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Introduction

Paul states that the Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series is one of the most popular series' in children's literature and that it creates an environment where the Classical Greek world is not only explored and understood but relevant to the life of the reader.¹ Riordan also creates a relatable character who, inspired by his own son, has dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) which makes him seem more empathic and realistic. Haley, his son, has long suffered with these conditions so Riordan uses them to make his character more relatable to young audiences. Due to Riordan's personal relationship with these disabilities, he ensures that they are not a disadvantage to a true hero. Riordan's way of explaining the origins of these conditions can be comforting to those who experience them as they are seen as cool. This is due to the advantage these conditions give demigods; dyslexia is the ability to read and understand ancient Greek and ADHD is what keeps them alive in battle and keeping them alert in dangerous situations. The whole series is narrated by Percy himself, giving everything a colloquial tone which helps make him such a relatable character to the intended audience. The series of books are intended for teenagers who are expected to grow with Percy as he experiences normal teenage life alongside the extraordinary world of the Olympians. This provides young people with a view into a time that they would not normally be interested in, and is also mirrored in films that will be discussed later in this work. So much of what is

¹ Zajko. 2017. P.231.

experienced in present day-to-day life has its roots in classical Greece but most people are not aware of it, which Riordan is working to change.

Classical reception is the examination of how Greek and Roman material has been reimagined and changed over time and the reasons behind this. It is also the study of the relationship between ancient life and the modern world and deciding where ancient materials belong in modern society,² including how the ancient texts have been read throughout history up to the modern day. Martindale goes as far as to say that the study of classical reception incorporates every work that is concerned with post-classical material,³ as the Greek culture and beliefs have been exposed to most of the world, either directly or through its connection to the Roman empire. Martindale argues that, because of this, the culture and beliefs have influenced all later works.

The role of classical reception is debated by scholars. There seems to be a consensus that studying reception is important but to what extent appears to be the dilemma. Zajko explains that some of the disagreements arise from the uncertain parameters of this field of study. Some scholars try to keep the original text separate from its receptions while others think they are one and the same and that trying to distance the ancient from the modern is futile.⁴ Their argument is that most of the literature originating from ancient Greece has been passed down through oral tradition and has being subject to change over the years, thus making it receptions of the original.

² Hardwick, Stray. 2008. P. 1-9

³ Martindale, Thomas. 2006. P. 1.

⁴ Zajko. 2017. P.1.

The first chapter of this dissertation discusses what makes a Greek hero, examining some of the more famous heroes of the time. By reading and analysing the Greek stories and the heroes involved, common strands of experiences and characteristics become evident and their importance to the lives and beliefs of the heroes themselves. Connections to the divine, their monster slaying ability, bravery and their perception of immortality will emerge. These examples will be analysed to determine what makes a Greek hero and the importance of their actions.

The second chapter will move on to modern heroes where three of the most notable characteristics will be discussed: selflessness and sacrifice; kindness and virtue; and loyalty, with an emphasis on how Christianity has played a role in ideas of what a hero should be. While classifying Jesus himself as a 'hero' could be a delicate matter it is clear to see the influence he and the Christian religion have had on present ideas of heroism. Catholicism's connection to the ancient pagan beliefs of ancient Greece and Rome has been a vigorously discussed topic between scholars, specifically through the Medieval church and its teachings. Clark describes how classical myths found their way into the curriculum in monasteries and cathedrals but in an altered, catholic friendly way.⁵ The dissertation will examine how Greek myth itself has been altered to fit modern ideals of a hero, especially in the genre of children's media. It will focus mainly on the film *Hercules* by Disney and the 2010 film *Clash of the Titans* both of which follow the refashioned stories of famous Greek heroes.

⁵ Zajko. 2017. P.3.

The final chapter of this dissertation will pertain to Percy Jackson and how he compares to the heroes already examined. His character will be analysed and compared to the previous characteristics to ensure that he can be defined in the terms highlighted in previous chapters. His heroism cannot be denied, he is often referred to as a hero throughout the series of books, but what kind of hero is Percy Jackson?

Chapter 1: Ancient Heroism

The heroes of Ancient Greece are usually concerned with a time before ordinary mortals. The fifth race in Hesiod's *Work and Days* is described as the race of heroes, a term used for an individual and for the collective.⁶ He describes that after the Bronze Age a new race was born 'a divine race of men who were heroes' which includes all the men who fought in the Theban and Trojan wars, as well as the traditional heroes like Herakles, Theseus and Perseus.

Homer also uses the term collectively to describe every man involved in the Trojan war and the term is also used to describe the specific heroes who are at the forefront of the narrative. Lord writes that Homeric heroes are fuelled and motivated by greed and terror comparing their actions to piracy.

The research for this dissertation has highlighted the four most important characteristics of Greek heroes which will be analysed and explained in this chapter to determine whether being a Greek hero is something that can be defined. The characteristics to be explored are: connections to the divine; monster slaying; bravery; and their perception of immortality. These will be analysed with regard to the previously mentioned ancient heroes.

⁶ Hes. Wor. 160

Connections to the Divine

The gods on Olympus are often involved in the stories and lives of heroes either through birth, allies or enemies. Heroes of Greek mythology are bound tightly to the Olympians and there is hardly a myth that does not include a hero or a god.

Herakles' life began when Zeus interfered in the life of a mortal woman, Alcmene.⁷ By being half-divine, Herakles starts his life a step up from other mortals and therefore with higher expectations of him. His lineage causes him problems, however, as it creates an enemy of Hera.⁸ Zeus does not appear to help Heracles in his quests but remains on the side-lines. Odysseus, too, has strong connections to the divine but, unlike Herakles, not through birth. Odysseus is completely mortal but has a strong alliance with Athena, who helps him constantly throughout the *Odyssey*, keeping him safe and even disguising him on his return to Ithaca.⁹ This relationship works by increasing Odysseus' status having been chosen as an ally by an immortal, and exaggerates his skills, especially his wisdom, as this is what the goddess is renowned for. The ability to impress an immortal is what is important here, he is not romantically involved, as many mortals in myth are, nor biologically related but his connection is still undeniable. Athena is also prominent in the story of Perseus, together with Hermes, who helps the hero along the way. According to Apollodorus, the gods help Perseus find the

⁷ Apol. *Lib.* 2.4.8

⁸ Apol. *Lib.* 2.4.8.

⁹ Hom. *Ody.* 13:189-92.

daughter of Phorcos who tell them of the location of the Gorgans and lead them to the nymphs who bestow gifts on them.¹⁰ Athena is involved in transforming Medusa and is disgusted by her presence and so, in this case, is interested in revenge against Medusa rather than out of respect for Perseus. Athena encourages the quest, telling Perseus where to go and how to succeed, resulting in the death of Medusa.¹¹ Although Athena's motivation is different here, in comparison to her alliance with Odysseus, the outcome is still the same, Perseus gains *kleos*¹² and the respect of being called a hero.

Herakles' story is also altered by his immortal enemy Hera, scorned wife of Zeus. Throughout his story, Herakles has to deal with Hera's interference and troublemaking, including inflicting insanity on him which causes him to kill his first family.¹³ These divine connections, although negative, shows that Herakles is superior in comparison to regular mortals and should, therefore, be treated thus. Odysseus too found an immortal enemy in Poseidon, who is against all the Greeks who fought at Troy, and also is offended when Odysseus blinds Poseidon's son, Polyphemus.¹⁴ Having an immortal enemy sets the hero apart from the other mortals especially when, as in Odysseus' case, the hero apparently defeats the immortal.

A connection to the divine is important in the makeup of an ancient hero which, it could be argued that, could be due to the strong link at this time of piety and religion.

¹⁰ Apol. *Lib.* 2:4.2

¹¹ Apol. *Lib.* 2:4.3

¹² *Kleos* is the Greek term for glory.

¹³ Apol. *Lib.* 2:4.12

¹⁴ Hom. *Ody.* 9:382

Monster Slaying Ability

Many encounters between the heroes of Greek myth and their enemies are often seen as, not just good versus evil, but civil versus barbarians. This triumph of civilisation is extremely important for the heroes of Greek myth and the stories they tell. This role of the bringer of civilisation is seen through the patriotism of the heroes, and their followers. For each of the heroes, there is a significant city state in Greece that owes its founding and prosperity to them: Theseus is credited for bringing civilisation and independence to Athens through his encounter with the Minotaur; Perseus is recognised as being the legendary founder of Mycenae and the Perseid dynasty; Herakles is known, not only for bringing civilisation to Thebes, but also for cleansing Greece from its monstrous enemies.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷ Rome too incorporated Herakles into its foundation myth through the story of Herakles, known to the Romans as Hercules, as he defeats the monster Cacus in the land that would one day become Rome.¹⁸

Probably the most well-known example of Greek monster slaying is that of Herakles and his twelve labours. During the twelve tasks, Herakles is shown fighting a multitude of disparate monsters all of which need to be battled against in different ways.¹⁹ The diversity of his labours exemplifies his extraordinary abilities in dealing with monsters and also his ability to adapt to different situations. His efficiency in obtaining and destroying

¹⁵ *Apol. Lib.* 3:16.1

¹⁶ *Apol. Lib.* 2:4.5

¹⁷ *Apol. Lib.* 2:7.8

¹⁸ *Vir, Aen.* 8.190-268.

¹⁹ *Apol. Lib.* 2:5

monsters gives Herakles the title of “most emblematic and most singular of Greek heroes”.²⁰ Sabine expresses the deeds of Herakles with such awe and respect that it can be seen that even in this modern time, the story of Herakles’ skill still resonates with audiences.

The monsters being slain are often impossible to defeat, Theseus’ famous encounter with the Minotaur being an excellent example of this.²¹ According to Apollodorus, there was a long custom of Athenians being sacrificed to the monstrous Minotaur of Crete with an emphasis on the longevity of the tradition and how crippling it became to the Athenian people.²² Theseus, albeit with the help of Ariadne, successfully kills the Minotaur and relieves the Athenians from the stress of selection.

There is also the significance of the monsters representing the anger of the gods. Perseus’ quest is to find and destroy the Gorgon Medusa who is able to turn her enemies into stone.²³ Athena has not forgiven Medusa for her actions that lead to her monstrous transformation. The monster in this case is a personification of Athena’s anger and sadness and by Perseus killing Medusa he is eradicating that anger. In contrast, when Perseus kills the sea creature that is terrorising Andromeda he is seemingly defying the god’s wishes.²⁴ Andromeda is sent as a sacrifice by the god Poseidon as a punishment for her mother proclaiming that Andromeda is more beautiful

²⁰ Albermeier. 1967. P. 31

²¹ Apol. *Lib.* Epit:1.9.

²² Apol. *Lib.* 3:15.8

²³ Apol. *Lib.* 2:4.2

²⁴ Apol. *Lib.* 2:4.3

than all the nereids. By Perseus killing the monster he is preventing the sacrifice from taking place and stops Poseidon taking his revenge.

Bravery

The Oxford Dictionary defines a hero as ‘a person noted for courage’ which emphasises the importance of bravery in a hero’s life.²⁵ Bravery is a characteristic that is paramount for any hero, and Greek heroes are often thought to be the bravest of all. Here specific moments of heroism will be analysed that shows the level of the heroes’ bravery and explain why heroes are not expected to be brave all the time.

Many Greek heroes are involved in wars; Achilles, most notably in the Iliad.²⁶ He constantly faces the dangers of war and is often the highlight of Homer’s narrative. Achilles’ *aristeia*²⁷ takes place after Achilles finds out about Patroclus’ death and receives the armour from Hephaestus.²⁸ He rampages through the Trojan army cutting down everyone in his path before finally facing Hektor and taking his revenge.²⁹ From the arming scene to his actual fighting, Achilles’ strength and skill is seen in battle. Achilles knows before joining the army against the Trojans that he will die if he fights. His charging into battle shows that he is acting out of true valour and bravery. Emerging from his tent, Achilles makes the ‘knees of all the Trojans quake beneath them in their terror’³⁰ presenting him as a formidable force, but his bravery is not the only factor to be taken into account, his anger for example, is also evident throughout this episode.

²⁵ Thompson. 1995. P. 635.

²⁶ Hom. *Ody.* 1:1.

²⁷ A dramatic scene which shows the true valour and skill of a Hero

²⁸ Hom. *Ody.* 19: 1-10

²⁹ Hom. *Ody.* 22:400-5

³⁰ Hom, *Ody.* 20:79-81

Heracles is often regarded as the bravest hero of all as every one of his labours needs extreme bravery to be successful. Apollodorus describes the Nemean lion as ‘invulnerable’ and describes each of the trials in terrifying ways.³¹ He makes each labour sound almost impossible, portraying him as being all the more skilful and brave. In Apollodorus’ account, the twelve labours are only the start of Heracles’ heroic story, which includes the first sacking of Troy and campaigns in the Peloponnese.³²

A hero’s bravery does not, however, need to be discernible at all times. Before the Trojan war many of the heroes famously try to avoid being called to battle. Odysseus tries to avoid war by pleading insanity, and is caught when Telemachus, his new born baby, is almost killed and Odysseus, who is of sound mind, stops the plough and saves his baby.³³ Achilles spends the majority of the Iliad sitting out of the war, an action that although is not accounted for by cowardly intent, is not a brave act.³⁴ It can be deduced that the making of a hero is from a few heroic acts, not by being a hero all the time. When analysing what it means to be a hero it entails looking at specific examples of heroism.

³¹ ‘Nemean lion; this was an invulnerable beast fathered by Typhon.’ – Apol. *Lib.* 2:5.1

³² Apol. *Lib.* 2:6.4-7.4

³³ Apol. *Lib.* Epit:3.7.

³⁴ Hom, *Ody.* 1:488-93

Perception of One's Immortality

A hero's connection and appreciation of immortality is something that many scholars believe is what sets them apart from other mortals. Many Greek heroes are descended from gods, making them semi-divine. As they bridge the gap between mortals and immortals they are seen as striving for immortality rather than a normal mortal life. Whitman describes the heroes of Greek myth as being set apart by their 'urge toward divinity' and exemplifies their wish to be a god or godlike.³⁵ There is also a contradiction in the need for immortality, as a hero is often glorified by their death,³⁶ they have to face mortality and then transcend it to become a true hero.

The way in which they can transcend mortality is to ensure that they are remembered through time for their deeds and stories. Greek heroes appear to go to great lengths in order to make this happen. In both the story of Herakles and Achilles they are given the option of having a long and quiet life or a short and glorious one.³⁷ Their choice of the latter highlights that it is not a fear of death that makes heroes strive for immortality but rather a need for *kleos* and glory and a desire to be remembered over time. Fajaro-Acosta, who seems to have a very negative view of heroes, suggests that the heroes are motivated by 'self-elevation and self-glorification', characteristics that have often crippled society.³⁸ This selfish agenda, that many believe is what fuels the actions of heroes, is primarily based on striving for the almost

³⁵ Whitman. 1982. P.21,25-7.

³⁶ Sabine. P.11.

³⁷ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.21-34

³⁸ Fajaro-Acosta. 1990. P.11-12.

unachievable. Whitman even goes as far as to say that these attempts are ultimately futile.

There is a tradition of hero-worship in ancient Greece which involves many heroes having a cult following and being worshiped as a god with their own temples all over the ancient world.³⁹⁴⁰ Many heroes, such as Ajax and Achilles, although they had a few temples scattered around the ancient Greek empire there is no literary evidence to suggest that these heroes were transformed into gods and were welcome onto Olympus. Three heroes achieve a place on Olympus as a part of their story, Herakles, Dionysus and Asclepius are all granted immortality in literature. There are many differing versions of Dionysus' story but all agree that he becomes a god during his lifetime, and achieves hero status. Both Herakles and Asclepius live significant lives and die in ways that the gods think are unfit for their domain. According to Apollodorus, Herakles is killed by his wife after she unknowingly poisons his cloak. As he lies on his funeral pyre he is lifted up to Olympus where he reconciled with Hera and marries Hebe.⁴¹ Asclepius is killed by Zeus after bringing someone back to life and accepting money for the deed which starts a feud with Apollo, Asclepius' father.⁴² As these deaths do not fit the splendour one expects of a hero, they are rewarded for their heroism by becoming gods: Herakles becomes the gatekeeper to Olympus and Asclepius becomes the god of medicine.

³⁹ For more information about hero-worship in the ancient world see the Gifford lectures edited by Farnell.

⁴⁰ For more information of the structure of Greek Religion see 'A Companion to Greek Religion' edited by Ogden.

⁴¹ *Apo. Lib.* Pg 91.

⁴² *Phil. Pie.* 147.

The only record available of a hero turning down immortality is Odysseus who has been trapped on the island of Ogygia. Calypso explains that while on the island Odysseus will not age and can live eternally with her. Although he stays on the island for a few years, Odysseus does turn Calypso down and returns home to his wife.⁴³ Although there are many other factors that make him arrive at this decision it does highlight that immortality is not his main motivation.

⁴³ Hom. *Ody.* 5:262-8.

Conclusion

Examining the differing characteristics of the heroes of ancient Greece shows the difficulty in defining ancient heroism: as not all heroes possess all the examples discussed. There will always be anomalies and differences in each character's behaviour but the majority of Greek heroes share these specific features.

The actions of ancient heroes seem to be motivated by self-interest and self-glorification, making the characters themselves seem selfish and almost childish: Achilles attitude in the opening of the Iliad being an example of this. This is also seen through the desperation they possess to achieve immortality, whether being welcomed onto Olympus or immortalised in history.

This does not, however, make them unworthy of the title 'hero' as they still fought the creatures that endangered humanity and protected the sanctity of civilisation, a construct that the Greeks were very proud of. There are many acts that, regardless of motivation, are heroic in their own right thus making the heroes truly heroic; Perseus and Medusa and Theseus and the Minotaur are just a few.

It must also be remembered that although these heroes are thought of as fictional today, they are history to those who first knew of the stories.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Diodorus Siculus' work is called a history but starts with a mythological section.

The legacy of these heroes has survived as legend and history before myth making their actions subject to the admiration by the original audience.

Chapter 2: Modern Heroism

In the modern Western world, the idea of heroism is clearly split between ‘regular’ heroes and superheroes. Superheroes are fictitious characters that have super human features, like flight, super speed or strength.⁴⁵ A ‘regular’ hero, can still be fictitious, but has to be a realistic character. Both types of modern hero will be discussed and analysed, how they are similar and why, bearing in mind the constraints that ‘regular’ heroes have to confine themselves to, and the disadvantages they have in comparison to their superhuman counterparts.

There are a lot of similarities between Greek heroes and modern heroes as our modern culture has been influenced by Greek culture, either directly or through the expansion of the Roman Empire.⁴⁶ This creates a familiarity between the aspects of heroism. Bravery for instance, is a common similarity but more emphasised in ancient heroes who are renowned for their heroism. Another influence on our concept of heroism is Christianity. With the expansion of Christianity, the idea and person of Jesus and his deeds are spread throughout the world; the story of Jesus emphasising morality and care, and highlighting the characteristics that are discussed in this work. Saint Paul writes letters, that are published in the Bible, to the Romans, explaining the Good News of Jesus Christ and how the people of Rome would

⁴⁵ Oxford dictionary defines a superhero as ‘a fictional character with extraordinary heroic attributes’. – Thompson. 1995. 1399

⁴⁶ There is good discussion of this in the first part of ‘a companion to classical reception’. Hardwick and Stray. 2008.

benefit from worshipping him.⁴⁷ In these letters Paul also explains the kindness and sacrifice that Jesus went through when he died on the cross.⁴⁸

Under discussion will be the three most notable traits of modern heroes: selflessness and sacrifice; kindness and virtue; and loyalty; using examples from both fiction and real life. Also included will be Greek myth itself and how it has been changed and altered to suit modern audiences.

⁴⁷ Romans 1:1-7.

⁴⁸ Romans 5:12-19.

Selflessness and Self-sacrifice

Self-sacrifice is a recurring theme in contemporary characters and people defined as heroes, seemingly stemming from the sacrifice that is told through Christian faith and the Passion of Christ.⁴⁹ Sacrifice is not only shown through the sacrifice of life but also the sacrifice of time and effort for others and what is right. Selflessness is defined as having a disregard for your own interests while self-sacrifice is the act of negotiating your own wishes in favour of the wishes of others.⁵⁰

During the battle of Hogwarts in the final Harry Potter book, Harry goes to face Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest, with the intention of sacrificing himself in order to save everyone else and to ensure that Voldemort can be killed.⁵¹ Harry, invisible, walks through the castle and the grounds seeing all the pain and destruction that the war has caused to his friends and his guilt is clearly portrayed. Upon seeing Ginny on, we hear him wishing that she would notice him and that ‘he wanted to be stopped’.⁵² His fear and trepidation only intensify the sacrifice he is making. Harry, however, does not remain dead and returns to face, and destroy, Voldemort once and for all. Although he did not die, the intention was there to end his life for others. This is illustrated in Voldemort’s inability to cast spells on Harry’s allies.⁵³

⁴⁹ Matthew 27:32-61, Mark 15:21-47, Luke 22:26-56, John 19:12-42

⁵⁰ Thompson. 1995. 1256.

⁵¹ A plan explained by Dumbledore to Snape in the 33rd chapter. Rowling. 2007. 688

⁵² Rowling. 2007. 695.

⁵³ Rowling. 2007. 727

It is not only fictional characters that show great selflessness and sacrifice. Soldiers and others who go off to war are constantly putting their lives on the line, many dying, for the sake of others. War is a very controversial topic with many disagreeing with the causes of war and the actions taken during war, but no matter the view of war people fighting are risking and sacrificing their lives for others. They are labelled heroes. Siddiqui labels Fazal Dinas the number one world's greatest hero as, after being impaled, he still managed to defeat the Japanese soldiers against him and make his way back to camp before he died.⁵⁴ These actions of bravery and sacrifice are extraordinary and are necessary and important to modern heroes.

Nelson Mandela is an example of great self-sacrifice, his activist work and his struggle for racial equality in South Africa led to his imprisonment for almost thirty years. Although Mandela did not die for others, he sacrificed thirty years of his life in prison and years before, and after, in the continuous fight against until the end of apartheid and his appointment to President. While he benefited from his sacrifice, so did the countless number of people whose lives improved after apartheid ended. He is still considered one of the greatest heroes in the fight against apartheid and of modern times. Mandela was also not aware that his imprisonment would ever end proving that he was acting for the good of others.⁵⁵ He says of himself that 'a good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination' and that 'our human compassion binds us the one to the other – not in pity or

⁵⁴ Saddiqui. 2014.

⁵⁵ Benson. 1986. p.165

patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.’⁵⁶

To be self-sacrificing a hero does not have to die, or intend to, but dedicates an extensive period of time to others who’s need ‘is higher or more urgent’⁵⁷. This includes, but is not limited to, prison time, charity work and the protection of others.

⁵⁶ Starryskies. 2013.

⁵⁷ Thompson. 1995. 726.

Kindness and Virtue

Kindness is a trait that is often instilled in children as one of the most important virtues to have. Virtue is defined as ‘moral excellence’ and goodness.⁵⁸ The characteristics of kindness and virtue combine to create the basis for what we now think of as a good person.

Adventure Time is a favourite of children’s cartoons, it follows the life of orphaned Finn ‘the human’ and his best friend Jake ‘the dog’. As the title suggests, the two go on adventures and, in many episodes, Finn’s heroism and ‘righteousness’ is exemplified. In the episode *Memories of Boom Boom Mountain*, Finn wrestles with the need to help and make everyone happy, a feat which proves almost impossible. He ignores Jake’s negativity and, after a few failed attempts, succeeds in making everyone happy. This need stems from him being abandoned as a child and crying in the woods without help. He then vows that he will help anyone in need, no matter how small their problem. His kindness is what defines him as a hero in the tale.

The Enchiridion is an episode where Finn and Jake are quested to find the Enchiridion; the book that contains special instructions for heroes. In order to find the book a hero must go through a series of tasks and be righteous⁵⁹ throughout which Finn succeeds in doing. After using a dollar to escape from an ogre and save Jake, Finn feels bad and once they are safely away he returns the dollar to its rightful owner. He is told, by Princess

⁵⁸ Oxford Illustrated Dictionary. P. 919.

⁵⁹ Oxford Illustrated Dictionary defines as ‘*virtuous*’

Bubblegum, that one has to be a good person in order to succeed at the quest, an excellent lesson for the audience to learn.

Sir David Attenborough is one of the best loved personalities of his generation by the British public and well-known for his documentaries about the wilder parts of the world. He is constantly educating people about the wonders and dangers of the natural world. Although he is not a traditional hero he is an environmental hero as he is a great activist for environmental issues and protecting the environment. He is greatly respected for his work on climate change and how individuals can help slow down the process. His soft voice and gentle demeanour fits with his kind outlook on the human race and their place in the world. The care he puts into his work is astounding, he is still recording documentaries at almost ninety-three, setting an amazing and pure example to future generations.⁶⁰ He does not talk down to people, a trait that many of the older generation seem to have when talking to youth, which encourages people relate to him and listen to his message.

Kindness and virtue are the specific traits that many people believe define a modern hero. The need to be a righteous and morally good person is a common theme that runs not only through children's media, but through the whole of modern heroism.

⁶⁰ *Blue Planet II*. 2018.

Loyalty

To be loyal one must be unwavering in the commitment to duty, love and obligation.⁶¹ These are important characteristics in modern heroes as they instil an idea of being devoted to a cause and remaining faithful to the hierarchy. This section will focus on two epic fantasy novel series, *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, and their loyal heroes.

The heroes of the *Harry Potter* series are often portrayed as loyal, notably Severus Snape who, although it was not revealed to the reader until the end, supported Dumbledore and the Order throughout the series, even committing the murder of his beloved master. His loyalty is faultless and, although he does not treat most of the other characters with respect, he was always behind the scenes helping Harry.⁶² His loyalty falters when confronted with the plan for killing Dumbledore and later when he learns of Harry's fate but, after venting and hearing Dumbledore's reasoning, he understands the importance of his actions and accepts his role. This loyalty is vastly important to the character of Snape's character as throughout the series he is considered to be of him as a villain, an untrustworthy character, but because of his loyalty to Dumbledore and Lily he is seen as the hero he is.

Neville Longbottom and Hermione Granger are also portrayed as extremely loyal characters, both to Harry and Dumbledore. Neville's character really develops in the fifth book of the series when he defies the

⁶¹ Thompson. 1995. P. 810.

⁶² Rowling. 1997. P. 310.

rules and join the DA⁶³. In this book he ignores the Ministry and stands by Harry and Dumbledore. In the final book his loyalty reaches a new level when, during the battle of Hogwarts,⁶⁴ he stands up to Voldemort even when he thinks that Harry is dead and the battle seems lost. Hermione is always faithful to Harry and Dumbledore, always helping them and being there for Harry when he is lost or in trouble. She often demonstrates her loyalty as a friend but she seems to be taken for granted for much of the series, as both Harry and Ron make the assumption that she will always be there to help them out.

Samwise Gamgee is a fictional character from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy who is the best friend and confidante of the main character Frodo Baggins. He is fiercely loyal to Frodo which at times makes him seem unloving and uncaring especially towards Gollum. His loyalty, however, does not waver even when it seems Frodo is going down a dark path, Sam is still there to protect his friend.

Loyalty is seen to be an important trait for the modern hero but it seems that to command respect the character must question authority before succumbing to it. This could indicate that loyalty is strengthened by knowing one's mind and thoughts.

⁶³ Dumbledore's Army: A secret defence society that taught the students real defence against the dark arts while the subject was run by Professor Umbridge, an inadequate teacher and all round bully.

⁶⁴ The battle between the Order and the DA verses the army of Voldemort.

Modern Greek Myth

Greek mythology has always been an intriguing topic for modern literature and film with many films manipulating the stories of Greek heroes to fit with the period. By analysing the differences in the heroes' stories and examining why the changes occur could provide conclusions on how the idea of heroism has changed. The theme of Greek mythology seems more amenable to lending itself to many different scenarios as there have been many different versions of the myths over the years.

Disney's *Hercules* is an excellent example of this. The story of Heracles was altered even in ancient times, with the addition of Roman version.⁶⁵ Heracles being known as the 'greatest and strongest' of all Greek heroes, has made him the focal point for many films.⁶⁶ Disney manipulates the story of Heracles right from the beginning of his life. Heracles was born due to Zeus' rape of Alcamene but Disney, deciding this was not suitable for children, changes his heritage and makes him the son of Zeus and his wife Hera.

Throughout the film *Hercules* battles many monsters for the good of the people of Thebes, unlike the accepted theme that he was forced to do these tasks as punishment for killing his wife and children. This change emphasises to children watching that helping others is the appropriate action for them to take. At the end of the film *Hercules* is seen to turn down the chance of immortality in order to live a mortal life with Meg,⁶⁷ showing the

⁶⁵ Vir. *Aen.* 8.229.

⁶⁶ *Hercules*. John Musker. Ron Clements. 1997. 0.00.26

⁶⁷ *Hercules*. John Musker. Ron Clements. 1997. 1.25.10

audience that immortality, and self-gain as a whole, is not as important or fulfilling as a meaningful and loving life.

Zeus, while giving his son advice on how to be a hero, tells him that ‘a true hero is not judged by the size of his strength but by the strength of his heart.’⁶⁸ This, as already seen, is not a thought shared by many during ancient times so it can be deduced that this is the view of a modern hero. He must be caring and loving to be a true hero which is an excellent message to present in a children’s film.

The 2010 film *Clash of the Titans*, and the sequel *Wrath of the Titans*, follow the life of the Greek hero Perseus, but with changes to his character and story. In the film, Perseus is caught in a war between gods and mortals resulting in his family’s death.⁶⁹ This creates a platform for Perseus to fight for which is righteous and honest portraying him as a good role model for the audience. Hades is double crossing the gods and shown as the main villain throughout.⁷⁰ This means that Perseus is seen as fighting the ‘dark side’ and protecting the gods, a common theme in modern media which, again, creates a universal enemy.

Perseus declares that he will ‘serve you better as a man’ throughout the film with regards to being a demigod and a king.⁷¹ He is constantly downplaying his heroism and insisting that he would rather lose as a man than win as a god. His continuation of his quest after being told that he will

⁶⁸ *Hercules*. John Musker. Ron Clements. 1997. 1.24.26

⁶⁹ *Clash of the Titans*. Louis Leterrier. 2010. 0.08.55.

⁷⁰ *Clash of the Titans*. Louis Leterrier. 2010. 0.30.12.

⁷¹ *Clash of the Titans*. Louis Leterrier. 2010. 0.52.04.

die, shows that self-glorification and preservation are not traits that he regards highly, he would rather be true to himself and die for his friends.

Greek mythology and the stories of heroes are important to modern culture but from analysing the differences between the ancient examples of the heroes and modern versions it can be seen why and where the emphasis of modern heroism lies.

Conclusion

To be a modern hero, a person must be selfless, self-sacrificing, kind, virtuous and loyal while still retaining some of the behaviours of ancient heroes such as bravery. They can be fictions or real, super or ordinary but there must be this righteousness in their character. The X-man Colossus, in the 2016 film *Deadpool*, gave the title character an ultimatum at the end of the film. He says that being a hero is not a job that must be committed to all day everyday but that the status of a hero is defined by four or five moments where they are expected to ‘make a sacrifice, conquer a flaw, save a friend... or spare an enemy.’⁷² Ultimately Deadpool does not listen and still kills Francis but this cements him as an anti-hero. Colossus’ words are still an accurate representation of what a modern hero must do in order to be a true hero.

Modern representations of ancient heroes show that, although the actions remain mostly the same, the motivations behind the actions are either kind and selfless or, in the case of Disney’s *Hercules*, a lesson that needed to be learned. Trying to be a hero does not make you a hero but it is the love and kindness that a hero has which earns him the title.

⁷² *Deadpool*, Tim Miller. 2016. 1:35:09

Chapter 3: Percy Jacksons Heroism

This chapter will focus on how Percy Jackson fits into the definition of heroism using the characteristic examples already examined. The first series from the Percy Jackson world will be the focal point in this with selected examples from the second series, with the intention of creating the image of a well-rounded teen demigod and his actions.

Rick Riordan seamlessly fits the ancient world into America and does so in a way that almost makes it believable.⁷³ He was able to make his world plausible by the way he connects Western Civilisation to the Olympian gods. He makes it believable that the gods reside in America. This mythographic strategy is unique and interesting as even in the time of Homer or Hesiod, these myths and heroes were always kept in the heroic past or in distance lands and not part of the contemporary world.⁷⁴ This technique is rarely used in children's literature but is effective at making a relatable and realistic world for children to enjoy.

Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians is a five book series following the life of New York middle-schooler Percy Jackson as he discovers his true heritage as a child of the Olympian god Poseidon. On discovering his identity, he makes his way to Camp Half-blood, the only safe haven for Greek demigods situated in Long Island, New York, where he is taught to defend himself from the monsters that live outside the camp.⁷⁵ Most

⁷³ Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* does something very similar though is aimed at adults whereas Riordan's books are for children.

⁷⁴ Zajko, Hoyle. 2017. P. 235

⁷⁵ Riordan. 2005. P. 97.

of the campers stay for only the summer and usually leave when they are in collage trying to live in the mortal world. Young Percy has to endure four years of quests in order to save his friends and defeat the Titan Lord Cronus. He, along with his fellow demigods from Camp Half-blood, defeat the Titan army, securing the reign of Western Civilisation and the Olympians.⁷⁶

Riordan's complex world is extended in the second series, *Heroes of Olympus*, which introduces the Romans. Naturally if the Greek camp is situated in New York, the home of the Romans would be in the West, California to be exact. Unlike Camp Half-Blood, New Rome, the Roman equivalent, is a whole city created with military precision, where demigods live in safety, go to college, get married and even start families without the risk of monster attacks.⁷⁷ Percy is still involved in this series, teaming up with other demigods, both Greek and Roman, to travel to the ancient lands to battle Gaia and her giants. The first series sees the most growth in Percy's character as he transforms from a troubled teen who hated school to a hero who saves the world, the second series shows the progression and success of some of his intentions from the first series.

⁷⁶ Riordan. 2009a. P. 317.

⁷⁷ Riordan. 2011. P. 112.

Percy Jackson Vs. Ancient Hero

Percy's has many connections to the gods on Olympus, both positive and negative. Percy's father is Poseidon, god of the sea, a decision that Riordan makes thinking that having a hero who 'had to try a little bit harder because his dad was the second most powerful god, rather than the guy sitting on the big throne.'⁷⁸ His relationship with his father is unstable and is, in the beginning, unknown. Their first meeting shows Poseidon being unsure of how to act with his son, even referring to Percy's existence as his 'wrongdoing' which offends Percy.⁷⁹ This is one example of Percy being insecure in his relationship with his father.⁸⁰ He is unsure of how he should act or his expectations of the relationship but he is often seen hoping for a more intimate relationship with his father, especially in Book 2 when he hopes for some gratification for his actions throughout the book.⁸¹ Poseidon shows great love and pride for his son as their relationship grows; even referring to Percy as his favourite son and that he is more of a hero than Hercules.⁸² Even in ancient myth, heroes did not have much of a connection to their immortal fathers, a fact that they never tried to change. Heroes like Achilles and Aeneas both had good relationships with their immortal mothers which is indicative of the time as fathers were not expected to be in their children's lives.

⁷⁸ *An Interview with Rick*. 2015.

⁷⁹ Riordan. 2005. P. 340-2

⁸⁰ See also Riordan. 2006. P. 248, Riordan. 2008. P. 336-340, Riordan. 2009a. P. 325

⁸¹ Riordan. 2006. P. 248

⁸² Riordan. 2008. P. 339. Riordan. 2009a. P. 325

Percy's father is not the only Olympian god to help him through his travels but they usually have their own agendas. Apollo and Hermes help Percy by either giving gifts or helping him to get where he needs to be.⁸³ Apollo is helping in order to help save his twin, Artemis, and Hermes wants to help his son, Luke. This contrasts with Ares' role in the first book, as he is the enemy of Percy and his friends ending in them fighting on the beach.⁸⁴ The significance of an immortal enemy has already been explored and it is evident here. Although having fighting Ares causes conflict for Percy throughout his life at camp, specifically with the children of Ares,⁸⁵ it elevates Percy's station as he has defeated an immortal.

Percy fights many monsters throughout his years at Camp Half-blood from before he knew he was a demigod to the end of the series. The first monster is Mrs Dodds; one of the furies. She transforms from Percy's maths teacher into her natural form of a winged demon. At this point, Percy was unaware of his heritage and even without any heroic training manages to slice the monster and send her to Tartarus.⁸⁶ Again, before any training and without any weapon, Percy manages to kill the Minotaur.⁸⁷ These examples show that Percy was so skilled at killing monsters that he is able to do much without any training, it emphasizes Percy's heroism, especially as the furies are described as some of the worst monsters in the underworld. His skill improves with training and by the fourth book Percy is able to kill some of the most notorious monsters, including Geryon.

⁸³ Riordan. 2006. P. 93-101, 245-248. Riordan. 2007. P. 142-8.

⁸⁴ Riordan. 2005. P. 321-2

⁸⁵ Riordan. 2005. P. 355

⁸⁶ Riordan. 2005. P. 12-3.

⁸⁷ Riordan. 2005. P. 55

Percy's skill with water also increases over time as he learns more about himself. This is shown in the fight between Percy and Hyperion, the Titan of the East and of Light.⁸⁸ Percy uses his powers to counteract the light and fiery powers of the Titan eventually subduing him long enough so that the nature spirits and Satyrs are able to finally finish him off.⁸⁹ Percy's raw power over the element is a reminder that Percy is part god and has enormous, undeniable power. This is comparable to the inhuman physical strength we see from Herakles in myth, a power given to him due to his immortal heritage.

Percy shows his bravery throughout the series in many different ways,⁹⁰ often standing up to the gods and is shown to be unafraid of standing up to the immortals.⁹² He is constantly speaking his mind even though it often gets him into trouble, voicing hard truths. He informs Zeus of his suspicions of Cronus and later speaks out about the negative impacts of the gods' behaviour towards their children.⁹³ He also stands up to both Hades and Hera, and tells them off, pitting himself against immortal, all powerful beings.⁹⁴ He shows his bravery through his physical actions as well as his words. After successfully finding Annabeth and Artemis, Percy takes the sky off Artemis and has to endure its immense weight. The weight is so extraordinary that Artemis doubts that Percy could maintain the weight⁹⁵ but

⁸⁸ Riordan. 2009a. P. 230-1

⁸⁹ Riordan. 2009a. P. 232.

⁹⁰ Oxford Dictionary: 'Ready to face and endure danger or pain; showing courage.'

⁹¹ The other characteristics I have looked at also show Percy's bravery.

⁹² Riordan. 2005. P. 309-14. Riordan. 2005. P. 342-4. Riordan. 2009a. P. 331-3

⁹³ Riordan. 2005. P. 342-4. Riordan. 2009a. P. 331-3

⁹⁴ Riordan. 2005. P. 309-14. Riordan. 2008. P. 331-2

⁹⁵ Riordan. 2007. P. 253.

he insists and endures this willingly as he knows that they need Artemis' help.⁹⁶ The weight is so formidable that he is left with a grey streak of hair and this action allows Artemis and Zoë to see him as a 'man' instead of a 'boy'.⁹⁷ The climax of his bravery is shown in the second series when he willingly falls into Tartarus so that Annabeth, his girlfriend at this point, does not have to do this alone.⁹⁸ In Riordan's world he describes Tartarus as the pit of hell where monsters go after they have been disintegrated. Percy willingly and knowingly puts himself into dangerous situations but only when he is influenced by the safety of the people he loves.

Percy's immortal perception is questioned throughout his story and the first time Percy's battle with immortality is witnessed is when Calypso offers him a place in Ogygia where he will be immortal.⁹⁹ Percy turns down the offer after deciding that he needs to go back and help with quests, which is comparable to Odysseus' own experience on Ogygia. Riordan explains this similarity saying that Calypso is cursed for siding with her father Atlas in the first titan war. She was cursed with being trapped on Ogygia, only being visited by heroes whom she could not help but fall in love with but who had to leave. He later turns down immortality on Olympus after it is offered to him by Zeus.¹⁰⁰ His decision, again, is made because Percy feels that his life will be better spent in doing something more productive, in this case it preventing another war.

⁹⁶ Riordan. 2007. P. 252-255.

⁹⁷ Riordan. 2007. P. 161,263

⁹⁸ Riordan. 2012. P. 566

⁹⁹ Riordan. 2008. P. 210-2

¹⁰⁰ Riordan. 2009a. P. 330-3

At the beginning of the fifth book Percy is seen taking a dip in the River Styx.¹⁰¹ Although this does not make Percy immortal it does make him invulnerable which is a similar status. He does go through with this but he is very reluctant whenever Nico brings it up. He struggles with his decision only giving up after realising that the only way to defeat Luke and Cronos is to join them in their invulnerability. After Percy meets Cronos in combat in the first chapter of the book, it is clear that he will not be able to defeat the Titans without this extra power. His reluctance to accept the invulnerability paired with turning down immortality sets Percy apart from the other ancient heroes.

¹⁰¹ Riordan. 2009a. P. 125

Percy Jackson Vs. Modern Hero

In most of the books in the first series Percy is spurred into action by the need to save his friends. In the first book Percy is secretly only going on the quest to save his mother and to bring her back.¹⁰² In the third book he breaks the rules and leaves camp to try and find Annabeth.¹⁰³ In both cases Percy risks his life in order to find and protect his friends and family and in both circumstances Percy keeps his true motivations hidden and plays along with the quest. By putting himself in danger to save his friends he is showing that he values other people's lives above his own and cares more for their happiness.

Percy shows selflessness throughout the series in a variety of ways. In the fourth book Percy is tasked with cleaning out the Augean Stables at Geryon's ranch.¹⁰⁴ Percy's initial reaction is to redirect the river through the stables, like Herakles did, thus cleaning them without having to be near the flesh eating horses. But he changes his mind after meeting the river nymph.¹⁰⁵ She tries to stand up for herself but Percy sees through her façade and seeing that she is scared and weak.¹⁰⁶ Percy knows that he can easily overpower the nymph but he feels sympathy for her and admits defeat. In return she helps him work out another way to successfully clean the stables and complete his task. He is observed here putting his own needs aside in order to help a defenceless young nereid.

¹⁰² Riordan. 2005. P. 159.

¹⁰³ Riordan. 2007. P. 95.

¹⁰⁴ Riordan. 2008. P. 142-4

¹⁰⁵ Riordan. 2008. P. 142

¹⁰⁶ Riordan. 2008. P. 143

Hand in hand with this, Percy is extremely kind and virtuous towards his loved ones and for the greater good of the world. He shows this when he turns down immortality¹⁰⁷ believing that the gods must look after and care for their children and claim¹⁰⁸ them before their eleventh birthday as this is a major reason as why so many demigods join the Titan army. He also wants to ensure that all the minor gods and Titan kind are pardoned and accepted onto Olympus.¹⁰⁹ Later on in the book Percy's plan comes together as all the new cabins to the minor gods are being built as the first step in the gods promise to Percy.¹¹⁰ But the gods do not always keep their promises and by the next book, *The Heroes of Olympus; The Lost Hero*, the gods have already let their side of the deal slip; with Leo and Piper¹¹¹ remaining unclaimed until they are almost sixteen. In this series it is discovered that Calypso, a child of the Titan Atlas, has not being released from her prison and in the final book of the second series Percy acknowledges that he has neglected Calypso by not checking that she had been freed and he is observed promising Leo¹¹² that he will help him get back to Calypso in any way that he can. This proves that his kindness is above his own needs and extends to those that need him and his help.

This is again witnessed in his treatment of Bob the Titan. In the *Sword of Hades*, one of the spin-off mini-stories, Percy, Nico and Thalia travel into

¹⁰⁷ Riordan. 2009a. P. 331-3

¹⁰⁸ The gods would have to send a sign to acknowledge their children and until then the 'undetermined' would have to live in the Hermes cabin and not with their siblings.

¹⁰⁹ Riordan. 2009a. P. 332

¹¹⁰ Riordan. 2009a. P. 355-6

¹¹¹ Leo Valdez, son of Hephaestus, and Piper McLean, daughter of Aphrodite, travelled to the ancient lands with Percy and the other demigods.

¹¹² During the series Leo goes to Ogygia and falls in love with Calypso, vowing to return to save her.

the underworld to retrieve the Sword. On their travels they meet the Titan Iapetus who repeatedly tries to kill them.¹¹³ After wiping the Titan from his memories Percy does not have the heart to kill him and thus changes his name to Bob and leaves him in the care of Persephone.¹¹⁴ By sparing a Titan who had already tried to kill them, Percy is showing great care and kindness and also a strong trait of forgiveness.

Percy shows great loyalty throughout the series, constantly trying to save people even though it often puts his own life in danger. Athena tells Percy that loyalty is his fatal flaw, that to save a friend he would sacrifice the world. In the first book his mother is taken which leads him to use his quest to save her. A similar thing happens in the next two books, first Grover is kidnapped by Polyphemus and Percy leaves Camp without permission to save him.¹¹⁵ Next Annabeth is taken and, again, Percy breaks the rules and leaves Camp to try and save her. On both occasions he risks expulsion from camp and his own life but insists on helping his friends. During his search for Annabeth, Percy meets Aphrodite who makes him realise that Annabeth is the most important thing about the quest, not Artemis, not saving the world, but Annabeth.¹¹⁶ His loyalty then shifts to the everyone at Camp and his beloved New-York City. Percy also believes that he will die fighting Cronus,¹¹⁷ as the prophecy foretold. Despite this, Percy still fought the titan and excelled in the battles leading up to the final fight.

¹¹³ Riordan. 2009b. P. 141-143

¹¹⁴ Riordan. 2009b. P. 148-9

¹¹⁵ Riordan. 2006. P. 100.

¹¹⁶ Riordan. 2007. P. 176.

¹¹⁷ Riordan. 2009a. P. 48-9. 'the hero's soul, cured blade shall reap'

Conclusion

Percy Jackson's character has been explored in this chapter with each aspect of his personality being analysed in the context of heroism. It is seen that although there are a lot of similarities between Percy and other heroes, there are also many differences. Percy's connection to the divine, monster slaying ability and bravery are similar to those of his ancient hero counterparts but his perception of immortality is vastly different to what we expect from other heroes from ancient Greek mythology. There are many similarities between Percy's personality and that of other modern heroes examined. It has been observed that he is a kind and considerate teen who values the thoughts and feelings of those around him. His kind nature sets him apart from normal ancient heroes as they are rarely seen to take into consideration the feelings of others as modern heroes do.

What is interesting about defining Percy Jackson's heroism is seeing the differing opinions of the other characters in the series. The mortals and his fellow demigods admire his ability to fight monsters and keep them safe but also value his loyalty and kindness. The Olympians, on the other hand, admire his sword fighting and his ability to save the world but seem put off by his lack of respect for the gods and the pantheon he should be supporting.¹¹⁸ This can be seen as the differing opinions of the times: the gods, who are used to Greek heroes, would expect this kind of behaviour in Percy; the other demigods, who were brought up in the modern world, have

¹¹⁸ Riordan. 2009a. P. 331.

been influenced by the modern ideas of a hero and so admires him for those shared traits.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation is that Percy Jackson is neither a totally ancient, nor a totally modern hero, instead he is an amalgamation of the two. Percy Jackson is definitely a Greek hero with the heart and conscience fitting of a modern children's role model. Percy's life straddles two contrasting worlds: the ancient and the modern, and is therefore influenced by both. As a child of a god and a skilful sword-fighter, Percy embodies the identity of a Greek hero and he also lives in a world which is influenced by the Christian ideals of morality and kindness.

Riordan has used myths throughout his literary career particularly Egyptian, Greek, Roman and, most recently, Norse tales. In order to create a convincing mythological substitute Riordan needed a substantial hero to fill his leading role, who could also stand for the standards of the modern world in which the series is set and being released into.

This dissertation has examined the traits of both Greek and modern heroes in order to define them. Ancient heroes, although honourable and supportive to their society, are more often motivated by self-interest and self-glorification. The ideal of being immortalised by their heroic acts is the precedent for their deeds and the way they conduct their lives leads to the conclusion that ancient heroes are inherently selfish. This is the overriding difference between Percy Jackson and his ancient counterparts; Percy always acts for the sake of others. The motivation behind his actions would have been totally out of character for an ancient hero, but the actions themselves,

monster fighting, creating immortal enemies and sword fighting, are traditionally Greek.

The selfish agenda sets the ancients apart from their modern counterparts. The life and deeds of Nelson Mandela have been mentioned earlier; his kindness and self-sacrifice epitomised his lifetime and reputation but a Greek hero has never been remembered for such selfless motivations. From the detailed analysis above it is evident that no ancient hero would have sacrificed thirty years of their life for the good of others, without substantial rewards in return. Mandela, on his imprisonment on Robben Island penitentiary, had no idea that he would ever be a free man again, let alone president of South Africa and much loved and admired around the world. Evidence shows that the ancient heroes would not have taken such a risky course without the guarantee of being immortalised afterwards.

While Percy's kindness and loyalty portrays him as a hero with a heart it is also seen as a fatal flaw. Athena explains to him that 'in order to save his friends he would sacrifice the world' which is a dangerous mind-set for someone with his destiny.¹¹⁹ She also tells him that the most dangerous characteristics are those that are good in moderation. This, coupled with all the examples previously explored, shows that Percy embodies the heart that a modern hero requires.

Riordan has ensured that most important character is relatable to his target audience that of children and young people. Percy Jackson is first introduced to the readership as an underachieving middle-schooler who is

¹¹⁹ Riordan. 2007. P.281

struggling with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactive disorder, he is seen lashing out at school and getting angry because of his difficulties. Percy hates school, until he sees that his weaknesses are actually his strengths. Annabeth tells him, not long after arriving at camp, that his brain is hotwired for the ancient Greek language, not English which is why the alphabet letters seem to float off the page.¹²⁰ She also explains how his attention deficit hyperactive disorder is, in fact, his battle reflexes keep him alert and watchful ensuring that, during battle, he will succeed and not be caught off guard. His disabilities are superpowers. This is a common theme in the series as Grover is first seen as a scrawny bullied child on crutches due to a genetic abnormality in his legs.¹²¹ In actual fact his disability masks his identity of a satyr, a goat legged man, and that he works for the camp as a protector.¹²²

Making the main character a ‘loser’ ensures that Riordan’s story telling has the optimum impact on his audience as it makes Percy’s transformation even more remarkable. It also shows the reading audience that weaknesses should not be excuses for lack of achievement, but, in fact, used as a motivation for the individual to be better. Riordan’s own son, Haley Riordan, embodies just this. Haley too struggled with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactive disorder but dreamed of being a writer, a dream that he achieved when he wrote *Son of Magic*, a short story based in the ancient /American world his father had created. The need for his audience to relate to his

¹²⁰ Riordan. 2005. P. 18.

¹²¹ Riordan 2005. P. 3.

¹²² Riordan. 2005. P. 58.

characters has ensured that Percy is truly involved in the moral upbringing of modern society.

Percy's similarities to the ancient heroes, but with traits of modern characteristics, shows the importance of classical reception as a topic and as an area of study. The classical world is still influencing the modern world from the many areas of media to the way in which people think. This study has highlighted the importance of the ancient world and its relevance to today's society and culture.

To conclude, Percy Jackson does not fit perfectly into the definition of heroism but it is undeniable that he is, indeed, a hero. He is a boy that has been moulded by, not only the modern American world that he grew up in, but also the ancient Greek world that he is welcomed into. He is most easily identified as an Ancient hero but with the heart and morality of a modern hero.

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