RE-DISCOVERING MYTHOLOGY: ADAPTATION AND APPROPRIATION IN THE *PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS* SAGA

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ABSTRACT

Buchbinder (2011:128) writes that adaptations are often regarded as barely a step away from plagiarism; however, he notes that 'much of the literary output of classical Greek culture, for instance, consisted of reworkings of already familiar narratives'. His point is not only true of the classical Greek output, but of a contemporary adolescent fantasy saga, Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2006–2011), which retells many of the classical Greek mythological narratives in a contemporary setting. Given that many adolescent audiences may be unfamiliar with the root narratives, the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* saga serves the function of re-introducing an audience to classical mythology, thereby helping them to rediscover their value. This article argues that by skilfully adapting and appropriating the monomythic hero-journeys of Greek mythology, and by retelling them within a contemporary narrative, Riordan is creating a space where readers, possibly unfamiliar with the root classical narratives, can re-discover classical mythology.

1   INTRODUCTION

> If the novel puts life under the microscope, mythology blows it up to billboard size. (Rick Riordan, Introduction to *Demigods and Monsters*, 2008)

The danger always exists, when entering into an exploration of an author's adaptation and appropriation of an earlier work, of becoming embroiled and entangled in discussions of

originary value, of precedence by publishing date, of ownership and rights. While these arguments are not always without cause or merit, what they often fail to acknowledge is the value of the adaptation itself; an adaptation does not have to be secondary in value, nor indeed, second in terms of chronology as far as reception is concerned. Hutcheon (2006:xiii) reminds us that 'one lesson is that to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative'. In the influential *Adaptation and Appropriation*, part of *The New Critical Idiom Series*, Sanders (2006:158) concurs, writing that '[a]fter need not ... mean belated in a purely negative sense. Coming "after" can mean finding new angles and new routes into something, new perspectives on the familiar, and these new angles, routes, and perspectives in turn identify entirely novel possibilities'. It is these 'new angles' and 'new perspectives' which are central to this study of re-discovering and re-imagining classical mythology through Riordan's adaptation and appropriation of Greek mythology in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* saga.

Adaptations and appropriations are becoming increasingly common, and scholars are beginning to acknowledge that adaptations and appropriations have value *as adaptations*, on their own, and do not necessarily stand secondary to the root narratives from which they have been formed. Sanders (2006:20) notes that 'adaptation studies are, then, not about making polarized value judgements, but about analysing process, ideology, methodology'. Of particular relevance to the discussion of the adaptation and appropriation of the Greek mythological roots, alluded to and referenced in the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* saga, therefore, is the fact that, as Buchbinder (2011:128) indicates, 'adaptation of an originary text is quite often treated as only a step away from plagiarism. However, much of the literary output of classical Greek culture, for instance, consisted of reworkings of already familiar narratives'. Indeed, the stream of our understanding becomes muddied even further when we consider that the root narratives, themselves often re-workings of older orally transmitted stories, are not necessarily the first to be read by contemporary audiences, particularly where such audiences may be adolescents; a fact which challenges notions of priority. Sanders (2006:158) writes: 'So influential, indeed, have some appropriations become that in many instances they now define our *first* experiences or encounters with their precursor work of art' [author's emphasis].[1] The concept of *first*, of primacy, of a canon by gerontocracy is being steadily eroded, subverted and shown to be increasingly irrelevant in the light of new readers, particularly adolescent readers, discovering these narratives for the first time via the texts that Gérard Genette ([1997] 1982:ix) terms 'hypertexts' and not the predecessor 'hypotexts'[2] – if such texts could even be said to exist in the case of Greek mythology. The very definitions of 'original text' and 'adaptation' often become politically troublesome and reveal values which may not reflect either the author's intention in creation, nor the audience's reception or understanding. According to Stephens and McCallum (1998:4), this is because 'retellings do not, and cannot, also reproduce the discoursal mode of the source, they cannot *replicate* its significances, and always impose their own cultural

presuppositions in the process of the retelling'. In the course of these adaptations or retellings, then, some aspect of the author's cultural and political presuppositions may be transferred to subsequent encounters with the pre-text. While Sanders (2006:158) rightly reflects that '[n]o appropriation can be achieved without impacting upon and altering in some way the text which inspired the adaptation', it is the purpose of this study to show that such alteration need not be negative, but, in fact, may serve not only to benefit the hypertext, *as adaptation*, but serve also the interests of the hypotext by re-introducing a contemporary adolescent generation to the very root narratives which served as foundation for the adaptation, and which they otherwise might never have encountered. This rediscovering constitutes the continuation of the shaping power and influence of the original texts throughout time.

2 THE *PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS* SAGA

The *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* saga comprises five novels, namely: *The Lightning Thief* (2006); *The Sea of Monsters* (2008); *The Titan's Curse* (2008); *The Battle of the Labyrinth* (2009); and *The Last Olympian* (2011). In each of these constituent novels, the principal character Percy (short for Perseus) Jackson, a demi-god son of Poseidon, is sent on a quest with his friends, episodically fulfilling a prophecy which culminates in the re-emergence of Kronos, Titan father of Zeus, Hades and Poseidon, from the infernal pits of Tartarus, and a war fought for the fate of the earth and the future of humankind. The Titanomachy serves as backdrop for the series as a whole, instead of being dealt with exclusively in any individual novel. Indeed, while the events and characters of Riordan's series remain largely consistent with those of Hesiod's *Theogony* or Graves's *The Greek Myths* ([1955] 1993) in a general sense throughout the saga as a whole, many important adaptations are also made in each novel. In this manner, while the battle for Mount Olympus between the gods and the Titans is a familiar mythological setting, a great deal of distinction exists between Riordan's saga and the myths which it adapts, a small sample of which are provided here. Percy's character references the mythological hero, Perseus. Indeed, variously in the novels, Percy experiences Riordan's re-imagined visions of contemporary analogues of the hero journeys and adventurous experiences of Odysseus, Achilles, Theseus, Bellerophon, Jason and Hercules, by no means an exhaustive list. Percy is trained by Chiron, the centaur son of Kronos, and receives his quests as equivocal prophecies from the oracle of Delphi. Many of these characters experience adventures which are almost idiomatic in language usage, testimony to their far-reaching influence and popularity through the ages. While a thorough analysis of each of these episodes is impossible in this space, the adventures Percy dares in the first novel, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2006), will serve as an example for how Riordan re-imagines and re-creates these adventures for a contemporary adolescent audience.

In his adaptation and appropriation of the Greek mythological root narratives, Riordan neither emulates nor creates an analogue of any one particular adventure. While Percy and his friends attempt to unravel the enigmatic prophecies of the Oracle, or face off against the denizens of Tartarus, they do so in a series of micro-narratives, scenes of iconic episodes, often indexical of the originary hero tales, each of which will be instantly recognisable to readers familiar with Greek mythology. Indeed, as indicated, Percy, in the course of even a single novel, re-experiences the adventures of a number of heroes who preceded him, never completing even his namesake's particular hero journey in its entirety, but appropriating rather certain aspects from each and re-imagining them in a contemporary setting, formulating an entirely new hodgepodge adventure, a patchwork of the most iconic scenes and occurrences of the ancient Greeks. Not only is the setting made contemporary, however. Many of the values, outcomes and associated morality of the Greek myths are revisited and given a new perspective, reflecting more closely perhaps the morals, values and attitudes of the contemporary culture which allowed the creation of such a series for young adult readers of fiction, as argued by Stephens and McCallum (1998:4) above. Before an analysis of how this is achieved can be undertaken, an understanding of *why* such an adaptation was undertaken is necessary.

Buchbinder (2011:129) points out that 'there may be many reasons why an adaptation is undertaken', citing a comprehensive list by Hutcheon (2006:79–111). Riordan had personal reasons for this undertaking. Riordan, already a writer and middle school teacher in the United States (US), relates in the introduction to *Demigods and Monsters* (2008:vii) how he learned that his son had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. His son, othered in the classroom, gave him the idea of re-imagining the mythological narratives from the perspective of adolescents[3] who, by their nature are in a state of 'in-between', neither fitting into the world of childhood nor adulthood. Only the class on mythology was accessible to Riordan's son in school – nothing else held his attention. An adapted bedtime story was to become something far greater. It is perhaps an indication of the power of myth itself that it could reach an adolescent where nothing else could.

Percy Jackson, and his demi-god compatriots, personify this state of flux that Riordan's son felt, and wrestle constantly with the difficulties of being caught in between the deified other-world of their godly parents, and a contemporary society which classifies their gifts and birth rights as learning disabilities and marginalises them because they are different. The motive behind this particular temporal and cultural shift, or updating, is clear: this movement brings the events of the narrative closer to the audience's frame of reference in temporal, geographical and cultural terms. Buchbinder (2011:130) states that 'adaptation *transposes* the originary text into a new mode and/or context ... and that transposition necessarily creates shifts of meaning and understanding for the reader'. This shift in meaning and understanding made classical literature accessible to a young reader. Where before, mythology was explained as '[i]nvesting such powers with spirits that have a recognisably human nature … [allowing] people to make greater sense of

a random and threatening universe' (Cotterell & Storm, 1999:7) these same events, re-told, and re-imagined in a new social and geographical and even political context, allow a new meaning to be created for adolescents.[4] For Riordan's son, as is indeed the case for many other adolescents, such created meaning meant finding a sense of a belonging between two worlds, neither of which they are fully a part of.

In *The Lightning Thief* (2006), Percy faces a number of mythological challenges. Briefly, he must accept his demi-god heritage; battle the mythical Minotaur; learn combat proficiency from a mythological beast; receive both a quest and a prophecy from the Oracle; wield magical weapons; face both Medusa and the Chimera; travel to Hades via the lair of the lotus-eaters to save the soul of a loved one; and eventually, complete his quest at Mount Olympus where he is awarded the right to ask a boon from the gods themselves. The majority of the encounters listed will be recognisable to readers familiar with Greek mythology. Readers familiar with these tales are just as likely to note that the characters who were originally (a troublesome term) involved in these narrative scenes include Theseus, Achilles and Hercules. Each of the adventures warrants closer scrutiny to learn the details of how each is appropriated into a new hero journey, a re-imagined version of events, though such an undertaking is impossible in this space. In the preface to the excellent *The Ultimate Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, Cotterell and Storm (1999:6) write: 'The stories that have survived from these ancient civilizations describe gods that have long passed into history.' Percy learns that this is not so, as indeed do the readers. They, and their associated mythology, were there all along, waiting to be discovered.

3   RIORDAN's ADAPTATION OF *THE LIGHTNING THIEF*

What follows is a brief summary of some of the more obvious ways in which Riordan has adapted and appropriated mythology in the saga's first novel, *The Lightning Thief* (2006). A fuller and more complete study highlighting both the actual adaptations being made as well as their cultural, political and social implications is impossible within this space. Some changes are purely modernising the stories. However, many of the adaptations Riordan makes have socio-political implications because of his changes to formula, focalisation and narration.[5] Percy learns he is a demi-god (the progeny of Poseidon and a mortal woman) when he is attacked by his mathematics teacher who is also a harpy. He is rescued, in part, by his Classics teacher who entrusts him with the safekeeping of a pen, which magically becomes a golden sword, and by his best friend, Grover, who is a satyr in disguise. His Classics teacher, who upon first meeting rides in a wheelchair, is actually Chiron, centaur son of Kronos, who later trains Percy in combat proficiency and serves as his mentor and guide, as well as occasional transportation. Percy is attacked by the mythical Minotaur of Daedalus' labyrinth fame (itself the primary subject of a later novel in the series) outside Camp Half-blood, the

home and safe-haven of demi-god heroes, re-imagined as an American summer camp. The camp is overseen by Mr D, the god Dionysus, who has been banished from Mount Olympus for alcoholism. Percy is rewarded with the Minotaur's horn after returning to consciousness following his victory in battle. Percy consumes ambrosia, the drink of the gods and general healing restorative, which tastes, to Percy, of chocolate-chip cookies. Percy meets Annabeth, a daughter of Athena, one of Riordan's creative additions and the character who, throughout the series, most fully realises Riordan's postmodernist concerns of challenging patriarchal tropes and expectations of mythological narratives. The camp itself is situated near Long Island in the US, the current bastion of Western civilization and home of the principles of democracy first envisioned and enshrined by the Greeks and Mesopotamians. Chiron explains to Percy how Greek civilization has moved both chronologically and geographically:

> What you call 'Western Civilization.' Do you think it's just an abstract concept? No, it's a living force. A collective consciousness that has burned bright for thousands of years ... he fire started in Greece. Then ... the heart of the fire moved to Rome, and so did the gods ... The gods simply moved, to Germany, to France, to Spain, for a while ...Wherever the flame was brightest, the gods were there ... Every place they've ruled, for the last three thousand years, you can see them in paintings, in statues, on the most important buildings ... America is now the heart of the flame. It is the great power of the West. And so Olympus is here. And we are here (Riordan 2006:73).

Riordan uses mythology, itself originally 'man's attempt to explain phenomena' (Riordan & Wilson 2008:ix), to explain the 'phenomena' of why architecture, music, art, literature, often pioneered and first mastered by the Greeks, find themselves so prevalently displayed across much of Europe and the US. This definition of mythology is similar to that of Dundes' (1984) definition of mythology as a sacred narrative used to explain how the world as it is came to be. However, in his adaptation and appropriation of the myths, Riordan's saga appears to also include another aspect which more readily follows Lincoln's (1999:209) definition of mythology as 'ideology in narrative form'. Riordan's appropriation of mythological stories and hero tales re-creates a new mythology, a new explanation for a new phenomenon, and a new ideology, constituting what Weimann terms the 'reproductive dimension of appropriation' (1983:14 in Sanders 2006:1). He thus reveals not only the ideologies of a time in the past, but the ideologies of the present in which the adaptation was written.

At Camp Half-blood, Percy encounters a desiccated mummy in the attic of the camp's main cabin, all that remains of the once young and beautiful Oracle of Delphi. She delivers an equivocal prophecy to Percy which sees their fellowship, comprising Percy, Annabeth and Grover, seeking Zeus' stolen thunderbolt. Their first encounter is with Aunty M., the gorgon Medusa, owner of a garden gnome and statue emporium. The fellowship defeat Medusa, avoiding her deadly gaze by looking into a gazing ball (instead of the more familiar polished shield, the absence of which Annabeth vocally laments) after which, Percy packages Medusa's decapitated head and snail-mails it,

using Hermes Overnight Express, to the current location of Mount Olympus: the 600th floor of the Empire State Building in New York.

After surviving an onslaught of the Chimera later in the journey, Percy receives duplicitous divine aid from Ares, before moving on to the current location of the entrance to Hades, Hollywood. En route, they become trapped briefly in the Lotus Casino in Las Vegas, the current home of the Lotus Eaters whom Odysseus encountered in *The Odyssey*. After escaping and entering the entrance to Hades, Percy bribes Charon, the boatman, travels down the badly polluted river Styx and enters Erebus, avoiding being judged by the current court of the dead (presided over by King Minos of Crete, Thomas Jefferson and Shakespeare variously). Annabeth uses her cunning to allow the group to evade Cerberus, proffering him a chew-toy ball to occupy him while they make their passage. In discussion with Hades, the group learn that the real thief of Zeus' lightning bolt (the goal of the quest) is the disgruntled son of Hermes, Luke, who becomes the series' principle demi-god villain, motivated principally by his father's dismissive attitude towards him. Percy, faced with impossible decisions, leaves his mother in Hades (the soul he ventured into damnation to save) to return the lightning bolt to Zeus. They travel to the Empire State Building, return Zeus' stolen property and, at the conclusion of another hero journey, Percy is given a boon of his choosing. While immortality is considered, Percy opts for another choice: to enforce that the gods acknowledge their mortal offspring, so that the children may know their true parents.

In this way, Riordan subverts the expectations many readers might have regarding the ending of Percy's journey. Many heroes of Greek tragedy and Greek mythology made poor choices which ultimately signalled their doom and many readers may expect Percy's fate to be similar. Riordan, however, appropriates the meaning of the myths and imposes his own outcome on Percy's actions. Percy's choice signifies more pertinently the concerns of the adolescent audience: acceptance and worthiness in the eyes of adults, parents in particular. Through the adapted and appropriated vehicle of pre-existing mythological narratives, Riordan constructs a pleasingly familiar narrative of his own, which, through its unique twists and endings, allows readers to make different inter-textual associations and form meanings and understandings of their own. As Stephens and McCallum (1998:68) note (quoting Egan 1989:283), myths

> are told in contrasting ways, then. They can be self-referential, somewhat exotic stories, appearing to be of the same formulaic kind as modern fantasy action stories, or they can be retold within a frame which seeks to express or evoke their capacity to be, as Egan expresses it, 'powerful abstract concepts structured in concrete content'.

As scholars have indicated (see Barthes [1972] 1993) texts are not necessarily indebted to their authors for the production of meaning. This is particularly true of mythology where 'there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely' (Barthes [1972] 1993:120 in Sanders 2006:64). This lack of fixity allows for much meaning to be created by the readers themselves who

discover their own inter-textual relationships. Indeed, in understanding the bricolage of literature which exists around them, adolescent readers might first discover the adaptations and appropriations before the texts from which they were adapted. It is certainly acknowledged that adolescent readers' first impressions may well be informed by the values and attitudes of the author engaged in the adaptation, because of the very fact that those readers may encounter the adaptation first before the originary source which they may be motivated to discover. Thus, they are reassured that none of the associated cultural, social and political assumptions made or engendered on the part of the authors of either the pre-text or the re-version needs to be definitive or prescriptive. Rather, both the pre-text and the re-version may be read within a cocoon of safety. The readers may better appreciate, through having already read an adaptation, itself a conscious engagement with an existing cultural viewpoint, that assumptions about culture and society, and their associated values and attitudes, are not immutable, but rather openly invite discourse and re-invention. This acknowledgement of the lack of 'fixity' is a principal advantage of reading adaptations, and a powerful instructive tool in creating sensible and valuable reading strategies in readers of fiction for young adults. This is not to say, however, that the reading of adaptations need only be enjoyable in its ability to instruct young readers in reading strategies that allow for subversive encounters with adaptations and pre-texts in relation to one another.

It is certainly true that much of the enjoyment of reading adaptations stems from the recognition of ways in which a text has either been adapted temporally or appropriated stylistically, and recognising the subversive power thereof. This is not to say that enjoying an adaptation *as adaptation* is any less possible, or indeed, any less rewarding, however. The motivation, according to Andreas (1999:107 in Sanders 2006:12) in writing an adaptation, 'is serving the capacity of incremental literature', 'adding, supplementing, improvising, innovating. The aim is not replication as such, but rather complication, expansion rather than contraction'. The examples from *The Lightning Thief* (2006) above show this capacity for temporal adaptations and stylistic appropriations to expand upon, and supplement the source material. It is the very interplay between knowledge of root narratives, and the innovative expanded re-imaginings, that inform much of the pleasure of reading adaptations *as adaptations*, particularly where such readings may inspire readers to seek out and explore their adaptations' hypotexts, as indicated previously. The tension of expectation and surprise, the relied-upon similarities and unforeseen differences between new re-imagined visions of past literature is central to the enjoyment of the experience of adaptation. As Genette ([1997] 1982:399) asserts, the hypertext compels readers to partake in 'relational reading', which I feel is particularly true when the hypertext is the first text that is encountered.

4 'KNOWING' READERS AND 'UNKNOWING' READERS

Hutcheon (2006:121) argues that '[f]or an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences'. Hutcheon refers here not to the knowledge of whether a text may be an adaptation or not, but rather implies that 'knowing' refers to readers who have encountered and have read the originary pre-text being adapted. Readers who are aware that a novel is an adaptation of an existing pre-text may still be classed as 'unknowing' if they have as yet not fully encountered the pre-text itself. A distinction may then be drawn then, perhaps, between two sets of readers who are both aware that the adaptation is an adaptation of a pre-text, but where one set has read the pre-text (knowing readers) and the other has not (unknowing readers).

This distinction is relevant. A novel which is an adaptation, but which makes no attempt to re-imagine either the implications of the pre-text or its associated socio-political views and assumptions, but rather simply modernises the settings and events of the plot and character, may well be enjoyable to an 'unknowing' reader. It would constitute the first encounter with the *story* which governed the pre-text, and which was popular or influential enough to warrant an adaptation. However, such a story, it could be argued, might leave a 'knowing' reader unmoved. Because such an adaptation, which seeks only to modernise, does not challenge, subvert or address the cultural and historical framework of the pre-text, knowing readers might understandably be critical of the novel's value to a contemporary audience who would be as well served reading the originary pre-text. While it cannot be asserted with certainty how the two sets of readers may regard such an adaptation, it could be argued that knowing readers might rightly question the purpose of such an adaptation if it risks propagating or inadvertently endorsing out-dated assumptions and prejudiced stereotypes.

The question for the *Percy Jackson* and the Olympians saga, then, must be: is Riordan guilty of what Buchbinder (2011:138) calls: 'dressing it up in modern costume and embellishing it'? Or is there more to it? Though only an exhaustive study could prove this definitively, it is my contention that: because Riordan actively engages in an interrelationship with the pre-text mythological narratives which inspire his story; because he challenges many of the ideologies[6] governing heroic journeys; and because the novels are amusing, contemporary and engage adolescent readers within their frame of reference, there is value in his novels for both 'knowing' and 'unknowing' readers.

It warrants noting, however, that this value which I believe the saga has suffers from undue obfuscation and may, in fact, sometimes go unrealised. It is recognised that a text's reception can be informed by the existing metanarrative framework in which it is received. In the case of the novels, then, this is problematic for the recognition of the value of the novels because of the film adaptations: *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010) and *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* (2013). There is a strong likelihood that the films may constitute the first encounter with the saga for many young

adults. It is no secret that the popularity of television and cinema eclipses that of reading. In the case of the novels, the complication referred to above is compounded because now readers may first watch an adaptation of a series of novels which are adaptations themselves. While this is not necessarily problematic on its own, the complication arises because of the manner in which the film versions may be approached. It is a complicating factor that Riordan's novels, which I believe do have value, both *as adaptations* and in terms of the interrelationship informed by the source pre-text, may only be encountered as secondary to the films because, notwithstanding their monetary successes, the films make no claim to the transformative power of the novels and share few (or none) of their deeper significances.

5 THE FILM ADAPTATIONS

The films based on Riordan's novels abandon the use of hero journey models that, in many ways, inform the plot structures of the novels.[7] Annabeth, an important character and focalisation, is relegated to a useless appendage who more often than not is simply absent on screen. Percy is transformed into a wind-swept reactionary who is blown from one encounter to another where he is constantly rescued by others while looking bewildered. Luke Castellan, the complex antagonist of the series, who is revealed in the final novel to be the hero of the prophecy, is replaced by an onscreen counterpart who is idiosyncratically evil, without any motivation or purpose, and who is more comic in his evil than actually complex. Additionally, despite the series' conclusion necessitating Luke's presence at the final battle, his death, bizarrely, is implied at the end of both of the films. Variations to the plot, such as the inclusion of a Hydra battle; Hades being a rock-star with relationship troubles; and Annabeth and Percy being marginalised at camp, while not necessarily objectionable in and of themselves, nonetheless make little attempt to recognise the place of early events in the series shaping the overall plot progression.

Each of the films seems to be have been made as an individual entity, depriving the series of its significance as a saga. The second film, for instance, closes with a bizarre battle in which Percy battles a building-sized Titan, Kronos, who for some reason is molten in form, and who is defeated by being stabbed by Percy's otherwise not unusual sword. His defeat in this second film will make problematic any realisation of the fifth novel, where Kronos possesses Luke's body, the result of which is the series' ultimate climax and subversion of the very concepts of 'hero' and 'heroic responsibility'.

While it would be counter-productive to argue in the current article that an adaptation cannot have value *as adaptation* on its own, the very fact that the interrelationship between the films and novels is explicit – while at the same time being attempted without any relevant evidence of this interrelationship informing the structure and implications of the films – is extremely unfortunate for the modern reception of the novels (which are worthy of attention), since many young adults may feel uninterested in exploring the

novels after having seen the films, 'based on the novels', which are so poor. It is worth noting that their lack of meaningful discourse with their pre-text novels does not devalue the films as adaptations. The practical reality is just that it is unlikely that the films will ever draw an audience away from the big screen towards an active engagement with the pre-text, as it could be argued Riordan's series *could* do with their informing pre-texts.

6 GENETTE'S 'MOVEMENT OF PROXIMATION'

Though not always the case, in some adaptations and appropriations, as above, the interrelationship between hypertext and hypotext is explicit. An awareness of the informing narratives often alerts cognisant readers to more diverse reading enjoyment possibilities. Through Genette's ([1997] 1982:304) 'Movement of Proximation' the very adaptable and re-usable myth is given new relevance within a new social context and contemporary social geography. Part of this 'Movement of Proximation' is the challenging of the assumptions surrounding the significances of myth itself. Stephens and McCallum (1998:62) argue that '[a]dults who produce the retellings, however, generally further assume that myths also perform important literary and social functions'.

Stephens and McCallum (1998:62–64) suggest five assumptions regarding myth: (1) 'a myth is invested with value as story itself'; (2) mythology 'forms part of "our" cultural heritage';[8] (3) 'because myths are linked with religious urges and aspirations they express spiritual insights in oblique narrative form'; (4) 'as narrativized expressions of impulses within the human unconscious they distil psychic truth'; and (5) 'myths facilitate intercultural communication by bringing out the similarities between various world cultures, and hence affirm the common humanity of the world's peoples'. These assumptions surrounding myth are of paramount importance, not because any of the five is necessarily untrue for any given myth or its re-tellings, but rather because the adults engaged in the creations of the re-tellings cannot *assume* that the 'important social and literary functions' associated with their work are automatically constructed because of the mythical nature of their subject matter. Rather, as implied by Genette above, the adaptation must begin a 'Movement of Proximation', informing, engaging with and creating an interrelationship between the pre-text and the re-version. It is this interrelationship and determined, conscious desire on the part of the authors to invest their novel/s with 'movement', away or towards a pre-text, which often informs its/their value.

It is clear then to see that an 'unknowing' reader may read an adaptation that assumes any of the five points above, and which does not attempt a 'Movement of Proximation', and yet possibly enjoy it *as adaptation*. However, it is equally clear to see that an adult writing such fiction for young adult readers, in making those assumptions, deprives the adaptation of the very 'important social and literary functions' that would make it

enjoyable to 'knowing' readers. Thus, the adaptation might be a monetary success, as with the film versions of Riordan's novels, but would not be a success in the manner suggested by Hutcheon (2006) above.

This is not to suggest that novels which attempt financial success as adaptations on their own are without value. Rather, it is my contention that such narratives miss the mark in not recognising their potential to be so much more. As Stephens and McCallum (1998:22) note:

> In such a context, the retelling of old stories requires careful scrutiny. In all of the domains of reversion we are concerned with here there is a high probability of replication of, for example, old masculinist and anti-feminist metanarratives. At the same time, retold stories have the potential to disclose how old stories suppress the invisible, the untold, and the unspoken. Such a potential will be realized through changing the modes of representations as well as, and more than, changing the content: by careful attention to point of view; by focalization strategies, since agency cannot be manifested by characters who do not focalize; and by textual self-reflexiveness or other strategies which remind readers not only of how they read the text but of how they read the world.

7 CONCLUSION

In re-imagining and re-working these ancient myths with a view to creating a conscious discourse and interrelationship between pre-text and re-version, therefore, Riordan is serving a duality of purpose: both activating familiar archetype narratives (for those who are 'knowing') and placing them in contemporary cultural and social geography to deliver a message tailored for younger readers (who may yet be 'unknowing'). Their responses to this reading, whether informed or uninformed of the originary narratives, do not invalidate the informing source material, nor the value of their personally-formed understandings. Because of Riordan's creation of Genette's 'Movement of Proximation', quite the opposite is actually the case.

Where such readers are introduced to these narratives first, before encountering a pre-text, as shown, they are invited to re-examine their original reading of an adapted text, and wilfully seek out the informing text and experience the reading joy of adaptation backwards, In this way, they ensure that there remains an interest in the originary archetype narratives, albeit in revised and contemporary circumstances and with re-envisioned understanding. Sanders (2006:14) describes that for her (and indeed for many of us), part of the sheer pleasure of the reading experience must be the tension between the familiar and the new, and the recognition both of similarity and difference, between ourselves and between texts. The pleasure exists, and persists, then, in the act of reading in, around, and on (and) on.

Adaptations and appropriations are, she continues, 'endlessly and wonderfully, about seeing things come back to us in as many forms as possible' (Sanders 2006:160). As

Hutcheon (2006:167) so eloquently puts it: 'Each [text] adapts to its new environment and exploits it, and the story lives on, through its "offspring" – the same and yet not.' So too, then, is the case with *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*.

NOTES

1. It is noted later on, in reference to the films based on Riordan's novels, how this can also be disadvantageous.

2. Stephens and McCallum (1998:4) term the predecessor text a 'pre-text', and the subsequent retelling a 're-version', a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration.

3. This change of focalisation is an important adaptation, one which invests the adaptation itself with much of its instructive power for adolescent readers, as shown later in the article.

4. This new meaning, as indicated above, need not be pejorative in terms of the originary and founding narratives. Rather, it may invite readers to explore those pre-texts for themselves and come to more fully appreciate the different focalisations and cultural assumptions which governed the creation of each.

5. Examples of these changes include Percy being the narrator, but not the hero of the story, nor the only character focalisation. It is revealed at the series' conclusion that Luke, Percy's rival and the saga's antagonist, is actually the hero of the prophecy. It is also the case of the later novels that Percy's viewpoint is, in many ways, made less important than that of Annabeth Chase. In this way, Riordan's adaptations imply his altered view regarding the role of women in hero tales and the nature of heroism itself, for example.

6. Though this is difficult to show in this space, Riordan challenges many of the ideologies of Greek hero myths. Percy, as noted, is revealed not to be the hero of the prophecy. Additionally, he does not defeat his rival and his final choice does not decide the fate of Olympus. Though brave, Percy does not suffer from hubris, nor is he generally considered to be the leader. Percy's greatest attributes are seen as feminine: his trust in his friends and his willingness to sacrifice himself for them. His character is a novel adaptation of the ideology surrounding Greek heroes and what constitutes heroism. A similar case can be made for Annabeth Chase, a character not based in Greek mythology, who challenges the ideology of a woman's role in heroic journeys. She trusts in her own agency, is neither attached nor subservient to any other character, and achieves her own autonomy separately and before Percy completes his own heroic journey.

7. It is acknowledged that the use of hero journey models to influence plots and narratives may be contentious, especially given feminist developments surrounding the roles and journeys of male and female heroes. Hero journey models and their use have variously been accused of being essentialist and of excluding entire groups of people. However, a simple abandonment of any determined plot structure by the film is, arguably, even more detrimental to the story than the use of a model which may be accused of being out-dated or essentialist.

8. Stephens and McCallum (1998:63) note, however, that 'quite modern retellings still often lack any apparent awareness that the corollary production of subjective wholeness attributed to the influence of classical mythology is radically flawed by the individualism, imperialism,

masculinism, and misogyny which pervade that mythology'. It is, however, also the case of many authors of adaptations, specifically Riordan in this case, that part of the goal of writing the adaptation is the interrogation and refusal of the implications of these assumptions. Quite contrary to '[lacking] apparent awareness', the reason, very often, for these authors writing the adaptation is grounded in the subversion of these assumptions. Where a pre-text may be 'flawed by individualism, imperialism, masculinism, and misogyny', a re-telling, aware of the failings of the mythology on which an adaptation is based, can consciously subvert and improve upon those flaws – thereby highlighting those flaws to readers when they encounter the pre-text after the adaptation, and illustrating how such destructive ideas in society can be deconstructed and disproved.

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