and twelve years*" (Riordan 9) Apollo will now face situations and obstacles he never came across or had to worry about as a god. We see his obvious dilemma at the onset of the novel, how being turned mortal according to him is the worst of worst punishments he could face. The only thing Apollo can recall is being punished for something he did by his father Zeus. We're not given any other explanation at first and this leads us to questioning the validity

of this punishment. Right from the get-go this showcases power dynamics which as usual play a huge role in Greek mythology.

Despite being a god, Apollo is left “*feeling helpless, ashamed, completely vulnerable—publicly and brutally stripped of everything.*” (Riordan 9). At first, he thinks that this punishment is not permanent, and he will be turned immortal again, nevertheless he soon realises that it is not so. This fosters a truly terrifying fear into him since as a god he is aware of the hardships humans as well as demigods go through every day. His obvious dismay may at times seem to be humorous lest his life wasn’t actually in real threat. As a former god Apollo will now first-hand experience how mortal demigods feel all the time. How they are always hunted and, on the run, how their life is constantly in danger. And to top it all off, demigods often end up being pawns for the gods, doing their dirty work.

Riordan presents to us a phenomenon that isn’t only rarely witnessed but at the same time immensely creative. Apollo’s character as a mortal is intriguing to readers used to reading about his divine form and yet regardless of the situation he is in, Apollo’s arrogance and narcissism seeps through his words and actions from the get-go. We see it first when he claims, “*I tried to move. I wanted to be on my feet when Zeus came to apologize.*” (Riordan 10) he was still under the delusion that Zeus would turn him back into a god and take him to Olympus. It is elements like these that make Riordan’s novels inspired by Greek mythology so captivating. He takes traits such as humour, self-confidence, delusions often seen among humans which help us connect to his characters better.

In line with the above this novel portrays the protagonist, an Olympian god in situations regular mortals have to endure. He is given a human name, Lester

Papadopoulos, American currency to get him by the first few days and most importantly features of a teenage boy, acne and all. As someone who was always known for his charm and beauty, Apollo is horrified by his appearance as a mortal teenager. He is constantly picking out faults seen in the mortal world. He states, *“where is your pride? Your sense of style?”* (Riordan 27)

There is no former glory, whether it came in his *“regal bearing and divine beauty”* (Riordan 10) that Apollo gets to take with him as a mortal. He soon realises that he doesn’t even have his former powers which are one of the biggest adjustments he would have to make in his new form. Like any other mortal or demigod for this instance, Apollo would have to learn from scratch the ways and techniques to protect himself and the ones he cares for. Therefore, we are presented with a novel outlook towards the always revered and respected god of poetry. This novel highlights the journey of Apollo learning to comprehend just how life as a human works. Getting accustomed to small human problems like not having infinite energy, having clumsy legs or simply feeling hunger. It is immensely intriguing to see the reaction of a god to all of these events they never have to face.

Apollo ungraciously landed in a dumpster with all his powers stripped and no sooner did he realise his current situation that he ended up being a victim by other teenage thugs in the area. They took his money and left him black and blue, struggling to come to terms with what just happened to a once mighty god. He soon realises that these thugs were sent by someone who had it out for him. Powerless, he was an easy target for all who had a vendetta against him; therefore, when Apollo meets Meg, a demigod from that alley, he decides to take her help to get to Camp Half-Blood, a safe haven for all demigods. In the previous two times Apollo had been turned into a human his punishment would end once a demigod claimed his

service and he completed it. This time the demigod Meg, at only twelve jumps at this opportunity, claims Apollo, becoming his master.

The central theme of this novel is observed in Apollo's acceptance of mortality. Being a human, Apollo soon realises the depth of human emotions and how even a small kind word can change your day. While speaking to Sally Jackson he states "*I, the silver-tongued god of poetry, could not bring myself to describe my fall from grace to this kind woman.*" (Riordan 20) it portrays the kind of empathy that humans often have for each other. The understanding and love they provide to help get through difficult times.

Apollo as a god was used to being the centre of the universe, nothing moved on without him, sometimes literally since he is also the god of the Sun and Light. The character of Apollo is clearly a round character, one that goes through major development throughout the novel. At first his only concern was himself, to get to safety and find a way to turn back into a god. No other issue should in his mind be given more importance than him as we see when he states, "*I admit I felt a bit impatient. We had not yet addressed the most important issues- mine*" (Riordan 47) and yet when push comes to shove, we see him put others first, deep down he cared about Meg and the other demigods he met at Camp Half-Blood, including his children.

Soon we see another side of mortality from the perspective of a former immortal. Apollo admits that "*as you've seen, immortality can be taken away*" (Riordan 60) and that is the biggest reason gods fear and nitpick about mortality. Its fleetingness is only a small factor. Apollo makes some very poignant confessions here, portraying how sometimes gods are much more humane than we imagine them

to be. He states, *“I have to confess something else: all gods fear death, even when we are not encased in mortal forms.”* (Riordan 32) and that *“Gods know about fading. They know about being forgotten over the centuries. The idea of ceasing to exist altogether terrifies us.”* (Riordan 32). Most importantly he points out, *“The truth is we gods are a little in awe of you mortals. You spend your whole lives knowing you will die. No matter how many friends and relatives you have, your puny existence will quickly be forgotten. How do you cope with it? Why are you not running around constantly screaming and pulling your hair out? Your bravery, I must admit, is quite admirable.”* (Riordan 32)

Apollo is ill-equipped to deal with the abundant limitations of being human, both mentally and physically. He simply cannot relate to the trials and tribulation mortals or demigods constantly face. Therefore, he constantly compares his past glory to his current dilemma.

Riordan puts forth the poignance of empathy, how it is one of the most humane qualities making it a key theme of the novel. It serves to be Apollo's first mental trial to learn how to truly empathise. Apollo exclaims that relying on mortal intuition is *“like trying to pick up sewing needles while wearing oven mitts”* (Riordan 27). His usual power as a god which aided him in recognizing situations and people in an instant is no longer in play. Apollo is forced to put someone other than himself first and empathise which for someone as narcissistic as him is a tremendous task.

At Camp Half-Blood Apollo had to learn all his former skills from scratch. He no longer possessed innately excellent skills, he had to practice and hone them as a mortal. Apollo now realises the strain and effort that goes in to perfect a certain

skill to survive. Demigods are constantly putting their lives on the line for gods, practicing and perfecting techniques that would aid in their survival during and after quests. Their efforts are almost never recognised. Very often they are simply forgotten. Mortal or not, everyone likes to be validated once in a while so that they are encouraged to go on. It helps endure the hardships life throws at you.

We see Apollo struggle with the reality that his archery skills don't come as easy as they used to before. Despite being reassured that he is well above average as a mortal Apollo lets his annoyance get the best out of him. In the heat of the moment he swears, "*upon the River Styx—until I am a god again, I will not use a bow or a musical instrument!*" (Riordan 63)

The theme of redemption drives the plot of this novel. Apollo did not only have to redeem himself to gain his former glory, but he soon realised he had to make it up for being absent in the lives of his children. He would have to face the consequences of his action in this new form as a mortal where everything is a hundred times harder than when he was a god. Before we dive into the trial Apollo will have to face, we need to understand the myths Riordan centres this novel around, and this can be witnessed in small ancient myths surrounding Apollo. Nevertheless, this study will look at Apollo in the works of Ovid (43 BC-17 AD).

5.2. Apollo over the ages

In the work *Metamorphoses* Ovid presents the myth of Apollo and Daphne. In his myth Apollo defeated the monster Python who had been terrorising mankind for the longest time. This was a huge victory for the god as later seen in the foundation of the sacred Pythian Games which were named so after the serpent. Soon after the sanctuary of Delphi was built for the renowned oracle, Pythia. Ovid portrays how

eventually all this triumph leads to Apollo getting arrogant. He picks a fight with Eros, who is better known as cupid. As we see depicted in the art of Eros, he also makes use of a bow and arrow as his choice of weapon. Apollo didn't take this lightly as he believed himself to now be the sole being worthy of this weapon. This resulted in Cupid hitting Apollo with an arrow which did not harm him physically but instead emotionally ruined him.

Due to the arrow, Apollo falls madly in love with a nymph called Daphne who has also been hit by an arrow from Eros. The difference being that while Apollo falls madly in love with Daphne, the nymph herself is filled with disgust towards the god. Apollo did not take her rejection smoothly; we see his relentless pursuit for the maiden. Finally tired from running from the paranoid Apollo, Daphne begs to be saved and is turned into a laurel tree by her father Peneus.

What this myth puts forth is a side of Apollo that is not appealing in the least. It was a complete contrast to his usual characteristics of a calm and wise god. It shows how his arrogance ruined a life. How even the wisest of the god had to be careful lest they end up with an eternity of misfortune.

In Riordan's novel Apollo has to face this deadly enemy Python once again. We see him constantly fret about the fact that now without his powers defeating this monster from his past will be the most daunting task he'd ever undertaken. For even with his powers as a god it was a tough battle with Python.

For centuries after our battle, I had bad dreams about my old foe. Now I was almost grateful for my imperfect memory. I could not recollect all of the nightmarish details of my fight with Python, but I did know he had been no

pushover. I had needed all my godly strength, my divine powers, and the world's most deadly bow. (Riordan 48)

Through this expert we see the effect certain monsters could have on gods themselves. The impact they leave long after they're defeated. We can observe how even gods can embody certain humane emotions and deal with them in their own ways regardless of what the poems written in their honour may put forth.

Riordan uses this old myth to drive the quests Apollo will now undertake. Due to his negligence and pride, Apollo's most cherished Oracle of Delphi has now been taken over by Python who has been interfering with the prophecies that are delivered to gods and demigods alike. Not only this but he believes that Python is also literally changing the prophecies which leads to a blurred future for the Greeks. With this monster back at his old lair, the very spirit of the oracle had been completely blocked. And since nobody could now tell the future, the demigods had no idea what to expect. The mythical world was now left with no "*known methods of divining the future*" (Riordan 45) There could be no approvals for quests to lead them to solve this dilemma without first receiving a prophecy.

Of course, Apollo was aware of this as a god but like the others he simply assumed that this would be taken care of by dispatching demigods on dangerous quests to reclaim Delphi. Since this couldn't happen due to a lack of prophecy Apollo is stuck correcting his own wrongs which is honestly really satisfying to watch. Finally, the gods are seen being held accountable for their own action rather than shoving them onto innocent demigods.

There is a moment in this novel where Apollo thinks he has heard the voice of Daphne. The guilt he is carrying due to her fate and the part he played in it are

reverberated here. It shows us how people or in this case gods aren't as simple as black and white. We all have our additional layers and depth. Riordan puts forth the less talked about characteristics of gods, their sensitivity, kindness and so on. Readers can connect to this side of Apollo. We also get the aftermath of the various myths he is part of. The predominant achievement of modern retellings and interpretations have been the additional insights we've been given on our favourite characters and myths.

In Riordan's novel Apollo constantly repents over how things ended with his previous lovers, we see the impact it had on him and how he often would make a joke about it to lessen the pain. We see how he attempts to move on from the tragedy that struck him when Daphne transformed.

After Daphne, I swore I would never marry. Sometimes I claimed that was because I couldn't decide between the Nine Muses. A convenient story. The Nine Muses were my constant companions, all of them beautiful in their own way. But they never possessed my heart like Daphne did. Only one other person ever affected me so deeply—the perfect Hyacinthus—and he, too, was taken from me. (Riordan 101)

Readers get to know the inner dilemma, the loneliness of the seemingly invincible gods. Apollo exclaims, *"During my delirium, both of my great loves had visited me. Now, once again, I was devastatingly alone."* (Riordan 106)

Riordan uses these feelings of hurt and guilt to propel Apollo to save Meg when she is taken by the *myrmeke*. Apollo hears the voice of Daphne in the woods urging him to get to Meg faster, to make up for his past mistakes now that he has a chance and not let any other person he loves face the same fate again. Riordan

making use of this ancient myth to provide redemption to the god is commendable. It showcases how we cannot change the past, but we can always take control of our present to have a guiltless future.

5.3. The trials

The trials Apollo has to go through are filled with sacrifices, betrayals and adventure, the usual ingredients for a good mythological tale. No sooner did Apollo arrive at camp did he realise the sparse number of campers around. This is due to the fact that there had been disappearances at Camp, all related to the Oracles as we soon get to know. All means of connecting the Camp to the outside world had been mysteriously shut down therefore communication became sparse. Even modern means of communicating like telephones and emails were not reliable. Everyone was left in the dark and could not find a way to get around it without a prophecy.

It was assumed that these problems that the Camp was facing and the issue of Apollo losing his immortality were somehow connected. Riordan's foreshadowing through dreams makes one thing clear, Apollo will have to be the one going on this quest with or without any help. Although due to his bond of service to Meg, he can't leave her alone and would have to do as she pleases, which was going on this quest.

Apollo soon realises that there was another Oracle more ancient than Delphi. A grove of trees which would give out prophecies to those who would seek them. And Apollo had to find the gates of this forest if he wanted to save himself and his children. After getting to know his children as a mortal, enduring and understanding the struggles they face, Apollo becomes a better parent than what he was. He is devastated enough to know about their disappearance that he forgets the

dangers this quests would bring forth for his mortal self. Riordan puts forth how Apollo would've reacted towards his children in the past,

Over the millennia, I had barely managed to remember my children's names.

If I sent them an occasional birthday card or a magic flute, I felt really good about myself. Sometimes I wouldn't realize one of them had died until decades later. (Riordan 80)

The present Apollo shows an enormous contrast between his behaviour then and now. From being negligent to concerned he relearns what it is to be a good parent.

This led Apollo to also rethink his own familial relationships, he states, *"I couldn't recall the last time someone had cared about me enough"* (Riordan 52) He had been turned mortal for weeks now and nobody from Olympus had come to his aid or even inquired about his well-being. An encounter with Harely a son of Hephaestus leaves Apollo pondering the value of his presence in his Olympian family. Harely was tirelessly working to create a device that would help guide his brother Leo back home and this garners Apollo's admiration for his efforts. This makes him wonder *"if anyone would work so hard to bring me back home to Olympus."* And conclude saying *"I very much doubted it."* (Riordan 67). It's almost heartbreaking to think that despite his immortal years, Apollo has reached a point where his questioning his relationship with his family. Being with other demigods did more than good for Apollo. It helped heal his character so that he could reach his top potential. It also made the reader aware of just how lonely and sometimes futile immortality can be if you don't have the right people around you.

When Apollo met his children, we saw a softer and less self-absorbed side of him. The news of his mortality is received differently by everyone, and his children are no exception, they are more concerned about themselves than their father. Apollo states, *“It warmed my heart that my children had the right priorities: their skills, their images, their views on YouTube. Say what you will about gods being absentee parents; our children inherit many of our finest personality traits.”* (Riordan 41). In his own uncanny way, Apollo did care about his children. He did not completely forget them like many other gods do. The occurrence of having absentee parents in Greek mythology is not a new one, Riordan with his work is trying to establish that sometimes the gods are just a bit too preoccupied with themselves but are still aware of what’s important to them.

To an extent Apollo is also self-aware of his own doings. The fact that Rachel Dare, his own prophetess had lost her power pointed to Apollo’s carelessness and negligence of his own. He exclaims that even though he *“had invented mansplaining and was its foremost practitioner; I had no answers to give her.”* (Riordan 42). This portrays that he was willing to take at least a little responsibility for the domino effect his actions had.

Meg might’ve entered Apollo’s life as a little wrecking ball, but her companionship is what truly saved Apollo from completely losing it as a mortal. The number of times she saved him from harm is what played a huge role in the completion of their first quest together. Meg was determined to be the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. Despite the complicated history Apollo had with Demeter and her children he develops a close bond with Meg. He becomes almost a parental figure in her life, guarding and trusting her.

Finding the grave of Dodona is Apollo's first trial to redeem himself in the eyes of his father Zeus as well as to an extent his own children. At the heart of the grove Apollo sees his children along with a few other campers tied to pillars covered in inflammable substances. The antagonist, revealed to be Emperor Nero also called the Beast, set up this clever strategy to lure Apollo at the gates of the grove. Nero planned on executing these demigods how he used to execute Christians during the Roman wars. It's a horribly cruel death used to ignite fear in the hearts of people. Nero needed Meg and Apollo to open the gates of Dodona so that he could then take over the ancient Oracle.

This quest also turns out to be a journey of transformation for the Olympian, a theme quite prominent in Greek mythology. He is on a quest to seek his identity when stripped from all divine powers. Ever since turning mortal Apollo has needed all the help he could get, which is a complete one eighty from how things turned out before. Humans were used to relying on gods for guidance and peace. But now Apollo has to face the reality that even as a mortal the others are still relying on him. His intrinsic qualities are still what they seek and therefor according to him, *"now that I was mortal, being relied upon was a little terrifying."* (Riordan 45)

The first monster Apollo and Meg come across on their quest to save the grove of Dodona were the *myrmeke*, giant ants who range from as big as a small dog to straight up grizzly bears. They would spit acid strong enough to melt bronze armour, to end their enemies in an instant. One look at them and Apollo confesses, *"My legs locked up in complete fright. For the first time, I understood the trials that awaited me."* (Riordan 105)

This scarring image is enough to disorient anyone, it adds a certain urgency to the situation and makes you root for the safety of the characters. Riordan selects some of the most interesting and yet challenging monsters from Greek mythology, ones that have the highest chances of showcasing the development of his characters.

The biggest shift in Apollo's character is seen when he regains his divine strength for a moment and instead of going on a chase to capture Nero, he saves the demigods around him. He uses all his divine strength so that the demigods don't burn to death. Apollo could have fled and saved himself first instead he saves everyone around him despite his limitations. When the dryads sacrifice themselves to stop the entire woods from burning due to the Greek fire Nero had lit, Apollo laments not only for their life but the countless heroes he sent on missions without carrying about their safety or giving them a second thought.

"Then it occurred to me how many times I had asked for sacrifices, how many heroes I had sent to their deaths. Had they been any less noble and courageous than these dryads? Yet I had felt no remorse when I sent them off on deadly tasks. I had used them and discarded them, laid waste to their lives to build my own glory. I was no less of a monster than Nero." (Riordan 124)

This realisation becomes the onset of major character development we will see in the rest of the series. It makes Apollo seem human with all his shortcomings and faults laid bare. We can feel the intensity of his breakdown and how this would now further shape the narrative.

Even in the throes of battle Apollo's humour is what helps make situations light and easy going. The infusion of modern elements is just the bonus. When Meg

put herself between the *myrmeke* and Apollo he dramatically proclaims, “*I might have to nominate Meg McCaffrey for Best Sacrifice at the next Demi Awards*” (Riordan 98). Humour aside, this shows us just how far these two characters have come. Their relationship is no longer that of a master and a slave, how Apollo used to exaggerate. They both now fight for each other, comfort each other and most importantly risk their lives for each other. And this is exactly why Meg’s betrayal doesn’t stink as much as it would’ve because Apollo realises that someone is pulling the strings from the shadows.

Riordan’s characters vividly go through numerous emotions throughout the novel, it’s their key quality. These emotions shape them into the characters they are. Meg as a young demigod is the most susceptible to human emotions and falls victim at the hands of the novel’s antagonist. The Beast, who can be seen as the one of the novel’s antagonists has been slowly but steadily manipulating Meg into being a pawn for him. He isolated her from other demigods and gaslighted her into thinking she can never survive without him. The Beast is also seen to be in contact with Python, Apollo’s arch enemy. Both these antagonists aren’t any new characters but ones who were previously mentioned in ancient myths. The Beast was a Roman emperor when Rome was at its prime. This novel serves his character as a new rendition of how he would behave in the modern world, the what if of what he would do if he survived the wars.

The Beast killed Meg’s father and took her in on the pretext that she would now be safe. He showed her two sides of him, one as the Beast who could hurt her and the other as her stepdad that would protect her. He manipulated her into believing that she is the one bringing the Beast side of him out when she doesn’t

obey his commands. Megs' life with this monster can be summarised by her reaction to hearing his voice in a conversation with Python,

"Her look of absolute terror when she recognized the Beast's voice. Not all monsters were three-ton reptiles with poisonous breath. Many wore human faces." (Riordan 81)

Nero had Meg in the palm of his hands. He was a master at manipulating people and situations to the best of his advantage. Meg was a daughter of the goddess Demeter and yet he forced her to stand by him when he intended to destroy nature, that is the grove of Dodona. He made nature spirits like the geyser gods in the woods to try and steam the gates to the grove to open. He managed to instil such a deep-rooted fear into Meg that she couldn't even move to help Apollo for a while. Nero needed the power of Apollo as well as Meg to open the gates and take control of the oracle and he would stop at nothing. He convinced the 12-year-old that his bad side, which he called the Beast, was just a consequence of her own disobedience, and that so long as she listened to him nobody would be harmed. Finally, we get to the grand reveal of Nero's plan which becomes the crux of this novel as well as the novels that follow in this series. It's what drives Apollo to reclaim his Oracles,

"The three of us have come to an agreement. We have divided up the new empire...by which I mean North America. Once we have the Oracles, we'll expand and do what Romans have always done best—conquer the world."
(Riordan 115)

We need to remember that this is the same Roman emperor who watched over thousands of people die during the Great Fire of Rome. Even after all the

destruction, he managed to portray himself as a saviour. He built a statue of himself which then was known as the Colossus of Nero, it was moved to the then well-known amphitheatre which we now call the Colosseum. The fact that they live in human memory is what kept them alive. Riordan makes use of this part of history to help the readers understand the type of character Nero was and how he affected real history would then aid in our understanding of the impact he would have in the rest of the series.

5.4. Riordan's techniques

In the middle of the woods, mid battle Apollo begins to belt the lyrics of "Sweet Caroline" a 1970s hit in the world we live in today. If this isn't peek humour, comprehending what would classify as it is tough. Apollo's entire personality, narcissism aside, is a breath of fresh air. Riordan draws his readers with admirable qualities and humour. All the while he points out the reality of the limits Apollo's mortal form has, "*Defeating one ant had taken all my energy. (I don't think I have ever written a sadder sentence than that.)*" (Riordan 98). It gives this Greek god a humane side that connects him to regular beings. He also lays bare the regrets Apollo harbours due to the fate of his lovers. "*Whenever I angered the other gods, those closest to me were struck down. I'd lost Daphne because of one careless comment to Eros. I'd lost the beautiful Hyacinthus because of a quarrel with Zephyros.*" (Riordan 99) Riordan also blatantly puts forth the power dynamics that are always at play in Greek mythology.

Riordan has often made use of foreshadowing to enhance the mystery of his novels and *The Hidden Oracle* is no exception. Since the protagonist of this novel is a god of prophecy you would obviously expect a few deep and interesting

prophecies driving the novel. The first nearly prophetic encounter Apollo has is in the woods near Camp Half-Blood where he hears voices in his head warning him of danger and that he has to make haste. This jumpstarts the tension in the novel and the eventual complications that would need to be addressed by the god.

In Apollo's dream a woman he can barely recognize advises him to "*follow the voices.*" And to "*find the gates*" (Riordan 39). This foreshadows the quest Apollo will have to undertake in this novel. By now the readers are aware of the danger that the Oracle is under, the source of a secure future. Riordan highlights the important events in the novel by using prophecies and dreams as foreshadowing techniques.

Riordan's inclusion of smaller myths is what spices up this novel. Apollo's encounter with the *nosoi*, plague spirits let out from Pandora's box is another myth highlighted in the novel even if it's just for a small time. Riordan pushes an interaction between these old plague spirits that brought havoc around the world with the new god who brings about plague. It helps us gain an insight on how the two would interact. In this novel the *nosoi* attack Apollo and it's an interesting turn of events that Apollo, former god in charge of bringing about plagues and diseases has to now fight the spirits of it as a mortal. It's almost as retribution for all the mortals who had to go through sickness due to Apollo's doing.

By making use of intertextuality, Riordan manages to connect his previous works and myths to this novel. We see characters who have been previously part of Riordan's novel do short cameos and bring about unparalleled joy to older readers. Percy helping Apollo reach Camp Half-Blood can be seen as a full circle moment since he too was once brought in camp after facing tremendous difficulties. The

readers also can now rest assured that Apollo is in good hands and will get to camp safe.

The antagonists of these series are the Triumvirate. The three Roman generals who have survived long enough to build empires in the modern world. They have waited and bided their time for centuries. In this novel Riordan surprises the readers by clarifying that these beings have not only cause trouble for Apollo now but have been a part of the conflict even in his previous novels. This additional insights are what makes readers join the dots and enhance their reading experience.

5.5. Modern elements

When Apollo is getting absolutely humiliated, he claims that instead of helping him, his father Zeus would be “*probably too busy recording my humiliation to share on Snapchat.*” (Riordan 15). Snapchat is a modern-day platform which aids in sharing moments and memories, this application is tremendously popular among young adults therefore we can see how the mention of this would portray life in the modern era where everything is so digital and instant. Very often we also see Apollo mention that he’s heard a particular song on Spotify, another 21st century application curating a bunch of music artists. He talks about various popular bands who he claims have been inspired by him. This element of infusing a form of art to the Greek god of it makes the novel highly stimulating.

Through blending mythological characters with modern elements readers can connect to the characters better. It provides a sort of normalcy to the extravagant situations these characters have to go through. Apollo also refers to Google self-driving cars, a relatively new phenomenon. Shows us how even Greek gods are evolving and adapting. To make transportation easy. We can interestingly note how

Apollo calls Daedalus' labyrinth widely known in Greek mythology as a self-aware maze that is like A.I, and something that would destroy the world. He hints on how anything that is self-aware can eventually gain a malevolent consciousness. The impact A.I can have on our present and future in a common debate among this generation. We've been stuck between the merits and the demerits A.I possesses. And yet the majority of humans rely on A.I for several tasks. Hence the question of whether or not A.I would take over the modern world is still unanswered. Although in this case, Apollo was right about the labyrinth turning on him as it sniffed out his worst fears and took him right to the cave at Delphi which was overtaken by Python.

Even the language used by these ancient gods are influenced by the modern world, which connects young readers to the text. The titan Rhea makes a brief appearance in this novel and she's the best example when it comes to using GenZ language. We can accurately note this in the following few excerpts of her conversation with Apollo when he is injured and seeking information about the trials he has to face, "*Glad you're awake. I was worried, man.*" (Riordan 103), "*It's bumming me out in a big way.*" (Riordan 104) and "*They have no chill whatsoever.*" (Riordan 104)

When it comes to the antagonists of this novel, Riordan attributes the survival of these Roman emperors due to them being present in the memory of mortals. Just like with gods, so long as humans remember and revere gods they remain in power. The prayers and sacrifices mortals made to Greek gods led to enhancing their powers. And yet we see how even with all the might and power gods can be blind to the happenings around them.

The triumvirate of these ancient Roman emperors hid in the shadows until they were powerful enough. Nero reveals, “*Thank goodness for the Renaissance when our Classical greatness was remembered. And then came the Internet. Oh, gods, I love the Internet! It is impossible for me to fade completely now. I am immortal on Wikipedia!*” (Riordan 115). The modern movement of the renaissance is used here to regenerate these forgotten emperors. We see another fictional repercussion of the movement that greatly inspired art and literature. Riordan also highlights the power of the Internet here, how data can be stored, tempered with and most poignantly cemented in history.

We’ve seen Riordan be inclusive when it comes to his characters in a few of his previous novels. In *The Hidden Oracle* Apollo proudly wears his sexuality as a badge of honour. We see him openly discuss his past love life, with both men as well as women. Apollo’s certainty of being an ally is seen when he strongly asserts that “*we gods are not hung up about such things*” (Riordan 44). The normalcy to be able to love whoever you want and not be restricted by the innumerable norms’ society puts forth is expressed. Because why would one worry about society when even the gods are with you.

Many ancient Greek myths especially as seen in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* highlight Apollo’s love life and the consequences they brought about. In this novel we get a close look on the reactions to his previous lovers by the modern version of Apollo put forth by Riordan. He states how the “*two greatest loves were, of course, Daphne and Hyacinthus*” (Riordan 44) and how embarrassed he is by how those stories turned out. In later novels in this series Riordan goes into more detail of how the situations with his lovers affected Apollo and we see how he was still facing the

repercussions of it. Nevertheless, the mere recognition these myths add to understanding how they impacted Riordan's Apollo.

Through the characters of Will Solace and his relationship with Nico di Angelo, Riordan proves how their love is just as important and authentic as any other heterosexual romance in the series. These characters are not simply reduced to mere tokens to portray diversity, instead these are strong characters with strength, flaws and personalities of their own. We see how Nico very often grapples with self-acceptance and his identity throughout the series. This proves to be in line with many experiences many young LGBTQ adults go through. This representation can be very dear to those who can find a little bit of themselves in these characters. Readers who relate are able to find solace in terms of their sexuality in this world which more often than not marginalises them.

Nevertheless, Riordan using inclusive characters goes beyond simple representation, rather it is a very deliberate act of allyship and advocacy. It helps readers to not only normalise love as it is but also promote feelings of empathy, understanding as well as acceptance. When he depicts diverse characters like Apollo, Nico and so on in positions of agency and strength, Riordan manages to dismantle the predominant stereotypes. This also leads to him challenging societal norms and fostering an inclusive literary landscape.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: Navigating Modern Mythology

Despite cultural and time barriers, Greek mythology has succeeded in cementing itself in literature. With its unending adventure, mystical circumstances, unapologetic love and cutthroat battles it captivated readers throughout centuries. In addition to its strong narratives Greek myths are filled with messages for anyone willing enough to read between the lines. They contain universal themes and issues that are relevant even today. Greek mythology highlighted the plight of people in ancient times, it brought forth difficult circumstances and served as a guiding force. It has paved the way towards understanding various questions about human existence. What is the role or the purpose of individuals in this ever-evolving world? Does life have meaning, or do we give it meaning through our words and actions?

The novels analysed in this study showcase how Greek myths have constantly contributed as rich sources of inspiration for contemporary literature. It has shaped characters, themes as well as narratives of modern literature making it intensely popular.

The most poignant reason Greek mythology continues to dominate literature is due to the realism it presents despite its mythical nature. The stories it encompasses are not entirely fictional or monotonous, rather it presents a very vivid description of well-known phenomena. This is seen in the novel *Circe* by Madeline Miller, in spite of being a fictional character the struggles Circe goes through resonates with women around the world. We see how powerful women are treated miles differently compared to powerful men. The repercussions of being a woman in a society that constantly binds you with preconceived notions and norms.

Through the character of Circe, we've been presented a journey filled with self-discovery and independence, two of the major themes in the novel. Miller retells the ancient myths surrounding Circe through a modern narrative, highlighting issues that women in ancient Greek society faced. Amongst all the powerful immortals being, Circe is considered to be weak not only because of the late manifestation of her powers but moreover because she is a woman. She is constantly isolated to a point that she craves comfort and company, losing herself along the way. This paired up with twice the marginalisation than other characters in the novel pushes her to extremes that force her to rebuild her life because, *"When there is rot in the walls, there is only one remedy. Tear down and build again."* (Miller 162)

It is only after Circe's exile that she finds the space to explore her identity as a first-generation witch. This time spent alone is different compared to her loneliness in her father's palace simply because there are no negative forces around her. The family that brought her down are at bay and this opens up numerous avenues to the newly freed Circe. We see her build up a life for herself through repeated trials and errors, educate herself on the ways of the world and finally consider what it is that she wishes to accomplish in her immortal life.

Through the character of Circe, Miller presents the harsh reality of being an immortal. How having infinite years in your destiny is not as grand as it appears. Miller portrays the negative side of the often-glorified immortality we see in ancient narratives. Circe may have lived for aeons, but it was aeons filled with sadness and hurt. She sees a repeated cycle of suffering and pain that crushes her very being. This leads her to hate her immortal life, the mere thought of spending eternity in exile despite the luxuries at her hand was not a blessing but a punishment.

In comparison, life as a mortal seemed to be more fulfilling to Circe. She was fascinated by the way humans worked hard every day to achieve small goals and survive. Despite their short and apparently insignificant lives, mortal did not have to go through never-ending cycles of pain Circe experienced. As a mortal Circe would be free of everything that binds her as an immortal, she would no longer be an exile and most importantly would never see her mortal lovers die.

The quest for love is a central theme throughout the novel. Circe constantly seeks love from wherever she would get it, may it be family, suitors and even the travellers that visited her island. Circe had so much love to give and very few people who would accept and return it. From ancient times audiences have been captivated by good stories revolving around love. This novel is no exception, the readers are constantly rooting for Circe to find people who would love her unconditionally. And most importantly for her to develop enough to realise that to be loved you first need to love yourself. Therefore, it is a very satisfying moment when Circe finally goes from begging for scraps of affection to being a woman who loves herself, acknowledges her needs and is unapologetic about it.

Greek mythology no longer focuses solely on the characters portrayed to be physically powerful and mighty, rather it narrows the spotlight on characters who left a memorable impact on readers. Characters who were undeniably interesting and had the potential to grow under different circumstances. One of the objectives of this research was to determine the developments in 21st century novels due to Greek mythology, and while there can be many responses to this concern the prime development is seen in the representation of previously sidelined characters. The novel *Circe* aided in reaching this conclusion by highlighting the life of a previously

disregarded character in acute detail. Miller presents a character whose struggles and circumstances are still relevant in modern times.

The process of transformation has been repeatedly seen in Greek myths, whether these transformations are literal or not. The same stands for novels of the 21st century who emphasise on the theme of transformation. In this study we see two novels highlight the essence of transformation, *Circe* as well as *The Hidden Oracle*. They bring to the fore how beneficial and noteworthy the process of transformation is. Circe's divine power is that of transforming objects as well as beings into their truest form, a daunting power that makes her a formidable foe to everyone around her.

Riordan's Apollo in *The Hidden Oracle* has been literally transformed into a mortal and sent to live among humans. This stripping of power from being an all-mighty immortal god to a puny human is Zeus' form of punishing Apollo for his negligence. The audience is absolutely hooked to see how this god used to having everything at the palm of his hands, would navigate the mortal world in all its dangers with little to no divine powers.

The Hidden Oracle presents a new interpretation of the ancient god of poetry. This representation is quite different from what we usually see in ancient texts, for example, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* which puts forth a side of Apollo that's not appealing in the least. It portrays him as an illogical and arrogant god who ruined the life of the nymph Daphne. The 21st century Apollo is seen making haikus about his woes and troubles. His humour is top notch filled with puns and allusions to modern individuals in the creative fields. This makes the novel intensely creative and engaging. It proves my initial hypothesis that the inclusion of modern elements

in novels inspired by Greek mythology leads to them being popular. Readers are also drawn to the newer qualities and characteristics present in Riordan's Apollo. We see numerous ancient myths around the god being addressed, which only provides readers with additional insights into the myths and Apollo's reactions to them.

The theme of redemption begins when Apollo undertakes the quests involving various trials to prove himself worthy of being a god. As a mortal he is forced to confront issues he neglected as a god, for instance his demigod offspring. This notion of being an absentee parent is not uncommon in Greek mythology. Riordan addresses the implications of this often in his works. Gods are often seen getting away with their misdoings by shoving the responsibility of them on someone else. There would always be another mortal or demigod cleaning up the god's mess. But now for the first-time readers are presented with gods not simply acknowledging their shortcomings but actively working on being a better version of themselves.

Riordan makes it a point to represent the LGBTQ+ community in his inclusion of the myth of Apollo and Hyacinthus, a Greek hero who became his lover. It portrays their love to be as real as any other of Apollo's relationships. Apollo's own certainty of being an ally is seen when he strongly asserts that "*we gods are not hung up about such things*" (Riordan 44). The normalcy to be able to love whoever you want and not be restricted by the innumerable norms' society puts forth is expressed. Because why would one worry about society when even the gods are with you.

This notion of accepting and respecting one's sexual identity is very predominant in modern society. Individuals are constantly fighting for the rights to express their sexuality freely and without any judgement. Riordan using inclusive characters goes beyond simple representation, rather it is a very deliberate act of allyship and advocacy. It helps readers to not only normalise love as it is but also promote feelings of empathy, understanding as well as acceptance.

A perfect blend of modern elements and lifestyle along with ancient Greek mythology is seen in the novel *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan. It showcases the heart of Greek mythology, that is quests and adventures all in a modern setting. The protagonist Percy lives in modern day America and has been living the majority of his life blissfully unaware of his Greek heritage until he is thrust into a world of mystery and magic. Now along with the readers Percy gets acquainted with the world of Greek mythology, its monsters, heroes as well as gods. The quest undertaken by demigods in this novel presents Greek mythological places in the midst of the modern world, for example the entrance to Olympus is at the 600th floor of the Empire State Building. Details like these connect readers to the texts as it builds a ground of familiarity.

Riordan often alludes to non-fictional events, places and people in his texts, through this we can trace the influence of Greek mythology in present times which is one of the objectives of this research. Riordan states that with passing time the gods have only adapted and gotten stronger. When the western civilization moved to America the gods moved with them because, “*“Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there.”* (Riordan 81)” and currently the power of the West was proclaimed to be in America, making it the heart of the flame. Riordan insinuates that the very own symbol of America is “*the eagle of Zeus*” (Riordan

81), “*the statue of Prometheus in Rockefeller Center*” (Riordan 81) even the architecture contains Greek façades. This puts forth the current existing proof of the influence of Greek mythology.

By creating a character who has ADHD and is diagnosed with dyslexia too, Riordan breaks the stereotypes around children with the similar conditions. The predominant notion that being differently abled hinders you from doing anything worthwhile in your life is shattered here. Riordan showcases just how courageous, intelligent and quick-witted Percy can be despite his dyslexia. He doesn’t let his differences bring him down; instead, he turns the tables by making use of them in situations of life and death where his hyperactivity helps him to stay focused in the battles of the mythological world.

The most predominant theme in this novel is friendship and found family. Percy not only succeeded in returning Zeus’ lightning bolt, but he managed to secure lifelong friends and a camp he could call family. He finally found a place for himself in this mythological world where nobody would consider him to be a troubled child. This theme of seeking long lasting friendships is a universal yearning. We all spend a very limited time in this world and therefore want to spend it with people who are dear to us. This novel explores the intricacies of finding a family and keeping up friendships. It targets the ups and downs in relationships all the while highlighting the poignance of them.

This research brought to light the ongoing influences of Greek mythology on modern narratives. It focused on the dominant themes that are used and reused in works highlighting this unique culture. We’ve seen how certain themes and characters have stood the test of time. Many themes focus on issues that are still

relevant today such as self-discovery and the pursuit of finding one's identity in this ever-changing world. Through the novel examined in this study, we can note characters who have resonated with readers over the centuries. Ones who were so dominating with their presence and characteristics in ancient texts that they've preserved their legacy throughout time periods.

In line with the above Greek mythology presents not just poignant issues that need to be addressed but also becomes a source of entertainment. Its creativity when it comes to ancient monsters, quests and adventure are unprecedented. It provides an escape to a world unlike our own but rather filled with fantastical elements. It hooks readers from page one with both the relevant messages it presents and also the promise of a dopamine filled adventure.

This research has presented an analysis of a comparison between a number of ancient Greek characters. The most dominating one being the god Apollo, one of the major Olympian gods. Greek gods are now shaped into qualities that are appreciated by modern audiences. We see Apollo grovelling to his past lovers for forgiveness and actively working on being a better individual. His words are not empty in the novel instead he proves the authenticity of his resolve through his actions. This shift in his character is arguably due to the evolving perception of individuals over the ages. Finally, he is presented as a modern version of a confident, slightly delusional and highly creative god. His character retains many of his ancient characteristics all the while seeming to have adapted to be a more relatable individual.

One of the biggest limitations of this research was restricting the study to only three novels from the ocean of Greek mythological novels present in the 21st

century. The objectives met therefore are based on the texts above. They portrayed just how much of an influence Greek mythology has had on modern narratives, may it be a retelling or a completely new fictional tale. Finding common themes and motifs in these texts aided in understanding the characteristics that've made Greek mythology popular over the ages, for example all the novels put forth prophecies for their characters fate. This technique leads to readers constantly being on edge and speculating how the plot would advance. It also presented another literary genre within novels that is poetry. This showcased the talent of the modern writer of weaving different genres together to make it a collective whole. This portrayed the developments in novels of the 21st century in comparison to ancient myths that were often written within a singular genre.

The hypotheses of this research stated that Greek mythology is popular in the contemporary era due to the inclusion of modern elements and lifestyles in 21st century novels and the fascination of readers towards ancient texts lead them to pick up retellings which provide additional insights into a particular Greek myth or character. This statement stands true and is backed by the analysis presented in each of the novels. We may have selected readers who would love to read about ancient myths and characters by the inclusion of modern elements in these to draw a wider audience. It's a creative process of blending the ancient with the modern which produces tremendous results. It proves to us why it is important to retain things from our past but also tweak it according to our times. Other than that, the general curiosity among individuals who have been fascinated by Greek mythology lead them to yearning to read more about it, creating a cycle of demand for the texts. Many new works also present justice to characters who were previously sidelined

or misunderstood, it gives us new perspectives that aid in understanding characters and certain situations better.

This research showcases why certain texts from the past are poignant for the development of new genres and narratives. We can note how narratives have evolved to bring out the best of each era. Literature today is the means through which we not only entertain but educate. Authors today have reinterpreted and reimagined classical myths to show and reflect the numerous concerns and complexities of contemporary society. Finally, the most poignant reason Greek mythology has persevered throughout the ages is due to its innate appeal, its ability to put forth the very fundamental aspects of being human.

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