The Myth Continues in Percy Jackson: A look into mythology and its persistence today

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Introduction

It is easy for us modern readers to forget that there was a difference between Greek and Roman literary mythology because they were first written down so long ago, yet so closely related. The way we talk about the Greco-Roman pantheon implies that we do not separate the two sets of gods as being unique. Clearly there is a difference between them since they did spring from two unique cultures. The Romans borrowed many things from the Greeks, like their pottery and sculpture and visitations to the Delphic Oracle, but they held a culture of their own that was different from being Greek. That is why using all of these different epics, Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Homer’s *Iliad*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is so important. Each one incorporates something uniquely Greek or Roman, especially at the beginning of written mythology.

Hesiod and Homer were the first ones to write down the mythology of their religion. That being said, I am strictly looking at their works in the context of literature. The stories these authors told were not new stories to the Greeks by any means, but they were told in such a way that we have continued to read them. We all know the basics of Greek myths, like the Trojan Horse and the Minotaur in the Labyrinth, but we still like to read or watch or hear different variations on the tales. Homer and Hesiod knew their audiences wanted a new story. Instead of singing the end of the Trojan War, Homer instead sang about how one man’s anger endangered so many. Hesiod also gave a new way of thinking about where the gods came from. The best description is that he was “organizer and interpreter of traditional tales.”¹ For Hesiod it did not matter that Tartarus

¹ Graf, p.87
spawned so many monsters because it was still their start and it was still about the start of all the tales to come.

Move forward about seven centuries and these epic poems are well known. So well known, in fact, that Roman poets have emulated them many times over. Virgil’s *Aeneid* is by far one of the best because he was able to combine Homer’s two works, yet make it into a Roman’s myth. Aeneas is everything that a good Roman should be; he gives his duty to the gods, is brave and strong, and he is committed to his people and their allies. His story is no less known to the people, but Virgil makes him into a Roman hero. Ovid picks up his mantle soon after, but he is much more interested in the things in the stories of the gods and men together. The Romans already know of the great heroes, but what about all of those other smaller myths involving the gods’ interactions with human kind? These myths are about the changes to the world and the gods committing some of them to the humans.

Ancient Greek mythology has been continually adapted – having started with the Romans variations and moving forward to present – because there is something about it that is culturally relevant. We still like the stories about the gods and heroes because there is something within each myth that is relatable to modern thought. Graf states that true myths are told over and over again thus changing through the ages.\(^2\) He believes that myths are meant to change and adapt with each culture they pass through. They are also cultural memories, and each new generation adds a certain memory to them.\(^3\) Listening to modern students talk about how whiny Achilles can be or how weak Diomedes is is what I mean about adding a memory. Those emotions from men are still existent, but what

\(\text{\footnotesize\(^2\) Greek Mythology, p. 3}\)
\(\text{\footnotesize\(^3\) Religions of the Ancient World, p. 55}\)
they imply about the man has changed. Therefore the earliest poets to write down the myths are exactly that, they are only the first to do it but by no means are they the end.

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 as well as government (since we do have a democratic-republic, taking the best from each civilization). We have kept the gods alive with our Western thought because the stories have now passed to us to retell and give new meaning to. There are no more heroes that seem as selfish as Achilles or as pious as Aeneas. All of Riordan’s heroes are relatable, especially to the young adults Riordan is writing for. On top of that, his gods are just as accessible to the heroes in the story as the ancient Greeks saw them.

His stories should not be dismissed simply because they are written for young adults. If anything, they should be exalted in their combinations of simplicity and complexity. Riordan is able to bring in so many of the ancient Greek and Roman myths, without overwhelming the readers, but then on top of that he adds monsters from ancient Eastern cultures (like from the Persian Empire and Egypt). He presents a new type of hero in Percy, one that can be championed by all who read. In a simple view, Percy does not put up with bullies and he always does what is right for his friends and family. In a more complex way, he challenges gods who have done wrongs to their heroes and he defeats the greatest of monsters and Titans. Young adult series always appear simple, but there is a deeper meaning that does not always come through on first sight. Percy puts up with the ordinary challenges of growing up while still being a demigod.
There are five novels in the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series. It is about a young demigod, Percy Jackson son of Poseidon, on his survival from the threats of all kinds of ancient Greek monsters and a war with the Titans of old. Percy is a regular 21st century kind of kid. He has problems with ADHD and dyslexia, which often lead to troubles with other kids at his many boarding schools. Through it all though, he has his mother, Sally Jackson, whom he can rely upon.

That is until he is attacked by the Minotaur and forced to go to Camp Half-Blood, a camp for other Greek demigod children. Percy learns that the ancient Greek gods have moved with Western thought and are now situated in modern day America. He is claimed by his divine father, whom he has never met, the ancient Greek god of the sea, Poseidon. The power of Poseidon is transferred to Percy in a diluted form, meaning he can control almost all the waters of the world with little effort, which helps him survive the same monsters it attracts. There is also the problem of the Great Prophecy, which states a child of the Big Three gods will either be the champion or destroyer of Mt. Olympus.

First Percy must go on a quest in order to save his mother and to create peace between his father and his uncles, Zeus and Hades, the Big Three gods. He takes two companions on his quests, his friend Grover the satyr and his newfound ally Annabeth, daughter of Athena. During his quest Percy learns that the king of the Titans, Kronos, is regenerating and Luke, Annabeth and Grover's oldest friend, is helping him from within Camp Half-Blood. Percy, with his strong morals, knows he must stop Kronos, rather than join him, even though the Olympians have not helped him and have blamed him up to this point.
After he saves the day in *The Lightning Thief*, he travels to the Sea of Monsters to save Grover and hopefully the camp’s poisoned boundaries. Hermes, giving his blessing of the quest, asks Percy to try and talk to his son, Luke, about coming back to camp and his family. Luke is an angry young man, so there is not much hope for Percy’s talk going well. Luke feels like the gods are outdated and uncaring toward their children. He brings it to Percy’s attention that the gods are using the heroes as they have for two millennia. Luke believes that the gods do not have the best interest of mortals or demigods in mind when they act. Percy does not understand Luke’s pure rage until much later, though. He holds the innocent belief that the Olympians will come through for him in the end as he has for them.

However, when Thalia, daughter of Zeus, comes back from her almost death,\(^4\) Percy finally understands that the gods have many contingency plans. Percy believes he is the only one meant to receive the Great Prophecy, but Thalia’s rebirth throws a wrench in that thought. Even worse, Hades brings his children, Bianca and Nico, out of the Lotus Hotel so that one might also be the hero of the Great Prophecy. Hades had stored them in the Lotus Hotel, a place where children do not age,\(^5\) after World War II. After the WWII, the Big Three had made a pact to not have children because of the prophecy but also because their children were often responsible for the great wars. Bianca decides that she cannot hold that responsibility, so she joins the immortal maiden Hunters of Artemis. Nico is ten years old, thus making him the least likely candidate since Kronos would have to wait six years.

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\(^4\)Thalia was turned into a tree by her father when she was about twelve years old. She sacrificed herself to a group of monster so that Luke and Annabeth could reach the safety of camp.

\(^5\)In *The Lightning Thief*, Percy, Annabeth, and Grover get stuck in the Lotus Hotel, which is run by the Lotus Eaters from the *Odyssey*. When they are there, time moves at a fraction of its actual speed. Kids can stay in there for decades and not even notice because they are having fun.
Percy, who quickly takes the role of leadership among his fellow demigods, discovers that Luke will try and attack camp thereby ridding himself of the heroes. The gods need their heroes to fight their battles on Earth, so Luke is trying to cut Olympus off from one of its greatest tools. Luke is going to try and use Daedalus’ Labyrinth (where the Minotaur used to live), which has also moved with Western culture. It has had a few millennia to grow in size and tricks, but Percy and Annabeth are able to master if with the help of a mortal girl, Rachel Dare, who can see through the Mist. Mist is the substance that disguises the supernatural as something bizarre to a mortal, though a few can see through it. It comes down to a battle for the camp, which the demigods win, but not at the cost of fellow heroes. The war against Kronos and his titans is real and dangerous; not something to be taken lightly.

The Great Prophecy comes to fruition a year after the Battle of the Labyrinth. Percy discovers that Luke took Achilles’ curse, invincibility, and is capable of holding Kronos’ spirit in his body. Instead of backing away from the Great Prophecy, Percy decides that he is the hero to be champion of Olympus, not Nico or any other hero after him. Percy gathers the campers and takes them to downtown New York City to defend Olympus while the gods are off fighting the father of monsters, Typhon. The gods have to come together to destroy Typhon; even Hades must come out of the Underworld to help. The heroes also have to come together to keep NYC from being overrun by monsters. Luke sacrifices himself thus the demigods win the war. However, many heroes died for the cause, which infuriates Percy. He sees what Luke hated about the gods: they

6 Luke took a swim in the River Styx with his mother’s blessing as Achilles was dipped in the river by his mother. The river gives the ones who survive invincibility from any weapon except in one spot (on Luke it was under his armpit).
7 Percy accidentally woke him from his deep slumber in *The Battle of the Labyrinth.*
do not always claim their children, they forget or plain ignore the pacts they make with each other, they are all selfish. He wants a better future for the heroes to come, so he forces the gods to promise to do better.

While in the four of five novels currently released of the sequel series, *The Heroes of Olympus*, another storm is brewing and Percy is not even around to help everyone out. Instead the campers are introduced to a new son of Zeus (though he calls all the gods by their Roman names),\(^8\) Jason, and two other older demigods. It is a confusing time at the start of this series because the gods have shut down contact with their heroes (even Mr. D., camp director, was recalled to Olympus), and Percy has disappeared over night, but the heroes at Camp Half-Blood get used to Jason and his two friends Piper, daughter of Aphrodite, and Leo, son of Hephaestus. Jason claims to have amnesia, but he knows a lot about the gods’ stories, and he has some nice moves with the sword. He must go on a quest, though, to save Hera from the greatest enemy the gods have ever faced, Gaea. She is waking up, and she is no free-loving Mother Earth. She brings her giant children with her out of her slumber.

*The Son of Neptune* puts Percy back in action, but for a new camp completely. Juno has sent him to Camp Jupiter, the Roman camp, after hiding him away for six months. She has decided that he must make a name for himself among the Roman demigods. He too is sent on quest, but instead of finding Juno he must rescue Death from the clutches of the giant king. He makes the friends with Frank, son of Mars, and Hazel, daughter of Pluto, and together they travel to Canada with a few pit stops along the way.

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\(^8\) Riordan does this to show the Greeks (and the reader) that there is another sect of Greco-Roman gods and heroes out there. This is a clear sign to all of the Greek heroes that Jason is a trained hero from some other camp. Whether he is friend or foe is yet to be determined at the beginning.
Then they are all back together in the third book. Seven demigods must travel west to save Olympus, so they tack on Annabeth because a journey is not complete (at least for a Greek) without the assistance of Athena. Annabeth, however, is given the unfortunate task of finding her mother’s lost statue and returning it to the Greeks. The Romans have decided to march against Camp Half-Blood as Camp Jupiter has been doing for centuries. The demigods must pass into the old lands and travel to Rome first to save Nico and then Greece. The Mediterranean is no friend to modern demigods, though; it is filled with older monsters than they have ever seen.

Although they save Nico, they lose Percy and Annabeth to the pit of Tartarus, a place no one goes willingly. The group is thus split, but the other five quest-makers plus Nico have hope that they can reach the Doors of Death and find Percy and Annabeth. The hope is slim, but it is the only one they have. Percy and Annabeth on the other side know that they have to find the Doors of Death and close them so that the monsters and giants stop coming out of the pits of Tartarus. The journey is treacherous, but each hero learns a little more about himself/herself along the way. Eventually Annabeth and Percy escape Tartarus, but they still have to travel to Athens to try and stop Gaea from waking completely from her slumber.⁹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Mortal parent</th>
<th>Immortal parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percy Jackson</td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Poseidon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annabeth Chase</td>
<td>Fredrick</td>
<td>Athena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Castellan</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Hermes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia Grace</td>
<td>(mother)</td>
<td>Zeus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nico di Angelo</td>
<td>(mother)</td>
<td>Hades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Grace</td>
<td>(mother)</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piper McLean</td>
<td>(father)</td>
<td>Aphrodite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Valdez</td>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>Hephaestus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel Levesque</td>
<td>(mother)</td>
<td>Pluto</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
With such a long description of the two series, there is no doubt that they are complex. Riordan chooses myths from all over the Greek and Roman tradition from the less well known (e.g. Chrysaor, son of Medusa) to the most famous heroes (e.g. the ghosts of Theseus and Achilles). Myth in literature has not disappeared. In fact it has continuously expanded. Riordan is another author in the long line of authors to draw upon ancient mythology in his literature to talk about the important characteristics of our culture. He points out that heroes come in all different sizes and ages. We cannot always trust the most physically beautiful to lead the way because sometimes they are the ones with the alternative motives. You should be the ones to stop bullies because they will never stop on their own. Riordan has so many different messages that he brings across in the nine books, but he does it with the same style as the ancient authors. A great war and adventure can be the setting for the deeper meaning of an author’s desired message. Being clever is good, see Odysseus’ adventures through the Trojan War and afterward. Honor those who deserve it, see how easily Achilles killed Hector. Be a good Roman and honor the gods, see how much Aeneas gave up for his people. Complexity can be the background for the simplest messages.
Chapter 1

It is best to look at the beginning of Greek literature with Hesiod and Homer. I am using the thought Herodotus first brought up when he said that these two authors are the origin of Greek myth (Histories, 2.53.1-2). There probably would have been others to write similar tales at one point, but no one did, or at least they were not remembered. These two have survived because they tell stories that are unique and, more specifically, cohesive. Hesiod’s stories, though they can be a little disjointed at times, tell the tale of the creation of the gods. Homer’s is even more cohesive because it has specific heroes it focuses in on, like Odysseus, Achilles, Agamemnon, etc, and their ability to work with each other and the gods.

Hesiod and Homer were singing their poems at a time when chiefs ruled the poleis (city-states) and elite soldiers were honored above the rest. The hierarchies that existed were in favor of the strong and weathered fighters. They enjoyed entertainment as much as everyone else, though, and they appreciated that part of it was to keep the history of their ancestors from slipping away. Homer, more than Hesiod, sang of the heroes to the people. Stories of humans are more common than those of just the gods because people like to hear about other people. Hesiod, though, was singing more at religious festivals than in the court of a wealthy man. These two authors are the starting point for the gods’ anthropomorphic identities, by which I mean that these two authors gave a human form to these gods rather than just the idea of their realms. Nyx (Night) is an idea, but Hesiod also gives her a palace in Tartartus instead of keeping her as an ambiguous idea. They also stated the exact realms the gods hold. There would be other aspects of the

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10 Pomeroy, et al., p. 52
11 Nelson, p. 7
gods added later, but for right then they were more interested in pleasing their audiences with the songs they wanted to hear.

Hesiod’s *Theogony* is about the birth of the gods and every other type of supernatural force there was for him because other creatures would be added on as the myths continued. He starts at the beginning of all things coming from Chaos. Then he goes through three generations of gods starting with Earth and finishing with the Olympians and some of their children. As a reminder, this is about the literary side of the poem rather than any religious rites it may talk about. This is poem is specifically used because it is the beginning of the gods. Clay describes the order in the *Theogony* best when she says that Olympus is in disarray but eventually works itself out in Homer’s poems.\(^{12}\) Where the gods stand amongst themselves is very important to the progression of future stories. Whether Hesiod meant to inspire so many future authors is unclear, but it is the dream of writers to be remembered and emulated.

It is nice that Hesiod is not concerned with a timeline of each god or goddess birth, thereby allowing him to tell of the most important gods. Now, that might be pushing it a little since he does spend approximately thirty lines naming Oceanus’ oldest daughters (337-362). However, since this was a song, and sometimes the easiest parts to remember are lists of names, so we can let him slide for it this time. Before there were the Titans and the gods, there were the children of Chaos and Night and Oceanus (116-152). He sings the rule of the Titans, and then how their own children defeat them (453-721). Hesiod then sings of the very beginning of the gods and all of Zeus’ exploits with goddesses and mortals (820-944). Hesiod finishes with the names of great heroes from more god and mortal procreation. In some cases the parents are stated then the child’s

\(^{12}\) *The Politics of Olympus*, p. 15.
name is said and then it is onto the next one (945-1022). The origins of all of these beings are what interested Hesiod, not the completion of the tale. There were others to tell the end of heroes’ journeys, and then there is the fact that the gods do not have an end. One day they could be defeated, but for Hesiod’s time, the gods were immortal and persistently present.

Though the first half of the poem is about Gaea mating with everyone and her Titan children, it is the second half filled with Olympians that is most interesting to me. The Olympians do not have a standing among the other immortals besides being children of Kronos. Hesiod is giving them what he believes to be a blank tablet, which they will then be filled up from previously written myths (e.g. Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey). His audience probably knew Homer’s poems, so it was likely they already knew about the stories to come later in the immortal’s lives.

Zeus is the only one who seems to have any standing and that is because Rhea decided she was fed up with Kronos (477-92). He has to be the one to fight Kronos, and then Typhon, alone with only minimal aid from Gaea. He is the one sleeping with everyone. Even before all of this, though, he had already decided that in order to have the support of the other gods he must distribute the timai, (the honor of a position the gods hold) to those forgotten by his father. Clays remarks on how his “coopting older gods and assimilating them into his regime prefigures his triumph in the Titanomachy.” He has the foresight that seems to have been missing with the previous two eras.

Since Zeus is the oldest of the Olympians, in the sense that the other five originals were reborn after Kronos regurgitated them, he has a greater advantage over his siblings.

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13 Hesiod's Cosmos, p. 22-23
14 Hesiod's Cosmos, p. 22
who might want to overthrow him. He even briefly ruled at the same time as Kronos was
around before defeating him, which makes his challengers wary of him.\(^{15}\) He was the one
to take down his father, free all of his siblings, and eliminate Typhon. It is important that
Zeus works alone because it was important for the Greeks to see the king of the gods as
the sole ruler. The ruling class in Hesiod’s time did not accept support without the
knowledge that it would one day be asked of them. Homer plays on that type of xenia
(guest-friendships) more, but since they were contemporaries of each other, it makes
sense that they would have similar themes. Better to fight individually until help is
absolutely necessary.

While Homer also wrote about these conflicts of xenia, he was more interested in
a single conflict within the Trojan War, not everything that happened during it or would
happen to end the war. The reason it has lasted as long as it has is because it is not purely
about gods or humans alone, it is about a combined effect of the supernatural on the
mortal realm. Homer sang of characters that his audience could relate to. That is in part
why myth still exists; we want tales that bring out something important in our own lives.
The heroes are men that everyone else wanted to be for Homer’s listeners. He sang to a
warrior class, but his story continued on after that class fell because his story is about
humans dealing with humans as well as gods.

Kearns says that Homer sang about the gods in the Iliad as an extension to their
human counterparts.\(^{16}\) The gods’ purpose throughout is to amplify scenes and give reason
for the warriors to act their own way. The heroes are privileged individuals with access to
personal messages from or meetings with the gods. I agree with Kearns but to me the

\(^{15}\) Graf, p. 87
\(^{16}\) Kearns, p. 71
gods use their heroes as agents in their own game.\textsuperscript{17} As their warriors have a plan, so too do the gods when they get involved. They have to fight each other through their favored humans, or there is the chance that they would destroy Earth in a violent supernatural fight.

Kearns does rightly note that the \textit{Iliad} could be told without the gods, but it would not be as fantastical nor would Homer have had an explanation for a hero’s epiphany moment.\textsuperscript{18} By epiphany I mean when a god intercedes in a hero’s thoughts and/or actions. When Athena stops Achilles from killing Agamemnon in Book 1 is an epiphany moment because the goddess comes down herself to stop himself rather than it being credited to his own thinking process (\textit{Iliad} 1.203-28). For the gods are important because of their interactions with the heroes and the fact that they are the driving force behind the men on both sides. Athena’s gift to Diomedes in Book 5 is one of the most noteworthy moments of the gods helping humans while trying to out-maneuver another god. She says to him,

\begin{quote}
Go after the Trojans for all you’re worth
\ldots And I have removed
The mist that has clouded your eyes
So that you can tell god from man.
Do not fight with any immortal
Who might come challenge you,
Except Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus.
If she comes you may wound her with bronze. (5.140-50)
\end{quote}

Diomedes’ moment of \textit{aristeia} (the best moment for a warrior when no one is able to stop him in his quest) can be told without involving Athena, but her presence gives him recognition among his peers. He is a great hero even without her, which is part of why she comes to him, but with her he is almost unstoppable. She warns him against that

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17} Kearns, p. 67. Kearns states that the gods are amplified versions of human thought, which I agree with. I am stating, however, that the gods do not do this out of the kindness of spirit, but rather as a way of entertaining themselves.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} Kearns, p. 59}
thought, but it is a powerful thing to be given the strength that could take down a god like Apollo (5.470-72). He needs to be reminded, though, that he is in fact only human, and it is not his place to injure a god in war: “Don’t set your sights on the gods. Gods are / To humans what humans are to crawling bugs (5.477-79).”

Homer knows the importance the gods play when describing a great hero. Their interactions are key for the Greek audience. Only the most noble and brave heroes are honored by the gods in the Iliad, and so we still read their names because they were honored most by the Greeks. In ancient Greek myth Athena is a part of the hero’s journey giving the evidence that the hero is an important man. She is the one to give guidance and knowledge when all other gods abandon the men. Instead of going down to the Greeks herself, Hera sends Athena to help because Athena can give good, strategic advice. When she favors a hero, and obviously in this tale it will be a Greek, he knows his destiny will be great but not easy. Odysseus is a prime example of a great hero who has a troubled path. Even within the Iliad Odysseus must fight the senseless logic Agamemnon presents in Book 2 (2.190-305). He has to convince the Greeks that they must stay and fight because it has already been too long. He does not have an easy path, but we still talk about him and his great feats. Even though the gods are good at showing off the best, they do not make life easy for the mortals.

Zeus, as a mythological character, is one of the only gods who truly cares what his family does to the mortals that call on him. That is a scary thought in some ways because he is the king and father of gods and men, meaning he has many things to occupy his time including the lasting unity of the Olympians. However, they are not his concern most of the time; Zeus lets his family run around and among the armies killing and
encouraging. They do not have to check in with him when they go to war, nor do they try and persuade him to one side most of the time. Yet, when he calls, they all come running. He is not a god to be ignored. Zeus orders them to stay out of the war, so they do (8.7-13). He tells them that they cannot save all of their favorites, so they do not (16.480-96). He loves these two groups of mortals equally, but he knows that only one people can thrive. That is how he holds himself above the other gods; he does not let his love for Troy cloud his duty to the future. His own son, Sarpedon the Trojan, must be killed, and even though he loves his son, he has to let him go (16.471-75). Zeus knows that his divine family is partially responsible for this coming to pass, but he also understands fate cannot be ignored.

That being said, the gods are still very much individuals with desires that fight the order Zeus puts down. They are a reflection of their heroes, so their heroes are also individuals being forced to fight together. The Greeks were not a singular group until much later in history, but they would come together for great wars, like the mythological Trojan War and later the historical Persian War. They lived in *poleis* that had distinct culture and customs but spoke a similar language and gods to the others around them. It is no surprise then that Homer would write about these great heroes, who are all kings or companions of kings (e.g. Patroclus), wanting to be the leader of the rest. Agamemnon rules because he is the richest and he is the one to have called them all together, but that does not mean that he is the best fighter or the cleverest. In fact, it is his hubris that causes Achilles to step away from the war. These Greeks are out for individual glory before teamwork. It is best described as all for one and none for all. They have allies and
xenia already established, but that does not mean that in the near future they will be willing to give up their own prizes.

Honor and glory are what a Greek warrior can truly possess within the Iliad, so it is no wonder that the gods are just as possessed with these ideals. They do not team up often, but sometimes it is necessary in order to defeat a greater enemy. Hera’s and Athena’s prides were wounded by Paris’ decision, so they had to gain that back by destroying the man who believed he could judge a contest for the goddesses. They have the benefit of having supernatural powers in their quest for vengeance. Though they are not as bloodthirsty for physical objects as their heroes, they do require the same amount of retribution for an injury. To dishonor a god or goddess is one of the most foolish things a mortal could do because they are more than willing to decimate everything. Hera and Athena are so angry that they want to wipe out the Trojan people entirely. Hera looks back to Zeus, though, to get the permission she needs and to offer something in return; she is willing to give up her three favorite cities, entirely, for these Trojans (4.61-64).

Is there really any doubt then that Zeus has claimed his rightful spot as leader among this ragtag pantheon? Ragtag is not used to imply that these gods are unimportant in the mythology, rather that they do not work together in a harmonious way. And that would be no fun for myths if they did. Zeus threatens and yells and argues when he must, but it is not his desire to micromanage the Olympians. It is his role as overseer that is more enticing to him and to us as the readers. He is the closest thing that Greek mythology comes to an omnipotent god and that would be no fun to add to a war. However, there is the famous moment in the Iliad when Hera seduces Zeus so that her

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19 The story is a well-known one even though it is not the specific story in the Iliad. It is referenced at 24.25-30, but only briefly and given no more importance than a reference as to why Hera and Athena hate the Trojans so much.
side might be able to join the fighting again (14.305-67). This scene is fun and silly and serves a purpose of showing how the gods trap each other and go about their merry interactions with mortals. Yet Zeus is able to bring a semblance of order to the gods and war again by evening the scales. He sends in Apollo and Artemis to help the Trojans and thereby shows Hera that she is not the one in control (15.51-78). The ancient Greeks liked their dysfunctional families as much as modern peoples do, which adds to the continuous appeal the *Iliad* holds.

It is the decision of the author, and I mean during any time, to involve the gods more or less in human affairs. Since we no longer believe that the ancient Greek gods are ruling the skies, modern readers have the opportunity to read stories where the gods have almost mortal feeling involving consciences. It is the belief in the gods for Homer’s time that allows him to include them in his story of Achilles’ rage. However, their part in all of this is to show off some of the best heroes, but the ones that will not live long (as is right for a good hero). The gods fight and argue and use their mortal pawns to outmaneuver one another, and yet they do have some care for the heroes they use. There is a sense that even when this war is over they will remember the heroes because other mortals do.

Greek mythology came from these two authors and has only progressed since then. It is right to credit these two with their creation, not because they were new and original pieces, but because they were different and cohesive. Hesiod presented his audiences with Zeus, the great and wonderful father and king, who could defeat the strongest challenges thrown at him. Then there is Homer who puts all of the gods together in the understanding that they are a family to the end even when they hate each other.
Chapter 2

The *Percy Jackson* series is another variation in the long line, but I am specifically focusing on this series (and its sequel series in Chapter 4) because it incorporates so many different myths while staying true to the original. Chapter 1 looked at how Homer and Hesiod dealt with the gods during their time and culture. This chapter is about how Riordan has continued the tradition. Riordan does not assume that his readers know every myth and their original context. He does not even assume that his readers know each of the Olympian gods. He is finding a way to interest them in the ancient works by writing about the gods today. Reception theory comes into play here because his readers will already have these stories in mind when reading the old texts.\(^{20}\) There are parts when it feels like Riordan took the gods straight from their Iliadic personality (e.g. when Percy meets Hephaestus in *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, the god is uninterested in the mortal realm but he is concerned with his family). There are other times when the god is almost unrecognizable because our culture has changed his image so much (e.g. Dionysus, though still a lover of parties, has to sit soberly at a heroes camp as punishment for chasing after a nymph). It is right, however, that these gods have changed to fit our image of who they should be. It is also right that the image of a hero has changed since Homer. Riordan knows his myths, so it is no surprise that he is able to work the old myths in with our different thought processes.

There is a tension throughout the series between the gods and their demigod children. The gods are about three millennia old, thus making them less willing to change their ways for heroes. On the other hand, the heroes are products of their time just as Homer’s heroes were culturally relevant for their time. Humankind is constantly

\(^{20}\) Batstone
changing, and though we like to look to our past for answers, the past does not always
hold them. By the end of the series, Percy understands that the past is not the place to live
and that the gods need to understand that as well. He has a driving need to make the gods
understand modern heroes and not live for the days of yore.

Riordan first starts to show this by telling the story through the eyes of one hero,
Percy, which is very different than the ancient poems. The gods are described the way
Percy sees them. He is supposed to be a normal kid with some normal problems and
some not so normal ones, but they are still relatable. Therefore, the way that he sees the
gods should be the right way for the readers to understand the gods. Percy shows us the
gods are as dysfunctional as any other group of powerful people. They are not all
knowing, all-powerful, as most people would believe. His perception of them may be
different from the ancient one, but it should still be the one to trust. For example, because
Percy appreciates Hephaestus’ inventions, we see the beauty in his creations. Riordan
likes the idea that Percy is the representative for how the gods should be seen. Percy sees
them as most humans should: they are immortal beings with personalities like every other
character.

Then Riordan adds characterization to his gods by giving them physical features,
which they in turn give to their children. He has the advantage of not being limited by
poetic form, which means he can give straightforward descriptions of the gods and their
intentions. Already he has changed the ways of the ancient Greek gods by not giving
them the opportunity to tell their thoughts except to Percy and by creating a definite form
for the gods. Though they do change form frequently, the gods always have a specific
aspect that distinguishes them in any form they choose. Poseidon is described in beach
wear almost every time Percy sees his father, Hermes is shown on his cell phone, and Ares’ eyes are endless pits covered by sunglasses. These descriptions also point back to important character traits, Ares exudes hatred, Hermes is always busy, and Poseidon can handle the sea with comfortable ease.

Some of the gods have altered realms of power as well as appearance. Aphrodite no longer stands for lust alone, but romantic love. It is the persona modern thought has attached to her. The gods exist for Percy because we are all still reading and talking about them, according to Riordan. Aphrodite is what she was to the Greeks (a goddess of lust) as well as our censored version her (goddess of love and romance). However, she is not the only one to have a significant change. Though Zeus is the king of the gods, he appears similar to a CEO of a family run business instead. His suits add to this persona, but it is his attitude toward the Olympian and minor gods that allows the audience see his newer side. He cares less about the gods’ feuding, and he no longer feels comfortable in his sole possession of the royal seat. He fears his brothers, Poseidon and Hades, more than he ever did in the Iliad. The king of gods and men fears that his throne will be taken because his brothers have kingdoms of their own. Neither Poseidon nor Hades has to look to Zeus for permission like they once did. Poseidon always had to check in with Zeus before he entered the Trojan War, but now he can rules his underwater palace without interference for Zeus.

These gods are fighting between their ancient nature and their new American one, which also means that they are unsure in their dealings with heroes. As the saying goes,

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21 In The Titan’s Curse, pp. 184-87 she makes it a point to talk to Percy on his way to save Annabeth. She promises him that he will have a great love affair like that of Helen and Paris. She is concerned with their love for each other instead of two fourteen year olds having sex. For one reason this is a young adult series, for another it is what we have come to associate with the title “Goddess of Love.”
the young are our future, which is very applicable to Riordan’s gods. They realize that they need the heroes, but the need to rely on a mortal is not what gods want to feel. Though these gods committed some of their power to their children, it does not make them parents. So then the question becomes, how do they deal with these children as heroes and as agents? Percy knows that half of him comes from his divine father, but Poseidon does not need him as a son, but rather as a representative for himself and the Olympians. In the past, the heroes knew that the gods were their parents, but that they had to make their own way in the world. Achilles did not rely upon his mother except when he was offended, and only then because he knew that he could fight every other battle on his own. Clarisse calls on her father, Mars, when she needs assistance in a quest, but she knows that calling upon him any other time would lead her to nothing. These modern children believe that their parents are there to guide them along the way to adulthood. Ares says it the most simply, “I don’t fight my kids’ fights, you know?”

Family is much more important to the Olympians than it was for their ancient selves. Hermes tells Percy how hard it is to be a godly parent, but it is worth being a part of a family in the long run:

...the hardest part about being a god is that you must often act indirectly, especially when it comes to your own children. If we were to intervene every time our children had a problem...well, that would only create more problems and more resentment...Families are messy. Immortal families are eternally messy. Sometimes the best we can do is to remind each other that we’re related, for better or worse...and try to keep the maiming and killing to a minimum. The Olympians are a family, whether they like it or not, and the gods have a responsibility to their children. They are still dreadful parents, though, because they

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22 *The Sea of Monsters*
23 *The Lightning Thief*, p. 226
24 *The Sea of Monsters*, p. 258
cannot be there to help at every turn; they must let their children fail or succeed on their own in order to prove their worth. Families are indeed messy and even worse they are always competitive, which makes proving worthiness difficult because every other hero is trying the same thing.

Having a godly parent is not something Percy, or the other demigods with their parents, relish because he does not have a normal relationship with Poseidon. In antiquity having an immortal parent would be something to boast about and be proud of. Heracles, one of the most well known heroes of antiquity, was the son of Zeus and quite pleased; he never hid the fact that he can from a divine lineage. However, now the supernatural is not an acceptable controlling force. This is another way in which Riordan is moving his Olympus and Olympians away from the ancient Greek roots. Interaction with a god is completely unaccepted, unlike how the ancient mortals in myth. These children, though, can never tell who their absent parent is because of the absurdity of the claim. It is more acceptable for Percy to have a single mother than to make a claim about the gods. The demigods at Camp Half-Blood cope well though because they have each other and the knowledge that one day their parents will honor them.

Even with all this talk about the importance of family, the gods still do not get along in Riordan’s universe. Athena and Ares are a perfect example. They are two opposing forces at camp and on Olympus. Their children are the ones to lead the clashing teams in capture the flag, which is battlefield experience for these heroes-in-training. On Olympus they do not agree on whether to go on the offensive against Kronos or not. There has never been a reason for these two to get along, or any of the other gods to agree on much. However, they no longer have the option of existing solitarily. Riordan wants
them to work together, even the most bitter of enemies. Worst of all, the gods must depend upon their heroes to maintain the balance between chaos and order.

Athena gives counsel to all of the gods, especially Zeus, on what should happen to the demigods. She does not trust the heroes to believe in Olympus. In *The Titan's Curse* she calls Percy and Thalia a risk because they are so strong for demigods. Demigods have free will because they are humans, so they can choose to believe in the gods or to turn against them. This is what Athena takes into consideration when she gives counsel. It would not have been a factor in antiquity for her because the heroes were dependent upon her patronage. The relationship between Odysseus and Athena is one of the most well known myths. She gives him help at the moments when he himself cannot do it alone, like when he and Diomedes go on a raid in the Trojan camp and she guides them (*Il.*, 10.282-312). However, the gods cannot come to the aid of heroes as much, which makes them less dependable in turn making the heroes doubt more. It is her responsibility to give the other gods good counsel, whether it is welcomed or not. That is why Athena, though barely present in her godly form, is important to heroic tales. She is the one to give good counsel and push the hero along on his quest.

Percy’s interactions with Ares are also an excellent example of how much the gods can hate heroes but still need them. It is set out from the first book, *The Lightning Thief*, when first Percy shames Ares’ children and then challenges Ares himself to a sword fight at the end. I have already mentioned that Ares evokes aggression in whomever he comes across, so it makes sense that Percy will abhor him because everyone else does. However, what is unexpected is that Percy does not honor or respect Ares. That is one of the greatest offenses a mortal can give to an immortal. Yet, Ares still

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25 *The Titan’s Curse*, p. 289
needs Percy in the final battle against Kronos. So the gods have changed in some ways because in the past Percy would have been killed or changed into something worse. This time he is left with the knowledge that someday Ares will take his revenge.

When it comes down to it, Percy knows that all of the gods are not to be trifled with. He refers to them, the ones he respects at least, as lord or lady because he knows that they do hold truly dangerous powers. However, their continued existence relies upon Percy and the other heroes at Camp Half-Blood believing in them and the order the Olympian gods represent. If the heroes are not willing to fight and move between the different realms of the gods, then the gods themselves no longer have the support base to rule. Heroes are the agents of the gods because that much power cannot go everywhere without notice. That is why the gods have to interfere sometimes; they know that the hero needs help and that they need that hero. Hera, who is notorious for hating heroes, comes to see Percy and Annabeth while they are in the Labyrinth in order to point them in the direction of Daedalus.26 The ones in power only stay there because of the will of the people or they just kill everyone who disagrees. The gods are still around because people believe in them and talk about them.

However, there is only so much a hero can take from arrogant gods before he starts to talk back. It is not that big of a surprise for a teenager to talk back to his family, even if they do possess mighty, magical powers. Nico tells his father, Hades, to grow up and stop pouting in his underworld kingdom: "You’re just as much of an outcast as I am!...Stop being angry about it and do something helpful for once. That’s the only way they’ll respect you."27 Percy believes that his family can work together even if they do

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26 *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, pp. 100-105
27 *The Last Olympian*, pp. 53-54
not all believe that themselves. To go back to Hades as an example, Percy tries to
convince him that the gods could use his help and that he does not have to live separately.
However the Greek gods work best alone or at least that is how they see it. As a son of
Poseidon, Percy can work with Thalia and Nico, both of whom are just as strong as he is
because they are all children of the Big Three. Thus he does not understand why his
father and uncles cannot work together in order to save Olympus in the end. The only
way he can convince any of them is to play their egos and possibly risk their anger for
doing so. In order for Percy to get his own father to help, he has to remind Poseidon that
he Zeus would owe him a favor and that is worth a lot more than saving a palace.²⁸

Ultimately each individual god is out for himself before he considers anyone else
or even the collective power of Olympus, so it is not surprising when Percy starts to get
tired of the isolation. Even in The Lightning Thief when he is claimed by his father, Percy
finds out that he has to sleep in a cabin alone and eat alone because the gods’ children
have their specified places to go. Percy is a Greek demigod who does not like the isolated
lifestyle that comes with it. None of the gods care about whether their children feel the
same way, though, because it is the way things have always been. Ultimately Percy wants
to change that; he wants to make sure that no other demigod feels abandoned like Luke.
He requests that the gods swear on the River Styx that they will claim all of their children
so that they could be trained and know that their divine parent cared for them at some
point.²⁹

It is really the start of the transition of the single, selfish heroes of Greece to the
heroes who need a team. Percy is no Odysseus cleverly working everything out nor is he

²⁸ The Last Olympian, p. 310
²⁹ The Last Olympian, pp. 353-54
an Achilles using his strength as a way to manipulate his fellow Greeks. He cannot be that kind of classic Greek hero, so he must create a new type. Though the Greek gods talk about family being important, they do not show it through their actions, which causes Percy to want to be better than them. He likes to be appreciated if he does something right, but he will never take credit for someone else’s actions. That is not to say that he does not get jealous of others for outshining him. In *The Titan’s Curse* he goes out to save Bianca and Nico without Thalia or Annabeth, his partners on that mission. Annabeth is captured because of his actions, but because of that he learns that it is okay to be the second brightest star sometimes.

Annabeth is one of the most important characters, though, because she is the daughter of Athena, who is a goddess that is always along on the hero’s journey to help. Since Riordan has his gods interact with heroes even less than Iliadic Zeus, it is necessary as a literary device to fulfill the mythic mold to have a child of Athena present to help the hero. She is always the one to move the hero on a quest or journey in the right direction; without Athena in some form the hero would not be as successful. Annabeth dislikes Percy in the beginning, as her mother would advise, but that quickly changes as the series goes on. She learns to appreciate Percy’s flippant attitude towards danger and his adaptability as their plans inevitably fail. Athena of old would never have accepted a hero’s deviation from the plan without some repercussions on his part. Annabeth is restricted in a way that Percy is not because of these attitudes. She is his guide on the quests and his connection to a world so different from the one he goes to school in.

To be a hero is not easy for these children precisely because they are children. They live with a mortal parent, maybe, and have an absent, though divine, one. Some

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30 *The Titan’s Curse*, pp. 14-21
have the opportunity to exist solely in one world (e.g. Thalia with the Hunters), but most choose to stand between them and try and survive. Annabeth has to stand between the worlds, but she does not have it as easy as Percy. He is able to live between them because he has a supportive mother and the knowledge that he could one day bring the two together a little more. Annabeth on the other hand does not have a supportive mortal family, but she knows how important it is to stay connected to that side. The mortal world is what these heroes are fighting for and when they forget that, they are likely to turn out like Luke, son of Hermes and traitor of Olympus. It would seem like it is an obvious choice, but the gods are selfish and forget about their children. To be a hero for them means that they must forgive their gods for their selfish ways and remember that the mortals are worth it.

It is because of Percy that the gods begin to learn to work together. He is the driving force in showing the Greeks that they can indeed change. There is the hope that things can get better for the demigods and their futures. Myths have continued with essentially the same stories for so long because they do not change. Change is not something that happens quickly for humans. However, Hermes does not believe they will ever change as he says at the end of The Last Olympian, ""They'll try, Percy. Oh, we'll all try to keep our promise. And maybe for a while things will get better. But we gods have never been good at keeping oaths. You were born because of a broken promise, eh? Eventually we'll become forgetful. We always do.""31 That is the problem with the gods, but also the reason that they have persisted. Since change does not happen quickly, that means that we are willing to continue to read and hear about these ancient beings. Percy knows this too, but he holds the hope that they can change in this one way. He does not

31 The Last Olympian, p. 358
ask them to change their pride or their selfish ways, though it would help all of them, he asks that they help the children, whom they helped create, to survive a little longer.

These Greek gods have existed for millennia and have changed very little. Riordan does not believe that a significant amount has changed from then to now. People ebb and flow in beliefs and so too do the gods in Percy Jackson. The Olympians stay true to their more original characteristics, like their realms of influence and epithetic features. And most importantly they still depend upon heroes to keep control of the universe rather than letting chaos take over again. It is because the gods and heroes have a codependent relationship that they have continued on as they have. The tension between the two is a newer aspect that Riordan has developed, though. In the past there has never been this tension between the gods and their chosen heroes, but now the gods cannot help because we do not rely on the supernatural forces for answers. It is also because their heroes have more free will than any of their previous heroes; our culture puts a greater emphasis on what man can and cannot do. Thus Percy is allowed to make demands on the gods such as they show him support rather than sitting back and watching. We cannot work alone, so Percy gets the campers and the gods to work together to stop the Titans and Typhon. The gods are still culturally relevant because Percy is. Stories about just the gods are not as popular because they do not involve the combustible factor of mankind.
Chapter 3

Roman myth is a strange combination of simple and complicated. Many of the myths come straight from a Greek tradition, but then there is the fact that the Romans have whole myths completely their own. They deified many of their emperors, and there are even myths to go with them. How interesting to have the deification of Gaius Julius Caesar in the same poem as the creation of man and stories about gods falling in love with mortals. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is a great exhibition of the different aspects of Roman mythology, as is Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Each nicely combines the historical nature of Roman myth as well as the influence from the other cultures around them (e.g. Etruscans and Greeks).

The Romans were another stop in the long line of continuators that have continued today. However, the Romans were able to add their own twists along the way. Grant says that the Greeks were critical to the spread of myths in the Mediterranean Sea, and most of the peoples they came in contact with took to the myths like bees to honey. However, the Romans were less inclined to jump all the way in. It was always more important for them to stay true to their culture. That meant that they were willing to take in some of the Greeks’ thoughts, but things like divine interventions, were too improbable for them to accept on a regular basis. That is something they passed down to the continuators yet to come. However, Grant also talks about how the continuators of myths were selective in the ones they chose because ultimately “they are exploring the

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32 Caesar’s interactions with the Sicilian pirates are a good example of how he changed the story to make himself look more impressive. Yet the story persisted long after his deification because that was one of the myths that were attached to his name.
33 Grant, p. xviii
34 Grant, p. 218
permanent values of life.” That is one of the reasons why there have been so many variations on myths as well as why it persists. People look for what they want in the stories, and they will always find something that makes an impression.

Ovid certainly makes an impression in his 12,000 lines. The Metamorphoses is about the change that happens to gods, mortals, the earth, and the heavens. There is not a subject he leaves untouched. The para-history, as Grant terms Roman mythology, is evident at the end of the poem, especially. There is this sense that the original myths of Rome, its founding and the stories of the founders, have a distinct timeline. All the stories before the last five books then occur sometime between the creation of humans and the Trojan War. This is Ovid’s way of combining the more Greek influenced myths, which actually occur over eleven books since Book XI is about the Trojan War itself. Yet, he makes the myths his own as any good continuator should. Ovid the narrator evokes sympathy for the victims of the gods’ wrath.

She did as much as any woman could (if only you had been a witness, Juno, your judgment would have been much less severe); she fought against him but was just a girl; and can a mere girl fight off a grown man? Can anyone fight off great Jupiter? (2.599-603)

Callisto’s struggle against Jupiter is not her fault in this case. She does ask for the god to come down to her, and she does not deserve the rage of Juno. Even her patroness, Diana, leaves her though it is no fault of Callisto’s that Zeus impregnates her. The narrator makes sure that his readers know what the gods put the unsuspecting humans through.

However, Ovid’s gods are not the lively gods found in Greek mythology. His possess a hierarchy, though similar to the Greek system, but much stricter. Deferment to

35 Grant, p. 224
36 Grant, p. xviii, describes para-history that it is not about what actually happened rather “what people, at different times, said and believed to have happened.”
Jupiter is not a simple by your leave; rather his permission in important matters is more significant. The Romans were more insistent about following the rules put down by the father of the household than even more than the Greeks were. This type of hierarchy also presents class differences, and obviously Jupiter and the other eleven on the council sit in the upper crust (1.229-49). Jove is the one to sit above even those in the inner circle.

There is no opposition to his word once it is final. That absolute rule of Jupiter would still be tested with the Greeks. The Greek Olympians would have greater arguments and there would be a lot more sneaking around. Roman Olympians, however, do not and cannot follow that view. Jupiter’s rule is final.

Ovid gives this sense that the gods can still do what they want, especially to/for humans, as long as Jupiter does not make a verdict against it. However, a god cannot go against another god’s punishment or present on a mortal. This all very confusing to put down in an ambiguous way, but I am trying to explain the rules the gods put on themselves and each other. There are strict rules for the Roman gods that even the Greeks did not follow. As an example, Jupiter and Juno argue over whether men or women receive more enjoyment from sex. They ask Tiresias, who had had the experience of both, and he upsets Juno so much when he agrees with Jupiter that she blinds him. Even at that moment, though, Jupiter does not completely respect her ire because he gives Tiresias the gift of foresight (3.408-40). The two highest gods on Olympus use this mortal for their own disagreement, and then decide to both punish and gift him. Like the Greeks the gods do not have a higher power than themselves, but Jupiter is more willing to keep them in line than Zeus was.
Ovid does not run out of stories to tell about all the different gods with humans and even mortals with mortals. There are many regular mortals involved in Ovid’s stories and not just heroes or demigods. Though I did mention that the Romans did not believe in divine intervention except in the most remarkable occurrences, it should be noted that all of Ovid’s stories are remarkable and that is why he wrote them down. Ovid finds the gods’ interactions with the mortals much less of a blessing than what the early Greek writers saw it as. The daughters of Minyas in Book IV want nothing to do with Bacchus so they each tell a story about the gods being scoundrels (4.1-571). This is a narrator who cares for his mortal victims as much as he enjoys talking about the gods saving them.

Grant makes the excellent point that one cannot help but compare Virgil’s *Aeneid* to Homer because it is an emulation of Homer’s works. It is the tale of Aeneas, a survivor of the Trojan War, on his way to Italy. His mother, Venus, told him that he would find a home there for himself, his future generation, and the other Trojans left over. He will have to fight another Trojan War when he gets there, but it will be worth it because his descendants will have a place. That is a great destiny to put on the shoulders of one man, but he is known as *pius*, meaning he is devoted to the gods and follows their will strictly.

Aeneas is best described as a hero of the gods. He listens to his mother, Venus, when she tells him to turn away from Helen and save his father (2.735-52). Aeneas is not the hero to turn away from a challenge in his path, but he also knows that when a goddess comes down from Olympus, she must be obeyed. Aeneas is one of the few, privileged heroes who has the gods communicate with him in person, which in turn makes him regard them in the brightest light. He knows that it is a rare occurrence, or it is for a

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37 Grant, p. 67
Trojan/future Roman hero, to be visited by the gods. He also follows their desire for him to set sail for foreign shores so that his future descendants can create a vast empire. He leaves behind his first wife, Creusa, and then his lover, Dido, and for the sake of creating a new home for his son (4.330-44). He does not deny the gods their wishes, nor do they ask him to do something that did not appeal to his sense of duty.

However, there is the missing aspect of Minerva on Aeneas’ journey and battle. As her counterpart was Athena, patron goddess of the Greeks, it is not so surprising that Minerva is absent. In the beginning of the Aeneid she is still associated with the Greeks, so it would do Virgil no good to include her with Aeneas’ travels (2.18-19). The very fact that she is absent, though, shows how little use the Romans had for her. They obviously respected her because it would do them no good to ignore her as a part of their pantheon, yet she was given a lesser status than the one she held with the Greeks.

In fact, Virgil makes it seem as if Venus is Jupiter’s favored daughter, even though myth says that he birthed Minerva from his own head. Jupiter is not the same as the high-spirited Iliadic Zeus, though; instead he has a self-possession that the Greeks never show with Zeus. When Jupiter embraces Venus after she begs for the safety of Aeneas (1.306), Segal states that Jupiter “is still the god of the remote cosmic order.”  

He does not care for his children anymore than the fact that they are a part of the larger family. He does not have to keep peace among his family, only an order to it.

Juno upsets the order more than any other god in the pantheon. Virgil writes her as disruptive as Homer’s Hera and even Ovid’s Juno sometimes. She is a goddess with one of the most confusing mythology in relation to her religion. She should be most respected, but in mythology she often plays the shrew. She is Aeneas’ greatest adversary,

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38 Segal, p. 88
which is important for his journey and final acceptance in Latium. As the goddess of marriage and family, Juno must accept Aeneas and the future empire he will build there. She yields to the reign of a former Trojan, only asking that the people stay Latins (12.937-61). In the end she falls under the rule of Jupiter and follows his commands.

Myths are less likely to be confirmed by stories from the time they were written, but the important part is that they have continued. Though modern readers do not trust myths, like the deification of Roman emperors, it does not mean that the myth is any more wrong than the facts. Virgil’s epic hero is one that has survived because it is a variation on Homer’s works yet tells it in a new and thoughtful and entirely Roman way. Rome, filled with its laws and foreign influence, held its own mythology as true as that of ancient Greece.
Chapter 4

Riordan, who has made many of the myths his own, has come to an unknown place. He has created a Roman camp for demigods and the descendants giving them a mythology created from some of Rome’s own history. It comes back to Grant’s concept of para-history, only this time Riordan is the one creating the myths. The Twelfth Legion went missing from Rome’s army, according to Riordan, and it went rogue and created an underground community so that Rome’s history would live on. Riordan has his readers understand that their myths still continued through Camp Jupiter.

While *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* exhibits a tension between the gods and the heroes, *The Heroes of Olympus* is about the tension between what it means to be Greek and what it means to be Roman. It includes seven heroes, three from the Roman Camp Jupiter and four from the Greek Camp Half-Blood. Riordan does not favor one side more than the other, but more the way the two can and should work together. It was an important theme from the first series that great forces learn to work together and he brings it out again in this one. However, this time it is about two groups of heroes working together in order to save their friends and the Olympian family. He is trying to create a new hero who does not have to fit the standard of either side because this new one is true to the home of the gods in America.

Frank and Annabeth are good examples of the good and the bad sides of being completely Roman or completely Greek. It is not only that their godly parents, Mars and Athena, are revered just under Father Jupiter/Zeus, but also that these two heroes do not want to be anyone except who they are. Frank and Annabeth get along well though because they both know what it means to a leader and to think through strategies. The
only bizarre part of their relationship is the fact that they have a relationship. Athena Cabin never gets along with Ares Cabin, yet Mars is different, which makes Frank different. Being one or the other does not damage the chance of a friendship, it only means that the hero does not wish to be at a different camp.

Meanwhile the roles of Percy and Jason, a son of Jupiter, provide useful comparison points for what it means to be Roman and what it means to be Greek. Neither character completely fits the mold for either camp perfectly. They want to walk that untouched middle ground. Jason knows what it means to be completely Roman, but he does not want that to be his only choice. There is a part of him that wants to be a little freer and less responsible. While Percy has seen those truly singular Greek demigods who fight for no one but themselves, he knows that he was not made for that solitary life. Camp Jupiter grants him the opportunity to fight with fellow soldiers and live in a close community.

There is a subtle difference (which is generally filled with tension) from the gods of ancient Greece to ancient Rome, but large enough that Riordan can pull it out and play with it. The gods of the Roman Empire were a part of a strict hierarchy instead of the loose Greeks. The Romans appreciated that the gods were meant to work together as a unit, but much less involved in the lives of the mortals. Jason recognizes the fact that he will never meet his father at Camp Jupiter but has a chance at Camp Half-Blood. It is not his choice alone for his father to stay away; rather the Romans do not like their gods physically interfering in their business (though they do appreciate their prayers and

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39 Camp Half-Blood is split into twelve cabins in the first series and then is expanded because of Percy’s demands on the gods at the end of the first series. Each god, no matter how minor, has a cabin at Camp Half-Blood now, and they all have to claim their children by their twelfth birthday.

40 The House of Hades, p. 434
sacrifices being answered), so it does not happen. Though the gods are the higher beings, they are exactly what the heroes make them. Therefore, they need to be brought together just as much as the two camps.

Even with all of this tension between the two sides, there is one goddess who sees that each side must get along so that Olympus, which is the seat of Western culture, continues. Hera/Juno recognizes that the gods need their heroes just as they have always needed them. In fact, she seems to have recognized the problem years before even the Titanomachy happened in Percy Jackson. In this decision the goddesses are one united force. However, her importance differs between the two camps. For the Romans, Juno does not lose any of her rightful power as queen of the gods. The Greeks, on the other hand, do not respect her because she is disrespected by everyone on Olympus. Even though many of the heroes openly dislike her, Hera/Juno knows that she needs them as much as they need her for the survival of Olympus. She is one of the most unified goddesses because both halves know that for the continuation of her family, which is the most important thing for the modern goddess of marriage, she needs to complete the puzzle. She does not want to have a split personality like the rest of her family.

Part of Hera’s family includes Greek demigods, specifically Annabeth. She can work with others, when she has to, but clearly she likes to go at things alone. The other six naturally look to Annabeth for leadership while aboard the Argo II, the ship Leo built and the one that the seven demigods are taking to Italy and Greece, because she is the one that has the plan. She does not always share he plan right away, but heroes, like the ones at Camp Half-Blood, have learned to trust her judgment. She could only have that kind of opportunity with the Greeks. Annabeth is not a hero that could easily get along with the
Romans, but that is due more to the slight the Romans did to Athena in her transition to their pantheon. Athena charges Annabeth with the special quest of getting her statue, Athena Parthenos, back to its rightful place with the Greeks. It is one of her greatest struggles because she must do it alone, and she realizes, as the quest progresses, that there are many good, strategic choices but not all are easy. “Now she realized that the hardest test for a child of Athena wasn’t leading a quest or facing death in combat. It was making the strategic decision to step back, to let someone else take the brunt of the danger – especially when that person was your friend.”

Annabeth loves her friends as much as Percy, but she does not sacrifice for them the same way. She knows that doing what is right is not the same as easy.

However, Annabeth is not the only one that continually makes sacrifices along the way to Greece. Leo, son of Hephaestus, was chosen at his birth for this quest, but he has lost almost everyone and everything he loves along the way. He lost his mother when he is young and then his entire family turned against him. Then when he thinks he has found a new friend in the mechanical dragon Festus, the dragon gets destroyed as well. He even has to leave Calypso and her island, as every hero who visits her must, just when he finds true comfort in another human form. Leo’s journey has not been any easier than Annabeth’s, but like her he is the epitome of what it means to be a Greek hero. He is working with his other campers and other quest seekers, but he does it better alone. He alone knows how to work the Argo II, which is not actually strange because it is so technical, but he does not even try to teach the others how to fix it. Leo is a loner even among his fellow Hephaestus cabin-mates; he holds onto his greatest ideas until he is able

41 The House of Hades, p. 530
to get the recognition that he deserves. He works with the others, but only up to a certain point.

Then on the other side of the spectrum are the Romans. Frank, as an excellent example of what it means to be Romans, is so completely so because he is the son of Mars. His father is the second most revered god for the Romans because of Romulus and Remus were also born sons of Mars. Duty, honor, devotion to Rome were all very important characteristics for a good Roman to possess. It is a little harder for Frank to come to terms that this is what it means to be the son of Mars, but it is not something that he has to work hard for because it is so ingrained. It takes Frank a while to understand that, even though his family has been a part of so many cultures, he is right where he belongs. Mars tells him that he is on this huge quest because Frank knows what it means to follow duty and thus making him the most important part of fighting the war. Frank shows loyalty and duty to his fellow heroes and his father when they are in Venice by eradicating the *katoblepones*, and thus uniting Ares and Mars for a moment of time. The *katoblepones* are much scarier than their description, an elephant sized anteater, would imply. It is a great feat of strength on Frank’s part to eradicate the city of them. Both sides could agree that he proved himself worthy to be the son of the god of war, an act that was not easy but necessary.

Frank also possesses the same leadership that Annabeth exhibits, but he is more reluctant to take up the mantle in the beginning. It is a right and privilege to command a

42 *The Son of Neptune*, p. 364
43 A monster that Riordan describes as breeding like rabbits. The *katoblepones* are generally passive unless a demigod is around, then they spray a deadly gas in the face of the heroes. They were transported over from Egypt in a cargo that possessed some relics of St. Mark, according to the minor god, Triptolemus.
44 *The House of Hades*, p. 152
legion, yet it scares him because it is such an important role. Mars tells him that all great heroes feel fear, but only the best can face it head on. Frank has grown into a hero worthy of being called a son of Mars and helping on the quest to stop Gaea. His path is not to lead all of these heroes, but simply to keep them on task. Even though he has gained power, Frank still feels too young and inexperienced to lead these heroes, but that is what makes him one of the best leaders for them. Frank is not out for individual glory like a Greek leader might be. He is more interested in keeping his friends alive until the end. He leads because he has the ability and it is forces itself upon him, not because it is his strongest wish. He is like Cincinnatus, who was a regular citizen whom the Romans made dictator in order to run the enemy out of Rome and then he gave up the power right after they left, in that way, he would gladly give up his leadership once the war is over.

Percy and Jason are a bridge between the two camps because they will be the only ones who can bring the sides together. Jason possesses what should be all of the natural Roman characteristics, like bravery and loyalty and strong leadership, but he has a desire for something a little more freeing. While Percy knows what it means to work together with an entire camp, though the participants were a little less than willing, rather than fighting for his singular glory. He knows what it means to work with an army, and it was one of his triumphs. These two heroes were meant to work together to unite the two camps. A son of Jupiter and a son of Poseidon are natural born leaders, and these two are the heart of their respective camps. When Percy goes missing, the entire camp is out there searching for him, though they are lead to Jason instead. While Camp Jupiter is leery of any stranger that comes to them who might be as powerful as Jason. Their camps need

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45 *The House of Hades*, p. 150
them. That is why Juno/Hera's plan works out well, she chooses heroes who are not perfect for their mold, but will fit the one she has for the future. Percy and Jason are beloved, eventually by both camps, which is the perfect opening for a connection.

Since Percy has never fit the mold of a Greek hero out for praise, he has a chance of fitting into this new mold. His incredible uniqueness while at Camp Jupiter is the more important thing to pull out now. When he first arrives the other Romans are wary of him because a) he is the son of a sea god and b) he possesses the power of the sea thanks to his father, making him stronger than the rest. The Romans were not as inclined to the sea as the Greeks were; in fact it scared them more than enticed them. The Romans did travel and have a navy, but they were not seafarers like the Greeks. Neptune is a god that is not disrespected, but certainly not exalted. So Percy does not fit their norm from the beginning, but he can handle it because he has always been an outsider. He quickly learns that he does not fit in with the Romans because he knows what it means to be an individual and respected for his power. That being said, he also knows when to shut up and work with what he's got. Percy knows that he has to play along with Hera/Juno's game in order to get his memory back which means he needs to be Roman for a little while.

Meanwhile, Jason is at Camp Half-Blood learning what it means to not have to lead an entire legion. He was one of the praetors for Camp Jupiter, which put a lot of power and responsibility upon his shoulders. The Greeks offer him a chance to work with others and have fun rather than always having to be prepared for war. Jason is given an option that most other demigods never get, and he takes full advantage of it. At Camp Half-Blood he gets to have a girlfriend, Piper, and best friend, Leo, without feeling like
he is betraying the rest of his fellow heroes. The Greeks do not trust him right away because Percy is missing, but they are more willing to let him slide in because he is the son of the king of the gods and because he knows how to fight. The Greeks are willing to trust a fellow warrior even though there is the chance that he is a spy.

There is something to be said about a hero who fits no mold yet can work with every decent man and woman. Percy does not allow anyone to put him down; Clarisse in the first series and then Octavian in New Rome, which is the city connected to Camp Jupiter where the retired soldiers live, try. It is a part of his nature to stand up for what is right, which is not something done by everyone. That is one of the key reasons Hera/Juno can exchange him for Jason, he has the greatest desire to do what is right for everyone not only himself. That would lend him to a more Roman hero, but Percy likes to leave ranks more often than is suitable for a legion soldier. During his first foray into Roman games, Percy convinces Frank and Hazel to break the general formation of the Roman ground forces.\textsuperscript{46} He wants to win, and if that means that he has to go out on his own, then he will. He cannot fit anywhere perfectly so he must become a bridge. He stands between with Jason the two and welcomes both sides.

The queen of the gods creates a bridge to help the gods reconnect as well as the camps. She knows that the gods could never go through a war against the giants without both camps. Neither camp is completely whole because they have only taken the strongest aspects from their ancient counterparts. She believes that they can create a new,

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{The Son of Neptune}, pp. 121-141. The games themselves are similar to that of Capture the Flag that Camp Half-Blood plays. However, for the Romans it is a much more a game of war; they build forts and then tear them down at the end of the night’s campaign. Whereas Capture the Flag is about making alliances, but still being out for number one (cabin).
modern hero, one born from their ancient heritage and culture around them. When the
gods separated the two camps, they split themselves. The gods do not change, and that is
part of their appeal and their downfall. Percy started a change in the gods at the end of the
Second Titanomachy, but there is only so much a god can change for a hero before he
realizes he is the one with power. The Greek gods never had to go through a revolution
by their heroes, yet that is exactly what they would need in order to see how much more
forward the world is. However, they decided after the American Civil War to keep the
two sides independent because it was too complicated for some. Athena cannot stand her
Roman alter ego Minerva, thus making hers the most complicated. *The Mark of Athena* is
about connecting her two halves, though. The Romans already have a goddess of war,
Bellona, so they push Athena into the goddess Minerva thereby limiting her power. It is a
long-standing slap in the face to the Greeks because Athena is such a beloved goddess.
Since the gods are not whole, their children are not connected, which makes it difficult
for them to defeat their enemies.

Athena’s is the most significant change, however the other gods also go through a
change in their personalities. For some gods it is a more business-like attitude, others it
involves a completely new light. The few times Pluto talks to his daughter, Hazel, it is
clear that he is only slightly less grumpy and a bit less demanding than his Greek half,
Hades. He is not a god to change, much more than getting involved since he is one of the
oldest Olympians. He holds the dead and there is not much else that can be changed due
to his realm. Then there are gods who are much more important to the Romans than their
Greek counterparts, like Mars. His change from Ares, therefore, means a lot more to each
side. To the Romans Mars is placed in a seat of honor just below Jupiter; he possesses the
glory of battle that the Greeks always deny Ares. The Romans have a different amount of respect for their gods, which also helps to keep that business like distance between them. The gods do not give prophecies (like the Delphic Oracle does for the Greeks), much less stop in a make a proclamation. However, Juno and Mars show themselves to Camp Jupiter to prove that Percy is to be trusted, respected, and a little feared. This is the beginning of the change from the older ways to a hopefully better one.

The demigods are still representatives on their divine parents, and they show the tension that builds between the two facets of the gods and the camps. For many gods, like Minerva/Athena and Bacchus/Dionysus, the change from Roman to Greek, or the other way around, is very significant. They are good when they are allowed to remain independent of the other, but when the two sides both want to manifest the gods get into trouble. Jason meets the South Wind and laments that the god cannot be Auster, his Roman half, or Notus, his Greek one. The South Wind in turn says to him "You have blown from place to place. You are undecided. You change day to day...It is time to choose a direction." The heroes are changeable as much as the gods, though they do not realize that they have an option. However, there are a few exceptions to the rule, like Nemesis and Aphrodite (though she goes by Venus in Rome) that do not have to change because the very idea of the god stays the same. Nemesis tells Leo that the Romans did not want to claim her by giving her a Roman name. Hazel even mentions how the Romans call Thanatos by his Greek name because he can stay exactly the same. Even so the heroes are the ones who choose which god looks upon them. They exist because people still want them around.

47 The House of Hades, p. 433
48 The Mark of Athena, p. 72
49 The Son of Neptune, p. 169
The gods of Rome are shown to be a lot more distant during the hero’s lifetime, something that is appealing to a demigod like Percy. They also leave it up to an augur to read their signs of the future rather than having direct contact like the Delphic Oracle. Camp Jupiter is a safe haven, a unique aspect that entices Percy to believe it is a better option for him: there is a chance for a future, to have a family with Annabeth, to grow old. Some of the heroes in the legion are demigods while others are many times removed from the divine parentage, but everyone who is at Camp Jupiter has some connection to the Roman side of Mount Olympus. His divine parentage would not make him an outsider if he wanted to join full time. That is what unifies them and allows them to continue living there long after their service to the legion is complete. Like the military of old, Camp Jupiter requires at least ten years of service to the legion before the soldier can retire. The Romans take care of their own, just like the ancient Romans. However, a modern hero often desires to prove his or her worth so he or she has to step outside the regular bonds. Frank reminds Reyna that "Great leaders have to think outside the box sometimes," which includes breaking the laws every now and then.\[50\] That is why these Romans are not their ancient counterparts. Reyna may have qualms about disobeying the legion law, but she does it anyway because she knows what is right. The Roman heroes have this opportunity to branch out because they all know that they are more or less equals.

Riordan makes sure his readers know that the Romans have their own unique culture, but that does not mean that their new home in America excludes them from working with the Greeks. Together the two can create a new way for heroes so that they

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\[50\] The House of Hades, p. 569
are no longer limited to one way. People can change; it takes a lot of effort and time though. In the end it is worth it because then they have their own culture to pass on.
Conclusion

Myth is about the continuation of culture and understanding what our society wants to believe of itself. Ultimately we choose what myths we like and still think apply to us, and then we pass them down. We, as modern readers, like the fantastical aspect myths give us as well. They are there for our entertainment and learning same as they were for the ancient Greeks and Romans. By the time these myths have gotten to the present, there have been so many variations already, but they are still loved. It all comes down to what is taken away from the myth that makes it count.

As for modern writers, they look for what they want in a myth and how it will aid them in their own story telling. They are writing to the people – not the gods, not the people of yesterday – but their own readers. Myth is about the people whom it is written for or told to. The Greeks wrote for the Greeks; they were not concerned with how another culture would take it and move it differently. The Romans knew that they could influence other cultures with their myths because it had been that way for them. We now enjoy it because it is about the old and the new coming together to create something. Since Riordan knows about the old tales, he can make a connection with how that has not changed.

Riordan chooses to have morals in his stories where a Greek or Roman would not. It is about how one’s actions against another can affect everyone. The authors in antiquity were more concerned with how the gods reacted to humanities inequalities and not about how the humans treated each other. One could say that the *Iliad* is about how men treat one another, and in parts it is, but it is also about how the gods like to interact (and sometimes interfere) in humans’ lives. Riordan sets out, though, telling about the morals
he wants people to keep in mind. There is no doubt that he is trying to tell people that they are killing the planet with pollution and that bullies need to be stopped, but they are everywhere. Riordan does not hide his morals, but he includes them where the ancients would not.

It is what you do with it that counts, right? There are variations, emulations, and continuations. So many different names for mythology. It persists because we want it to. Readers love to be taken into another world, and myths do that. Whether they are from Greece or America does not matter. Whether they are para-historical or plan fantasy is beside the point. They can be defined once they are written. When they are read, they are magic, they are safety, they are information. Call myths what you want, but they are persistent and forever changing.
Bibliography


